

From the Political Pipe to Devil Eyes: A History of the British Election Poster from 1910-1997

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Abstract

Despite their use in every British general election of the twentieth and twenty-first century, the political poster remains largely unconsidered by the majority of historians working in the field of British politics. This thesis is the first study dedicated entirely to the poster's role in British elections. Through five election case studies, the work contextualises the poster within the broader narratives of election culture. Unusually for studies of political communication, it is the type and content of the communication – namely the poster – that forms the central focus of each chapter. Each of which seeks to locate the production, content and display of posters parties produced for an election, within the broader landscape of that election's particular culture.

Understandably given the structure of the thesis, chronologically long, but heavily focused on specific events, the conclusions are at times pertinent to a particular moment. By studying communication in this way, however, by locating posters in one election and understanding them as products of the culture that produced them, the research expands on and questions some of the key totems that define research into British political communication. Moreover, the thesis positions the poster not as an archaic dying form of communication; one replaced by those electronic media that have been of far greater interest to academics, namely television and more latterly online platforms. Rather, as argued here, parties' use of the poster has constantly been in a state of flux. Ultimately, posters are objects that are constantly being re-imagined for each new age.

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I.0 Introduction

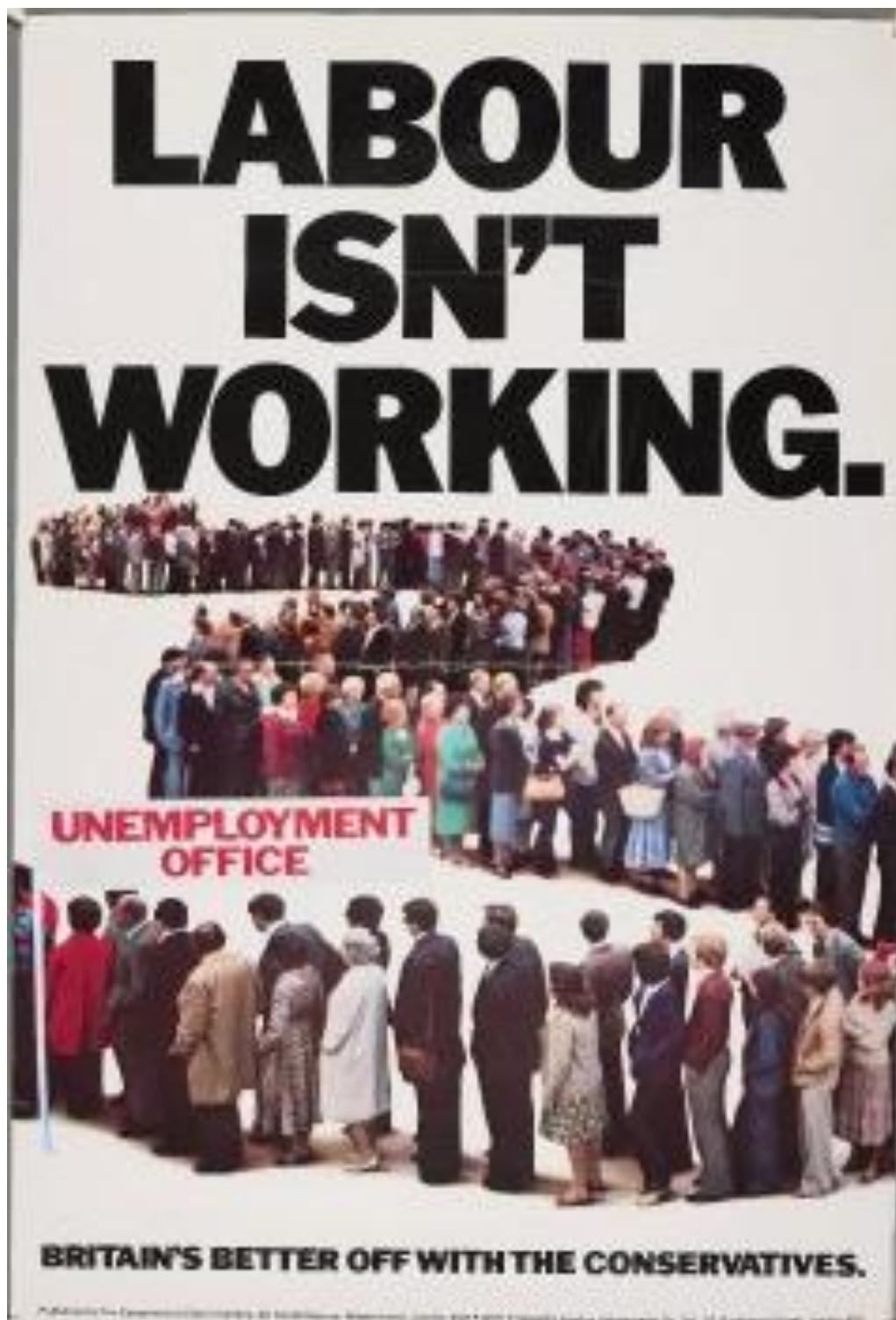


Figure i.1 *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*, 1978, Conservative Party of Great Britain, CPA, POSTER 1978/9-01.

I.1 1979 and all that

Election posters are ephemeral things. Political parties produce them in order to speak to a specific body of people, at a specific time. They have a short shelf life, and are easily forgotten. This then, makes the fame of the Conservative party's 1979 *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*. [Figure i.1] remarkable.¹ While little has been written on how parties have used posters to communicate with the people, that image of a queue snaking towards an Unemployment Office remains the exception. Rather than add to the already extensive literature on the birth of the poster and its supposed impact, this thesis begins with an appraisal of that literature. This study begins by questioning the hyperbole and myth that surrounds the poster. And in doing so it establishes the need for a study of political posters that moves beyond the narrow confines of '1979 and all that'.

The product of a relationship between the Conservative Party and advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*. was first unveiled in 1978. Some suggest that the combination of this poster coupled with the supposedly innovative Conservative campaign a year later changed electioneering. For Margaret Scammell the 1979 campaign represented, a 'landmark in the use of marketing in British politics', judging the 'Labour isn't working' slogan, 'the most brilliant and memorable piece of political advertising of the Thatcher era'.² Alison Fendley agreed, claiming the success of the poster 'signalled a change in public attitudes to political advertising'. 'Once the Tories were in office, their advertisements turned the tables on Labour by treating them as if they were a failed government rather than an active opposition'.³ Tim Bell – the liaison between Saatchi and Margaret Thatcher – wrote in 1982 that 'Labour isn't working' 'will probably go down in history as one of the most effective political posters ever produced'.⁴ Bell joined (or began) a chorus which testified to the billboard's role in the Conservative victory. David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh cite leading Conservatives who argued that the poster dissuaded James Callaghan from calling an

¹ Unlike conventional works of art posters were not formally titled. Throughout this work the posters referenced are referred to by their first line. Where this 'title' appears on the original poster in upper case, the capitalisation is retained in the citation. Where the text appears in lower case this is also reflected. This is a deliberate recognition of the conscious choice made by the producer in whether to use upper or lower case.

² M. Scammell, 'The odd couple: marketing and Maggie', *European Journal of Marketing* (1996) 30:10, p. 120; M. Scammell, *Designer Politics, How Elections Are Won* (London, 1995) p. 87.

³ A. Fendley, *Saatchi & Saatchi: The Inside Story* (New York, 1996) p. 59.

⁴ T. Bell, 'The Conservatives' Advertising Campaign', in R. M. Worcester and M. Harrop (Eds.) *Political Communications: The General Election Campaign of 1979* (London, 1982), p. 16.

early election in October 1978, one he might have narrowly won. He did not call the election, however, and the subsequent Winter of Discontent irrevocably undermined Labour support.⁵

Undoubtedly, the 1979 Conservative campaign has become synonymous with a new style of electioneering, and *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*, the visual embodiment of that transformation. Moreover, the poster's fame has only increased with the passage of time. Countless artists and designers have adopted elements of the poster for use in their own work: the 'isn't working' slogan and snaking line of people have appeared in a variety of different contexts. A year after the Conservative victory the poster appeared in a Bill Caldwell cartoon, which depicted a queue stood under the billboard alongside the caption 'So much for Tory election promises'.⁶ In 2011, Steve Bell used the queue and 'working' motifs to suggest the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition provided sinecures for the privileged few, while unemployment remained high [Figure i.2]. The concept has been regularly recycled in varied formats.⁷ When in 1999, the advertising weekly *Campaign* voted 'Labour isn't working' 'poster of the century' its position in posterity seemed secure.⁸ As its designer Martyn Walsh stated two years later, the poster had become the 'benchmark', having 'influenced all political advertising since and effectiveness is measured against it'.⁹

Good design or good art, however, do not necessarily make good political communication. Admittedly, those who have used parts of *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING* have done so in the belief that it will have some impact on the viewer. An important point in the study of the construction of political languages, this is considered in more detail below. However, the constant recycling of *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING* has increased not only the fame of the original poster, but also complicated any judgements of how that image spoke to the electorate at the very end of the 1970s. Critics no longer assess the image within the context of its production, but through eyes that have seen countless reproductions and read various heroic interpretations. As Walter Benjamin noted, reproduction of any image increases familiarity, and with such familiarity comes a failure to examine the image with a critical

⁵ D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1979* (Hounds Mills: 1999), p. 140.

⁶ British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent (BCA), 33888 B. Caldwell, 'So much for Tory election promises' (cartoon) *Daily Star*, 19 Feb 1980.

⁷ See for example 'Capitalism isn't working' (banner) www.swindonclimate.org.uk/20081206London [accessed 26 July 2012].

⁸ L. Campbell, 'Tories 'Labour isn't working' judged the century's top poster', *Campaign*, 15 October 1999. <http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/news/35243/Tories--rsquoLabour-isn-rsquot-working-rsquo-judged-century-rsquo-top-poster/?DCMP=ILC-SEARCH> [accessed 26 July 2012].

⁹ M. Walsh quoted in <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1222326.stm> [accessed 26 July 2012].

eye.¹⁰ Just because a poster remains in continued use, does not automatically mean that it had any great impact on the election for which it was produced. Furthermore, the poster's association with Thatcher has only heightened its renown. As debate continues around how precisely society should interpret her premiership, so the fame of the poster only increases. Would commentators hold the poster in such high esteem if the Conservatives had produced it for another contest? One, for instance, that did not lead to 'Thatcherism' and the end of the post-war 'consensus'?

Only by studying *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*. within the context of its production can we make any accurate declarations about its effectiveness as a form of political communication. To assess the extent to which a single poster was the first to achieve something, or marked a notable shift from what had come before, it needs locating within a broader history. Put simply, we require a more thorough understanding of parties' use of posters throughout the twentieth century set within a historical and contextual prism.

By interpreting *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*. within the history of twentieth century posters, we can expose the myths that surround it. Of Bell's claim that the poster won the 1979 election, it remains questionable whether a campaign has ever swung on a single event, let alone a single poster. Writing in 1932, Philip Cambray – a former Conservative Director of Publicity – stated that the brevity of such campaigns meant there was not enough time for posters to have any significant effect on voters.¹¹ Twelve years later Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet's established that the effect of media was to reinforce a general consensus rather than change it. It was interpersonal communication, they argued, that was the driving force behind changing political choice.¹² More recent studies, which prove the power of media to reinforce existing views as opposed to creating new ones, have confirmed Lazarsfeld et al's work.¹³ Ivor Crewe certainly disputed any causal link between *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*. and voter choice in 1979. Polling demonstrated that 'only a small minority

¹⁰ W. Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, (London: 2008 (first published 1935))

¹¹ G. Cambray, *The Game of Politics: A study of the principles of British political strategy* (London: 1932) p. 177.

¹² P. Lazarsfeld, B. Berelson and H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: 1944) pp. 88-9 and p. 150.

¹³ Discussed in D. Kavanagh, *Election Campaigning: The New Marketing of Politics* (Oxford: 1995) pp. 149-152; See also B. McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication* (London: 2011) pp. 33-34; Research into Party Election Broadcasts has shown to have the same effect, although their reinforcing impact is greater than posters. See I. McAllister, 'Campaign Activities and Electoral Outcomes in Britain 1979 and 1983', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, (Winter: 1985) 49:4, pp. 496-497.

of the electorate noticed the Conservatives' posters more than those of Labour.¹⁴ Winston Fletcher was more vociferous still: dismissing the Conservative Treasurer Lord Thorneycroft's view that the poster had 'effectively won the election for the Conservatives' as 'claptrap'.¹⁵ There is, moreover, little or no evidence to support claims that the poster caused Callaghan to delay going to the polls: Kenneth Morgan's biography of Callaghan certainly does not mention it.¹⁶

Although it is easy to dismiss claims that *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING.* won the election, it is harder to discount assertions that the poster was innovative. Rachel Grainger devoted an entire PhD to proving that the Conservative 'print advertisements' of 1979 were 'different to that of any previous political advertisements'.¹⁷ According to Grainger, Saatchi & Saatchi used 'cutting edge advertising techniques' premised on simplicity, including bold short slogans and a single image on a white background, which supposedly left opponents with 'very little to argue against'.¹⁸ Yet, simplicity in poster design was neither new nor innovative in 1979. Throughout the twentieth century, campaign planners had sought to abbreviate their messages to voters.

Many of the grander claims for *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING.* are a result of a lack of research into what had gone before. Fendley's suggestion that the Conservative campaign began the ploy of attacking oppositions for being 'failed' governments is simply wrong. As Chapter Four reveals, nine years before, in 1970, Labour had produced a poster with the slogan 'Yesterday's men, they failed before!'.

It is only by giving little or no regard to the history of election posters, that *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING.* seems so innovative. Partly to redress such interpretative shortcomings this thesis charts the parties' use of posters across the twentieth century. Such a long-view demonstrates that many conclusions regarding *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING.* require revision. By examining posters, studying their production, content, and display within the confines and

¹⁴ I. Crewe, 'Why the Conservatives Won' in H. R. Penniman (Ed.) *Britain at the Polls, 1979, A Study of the General Election* (Washington, London: 1979) pp. 269-70.

¹⁵ For Thorneycroft's quote and Fletcher's response see W. Fletcher, *Power of Persuasion* (Oxford, 2008) p. 150.

¹⁶ K. O. Morgan, *Callaghan a Life* (Oxford, 2007) pp. 638-646.

¹⁷ R. L. Grainger, *The Visual Rhetoric of the Conservative Party's 1979 General Election Poster and Print Advertising: A Social Semiotic Analysis* PhD Thesis (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2005) p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

contexts of the election for which parties produced them, this thesis aims to increase our broader understanding of how Britain's political elites used posters to speak to the people.

In addition to locating posters within a historical context, the thesis questions some of the theories that surround political communication. Even the foregoing brief consideration of *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*. has shown that there not only exists a problem of context and historical perspective, but also one of language. In her use of the term 'cutting edge', Grainger implies that before 1979 election planners and poster designers had no awareness, or gave no thought, to the use of contemporary best practice in the deployment of pictorial propaganda. A.J Davies suggests the same: according to him, the Conservative party in 1979 adopted 'sharper Madison Avenue-style methods'.¹⁹ The reality is quite different, as throughout the twentieth century Britain's three major parties were often eager to use the very best designers and advertising agencies. Existing scholarship defines parties' adoption of so-called 'cutting edge' and 'sharper' advertising techniques as 'professionalisation', a concept discussed in more detail below. The term however contains some unhelpful assumptions. As Ralph Negrine has suggested, if contemporary communication is 'professional', by definition previous work must be 'amateur'.²⁰ As the thesis demonstrates, this was far from the case. Frequently, parties sought to bring what is best described as 'contemporary best practice' to their posters.

The development of the 'professionalisation' (or sometimes 'Americanisation') model highlights a systemic problem with the study of political communication, one that undermines the utility of most existing assessments of *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*. A Whiggish inevitability pervades such analysis, implying that the newer the communication, the more effective it is. This is far from true. Not all posters produced before 1979 were inferior to *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*., just as not all produced since are superior. Posters are ephemeral products born of a specific set of circumstance. They are understood best within the context of the ideas and events that led to their production. As will become apparent, innovation was not the monopoly of Saatchi and Saatchi.

¹⁹ A.J. Davies, *We, The Nation* (London: 1995) p. 211.

²⁰ R. Negrine, 'The Professionalisation of Political Communication in Europe', in R. Negrine, P. Mancini, C. Holtz-Bacha and S. Papathanassopoulos (eds.) *The Professionalisation of Political Communication: Changing Media, Changing Europe* (Bristol: 2007) p. 34.

This examination of the existing work surrounding *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING*, has revealed a lack of historical perspective and contextual consideration. The Saatchi and Saatchi design is claimed exceptional without proper analysis of what came before, and all posters produced since are judged against it. As shown in the literature review below, aside from one key text – James Thompson’s article on the election posters of Edwardian Britain – there is a dearth of material dedicated to understanding pictorial election communication. This thesis is one attempt to correct that gap in the historiography of modern British politics. It does so through five case studies, each focussed on one or two closely connected elections and each charting the campaigns of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties. The justification for those case studies now follows.

I.2 The case studies

Each chapter analyses how and why parties produced the posters they did. The sweep of these case studies is necessarily broad. During the twentieth century, both politics and political communication went through rapid development. Votes for some women and all men of 21 years or older in 1918, universal suffrage by 1929, and the lowering of the voting age in time for 1970 election transformed the electorate. Those able to participate in general elections did not just change in number or age or sex: over the course of the century, their values and demands also altered. Party allegiance grew stronger before 1939 and then after the early 1950s weakened. The 1960s saw the rise of the permissive society. All these factors affected the way political elites and campaign organisers viewed the electorate and influenced how they spoke to the nation. The case studies have been selected so as to reflect on some of those changes.

If only because the two elections held in 1910 were the last conducted under an exclusively masculine franchise, Chapter One focuses on them. However, the contests of 1910 are also worthy of consideration because contemporaries branded the January campaign ‘the poster election’.²¹ This was due to the millions of posters that wallpapered the streets of Britain’s metropolitan areas. Moreover, other actors aside from parties involved themselves in this battle of the billboards. Posters sharing the linguistic codes of party examples but produced by pressure groups known as ‘leagues’, also contested for the voters’ attention. Given the centrality of posters to the two campaigns, coupled with the opportunity to explore pictorial

²¹ ‘The Poster Election’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 1910, p. 211.

politics before the onset of universal democracy, 1910 makes an interesting place to begin the study.

Chapter Two examines the impact that universal suffrage – following the 1918 Representation of the Peoples Act and 1928 Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act – made on the parties’ poster campaigns. The chapter examines the posters of the 1929 election the first under universal suffrage, which perhaps not surprisingly featured a unique number of images of young women. But it was also an election where the parties’ respective leaders featured heavily in poster designs, most famously in the Conservative’s campaign, ‘Safety First’, devised by advertising agency Benson’s. Using advertising experts who were fuelled by new understandings of ‘mass persuasion’ developed from the techniques of war propaganda, helped ‘sell’ the party – playing to wants and preoccupations of the voter. This, however, could be at odds with a belief that the new electorate must be ‘educated’ as to the issues they ‘should’ be considering when voting.

Education was not so much on the parties’ minds during the 1950 and 1951 campaigns, the subject of Chapter Three. During those elections, Labour and the Conservatives primarily aimed to simply get already convinced voters to the polls rather than persuade wavering voters of the merits of their respective programmes. This was a time of confident parties, reflected in high memberships and huge election turnouts: the 83.9% achieved in 1950 was the highest of the democratic era. Scholars believe this desire to ‘get the vote out’ meant parties rarely mentioned their rivals, even to attack them, which the posters in the Chapter demonstrate was not universally true.²² Posters emphasised a new politics centred on the domestic, rather than the workplace and while posters had often previously associated women with the home, they now located men there too. The 1950 election also saw the Liberals mount a personality-driven poster campaign, one the parties had abandoned after 1929, and which paradoxically anticipated the character of later elections.

The cultural changes that occurred during the two decades following 1951 significantly affected the way parties perceived and spoke to the electorate.²³ Conservatives began appealing to individuals’ economic self-interest and aspirations, most notably with the 1959 ‘Life’s Better’ campaign. In response, Labour came up with ‘Let’s Go With Labour’ in time

²² J. Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: 2009) pp. 146-147. ; D. Butler, *British General Elections Since 1945* (Oxford: 1989) pp. 2-3.

²³ J.K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (London: 1958) second edition.

for the 1964 election. Posters remained central to the communication of these messages despite the rise in television ownership, if only because the parties were not allowed to purchase small screen advertising. Chapter Four assesses these changes by concentrating on the 1970 election, the first in which 18 year olds could vote. One consequence was a rebirth of attack posters as parties competed for voters whose support was increasingly seen as up for grabs, the most infamous of which was Labour's *YESTERDAY'S MEN*.

Chapter Five examines the posters of the 1997 election, one in which 'New' Labour outlined a 'new politics' and adopted a supposedly novel communications strategy.²⁴ And yet this election saw posters – by the end of the century a venerable means of campaigning – be more important than ever before.²⁵ Posters helped mark Labour's 'newness'. The most famous 'poster' of the period, the Conservatives Tony Blair with 'Demon Eyes' that featured Claire Short's attack on the 'dark forces' behind Tony Blair exemplified how posters no longer simply communicated a message but had become the message. Her words were a veiled reference to Labour communication strategists Peter Mandelson and Alistair Campbell. No longer was the process of producing communication and the actual communication separate entities. Moreover, the reporting of the 'Demon Eyes poster' that had in fact mainly appeared as a newspaper advert, showed the new fluidity of political pictorial communication.

I.3 What is a Poster?

Contrarily, Carlo Arturo Quintavalle declared what a poster was not. Edouard Manet's *Les Chats* did not, according the Italian art historian, 'demonstrate the new rapport between image and word that one might call defining a poster.'²⁶ 'Rapport' was Quintavalle's expression for the inter-dependence between image and text, the relationship which creates a whole thought. If we were to remove the image then the overall message is lost. *LABOUR STANDS FOR ALL WHO WORK*, drawn by Gerald Spencer Pryse for Labour's 1929 campaign provides a useful demonstration of this view. A triptych design, the poster's middle

²⁴ For those associations see J. Lees-Marshment, *Political Marketing and British Political Parties* (Manchester: 2008) 2nd edition pp. 181-203. ; D. Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party* (Basingstoke: 2005) p. 175.

²⁵ Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p. 179.

²⁶ C. Arturo Quintavalle, 'The Development of Poster Art', in M. Gallo (ed.) *The Poster in History* (London, 1975) p. 217.

section carries the slogan above the image of female workers joined in celebration.²⁷ The left panel pictures female workers [Figure i.3] in what appears to be a manual trade, while the right hand poster would have depicted of male clerks. The middle section, with its slogan, is required to understand the outer images; without it, their meaning is unclear [Figure i.4].

‘Rapport’ was less important for Harold Hutchinson, who described the poster as ‘essentially a large announcement, usually with a pictorial element, usually printed on paper and usually displayed on a wall or billboard to the general public. Its purpose is to draw attention to whatever an advertiser is trying to promote and to impress some message on the passer by.’²⁸ For Hutchinson the poster is a large printed message, which spoke to people in the street. How posters went about doing this was less important to Hutchinson than it was to Quintavalle, but his incorporation of the term ‘usually’ in front of ‘pictorial’ does raise a crucial point. Not all election posters had pictures. James Thompson and Jon Lawrence highlight the importance of text-only examples in local Edwardian electioneering.²⁹ One National Union report of 1910 even spoke of ‘cartoons’ (with pictures), and ‘posters’ (without).³⁰ The term ‘bill’ was also quite common. Moreover, when in the second half of the twentieth century producing pictorial posters became increasingly cheaper, a single slogan would appear on nationally produced posters as Figure i.5 from 1955 shows. This thesis therefore considers that ‘posters’ might contain pictures or words or a combination of them both.

When considering what constitutes a ‘poster’, size is important. Writing in 1911, the poster designer John Hassall recorded three standard single sheet poster measurements used in the UK. Double Crown measured 30” by 20” (0.76m x 0.51m), Double Demy measured 35.5” by 22.5” (0.90m x 0.57m) and finally there was Double Royal which measured 40” by 25” (1.01m x 0.63m).³¹ All three types were available in ‘broadside’ (landscape) or ‘upright’ (portrait). By combining the Double Crown size in multiples of four, Edwardian commercial advertisers and political parties could mount larger posters: the biggest was the 32 sheet

²⁷ The author was unable to get an image of the poster of male clerks. That Labour intended three posters to be displayed together is shown in ‘The Dawn and the Day is Coming’, *Labour magazine* (May, 1929). The photo editing in figure i.4 is the author’s own.

²⁸ H. F. Hutchinson, *The Poster an illustrated history from 1860* (London: 1968) p. 9.

²⁹ Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p. 79. ; J. Thompson, “‘Pictorial lies’?: posters and politics in Britain, 1880-1914”, *Past and Present* (November, 2007) 197, p. 108.

³⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive (hereafter CPA): NUA 2/2/4, Report of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations 44th Annual Conference, 1910, p. 53.

³¹ Table 1 adapted from, J. Hassall, ‘Posters’ in T. Russell (Ed.) *Advertising and Publicity* (London: 1911) p. 133.

double crown, which was 120" deep by 160" wide (3.05m x 4.06mm).³² Over the course of the twentieth century, billboards have become ever larger. By 2010, JC Decaux – the company responsible for over 10,000 advertising sites – suggested three possible landscape billboard sizes, the smallest of which was a 32 sheet double crown, the largest being a gigantic 96 double crown sheets, measuring 3.04m high x 12.19mm wide.³³ Hutchinson's 'large' could, then, be very large indeed.

After the 1970 election defining what a poster is becomes more problematic. During the campaign Labour conducted one of the first ever poster 'launches', increasingly popular with parties who understandably wanted journalists to take note of their efforts and bring them to the attention of their readers and viewers.³⁴ But sometimes a poster was launched without ever being pasted on a billboard: during the 2010 election a cash-strapped Labour party held many launches but had no billboard sites.³⁵ The launch therefore qualifies Hutchinson's belief in the need for walls and billboards; as Chapter Five argues, the poster launch event has become as important as the poster itself.

By the end of the century there had been a shift, from something that is easily definable as a poster to something better classified as 'poster like'. Chapter Five shows how the Conservative 'Demon Eyes' image was reported as a poster, but actually was principally a newspaper advert. With the development in online campaigning, parties are increasingly releasing posters online. During the 2010 election campaign the Conservatives combined 'traditional' billboards in marginal seats, poster launches, and digital releases.³⁶ The latter of these looked like posters and called posters, but were they actually posters? If we return briefly to Quintavalle's idea of 'rapport' then in a sense they were. The message of the much parodied Conservative poster 'We can't go on like this' [Figure i.6] would not have been the same if the words or David Cameron's face were absent. The poster's intended sincerity would have been lost without the seriousness, but relaxed attitude of the future Prime

³² *Ibid*, pp. 133-134.

³³ JC Decaux, *Large Format Production Guide*, <http://www.jcdecaux.co.uk/products/billboards/> [accessed on 31 August 2010].

³⁴ B. Franklin, *Packaging Politics* (London: 2004) p. 129.

³⁵ C. Burgess, "This Election will be Won by People not Posters" ... Advertising and the 2010 General Election' in D. Wring, R. Mortimer, S. Atkinson (Eds.) *Political Communication in Britain* (London: 2011), p 193.

³⁶ For an account of the poster campaigns during the 2010 general election see D. Kavanagh and P. Cowley, *The British General Election of 2010* (London, 2010) pp. 143-144.; Burgess, "This Election will be Won by People not Posters" ... in Wring, Mortimer, Atkinson (Eds.) *Political Communication in Britain*, pp. 181-195.

Minister. Moreover, while the poster was displayed on billboards, it also appeared online. While this latter example may not have fitted in with the principle of being a printed medium, that the political class, press, and public were calling this digital communication a poster, suggests that what constitutes a political poster has gone through a process of redefinition. This thesis accepts such developments.

I.4 The purpose of political posters

At the most simplistic level, parties put up posters to persuade people to vote for them.³⁷ This reason, however, does not explain the complexity of why political parties have mounted such large and expensive billboard campaigns over the course of the twentieth century. Research of contemporary French and Belgium politics identified eight different reasons why parties displayed posters: Informing voters about the electoral programme, making a candidate known, showing campaign strength to voters, showing campaign strength to the opposition, mobilising activists, mobilising regular voters, convincing undecided voters, and convincing leaning voters.³⁸ During elections in twentieth century Britain, all these factors were at some point important. And as a dynamic form of communication, the reasons why parties used posters changed continually.

The other important practical consideration why posters have remained such a vibrant form of campaigning is the continued ban on paid for advertising on broadcast media. It remains illegal for any political or religious bodies to purchase broadcast advertising or for advertising to have a political or religious end. Access to broadcasting is not entirely restricted, and during election periods come in the form of Party Election Broadcasts. All parties contesting 110 or more of the seats up for election are eligible for a broadcast, and setting the parameters for the allocation of PEBs is in 2014 the duty of the regulator Ofcom.³⁹ This limitation on broadcasting has meant that parties have continually turned to posters in order to make mass public appeals.

³⁷ S. Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda and Persuasion* (New York: 2008) pp. 125-162.

³⁸ D. Dumitrescu ‘The importance of being present: Election posters as signals of electoral strength, evidence from France and Belgium’, *Party Politics*, (Nov, 2012) 18: 6, p. 947; For a similar argument on the use of posters see J. S. Trent and R. V. Friedenberg, *Political Campaign Communications, Principles and Practices*. (Maryland: 2008), p. 358

³⁹ O. Gay, ‘Party Election Broadcasts’ House of Commons Library, SN/PC/03345, 13 Jan 2010.

Having become synonymous with elections, posters play a symbolic role. Such is the link between elections and posters that fictional depictions of politics use posters to create an image of politics with which the audience can quickly identify.⁴⁰ The importance of symbolism cannot be overstated. Posters indicate to the public that an election is coming, often over a year in advance. Activists like to see posters from their own party because they believe them to be central to the process of electioneering, even without any definable practical purpose. A Conservative Party report of 1911 reflected on the posters role in symbolic representation, stating that the only reason for Conservatives to invest in billboard propaganda was because the other side did.⁴¹

Posters fill a space between parties and people, and in doing so fulfil a role in parties claim to represent. In order to represent political parties are forced, as Michael Saward states, to make claims about themselves and the represented. This act in turn forces parties to portray the represented, and in making those portrayals, parties (or any person who seeks to represent) must adjust themselves to ‘some selective version’ of that person ‘an activity that goes to the very heart of political representation’.⁴² As parties use posters to build their ‘constituencies of support’ (the represented) as Lawrence Black puts it, they provided an insight into how they saw the voter.⁴³ By unpicking how parties used these visual and verbal languages to speak to the represented, the thesis provides new understandings of the relationship between and high and low.

I.5 How the poster has been analysed

Despite its importance, scholars have largely chosen to ignore the poster. There are many reasons for this. Political historians favour text-based evidence and are often uncomfortable analysing the visual. While political scientists are more willing to study images, they have focussed on new developments in visual communication such as television in the 1960s and more recently the internet and social media, rather than the venerable taken-for-granted

⁴⁰ For instance see Episode 1, Series 3, *The Thick of It*, BBC, 24 October, 2009.

⁴¹ Conservative Party Archive (here after CPA): CCO 500/1/2. Unionist Organisation Committee Report, June 1911.

⁴² M. Saward, *The Representative Claim*, (Oxford: 2010), pp. 3-4 and 16

⁴³ L. Black, *What kind of People are you? Labour the people and the ‘new political history’* in J. Callaghan, S. Fielding & S. Ludlam (eds.) *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History* (Manchester: 2003) p. 24.

poster.⁴⁴ While some art historians have analysed election imagery, as a group they tend to focus on the admittedly often more aesthetically pleasing posters produced by Communist regimes, rather than their sometimes humdrum democratic equivalents.⁴⁵

Pictorial evidence in general, is remarkably absent from most studies of modern political history. This is somewhat surprising, given sights increasing importance to communication over the course of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ Admittedly, the relationship between politics and vision has always been uneasy, with Western tradition placing greater weight on writing and the spoken word.⁴⁷ Moreover, critics have long railed against the apparent shallowness of the image. Plato argued that artists were ‘a long way removed from truth’, and their work incapable of penetrating ‘beneath the superficial appearance of anything.’⁴⁸ As images are not reality but representations of it, they have long been regarded as potential sites for untruth.⁴⁹ The painter Rene Magritte frequently commented on the gap between truth and image; as the art historian Ernst Gombrich put it, Magritte was not ‘copying reality but rather creating a new reality’.⁵⁰ There is a final problem as images are, as Victoria Bonnell points out, usually polyvalent.⁵¹

Despite these concerns (or because of them), there has been a growing call for historians to utilise visual sources. As early as 1976 Raphael Samuel hoped images would ‘inform new modes of enquiry’, though few historians have seemingly taken up the challenge.⁵² When historians have used visual sources, the result Stephen Connolly believes has been ‘unreflective’ and too often they have not been studied in their own right, but merely to affirm arguments reached by other evidence.⁵³ Despite such concerns, work on vision and

⁴⁴ For instance, the Nuffield studies (one produced for every election since 1945) include within their analysis of the events leading up to, during, and after an election a detailed account of each party’s communication strategy and the mainstream media’s role in the campaign.

⁴⁵ J. Aulich and M. Sylvestrova, *Political posters in central and eastern Europe 1945-1995* (Manchester, 1999); V. E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet political posters under Lenin and Stalin* (California, 1999).

⁴⁶ J. Evans and S. Hall (eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London, 1999) p. 4. ; W.J.T Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: 1994), p. 12.

⁴⁷ D. G. Hill and M. Helmers (Eds.), ‘Introduction’, *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (London: 2003) p. 1.

⁴⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, H.D.P Lee translation, (London: 1955), p. 374.

⁴⁹ B. Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge: 1997) p. 110.

⁵⁰ E. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: 1950) 16th edition, pp. 590-591.

⁵¹ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet*, p.11

⁵² R. Samuel, ‘Art Politics and Ideology’, *History Workshop* (1978) 6:1, p. 102. ; R. Porter, ‘Seeing the Past’, *Past and Present* (1998) 118:1, pp. 186-205.

⁵³ S. Connolly, ‘Unseeing the Past: Vision and Modern and British History’, *Visual Resources* (June, 2008) 24:2, pp. 109-118; K. Layton-Jones, ‘Introduction: Visual Collections as Historical Evidence’, *Visual Resources* (June, 2008) 24:2, pp. 105-10; P. Bailey, ‘Ally Sloper’s Half-Holiday: Comic Art in the 1880s’, *History Workshop Journal* (1983) 16, p. 6.

politics has led to a number of breakthroughs. Most notably, in establishing the importance of sight to eighteenth and nineteenth political discourse.⁵⁴ Connolly admits that the work of James Epstein has demonstrated how eighteenth century political communication was constructed through a variety of mediums.⁵⁵ Epstein is just one of a number of historians who have used visual sources and other non-textual material to study what could be termed the ‘lived experience’ of eighteenth and nineteenth century politics.⁵⁶ Such innovation is just one part of a much broader shift within political history. For James Vernon, Patrick Joyce, and Gareth Stedman Jones this has come under the guise of the ‘linguistic turn’.⁵⁷ At times controversial, they have redefined political history through investigation of new forms of evidence – including visual sources – in order to study politics through its language.⁵⁸ If the study of visual evidence can radically alter our conception of pre-democratic Britain, then it also has the potential to reinvigorate our understanding of the modern and contemporary periods.

Change has come about through pressure from other forms of history which, according to Steven Fielding, has resulted in the study of political pasts turning itself ‘towards the ‘people’ and, increasingly, to the constitution of identities and meanings’⁵⁹. This approach has yielded significant results across a broad spectrum, most notably in the field of class-identity and party allegiance, but also the relationship between politics and society, highlighting the gap between those who sought to rule and those who would be ruled.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ For the idea of politics constructed around vision, see J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge: 1993) pp. 107-116. ; T. W. Laquer, ‘The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV’, *The Journal of Modern History* (Sept, 1982) 54: 3. ; S. Connolly, *Under the banners of death': iconoclasm, iconophobia and the scopic vocabularies of english popular politics, 1789-1821*, unpublished PhD thesis (Manchester: 2009). ; C. Otter, *Victorian Eye: A political history of light and vision in Britain 1800-1910* (Chicago: 2008).

⁵⁵ Connolly, ‘Unseeing the Past’, p. 113.; J. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford: 1994).

⁵⁶ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 116.; see also F. O’Gorman, ‘The Paine Burnings of 1792-1793’, *Past and Present* (November, 2006) 193:1, pp. 111-155.; R. Poole, ‘The March to Peterloo: Politics and Festivity in Late Georgian England’, *Past and Present* (August: 2006) 192:1, pp. 109-153.

⁵⁷ G. Steadman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: 1983); P. Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the question of class 1848-1914* (Cambridge: 1991).

⁵⁸ For criticism of their findings see J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the people: Party, language and popular politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: 1997), pp. 58-61.; Michael Bentley has been strongly critical of Vernon’s work see M. Bentley, ‘Victorian politics and the linguistic turn’, *The Historical Journal* (1999) 42, pp. 883-902.

⁵⁹ S. Fielding, ‘Review Article: Looking for the ‘New Political History’, *Journal of Contemporary History* (2007) 42:3, p. 516.

⁶⁰ For the relationship between people and party see Lawrence, *Speaking for the people*; D. Tanner, ‘Class voting and radical politics: the Liberal and Labour parties, 1910-1931’ in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds.) *Party State and Society: Electoral Behaviour since 1820* (Aldershot: 1997) pp. 106-120. For the role of politics

The work of Joyce and Vernon on people's relationship with formal and informal political structures at the local level, demonstrate how innovative studies of communication can inform understanding. However, although they sought to move away from E.P. Thompson's more reductive view of identity, their work remains rooted in the 'history from below' tradition, one that is necessarily largely uninterested in high politics and indeed sees national politicians as threatening local 'democratic' forms of expression.⁶¹ Such is the emphasis on local organisation it has become the main explanation for the rise of national party structures, especially Labour, in the pre- and inter-war years.⁶²

This focus on localised forms of communication has tended to marginalise the importance of the central national party voice. More recently, however, Phillip Williamson and Bill Schwarz have shown the significance of Baldwin's national rhetoric in the building of his public persona and the 'education' of the newly enfranchised masses in inter-war Britain.⁶³ Meanwhile, Laura Beers has shown how Transport House's communication contributed to Labour's growth before the victory of 1945.⁶⁴ Beers is one of the few historians to offer any sustained thinking on the use of posters. Even so, like Ross McKibbin, she claims Labour's 1910 posters had 'quality', but fails to articulate what that actually means.⁶⁵ Highlighting the limited nature of many political historians' analysis of posters, in his assessment of the Liberal Party's 1910 posters Neal Blewett applies the same word, but again leaves the reader wondering what exactly it signifies.⁶⁶

Reference to nationally produced posters does suggest political historians appreciated they played an important role in campaigning, even if most are not able to specify precisely what

in society see L. Black, *Redefining British Politics : Culture, Consumerism and Participation 1954-1970* (Hampshire: 2010).

⁶¹ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, pp. 264-265.; Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 331-339.

⁶² See D. Tanner, *Political change and the Labour party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: 2003); M. Savage, 'Urban politics and the rise of the Labour party, 1919-1939' in L. Jamieson and H Corr (Eds.) *State, private life and political change*, series Explorations in Sociology, 32 (Basingstoke: 1990).; D. Howell, *British Workers and Independent Labour party, 1888-1906* (Manchester: 1983).

⁶³ P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin conservative Leadership and national values* (Cambridge: 1999).; Schwarz, 'Politics and Rhetoric', pp. 131-149.

⁶⁴ L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and Making of the Labour Party* (Harvard: 2010) p. 9; L. Beers, 'Counter-Toryism: Labour's response to anti-socialist propaganda, 1918-39' in M. Worley (ed.) *The Foundations of the British Labour Party* (Surrey: 2009); L. Beers, 'Education or Manipulation? Labour, Democracy, and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain' in *Journal of British Studies* (January: 2009) 48, pp. 129-152.; L Beers, 'Labour's Britain fight for it now', *The Historical Journal* (2009) 52:3, p. 688.; Beers, *Your Britain*, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁵ R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1914* (Oxford: 1974) pp. 17-18. ; Beers, *Your Britain*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People, The General Election of 1910* (London: 1972) pp. 312-313.

it was.⁶⁷ James Thompson has done the most to develop a coherent analysis of the efficacy of posters, in a wide-ranging study of Edwardian pictorial propaganda.⁶⁸ Thompson has demonstrated the centrality of pictorial propaganda to Edwardian politics and has shown the benefit of locating visual language within the myriad voices that constructed political communication. His work naturally leads to questions of how parties continued to use posters after 1914 and how in turn those images help construct post-reform political communication, one of the most significant aims of this thesis.

While political historians like Beers and Thompson have demonstrated the importance of locating posters in their context, many art historians are apt to ignore it. By refusing to acknowledge the political posters purpose – communication – and instead concentrating on the aesthetic, their work result in few conclusions about how posters actually functioned.⁶⁹ By exclusively focusing on the image contained in the poster, art historians reveal nothing about why the posters were created and so why such images were produced, a failing common to the innumerable studies of war posters.⁷⁰ This absence also undermines Susan Sontag's analysis of posters, which suggested a binary separation between commercial and political examples; the former she deemed cultivated private desires, while the latter promoted a sense of obligation. The briefest glance at the images included in this thesis show that her distinction is by no means universally true. Nor is Sontag correct that posters were a mirror for the public to look upon themselves: many political posters aspired to change how people thought.⁷¹

⁶⁷ See also Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, pp. 79-81.; Stuart Ball has produced a catalogue of Conservative party posters held at the Bodleian Library. Although offering little analysis of the material it provides a useful guide to material one party produced over the twentieth century. S. Ball, *Dole Queues and Demons, British Election Posters from the Conservative Party Archive* (Oxford: 2011). Although antiquarian in his approach John Gorman showed that Labour posters in 1945 election provided a strong visual element to that year's election. J. Gorman, 'The Labour Party's Election Posters in 1945', *Labour History Review* (Winter, 1996) 61.3, pp. 299-308.

⁶⁸ Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', pp. 177-197. ; For claims that parliamentary reform pacified politics see Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 331-339.

⁶⁹ J. Barnicoat, *Posters a Concise History* (London: 1972) p. 222. ; Hutchinson, *The Poster an illustrated history*; M. Gallo, *The Poster in History* (London: 1974).

⁷⁰ J. T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides: The Art of the Political Poster 1914-1989* (Milan: 2005), p. 13. ; D. Crowley, 'The Propaganda Poster' in M. Timmers (ed.) *The Power of the Poster* (London:1998) p. 104; P. Paret, *Persuasive images : posters of war and revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives* (Princeton: 1992). ; J. Darracott, *The First World War in Posters* (New York: 1974). ; R. Mace, *British Trade Union Posters, An Illustrated History* (Stroud, 1999). ; P. Darman, *Posters of World War II* (London: 2008). ; Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda and Persuasion*, pp. 125-162.

⁷¹ S. Sontag, 'Posters: Advertisement, art, political artefact, commodity' in D. Stermer (ed.) *The Art of Revolution* (New York, 1970) p. 5 and 14.

For scholars of political communication, an interest in the post-war rise of so called ‘professionalisation’ (a term used to capture the mainstream parties’ growing use of commercial techniques and advertising expertise) has led to a reaction against the study of posters.⁷² As Dennis Kavanagh suggests, ‘one indicator of the acceptance of professional communications is that no major British party would now dream of entering an election campaign without a communications strategy and advice from professionals.’⁷³ Within these constraints, campaigning of the past is naturally viewed as unstructured and amateur.⁷⁴ However, Dominic Wring and Richard Cockett have shown that political marketing before 1945 was more complex and advanced than those who study post-war politics are prepared to admit.⁷⁵ As this thesis demonstrates, throughout the twentieth century, the production of election posters was often informed by external expertise in some form. Undoubtedly, in the latter half of the century this dependence increased but it did not come from nowhere.

This focus on the ‘new’ means that political communication studies focus on more recent types of communication. A rapidly growing body of literature dedicated to internet campaigning is testament to this fact.⁷⁶ Yet, as the authors of the 2010 Nuffield study state, parties’ use of the internet in the election was hardly revolutionary. While online platforms are becoming increasingly important, they deliver a relatively traditional type of message.⁷⁷ Tellingly the greatest expense during the 2010 campaign was not web advertising, but direct mail, something that is, like the poster, usually overlooked.⁷⁸ Before interest in internet campaigning, it was television’s role in political communication that dominated research.

⁷² For example, Negrine, ‘The Professionalisation in the British Electoral and Political Context’, pp. 47-62.; Lees-Marshment, *Political Marketing*; M Scammel, *Designer Politics*; P. Norris, *Electoral Change in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: 1997).

⁷³ Kavanagh, *Election Campaigning*, p. 148.

⁷⁴ Norris has developed a three stage model for professionalisation across two monographs. It begins in 1945 which she defines as ‘pre-modern’. Norris, *Electoral Change in Britain*, pp. 197-211. ; Norris developed on the theme and advanced the idea of the post-modern in, P. Norris, *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies* (Cambridge: 2000) pp. 173-177.; See also J. G. Blumler and D. Kavanagh, ‘The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features’, *Political Communication* (1999) 16:3, pp. 209-230.

⁷⁵ Wring, *Marketing the Labour Party*, pp. 1-9.; M. Cockett, ‘Party Publicity and the Media’, in A. Seldon and S. Ball, *The Conservative Century since 1900* (Oxford: 1994) p. 556.

⁷⁶ See for example W. Lusoli and J. Ward, “‘Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows’ The Internet and the 2004 European Parliament Election in Britain”, *The International Journal of Press/Politics* (October: 2005) 10:4, pp. 71-97. ; P. Norris and J. Curtice, ‘Getting the Message Out: A Two-Step Model of the Role of the Internet in Campaign Communication Flows During the 2005 British General Election’, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* (2008) 4.4, pp. 3-13. ; R. Southern and S. Ward, ‘Below the Radar? Online Campaigning at the Local Level in the 2010 Election’ in Wring, et.al *Political Communication in Britain*, pp. 198-217.

⁷⁷ This is discussed in 2010 Nuffield study. Kavanagh and Cowley, *The British General Election of 2010*, pp. 184-186.

⁷⁸ P. Cowley, quoted in round table discussion, *Parties, people and elections: Political Communication since 1900* conference, 14 June 2012, PHM.

Following the publication of Jay Blumler's and Denis McQuail's classic study in 1969, academics have constantly questioned, reassessed, and revised the function and impact of broadcasting politics to the people.⁷⁹

While research into the role and impact of television and the internet on political communication is substantial and growing, the same is not true of posters. One reason for this is a prevailing view that the medium is a redundant outdated form of campaigning.⁸⁰ Indeed, during the early 1990s academics had begun to point to the posters waning influence.⁸¹ And while Martin Harrop and Margaret Scammell showed that in 1997 there had been a shift away from newspaper advertising back to posters, the medium was by that point viewed as communication from an earlier time.⁸² Whatever the merits of such conclusions, they reflect the problem that – ‘Labour isn’t working’ aside – those working in political communications simply regard posters as of little interest.

Building on those few who have taken posters seriously, this thesis aims to map out a nuanced and coherent explanation of the development of the political poster during the twentieth century, integrating an understanding of text and context. The poster continues to be an important part of any campaign and it is surprising that it has not yet been the subject of a serious academic study. Consequently, this thesis can do little more than scratch the surface, but in doing so, it aims to encourage others to look at posters in greater depth.

I.6 Method

As indicated at the start of this Introduction, much written about the ‘iconic’ *LABOUR ISN’T WORKING* poster lacks historical perspective. It has further established that, apart from the Saatchi brothers’ most famous product, most scholars interested in contemporary politics or

⁷⁹ J. G. Blumler and D. McQuail, *Television in politics: Its uses and influence* (Chicago: 1969). ; M. Scammell and H. A. Semetko, ‘The British Experience’ in L L Kaid & C Holtz-Bacha (eds.) *Political Advertising in Western Democracies: Parties & Candidates on Television* (California: 1995); Dominic Wring and Stephen Ward have highlighted the continued importance of television to the 2010 campaign and the hype surrounding the internet see, D. Wring and S. Ward, ‘The Media and 2010 Campaign: the Television Election?’, *Parliamentary Affairs* (2010) 63:4, pp. 802-17.

⁸⁰ Robert Worcester and Roger Mortimore were particularly scathing about how useful posters were during the general election of 2001 see R. Worcester and R. Mortimore, *Explaining Labour’s Second Landslide* (London: 2001) p. 171.

⁸¹ M. Harrop, ‘Political Marketing’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, (1990) 43:3, p. 285. ; D. Butler and A. Ranney ‘Conclusion’ in D. Butler and A. Ranney (eds.) *Electioneering: A Comparative Study of Continuity and Change* (Oxford: 1992) pp. 281-282.

⁸² M. Scammel and M. Harrop, ‘The Press’ in D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997* (Hounds Mills: 1997) p. 183.

modern political history have rarely turned their attention to posters. Historians tend only to take written forms of evidence seriously, while scholars of more recent political communication appear to view the poster as old-fashioned and unworthy of serious consideration. This thesis will hope to demonstrate that such outlooks are in need of revision.

An awareness of context is critical to any interpretation of posters, something appreciated by both James Thompson and Pearl James.⁸³ In order to achieve this, the five case studies break down each campaign to reveal the conception, production, and dissemination of posters. Each case study shares the same structure, beginning with an investigation of how parties organised themselves to produce posters. The middle section examines the posters themselves, deconstructing their images in order to understand how exactly they communicated their intended messages. The final section examines how parties displayed their posters, and therefore the changing way in which voters physically experienced the billboard.

This method builds on well-established foundations. As early as 1949 the political scientist and communications specialist Harold Laswell broke down the ‘act’ of communication into five steps, Who, Says What, In Which Channel, To Whom, With What Effect.⁸⁴ For the purpose of this study ‘In Which Channel’ will always be posters. ‘To whom’ is broadly considered as those who could vote, but does account for the reality that although posters were essentially viewable by all, they were a sophisticated form of communication, using as discussed below specific codes to speak to specific groups. This leaves us then with ‘Who’?, ‘Says What’? to ‘What Effect’? We need to understand what the image theorist Susan Buck-Morss called an ‘object’s prehistory’ and ‘afterhistory’.⁸⁵ Cara Finnegan was more precise still, arguing that if one or all of an image’s ‘production’, ‘composition’, ‘reproduction’, ‘circulation’ and ‘reception’ is analysed, it is possible to answer ‘particular questions about the roles images play in public culture’.⁸⁶

⁸³ Thompson, ‘Pictorial lies’, p. 182.; P. James, ‘Introduction: Reading World War I Posters’ in P. James (ed.), *Picture This: World War I posters and visual culture* (Nebraska: 2009) p. 22.

⁸⁴ H. D. Laswell, ‘The Structure and Function of Communication in Society’ in W. Schramm (ed.) *Mass Communication* (Illinois: 1949) p. 102.

⁸⁵ S. Buck-Morss, ‘Visual Culture Questionnaire’, *October* (Summer: 1969) 77, p. 30.

⁸⁶ C. Finnegan, ‘Studying Visual Models of Public Address’ in S. J. Perry-Giles and J. M. Hogan, *The Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address* (Oxford, 2010) p. 252.; C. Finnegan, ‘Doing Rhetorical History of the Visual in C. Hill and M. Helmers (eds.) *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (London: 2004) pp. 195-214. Nick Hiley adopts a very similar techniques in, N.Hiley, ’ Showing Politics to the people: Cartoons, comics and satirical prints’ in R. Howells and R Matson (Eds.) *Using Visual Evidence* (Maidenhead: 2009) p. 24-43.

Finnegan's method is useful to a point, but more is needed. In this thesis, 'production' is understood not just for individual posters but also at the level of entire campaigns at the national level. Undoubtedly, some posters were incredibly influential, remaining longer in the public consciousness than others. The thesis, however, is concerned with how the posters interacted with each other, with other texts and with the electorate. Consideration is needed of who worked on campaigns and made the decisions. Why parties employed certain artists and how they worked with them, and whether this had an impact on the final product. For the first four case studies archival material can tell us the organisational practicalities of why parties acted in the manner they did.⁸⁷ With the fifth case study, that of 1997, a closed Conservative archive and a 'New' Labour Party reluctant to retain documents has meant a reliance on the posters and evidence gained from contemporary newspapers and other published accounts.

The second point on Finnegan's model is composition, and we need to build on her approach. We need to know not only how the image is composed, but also of what, and more crucially why. Posters are an amalgam of various symbols, each taken from a variety of locations and like all texts constructed from existing sources. Julia Kristeva called this process 'intertextuality'.⁸⁸ This 'mosaic of quotations' was evident in posters as designers made extensive use of existing symbols to create their product. Gerard Genette summed up 'intertextuality' as 'quoting (with or without quotation marks) plagiarism, allusion, and the perception by the reader of the relationship of one work to another.'⁸⁹ By determining the origins of slogans and symbols designers used, we can better understand how posters communicated with the electorate and thereby begin to bridge the gap of understanding just how that electorate interpreted that communication.

Posters were not simply images, but very often mixtures of words and pictures. The nature of this relationship is contested. For Roland Barthes, image and word act as one in a single document. They work in unity and present a coherent whole. The image fixed in place using the written word.⁹⁰ In recent years Barthes' analysis has come under scrutiny, not least with the suggestion it is only possible to understand the relationship between image and text by

⁸⁷ For example see, Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda and Persuasion*, pp. 125-162.

⁸⁸ J. Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' in T. Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: 1986) pp. 36-37.

⁸⁹ Interpretation of Genette's argument taken from M. Helmers and C.A. Hill, 'Introduction', *Defining Visual Rhetoric* (London: 2004) p. 14.

⁹⁰ R. Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the image' in R. Barthes, *Responsibility of forms*, trans. by R Howard, (Berkeley:1991) p. 28.

studying them independently of one another.⁹¹ W.J.T Mitchell adopts a position somewhere beyond, rather than between, Barthes and his critics. Mitchell stated that the relationship between text and image is entirely dependent on the subject and the difference or similarity between image and text does not matter. What is important, according to Mitchell, is what difference do the ‘differences and similarities make’.⁹²

Mitchell’s approach to the interpretation of media following the ‘pictorial turn’ are particularly useful because he accepts that communication is increasingly formed via mixtures of codes and symbols. In the age of the digital revolution, this is becoming ever more the case. As stated above historians have previously shied away from visual evidence, preferring instead the safety of the written word that confines their disciplinary boundaries. What Mitchell has in effect called for is a de-disciplining of the gap between the verbal and the visual.⁹³ What this offers for the study of posters is an insight into the world of mixed communication. Barthes and Mitchell do not agree on the relationship between image and text. Writing on the work of William Blake Mitchell argued there could be a complete collapse in the difference between the written and verbal forms.⁹⁴ Despite these differences Mitchell and Barthes are useful in that both theories maintain the acceptance, that at a posters inception the intention is that image and word would function in unity. Designers intended that a single poster constructed from image and word would deliver a cohesive idea, embodying what Quintavalle called ‘rapport’. Therefore as a starting point to understanding posters, it is important to treat image and text as functioning towards the same goal, even if at times, they did not always succeed.

Having negotiated the relationship between text and image, the thesis unpicks the posters to try and source their content. This enables us to see from what languages designers drew, and understand better the nature of political language in particular elections. During each election, certain factors remained constant in poster production. Parties (and their designers) wanted to say something and believed that voters would understand the communications they produced. They made decisions about what they wanted to say – and how best to say it – by drawing on their interpretations of the contemporary political culture. Indeed this is one of the factors Steven Fielding stated as defining ‘culture’, as it embraced ‘not just what people did, but

⁹¹ G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, *Reading Images The Grammar of Visual Design* (London, 1999) p. 17.

⁹² Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p.91

⁹³ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p.83-107

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 146-147

what they imagined they were doing and what impact they believed their actions would have.⁹⁵ In relation to the production of pictures and other ‘historical artefacts’ the historian Michael Baxandall conceptualised this as ‘a man addressing a problem of which his product is a finished and concrete solution. To understand it we try to reconstruct both the specific problem it was designed to solve and the circumstances out of which he was addressing it’.⁹⁶ The process of producing posters was constituted by the parties addressing the problem of how to speak to the voter, and how they went about solving it. This involved using words, symbols, and codes that the communicator thought the viewer would understand. In his work on Renaissance painting Baxandall spoke of an individual’s ‘cognitive style’.⁹⁷ This ‘style’ was the viewer’s experience, understanding, and education, that which they brought to bear on the image. Moreover, Baxandall argued that the ‘cognitive style’ differed from generation to generation; it was the cultural norms of each generation that determined this ‘style’, and this he described as ‘the period eye’.⁹⁸ Obviously when poster and voter met, a number of complex negotiations occurred, and envisioning individual voters’ experience of that moment is difficult, if not impossible, given the nature of the source material available. However, by locating and interpreting the language of posters in the context of the period we can at least begin to resolve how voters experienced election billboards.

By picking posters apart, by studying the visual and verbal symbols, appreciating how the parties envisioned voters also becomes clearer. The poster hails people, the very act of attraction – of hailing – Louis Althusser called interpellation, and this, he stated, made subjects of people.⁹⁹ By studying how posters communicated, we can better understand how far they actually subjugated people. While political historians acknowledge that voters were capable of multiple identities, there is little understanding of how parties engaged or indeed envisioned this group as an audience. Michael Saward highlighted the importance of understanding the ‘*aesthetic*’ of representation, of the evocation of the ‘represented’.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the poster can demonstrate just what the parties thought about those they sought to rule.

By unpicking the images posters used, and seeking to understand how they constructed a picture of the electorate, we are moving towards understanding the impact of posters, but

⁹⁵ S. Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970: Labour and cultural change* (Manchester, 2003) p.1.

⁹⁶ M. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Picture* (Yale, 1985) p. 14.

⁹⁷ M. Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford, 1988) 30, pp. 36-40.

⁹⁸ Outlined in section 2 of Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, pp. 29-32

⁹⁹ L. Althusser, ‘Ideology and State’ in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (London: 1977) pp. 162-165.

¹⁰⁰ M. Saward, ‘Representation’ in A. Dobson and R. Eckersley (eds.) *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge* (Cambridge: 2006) 186.

probably not the ‘effect’ of which Laswell spoke. Establishing whether posters had significant electoral impact is at best problematic. Steven Seidman asserted that they could be effective. A possibly sensible conclusion, but he provided no conclusive evidence to back up his claim.¹⁰¹ What limited studies have been conducted suggest that if posters do anything to achieve electoral success it is, like other forms of advertising, to reaffirm existing beliefs rather than changing minds, but to a much lesser extent than broadcasting.¹⁰² Separating out one particular type of political communication to understand its specific impact is extremely problematic, as those who have tried to assess the impact of party election broadcasts have discovered.¹⁰³ Where evidence is available, the thesis does articulate where individual posters or campaigns appeared to have an impact. This, however, is rare. Political communications does not exist in a vacuum, and separating posters from the maelstrom of other communication to which voters were subject is impossible.

By examining how a party organised itself to produce posters, by unpicking and contextualising the images within them, by recreating the period eye, and then by seeing what that meant for political elites’ vision of the people, we can move towards an understanding of this neglected aspect of Britain’s political culture. The study here is of a developing relationship of reciprocity. The thesis suggests that actors (be they politicians or poster designers) reacted to the existing perceived culture, and produce communication based on that reaction. This in turns helped to inform and indeed change the existing culture. This occurred with the production of *LABOUR ISN’T WORKING*. The Conservatives, and Saatchi and Saatchi saw that sections of electorate were concerned about unemployment. They devised a campaign that spoke to that concern using codes or symbols taken directly from the culture of unemployment, in this case the job centre and the queue. On its release, the poster became part of the political culture as designers continued to recycle the poster’s constituent parts to construct their own message.

Each case study ends by examining how the parties displayed their posters. Just as the design of posters changed, so the physical appearance of posters also changed. Images certainly became larger; change in the physical nature of posters having come as result of legislation and technological development. The large posters sites of more recent times, displaying as

¹⁰¹ Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda and Persuasion*, pp. 228-229.

¹⁰² I. Mcallister, ‘Camapaign activities and electoral outcomes in Britain 1979 and 1983’ *Public Opinion Quarterly*, (1985) 49.4, p. 500

¹⁰³ David Denver, *Elections and Voters in Britain* (2007), pp. 137-9.

they do single images have replaced the densely packed billboards of Edwardian Britain. In the latter part of the century, the rise in car ownership has meant that the time individual electors have to ponder over bills has decreased. Furthermore, fly posting, poster launches and the rise of internet posters all provide different opportunities for interaction between poster and viewer.

Problems associated with understanding posters do not simply begin and end with the source itself. Gaining insight into the political and electoral culture of the periods that the thesis covers is made more problematic by long thin nature of the study. For the first elections under scrutiny, archival research has formed a significant part of the basis for the evaluation. Any archival research has its limitations. Research is often constrained by the cataloguing and accessibility of papers. During the period of mass cataloguing of party archives during the 1980s and 1990s, it was little anticipated that researchers would one day want to know how and why parties produced the posters they did. It remains a sad but true statement that much of the information regarding the whereabouts of documents in archive remains in archivists heads. The problem with archival research is also historical. Minutes detailing decisions made in committee are often sparse, although at least it has been possible to trace top level decision making regarding posters. Finding detailed correspondence about the nature of posters has been more problematic. Where it exists it has, hopefully, been located.

Archival research has not been the only source of evidence used in this thesis. The vast span of history covered in the thesis, has inevitably meant that the type of evidence utilised over the course of time period covered has changed. The rise in advertising trade press in the latter half of the twentieth century, most notably with the introduction of *Campaign*, has provided a much greater scope of evidence for understanding how posters were produced and functioned. The thesis has exploited *Campaign* alongside articles on political posters included in the mainstream press. Such coverage has filled some of the gaps left by conventional archives, which become much less rich for the later decades of the century.

Newspapers, however, do not always provide a complete solution to the deficiencies of archives. Often posters that newspapers mention no longer survive, or more commonly, those mentioned in the newspaper appear slightly differently when compared to surviving examples. Moreover, the evidence of newspapers is tainted by the fact posters suffer from being entities of which many people have an opinion. Just as with some of the historians cited above, opinion formers will cast views of posters with little or no analysis as to why they hold such

an opinion. The reason for this is as much to do with the people to whom newspapers have turned to reach their views, namely members of the advertising industry. Within this world esteem is often based on creativity. As the proceeding chapters make clear those who work in advertising are reluctant to listen to any evidence of what makes a good advert beyond their own opinion. It is an industry reluctant to engage in any quantitative or qualitative testing of their work, and it was notable when questioned by the author how he knew what a good advert looked like, a respondent from a high ranking advertising firm simply replied 'I just know'.¹⁰⁴ The consequence of this is that the use of this source must always be tempered with the realisation that any opinions cited come with provisions.

Although those working within the advertising industry have it seems ignored any structured analysis of the effect of their posters, this study has not. In the later elections cited in this study, the use of polling and particularly in 1997 focus group testing has offered new insights into posters and their use. Polls taken often questioned people's recall of posters and whether they agreed with the statement. Such evidence undoubtedly adds an extra dimension to our understanding of how posters functioned, but as with any evidence it also brings new questions. The ability to recall a poster or remember seeing one, does not reveal the actual effect of the poster, only that it was memorable.¹⁰⁵ Focus group testing – to which Maurice Saatchi riled in 1997 – potentially has the ability to fill this missing qualitative detail. This thesis does use such information where it is available, but this is often second hand, through newspaper reporting. Labour, in the run up to and during the 1997 campaign conducted hundreds of focus group tests. Quite what happened to these results is unknown, however. They do not exist in the Labour party archive, and while the author has made attempts to interview or discuss the findings of these groups with individuals involved, this is so far to no avail.

The final problem of evidence related to the study of election posters is the posters themselves. Large numbers do survive, the Labour and Conservative Party archives contain large collections of examples produced by the respective parties over the course of the twentieth century. In addition, the London School of Economics, the Hoover Institute in Stanford – particularly good for Liberal posters otherwise missing from the various British Liberal archives – and Oldham and Wigan Museums also hold significant collections. The

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous interview with the author.

¹⁰⁵ Something Steven Seidman fails to consider in summation of whether posters work. Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda, and Persuasion*, pp. 221-229.

availability of such a resource is a combination of good curatorial decision-making and happy coincidence.¹⁰⁶ However, despite the hundreds of posters that do survive, some do not. Newspapers report their release, but it has not been possible to trace an original copy. A further problem with researching posters is that actually getting to see them can be difficult. The superb cataloguing and digitising of the Conservative Party collection remains a rarity. The posters size, difficulty of handling and staff time in supervising research, can lead to reluctance on the part of some museums and galleries to allow access to the researcher. While the thesis has made its conclusions based on those posters it could access, it acknowledges that some posters the author was unable to view and this remains a limitation.

Of those that do survive there is also the problem of selection. As stated above, this thesis is a study of posters produced by central parties at a national level. By understanding how posters functioned towards constructing a relationship between the national party and voter it seeks to inject into the debates on the relationship between the two groups. By focussing on only one source of evidence others are naturally ignored, namely the huge numbers of posters produced throughout the century at a local level. The author recognises this as a problem, but highlights the want to understand how posters functioned between national parties and voters rather than local organisations.

Posters are a complex source of evidence. It is perhaps little wonder that the majority of political communication scholars from whatever discipline prefer to study communication with a strong oral and written content. The written or spoken word is a muscular thing upon which to grasp. Contextualising and interpreting any communication within the framework of its production is difficult enough. To do so with an image is harder still. The conclusions of this thesis may be challenging and are certainly open to discussion. But in placing the poster – an object which is after all closely associated with elections – at its centre this work aims to open the ground for new scholarship into this, one of the most evocative and visceral forms of political communication.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ J. Aulich and J. Hewitt have commented on the survival of war posters in the Imperial War Museum collection. See *Seduction or Instruction?: First World War Posters in Britain and Europe*, (Manchester: 2001)

¹⁰⁷ Unlike conventional works of art posters were not formally titled. Throughout this work the posters referenced are referred to by their first line. Where this ‘title’ appears on the original poster in upper case, the capitalisation is retained in the citation. Where the text appears in lower case this is also reflected. This is a deliberate recognition of the conscious choice made by the producer in whether to use upper or lower case and the effect the choice might have on the consumer.

1.0 The General Elections of 1910

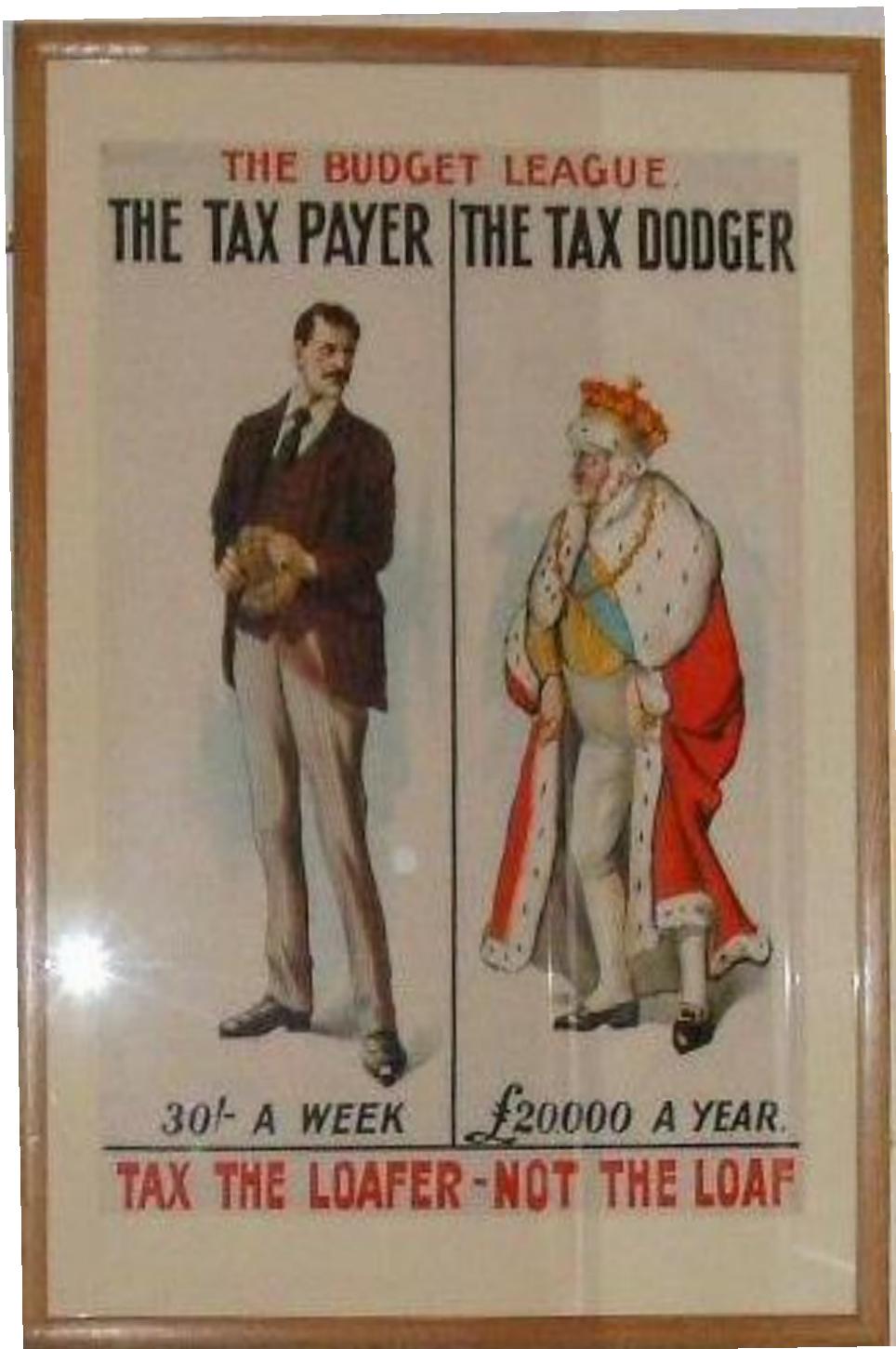


Figure 1.1 *TAX THE LOAFER – NOT THE LOAF*, 1910, Budget League, PHM.

‘That the action of the House of Lords in refusing to pass into law the financial provision made by this House for the Service of the year is a breach of the Constitution and a usurpation of the rights of the Commons.’¹

So spoke H.H. Asquith on the 2nd December 1909, after the Peers refused to pass Chancellor David Lloyd George’s ‘People’s Budget’. The Upper House’s intransigence led the Prime Minister to dissolve parliament, and polling took place from the 15th January to the 10th February 1910. Although the Liberals retained power, their 274 seats was only two more than the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (hereafter known as the Conservatives). Asquith required the support of Labour’s 40 MPs and the 71 seats of John Redmond’s Irish Nationalists to pass the budget. Constitutional wrangling continued throughout the year. Stalemate between the two Houses over an act designed to remove the Lords’ right to veto future budgets forced Asquith to call the year’s second election. Polling took place between the 3rd and 19th December and the result again was tight. The electorate returned the Liberals to power with 272 MPs, and support was once again required from the Irish Nationalists and Labour; the Conservatives finished with 271.

The two contests of 1910 were the last elections premised under a Victorian style of politics. The Liberal’s Parliament Act, passed in 1911, irrevocably diminished the power of the Lords.² And although unknown at the time, the Liberals would never again win the largest number of seats. Moreover, 1910 would be the last election conducted under an all-male franchise. These constitutional adjustments changed the *aesthetics* of electioneering. As Jon Lawrence has shown, reform in 1918 and an end to the masculine preserve of Westminster electioneering, made campaigning a much less rumbustious affair.³

Developments after 1910, therefore, make the elections worthy of study in order to see how change affected posters. The election is of additional interest to the poster historian because of the sheer number of examples deployed. Pictorial propaganda wallpapered Britain’s streets. Such was the coverage the *Pall Mall Gazette* declared the January contest to be *the*

¹ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 2 Dec 1909, vol 13, col 546-81.

² D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: 1996), p. 54.

³ See J. Lawrence, ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914’, *English Historical Review* (Jul, 1993) 108:428, pp. 629-652; *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: 1998); ‘The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War’, *Past and Present* (Feb, 2006) 190:1, pp. 185-216.

'Poster Election'.⁴ The Conservative Party produced 1,147,900 word only posters and 983,615 pictorial examples or 'cartoons'. Surviving data for the Liberal Publications Department is less illuminating but it seems the party produced 662,000 posters (both pictorial and non-pictorial examples) for the January election. In London alone, posters covered two million square feet of wall.⁵

Production of pictorial propaganda was not limited to parties. Edwardian pressure groups, known as leagues, played a prominent role in both campaigns, and although not officially linked to parties, the two advocated the same policies and often shared the same leadership. Liberal Cabinet minister Winston Churchill chaired the Budget League, founded in June 1909, in support of Lloyd George's budget.⁶ The number of leagues had increased following the 1883 Corrupt and Official Practices Act because unlike parties they were unencumbered by any legal restriction on candidates' expenses.⁷ The leagues spent heavily on propaganda during the campaigns, and the millions of posters they produced were explicit as to which party they were allied.⁸ The same artists worked for pressure group and party, and as a result, both organisations shared a visual language.⁹

Arguments proposed by parties in their posters were few, and pictorial propaganda reflected the broader themes of the election. 'Peers vs. the People' was a campaign message and ethos that pervaded both the posters of the Liberal party proper, and those leagues aligned to it. The phrase encompassed more than a battle based on the relative constitutional positions of the upper and lower classes, as some historians have suggested.¹⁰ In posters and speeches, Liberals yoked upper house reform with an attack on the economics of protectionism. At a speech at Walworth during the first campaign, Lloyd George claimed the Lords' stance was the 'spirit of reaction', taking 'you back sixty years to the days of the Corn Laws'.¹¹ Liberal

⁴ Quoted in L. Beers, *Your Britain* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: 2010), p. 31.

⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive (hereafter CPA): NUA 2/2/, National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations 44th Annual Conference Report, 1910, pp. 4, 53. For the Liberal figures see *The Liberal Agent*, April 1910, XII, p. 165. For the poster coverage in London see N. Blewett, *The Press, the Parties and the People: The General Election of 1910* (London, 1972), p. 312.

⁶ Churchill College Archives Centre (hereafter CCA): CHAR 2/42/13-18, 23 June 1909.

⁷ J. Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters* (Oxford; 2009), p.81.

⁸ E. Porritt, 'The Struggle over the Lloyd-George Budget', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (Feb, 1910) 24:2, p. 260.

⁹ For Edwardian leagues see F. Coetzee, 'Pressure Groups, Tory Businessmen and the Aura of Political Corruption before the First World War', *The Historical Journal* (December, 1986) 29:4, pp. 833-852.; Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p.81.

¹⁰ B Murray, 'The Politics of the People's Budget', *The Historical Journal* (September, 1973) 16:3, pp. 555-570.

¹¹ Lloyd George speech as reported 'The Peers and the People's Wishes', *The Manchester Guardian*, 18 Dec 1909.

posters suggested a widespread conspiracy – the word used by the Chancellor at Walworth – of the rich and powerful, against the poor. As for the other parties, Labour's stance broadly mirrored that of the Liberals. The Conservatives meanwhile, responding to the Liberal's two-fold attack – on their patrician supporters in Upper House and preference for economic protectionism – caste themselves as defenders of the people. Posters claimed Lloyd George's policy of free trade had already raised prices, cost jobs, and denied the working man his pleasure of drink and tobacco. According to the Conservatives, the so called 'People's Budget' would only exacerbate the problem further.

The messages may have been simple, but the posters produced were far from singular. Each party adopted a very different method of production, each in turn resulting in very different ways of making the same argument. Relying on the specialist Liberal Publication Department, the Liberals seemed to have thought most coherently about the best way of producing literature. Superficially at least, it seemed a better method than that adopted by the Conservatives publications committee. This, formed from MPs, disbanded at the call of the election. There was, however, a similarity between the Liberals and the Conservatives in that they placed implicit trust in the highly paid artists they used to produce their posters. This was in stark contrast to Labour who discussed poster design at the highest level, the party's National Executive Committee, and dictated to their artists exactly what they wanted.

Across the parties and across the billboards there were consistencies in the language of visual politics. Where people were depicted they were mainly men, and working-class. However, the way in which posters depicted this group varied from party to party and from poster to poster. Both contemporary commentators and historians have been critical of Conservative depictions of working class men, citing the party's poor organisation as the reason.¹² Certainly, the figures in some posters were weak and feeble. But Conservative posters also defined working-man masculinity by the pub and the pipe; the implication being that the interfering Liberals sought to erode these sacred pastimes. Moreover, the working-class man's right to a domestic life, free from Liberal attack, was a recurring theme. Jon Lawrence has argued that the Conservative language shifted from the pub to the home in later 1900s.¹³ The posters demonstrate, however, that there was no complete break from one to the other but instead a gradual shift as the two appeals overlapped.

¹² Blewett, *The Press, the Parties and the People*, pp. 312-313.

¹³ Lawrence, 'Class and gender', p. 646.

Just as the Conservatives were inconsistent in their depiction of working men, so too were the Liberals. While some Liberal posters did show working-class men defined by their moral fortitude, other billboards depicted the same as a victim of circumstance. The Liberals struggled with a contradiction that proposed that while workers must shake off their own shackles in order to free themselves from the tyranny of the Tory Lords, the only way to achieve this was by accepting Liberal help. The Labour Party were more consistent in their depiction of the working man, with posters premised on the argument that labour had to seize politically what was rightfully theirs.

Some of the inconsistencies in depicting the working man can be explained by the way parties dealt with the artists they employed. The Conservative and Liberal habit of trusting their artists, meant that the bias and ideas of those artists emerged from the image. Another explanation relates to the rich tradition of cartooning in political posters.¹⁴ The very nature of cartoons (establishing as they did a comparison between one extreme and another) meant that while some posters that visualised the ‘Peers vs. the People’ did portray upright working-class men, it was common to adopt the language of the oppressor and oppressed. This naturally led to passive depictions of the voters.

Just as the depiction of working men changed from poster to poster, so too did the vernaculars from which artists plagiarised. A complex visual language occurred, central to which was metonymy – the replacement of the name of a thing with an image – that liberated ‘the artist from the need to describe’.¹⁵ Certainly commercial advertising provided some of these visual symbols and frameworks.¹⁶ But poster artists adopted symbols and motifs from a variety of sources pictorial political propaganda, cartoons or high art. Where consistency did occur was in the politics of attack, as all parties assailed the opposition. While the Liberals and Labour aimed their wrath at the Lords, the Conservatives concentrated on leading Liberal politicians.

The packed Edwardian billboards brought these varied languages and styles together. The viewers’ eye wandered from cartoon, to letterpress poster, to commercial advert, to genre painting. Raymond Williams spoke of three types of ‘flow’ in television. Whether it be

¹⁴ J. Thompson, “‘Pictorial lies’?: posters and politics in Britain, 1880-1914”, *Past and Present*, (November, 2007) p. 188.; F. Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: 2008), p. 127.

¹⁵ J. Aulich, *Weapons of Mass Communication* (London, 2011), p. 15.

¹⁶ Thompson, ‘Pictorial Lies’, pp. 186 and 189.

between programmes, the flow of the ‘succession of items’ within each programme and finally the very detailed ‘flow’ between word and image.¹⁷ Although writing on a different medium Williams ideas help elucidate thinking on the Edwardian poster. There is the flow of the production process from commissioning to billboard, a process that dictated what the viewer saw. There are viewers’ eyes which flowed over the packed Edwardian billboard and encountered a wide variety of different style of electoral and commercial posters, each demanding to be understood. Finally, there is the flow of image and word in the individual poster. Understanding how all these processes relate is crucial if we are to come close to understanding the poster cultures of 1910.

This chapter expands upon these subjects in three parts; it begins with an examination of why and how each party produced their posters. The second section is an examination of how posters constructed their message, analysing the many ways pictorial propaganda extemporised the relatively few arguments of the 1910 election, and exploring this means for our understanding of political communication. The final section reconstructs how nationally and locally produced posters contested the battle of the streets.

1.1 Producing posters in 1910

Posters were products of complex internal and external relationships, which ultimately shaped the visual language of Edwardian politics. But making posters could be a fraught business. Parties producing billboard communication had to contend not just with their own, sometimes Byzantine, internal politics, but negotiate with external actors, such as artists, advertising agencies, and printers. Each party used a different method to achieve the ultimate aim of putting a poster on a billboard. Liberal leaders trusted the party’s Publication Department to take responsibility for commissioning posters. The Conservative Party relied on experienced poster designers, often paying commercial prices and leaving much of the work in the hands of professionals. Notably the leagues worked in a similar fashion. In contrast, Labour’s senior officials designed pictorial propaganda by committee.

With the formation of the Liberal Publication Department (L.P.D) in 1886, the party had established an effective way of producing posters well before 1910. The Department had emerged following its Chief Agent, Francis Schnadhorst’s, complaints about the quality of

¹⁷ R. Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London, 1990).

Liberal publications.¹⁸ After a shaky start, by 1896 the annual report highlighted the Department's continuing 'invaluable work of political education' noting that it had become largely 'self supporting'.¹⁹ The latter statement was a reference to the L.P.D's ability to cover the cost of producing literature by selling it to local Liberal associations. From the outset, the Liberal Central Association, the Liberal Federation and the Whips office jointly administered the L.P.D, but the three groups appeared not to interfere with the Department's work, too much. Such independence offered the L.P.D a freedom from the exacting hand of the party, and a relatively 'professional' way of working.²⁰ Such professionalism increased with the appointment of Charles Geake as head of the L.P.D in 1895. At this point Liberal propaganda began to outstrip its rivals.²¹ Key to Geake's improvement was a greater ability to cope during election campaigns and improved financial viability.²²

While historians have criticised Liberal organisation during the period, the L.P.D had proved itself in the huge Liberal victory of 1906. As a result, the party in 1910 had significant confidence in the body.²³ It was certainly safe in the competent managerial hands of Geake. More specifically, the party was also attempting, or at least thinking about, two things that in later years of the twentieth century election planners would see as key to success. The first was a recognition that campaigning was something that could happen between as well as during elections. However, in stating such an aim in July 1909, a little over six months before the General Election, one might question how effective it was at this. The second consideration was the want to speak in a unified voice.²⁴ Recognition of the single party voice, and the effort to construct a language of liberalism recognisable to the public as such, does show a relatively advanced view of electioneering on the part of the Liberals and their Publication Department.

Organisational speaking, the Conservatives appeared to lag behind their Liberal rivals. Their publication committee was twenty-five strong and made up of sitting Members of

¹⁸ Bristol University Special Collections (hereafter BUSC), Schnadhorst Collection, Schnadhorst to Morley, 25 June 1887.

¹⁹ BUSC: Liberal Central Association Minute Book No. 2, Annual General Meeting of the Liberal Central Association, 9 April 1889 and 25 June 1896, pp. 103 and 196.

²⁰ Blewett, *The Press, the Parties and the People*, pp. 312-313.

²¹ BUSC: Liberal Minute Book No. 2, minutes, May 1895.; Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp. 312-313.

²² BUSC: Liberal Minute Book No. 2, minutes, 9 May 1911.

²³ For criticisms of the organisation see M. Pugh, 'The Triumph of the New Liberalism (1899-1914)' in R. Ingham and D. Brack, *Peace, Reform and Liberation* (London:2011), p. 168.

²⁴ BUSC: Proceedings in connection with Thirty-First Annual Meeting of the National Liberal Federation, 'The Liberal Publication Department', 1 and 2 July 1909, p. 17.

Parliament. Subsequently, when the Liberals called the January election the membership left for their constituencies, passing responsibility for poster design to Central Office. For some scholars this was evidence of ‘poor organisation’, as the dispersion of the Publication Committee at election time had the potential to undermine whatever continuity of communication that might have existed.²⁵ As, however, the party produced many of its poster designs before Parliament’s dissolution it cannot explain the reasons for the supposed failure of some Conservative posters – a subject explored in more detail below.

In comparison with its larger rivals, Labour adopted a far more bureaucratic model. Poster production was a process consisting of submission, discussion, and resubmission. From its formation in 1900 the party had viewed posters as a useful tool for self-promotion, a belief that continued to 1910.²⁶ This is not to say that the two larger parties viewed posters with any less importance. But Labour’s reverence for pictorial propaganda meant it was the party’s most senior body, the National Executive Committee (N.E.C), which discussed and made the final decision on what to produce.²⁷ When in October 1909, the N.E.C assigned poster production to a newly formed sub-committee, it was not to pass responsibility to more lowly members of the party. The new body’s membership included the then leader Arthur Henderson, former leader Keir Hardie, and other such luminaries as Philip Snowden, G.H. Stuart, and E.R. Pease while James Ramsay MacDonald sat in Chair.²⁸ Even after the establishment of the new specialist sub-committee the N.E.C did not entirely absent itself from poster production, as the more senior body continued to make the final decisions.²⁹

The N.E.C’s reluctance to hand responsibility down, lay in part with the sheer expense of producing billboard imagery. Parties with the largest incomes could afford to pay those commercial artists who came with the greatest reputation, and in theory could be trusted to produce effective work. The two largest parties used well-established figures, either from the world of illustration or cartooning. Cartoonist and book illustrator Charles Crombie charged the Budget League £26.5.0 for the poster *Sympathy* (around £2090 at current value). John Hassall – frequently the Conservative’s and their associated leagues designer of choice – typically charged £25.0.0 per design, but did offer reduced rates for bulk orders.³⁰ By

²⁵ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp. 312-313.

²⁶ Beers, *Your Britain*, p. 28.

²⁷ LHASC: NEC minutes, 11 April 1907 and 19 December 1907.

²⁸ LHASC: NEC minutes, 6 October 1909.

²⁹ LHASC: NEC minutes, 30 June 1910.

³⁰ University of Essex, John Hassall Collection (hereafter JHC): Box 25, Commissions Book, p. 46.

comparison, Labour did, or would, not spend such sums. In 1909 the party agreed a maximum fee of £5-5-0 for each design, which was an increase on the previous maximum of £3-3s-0d.³¹

1.1.1 The Relationship between Party and Artist

Labours meagre fees reflected the artists they used. The party often pursued suitable draughtsmen and designs from within the ranks of the wider socialist movement. Adverts for poster designs were placed in the *Fabian News*, and the party benefited from offers of help from activists.³² Before 1910, Ramsay MacDonald received regular designs, accepting for instance F.H. Rose's (a future Labour Representation Committee (LRC) candidate for Stockton and sometime cartoonist for *Dispatch*) ideas for 'cow and the railway' and 'Labour at the gate' [figure 1.2].³³ Designs came from all parts of the labour movement, and the routes by which they arrived were convoluted. F.G. Burgess, who wrote to MacDonald in 1903, heard of Labour's need for posters from G. J. Wardle (editor of the *Railway Review* and in 1903 the prospective L.R.C candidate for Stockport).³⁴

In the appointment of Gerald Spencer Pryse – whose artist style is discussed in section 2.2 – MacDonald continued a Labour tradition of using artists whose sensibility was artistic rather than mercantile.³⁵ Pryse, who from 1910 to 1929 was Labour's most prolific and celebrated poster designer, came from within the party's wider network. A Fabian socialist, war hero, and respected artist, who produced commercial advertising and cartoons for *Punch*, Pryse came to the attention of MacDonald in 1909 after Beatrice and Sidney Webb employed him to help popularise their 1909 minority report.³⁶ Towards the end of the nineteenth century the labour movement had constructed its visual language on the 'spiritual socialism' of artists Walter Crane and William Morris.³⁷ Crane's style, if not his actual designs, were seen on

³¹ LHASC: N.E.C minutes, 6 October 1909.

³² LHASC: NEC minutes, 28 January 1908.; *Fabian News*, February 1908, 19:8.

³³ LHASC: LRC 10/352, Rose to MacDonald, 1 October 1903.; The previous month Rose had also offered to design posters for the LRC conference see LHASC: LP/LRC/10/351-352 and LP/LRC/LB/3/73.

³⁴ LHASC: LRC 11/386, F.G Burgess to MacDonald, 19 November 1903. Burgess was a Railway worker and member of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.

³⁵ Thompson argued Pryse style was Pre-Raphaelite, see Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', p. 185.

³⁶ Spencer Pryse stated how he came to work for Labour in a letter to Jim Middleton written over thirty years after the 1910 election. See LHASC: MID 79/8, Spencer Pryse to Jim Middleton, 19 June (year undated but after 1940).

³⁷ I. Spencer, *Walter Crane* (London, 1975), p. 143; For 'spiritual socialism' see A. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Hampshire, 2001), p. 5.

membership cards and banners.³⁸ Just as the socialist principles of Morris and Crane guided their work, so it was the same for Pryse. His appointment demonstrates that although the poster election may have been an Edwardian phenomenon, both organisationally and stylistically, Labour looked back to a Victorian tradition.

Labour leaders had a resolute vision of how they wanted their posters to appear. Often artists were not there to come up with their own ideas, but deliver the ideas of party leaders who would constantly demand revision.³⁹ Leaders even designed entire posters. In June 1904, Ramsay MacDonald anticipated that the arrival of the *SS Tweeddale* in Durban carrying Chinese indentured labourers' would have ramifications for domestic politics. His letter to the printers G.S. Christie, detailed exactly the image he wanted.

We want an 8th cartoon upon Chinese Labour The idea we should like to have expressed is as follows: Let us have the opening of a South African mine, with a notice well displayed "Labour wanted: Only Chinamen need apply." Put a stream of Chinese going down and a small group of English miners standing unemployed at the top. Across the top of the bill in bold letters "After the War" and on one of the top corners, preferably that to the left, "£230, 000 spent. 125, 000 Lives sacrificed."

At the bottom put "Chorus of English Miners : "Time we had Labour Members."⁴⁰

Figure 1.3 shows how close MacDonald's brief was to the final design. Despite the party's need to solicit expertise to produce pictorial propaganda, it was possible to design their own images. The larger parties did not practice such micro-management, and it was not without difficulties. Before arriving at Figure 1.3 – itself a specimen – the L.R.C demanded a number of alterations.⁴¹ The party criticised the standard of drawing, the quality of the colours and the inability of Christies to deliver work on time. So fraught was relationship between the L.R.C and printers that the party eventually used another company, indeed, Christies did not produce Figure 1.3, which was instead executed by another Nottingham firm Blacks.⁴² When

³⁸ Crane designed large amounts of ephemera for various strands of the labour movement from the late 19th century to his death in 1915. See PHM: *Social Democratic Federation membership card* NMLH.1992.24.; PHM: *National Clarion Van* NMLH 1992.139.; His designs also influenced banners of the period see PHM: *National Union of Railwaymen, Wakefield Branch, No. 2*, NMLH. 1993.653.; PHM: *The Workers Union Holloway Branch*, NMLH.1993.712.

³⁹ LHASC: LP/LRC/LB/3/73, MacDonald to Rose, 3 Nov 1903.

⁴⁰ LHASC: LRC 18/60, MacDonald to Christie, 9 July 1904.

⁴¹ LHASC: LRC 18/63, Assistant Secretary to Christie, 11 July 1904.

⁴² LHASC: L.R.C 18/48- L.R.C 18/122, correspondence between James Ramsay MacDonald and G.S. Christie, 1904.

producing the posters used in the 1910 election Labour continued with the practice of closely scrutinising a design and then sending it back to the artist for changes. A N.E.C minute from the 8th July 1909 stated, ‘A design for a new picture poster was also presented and the Secretary was instructed to consult with the artist with a view to the embodiment of certain suggestions that had been made.’⁴³ In all the N.E.C discussed the design and production of posters in ten meetings between 1907 and 1910, in only three of did the committee instruct the Secretary to have the posters produced.⁴⁴

The benefit of Labour’s model was that although it took time, the final product was what party the wanted. John Hassall, a leading poster designer of the day, argued that only direct contact between customer and artist could deliver exactly what was wanted.⁴⁵ Most famous for his Jolly Fisherman in the poster *Skegness is so bracing*, Hassall produced a number of posters for the Conservative party and the Conservative supporting Budget Protest League during the 1910 campaign (see below). Some posters produced for the Conservative party were a result of this close relationship, suggesting similarities with the way Labour worked.⁴⁶ But in comparison with the N.E.C’s lengthy committee made decisions, Hassall and the Conservatives turned posters around much more quickly. Hassall after visiting party headquarters on the 16th November 1910 despatched a poster the following day.⁴⁷ This was not unremarkable, given in a single week Hassall could produce over eight completed posters.

On occasion, the Conservatives would also use an advertising agency to commission and produce posters. The process involved approaching an agency who would go to a number of artists to have designs produced, the agency would then return to the customer who would select their preferred example.⁴⁸ Hassall was not an advocate of conducting work through an agency. Obviously, returns meant no payment. However, he also argued that the process diminished the final product, as without direct contact the client would not get exactly what they wanted. Moreover, dealing with the artist directly, according to Hassall, saved ‘unnecessary expenditure’.⁴⁹

⁴³ LHASC: LP/LRC/LB/3/73, MacDonald to Rose, 3 November 1903.; LHASC: N.E.C minutes, 8 July 1909.

⁴⁴ LHASC: N.E.C minutes, 19 March 1908, 29 November 1909 and 7 December 1909.

⁴⁵ J. Hassall, ‘Posters’ in T. Russell (ed.), *Advertising and Publicity* (London: 1911), pp. 124-125.

⁴⁶ Hassall made detailed lists of the posters he produced. The information included the title, whom the commission was for and when (or if) it was paid see JHC: Box 25, Commissions Book, pp. 49-51.

⁴⁷ JHC: diary, entry 16 November 1910.; JHC: Box 25, Commissions Book, p. 51.

⁴⁸ Hassall had a number of posters returned from the agency Dobson Molle and Company, see JHC: Commissions Book, p. 47.

⁴⁹ Hassall, ‘Posters’, pp. 124-125.

Whether judged by the resources expanded on them, both human and economic, it was clear that by 1910 the poster was a key type of communication available to parties.⁵⁰ The way each approached the production of those posters demonstrates something of their attitudes to the medium and, indeed, communication more widely. Each party had to tackle a specific problem: although they recognised the usefulness of posters to project their message, they were unable physically produce the final product themselves. This context of production is important as we move into an examination of the actual images. Political languages are constructed from a variety of sources. If we are to understand how posters took from and contributed to this wider language, it is necessary to consider just how much, or how little, parties were still involved with the process of production. There was clearly a difference between a communication actually being yours, or you simply putting your name to it.

1.2 The posters of 1910

Of the posters used in the 1910 election, many bore a strong visual relationship to cartooning, as many of the artists parties commissioned to produce posters came from the ranks of cartoonists who readily transferred the traditions of their craft to the billboard.⁵¹ The *Westminster Gazette*'s Francis Carruthers Gould worked prolifically for the Liberals. While in 1908, the Conservatives commissioned -editor of the *Pall Mall* magazine and cartoonist-George Ronald Halkett to produce cartoon and poster designs.⁵² With its traditions of visual argument, cartooning had significant potential for use in the combative world of electoral campaigning. As with many cartoons, posters often showed the cause of a problem, effect it had, and the solution to solve it. In the Conservative poster *HOW LONG CAN YOU COMPETE AGAINST THIS?* [Figure 1.4] the problem was the low pay of Japanese cotton workers. The artist intended that the viewer would subliminally reply 'not long' to the question posed in the posters title, and thereby come to a conclusion that the problem was fewer jobs due to overseas competition, and therefore the only solution or 'your remedy' must be tariff reform.

Given the symbiosis between cartoons and political posters, it is unsurprising that scholars have criticised the academic and one-time Liberal candidate Graham Wallas' 1908

⁵⁰ LHASC: Report of the Fifth Annual conference of the Labour Representation Committee, 1905, p. 29.; LHASC: 11th Annual Conference The Labour Party 1911, Report of the Executive 1910, p. 9.

⁵¹ Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies?', p.188.

⁵² *Ibid*, p.188.

suggestion that the use of large political posters represented the conquering of the political by the commercial.⁵³ For Wallas such developments were sinister, representing he argued, a shift from an appeal to the intellect with one to the automatic sub-conscious.⁵⁴ As such, according to Wallas, the large-scale political poster represented a very attack on the people's relationship with the process of British politics.

Political cartoons and commercial imagery are inherently different, the former presenting the viewer with an argument, the latter selling a lifestyle or 'expectation' as John Berger put it.⁵⁵ While Wallas undoubtedly overestimated just how much absorption there was of commercial techniques into Edwardian political communication, we should not dismiss his views too readily. The Edwardian artist was a dilettante (something Wallas recognised) and as such visual codes of the period transmuted from one form of communication to another.⁵⁶ John Hassall famously produced the 1908 railway poster *Skegness is so Bracing*, and regularly undertook commissions for Kodak. He was also a prolific cartoonist, and this genre provided the inspiration for both his political and commercial work, writing in 1911 that the best posters were as 'sparing of words as a good political cartoon; its action, not its explanatory wording, for the most part tells the story'.⁵⁷ Nor was Hassall the only artist who negotiated a career across visual formats. Bernard Partridge, designer of at least two Budget League posters, became chief cartoonist at *Punch* in 1910, but also worked in a commercial capacity for Lever Brothers and Selfridges.⁵⁸

Just as cartoons provided the images and symbols for posters so too did advertising. Politicians were not beyond selling themselves in the most mercantile fashion. In 1900 the voters of Oldham were urged to vote for the Liberals Emmott and Runciman simply because 'you like them' [Figure 1.5]. In addition to this direct act of selling, designers also regularly plagiarised existing commercial adverts. The Conservatives poster *TARIFF REFORM TOUCHES THE SPOT* took directly from adverts for Homocea lumbago cream, indeed, the poster even included an apology to the manufacturer.⁵⁹ The benefits of such technique were

⁵³ G. Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London, 1920), pp. 87 – 89; Thompson rejects Wallas' argument, see Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies?', p. 189.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* pp. 87 – 89.

⁵⁵ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1972), p. 129.

⁵⁶ Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Hassall, 'Posters', p. 119.

⁵⁸ M. Bryant, *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century British Cartoonists and Caricaturists* (Aldershot: 2000), p. 169.

⁵⁹ Mundaneum: *TARIFF REFORM, TOUCHES THE SPOT*, 1910, National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations.

obvious. Artists knew they were deploying a visual language which the viewer would recognise. Wallas understood the importance of familiarity to Edwardian campaigning, arguing that if anything ‘is to stimulate us toward impulse or action is that it should be recognisable – that it should be like itself when we met it before, or like something else which we have met before.’⁶⁰ The famous Pears soap advert was another from which artists readily plagiarised.⁶¹ Such was the case with the Free Trade Union’s *WILL IT BURST TOO?* [Figure 1.6]. Here the artist took the advert – again the images included an apology – and re-imagined it, with Austen Chamberlain drawn as the young boy contemplating the fragility of past and present ideas, which were represented as the bubbles.

As with many posters the image of Chamberlain involved the viewer to unpick a framework of codes and symbols. Those who looked at the poster were expected to understand the source material (the Pears soap advert), recognise that the figure was a caricature of Chamberlain, and have some knowledge of his past ideas. Furthermore, the inclusion of the picture frame added an extra dimension, perhaps referencing the original source material; in this case John Everett Millais’ canvas *Bubbles*, a painting that continued to drive the imagination of poster designers well into the inter-war period.

The reference to *Bubbles* showed that, alongside cartooning and commercial advertising, the language of fine art also held a place in the visual politics of the 1910 billboard and further demonstrates how designers drew from a varied range of different image types. Of all the parties, it was Labour’s posters which were most noted for their artistic quality. *The Times* believed that the work of Gerald Spencer Pryse especially had ‘exceptional merit as artistic productions’.⁶² Art was certainly the party’s intention. The annual report highlighted the ‘symbolic and artistic’ value of Pryse’s work, which was untypical of the Edwardian period.⁶³ “*FORWARD! THE DAY IS BREAKING!*” for instance, formed the centre of a triptych. The optimism of the centre panel counteracted the dystopian plight of the urban and agricultural workers in the outer flanks “*WORKLESS*” and “*LANDLESS*” [Figure 1.7], respectively. As with any characteristic poster, Pryse contextualised his pictures with words, but the intensity of the message relied on his artistic talent.

⁶⁰ Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, p. 62.

⁶¹ Thompson, ‘Pictorial Lies’, p.188.

⁶² *The Times*, 1 December 1910.

⁶³ LHASC: 11th Annual Conference The Labour Party 1911, p. 6.; Historians have also praised Pryse’s work see R. Mckibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1914* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 17-18 and Beers, *Your Britain*, p. 32.

Pryse used symbols common to political posters, but did so in a more deft way than seen in other examples. His use of the sun, for instance, is noteworthy. This was a symbol as old as figurative art itself, which was revered by ancient peoples as both a source of life and destructive force; J.M.W. Turner described it as ‘God’.⁶⁴ It was particularly apt for the visual culture of electoral politics, speaking of rebirth, new life, and brighter futures. The mannered form seen in Figure 1.5, was typical of election posters. Not for Pryse though, his figures bask in the brightness and warmth of an unseen luminary, his poster a confident message of Labour’s promise to illuminate the darkness of both the urban and rural poor.

Although Pryse’s efforts were undoubtedly good art, the question remains whether they were good political propaganda? Certainly, those employed in the advertising industry often questioned the utility of such painterly techniques for billboards. On the one hand, the advertising manager of the *Financial Times* Howard Bridgewater hailed posters depicting landscape scenes, such as those produced by Norman Wilkinson for the London and North Western Railway, as a type that ‘tend to raise the public ideal.’⁶⁵ But such views were not universal. The American advertising executive Truman Armstrong DeWeese believed that ‘Successful poster copy must do something more than respond to the art sense or cultivated taste of those who have a highly developed art instinct. It must show the uses of a product in its regular lines and vital element of the selling argument.’⁶⁶ Hassall was also critical of the overly elaborate image.⁶⁷ Such concerns reflected the need for a poster to deliver its message quickly. However, as DeWeese argued, it also hinted towards the fact that technical experts believed a poster’s audience might not possess the cultivated capacities to move beyond anything but the most simply expressed messages.

Despite these technical debates about the merits of fine art over more simple forms in advertising, Labour was not the only party to publish posters that conformed to a classic canon. T.B. Kennington’s “*FREE TRADE*” [Figure 1.8] was one of the most widely commented upon posters of the 1910 campaign. The painting, depicting a family destitute as a result of Liberal policy, was described by Peter Clarke as the *pièce de resistance* of the Unionist campaign, while Frank Trentmann has declared it ‘the most successful poster of the

⁶⁴ M. Green, ‘The Sun Gods of Ancient Europe’ in M. Singh (ed.) *The Sun in Myth and Art* (London, 1993), pp. 295-310.; For the Turner quote and discussion about the artists relationship with the sun see J. Gage, ‘J.M.W. Turner and the Solar Myth’ in J.B. Bullen, *The Sun is God* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 40-48.

⁶⁵ H. Bridgewater, *Advertising or the Art of Making Known* (London, 1909) p. 60.

⁶⁶ T.A. DeWeese, *Practical Publicity* (London: 1909) p. 215.

⁶⁷ Hassall, ‘Posters’, p. 127.

period'.⁶⁸ The latter further highlighted 'that no picture could possibly have been further removed from the single splash of bright colour that dominated successful commercial advertisements like those for Coleman's Mustard.'⁶⁹

Rather than demonstrate that political communication and commercial advertising were poles apart Kennington's vision of the destitute family demonstrated just how varied political advertising could be. From the cartoon, to the commercial advert, to fine art, posters drew from each and at times amalgamated them together. Just as Chamberlain and his bubbles was surrounded by a two-dimensional frame, so too were the *Free Trade* family. The inclusion of the framing device was an attempt to present the argument in some way as to be understandable to the viewer. Chamberlain staring at his bubbles could never have claimed to be anything other than a mocking parody, yet the frame drew on themes with which the artist hoped the viewer would be familiar. Kennington's inclusion of the frame appeared an attempt to elevate the political argument from the abstract theorising and politicising of Westminster. The frame made the political personal, but also made the image refined and worthy of contemplation, as if in a gallery.⁷⁰ Kennington wanted above all to humanise politics and for the viewer to consider it in those terms. And whether this humanising of politics came in the form of slamming the opposition, or picturing the electorate, whether the source material were cartoons, attempts at selling, or from a tradition of fine art, all posters attempted to make the distant impersonal politics of Westminster relevant at some level to the viewer. It is to how exactly this human form of politics appeared on posters that we now turn.

1.2.1 Peopling Posters

Peers vs People may have been the verbal slogan of the Liberal campaign, but those 'people' that appeared in posters were male and working class. Even Pryse's egalitarian evocation [Figure 1.7] showed a male manual worker leading the group out of the dark. The activity of Pryse's figure was in stark contrast to depictions of working-class men in some Conservative posters, which critics argued were rather pathetic figures. A 1911 Unionist Organisation Committee Report laid out the complaints in stark detail, highlighting that 'in some of the pictorial posters that are issued, it has been stated that a certain amount of offence has been

⁶⁸ P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: 1971) p.132.; Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 127.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 127.

⁷⁰ Thompson comments how the frame added to the images 'moral judgement', see Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', p. 196.

given to workmen by their always being depicted in corduroys and generally assuming a rough appearance, and in most cases caricaturing the working man.⁷¹ And certainly, in some Conservative imagery, the working man appeared helpless against pernicious assault on his life. Yet, there was more to the image of Conservative working-men than passivity. Tory posters defined working-class masculinity in terms of the pipe, the pub, and the home. Such complaints suggested that Liberal and Labour posters projected a more progressive image of the working classes, and at times, they did. But across the posters of all parties, such was the construction of political imagery it was too easy to revert to a visual language of victim hood.

It was clear that frequently, whether working for Conservative party or associated leagues, artists struggled to portray the working classes positively. A *Westminster Gazette* journalist commented that the figure in one particular poster looked more like a ‘victim of free drink’ than free trade [Figure 1.9].⁷² Similarly critical of the party’s literature was the editor of the Conservative supporting *Observer*, James Louis Garvin, who in a memorandum to party leader Arthur Balfour stated that ‘the British workmen must appear in all our pictures as a fine fellow, not the debased and uncouth and grotesque person that he seems in some of our pictures.’⁷³

There were several reasons for the often-pitiful portrayals of the working classes on Conservative billboards. Undoubtedly, the party often placed too much trust in the artist. Uncritical party officials waived through designs without due consideration and as a result, the bias was evident. Such was the case of Ralph Cleaver; it was his *IT'S WORK WE WANT* [Figure 1.9] of which the *Gazette* journalist was so scathing. Cleaver also produced *LESS BEER-LESS BACCY LESS EMPLOYMENT* for the Budget Protest League.⁷⁴ In both posters, the artist drew supplicant figures with out stretched hands and open palms. The importance of hand signals in personal communication had been long recognised by social commentators, the open palm gesture in Cleaver’s images was an emotional desperate call for help, from men who spoke the truth, and had nothing to hide.⁷⁵ But the result of drawing these hand gestures led naturally to the image of a pitiable figure.

⁷¹ CPA: CCO 500/1/2, Unionist Organisation Committee Report, June 1911.

⁷² Blewett, *The Peers, The Parties and The People*, p. 313.

⁷³ British Library (henceforth BL): Balfour Papers, ADD 49795 973c, Garvin to Balfour report on Campaign Literature, sheet inserted between correspondence dated 29 Nov 1909 and 18 Dec 1909.

⁷⁴ CPA: POSTER 1909/10-16, *LESS BEER-LESS BACCY LESS EMPLOYMENT*, 1909, Budget Protest League.

⁷⁵ See for example J. Bulwer, *Chirologia* (1664), J. W. Cleary (ed.) (Illinois: 1974), p. xvi.

Blaming artists, however, does not account for all the reasons why Conservatives portrayals of the working class were often so negative. Certainly many within the party had a poor view of the voter. Garvin told Balfour that mind of the masses is for the most part inconceivably crude; that you cannot be sure of their understanding any word more than two syllables long'.⁷⁶ Indeed, members of all parties had little faith in electorate. The Liberal candidate Wallas spoke of the simple-minded voter 'intellectualising' why he supported a particular candidate but effectively being duped by a photograph.⁷⁷

The Conservatives struggled in part to find a visual language that could both appeal to working class and depict them. In part, this problem occurred because of the way political imagery was constructed. The binary separation between oppressor and oppressed naturally lead to one seeming weak and under attack from an opposing force.

The vigorous nature of the attack on socialism did nothing, moreover, to help depictions of working-class men in Conservative posters. Edward Huskinson *The Socialist's Little Game* [Figure 1.10] demonstrated the contrast between this strength of one language compared with the weakness of another. With the heavy labelling, and use of the Phrygian or cap of liberty the *Socialist's Little Game* left viewers in no doubt that those purporting left wing ideology could not be trusted. The cap alone, with connotations of the French revolution, and historic use in early nineteenth century cartoons, was a symbol of foreignness.⁷⁸ But Huskinson further emphasised the otherness of the socialists by drawing them with a swarthy complexion, and dressing them in clothes more apt for 1910 Monmartre than the working-class areas of Britain. The strength of this anti-socialist imagery contrasted strongly with the passivity of Huskinson's Trade Unionist, who in his garters and flat cap appears a dim witted character, distracted by one socialist espousing his creed while another picks his pocket of union funds.⁷⁹ The strength of anti-socialist visual rhetoric was further evident in the numerous depictions of socialism as monster-like. Figure 1.11 showed socialism as a devil-monkey strangling Britannia, whose depiction did at least free the artist from showing a working-class man being physically attacked.

⁷⁶ BL: Balfour Papers, ADD 49795 973c, Garvin to Balfour report on Campaign Literature.

⁷⁷ Wallas, *Human nature in politics*, p. 54.

⁷⁸ J. Epstein, 'Understanding the cap of liberty: Symbolic practice and social conflict early nineteenth-century England', *Past and Present* (Feb, 1989) 122: 1, pp. 75-118.

⁷⁹ Hassall also used the Phrygian cap of liberty see, London School of Economics (henceforth LSE): Coll Misc 0159-72, *ELECTORS DONT [sic] TRY THE IMPOSSIBLE*, 1910, Dobson Molle and Company.

Although attacking socialism could lead to passive depictions of the working class, this was not the only image of the worker revealed in Conservative posters. Matched with this vigorous anti-socialist rhetoric was a language that positioned the party as defender of the working man's right to smoke and drink; a separate campaign focussed on his right to a private domestic life. As such, the posters of 1910 form a bridge between the sensibilities of the masculine working-class drinker familiar to Conservative propaganda at the start of the century and the centrality of the home more common towards the outbreak of war.⁸⁰

The link between drinking and smoking had been common since the nineteenth century, not least because of the availability of free clay pipes in pubs.⁸¹ The Conservative posters of 1910 maintained such tradition. In *UNFAIR PREFERENCE* [Figure 1.13] the workman's right to enjoy the solid British beverages of whisky, beer and tobacco were compared unfavourably with the plutocratic foreign vices of rich Liberals. The poster visually reinforced its verbal message about taxation, by comparing the working man at the bar, with the clubbable prosperity of those being waited on and sipping champagne.

The Unionists mixed this appeal to the drinking man with a visual demonstration of how Liberal free trade policy attacked his domestic idyll. Kennington's "FREE TRADE" was certainly not the only poster to outline this threat. Although the date of the Imperial Tariff Committee's *BRITISH WORKMEN CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF* [Figure 1.13] is unknown, like Kennington's image it pictured the Liberal danger to family life. The image dripped with verbal and visual symbolism. The much larger loaf on the table in the left hand image than that seen on the right, visualised the lower spending power under free trade. The canary in the left hand image suggests the man might be a miner, while the cat in front of the roaring fire suggests warmth and comfort. In addition the poster visually quotes Psalm 23:5 as the man's 'cup runneth over'. Comment on the impact free trade was having on the drinking man's pastime was included too, as the Red Lion pub, visible through the window is closed and up for auction.

Just as the Liberals sought to split aristocrat and worker with their rhetoric of People vs. Peers, one poster used the language of the home to yoke the two classes back together. The Unionist supporting Budget Protest League's *ENGLISHMAN'S HOME* [Figure 1.14] depicted the future under land taxes as proposed in the budget. According to the image, the

⁸⁰ Lawrence, 'Class and Gender', p. 646.

⁸¹ M. Hilton, *Smoking in popular British popular culture 1800-2000* (Manchester: 2000), pp. 47-49.

result would not just mean aristocrats leaving their homes and the collapse of Britain's ancestral piles, but the Peers faithful retainers would be homeless also. The rotting gatehouse symbolised how taxing the rich ultimately affected the whole of society; while aiming at one thing, Lloyd George's budget would inevitably adversely affect another.⁸²

On occasion Conservative posters mirrored wider political culture. Just as heckling was a common feature of the Edwardian political meeting, so some Conservative billboards depicted working-men speaking truth to power.⁸³ In a rare defence of the Lords, one Conservative poster showed a man telling MPs that it if it wasn't for the Peers he would have been ignored [Figure 1.15]. Artists readily deployed languages familiar to viewers from the mass platform, as the image of the meeting crossed onto the billboard. In A.B. White's Tariff Reform League *WANTED-A CHANGE* [Figure 1.16] a man rejects the claims of a Liberal canvasser.⁸⁴ White demonstrated the plight of the working class man and his wife through their dishevelled, decidedly grubby appearance. Nevertheless, the poster's protagonist's classic oratorical stance showed him to be completely at one with the economic arguments, well able to make his point clearly. It was if White had copied an Edwardian public speaking manual. One such teaching aide highlighted the need to keep the 'forehead in general elevated, the brows are slightly drawn down and knit together they indicate, like the downward gesture with opening fist, force and authority, with the conception of *an ability to master* exercised upon that to which attention is directed.'⁸⁵

There was less variation in Liberal posters compared to the seemingly ever-changing image of the working class man on Conservative billboards. The existence of the Publication Department was one reason, the centralised structure less prone to generating communication that spoke at cross-purposes. But in addition, the Liberals simple central campaign message of 'Peers verses the People', provided the party with a concept easy to visualise; it was a language that lent itself to comparing upright, conscientious, and honourable workers, with stooping, supercilious peers. The Budget Leagues' Figure 1.1 is an example of this type. Other posters showed Liberal MPs and working-men protesting together against the Lords.⁸⁶

⁸² The same technique can also be seen in CPA: POSTER 1909/1004,.EMPLOYER "YOU'VE HIT US BOTH BUT YOU HAVE KILLED THIS MAN", 1910, Budget Protest League.

⁸³ For disruption and even violence at meetings see Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, pp. 62-65.

⁸⁴ A.B. White produced another poster for the Tariff Reform League which also shows a working man speaking truth to power, Mundaneum: *NO, THANKS!*, c.1909, Tariff Reform League.

⁸⁵ G.L Raymond, *The Orator's Manual* (New York, 1910), p. 147.

⁸⁶ BL: LPD 257, *Under Which Flag*, 1910, Liberal Publication Department.

Unlike their Conservative rivals, Liberal posters reflected the party's position of power and could therefore highlight actions they had taken to improved people's lives. A *CROWN OF COMFORT* [Figure 1.17] depicted two elderly people sat in the flower garden of a cottage under the sun rays emanating from a 5s piece, representative of the old age pension. The positive message had some impact on one *Times* journalist who thought it might be more 'would be more telling than any of the others' produced.⁸⁷ Quite why he thought the impact would be greater than other images was unclear, but the poster did stand in stark contrast to the vitriol of other examples. Like Spencer Pryse's work for Labour the image provided a ray of hope in an otherwise confrontational visual landscape. Moreover, the poster further demonstrated the persistence of the sun as a symbol of benefice in Edwardian political imagery.

While many Liberal depictions of the male working-class man were positive as shown in Figures 1.1 and 1.17, there were exceptions to the rule. When Murray Urquhart drew a Swiftian scene in which miniature peers bind a giant figure with the bonds of amongst other things 'monopoly' 'feudalism' and 'vested interest' and demanded that working men '*WAKE UP! VOTE LIBERAL AND FREE YOURSELVES ONCE FOR ALL*' [Figure 1.18], he left viewers with the conclusion that the fault lay with the very same 'working men' who had allowed themselves to be shackled in the first place. According to Urquhart the apathy of the working class facilitated the Lords' power. Budget League posters too, in aiming to demonstrate the plight of the older man, debased the very same to a position of servitude unable to escape the drudgery of life. In "*THE LIBERALS GAVE ME BREAD YOU OFFER ME A STONE.*" [Figure 1.19] the dress of the bearded pensioner and the brick wielding tariff reformer he faces initially appear similar. The sack coat, striped trousers, and waistcoat seem hardly far removed from his opponent. Detail though enabled the viewer to distinguish between the two; the frock coat top hat, red waistcoat, leather gloves, spats and gold watch chain, all add an air of entitlement otherwise lacking in the older figure. A 1907 American guide to tailoring stated that it was 'the better class of business men' who wore frock coats while the sack coat was a more egalitarian garment.⁸⁸ The stance too helped distinguish between the men, helping the viewer distinguish between elite and subject. The high-handed

⁸⁷ 'Party Publications – II', *The Times*, 15 December 1909.

⁸⁸ F.T. Croonborg, *The Blue Book of Men's Tailoring* (New York, 1907) republished (London, 1977) pp. 14 and 30.

approach with ‘Thrown-back’ head, ‘slightly-sneering countenance’, ‘thrown back’ body are all signs of the arrogant or self-important orator.⁸⁹

Given Labours organic attachment to the working-class, it was after all a party of and for them, their posters showed the workers in a wholly positive light. Working-class men were generally depicted as upright and proud, but there was difference in the progressive message of some posters compared to the adversarial rhetoric of others. In *VOTE FOR THE LABOUR PARTY THE HOPE OF THE WORKER* [Figure 1.20] a miner stands opposite a Peer separated by lines from the Robert Burns 1795 *A Man's A Man*. Burns was popular amongst the educated working class, Jonathan Rose states that among the 1906 intake of Labour MPs, the poet was the fifth favourite author.⁹⁰ Educated socialists might have understood the quote, Labour activists almost certainly so. Such imagery fitted well with the moderation of James Ramsay MacDonald and his belief in progress through parliamentary democracy. However, just as Labour was a party in conflict over reformism versus revolution, so too was their pictorial propaganda.⁹¹ The party’s posters went from progressive strides (evident in the work of Pryse) to action that was more forthright. *LABOUR CLEARS THE WAY* showed working-class men battering their way into the House of Lords [Figure 1.21]. Here, the unknown artist resolutely positioned Labour as a party for the industrial (and unionised) male worker. The image showed the necessity and validity of labour representation in Parliament, by drawing a seamless transition from Westminster to smoking factory chimneys. This overtly aggressive form of Labour politics could also be seen in *THE OSBORNE JUDGEMENT* [Figure 1.22]. The pugilists of ‘Labour’ and the ogre of ‘capitalism’ battle in the boxing ring and the poster’s imagery and labelling leave the viewer in little doubt that this was a party premised on the rhetoric of masculine trade unionism. Labour may have been confident in depicting the working-class, but it had not yet decided quite how forthright it should be in its appeal.

⁸⁹ Raymond, *The Orator's Manual*, p. 147.

⁹⁰ R.Q. Gray, ‘Styles of Life, the “Labour Aristocracy” and Class Relations in Later Nineteenth Century Edinburgh’, *International Review of Social History* (December: 1973) 18:3, p. 437.; J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (Yale: 2002) p. 42.

⁹¹ For the debates surrounding reform over revolt see D. Tanner, *Political change and the Labour Party* (Cambridge: 2003) pp. 51-56.

1.2.2 Personal Attack

Late Victorian and Edwardian electioneering was an adversarial affair and the politics of attack transferred easily to the billboard. Conservative posters levelled their guns at Asquith and Lloyd George; Hassall in particular showed the Chancellor to be a bungling figure, a man-child who could not see the consequences of his economic policy.⁹² There was a clear effort to infantilise Lloyd George and thereby undermine the statesman's authority. In *CAN IT BE DONE* [Figure 1.23] Hassall drew Lloyd George sat on his budget staring intently at the puzzle, pondering if 'capital' could be removed without upsetting 'labour'. It was a caricature infantilising the man, who sat chin in hands, elbows resting on the knees, slightly in-turned toes, and almost on the floor, just as a child might do. If Hassall's depiction of Lloyd George was childish, Edward Huskinson depiction of Asquith demonstrated just how vicious posters could be. The cartoonist drew the Prime Minister clutching a 'Radical cheap loaf' with the simple question where is it? [Figure 1.24] Overtly Huskinson accused the Prime Minister of being a liar, or at least failing to deliver on his promises. And implicitly Asquith's turned in toes, apparently swaying figure and partially flushed cheeks suggest someone mildly inebriated. This vision of drunk perhaps went where verbal attacks could not go; although not discussed publicly, Asquith was a confirmed alcoholic; his detractors nicknaming him 'squiff'.⁹³

Liberal and Budget League propaganda attacked members of the House of Lords with a similar ferociousness. As Lloyd George made regular reference in his speeches to the idle Lords, so the posters showed the upper house to be indolent. Peers appeared unwilling to remove their hands from their pockets in order to help.⁹⁴ It was the perceived vice of greed, however, upon which opposition billboards focussed their most virulent attacks. In *THE GLUTTON!* [Figure 1.25] the expertly drawn piggy eyes and red face of the milk stealer convey the image of a figure that was full but still demanded more. Labour produced a more biting example still [Figure 1.26]. The figures existing wealth was evident with the large cigar and rings, his avarice shown by the pulling of the gold and deeds towards his person.

⁹² CPA: Poster 1909/10-05, *LLODIE-GEORGIE BENT HIS BOW AIMED AT A PIGEON AND KILLED A CROW*, 1909, Budget Protest League; CPA: Poster 1909/10-06, *ROBIN HOOD:- "I TOOK FROM THE RICH AND GAVE TO THE POOR YOU ROB BOTH*, 1909, Budget Protest League.

⁹³ M. Rintala, 'Taking the Pledge: H. H. Asquith and Drink', *Biography* (Spring 1993)16: 2, pp. 103-135.; Asquith's nickname is quoted in G.H. Cassar, *Asquith as war leader* (London, 1994), p. 34.

⁹⁴ See Figure 1.21 and also PHM: *BRITANNIA IF YOU WERE HALF THE MAN YOU'D OFFER TO CARRY SOME OF THESE PARCELS*, 1910, Budget League.

The slogan ‘What I’ve got I’ll hold and what I’ve got I’m after’ left the viewer under no doubt as to the poster’s intent. A strand of anti-semitism runs through the image. Just as Dickens reported that Fagin’s eyes glistened at the sight of a jewelled watch, the Peers’ gleaming rings spoke of the symbolic association between Jewish people and jewels.⁹⁵

In depicting the Lords the artists did not have to ask much of the viewer, the uniform of the upper house was distinctive. Categorising the other malevolent forces that were central to the pictorial propaganda of 1910 was more complex, and the image required a greater level of ‘reading’ on the viewer’s part. Such were the codes of Edwardian dress, some garments crossed class divisions. Whilst the bowler hat could represent a businessman it also appeared on the heads of working men.⁹⁶ The complex nature of the imagery reflected the past (and future) history of the bowler, supposedly invented by the Earl of Leicester to protect his gamekeepers’ heads while out-riding.⁹⁷ And it quickly became the headwear of choice for many regardless of class.⁹⁸ In 1910 its social symbolism was entirely dependent on whose head it sat. Intriguingly, of the surviving posters from 1910, the bowler wearing working-class man only appears in Unionist or their associated leagues poster not in those of the Liberal or Labour parties, this may be a coincidence but is interesting nonetheless.

Depictions of top hats always represented elites but exactly who that elite was depended on the party commissioning the poster, for instance the top hat appears on the heads of the Unionist tariff reformers of Figure 1.19 and the Liberal free trader in Figure 1.16. In both posters, the top hat is a symbol, used to depict an ‘other’ who sought to further their own position at the expense of those below them. In 1910 the top hat was a garment well suited to this cause. Although previously worn by all gentlemen whatever their profession, the top hat was mostly limited to those in the political sphere; fashionable men from other professions might have sported a homburg or a bowler.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ A. Munich, ‘Jews and Jewels: A symbolic Economy on the South African Diamond Fields’ in E. Bar-Yosef and N. Valman, *‘The Jew’ in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture* (Hampshire, 2009) pp. 28-44.

⁹⁶ For businessmen wearing bowlers see PHM: *SAVE THE CHILDREN FROM TARIFF REFORM*, c. 1909, Free Trade Union.; for working men wearing the same see Figures 1.13, 1.15, 1.16, 1.17.

⁹⁷ ‘The history of the Bowler hat at Holkham’, <http://www.holkham.co.uk/downloads/TheBowlerHat.pdf>, [accessed 6 September 2012]; F.E. Robinson, *The Man in the Bowler Hat* (Chapel Hill and London, 1993) p. 15.

⁹⁸ J. Davidson, ‘Icon, iconography, iconology: Visual branding, banking and the case of the bowler hat’, *Auditing & Accountability Journal* (2009) 22:8, p. 893.

⁹⁹ A. Gernsheim, *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion: A Photographic Survey* (New York, 1981) pp. 76, 90.

1.3 Displaying posters in 1910

The pictorial rhetoric of 1910 did not just advance party opinion. Parties were using posters to conduct a political battle. Posters rebutted, opposed, and corrected those of their rivals, one image declaiming another.¹⁰⁰ The images themselves may have been simple, the way parties used them certainly was not. For instance in December 1909, *The Times* wrote of the Budget League's '*The Worker's Burden as the Tories would make it*' [Figure 1.27] that it was 'a reply to a poster issued in support of tariff reform. It shows the working man bending beneath the tariff reform Budget, which it claims will put a tax on food, clothes, materials, and living.'¹⁰¹ Exactly to which poster the Budget League were responding is more complicated. It could either have been *HURRAH FOR TARIFF REFORM AND MORE WORK* [Figure 1.28] which showed a workman stamping on the Lloyd George budget or *THE POOR MAN'S BURDEN* [Figure 1.29], which showed him carrying it. Either way the similarities between the two demonstrate how visual vernaculars crossed the political divide, and make sense of just how posters fought a nuanced visual argument of the street.

By tracing the call and response of these posters, we can better understand the construction of political communication beyond its initial production and release. As communication was built through the adversarial interaction between political actors, it rippled out beyond the initial poster, gradually affecting all manner of electoral politics. Such was the case, when Chairman of the Budget League, Winston Churchill authorised the cartoonist Charles Crombie to produce a poster called *Sympathy*, which attacked the Peers.¹⁰² Apparently, Churchill approved the design while staying at his ancestral home and immediately after the poster's publication the *Daily Sketch* published a rebuttal cartoon, *Blenheim*.¹⁰³ Highlighting the hypocrisy of criticising the House Lords while at the same time living like one, *Blenheim* depicted Churchill recumbent, sipping brandy, smoking a pipe while two footmen held up *Sympathy* for his approval. This sophisticated communication required the viewer to understand who Churchill was, his background, and his role not only in the Liberal party but – as the original *Sympathy* poster was for the Budget League – also in wider Liberal organisations.

¹⁰⁰ Thompson talks of the 'self-referentiality' of posters see, 'Pictorial Lies', p. 208.

¹⁰¹ *The Times*, 15 December 1909.

¹⁰² CCA: CHAR 1/98/8, Account from Charles Crombie, London, for poster sketch titled "sympathy", 3 January 1910. The *Sympathy* poster was published sometime after this date.

¹⁰³ CCA: CHAR 2/49/20, Cutting from the daily sketch, 10 January 1910.

Within a week *Blenheim* was reproduced as a poster, taking the image of Churchill's duplicity to the streets. While the originator of the *Blenheim* poster is unknown, they did write to the Manchester Billposting company – who posted the bills of the Budget League's – enquiring where *Sympathy* was due to be stuck, in order that the two posters could appear next to one another.¹⁰⁴ An incensed Churchill accused the Manchester Billposting of posting the offending poster.¹⁰⁵ Churchill even wrote to the publisher of *Blenheim*, David Allen and Sons, angry about how the poster depicted him; he got his apology, but the company did point out that the image was no worse than others produced during the campaign.¹⁰⁶ Knowledge of the poster travelled far beyond its site of publication, with the Conservative candidate for Burnley, Gerald Arbuthnot, holding up the *Sympathy* poster at a meeting and after relating the circumstance of its production complained the whole thing was 'monstrous humbug'.¹⁰⁷

The *Sympathy-Blenheim* affair demonstrated the ability of pictorial rhetoric to reference not just contemporary political debate but also contemporary pictorial propaganda. Moreover it suggested the potential of the viewer to understand a political contest waged across a variety of mediums. Posters were clearly not static entities, but woven into the fabric of an ever changing Edwardian political discourse.

1.3.1 The poster in its environment

As we shall see, parties thought hard about the display of posters, not least because of the potential costs involved. Parties required the services of a billposting company whom they paid to rent the space and pay for posting. This relationship could be difficult. During 1909 and 1910 billposting firms raised their prices in anticipation of an election.¹⁰⁸ And while billposters boasted of voluntary code of censorship, there were problems of over-posting.¹⁰⁹ Using the space of buildings owned by party supporters provided opportunity to display posters free of charge.¹¹⁰ Local supporters' windows also provided useful and free

¹⁰⁴ CCA: CHAR 2/49/31, Grimes to Churchill, 11 January 1910.

¹⁰⁵ CCA: CHAR 2/49/35, Telegram Grimes to Churchill, 12 January 1910.

¹⁰⁶ CCA: CHAR 2/49/57, David Allen & Sons to Churchill, 19 January 1910.

¹⁰⁷ 'Mr Churchill's Visit to Blenheim Palace', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1910.

¹⁰⁸ CCA: CHAR 2/49/1, G.W. Patterson to Churchill, 31 December 1909.

¹⁰⁹ W. Hill, 'Billposting and outdoor advertising' in T. Russell (ed.) *Advertising and Publicity* (London, 1911) p. 132.

¹¹⁰ H. F. Allen, *The Law of Parliamentary Elections and Election Petitions* (London: 1910), p. 144; Long-Eaton Conservative club relied on provision of wall space from members in January 1910 see Nottingham University Special Collections (henceforth NUSC): CEL M/5, Committee Meeting, 31 January 1910, Long Eaton Conservative Club, Minute Book.

opportunity for parties to display bills.¹¹¹ Election law prohibited supporters charging or parties paying for window displays, a breach potentially rendering the election void.¹¹² Private posting extended beyond windows. Fly posting matched the legitimate use of private window and wall space, with teams of party activists indiscriminately posting bills over those of their rivals in the dead of night.¹¹³

Whether fly-posted or on rented hoardings, political posters had to fight not only with each other, but also with commercial advertising for the public's attention. Edwardian billboards were packed environments, and ensuring posters stood out from the crowd was a skill, as Figure 1.30 from Manchester demonstrates.

Only professional illustrators Hassall argued, possessed this talent and indeed this was one of the reasons why his prices were so high.¹¹⁴ A few politicians grasped the problem of congestion. In 1904, MacDonald informed the printer G.S. Christie that, 'Round each [poster] I also want a good clear margin so that they will stand up separate and distinct on the hoardings. I also want the colouring very pronounced so that they will strike the eye of the passer-by.¹¹⁵ While the mock frame around "FREE TRADE" alluded to fine art, it also provided a useful buffer to other posters. Beyond good design, there were other means of getting posters noticed. Parties could occupy a whole billboard only with their images and thereby removing the necessity of having to compete with competitors. Known as a 'standard show', one Budget League employee certainly thought them 'more attractive'.¹¹⁶ Figure 1.31 shows a typical standard show in support of the Unionist MP, William Houghton-Gastrell.

In addition to this belief that there was benefit to displaying posters, which were supportive of each other's position together, campaigners also gave some consideration to the arrangement of the posters on the billboard. Charles Geake advanced the theory that massing many small posters together delivered the best results.¹¹⁷ *The Times* concurred, arguing that large political posters attempting to compete with commercial counterparts were ineffective. It was only possible, the paper argued, to make one single point rather than a whole variety

¹¹¹ CCA: CHAR 2/49/2, Patterson to Churchill, 3 January 1910.

¹¹² N. Everitt, *How to win an election or the workers guide* (London, 1910) p.121.

¹¹³ Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', p. 203; Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p. 79.

¹¹⁴ Hassall, 'Posters', p.120

¹¹⁵ LHASC: LRC 18/50, MacDonald to Christie, 18 February 1904.

¹¹⁶ CCA: CHAR 2/49/2, Patterson to Wylie, 3 January 1910.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', p. 204.; and Blewett, *The Peers, The Parties and The People*, p. 313.

them.¹¹⁸ Such views were not universal, however. Writing of commercial advertising the American DeWeese, echoing Hassall, wrote that the best adverts were those that reduced the product to a single strong idea.¹¹⁹ One Conservative agent agreed, ‘if the big poster was not effective’ he wrote in 1913 ‘our hoardings and public vehicles would soon cease to be covered with announcements and appeals.’¹²⁰ *The Manchester Guardian* concurred, stating that largest posters had the greatest appeal.¹²¹ Those involved in the creation of political posters appreciated that the viewers’ eyes roved over the packed billboards, but they could not agree about to harness that visual energy. Hassall and DeWeese thought it best to arrest the eye on larger images. Geake disagreed believing as long people viewed pro-Liberal images this was enough.

As we have seen the commissioning process of the two larger parties resulted in posters from a variety of artists each which dramatically different styles. As an artist Hassall wanted people only to see his posters. As commissioner Geake was happy to let people see other images so long as they supported his party; it mattered little if the bills were not entirely in visual synchronicity with one another. Posters from a fine art tradition sat next to cartoon illustration, and images of the working-man speaking truth to power, sat next to images of the working-man being downtrodden. Artists were little interested in the other posters being designed for the campaign and how their own work functioned alongside them. The only important fact to them was making their own design stand out. If Geake and contemporaries considered the effect of the commissioning process at all, resulting as it was in a myriad of visual styles and highly complex billboards, they did not act to mitigate against it. At some level they trusted the contemporary viewer’s ability to read each poster and move easily between them.

1.4 Conclusion

The manner in which parties sought to commission posters and the control they had over the artists that conducted the work, meant that visual languages were disparate. They referenced a myriad of visual sources with which the viewer may or may not have been familiar. Such were these differences, those contemporary commentators who complained of the woeful

¹¹⁸ *The Times*, 15 December 1909.

¹¹⁹ DeWeese, *Practical Publicity*, p. 43.

¹²⁰ G. W. Daw ‘The Utility of Posters in Politics’, *Conservative Agents Journal* (January 1913) 29, p. 243.

¹²¹ Quoted in Beers, *Your Britain*, p. 31.

depiction of the working class man in Conservative posters, compared to his up-right Liberal counterpart, were far too generalised. Across all posters, there was a diverse portrayal of this figure. In fact, aside from Labour, the two larger parties struggled to find a language of the working class man, and even the socialists varied between an image of the striver and the fighter. The Conservatives were as comfortable in appealing to the drinker and smoker, as the Liberals were in attacking the Lords, but beyond this the edges are blurred.

Given this myriad of language and inconsistency of style, concluding what exactly the 1910 posters tell us about the election more broadly is problematic. Certainly, posters represented an attacking form of politics. Vitriol was rife; this was not the politics of bland statements but rather of unrepentant aggression. Nor was the politics of the billboard a type of communication in and of itself. Not only did posters refer to other examples, they took a language of politics familiar to voters from other print forms and the platform and transposed it for the street. Posters were very much interwoven into the communication of the election, and as such continued a Victorian public and active form of politics. But they also represented the change that was occurring to politics during the period. While the Edwardian poster did not represent the complete pacification of public politics, it undoubtedly was part of a move towards it. Posters may have taken the language of the mass meeting or shown men speaking truth to power and even encouraged such action, but picturing something and being it are not the same. Posters required no exploit on the part of the viewer except to read, and unlike the hustings or the mass platform, posters were a political communication that denied the populous the opportunity to answer back. While large pictorial posters may have reflected and pictured Victorian and Edwardian political traditions, their very nature marked the end of a vigorous active election type. It is perhaps for this reason, that as a medium their use continued after World War One when electioneering became less public, and less participatory. It is to that period that we now turn.

2.0 The General Election of 1929

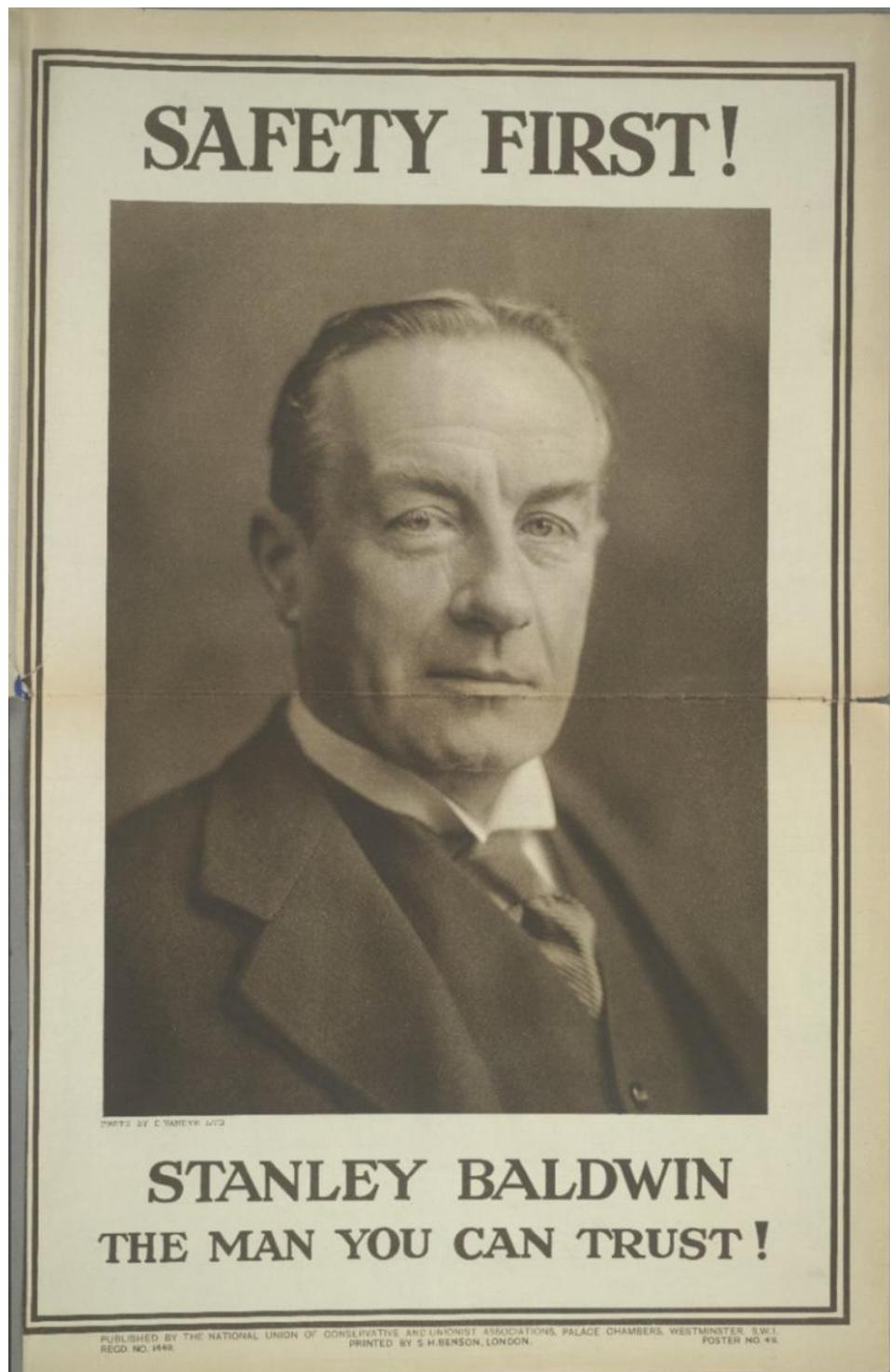


Figure 2.1 *SAFETY FIRST!*, National Union of Conservative and Unionist Association, CPA, POSTER 1929-09.

The 1929 election was the first held under universal suffrage. The Conservative's 38.1 per cent share of the vote produced 260 seats. This was twenty-seven fewer than their nearest rival Labour, whose 37.1 percent vote share resulted in 287 MPs. The result was a minority government, with Labour's leader James Ramsay MacDonald becoming Prime Minister for the second time. The Liberal Party under David Lloyd George held the balance of power, but despite winning 23.6 per cent of the vote and fifty-nine seats, the Liberals remained a diminishing electorate force.

To some extent, the passing of the Equal Franchise Act a year earlier had set the election's tone. The Act added 6 ½ million new women voters to the register, a quarter of whom were under the age of twenty-five. Despite passing the Act, many members of parliament, especially many Conservatives, were wary of these new voters. Conservative members had aired their concerns in 1928 during debates on the bill; George Balfour suggested that women had made no call for the move, while Reginald Applin submitted that women given true electoral equality must take on 'grave responsibilities, which would perhaps be too great a burden for women'.¹ Sir George Cockerill was not in principle opposed to women voting, but riled against a franchise in which the majority would now be female.² During the 1927 Conservative conference, one delegate moved that the age should be twenty-five for women, while Lord Cecil argued that this should be the age of eligibility for both men and women.³

Cecil's suggestion pointed towards the other factor that dominated Conservative thinking aside from gender, that of class. The passing of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which had not only enfranchised the majority of women aged 30 and over but also all remaining men 21 and over (and even some at 19), concerned Conservatives. A core of the party believed that the Act had opened up the franchise to working-class voters who would in turn vote Labour.⁴ Trade Union growth in the years leading up to the war had contributed to such concerns, as the unions' rigid organisation and links to Labour led many Conservatives to assume that union members' voters were already lost.⁵

¹ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 29 March 1928, vol 215, col 1359-481.

² *Hansard*, HC Deb, 29 March 1928, vol 215, col 1359-481.

³ 'The Conservatives in conference', *The Times*, October 07, 1927. For the views of Lord Cecil see, D. H. Close, 'The Collapse of Resistance to Democracy: Conservatives, Adult Suffrage, and Second Chamber Reform, 1911-1928', *The Historical Journal* (Dec, 1977) 20:4, p. 914.

⁴ D. Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', *The English Historical Review* (Feb, 1996) 111:440, pp. 69-70;

⁵ Jarvis, 'British Conservatism' pp. 71-72; S. Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, (Oxford: 2013), pp.89.

Amongst politicians of all creeds there was a more general concern that universal suffrage gave the vote to a dangerous, unthinking, and uneducated mass.⁶ One Conservative agent writing in 1927 claimed that voters had ‘thick skulls filled (more or less) with primitive and sluggish brains’.⁷ When Stanley Baldwin’s Conservative administration passed the equal franchise act, the Prime Minister had declared: ‘to build up that broken work half the human race was not enough. It must be the men and women together’.⁸ Privately, though, Baldwin thought that the War had pushed Britain into democracy long before the country was ready.⁹

A general belief existed amongst all parties that the new electorate were essentially irrational, and therefore needed to be ‘educated’ in the proper way to behave at the polls.

Parties had little interest in those who would weigh up the merits of all arguments and vote accordingly. Rather they sought to ensure that the electorate understood *why* they had no choice but to vote for their party. Factions within Labour constantly debated whether the party’s aim should be to create socialists or to merely sell the material benefits of socialism.¹⁰ ‘Education’ was also important to the Conservatives. David Jarvis has highlighted how the party used leaflets and propaganda to ‘educate’ new female voters in their responsibilities.¹¹

As Stuart Ball has stated, however, the 1930s was for ‘education’ what the 1920s was for propaganda.¹² Parties undoubtedly worried about irrational behaviour stimulated by propaganda, Labour MP for West Ham Thomas Grove claimed that those people aged between twenty-one and twenty-four were just the ‘sort of fish to be caught by the best electioneering agents at every General Election.’¹³ However, As Steve Seidman underlines propaganda has two definitions: one is the ‘distribution of promotional information’, and the other is ‘the spread of misleading information’.¹⁴ In 1929, politicians held both definitions in their head simultaneously. While they thought it acceptable to adopt new techniques of

⁶ J. Lawrence, ‘The Transformation of British Politics After the First World War’, *Past and Present* (Feb, 2006) 190:1, p. 203.; Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin conservative Leadership and national values*, pp. 146-148.

⁷ As quoted Ball, *Portrait of a party*, (Oxford: 2013) p. 88.

⁸ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 29 March 1928, vol 215, col 1477.

⁹ P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin conservative Leadership and national values*, p. 146.

¹⁰ D. Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party* (Basingstoke, 2005) pp. 13-24.; Beers, *Your Britain*, pp. 83-98.

¹¹ D. Jarvis ‘Mrs Maggs and Betty The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s’, *Twentieth Century British History* (1994) 5:2, pp. 129-52.

¹² S. Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, p.294.

¹³ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 18 April 1928, vol 216, col 221-86.

¹⁴ S. Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda, and Persuasion*, (New York: 2008), p. 8.

persuasion in order to secure their own victories, in the hands of the opposition, such tactics were thought anti-democratic. This was because, as Oliver Thomson states, a tendency had arisen, ‘for propaganda to be thought of as a technique used by the other side, rather than what it is – the range of skills used by all sides, consciously or subconsciously, to put across their own point of view.’¹⁵ In the hands of the opposition, propaganda presented a threat to democracy itself while your own party’s information was inevitably correct. Instinctively, Baldwin feared propaganda to be a permissive force, believing it had destroyed the individual and created the ‘mass-mind’.¹⁶ Yet in a Conservative Central Office report produced shortly before the 1929 election, Baldwin admitted that propaganda was ‘now recognised as the world’s most potent weapon’, a reference to both the beneficial possibilities of mass persuasion as well as its dangers in the wrong hands.¹⁷

Interest in propaganda grew following studies of its use during WW1. Academics such as Harold Laswell demonstrated how Governments used propaganda during the conflict while advertising executives such as Edward Bernays articulated how such techniques might transfer to peace, democracy, and commerce.¹⁸ Writing in 1928, the public relations expert Bernays even attempted to rationalise the use of propaganda in democratic education, as the latter was not defined by ‘academic education’ but through ‘the dramatization of important issues politicians could focus the public mind on crucial points of policy and regiment a vast, heterogeneous mass of voters to clear understanding and intelligent issue.’¹⁹

Criticisms of propaganda stemmed from the same complaints Graham Wallas had made before the war, namely that it spoke to impulse and not reason. Labour MP Arthur Ponsonby’s 1928 *Falsehood in War-Time* dissected the various lies propagated by Britain in order to maintain public support for the war. Ponsonby concluded that propaganda had a coercive nature and swayed opinion without structured argument.²⁰ Aside from an appeal to the irrational there were, however, a number of techniques used in wartime propaganda

¹⁵ O. Thompson, *Easily Led: A history of propaganda*, (Stroud: 1999), p.2

¹⁶ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin conservative Leadership*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Parliamentary Archives (henceforth PA): DAV 180, Draft report by G. J. Ball, J. C. C Davidson and Stanley Baldwin, undated.

¹⁸ H. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, (London, 1927) reprinted 1971; E. Bernays, *Propaganda*, (Brooklyn: 1928);

¹⁹ E. Bernays, *Propaganda*, (Brooklyn, 1928) reprinted 2005, p. 128.

²⁰ A. Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time: Propaganda Lies of the First World War* (George Allen and Unwin, 1928).

highly suited to the field of British campaigning. Writing in 1937 about the use of propaganda in the rise of fascist states, Amber Blanco White highlighted that the creation of an enemy or common danger allowed propagandists to unite around ‘the feeling of being exposed’ and under such circumstances propagandists would often turn towards a leader to reinforce such unity.²¹ In a systematic campaign of ‘red scare’, the Conservatives had throughout the 1920s bracketed Labour as a ‘common danger’ by accusing them of being Bolshevik, most famously with the release of the Zinoviev letter in 1924.²² By 1929, while the nuance of the attacks had changed, focussing to a much greater extent on Ramsay MacDonald, it was clear the Conservatives were still not beyond using such tactics [Figure 2.2].

The influence of developments in propaganda was also visible in the role the three party leaders played in the campaign. During the war, Lord Kitchener had famously appeared on a recruiting poster and in 1929 individual depictions of the leader were increasingly visible.²³ This was not surprising. It was much easier to construct images of trust, the modern man, or the efficient achiever – all of which appeared in the leadership posters of 1929 – in a single individual than it was in a party. The practice calls into question studies that argue it was only in the later decades of the twentieth century when parties thrust the leaders to the forefront of campaigning.²⁴ These leader posters allowed parties to personalise campaigns made impersonal by universal suffrage, bridging the gap between those who would represent and those who were represented. The most prominent example of this was the Baldwin poster *SAFETY FIRST!* [Figure 2.1].

Philip Williamson has emphasised the Conservatives use of Baldwin’s popularity in order to generate support in 1929, and the poster was a key facet of that.²⁵ There have been several attacks on the campaign and poster, focussing especially on its supposed defensive strategy.²⁶

²¹ A. Blanco White, *The New Propaganda*, (London: 1939 (the book was written in 1937)), pp. 68 and 73

²² For Conservative attacks on Labour during the 1920s see L. Beers, *Your Britain* (Cambridge: 2010), pp. 58-67; Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, p. 91

²³ Imperial War Museum: Art.IWM PST 2734, *BRITONS JOIN YOUR COUNTRY'S ARMY*, 1914

²⁴ A. I. Langer, *The personalisation of politics in the UK* (Manchester: 2011) p. 15-42.; M. Foley, *The British Presidency* (Manchester: 2000).

²⁵ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin conservative Leadership*, p. 37.; P. Williamson, ‘‘Safety First’: Baldwin, the Conservative Party, and the 1929 General Election’, *The Historical Journal* (1982) 25:2, p. 390.

²⁶ For contemporary criticism see G. Cambray, *The Game of Politics: A study of the principles of British political strategy* (London: 1932) p. 69.; see also S. Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party: The Crisis of*

In reality, the poster formed just one part of a broader attempt to cement Baldwin's position as the most trustworthy of the three party leaders. Pictorial imagery positioned Baldwin as the man of 'trust' and 'safety' in comparison with what it claimed was the extremism of his rivals. The Conservative Party had been using this tactic – relatively successfully – throughout the century, positioning itself as the party that would defend Britain against the egregious behaviour of its opponents. This was a period when Disraeli was looked upon as a golden figure of the past, and Baldwin sought to link himself to that man. Steven Fielding has shown that fictional representations of Disraeli during this period concentrated on the personal rather than the political.²⁷ It was Baldwin the man rather than Baldwin the party leader which emanated from the billboard. This is not to say that leader posters were unique to the Conservatives. Both Ramsay MacDonald and Lloyd George featured prominently on the billboards. The appearance of Ramsay MacDonald as an upright statesman was part of Labours' broader campaign to reject Conservative accusations of Bolshevism and make a cross class appeal.²⁸

The chapter begins with a demonstration of how parties began to explore the commercial world of advertising to produce posters. A post-war boom in the advertising industry occurred, in part buoyed by propaganda techniques learnt during the war.²⁹ Parties were keen to take advice from advertising executives employed by much larger agencies than had existed before the war. For the Conservatives this involved employing the advertising firm S.H. Benson. Labour and the Liberals conversely developed poster designs in a much more cost effective manner, in part though holding poster competitions.

The chapter examines what visual languages parties developed as a means of speaking to the new female electorate. A number of gendered stereotypes were clearly present. The Conservatives based their campaign on the construct of women as domestic consumers.

1929-1931 (New Haven and London, 1988) p. 213.; C. L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940* (London: 1955) p. 350.

²⁷ S. Fielding, 'British Politics and Cinema's Historical Drams, 1929-1938', *The Historical Journal* (2013) 56, pp. 509 – 510.

²⁸ For details of that campaign see D. Tanner, 'Class voting and radical politics: the Liberal and Labour parties, 1910-1931' in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds.) *Party State and Society: Electoral Behaviour since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997) p. 120; L. Beers, 'Counter-Toryism: Labour's response to anti-socialist propaganda, 1918-39' in M. Worley (ed.) *The Foundations of the British Labour Party, Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Farnham, 2009) p. 231-254.

²⁹ M. Tungate, *Adland: A global history of advertising*, (London: 2007), p. 24.

Liberal Party posters promised women peace, while Labour insisted that women vote on behalf of their children.

These were undoubtedly gendered stereotypes, but the chapter also shows how political billboards matched consumer billboards in promising women access to a modern Britain, defined in part by distinct fashion and consumer orientated culture. Such images reflected women semi-liberated by war work, and an independence derived in part from the fact there fewer men to marry.³⁰ The image of this modern woman – characterised in the modish attire, cloche hat, and ‘boyish’ haircut of the pejoratively titled ‘flapper’ – represented the very antithesis of the ‘romantic’ imperial and British culture of the war, as Alison Light has argued. Instead, it was English domestic, and above all, feminine.³¹ The posters show that parties defined these modern women as dynamic actors who could determine the outcome of the election.

In contrast to women, the vision of masculinity was decidedly one-dimensional. Labour and the Liberals pictured men either participating, or not participating, in paid work a reflection of the various election pledges to end unemployment. Given the relative different visions of women available on the billboards, it demonstrated that while the visual construction of female political identity had advanced quickly since becoming democratic actors in 1918, the vision of men seemed to have moved on little since the Edwardian period. The only difference came in Conservative posters that depicted all classes and genders together receiving the benefits of Conservative policy. Many posters responded to leading Conservatives’ fears – notably Baldwin’s – that the addition of an uneducated mass to the electorate was leading Britain to an inevitable fracture along class lines.³² Inevitably, such fears were shot through with memories of the General Strike.

³⁰ Although originally termed to encapsulate those young women who seemed to epitomise modernity, by the end of the 1920s ‘flapper’ was a word increasingly used pejoratively to mean young female voters who were naïve, uneducated and flighty. It was not a word that appeared on posters. See, A. Bingham, “‘Stop the Flapper Vote Folly’: Lord Rothermere, the Daily Mail and the equalisation of the franchise 1927-28”, *Twentieth Century British History* (2002) 13:1, pp. 17-37; for contemporary complaints about use of the word see C.E. Loseby to the Editor, *The Times*, 19 June 1929.; ‘The Flapper Vote’ *Labour Organiser* (April, 1928) 82, p. 57.

³¹ A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars*, (Oxon: 1991), p.8

³² See Williamson ‘Safety First’, 387; D. Jarvis, ‘British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s’, *The English Historical Review*, 111:440 (Feb, 1996), p. 61

Modernity heavily influenced the presentation of the leaders and women who appeared on Britain's billboards. The use of photographic and design techniques reveals how far new advertising knowledge influenced the language of political posters. Although the use of photographic posters did not become commonplace until the second half of the twentieth century, the photograph was seen on billboards in 1929, especially on Liberal posters. As such, political posters mirrored wider scopic tendencies, as photography was increasingly informing viewers' vision of the world. The public knew of course that photographs could be retouched, that the camera might lie. Nevertheless, the photo or film image had become an accepted representation of 'truth', such that the documentary film-maker Dziga Vertov claimed the goal for his kino-eye group was 'to make things on the screen look like "life facts"'.³³ Photography was not the artistic representation of truth against which Plato had riled, but a captured event, an incontestable view. The photographic poster –political parties hoped – would offer the viewer a familiarity unavailable to line drawn pictorial representation.

This chapter deals extensively with the language of posters. Given that major developments in poster display would not come until after 1945, there is no significant section on display in this chapter. Despite the time and consideration that went into the design of posters – detailed below – some people in 1929, including members of the Publicity Club, thought such considerations irrelevant. Location and size were deemed the most important aspects of a good poster campaign. At one meeting of the Publicity Club as reported in the *Conservatives Agents Journal*, a delegate argued 'that the position of the poster was more important than the design,' and made the further suggestion that all Conservative billboards should be a standardised 10 feet high.³⁴ In truth, the delegate spoke to the converted. Central Office's substantial investment in 1929 meant that across Britain voters could see Conservative posters of 16, 32, and 64 sheets; the latter of which was almost 27 feet across.³⁵ The reason the Conservatives could display such large scale images was, as Baldwin put it, 'WEALTH'.³⁶ In all the party produced 464, 614 posters in 1929 and, as shown in section 2.1 large sums were spent on the campaign.³⁷

³³ Dziga Vertov quoted in A. Danchev (ed.), *100 Artists' Manifestos From the Futurists to the Stuckists* (Penguin: 2011), p. 212.

³⁴ Report of meeting, *Conservative Agents Journal* (April, 1929), p. 68-70.

³⁵ Hollins, *The Presentation of Politics*, p. 49.

³⁶ PA: DAV 180, Draft report by G. J. Ball, J. C. C Davidson and Stanley Baldwin, undated.

³⁷ S. Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, p. 100.

Conversely, Labour produced 310, 000 posters, having rejected a national campaign out of hand on cost grounds. Transport House put up no large posters, nor had any available for sale to agents. Of the 26 pictorial posters and two letter press posters produced by Labour, the largest available to purchase was a 4 sheet, just 5 feet across. Agents purchased the majority of these posters in packs of 125 posters – 5 posters of 25 different designs. The content of these packs was suited to meet the needs of industrial and rural constituencies.³⁸ It was unclear just how much choice agents had in which posters Transport House sent them. Clearer was the fact that, despite the mention of rural constituencies, for practical reasons all parties concentrated their billboard campaigns in the towns. Posters in the country were considered a ‘nuisance’, and there was little point in sending large posters to villages, as there was nowhere to put them.³⁹ The issue of tied cottages also meant that Labour supporters were unwilling to show their allegiance by putting Labour posters in their windows.⁴⁰ The problems of using posters in rural communities only heightened the fact that while the billboards of 1929 often spoke to, and for, a new larger even modern public, it was one entirely metropolitan in character.

2.1 Producing posters in 1929

The appointment of J.C.C. Davidson as Chairman of the Conservative party in 1926 and the arrival several months later of former spy George Joseph Ball as Director of Publicity, heralded new ways of working at Conservative Central Office.⁴¹ Like many within his party, Davidson maintained a paradoxical relationship with propaganda. His memoirs claim that his motives for changing Central Office and its communication were in part an attempt remove those from within the party who dabbled in ‘untrue propaganda’.⁴² Yet, as will become clear,

³⁸ LHASC: Report on General Election Propaganda presented to Publicity and Research Committee, July 18 1929.

³⁹ See *Conservative Agents Journal* (December, 1920) p. 15; *Conservative Agents Journal* (September, 1928) p. 272; *Labour Organiser* (January, 1921) p. 12.

⁴⁰ C. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside* (Oxford, 2007) p. 63.

⁴¹ There is some dispute over the speed at which these two changed the organisation. Tim Hollins indicated the Davidson Ball over-hall was immediate while Keith Middlemas and John Barnes suggest the change came after rather than before 1929 see T. Hollins, *The Presentation of Politics*, PhD Thesis (Leeds, 1981) pp. 35-37.; K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, *Baldwin a Biography* (London: 1969) p. 510.

⁴² Hollins, *The Presentation of Politics*, pp. 33-34.; R.R. James, *Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C Davidson's Memoirs and Papers* (London, 1969) p. 270.

Davidson presided over a campaign that regularly attacked rival leaders along the most brutal lines. In truth, Davidson sought new personnel because he thought they would be more adept at speaking to the transformed post-war electorate. He believed the most coherent and effective publicity could only come from, as one senior Conservative official stated, ‘one common source’.⁴³ The aim was to centralise propaganda and to achieve this Davidson removed responsibility for communication from the Principal Agent. He then established Ball in the new post of Director of Publicity, to fully free the production of publicity from constituency agents’ ‘dead hand’ and ‘obstruction’.⁴⁴

With agents removed from the responsibility of producing propaganda, in February 1927 the Conservatives appointed the commercial advertising agency Holford Bottomley to produce their literature, the first party to make such a move. For an annual fee of £500 (estimated at just under £27,000 in 2014), the agency agreed to ‘design, free of charge, rough layouts for leaflets, posters, etc’, send its managing director to weekly meetings, and not to work for other political parties.⁴⁵ The innovation was not, however, entirely successful given the party declined to renew Holford’s contract, supposedly because of changes to office arrangements.⁴⁶ The experience was not so disastrous, as the Conservatives immediately appointed S.H. Benson to work on the 1929 election and in particular on the poster campaign that preceded dissolution of parliament. While constituency parties could opt out, Central Office took responsibility for renting billboard space for these posters, the most famous of which was ‘Safety First’.⁴⁷ The substantial cost contributed to the Conservatives spending on posters for the entire election, totalling as it did £26, 926, 9s 6p (about £1.4 million in 2014).⁴⁸

Benson’s impact on the campaign was significant. The agency persuaded the party to adopt the ‘Safety First’ slogan on the Baldwin poster; ‘the man you can trust’ was Central Office’s idea.⁴⁹ The merits of the slogan as stated above have been questioned, but the fact that it appeared on the poster demonstrated Central Office’s willingness to trust in the advice of

⁴³ CPA: CCO 4127 Philip Cambray, Party publicity and propaganda, Publicity and Propaganda Department, 1928.

⁴⁴ CPA: DAV 190, J.C.C. Davidson’s report on retiring as chairman.

⁴⁵ CPA: CCO 4/1/20, Holford Bottomley Advertising Service to Cambray, 9 February 1927.

⁴⁶ CPA: CCO 4/1/20, A.P. Hughes to the Directors of Holford Bottlomley, 21 March 1928.

⁴⁷ CPA: NU Exec minutes, 18 June 1929.

⁴⁸ PA: Davidson Papers, DAV 187, National Union of Conservative Associations, General Election – May 1929, Income & Expenditure Account & Schedules.

⁴⁹ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values*, p. 37.

their agency. Given that only one photograph appeared on a Conservative poster – that of *SAFETY FIRST!* – this, too, could have been the agency’s idea. As discussed below, the use of photography in posters was at the very forefront of design during the period, so the person who made that decision would likely have had knowledge of commercial design. More certain is that Central Office’s efforts to centralise communication by appointing Bensons resulted in great standardisation. In addition to their other work the agency produced a series of letterpress posters each with a strong blue outline.⁵⁰ This stylisation, albeit on a limited scale, was to become much more common after 1945, as the next chapter articulates.

Conservative attempts to streamline their organisation were in stark contrast to those evident in the Labour party. Before the extension of the franchise in 1918, the party had reorganised itself. In 1917, the party established a specialist Press and Publicity Department to produce propaganda material and staffed by figures who had previously worked in the press industry. The head of the organisation in 1929 was William Henderson the son of Arthur, former Home Secretary in the last Labour government. William had too come from a journalistic background and while head of the Press and Publicity department served as MP for Enfield twice.⁵¹ Overseeing the activities of the department was the Research and Publicity Campaign committee of the National Executive Committee. The ten members consisted of Labour MPs and senior figures from organisations within the party, such as J. L. Adamson, the women’s representative on the Labour National Executive.⁵² William Henderson was the committee’s Secretary. The committee made the overall decision about posters and other publicity. In November 1928, in anticipation of the coming election, this committee established an additional sub-committee to make final decisions on pictorial and other propaganda. This was smaller group made up of just Herbert Morrison, F. O. Roberts, Ellen Wilkinson, and the Secretary of the Party Arthur Henderson.⁵³

Before Labour decided to publish a poster, designs travelled between department and committees. Firstly, the Press and Publicity department solicited a design from an artist they thought appropriate, which they then passed to the Research and Publicity committee whose

⁵⁰ See also CPA: POSTER 1929-06 *THE LIBERALS PUT THE SOCIALISTS INTO OFFICE*, 1929, National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations; CPA: POSTER *SOCIALISM MEANS Higher Prices Heavier Taxes More Strikes Less Employment*, 1929, National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations

⁵¹ Wring, *The politics of marketing the Labour party*, p. 21

⁵² *Labour Party 27th Annual Conference Report*, 1927, p. 68.

⁵³ LHASC: Election Sub-Committees, NEC minutes, 4 October 1928.

members discussed it before forwarding it to the sub-committee for final approval.⁵⁴ While Labour's Publicity Department suggested the existence of specialisation, in terms of posters at least, it seemed simply to add another layer of bureaucracy. By commissioning its posters by committee, Labour perpetuated a production method that had been a feature of pre-war elections.

Labour commissioned designs from various artists. The party continued to receive unsolicited work from sympathisers in the labour movement, for example rejecting a suggested poster from the cartoonist and journalist James Francis Horrabin, who in 1929 became Labour MP for Peterborough.⁵⁵ In an attempt, however, to instigate new ideas Labour initiated competitions. One such competition, run through the *Labour Organiser* in 1921, aimed at discovering being fresh talent and the introduction to the Labour movement 'artists capable of adding to the effectiveness of its mural literature.'⁵⁶ Four prizes were offered: £10 for the poster best depicting 'The March of the Workers'. Second class received £7/10 for a cartoon that illustrated 'the appeal of Political Labour.' The two final classes sought to award the finest letterpress poster, and poster advertising a meeting receiving £5 and £2.10s, respectively. The financial incentive for the winner demonstrated that the party took the competition seriously, even if judges thought that many of the submitted designs lacked 'the arresting effect so necessary for electioneering use.'⁵⁷

The second prize, however, went to a poster designed by F.P. Merrett a 'Labour discovery, and a professional advertising consultant'. *Labour Organiser* announced that it hoped the reproduction of Merrett's poster would 'lead to an extension of his [Merrett's] present friends in the Labour movement.'⁵⁸ Frustratingly, it cannot be definitely established whether Labour ever produced Merrett's poster. However, *GREET THE DAWN: GIVE LABOUR IT'S CHANCE* [figure 2.3], produced for the 1923 election and re-issued in 1929 was signed by A.S. Merritt: were Merritt and Merrett the same man? The response to his design does indicate that the party were keen to investigate the use of such expertise in their designs. Merrett was not the only professional advertiser whose work Labour admired. During the 1929 election the party displayed three posters by V. L. Danvers, designer of posters for

⁵⁴ LAHSC : Research and Publicity Committee, NEC Minutes, 17 December 1928.

⁵⁵ LHASC: Research and Publicity Committee, NEC Minute, 22 February 1929.

⁵⁶ *The Labour Organiser* (January, 1921) 5, pp. 3

⁵⁷ *The Labour Organiser*, (March, 1921) 7, pp. 1

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 1

London Underground and Shell. Though Labour had not entirely turned to commercial advertising – professional cartoonists and artists continued to produce many of the party’s posters – the enthusiasm for Merrett and Danvers work demonstrates a move towards an advertising centred approach. Of course, Gerald Spencer Pryse, who again worked for Labour during the 1929 campaign, had produced designs for the world of commercial advertising. He however had been approached because he was good socialist and a good artist. In 1929 the party were keen on the use of draughtsmen who were simply good advertisers.

Labour were not the only party to hold competitions to find new designs. In early 1929, *The Manchester Guardian* reported on a Liberal Party competition that had received a diverse range of entries.⁵⁹ Judged by ‘advertising experts’, with total prize money of £1000, those who won the Liberal competition received more lucrative prizes than their Labour counterparts. The winning entries were all ‘illustrations of three phases of the Liberal appeal ‘the new unemployment programme’, ‘the land policy’, and ‘the appeal of Liberalism to women’.⁶⁰ The competition was a success, with several of the designs featuring on Liberal posters during the 1929 campaign (see below). By providing themes the party attempted to negate one of the problems of holding a competition, that of inconsistency. Whether achieved by luck or good judgement, as the next section demonstrates, the Liberals could point towards a uniformity of both message and design.

The Liberals’ search for new posters followed a re-organisation of its communication department. There was no intention of interfering ‘with the separate existence of the liberal Publication Department,’ but instead to solve the problem of ‘over-lap’ between departments.⁶¹ As with the Conservatives, the Liberals wanted more control at national headquarters so that propaganda would ‘reach the electors much more effectively than is possible at present.’⁶² To that end there was a new Liberal Campaign Department (LCD) which would ‘lead to a very great improvement in the presentation of the Liberal policy to the electorate.’⁶³ The change appeared to cause controversy, as following the formation of the

⁵⁹ ‘Liberal Election Ideas Competition’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 February 1929.

⁶⁰ ‘London Correspondence’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 March 1929.

⁶¹ ‘London Correspondence’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1927.

⁶² ‘London Correspondence’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1927.

⁶³ *The Times*, 15 December 1927.

LCD members of the Publication Department resigned arguing that the new organisation would not have the desired effect.⁶⁴

The party hoped that such reorganisation would improve its national voice, but the abject state of local organisation hampered such efforts. If Conservative agents were too influential, there were too few of their Liberal peers to make much of an impact. The absorption of the Land and Nation League into the Liberal machinery did improve matters somewhat, but the League was a London based organisation, and the dispersion of posters and leaflets still required constituency workers.⁶⁵ This was the complaint made by one memo writer to Lloyd George in April 1929, who stated that Liberal publications were only being distributed in a third of all constituencies. The memo sagely concluded ‘propaganda cannot go in advance of organisation.’⁶⁶

The Byzantine character of the Liberals funding arrangements compounded problems of organisation. Lloyd George transferred £300,000 between 1926 and 1927 from his ‘Fighting Fund’ to support 500 candidates, but stipulated that only the interest of this amount – around £15, 000 – could be spent on organisation. A further £20,000 was set aside to fund headquarters.⁶⁷ That the leader held such a large sum of money caused a rift between himself and others, creating concerns about an over reliance on one source of funds.⁶⁸ In spite of these problems, the Liberals did produce a coherent set of designs largely because they were able to stick to three single issues: the promise to end unemployment, an appeal to newly enfranchised women, and electing Lloyd George as leader. Given the Liberals’ problems of organisation, however, it is questionable just how many voters actually saw the posters.

2.2 The posters of 1929

As the next section demonstrates, parties constructed their appeal to women based on a number of gendered stereotypes. This meant that all parties spoke to women as domestic consumers, promising to lower household budgets. Labour meanwhile concentrated on women’s role as mothers and suggested that women should vote on behalf of their children.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 12 January 1928.

⁶⁵ *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 December 1927.

⁶⁶ PA: Lloyd George Papers, LG/31/3/17, Memorandum by H. Storey, 27 April 1928.

⁶⁷ ‘Liberal Party Finance’, *The Times*, 24 October 1929.

⁶⁸ PA: A 71/10, Runciman to Samuel, 17 October 1928.; *The Times*, 22 October 1927.

The most notable exceptions to this were posters, designed principally by Labour and the Liberals that suggested young newly enfranchised women would dictate the outcome of the election.

2.2.1 The Image of the People

The image of women as consumers was a common site on the billboards in 1929. Parties believed that electoral success would come with a claim that they could satisfy new voters' aspirations to participate in Britain's growing consumer culture. Many Conservative posters couched the domestic in monetary terms, but mixed an appeal to the pocket with one to their responsibilities. '*What do the Tea-leaves say?*' [Figure 2.4] depicts a young woman contemplating a pot of tea, the poster's slogan demanding that now 'The Tea-Duty has gone Your Duty Remains!'. With an eye to the election, Churchill had abolished the tax on tea in his 1929 budget.⁶⁹ All parties understood the significance of the issue and Philip Snowden responded to Churchill's announcement with the declaration that it was 'high time the Chancellor of the Exchequer did something for the women, because in practically every one of his previous Budgets he has laid additional taxation upon them. This, therefore, is a death-bed repentance. It is an electoral appeal which, I am quite sure ...will not achieve the purpose in view'.⁷⁰ The Conservative party's message to the female consumer came as part of a much broader campaign during the 1920s in which the party appealed to what David Jarvis called a celebration of 'women's financial common sense'.⁷¹

Like their Conservative rivals, the Liberals promised cheaper goods for women. *FAIR PLAY FOR WOMEN* [Figure 2.5] came as a submission to the Liberal's poster competition. Although *The Manchester Guardian* stated that the woman in the image stood in front of a row of 'dainty' suburban houses, she was in fact towering above a parade of colourful shops.⁷² The woman's modern dress and the shops behind her spoke clearly of affluence. This was not the only example of a Liberal poster that made such an appeal, as another assured women that 'money buys more under free trade' [Figure 2.6]. Such was the visibility of commerce and prosperity in these posters the Liberals seemed to speak not just of making the

⁶⁹ For other examples of posters that appeal to the female budget holder see CPA: POSTER 1929-15, 19 Points for your approval (1929) National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations; CPA: POSTER 1929-17, *WOMEN VOTERS IF YOU WANT* (1929) National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations.

⁷⁰ *Hansard, HC Deb, P. Snowden, 16 April 1929, vol 227, col 122.*

⁷¹ D. Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History* (1994) 5:2, p. 143

⁷² 'Our London Correspondent', *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 March 1929.

essentials such as food, but all goods cheaper. It was a series of posters that spoke not just of lower prices but also of higher standards of living. The companion poster to Figure 2.6 made a similar promise but aimed at men [Figure 2.7], and remained a rarity in speaking to men in such terms. These Liberal posters were not just about bringing down the price of goods, but an appeal to a middle-class who based their aspiration on material advancement. With their use of photography they aped glossy magazines, to which inter-war women had seen the birth. Just as *Vogue* linked consumerism with modernity, so too did these posters.⁷³ Indeed, the image of male consumerism pre-empted the arrival of the first male lifestyle magazine by four years. *Men Only* was a publication that spoke, just as the poster did, to the ‘metropolitan’ middle class man.⁷⁴

Just as Figures 2.6 and 2.7 aped consumer magazines, so too did they utilise the most contemporary layouts of poster design. They draw the viewer’s eye down the row of shops and into the middle, while the triangle formation of people gives the image depth. Such an effect was much harder to achieve with black and white photographs than with hand drawn colour images. One advertising layout guidebook noted that ‘it is not easy to make the main object or figure “stand out” from the background,’: to overcome this, the manual suggested ‘stripping away’ the background to leave figures or buildings standing proudly against a white background, which is exactly the steps taken by the designer of Figures 2.6 and 2.7.⁷⁵ The *Manchester Guardian* reported that ‘any political art critic would agree that the Liberal posters when they can be found are the best for the prime merit of a poster is that of catching the eye’ and the paper concluded later ‘they alone among the parties make use of photography.’⁷⁶

Liberal pictorial languages also appealed to the female vote through the promise of peace. W. Walker took the objects from Alfred Leete’s Kitchener recruitment propaganda and reconfigured them. The finger pointed not at the poster’s viewer, but from them towards the woman in the image [2.8]. The decision facing her – possibly she represented motherhood – was whether Britain’s young men should continue to be civilians or become soldiers. The

⁷³ P. Tinkler and C. Krasnick Warsh, ‘Feminine Modernity in Interwar Britain and North America: Corsets, Cars, and Cigarettes’, *Journal of Women’s History* (Fall 2008) 20:3, p. 113.

⁷⁴ J. Greenfield, S. O’Connell and C. Reid, ‘Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle-Class Male, 1819-39’ in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.) *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800-1940* (Manchester: 1999) pp. 186-190.

⁷⁵ R. Surrey, *Layout Technique in Advertising* (New York and London, 1929) p. 170.

⁷⁶ *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 May 1929.

position of her hands as scales alluded to the allegorical figure of *Justice*. But the woman in the image was real, and the poster an instruction that now women had the vote, they had a duty to deliver justice rather than simply be a representation of it.⁷⁷ Privately the Conservatives too thought that a promise of peace might motivate female voters. After Baldwin signed the Kellogg-Briand peace pact, Davidson suggested that the office of Secretary of State for War should be re-branded as the Secretary of State for the Army, as this would play well with female voters (and Liberals presumably). Such ideas, however, seem not to have been adopted in the party's poster campaign.⁷⁸

Like the Liberals Labour promised peace, but unlike their rivals the message was not gender specific. Both parties' made use in various forms of the 1st Baron Lytton's famous phrase 'the pen is mightier than the sword'.⁷⁹ But while the Liberals used the words to speak directly to women [Figure 2.9], Labour's poster did not [Figure 2.10]. While the cuff in the latter image appears to belong to man – perhaps even a middle class man – the use of the possessive determiner 'your' suggested a collective appeal. *Never Again!* [Figure 2.11] also employed the image of hand, on this occasion emerging from the wings to reveal a war cemetery. This time the hand was distinctly more feminine, and possibly Labour intended the two to be displayed together – something the party had done in the past – but there is no documentary evidence of this. It is hard to determine why the two parties constructed their message differently. In his pre-election address to his Caernarvon constituents, Lloyd-George spoke of peace being 'the greatest world issue before the country' but there was no indication that he spoke only to the female members of the audience.⁸⁰ The Liberal manifesto contained no specific statement about promoting peace. The Labour manifesto did, however, twice, once in a section dedicated to the subject, and again in the 'appeal to women' segment.⁸¹ Such diversion, between manifestos and posters reveals that although communication was increasingly coming from one source, parties had yet to achieve a single consistent voice.

⁷⁷ E. Hobsbawm makes a similar suggestion for Delacroix's depiction of *Liberty*. See 'Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography', *History Workshop Journal* (1978) 6 :1, p. 124.

⁷⁸ PA: DAV 185, Davidson to Baldwin, 6 September 1928.

⁷⁹ For the quote see E. G. Lytton Bulwer Lytton, 'Richelieu or The Conspiracy' in G.H. Lewes (ed.) *Selections from the Modern British Dramatists* (Leipzig, 1867) p. 182.

⁸⁰ 'Mr Lloyd George's Policy', *The Times*, 25 May 1929.

⁸¹ *Labour's appeal to the nation*, (Labour party: 1929), pp.3-4.

Where Labour did construct a specific electoral identity for women, involved the Labour voting mother.⁸² Gerald Spencer Pryse designed *Mothers Vote Labour* [Figure 2.12] for the 1918 campaign and the poster was again available for agents to purchase in 1929.⁸³ The striking image combined artistic technique with religious iconography. Just as Edwardian Labour posters often visualised a ‘spiritual’ type of socialism, so Pryse continued the tradition after 1918. With a background of factory and chimney, the poster harked to Labour’s heartlands. Yet the imagery of the woman – wrapped in a blue shawl, holding a child, and in the glow of a halo of golden light – Pryse took directly from Christian symbolism. This was not just an image that appealed to women, but also placed them at the very centre of socialism. Just as Orthodox icons of the Virgin banished ‘darkness itself’, so in *MOTHERS-VOTE LABOUR* the maternal image brings light to the new socialist world.⁸⁴

Thomas Henry Fisher, famous for illustrating Richmal Crompton’s *Just William* books, produced *WOMEN VOTE LABOUR-FOR THE CHILDREN’S SAKE* [Figure 2.13]. It was poster with very clear sentiments. Before female enfranchisement, parties instructed men to vote for the benefit of their wives. After reform in 1918 and 1928, Labour in particular, urged women to think of the children when enacting their democratic responsibility. Labour spoke to women in this fashion because the party believed that ultimately even if new women voters did not initially vote as mothers they eventually would. One writer in the *Labour Organiser* reassured readers that ‘each year a large section of this vote “settles down” to wield the most commanding influence in Society-as mothers and as wives. The capture of the “flapper vote” means infinitely more than it looks.’⁸⁵ Moreover, Labour posters reflected opinions about gender held by large sections of the party. Marion Phillips, the party’s chief women’s officer, wrote in *Women and the Labour Party* that the ‘interests of men and women were one and indivisible’ further qualified by stating that women’s interests lay mainly in the domestic realm.⁸⁶ This demand that women vote responsibly for someone else represented a shift in communication since the expansion of the franchise. Just as it was before female enfranchisement, men were expected to vote on behalf of their wives and families, now women had the vote they, too, had to act responsibly on the behalf of others.

⁸² There was one example of a Labour poster that appealed to the consumer see PHM: *I am voting LABOUR*, 1929, The Labour Party

⁸³ Evidence for the poster’s reissue in 1929 is in a pamphlet sent to agents detailing all the available posters, see LHASC: 1929 election box, The Labour Party, Posters.

⁸⁴ R. Muir Wight, *Sacred Distance, Representing the Virgin* (Manchester, 1988) p. 23.

⁸⁵ ‘The Flapper Vote’, *Labour Organiser* (April, 1928) 82, p. 57.

⁸⁶ M. Phillips, *Women and the Labour Party* (London, 1918) pp. 10-11.

In truth, peace, motherhood, and domestic consumption were unsurprising ways of speaking to women. They mirrored, as we have seen, parties' internal reflections on what might motivate women at the ballot box. But this was not the only image of women that appeared on Britain's billboard. A selection of Labour and Liberal posters constructed the image of a political woman, neither domestic nor consumer but defiant political actor. Moreover, in the same posters women could define modernity. The Liberal's '*COME ON DAD!*' [Figure 2.14] was a typical example of this type. The young fashionable and well-to-do women led their dapper father by the arm to vote Liberal. It is the young women who lead the way; the posters state that is they who will dictate the outcome of the election. Labour, too, showed this image of the young modern woman deciding the outcome of the campaign. In *THE NEW VOTER* [Figure 2.15] cartoonist Ern Shaw drew Ramsay MacDonald next to a young voter, whose attire marked the epitome of the new. The poster was as much about MacDonald being the new modern man in comparison with the antique Liberal and Conservative party leaders in the background, something discussed below. What Shaw constructed here –in his image of woman –was a defiant political actor making a choice. This poster and [Figure 2.14] show the, albeit brief, emergence on the billboard of a new image of womanhood.⁸⁷

Two further posters reflected the modernity of the new female voter, though in different forms from above. In Labour's *MEN & WOMEN WORKERS YOUR CHANCE AT LAST* [Figure 2.16] workers leave a closed factory and enter a polling station. The woman at the centre of the crowd stares directly at the viewer. The words demonstrate a message to the entire workforce regardless of sex. This equality was not unique in Labour communication in 1929. Gerald Spencer Pryse's *LABOUR STANDS FOR ALL WHO WORK* [Figure i.4] depicted a group of male and female workers standing shoulder to shoulder. The difference between the two images was the direct contact between female worker and viewer. Although this was a message to all workers, as with those Labour and Liberal posters who showed women deciding the election, the agency here was with the woman. As such it marked a new dimension in the development of billboard languages.

That said this image of the female worker was rare. On the majority of billboards paid work – or lack of it – was a masculine concern. In part this was because the Liberal posters reflected the party's main policy offer in 1929 as they claimed that the solution to joblessness was a

⁸⁷ See also PHM: *THE NEW UMPIRE!*, 1929, Labour Party of Great Britain.

mass programme of road building. An activity the 1929 manifesto argued was ‘peculiarly suitable for a time of unemployment; because a large variety of labour can be employed, widely spread over the country, and because a very high proportion of the total expenditure represents wages.’⁸⁸ *The NEW ROAD* [Figure 2.17] showed just how many trades road construction needed, but by their nature (in 1929 at least) these were jobs for men. The poster also visualised other manifesto promises such as maintenance of canal-bridges, and the construction of telephone wires.⁸⁹ The man in the bottom right of the poster with his open armed stance both invites the worker seeking employment and the viewer, to witness how the Liberal plan will bring jobs; the gaze directed beyond the initial point of focus to the scene behind. In *WE CAN CONQUER UNEMPLOYMENT ROAD MAKING EMPLOYS 47 DIFFERENT TRADES*, [Figure 2.18] the party was more explicit still about how their road building scheme would alleviate unemployment.

The casting of unemployment as a masculine issue in Liberal posters, however, went beyond depictions of the construction industries. It was further emphasised in the Liberal poster *NO MORE OF THIS* [Figure 2.19]. The image traded on an accepted view that unemployment was a male issue. Indeed, it reinforced that perception. While the men queue outside the employment exchange the three women visible in the poster – one walking in the opposite direction of the queue and two beside her strolling arm in arm alongside it – appear wholly detached. It was inaccurate image; joblessness was far from a male problem. In the Lancashire cotton industry in 1931, there was a higher percentage of unemployed women than there were men.⁹⁰

For Labour, billboards yoked masculine identity with hard physical work. This was particularly evident in a number of Labour posters, which promoted the importance of working class masculine endeavour to Britain’s industrial might. V.L. Danvers produced three posters along this theme in 1929. *SAVE BRITAIN’S COAL INDUSRTY* [Figure 2.20], *SECURE INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY* [Figure 2.21], and *A NATION AT WORK* (not pictured) all presented a visual representation of the nobility of industry.⁹¹ Danvers emphasised the worker’s masculinity and physicality through their muscular torsos. Moreover, the image of

⁸⁸ *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, p. 5

⁸⁹ *Ibid* pp. 9–10 and 15.

⁹⁰ M. Savage, ‘Women and work in the Lancashire cotton industry, 1890-1939’ in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.) *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: 1988).

⁹¹ PHM: *A NATION WORK*, Labour Party of Great Britain, 1929

the man in *SECURE INDUSTRIAL PROSPERITY*, kneeling in a heroic pose atop a pedestal, and surrounded by the objects of Britain's engineering success, further lionised the industrial male being. The posters conflated Britain, its industrial might, and its industrial workforce. They evoked Soviet imagery with its lionisation of the worker, when images of the blacksmith could depict 'skill', 'dignity', and 'physical prowess'.⁹² Despite a universal franchise, this group of posters adhered to and maintained a masculine form of pre-feminised politics. Moreover, with the marked difference between these posters and those intended for the female eye, parties clearly felt able to project multi-faceted depictions of themselves, even when using such a highly public form of communication such as posters.

While Labour and Liberal depictions of working-class men were clearly defined by their work, Conservative posters did something different. Three surviving posters show how leading Conservatives' – notably Baldwin – feared that the addition of an uneducated mass to the electorate would lead to society fracturing along class lines. It was a fear crystallised by the 1926 General Strike.⁹³ Working and middle-class men appeared alongside one another as the Conservatives promised to promote and preserve society. All of society was visible in *DON'T BE CAUGHT* [Figure 2.22] and in *The ESCALATOR to PROSPERITY* [Figure 2.23]. In both posters class and position were fixed by dress. The new female voter is visible in her cloche hat, the working-class man in his flat cap and the middle-class businessman in his bowler. In the last chapter we saw how in Edwardian posters the bowler was worn by both working and middle-class men. Now it was exclusively the attire of the latter. Just as the poet A.S.J Tessimond's wrote of the anonymity but sturdiness of the man in the bowler hat, 'I am the man they call the nation's backbone', so the poster shows the businessmen forming a central component of British society.⁹⁴ The posters message was clear: if the people followed Conservative plans all would ascend to a brighter more prosperous world.

The presentation of the Conservatives as a party of healing and benign faith ran across their range of posters. *The CONSERVATIVE SUN-RAY TREATMENT* [Figure 2.24] showed the suns rays cast the party's benefice across all of society. The whole image is one of

⁹² V. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin* (California: 1999) p. 27

⁹³ See Williamson, 'Safety First', p. 387.; D. Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', *The English Historical Review* (Feb, 1996) 111:440, p. 61.

⁹⁴ A.S.J. Tessimond, *Not Love Perhaps* (London, 2008) p. 23.; see also J. Davison, 'Icon, iconography, iconology: Visual branding, banking and the case of the bowler hat', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* (2009) 22:6, p. 884.

togetherness. The Sun-Ray treatment was a cure for tuberculosis and the poster was a visual image of how Conservative policy would ‘cure’ social fractures, appropriate given the general strike. All classes are here. On the left is a young woman attired in the cloche hat so familiar from the billboards during the campaign. Then comes an old women protected by the strong arm of a working-class man. The largest figure in the scene, around which all others revolve, is the working-class man. His straight back, protective character, and outstretched arm is far removed from some of the supine figures that appeared in 1910. The schoolboy and man in a top hat complete this image of society, the totality of which was further emphasised with the inclusion of the urban and suburban landscape.

2.2.2 Promoting the leader

The *CONSERVATIVE SUN-RAY TREATMENT* [Figure 2.24] demonstrated that posters when depicting complex entities, such as society, required high level of sophistication. Viewers were required to interpret a number of visual metonyms and symbols (and read extensive text) to determine exactly what the poster was trying to say. Such complexity demonstrated that the symbol rich pictorial languages of the Edwardian period still had a role in the languages of universal democracy. In contrast, posters featuring party leaders relied on a relatively simple visual language. The turn to the leader in part reflected a belief amongst campaigners that traits already extant within them naturally drew voters towards them. Conservative politician and economist William Herwits wrote to Baldwin along these lines. ‘Everywhere’ Herwits wrote ‘I hear the view is that at any rate this is your election, there is no other member of the Government who really carries any guns.’⁹⁵ Moreover, students of propaganda had highlighted the importance of leadership in successful mass persuasion. Writing on war propaganda in 1927, Laswell stated it ‘involves the enemy, the ally, and the neutral. It involves leaders on both sides and the support of certain policies and institutions.’⁹⁶ With the leader posters of 1929, parties both sought to reinforce and indeed construct archetypes of men to whom the voters would rally. In turn, to diminish their rivals claims to be the most suited to hold power, electoral posters hammered opposition leaders.

⁹⁵ CUL: Baldwin papers 36 D.4.1, Hewins to Baldwin, 9 April 1929.

⁹⁶ H. Laswell, ‘The Theory of Political Propaganda’, *The American Political Science Review*, (August, 1927), 21: 3, p. 630

The most widely circulated Conservative poster was *SAFETY FIRST!* [Figure 2.1], which carried Baldwin's photograph. In it Baldwin stares directly at the viewer to project statesman-like solidity. The restraint of the image matched the restraint of the slogan.

Clearly, the poster's designer felt that there was no need to say whom Baldwin was, the restraint of the image reflected Baldwin's reputation for deliberating the pros and cons of every question.⁹⁷ The slogan did not originate with the poster, but had been used in numerous road and rail safety campaigns.⁹⁸ While the party's own officials wanted to use 'the man you can trust' the nominal experts in such matters, S.H. Benson, favoured 'safety first'.⁹⁹ The Conservatives adopted a slogan with which some of the public were already familiar; a form of words widely used in non-political public advertising. Just as people associated the slogan with safety in transport, so Baldwin would keep the nation safe.

SAFETY FIRST! attempted to surmount the difficulty of speaking directly to millions of very different voters. An appeal on behalf of a man rather than a party: Baldwin's connection with the Conservative party the poster left unsaid. *Safety First* was moreover just one part of a campaign that aimed to reinforce the trust that the electorate was thought to hold in Baldwin. The Conservative strategist Philip Cambray concluded that Baldwin, 'has come to be regarded as the plain man, without subtlety or guile or superabundant ability, just smoking his pipe and thinking how he can best help his country and his fellow men and women.'¹⁰⁰ Cambrey wrote this in 1932, and the posters of 1929 had helped reinforced this view. In *TRUST BALDWIN He will steer you to safety!* [Figure 2.25], viewers saw the Prime Minister guiding the British ship of state through a storm. The poster played on the mythology of Britain's sea faring history; Baldwin the captain of the national ship, steering through difficult times. Just as *Safety First* achieved intimacy with the mass electorate through Baldwin's direct gaze, the word 'you' in *TRUST BALDWIN* aimed at achieving the same effect.

Baldwin's pipe adds to the sense of solidity. *SMOKE BALDWIN'S SECURITY MIXTURE* [Figure 2.26] did the same. Parodying tobacco advertising, the scene created a sense of familiarity for the onlooker. The image of a pipe is coupled with tobacco spilling out from its

⁹⁷ Ball, *Portrait of Party*, p. 468

⁹⁸ See *Safety First*, 1924, London North Eastern Railway, (available GettyImages <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/london-north-eastern-railways-poster-artwork-by-arthur-news-photo/90743117>) [accessed 9 Jan 2014]

⁹⁹ A. W. Baldwin, *My Father: The True Story* (London, 1956) p. 145.

¹⁰⁰ P. G. Cambray, *The Game of Politics: A study of the principles of British political strategy* (London, 1932) p. 108.

packaging, which bore the Prime Minister's likeness and those policies on the packaging were same he articulated on his eve of poll speech at the Drury Lane theatre on 18th April.¹⁰¹ The use of the pipe in the 1929 was then more than an 'instantly identifiable 'prop' as one scholar has claimed.¹⁰² It was a symbol for the very things Baldwin wanted the public to recognise him for, honesty, trust, and thoughtfulness. The use of the pipe in these posters built on and extended this perception of Baldwin. And as later chapters demonstrate, Baldwin was not the only Prime Minister who would use his fame as a pipe smoker, to portray a trustworthy and safe persona.

As Figure 2.27 shows the Conservatives were not the only party to use posters to popularise their leader. Liberal billboards depicted Lloyd George as the war winner who would now organise the country to solve unemployment.¹⁰³ The poster further demonstrated just how advanced Liberal communication could be. Photographs were one thing but here the Liberals once again repeated their manifesto title and election slogan, in a clear belief that a single message oft repeated would better pierce the voter's conscientious. Reinforcement of the message came with Lloyd George holding the manifesto. Here was a man with ideas and as the image showed, a man who could demonstrate a history of having seen these ideas through to success. Just as Conservative posters sought to imagine society in an act of togetherness so did the Liberals; the image on the right of the poster shows all classes and gender existing and working in harmony.

There were considerable similarities between the Baldwin and Lloyd George posters. Both articulated a single message: Baldwin was trustworthy and safe, while Lloyd George was the man who was dynamic and could achieve change. Labour did something quite different, as the party projected two different images of Ramsay MacDonald. Firstly they wanted to reassure established voters that the Labour man was every bit the Statesman as Baldwin and Lloyd George. Secondly, the party spoke to the youthful cohort as MacDonald the modern man. The first of these two quite distinct visions was as part of a long running campaign to combat Conservative claims that Labour were effectively Bolshevik. In 1929 Labour posters

¹⁰¹ S. Baldwin, *Mr Stanley Baldwin's Great Election Speech at Drury Lane Theatre April 18th 1929* (London, 1929) pp. 12-15.

¹⁰² Hollins, *The Presentation of Politics*, p. 22.

¹⁰³ Other examples at Mundaneum: *OUR PLANS OUR READY* (1929), Liberal Publication Department; Mundaneum: *VOTE LIBERAL AND CONQUER UNEMPLOYMENT* (1929), Liberal Publication Department; Mundaneum: *Say what they will, He got things done in time of need* (1929), Liberal Publication Department.

formed part of an effort to relocate the party in the eyes of middle-class voters, from that of Trade Unionist and extreme socialist, to a one with broad based appeal located at the centre of the democratic inter-war politics. By creating an image of MacDonald as a statesman equal to his rivals, the party hoped to be seen as one worthy of another term in office. In *LABOUR'S LEADER MAKE HIM THE NATION'S LEADER* [Figure 2.28] MacDonald looked as Baldwin did in *SAFETY FIRST*; wearing a stiff collar, morning coat, and tie of a man in public administration. Although formal dress of this type was increasingly rare it remained the image of international statesman. This was the persona of a man easy in the highest office of government, as much an established leader as were his rivals. The sheer numbers of the poster the party produced demonstrated the importance they placed on projecting this image, 20000 in all, double the number of any other example.¹⁰⁴ MacDonald-as-capable leader was also evident in *GENERAL MANAGER WANTED* [Figure 2.29] where he is seen accepting the job of Prime Minister from John Bull, the acme of conventional Britishness.

As shown above, MacDonald also appeared on the billboards as the modern man. In *THE NEW VOTER* [Figure 2.15] Lloyd George and Baldwin's old- fashioned top hats and morning coats contrast sharply with MacDonald's, lounge suit and homburg. It was a poster demonstrating the fluidity of visual symbolism. Symbols could easily represent the same thing but generate different meanings depend on context. Baldwin's pipe in Conservative posters was a reassuring sign of geniality; in the *NEW VOTER*, it represented an out of touch old man. In *LABOUR'S LEADER* MacDonald is presented in the traditional attire of an international statesman, in the *NEW VOTER* his opponents are ridiculed for wearing the same. The posters had different audiences, MacDonald as statesman a panacea to reassure middle-class voters, MacDonald as youthful leader a message to new voters. Potentially these posters never occupied the same space where all were visible. But given that Labour produced both and both were available for agents to buy for their particular constituency, it demonstrated that Labour's trust is the viewer to interpret the alternative messages of the posters – even those who had previously never been enfranchised – was high indeed.

¹⁰⁴ LHASC: Report on General Election Propaganda, Executive Committee Minutes, 18 July 1929.

2.2.3 Attacking the leader

Just as the billboard could promote the merits of one leader so they could attack another. The ‘personality’ of the billboard that had been so evident in 1910 remained. Just as in that campaign, Asquith was seemingly depicted as an inebriate, Lloyd George’s macabre wink towards the *NEW VOTER* hinted at his reputation as a serial philanderer. This focus on identity provided poster designers with ammunition upon which to base their attacks. Baldwin was widely regarded as a highly affective radio performer. Sir Arthur Salter described Baldwin’s 1924 radio technique as ‘common sense and sweet reasonableness’ and ‘Mr Baldwin was made for the microphone, and it for him.’¹⁰⁵ Labour in 1929 sought to undermine this perception through the billboards, producing a poster depicting a radio with ‘empty words’ pouring out of the speaker [Figure 2.30].

The most vicious attacks were those made by the Conservatives on MacDonald. ‘Red scare’ had morphed into a more vigorous assassination of the personality and politics of the Labour leader. S.H. Benson designed both the *SOCIALIST SCHEMES MEAN £250,000,000 MORE A YEAR IN TAXES!* [Figure 2.31] and *THE CHEAPJACK!* [Figure 2.32]. The figure of £250 million in *SOCIALIST SCHEMES MEAN* was, according to the Conservatives, what taxation would need to produce should Labour get into power.¹⁰⁶ The theme of both posters was the deceitful, untrustworthy, and ultimately crooked nature of Ramsay MacDonald. *THE CHEAPJACK!* suggested MacDonald was a con artist, a man whose promises about the effect of his policies should not be trusted. The image echoed the language of medical adverts with its talk of ‘luxuriant growth’. The poster was evidently more nuanced than *SOCIALIST SCHEMES*, which left viewers in little doubt about what the mask and gun meant. MacDonald is not so upfront about his schemes in the *CHEAPJACK*. He instead deliberately tricks the public by telling them he had the cure to all ills, but keeping secret the fact his ‘remedy’ would only bring greater evil. These posters were different from the simplistic fear raising images of ‘red scare’. They undermined Labour’s claim for cross class support. In *BEWARE OF THE SERPENT* [Figure 2.33] MacDonald was accused of letting socialism out

¹⁰⁵ Sir A. Salter, *Personality in Politics* (London, 1947) p. 58.

¹⁰⁶ The cost of a Labour win was a common theme across the Conservative campaign though a different Conservative publication put the figure at £226 million see H. Urban Broughton, *The Meaning of Socialism*, National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations (London, March 1929) p. 5.

of the cage, with the result of crushing both workers and employers. MacDonald appears in the background dressed as a zookeeper, incompetent and ambivalent to the ensuing panic.

Aside from attacking MacDonald's personal integrity, Conservative posters also suggested the Labour leader was in unholy alliance with Lloyd George. The reason for attacking both Labour and Liberals simultaneously was to discredit their rivals' plans for dealing with the problem of unemployment.¹⁰⁷ In *SO PRETTY!- 'TILL THEY BURST!' [Figure 2.34]* Victor Hicks' drew inspiration from both the famous Pears advert and the popular 1920s music hall hit *I'm forever blowing bubbles*. The poster combines the first two lines of the first verse 'I'm dreaming dreams, I'm scheming schemes' with the first two lines of the chorus, 'I'm forever blowing bubbles, Pretty bubbles in the air'. In fine art, bubbles were a symbol of both awe but also the fragility of human ideas and experience.¹⁰⁸ In Hicks' poster, MacDonald's and Lloyd George's 'scheming' amounted to promises whose frailty meant they would simply burst. As the last chapter demonstrated, Edwardian poster designers also took from Pears advert. It remained during the inter-war period, a recognisable visual language that artists could deploy towards political ends. Conservative posters highlighted the cost of Labour and Liberal plans for unemployment, in order to undermine their legitimacy in the public eye. Just as Conservative posters positioned women as domestic budget keepers, so the party couched national finance in personal terms. *DON'T LET THEM GAMBLE WITH YOUR MONEY!* [Figure 2.35], which showed MacDonald and Lloyd George betting bags of public money on a game of crown and anchor. Although the two play against each other use of 'other peoples' money and the smiles on their faces show that they fully understood that it would not be they who lost. The play on words in the poster *The Socialists will be LIBERAL with your money!* drew similar conclusions.¹⁰⁹

A further reason why the Conservatives attacked Lloyd George and MacDonald conjointly was in attempt to minimise losses in three-cornered seats. There were 150 more of these than had existed 1924 and it was not just the Conservatives who considered them a problem.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ For detailed discussion of both parties unemployment policies see, J. Campbell, *Lloyd George: The Goat in the Wilderness 1922-1931* (London, 1977) p. 236 and M. Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London and New York, 2005), p. 119.

¹⁰⁸ M. Emmer, 'Soap Bubbles in Art and Science: From the Past to the Future of Math Art' *Leonardo* (1987) 20:4, p. 328.

¹⁰⁹ CPA: POSTER 1929- *The Socialists will be LIBERAL with your money!*, National Union of Conservative Associations.

¹¹⁰ Williamson, 'Safety First', p. 401.

Lloyd George told Philip Snowdon in October 1928 that ‘If we fight each other in constituencies where Liberal or Labour, as the case may be, has no chance of winning, but can only keep the other out, the Conservatives, will have a good working majority.’¹¹¹

Although Philip Williamson has claimed that senior Conservative politicians discounted the possibility that three contested contests would result in a minority Labour government propped up with Liberal support, Conservative posters suggest otherwise.¹¹² In *ANOTHER LEG-UP FROM THE LIBERALS!* [Figure 2.36] Victor Hicks showed Lloyd George literally supporting Ramsay MacDonald in his efforts to ‘steal’ from the people. In depicting MacDonald in a pair of trews, the poster hinted at his Scottishness, a subtle nod to English voters, so too his red scarf, a suggestion of his ‘extreme’ socialism. The inclusion of the word ‘another’ reminded viewers of Labour’s first minority government. The poster was an extension of Baldwin’s rhetoric. At Bristol in April 1929, he stated ‘if the contest were a straightforward one between the Socialist party and the Unionist Party, the result would be a foregone conclusion...I do recognize that the fight is complicated by the fact that on our flank is fighting in battle array the Liberal Party’. Baldwin went on, speaking to those ‘who realize the gravity of this election and the issues at stake, if they are conscientiously opposed to the Socialist doctrine, to give their strength to the one party that is capable of beating the Socialists.’¹¹³ The poster was another reminder that whether it came in the form of socialism with a hand from the Liberals, or as class war, extremism could only be avoided by voting Conservative.

2.3 Conclusion

Given the large numbers of new voters in 1929 the question arises just how new was the billboards that confronted them. Perhaps predictably the vision of women on the hoardings was premised on the notions of gender that ran through much of the parties and society. In appealing to the consumer and motherhood, parties reflected their own notions of sex. When the Conservative Attorney General Sir Thomas Inskip told the Constitutional Club in February 1929 that the new voters, ‘represented a stable element in the country’ with

¹¹¹ PA: Lloyd George papers G/18/7/6, Lloyd George to Philip Snowdon 3 October 1928; a month later the Liberal leader was worried that the same situation would mean Labour ‘sweep the industrial constituencies’ see PA: Lloyd George papers G/8/5/15, Lloyd George to Garvin 31 October 1928.

¹¹² Williamson, ‘Safety First’, p. 401.

¹¹³ S. Baldwin, *Our First Duty Is to Run Straight*, speech delivered at the Colston Hall, Bristol 25 April 1929, (National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, May 1929) pp. 13-14.

‘aspirations centred around the home and the rising generation’, he might have been speaking on behalf of any of the parties.¹¹⁴ But what while parties may have believed that women might eventually ‘settle down’ there existed on the billboards of all three parties the image of modern woman defined through youth and fashionable style. Moreover, the image of this woman on Labour and Liberal billboards dictating the outcome of the campaign as a defiant political actor appeared a one off. All too quickly parties returned to a less dynamic appeal to women, premised on the trusted stereotypes of motherhood and consumption.

It would be decades before leaders featured so prominently again on the billboards. All parties actively pushed the merits of their respective leaders, and used the visual medium to undermine the efforts of their rivals to seek power. The posters provide the feeling of a genuine battle between leaders, not something that would really occur again until the latter part of the twentieth century. Was this then the start of a type of campaigning focussed almost entirely on leader, or an anomaly? In truth it was both, as it would not be until the end of twentieth century when elections would have the true feel of being battles against individuals rather than parties. However, it was from 1929 when parties began to routinely use the billboard to push the merits of their leader. This could be on a large scale such as Winston Churchill in 1945 or a relatively small way such as the one poster featuring Clement Attlee in 1955.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, 1929 appears to be the point when the positive image of the leader really takes off.

Did 1929 represent a type of war propaganda? Certainly parties adopted methods employed during war conditions, not least the Conservative ‘creation’ of an enemy in MacDonald. All parties by focussing on the leader used techniques applied during the creation of mass unity. 1929 was, however, a campaign based solely on the pursuit of votes through irrational impulse. In any case, the Conservatives turn to the politics of fear failed, because as Philip Cambray wrote commenting on the “Safety First” slogan ‘public opinion was unconvinced of the presence of any immediate danger.’¹¹⁶ Instead, 1929 reflected a contest on who was best suited to move Britain into a new age. Ramsay MacDonald’s lounge suits and Lloyd George’s vision of a new road system, sat alongside Baldwin’s steadfastness, in showing

¹¹⁴ ‘The New Voters’, *The Times*, 8 February 1929.

¹¹⁵ For Churchill in 1945 see IWM: Art.IWM PST 8449, *Help him finish the job*, 1945, S.H. Benson; CPA: 1945-12 *Confirm Your Confidence in Churchill*, 1945, S.H. Benson. For the Attlee image see PHM: VOTE ATLEE, 1955, W.R. Baldwin (Agent).

¹¹⁶ Cambray, *The Game of Politics*, p. 69.

three leaders demonstrating that only they could manage what was ultimately a transitional period of Britain's history.

3.0 The General Elections of 1950 and 1951

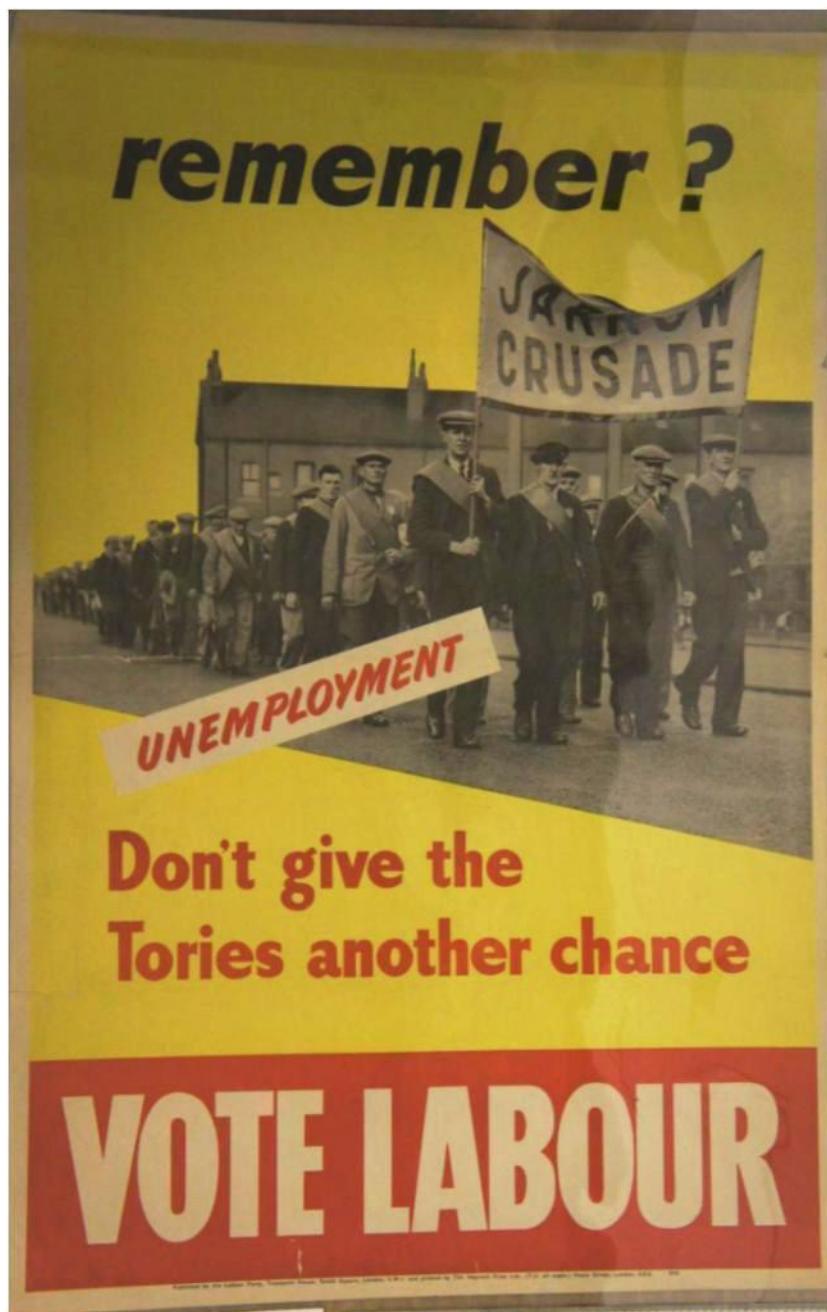


Figure 3.2 *Remember?* Labour Party, 1950, PHM: 1995.39.226

Polling for the 1950 election took place on 23rd February and the result was close. Labour won 315 seats, the Conservatives 298 (including those won under the National Liberal banner) and the Liberals nine. With a majority of just six, Attlee went to the people again a year later. That election, which took place on 25th October, saw the Conservatives overturn Labour's majority. The new party of power had 321 seats, Labour 295 and the Liberals just six. Despite the change in government, Labour had, in the second election, polled more votes than the Conservatives, 13,948,385 compared to 13,747,840.

Turnout for these two elections was the highest of the post-war period, 83.9% and 82.6% respectively. David Butler argued that the long lead into the election had provided parties with more time to get voters to turn out. As further possible reasons for the high numbers turning out, Butler also claimed that voters were better educated (in part stimulated by newspaper reading); he further propositioned that there had been a visceral response to the significant changes brought in by the Labour government.¹

This period was supposedly the apogee of class voting. For many the 1945 result proved that efforts to convert a majority of electorate to socialism had been successful. *Keeping Left* a pamphlet published by the Keep Left group of Labour MPs argued that the 'Labour Party won power precisely because its message differed from the electoral programmes of the two older parties.'² Ralph Miliband reflected on the popular radicalism of the period. During the war, so Miliband claimed, the classes had been united but in peace 'the men who had been imperilled in that survival were remembered, as well as the class to which they belonged, and the Party whose label they wore.'³ However, more recently there has been a reaction against this claim of mass conversion, and instead a move to suggest that 1945 represented an anti-Conservative rather than pro-Labour vote. Despite Churchill's popularity, people voted Labour because of long held resentment over high unemployment in the 1930s and a short-term annoyance at the Conservatives failure to appreciate people's desire for a more considered response to the housing shortage.⁴

¹ H.G. Nicholas and D.E. Butler, *The British Elections of 1950* (London: 1951), p. 296.

² 'Keeping Left; Labour's First Five Years and the Problems Ahead', *New Statesman Pamphlet* (London, January 1950) p. 3.

³ R. Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A study in the Politics of Labour* (London, 1964), p. 272.

⁴ See for example S. Fielding, 'What did the people want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election' *The Historical Journal*, (1992) 35:3, p. 639; S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, "England Arise!" *The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940s Britain*, (Manchester: 1995) pp. 67-68

Seemingly, many of the electorate had established their convictions well before Labour called the election. One Mass Observation publication reported that ‘So complex and deep-seated are voting impulses in fact that it sometimes seems surprising that anybody ever changes sides at all.’⁵ Party membership appeared to reflect such conviction. Both the Conservatives and Labour claimed rising numbers in the early 1950s, with the peak coming in 1953, at just over 2.8 million and 1 million respectively.⁶

The efforts of activists in the 1950 and 1951 elections have been given prominence over the role of billboards in corralling these committed voters to the poll. A study of election behaviour in Greenwich *How People Vote*, reported the point of election posters was to inform the voter which candidate represented which party, in a period before affiliation was printed on ballot papers. ‘The canvasser is the most immediate channel of communication between the party organisation and the electorate.’⁷ Indeed, the study dismissed the influence of party political literature, claiming that ‘The spasmodic appearance of election propaganda is likely to excite little more than indifference or scorn.’⁸ Jon Lawrence suggests that the importance of posters to campaigning was declining, citing as a reason the fewer used during the 1950-51 campaigns, than in 1945.⁹

This chapter, through a detailed study of the billboards, challenges this view of the 1950 and 1951 elections. The first section explores the different ways in which the two largest parties organised themselves, and argues this brought a significant difference to their respective campaigns. Labour was able to produce posters which utilised all that was best in contemporary design. However, due to internal disputes could not integrate the billboard campaign into its wider message. While Conservatives Party posters lacked the visual quality of Labour’s, the party began to use its pictorial propaganda as part of a more coherent broader campaign.

Labour’s success in design came following the development of a small in-house design team that sat within the Press and Publicity Department. The staff pushed the ethos of good design practice through the production of highly regarded posters for national campaigns, and by

⁵ ‘The Voters’ Choice’, *A Special Report by Mass-Observation* (London, 1950) p. 11.

⁶ House of Commons Library (henceforth HCL): SN/SG/5125, J. Marshall, *Membership of UK Political Parties* (2009).

⁷ M. Benney, A.P. Gray and R.H. Pear, *How People Vote: A Study of Electoral Behaviour in Greenwich* (London, 1956) p. 77 and on canvassing pp. 87-92.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.5.

⁹ J. Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics From Hogarth to Blair*, (Oxford, 2009) p. 140.

writing a series of articles for party publications that outlined best practice for those activists producing material at the local level. But the wider party was divided: should Labour try to ‘sell’ socialism, or instead push specific socialist policies like nationalisation?¹⁰ Those on the left of the party, believing the electorate converted, advocated a campaign in 1950 that promised greater socialist reform. Others such as Herbert Morrison thought restraint was required in order to maximise voter appeal.¹¹ Morrison was in charge of producing Labour’s posters and these articulated middle class concerns. However, the manifesto had wider input from the party, and in a bid to end monopoly in the cement and sugar industries Labour stated its intention to nationalise them.¹² Steel was already undergoing nationalisation, following the passing of the Iron and Steel Act in 1949. Due to Morrison’s efforts this policy did not feature in the posters. As a result one-half of Labour’s campaign said one thing, the other half another.

The Conservatives continued with their policy of using an external advertising agency to produce posters. And, as they had done in the past, the party trusted the company without ever questioning the quality of the finished product. Such confidence had implications for the final quality of individual posters. However, the Conservative’s relationship with the advertising agency Colman Prentis and Varley (C.P.V) enabled the party to create a campaign where the same message – visual or verbal – crossed platforms. While not a phrase used at the time ‘integrated campaign’ has broadly been defined by Sparrow and Turner as a ‘centralised control over central party machines’ a ‘subservient role for party activists and candidates’ and ‘the construction of more uniform and orchestrated messages’. In a completely integrated campaign, parties accompany these actions with a pervasive electoral pragmatism and a reliance on messages obtained from focus groups.¹³ While the Conservatives could not claim to be fulfilling the last of these tasks, they were attempting to centralise communication, and construct a uniform message.

¹⁰ S. Fielding, ‘Labourism in the 1940s’, *Twentieth Century British History* (1992) 3:2, pp. 150-151

¹¹ Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, “England Arise”, *The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940s Britain*, pp. 176-178.

¹² ‘Let us win through together’ *Labour Party of Great Britain*, 1950

¹³ N. Sparrow and J. Turner, ‘The permanent campaign. The integration of market research techniques into developing strategies in a more uncertain political climate’ *European Journal of Marketing*, (2001), 35:9/10 p. 985; Practitioners in the advertising industry have adopted the much simpler definition: ‘one voice one look’ see G. Franzen and S. Moriarty, *The Science and Art of Branding* (New York, 2009) p.521.

Scholars began discussing the concept of ‘integrated campaigning’ in earnest in the 1980s but this chapter shows how election organisers in the 1950s already understood that presenting a simple idea, with a single look across a variety of outlets, would better persuade a wavering elector than a series of inconsistently presented adverts.¹⁴ Several Labour posters in the past had shared colours, fonts, and layout, giving some sense of integration. Small groups of Conservative posters in 1929 and National Government posters in 1935 had shared characteristics, but not to the extent of Conservative and Labour posters in 1950. The expertise of C.P.V meant that integration in the Conservative campaign went even further, as centrally produced posters, press adverts, and leaflets all shared characteristics. By working through C.P.V the Conservatives were also able to target marginal constituencies up to a year before the campaign, through the former’s experience of buying up billboard space for commercial clients. Conservative Central Office would have been unable to achieve this without the unprecedented close relationship with the agency. Scholars have too readily overlooked the importance of the relationship between the Conservatives and C.P.V before Harold MacMillan’s famous victory in 1959.¹⁵ This chapter suggests that the partnership was flourishing in 1950 and 1951. The chapter also shows how integration extended beyond the boundaries of party literature to include the prominent and ostensibly non-party anti-nationalisation campaign. The extent of complicity between the Conservative Party and Aims of Industry – the public relations wing of the sugar industry – demonstrates that the Conservatives had a sophisticated understanding of how to promote its ideology across multiple outlets.

Section two begins by examining how both Labour and to some extent Conservative posters exploited contemporary design practices, in order that they could more effectively deliver their message. While Conservative posters were less successful at using photography during the period, the section does illustrate how all posters reflected prevailing ideas that the simplest billboard messages were the most effective. This simplicity included the use of font, colour and image, hence the interest in photography. Undoubtedly, the simplification of pictures in posters matched the general evolution of the medium’s look during the period.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the integrated campaign literature see O. Holm, ‘Integrated marketing communication: from tactics to strategy’, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* (2006) 11: 1, pp. 23–24.

¹⁵ R. Negrine, ‘Professionalisation in the British Electoral and Political Context’, in R. Negrine, P. Mancini, C. Holtz-Bacha and S. Papathanassopoulos (eds.) *The Professionalisation of Political Communication: Changing Media* (Bristol, 2007) p. 57.

Section two then looks at the figures that appeared on political billboards. Despite the supposed ideological and class motivations of the voters, this determinism was not reflected in the language of Labour posters. Just as recent scholarship has suggested that class structured identity, then too – as Steven Fielding states – could gender, generation, ethnicity, locality and status. Certainly, some contemporary politicians were suspicious of the notion that class and ideology was the sole determinate in voting behaviour.¹⁶ Therefore, reflecting Morrison's wish for all catch-all strategy that avoided overt references to class and socialism, Labour's posters depicted children. For both parties the depiction of youth helped appeal across class lines. Images of children also represented the post-war baby boom as the posters spoke to family voters. Indeed, what with the Conservatives acceptance of welfarism (so called 'Tory socialism') and Labour making overt appeals to the middle class – Miliband spoke of Labour election strategists wanting to 'seduce' them – it was little wonder commentators spotted overlaps in the parties' messages.¹⁷ Just as Bill Schwarz argued that the Conservatives attempted to 'appropriate the language of the people' at this time, so posters show Labour took the same approach to the middle class.¹⁸

Both Labour and the Conservatives depicted women principally in the home and as mothers, a result of the universal acceptance of Beveridgeism, and its argument that women's role was primarily domestic.¹⁹ The female worker that had appeared in the posters of 1929 was gone. As a result, the posters contest Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska's claims that the Conservatives polled more female votes in 1950 and 1951 because it associated itself with gender equality.²⁰ There is no reference to equality in billboard propaganda, but, instead, an emphasis on demonstrating how each party would improve the lives of the stay-at-home wife and mother. Admittedly, while the female workforce had shrunk after 1945, scholars maintain that women represented 31 per cent of the workforce in 1951.²¹ Posters did not reflect this, however, and instead mythologised home life.

¹⁶ S. Fielding, 'Rethinking the 'rise and fall' of two-party politics in post-war Britain' in J. Evans (ed.) *Working Papers in Contemporary History and Politics* (September, 2003) pp. 18-19.

¹⁷ Nicholas and Butler, *The British General Election of 1950*, pp. 67-69.; R. Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, p. 300.

¹⁸ B. Schwarz, 'The tide of history. The reconstruction of Conservatism, 1945-5' in N. Tiratsoo, *The Attlee Years* (London and New York: 1991) p. 162.

¹⁹ E. Wilson, *Only halfway to paradise, Women in Postwar Britain: 1945-1968* (London and New York: 1980) pp. 16-19.

²⁰ I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Explaining the Gender Gap' in M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds) *The Conservative and British Society 1880-1990* (Cardiff: 1996) p. 216.

²¹ G. Holloway, *Women and work in Britain Since 1840*, (Oxon: 2005), p. 197.

Mothers of course had been seen on the billboards before, fathers, however, had not. The increased visibility of the father demonstrated how parties were restructuring male identity away from that of workers to more domestic figures. Classic depictions of work – or worklessness appear as Figure 3.1 demonstrates – but they were much rarer than they had been before 1945. More usually, the posters of 1950 and 1951 speak of a generalised appeal to the protection and advancement of family life.

The final section highlights the changing nature of the billboard in the post-war world. It demonstrates how posters were now much larger, and tended to stand alone rather than contest with other pictorial advertising for the viewer's eye. The section then outlines how the relationship with commercial industry enabled the Conservative party to gain billboard space during the campaign of 1951, billboard space denied to Labour because of the election coming at short notice.

3.1 Producing posters in 1950

The internal organisation of the Labour party had changed significantly since the inter-war period. A team of in-house designers were responsible for laying out most of the party's literature; their remit included billboard advertising.²² Although Labour still used outside specialists – Philip Zec, designer of some of the most iconic images of the 1945 campaign, created four posters for the party in 1950 – this now became the exception more than the rule.²³ The Policy and Publicity committee also spoke with the cartoonists Vicky, Horner and Ronald Searle about potential designs, but these conversations appear to have come to nothing.²⁴

The creation of an in-house design department was one result of a concerted attempt to improve the effectiveness of the party's literature. This came through the department's own work, but also through a series of educational articles. For example, in 1951 *Labour Organiser* published a review of the design of a number of candidate addresses issued in that year; it judged them to be mostly mediocre.²⁵ In the pursuit of good design and effective

²² *Labour Party Report of the 48th Annual Conference* (1949) p. 30.

²³ For and analysis of Zec and his posters' influence on Labour's 1945 campaign see J. Gorman, The Labour Party's Election Posters in 1945, *Labour History Review* (Winter, 1996) 61:3, p. 300. ; J. Gorman, 'Labour's Britain, Fight for it Now!', *Historical Journal* (2009) 52: 4, pp. 667-695.

²⁴ LHASC: Policy and Publicity Committee minutes, 28 May 1951.

²⁵ *Labour Organiser*, (Nov-Dec 1951), 30: 356 pp. 218-219

communication, the party even published a guide to typefaces and lay out. *Soldiers of Lead* was written by Michael Middleton, a member of Labour's design team and responsible for laying out publications.²⁶ Middleton wrote in the publication that in the past 'Labour Party printing has in the main been neither functionally nor aesthetically satisfactory'. It consequently aimed for, 'a degree of standardization of typography in Labour publicity; a 'unity of style' a 'general raising of the quality of the movement's printing'.²⁷ While the appointment of in-house designers demonstrated Labour's commitment to improving its communication, the educational element of their role pointed to a wider issue. Conservative Central Office achieved centralisation by actually producing or at least commissioning literature itself. With limited resources Labour continued to rely on the production of most literature at a constituency level, and could only try and persuade those workers to improve the quality of their product. Labour attempted to enforce control, but was ultimately constrained by its limited means.

Labour's re-organisation may have been successful in raising the quality of the posters produced, but it did not necessarily result in a successful poster campaign. The party remained dominated by its overly bureaucratic committee structure, underpinned by what R.T. McKenzie described as a, 'dangerously rigorous conception of party discipline which sometimes appears to resemble the Communist conception of democratic centralism'.²⁸ The Policy and Publicity committee was responsible for long-term election planning but organisational practicalities were dealt with by an ad-hoc Campaign Committee, which the party established in July 1949. In the successful 1945 campaign, Labour's Deputy Leader Herbert Morrison had chaired both of these committees and while his biographers claim he did the same in 1950, the minutes suggest otherwise.²⁹ Reflecting his waning influence, Morrison only headed Policy and Publicity while Party Chair Sam Watson was responsible for the Campaign committee.³⁰ This division of influence inevitably meant the 1950 and 1951 campaigns suffered from a lack of strategic direction.

²⁶ D. Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London, 1989) p. 72.

²⁷ M. Middleton, *Soldiers of Lead: An introduction to layout and typography for use in the Labour Party* (London, 1948) p. 3.

²⁸ R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London: 1955) p.586.

²⁹ B. Donoughue and G. W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a politician* (London: 1973) p. 450.

³⁰ LHASC: Campaign Committee minutes, 26 July 1949.; Lord Morrison of Lambeth, *An Autobiography* (London: 1960) p. 289.

Morrison at the Policy and Publicity committee felt if Labour was to secure victory, rather than make an overtly ideological pitch, the party needed to focus on how socialism had improved electors' lives.³¹ After Labour's victory in 1945 Morrison had continued to assert that the party must chase the 'floating voter'; and as early as 1948 he was considering how Labour should conduct the next election.³² He was therefore in an ideal position to ensure this approach was expressed through the party's posters. At the first meeting of the Campaign Committee in July 1949, members had tasked him along with Sam Watson to speak to designers about drafting posters.³³ As the next section demonstrates, Morrison's influence on the design of billboards was evident in posters that spoke of the benefits Labour had made on peoples lives. They certainly made no specific promise about socialist policy.

Not all in the party agreed with Morrison's approach. Ian Mikardo and the 'Keep Left' group of fifteen MPs argued for more 'socialist' policy commitments, notably in the key area of nationalisation. Morrison's waning grip on the party left him unable to control the egresses of the far left entirely and a promise for further nationalisation duly appeared in the 1950 and 1951 manifestos. As chair of the Policy and Publicity committee, Morrison did control the posters and appears to have had only those posters produced that he believed would win Labour the campaign. Therefore, when Britain's businesses community launched a ferocious anti-nationalisation campaign – including posters – Morrison's grip on the publicity output of the Labour meant they issued few rejoinders.³⁴ There are no extant posters promoting the benefits of nationalisation. The Aims of Industry campaigns bombarded the electorate with a message outlining the terrors of state control, often from the billboard. Labour posters did not counter the argument. The virtues or otherwise of nationalisation was not a debate Labour lost on merit, but one with which they largely failed to engage.

Practical organisational difficulties also hindered Labour's campaign in 1950. Labour's victory in 1945, the subsequent practicalities of governing, and the splits over the platform, meant the campaign techniques which had helped the party win in 1945 were allowed to let slip. Campaigning was sporadic, conducted through local organisations, and beset by an inability to overcome practical organisational difficulties. The party dropped plans for a

³¹ Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, "England Arise", *The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940s Britain* pp. 176-178.

³² Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a politician*, p. 450.

³³ LHASC: Campaign Committee minutes, 26 July 1949.

³⁴ For details of campaign see, H.H. Wilson, 'Techniques of Pressure – Anti-Nationalization Propaganda in Britain', *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1951) 15: 2, pp. 225-242.

poster campaign in Birmingham in February 1949 because the Conservatives had booked all the best sites.³⁵ A poster campaign in March 1949, during which the party posted 10,000 sixteen-sheet posters, was not a national effort but a one off to coincide with local elections.³⁶ The failure led Labour M.P. Richard Crossman to reflect, the ‘Big lessons of February 23rd is that the votes are won between and not during elections’.³⁷

3.1.1 The Conservatives and their ‘allies’

In contrast to Labour the Conservatives had developed organisationally after 1945. The appointment of the advertising agency Colman, Prentis and Varley (C.P.V) in 1948 provided a significant boost. This followed new party chair, Lord Woolton’s, wide ranging reorganisation of Central Office after the defeat of 1945. During this reorganisation, Tony O’Brien – a Daily *Telegraph* journalist who had been part of the wartime anti-Nazi propaganda machine – was appointed Director of Information Services.³⁸ This was part of a wider effort to make the Central Office publicity department more efficient, and better able to quickly respond to developments during an election campaign. O’Brien headed the Tactical Committee, a group that assessed the news of the day and planned how to maximise its propaganda potential. Woolton’s greatest achievement was, however, to persuade Churchill to allow him a free hand to conduct changes as he thought fit.³⁹ For just as Central Office had constantly sought to wrest control from local agents, the Chairman sought freedom from the meddling of Westminster politicians.

Before taking up the Chairmanship, Woolton had been Managing Director of Lewis’s department store. Although admitting that ‘it was vastly more difficult to sell ideas than to sell goods’, previous commercial experience influenced his work on the Conservative propaganda machine.⁴⁰ Conservative pictorial propaganda often mirrored Labour’s in that it depicted a vision of the party providing a happy existence for idealised classless families. A pictorial language premised on the independent family unit supported through state benefits,

³⁵ LHASC: LP/GS/WMRL P/26, Reg Underhill to Arthur Bax, 4 February 1949 and Reg Underhill to Morgan Phillips, 4 February 1949.

³⁶ *Labour Party Report of the 48th Annual Conference* (1949) p. 30.

³⁷ LHASC: N.E.C Minutes, R.H.S Crossman M.P., Memorandum of Problems Facing the Party, 26 April 1950.

³⁸ J. Pearson and G. Turner, *The Persuasion Industry* (London, 1965) p. 227.

³⁹ J.D. Hoffman, *The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51* (London, 1964) pp. 82-85.

⁴⁰ Earl of Woolton, *Memoirs* (1959) p. 343.

easily co-existed with the party's policy shift conducted by R.A. Butler. This had established an acceptance of Keynesian economics, whilst still emphasising the limits of state power.⁴¹

Woolton established a number of guiding principles to direct the Conservatives communication strategy and thereby the poster campaign. Personal attack was to be avoided, perhaps hardly surprising given Churchill's much criticised comparison of Labour to the Gestapo in 1945. However, from January 1948 Woolton did seek to create a climate of fear surrounding the Labour government as an organisation.⁴² He wanted – before the election arrived – to cement within the public consciousness the image of Labour as a party failing. Central to that plan was a three-month national poster campaign.⁴³ Moreover, in a further innovation Woolton and Central Office targeted the campaign at marginal seats. It commenced in January 1949 and eventually covered 8,100 sites throughout the United Kingdom. The first part of the campaign ran for thirteen weeks, allowing for one change of posters. It then developed 'in stages' until the election.⁴⁴

Internal communication shows the Conservatives judged the campaign a success. One report produced after the 1950 election spoke of 'The impact of a comprehensive national campaign as distinct from sporadic local efforts.'⁴⁵ The statement came after the close result in 1950, as part of continued planning for a second national poster campaign should the Labour government call another election. Indeed, planning anticipated three various scenarios should the election come immediately, or in the mid-or-long term.⁴⁶ In the end it was the short-term strategy that was needed. Clearly, Woolton's reorganisation had successfully cemented an approach to poster campaigns based on mass national coverage rather than sporadic local efforts.

The campaigns also demonstrated the tight co-operation between Central Office and C.P.V. The party benefited from the agency's experience of running national advertising campaigns and particularly their knowledge and experience of buying up large numbers of poster sites. For the 1950 election they did this as and when sites became available. Such assistance enabled the Conservatives to improve the quantity and quality of places to display their

⁴¹ S. Ball, *The Conservative Party and British Politics 1902-1951* (London and New York, 1995) p. 112.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 353.

⁴³ CPA: CCO 20/25/23, Propaganda Directive 1948 (Jan-July), Propaganda and Publicity, 1948-1957.

⁴⁴ CPA: CCO 500/24/20, National Poster Campaign, 10 March 1950; General Election Records, Publicity Departments; Organisation Dept G.E. 1950, Review of publicity Department

⁴⁵ CPA: CCO4/3/172 Literature, Poster Campaigns, National Poster Campaign For A "Snap Election", 21 April 1950.

⁴⁶ CPA: CCO 500/21/1, Chief Publicity Officer to Mr W.M. Ridgewell, 12 May 1950.

posters in the period leading up to both elections.⁴⁷ Thus, aside from the obvious advantage of the Conservatives constantly plugging their message to the public throughout 1949 (when Labour wasn't doing the same) when Labour called both elections the Conservatives were in possession of the best sites within marginal constituency.

CPV's experience also facilitated the Conservative's development of an intergrated campaign. The idea was not entirely novel. Hassall had spoken of newspaper and billboards linking up 'when the Press has explained and convinced, the poster reminds'.⁴⁸ A 1927 article in the *Conservative Agents Journal* was less nuanced, but did nevertheless, argue that 'The constant re-iteration of three telling facts, conspicuously displayed in newspaper advertisements or on hoardings – preferably both-is worth 3,000 arguments.'⁴⁹

Yet, C.P.V's experience facilitated the Conservatives integration of their posters with the other aspects of campaigning in a particularly cohesive way. The national billboard campaign ran in conjunction with complementary press advertising under the same title 'Think', with adverts running in the national and local press from October 1949 to the dissolution of parliament in January 1950 [Figure 3.2]. The entire cost to the party was £18,223, the equivalent in 2013 of half a million pounds.⁵⁰ A letter to Central Office Agents reiterated the benefits of this cohesive campaigning, by claiming that the adverts were 'designed to implement the national poster campaign and to influence the electorate in a way not possible on the hoardings'.⁵¹

The repeated use of the same photograph in poster and newspaper (examples below) provided Conservative literature with a visual coherence. The advanced nature of the Conservative campaign was evident too in a conjoining of the party's communication with the campaigning efforts of those industries threatened by nationalisation. There was an intentional and conspiratorial overlapping of these two notionally separate campaigns, which iterated a single message. In March 1949, Lord Lyle had told the annual general meeting of Tate and Lyle that the company would not meekly accept nationalisation. To this end and in the same year his company's marketing operations had merged with Aims of Industry (AOI). The AOI was a public relations company formed in 1942 that campaigned against the

⁴⁷ CPA: CCO4/3/172, Chief Organisation Officer to Constituency Agents, 7 June 1949.

⁴⁸ J. Hassall, 'Posters' in T. Russell (ed.) *Advertising and Publicity* (London, 1911) p. 119.

⁴⁹ *Conservative Agents Journal* (December, 1927) 88, pp. 337-341.

⁵⁰ CPA: CCO 500 24 19, Organisation Department G.E. 1950 Review of Publicity Department, Press Advertising Campaign, 12 June 1950.

⁵¹ CPA: CCO 500 24 19, S.H. Pierssene to C.O. Agents, 27 October.

nationalisation of private companies.⁵² The organisation's output of newspaper adverts, posters, and the famous Mr Cube cartoon figure, who appeared on every packet of sugar produced by Tate and Lyle, took the anti-nationalisation campaign directly into millions of homes.

Labour then in 1950, faced a two-pronged attack. Anti-Labour ideas overlapped and flowed from one form of literature to another, from one campaign to another. The Conservatives and AOI sought organisation, synchronicity and cohesion. There was a simple message to the Conservatives and AOI's collaboration: further nationalisation was not in the public interest of the consumer. On 5th May 1949 the Conservatives' chief publicity officer, Mark Chapman-Walker, told the steel executives the Conservatives were keen to work with them. Their publicity, Chapman-Walker, told the group ought to go right up to the brink of saying ‘‘Vote Conservative’ but should stop there so that they made no party political approach.’ He then stated that after the public had been led to the ‘brink’ by the anti-nationalisation campaign the party would, ‘push them over!’⁵³ *Don't throw a spanner in the STEEL works* [Figure 3.3] was a clear example of this tactic.

Moreover, the Central Office programme of gathering the best billboard sites throughout 1949 meant they were able to lend these to ‘any industry threatened by nationalisation.’⁵⁴ Industries paid for the sites – which were registered in Central Office’s name – through C.P.V.⁵⁵ When the election was called, the sites used by AOI then reverted to the Conservatives, who in turn made over the sites to constituency agents for their use during the campaign proper.

Collaboration between the party and AOI extend beyond sharing billboard sites. Central Office also requested to be ‘consulted as regards the content and design of the bills posted by the “allies”’.⁵⁶ This was not to ensure consistency of design but to guarantee that the posters were not too similar. The party was concerned about a potential backlash should the public become aware of their collusion. Chapman-Walker hoped, however, that voters would remain ignorant ‘as the content of the design of the bills shows no obvious connection with our

⁵² Wilson, ‘Techniques of Pressure’, p. 227.; R. Rose, *Influencing Voters* (London, 1965) p. 96.

⁵³ CPA: CCO 20/25/24, Chapman-Walker to Woolton, 5 May 1949.

⁵⁴ CPA: CCO 4/3/172, Chapman-Walker, Confidential Memo, Temporary Loan of Sites of National Poster Campaign to “Allies”, 19 July 1949.

⁵⁵ CPA: CCO 500/24/20, Organisation Dept G.E. 1950, Review of publicity Department.

⁵⁶ CPA: CCO4/3/172, Chapman-Walker, Confidential Memo, Temporary Loan of Sites of National Poster Campaign to “Allies”, 19 July 1949.

current campaign.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the party still took several steps to ensure there was no leak, which might ‘be very damaging to the party.’⁵⁸

The Conservatives had embarked on a type of campaigning that stretched beyond the boundaries of official party literature. The benefits were clear. The Conservative and AOI campaign may not have always carried the Conservative name, but it pressed on the public a consistent coherent thought; rejecting a policy across multiple media to which only one party had approved. Both organisations clearly thought the collaboration worthwhile, as they embarked on the same course of action a year later.⁵⁹

Labour worried about the anti-nationalisation campaign. Morrison complained to the NEC that it ‘might be considered as an attempt to interfere with the rights of the individual and to influence his or her political opinions by undesirable methods.’⁶⁰ It is not clear whether Labour knew about the Conservative role. More certain is that Morrison recognised the anti-nationalisation campaign as anti-Labour.

Before moving on to examine the content of the posters of the two largest parties, the Liberal party poster campaign merits some attention. Given the size of the parliamentary party, with its twelve MPs – reduced to nine in 1951 – dedicating space to them might thought indulgent.⁶¹ However, the party’s specific problems, outlined below, resulted in a unique poster campaign. As we shall see while the design of Liberal posters was unusual, even futuristic, Liberal organisation was antiquated.⁶²

Desmond Banks combined heading up the Liberal Publication Department with being candidate for Harrow East. An election committee took charge of the campaign, the leadership of which kept changing as firstly Banks, and then his successor in post Frank Byers – Liberal chief whip and candidate for North Dorset – left to fight in their constituencies leaving Lord Rea in charge.⁶³ It is significant that, for the sake of efficiency, Lord Woolton expected Central Office staff to choose between professional party

⁵⁷ CPA: CCO4/3/172, Chapman-Walker, Confidential Memo, Temporary Loan of Sites of National Poster Campaign to “Allies”, 19 July 1949.

⁵⁸ CPA: Miss Spencer to Central Office Agents, National Poster Campaign, 12 September 1949.

⁵⁹ CPA: CCO 500/21/1, Organisation Department – Publicity, Poster Campaigns 1949-50.

⁶⁰ LHASC: National Executive Committee minutes, 26 October 1949.

⁶¹ So small was the party R.T. McKenzie reduced them to an appendix in his seminal *British Political Parties* (London, 1955).

⁶² A. Wyburn-Powell, *Clement Davies Liberal Leader* (London, 2003) p.180.

⁶³ Liberal Party Organisation, Twelfth Report to the Assembly Meeting (September, 1950), p. 12.; M. McManus, *Jo Grimond: Towards the Sound of Gunfire* (Edinburgh, 2001) p. 92.

employment or candidature during elections. The Liberals did not have enough personnel to afford this luxury.

The committee matched instability in leadership with woeful decision-making. Although Byers had reformed the Liberal organisation after 1945, including the re-establishment of local associations that had fallen into disrepair, the party still lacked the machinery to fight a national campaign. Despite this the party decided to contest 475 seats in an attempt to win a majority, or at least appear to want to win a majority. It was a decision that meant spreading resources thinly. Moreover, while they could not have known so at the time, it was a decision that made the 1951 contest harder to fight than it might have been.⁶⁴ The first campaign had used up the party's resources, as a result, by 1951, the number of full-time agents had fallen to 44; in October 1949 it had been a 149.⁶⁵ The next section shows that while the Liberal organisation and decision-making was poor its posters were highly unusual.

3.2 The posters of 1950

Certainly compared to many of those that came before, the defining aspect of posters produced in the post-war period was their simplicity. In this respect, political posters strongly evoked commercial advertising, incorporating as they did a straightforward image with a clipped slogan. As this section will go on to show, colour pallets, and the variety of fonts were deliberately limited. This would enable the public to identify a particular poster as originating from a particular party, or so the parties hoped. Each poster would be inherently 'Conservative' or 'Labour' in its presentation if not content. Photography also became the norm after 1945, rather than the exception it had been in 1929. The inclusion of 'real' people further enhanced the 'realism' of the posters. Thus, Labour and Conservative posters increasingly projected images of the voters back at themselves. Although this construct of the voter by the party, very much as the latter wanted the former to be.

Like those of their two main rivals Liberal party posters used colour consistently, and employed a standard format. However, disunity among its leading figures and an ongoing battle with others who used the 'Liberal' title, forced the party to dedicate as much of its poster campaign to showing the public just who the 'Liberal team' were, as what the party

⁶⁴ Violet Bonham Carter claimed in a letter to her daughter that the party leadership had been highly 'irresponsible' in its attempt to fight on such a large front. See V.B.C to Laura Grimond, 24 February 1950 in M. Pottle (ed.) *Daring to Hope, The Diaries and Letter of Violet Bonham Carter 1946-1969* (London, 2000), p. 83.

⁶⁵ D. Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party* (Hampshire, 2004) p. 174.

stood for. It was, and remains, a highly unusual campaign, one that paradoxically anticipated the much later ‘personification’ of politics, and it is with this that this section begins.

3.2.1 The Liberals: ‘A number of individuals’

Reflecting on the problems of disunity amongst his parliamentary colleagues, Liberal leader Clement Davies claimed, ‘There is no party’ but ‘a number of individuals who, because of the adherence to the party, come together only to express completely divergent views’.⁶⁶ Thus, while those on the Liberal left, such as Megan Lloyd George favoured co-operation with Labour – Tom Horabin having already defected to Labour in 1947 – counterparts on the right, notably Gwilym Lloyd George were in effect by 1950 already Conservatives.⁶⁷ These internal debates often spilt over into embarrassing, and damaging, public rows.⁶⁸

To add to its problems the party was in a battle for its own name. Sir John Simon had formed the Liberal Nationals in 1931 to align liberalism with the Conservative-led National Government.⁶⁹ In 1943 those who had remained outside government in 1931 attempted to bring those who had followed Simon back into the fold. But the two sides became separated permanently with the Woolton-Teviot association of May 1947, which formally linked the Conservatives with the renegade Liberals. In 1950 fifty-three candidates stood under the ‘Conservative Liberal’ banner. So often were candidates declaring themselves to be liberal, the Liberal party proper was forced to declare its own independence.⁷⁰

Liberal posters addressed these twin problems by avoiding matters of policy let alone ideology, and instead depicted the party’s leading figures and concentrated on their *personal* qualities. These posters sidestepped the awkward question of what a Liberal represented in terms of an idea, by associating this contested ‘liberalism’ with concrete – and relatively well-known – individuals.

Two posters pictured Clement Davies [Figures 3.4 and 3.5]. In 1950, [3.4] the ‘Liberal Leader’ appeared as a jovial figure sporting a large grin. A year later [3.5] he seemed more

⁶⁶ Quoted in Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party*, p. 154.

⁶⁷ J. Reynolds and I. Hunter ‘Decline and Disintergration (1929-1955)’ in R. Ingham and D. Brack *A History of Liberal Politics in Britain 1679-2011* (London: 2011), p. 227

⁶⁸ For example the disagreement between the Chief Whip Frank Byers and Violet Bonham-Carter over Israel, in Wyburn-Powell, *Clement Davies*, p. 175

⁶⁹ For an account of the formation and history of the National Liberals up to 1940 see G. D. Goodlad, ‘The Liberal Nationals, 1931-1940: The Problems of a Party in ‘Partnership Government’ *The Historical Journal*, (March, 1995) 38:1, pp. 133-143

⁷⁰ D. Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party*, p. 160

statesmanlike, the hand on a lapel suggesting a man at home on the world stage. A poster featuring the Liberal Chief Whip Frank Byers [Figure 3.6] uses a cinematic font – the shadowing and the text growing out the page – perhaps the only instance in twentieth century campaigning when a party felt the need to inform the electorate who occupied that relatively obscure position. Another design featured Megan Lloyd George, and yet another, the Liberal leader in the House of Lords, Lord Samuel [Figure 3.7]. All were relatively well known: Megan Lloyd-George carried the dynastic surname of course, but both she and Samuel were noted pre-war Liberals, while Byers was a broadcaster. Liberals used these personalities to fill the gap left by the party's lack of agreed substance, to show the electorate who – rather than what – was Liberalism. Perhaps further indicating the tricky position Liberals were in at this point, the posters made no mention of the term 'party'.

This focus on individuals was highly unusual for this period. The last chapter demonstrated that 1929 was to some extent a 'presidential' campaign while in 1935 a few National Government posters featured Baldwin.⁷¹ Ten years later, surviving Conservative posters show how far the party made play on Churchill's presumed popularity, but it seems to have been relatively limited.⁷² Labour, in comparison did not feature Attlee on billboards. In promoting a group of politicians, Liberal posters were doing something quite different, appealing to the nation on the basis of the party's team, albeit a team of individuals.

This tactic would become increasingly more common in later campaigns. In 1959 Hugh Gaitskell, Nye Bevan and Barbara Castle appeared together and in 1970 Wilson appeared with his cabinet. But if these later Labour examples were meant to suggest a unity many thought was lacking, the Liberals in 1950 were attempting to remind people *who* they were. The posters were a highly original response by a divided and marginalised party. A party some feared was doomed to be hoisted up by Labour and the Conservatives.

3.2.2 Design simplicity

While the content of Liberal posters differed from that of their two main rivals, they shared in the adoption of a universal colour scheme. This section demonstrates how all parties began to employ a cohesive style across all their posters and indeed literature. If a viewer could easily recognise that a poster belonged to a particular party, the parties hoped, understanding the

⁷¹ CPA: POSTER 1935-09, *THE MAN for PEACE SECURITY and PROGRESS*, 1935, Grafton Arts Ltd.

⁷² CPA: POSTER 1945-12, *CONFIRM YOUR CONFIDENCE IN CHURCHILL*, 1945, S.H. Benson.

posters message would occur more quickly. Labour's *Soldiers of Lead* for example reflected on how posters should be part of a larger campaign, one defined by 'brevity' and the 'cumulative repetition [of] a slogan or fact that sums up the whole campaign', and which could be 'rammed home' to voters.⁷³ This conviction reflected the assimilation of ideas from the broader world of design, such as that promoted by the inter-war modernist movement. In 1925, a member of the Bauhaus Jan Tschichold stated that 'The aim of typography was communication' and 'Communication must appear in the shortest, most penetrating form.'⁷⁴ By simplifying the message designers thought there was more chance voters would imbibe it. A 1949 article in *Labour Organiser informed its constituency agent* readers if they were to 'pierce the shell of resistance that every individual has built round himself, as protection against the demands made on him from hoardings, railway carriages, newspapers, and so on.'⁷⁵

By publishing *Soldiers of Lead* Labour showed it thought type crucial to effective communication. 'Type is a means to an end', the document stated, 'It succeeds or fails in so far as it conveys its message clearly, easily and without strain.'⁷⁶ Writing in the *Labour Organiser* Peter Harle, a Labour designer, further articulated the importance of using the best typefaces, instructing readers towards those it favoured, such as Gill Extra Heavy, Karnack, Beton, Rockwell, Gothic Condensed, Playbill, and Ultra Bodoni.⁷⁷ Transport House literature used these fonts, and the party was clearly interested in promoting an aesthetic uniformity. Uniformity did not end at the edge of printed-paper, however. Party designer Jack Brewer advised that when dressing constituency office windows, any lettering should be in 'block-lettering or Gill-Sans. This will fit in with the material being supplied by the Publicity Department.'⁷⁸ Colour was thought crucial, too. Black ink on yellow paper was encouraged to provide a good contrast.⁷⁹ While Labour's 1950 posters included some black script on a yellow background, the majority of text was in red. Furthermore, in 1951, the party instead chose the startling yellow on black for its text based posters, for example *You're winning the*

⁷³ *Soldiers of Lead*, p. 25

⁷⁴ R. Hollis, *Graphic Design: A Concise History* (London, 2001) p. 55.

⁷⁵ 'Designing a poster' *Labour Organiser* (Oct,1949) 28: 331, pp. 12 – 13.

⁷⁶ *Soldiers of Lead*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ 'Designing a poster' *Labour Organiser* (Oct 1949) 28:331, pp. 12 – 13.; The same fonts were recommended in *Soldiers of Lead*, p. 13.

⁷⁸ 'Designers Advice' *Labour Organiser* (September, 1949) 28: 330, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁹ 'Designing a poster' *Labour Organiser* (October, 1949) 28: 331, pp. 12 – 13.

peace and *PEACE the way to plenty* [Figure 3.8]. Clearly, designers even at Transport House did not always follow their own guidelines.

Figures 3.8-3.10 demonstrate how colour and font were used to create a uniform look. The common motifs were graffiti like font, black-background and ‘VOTE LABOUR’ in the dotted square. With such consistent style, viewers could rapidly appreciate that it was indeed a Labour poster. In centrally produced Conservative posters, combinations of blue and red predominated. The party had formally adopted the royal blue colour scheme in March 1950. ‘One national colour’ was meant to reflect its status as a national party, and in addition Central Office reported that a ‘single colour is more helpful in the production of printed matter for advertising.’⁸⁰ The ‘national party’ of course undermined local custom and in some parts of Britain traditions remained, Norfolk being one such example.⁸¹ However, there was a clear effort by both parties to create advertising whose universal look made it recognisably Conservative or Labour.

3.2.3 Photography

Simplification did not just come through colour and font. The drive to convey a posters message in the most expedient time possible, led designers to remove all detail from images that was irrelevant to the posters core point. A comparison between the 1951 Conservative poster, *after four years LABOUR* [Figure 3.11] and the 1931 National Government poster, *WEIGHED UP AND FOUND WANTING* [Figure 3.12] demonstrated this. The artistic rendering of the scales had given way to a flat graphic representation. By 1951, artistic detail was old, outdated, and superfluous.

The greatest innovation in expressing information quickly, during the period, however, came in the use of photography. Although rare, photography had appeared in election posters before 1939, *Safety First* being only the most famous, or perhaps infamous, instance.⁸² Moreover, as shown already, the photograph did not completely displace the work of cartoonists or draughtsman in 1950 and 1951. Labour liaised with *News Chronicle* cartoonists

⁸⁰ CPA: CCO 4/4/228, Letter to S.H. Pierssene to Colonel Cavendish, 1 February 1951, Party Colours 4.

⁸¹ CPA: CCO 4/4/228, Letter to S.H. Pierssene to Colonel Cavendish, 1February 1951, Party Colours 4; The Nuffield study reported variations in colour in local propaganda Nicholas and Butler, *The British Elections of 1950*

⁸² CPA: POSTER 1935-13, *GOOD MONEY*, 1935, Dowgate Printing Company; CPA: POSTER 1935 14, *AND WHAT WILL YOU VOTE FOR MADAM*, 1935, Grafton Arts Ltd; CPA: POSTER 1935 -16, *THEY BROUGHT US FROM THE SLUMS TO SUNSHINE* Studio Son Limited.

Victor Weisz (otherwise known as ‘Vicky’), Arthur Wakefield Horner who produced cartoons for *Tribune* and the *News Chronicle*, and in 1951 the satirist Ronald Searle, famous for inventing the girls of St Trinians. What happened to the posters designed by these figures is sadly unknown, the minutes of the policy and publicity sub-committee being unclear.⁸³ The fact that Labour was talking to such eminent cartoonists – Vicky was described by Randolph Churchill as a ‘genius’ – demonstrated the belief that politicians still felt they still had a role to play.⁸⁴ During the 1950 campaign, Labour re-employed *Daily Mirror* cartoonist Philip Zec, who had undertaken significant work for the party in 1945.⁸⁵ Despite employing a famed cartoonist, however, Labour did not get cartoons. Before his employment at the *Mirror* Zec had worked in commercial advertising, and his output for Labour reflected his first rather than second career. Thus, Zec’s 1945 and 1950 posters were fiercely simple, containing a strong central image, a succinct slogan and minimal use of colours [Figure 3.13].

Had photographs replaced Zec’s drawn figures, the posters would have communicated the same message. Zec had created appealing images of real people, but the fact remained that technology existed for photography to do the same and do it more effectively. Designers certainly thought photographs were more attractive to voters than drawings. One of Labour’s in-house team, Peter Harle, stated that an ‘appealing photograph’ was a ‘never failing’ way of getting people to look at your posters. Photography had the ability to resonate with the masses, because it more accurately evoked how they now saw the world. ‘Lots of people take their own ‘snaps’ when on holiday’ wrote Harle ‘so that a well presented and interesting photograph immediately strikes a chord.’⁸⁶ Visual theorist John Berger reflected on the public’s easiness with photographic images, claiming they did not view photos as art and therefore did not think of photography as ‘*beyond them*’.⁸⁷

Labour had given considerable thought to the use of photography before 1950. *Soldiers of lead* stated that if a photograph (or drawing) was to be used make sure that it was ‘good’ and to avoid the ‘grey and jaded photograph without life or sparkle’.⁸⁸ In contrast to Labour, the Conservatives did not give use of the medium quite such systematic thought and ultimately

⁸³ LHASC: Labour party Policy and Publicity Committee, 28 May 1951.

⁸⁴ For Churchill’s opinion of Vicky see, M. Bryant, *Dictionary of Twentieth Century Cartoonists* (Aldershot, 2000) p. 238.

⁸⁵ L. Beers, ‘Labour’s Britain fight for it now’, *The Historical Journal* (2009) 52:3, p. 688.

⁸⁶ *Labour Organiser* (Oct, 1949) 28:331, pp. 12 – 13.

⁸⁷ J. Berger, ‘Understanding photography’ in A. Trachtenberg (ed.) *Classic Essays on Photography* (Connecticut, 1980) p. 291.

⁸⁸ *Soldiers of Lead*, p.27.

regretted the decision. A London area report sent to Central Office following the 1950 campaign highlighted the evocative imagery of a Labour poster that featured an image of the Jarrow march [Figure 3.1]. ‘We consider the socialist made a very effective use of photographs showing unemployment between the wars, while we relied solely on figures and graphs’. Photographs had persuaded where data had not (in twenty years time poster designers would reverse their opinions on this). The report went on, ‘In view of the fact that the biggest increase in unemployment occurred between 1929 and 1931 when there was a Labour government in office, it should be possible to illustrate this with pictures taken during those years.’⁸⁹ The comment perhaps expected more of photography than it could possibly deliver, but it highlighted the belief that it could help deliver a posters meaning swiftly. Others in Conservative Central Office noted the Jarrow posters success. Worker Vyvyan Adams also spoke of the billboards impact. ‘Many commentators have repeated ad nauseum’ he wrote ‘– that the Labour Party’s Jarrow Marchers poster had a deadly effect.’⁹⁰

While Labour had success with its photograph posters, the use of this type of imagery was not in itself a guarantee of success. Good image selection was required alongside good design. One of the Conservative party’s publicity officers complained of *It’s Commonsense* [figure 3.14]

the Bulbrook head [the name used in party minutes of the poster] with the pointing finger defeated its object of arresting the passers-by attention by superimposing the finger on the face, which does not show up too clearly. Had the pointing finger been positioned slightly to one side, clear of the face, it would have been far more effective.⁹¹

The stern Bulbrook head with its foreshortened finger deliberately evoked Alfred Leete’s recruiting poster *BRITONS “WANTS YOU”* [Figure 3.15]. Two of the three salient points Paul White identified in the Kitchener image – the ‘gaze’ the pointing finger and the ‘YOU’ – were evident in the Bullbrook head.⁹² However, those factors which had combined to make the Leete image so memorable, were lacking in the Conservative poster, largely because of the failings highlighted by the Conservative official. Such is the arrangement of face and

⁸⁹ CPA: CCO 600/14/2, Chief publicity officer reviews of election during 1950.

⁹⁰ CPA: CCO 500/24/20, Review of publicity Department, 15 June 1950, Organisation Dept G.E.

⁹¹ CPA: CCO 600/14/2, Chief publicity officer reviews of election during 1950.

⁹² P. White, ‘Grabbing attention: the importance of modal density in advertising’ *Visual Communication* (2010) 9: 371, p. 373.

shoulder, forearm and hand, the method of pointing is strangely un-authoritative. The man's arm is not (and anatomically cannot be) outstretched. Kitchener's on the other had most definitely been. Moreover, while Kitchener's authority was emphasised in his military bearing of uniform and moustache, the same was less evident in the open-necked shirt and braces of the man in the Conservative image. Although intentionally evoking the Kitchener image, there were other concerns with the poster. Presumably, the Conservatives intended the poster's message to come from one working class voter to another, from equal to equal. Yet to achieve this it evokes symbolism from a poster based on authority. The Filed Marshall spoke from a position of authority to the intended viewer (those who had not yet enlisted). By evoking Kitchener, however, Bullbrook appears to be telling or shouting rather than acting from the intended position of equivalence.

This was not the only problem the Conservatives had when using photography. The iconography of the family in *family – happiness – and a home* [Figure 3.16] is discussed below. It is, however, another example of a poorly composed image. Dad's right hand vanishes into absent space between Daughter and dog. Had the photo not been a montage of shots, Mum's right hand would be on the arm or shoulder of her son, rather than vanishing behind his back. It was clear that despite the expertise of C.P.V in running campaigns, the Conservatives remained unable to maintain quality of design across the spectrum of posters produced during the election.

3.2.4 Women, Children and Men

Before 1950 the class position of those women and children who populated political posters had usually been clear: now they were often classless. Moreover, if working class men were still invariably linked to employment, male identity was now more domestic, and their class while determinedly not working (as it was not linked to employment) was much harder to define. Some of the changes reflected parties' attempts to make their universal appeal, but there is evidence of them constructing a new image of the post-war electorate.

Both Labour and Conservative posters habitually spoke to women as mothers. Labour in particular were keen to highlight how families had benefited from the welfare state. In *Healthy thanks to Labour* [Figure 3.17], a mother and son celebrate the foundation of the National Health Service in 1948. Labour even claimed credit for actions not entirely of their own undertaking, a demonstration of the use of billboards to build and maintain false truths.

One poster, depicting a mother holding a rotund baby while a toddler looks on, reminded mothers of the family allowance [Figure 3.18]. What the poster failed to mention was that while the government had started family allowances in 1946, it was the Churchill coalition which had passed the legislation. The irony certainly was not lost on William Beveridge – writer of the eponymous report that had laid the foundations of the welfare state – who noted the inaccuracy.⁹³

In the maternalistic posters of 1950 and 1951 Labour and Conservative both claimed they would continue to support mothers through the state. The Conservative's *give him security and a proud future* [Figure 3.19] argued a vote for the Conservatives would mean the continued security of welfarism, but – through the use of the word 'proud' – the poster also evoked the spirit of nationhood, implying Britain's position in the world would be maintained. The accompanying newspaper advert expounded on this idea, highlighting how a Conservative Britain would bring long term prosperity. 'His future' it stated 'will it be the kind of future you would like him to grow in to.'⁹⁴

Clearly, both parties spoke to women about the same issues in the same manner. Labour's search for universal support, meant women in their posters mirrored Conservative examples. The mothers were young, well dressed, and smiling; the children adoring, the babies plump, healthy and happy. It was to some extent the perfect vision of the perfect mother. As such we need to recast Zweinigier-Bargielowska's argument that it was the Conservative promise of female equality that resulted in such large support for the party at the polls.⁹⁵ There is no evidence from posters that the Conservatives made this promise in public. While the party may have promised equality and equal pay in the Conservative publications cited by Zweinigier-Bargielowska, such as *True Balance*, they certainly did not do so in their posters. Unpicking the reason why the party promised something to the specific readership of a party publication and not to the public, via posters, is problematic. Perhaps, given what a very public form of communication, billboards were the Conservatives were unwilling to make promises of equal pay to an audience who often would have rejected the idea.

Conservative and Labour posters linked women, children, and the home because they reflected the prevailing political opinion that after 1945 women should return to the domestic

⁹³ LSE: BEV 6 105/62, Beveridge to Dingle Foot, 4 February 1950.

⁹⁴ The History of Advertising Trust (henceforth HAT): CPV Guardbook, 1951, The History of Advertising Trust.

⁹⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Explaining the Gender Gap', p. 216.

sphere, thus freeing jobs for returning servicemen. Indeed, the government forced the issue by withdrawing subsidies for day nurseries in 1946.⁹⁶ Both parties – like Beveridge – saw women as part of a household team. The welfare state had been founded on the principle of a sole male breadwinner and benefits were intended to relieve rather than abolish the drudgery of domestic life.⁹⁷ Posters reflected the assumptions of those politicians responsible for them, invariably hailing women as wives and mothers. Following the 1950 election Morrison wrote that ‘the needs of the consumer and the problems of the housewife must be recognised as a real factor in politics and Party policy and propaganda should take full account of it.’⁹⁸

Morrison appeared to ignore the six million women in paid employment yet his reductive view did reflect that of wider society. As well as discussing issues relevant to any worker, such as accident prevention and permissible overtime, delegates at the 1951 Annual Conference of the Representation of the Trade Unions for Women Workers also dedicated time to discussing maternity benefits. Florence Hancock who chaired the conference declared that ‘working women had not entirely, or even to any great degree, shed their domestic responsibilities’.⁹⁹ It was clear that while political posters spoke to the domestic aspect of female life in post-war Britain, their audience was larger than those not in paid employment. This reductive view of gender was not surprising, but it is telling that where as Labour did feel willing or able to appeal to women as workers in 1929, albeit in a limited means [Figure 2.16] it had withdrawn from this in 1950.

Aside from their being a way of communicating to women, children symbolised a better future, their appearance an attempt to ‘own’ the idea of optimism. If a child’s life was improved now, then their future would be improved.¹⁰⁰ What was better for children was better for Britain, and without a vote for the respective party, it was the next generation who would pay. Parties used children as an encouragement to parents to vote both, on behalf of their own offspring, but also to construct a future in which parents would want their offspring to grow. Zec in 1945 and in 1950 symbolised ‘the future’ through the image of a small boy.

⁹⁶ M. Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement 1914-1999*, second edition, (2000) p. 286.

⁹⁷ S. Bruley, *Women in Britain Since 1900* (London, 1999), p. 121.

⁹⁸ LHASC: Box 1950 B/F1950/1 B/F1950/2, Memorandum by Herbert Morrison, The Recent General Election and the Next, N.E.C, 22 March 1950.

⁹⁹ *Women Workers: Report of the 21st Annual Conference of Representation of Trade Unions Catering for Women Workers*, (Trade Union Congress, May 1951) p. 4-28.

¹⁰⁰ The cultural historian Hugh Cunningham argued this was the message of every government of the twentieth century, H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society* (Harlow, 2005) p. 178.

In the 1950 image the onus on the electorate was clear, *HIS FUTURE YOUR VOTE*.¹⁰¹ In July 1948 as part of the ‘Forward’ campaign – the very title premised on a better future – Labour released the poster ‘HE’S MIGHTY FINE THANKS TO LABOUR’ [Figure 3.20] a reference to the decrease in infant mortality. One Conservative poster reminded voters that the young would suffer with the alleged slow pace of house building under Labour. ‘*The way things are going I shall be grown up before we get OUR HOUSE*’ [Figure 3.21] linked children with housing, the key issue after the war.¹⁰²

While the class identity of these mothers and babies was left vague, when fathers appeared, they appeared not to be working class. Dad’s shirt and tie suggests a non-manual occupation in the Conservative deliver *family – happiness – and a home* [Figure 3.16]. It was an idealised vision, a positive message, with the Conservatives promising to deliver an emotion that while desirable was impossible to measure. Labour too spoke to, and of, the nuclear family, Figure 3.22 depicting three generations. With all the adults focussing on the girl, the youngest member of the group, it was a message that still adhered to the principle of looking to the next generation. As with many earlier examples, determining the class of this family is difficult, but the jacket and tie on the men hints towards lower-middle. But both posters hint at a catch-all strategy; the ultimate appeal to those who belonged both to the middle class, but also to those who wanted to join. It was not the only Labour poster that spoke – in elliptical terms at least – to the middle class father. The 1947 *Daddy's jealous - he says I'm a lucky so-and-so to be growing up under Labour* [Figure 3.23.] depicts an angelic middle-class girl skipping, and speaking directly to the viewer, divorcing the appeal from the party it was instead a direct message from the next generation.

Posters placing fathers at the centre of family life were a development unique to 1950. One 1935 poster did depict a small girl declaring that ‘Daddy’s got a job’; it was still a poster that adhered to a well-established language linking masculinity to paid employment.¹⁰³ The posters mirrored development in society. Sociologists argued that by the 1950s men, especially in the middle class, were more likely to define themselves through their domestic

¹⁰¹ PHM: *FOR THE FUTURE*, 1945, Labour party; PHM, *HIS FUTURE YOUR VOTE*, 1950, Labour party.

¹⁰² See Benney, Gray and Pear, *How People Vote*, p. 147 and R.S. Milne and H.C. Mackenzie, *Straight Fight: A study of voting behaviour in the constituency of Bristol North-East at the General Election of 1951* (London, 1954) p. 81. In Bristol in 1951 the issue of housing was of far more importance for Conservative than Labour voters.

¹⁰³ CPA: POSTER 1935-08, *Daddy's got a job*, 1935, St Michael Press. See also CPA: *Smokeless Chimneys and – ANXIOUS MOTHERS!* 1931-04, National Association of Conservative and Unionist Associations.

rather than employment role.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, they came during a period when there was worry about the collapse in marriages and family breakdown.¹⁰⁵ Posters reflected this change and concern. Showing men now active in domestic life, Conservative and Labour billboards associated themselves with the presumed benefits of that life and promised to help maintain it.

While posters addressed middle-class men as fathers, the billboards continued to define working-class men in terms of their work, focussing on the importance of maintaining full employment. *Work for all thanks to Labour* [Figure 3.24] showed a man employed in physical labour. His spade indicates this, as does his haircut (short back and sides with more length on top) and stubble. The man in Philip Zec's 1945 *LABOUR FOR SECURITY* [Figure 3.25] had strikingly similar haircut and stubble. The Conservatives *Fair wages, fair prices and a house to live in* [Figure 3.26] adopted a similar iconography. The flat-capped agricultural worker leans on his shovel (or other tool) his shirt too is open-necked, his sleeves rolled up. We know the Conservatives intended the man to be a farm-worker because the same image appeared in a Conservative newspaper advert aimed at that group. 'Fair wages, fair prices and houses to live in' were of course relevant to many, but in this case they spoke specifically to rural workers. Such posters show that masculinity depicted through muscularity, remained a vital visual tradition.

Certainly, designers wanted working class viewers to self-identify with billboard imagery. Labour posters evoked the bitterness of working-class male unemployment in areas of heavy industry during the 1930s. The well received *remember?* poster [Figure 3.1] matched a photograph of the 1936 Jarrow marches with the slogan *Unemployment Don't Give the Tories Another Chance*. It was an image that reminded the working class of that period, should they need it. The party displayed five thousand of these Jarrow posters in the large 16-sheet format (10ft by 6ft 8ins) nationally.¹⁰⁶ Although not mentioned in the archive, arguably, it was an image whose message would have been most pertinent in the North and areas of employment in heavy industry poster Labour intended for particular in the North

It is worth considering the Jarrow poster within the wider contexts of visual languages of the election. With its use of photography to portray a real event, the poster demonstrates how

¹⁰⁴ P. Willmott and M. Young, *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (London, 1960) pp. 15–27; F. Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society: Family Life and Industry* (London, 1961) pp. 10–32.

¹⁰⁵ M. Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War', *Gender & History* (April, 2007) 19: 1, pp. 163–164.

¹⁰⁶ LHASC: N.E.C Minutes, 22 March 1950.

advances in design technique had come to define a new aesthetic to the billboard in 1950. And yet, by using a visual language that cemented working-class male identity to issues of work (and ultimately unemployment) Labour had moved on little. For aside from the emergence of the father in Labour and Conservatives posters, both parties continued to appeal to voters based on traditional conceptions of class and gender. Indeed, if anything parties were becoming more reductive, not less so, given the imperative to simplify their messages.

3.3 Displaying posters in 1950

By 1950, legal and cultural factors had changed the way the public saw posters. The 1948 *Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations Act* had curtailed fly posting, and shifted responsibility from those who stuck up the bills to the organisation that benefited from it.¹⁰⁷ This is why the packed billboards of the Edwardian and inter-war period were replaced by the single massive image, which became the feature of all succeeding elections. This section explores first the use of posters of different sizes in the elections of 1950 and 1951. Size was an issue that divided constituency and national parties, and formed another point of difference in the ongoing battle between centre and the constituencies. It then examines the phenomenon of ‘blanking out’, in which Conservatives and allied billboards were over-pasted with white paper, in order to comply with election law. Such was the extent of the practice that blank billboards appeared to have as much impact, as the actual designs.

In 1950 Labour issued 173,300 posters, of these 10,000 were 16-sheet.¹⁰⁸ The party displayed far fewer of the larger 16-sheet type posters in 1951, numbering just 2,978.¹⁰⁹ The Conservatives by comparison displayed 10,500 16-sheet posters in 1950 and 6,835 in 1951.¹¹⁰ Although David Butler cited cost as a factor in the declining use of posters between one campaign and another, the lack of available sites was as important.¹¹¹ Prior to the 1950 campaign, both party organisations had time to plan and book sites for the coming election.

¹⁰⁷ LHASC: G.E.8 Box 1950, Agents’ Reminders, Brief notes as to matters requiring attention prior to and during a parliamentary Election, Revised January 1950.

¹⁰⁸ LHASC: G.E. Box 1950, B/F1950/1, General Office Campaign, Head Office Service, N.E.C, 22 March 1950.

¹⁰⁹ LHASC: G.E. Box 1950, Appendix IX Comparative Literature Quantities and Prices.

¹¹⁰ CPA: CCO 500/24/75, ‘General Election (1951) Report Publicity Department,’ 5 November 1951.; CPA: CCO 500/24/77, Review of Publicity Department, National Poster Campaign, Organisation, Department GE 1951.

¹¹¹ Nicholas and Butler, *The British General Election of 1951*, p. 140.

Attlee's decision to call a snap election in September 1951 provided no such opportunity. Moreover, the election coincided with the launch of a number of nationwide advertising campaigns by large companies blocking billboards.

Labour could do little about this, hence the limited number of their larger posters. The Conservatives on the other hand were able to rely on contacts in the business world to secure sites. Bovril, MacDonald's Biscuits, G.E.C and the Distillers Company all released sites for the party while CPV gave it access to even more sites.¹¹² Many of these liberated sites were in key marginals, so for instance while the Conservatives had 'sufficient' 16 sheet poster sites in Birmingham in 1951, Labour had none.¹¹³ It was a further instance when the Conservatives campaign had gone beyond the confines of party structure to secure help for their campaign. With help from the above-mentioned companies and the ongoing collaboration with Aims of Industry, the Conservatives in 1950 echoed (though not mirrored) associations with the Leagues in 1910.

The election of 1950 was not the first time the electorate had seen such large posters but it was the point at which 16-sheet posters formed the mainstay of each party's visual campaigns. These large displays changed the visual dynamic of the election. Where as the Edwardian viewer was required to pick out the political poster from a packed billboard the electorate were now faced with a single image, unaccompanied by others 'shouting' to be heard. Contemporary imagery suggests that even when posters stood side by side, over posting and the crazy-paving effect of previous elections was gone. [Figure 3.27] The strength of 16 sheet posters did not mean the end of smaller type posters. Fly-posting continued – a Labour agent disowned a young Robin Cook for doing so – though it was becoming increasingly less common.¹¹⁴ More commonly smaller posters were produced to display in the gardens and in windows of local activists.¹¹⁵ These were often smaller versions of larger images, their aim to reiterate what parties hoped voters had seen on larger billboards.

The conquest of the large poster, standing as it often did on a billboard away from other advertising sanitised campaigning. Not all were happy with the development. Local agents preferred the smaller type. One writer to *Labour Organiser* commented that large posters at

¹¹² CPA: CCO 500/24/77, Review of Publicity Department, National Poster Campaign, Organisation, Department G E 1951.

¹¹³ CCO: 500/24/75, General Election (1951) Report, Publicity Department, 5 November 1951.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p. 141.

¹¹⁵ CAP: CCO4/3/172, T.F. Watson to Central Office Agents, 1 July 1949.

ground level were unsuitable, as the whole impact of the poster was lost on the pedestrian. This rendered the large billboards suitable only for those travelling on vehicular transport, rather than on foot. As the next chapter makes clear, posters were adapted after the war, to speak increasingly to those in mechanised transport. The simplification of the poster highlighted above was a reflection of these changing trends. John M. Smith, the agent for West Dumbartonshire, complained about large posters, stating there were few places ‘outside of big cities which have suitable hoardings for this size of poster and still fewer Agents who can afford to spend seven pence [sic] a week for display.’ Smith’s solution was the production and use of many smaller posters that constituencies could panel together.¹¹⁶ Centrally produced posters in their largest form represented the party machines assertion of itself over local campaigns. Some local Labour activists clearly resented such intrusion, but constituencies did also produce 16 sheet posters to their own design, such as Michael Foot in Plymouth Devonport [Figure 3.28].

Large Conservative posters were adaptable so local associations could use them for their own means. A letter from the Conservative’s Chief Publicity Officer Chapman-Walker to regional agents suggested that they could, at the call of the election, have a local printer produce a slip for the bottom of posters. The slip could contain the candidates name and vote Conservative, with the candidate’s election expenses meeting the cost. Perhaps such adaptability at a local level averted similar complaints received by Labour. Chapman-Walker’s letter further suggested for practical reasons the largest posters, 48 sheet and above, were not suitable for this adaptation.¹¹⁷ The use of adaptable designs did allow local concerns some degree of autonomy, but the fact that parties were using Central Office material demonstrated that centralisation was becoming increasingly more apparent, and moreover that communication more homogenised.

One peculiar aspect of the display in 1950 was the Conservatives blanking out of sites. Election law dictated that after parliament was dissolved, candidates were liable for the expense of all the party posters in their area. This is to what Chapman-Walker referred when he wrote to agents about adapting posters for their own means. Not all constituencies could afford this and in order to circumvent the law and prevent candidates shouldering heavy costs, Conservative central office blanked out the effected billboards with reversed posters, so only

¹¹⁶ *Labour Organiser* (November 1950) 29:344, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ CPA: CCO4/3/172, Chapman-Walker to Agents/Local Organisations, 9 November 1949.

a white mass of paper was visible. Central office seemed not to consider this a problem. The evaluation of the poster campaign stated, 'Each successive phase, from the blanking-out of sites to their reposting for election purposes, was completed according to the time-table previously prepared.'¹¹⁸ The absurdity of the situation, however, was not lost on Low who satirised the issue for a cartoon in the *Evening Standard* [Figure 3.29].

3.4 Conclusion

The General Election of 1950 represented the stark possibilities and restrictions of organisation. Working within the structure of the party, Labour's in-house design team were able to apply developments of contemporary design directly to their posters. The party's use of photography in particular, meant Labour posters could genuinely claim to have coherency of graphic superior to that of the Conservatives. The party were, however, through the machinations of Herbert Morrison, guilty of producing their posters in bubble. Labour's billboards sought to sell the benefits of socialism, but the wider party was attempting during the campaign to educate the working class in socialism. The Labour membership at large remained unconvinced that the middle-classes would ever vote anything other than Conservative.¹¹⁹ Posters and party were not at one. While Labour innovated in design, the Conservatives did so in strategy. The party's continued use of an advertising agency and contacts with the business community resulted in a campaign that crossed between billboard, newspaper, leaflet, and the Aims of Industry campaign. In method at least, the Conservatives in 1950 and 1951 heralded a type of election organisation that would in the latter half of the century become increasingly centralised, and dominated by a single voice.

Considering the billboard campaign of 1950 (and to some extent 1951) in isolation. It is hard to move beyond the conclusion that both Labour and Conservative party were attempting to make the same points, to the same people, in exactly the same way. Only the Liberals demurred from this approach, as they attempted to maintain a grip on their name and party in a politics dominated by two much larger rivals.

¹¹⁸ CPA: CCO 600/14/1, Mr. Ridgewell to C.P.O, 10 March 1950.

¹¹⁹ Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, "England Arise", *The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940s Britain*, p.184

4.0 The General Election of 1970



Figure 4.1 *YESTERDAY'S MEN (They Failed Before!)* Labour Party, 1970, PHM.

On the 18th May 1970, Harold Wilson asked the Queen to dissolve Parliament, with the general election set to take place on 18th June. There had been a ‘unanimous conviction’ that Wilson would win a third successive term, but a large swing of 4.7% to the Conservatives saw Labour lose ten per cent of its 1966 vote. The Conservatives won 330 seats, Labour 288 and the Liberals just six. Harold Jackson of *The Guardian* called the Conservative victory ‘the greatest majority political upset in Britain since 1945.’¹ Pointing to the future, turnout at 72 per cent was the lowest in 35 years. The 1970 election represented the final moment of the two party ‘hegemony’ that had been in place since 1945; what followed was what Crewe and Särlvik called ‘the decade of dealignment’.²

The posters of 1970 spoke to a society much transformed since 1950. The manner in which the political classes had interpreted this change, shaped the way posters were produced. In particular, the work of J.K. Galbraith had resonated with MPs. In his 1958 book, *The Affluent Society* Galbraith stated that it was no longer adequate to talk in classical economic terms of organic growth. Western states, the Harvard economist argued, had met demand for those goods necessary for living, wages were rising, and the new capitalist ‘machinery’ – such as advertising – was creating artificial demand for luxury goods.³ Frequently in the years following its publication, MPs returned to the book as reference point to explain current conditions.⁴ That the Conservatives had won the 1959 election with a campaign that focussed on the promise of continued prosperity only strengthened the case. Conservative billboards of that year featured happy families surrounded by the benefits of material life, including cars and televisions [Figure 4.2]. Labour’s leaders interpreted the loss as a failure on their part to deal with the ‘new Britain’.⁵

Although the Conservatives based their 1959 campaign on ‘intuition and impressions’ post-election research on the affluent society confirmed what they had longed believed to be true.⁶ Work by the pollster Mark Abrams and the sociologist Ferdynand Zweig demonstrated to the

¹ D. Wood, ‘Heath may name Cabinet Minister today’, *The Times*, 20 June 1970.; H. Jackson, ‘Heath will name team tomorrow’, *The Guardian*, 20 June 1970.

² I. Crewe and B. Särlvik, *The Decade of Dealignment: The Conservative victory of 1979 and electoral trends*, (Cambridge: 1983) p. 30

³ J.K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (London: 1958).

⁴⁴ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 6 March 1959, vol 601 col 745-839.; HC Deb, 1 May 1959, vol 604 col 1685-704; HC Deb 17 July 1959, vol 609 col 733-818 ; R. Crossman, *The Crossman Diaries* (London: 1979) p. 354; See also

⁵ S. Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970: Labour and cultural change* (Manchester: 2003) p. 61.; For an account of the Conservative 1959 poster campaign see R. Rose, *Influencing Voters: A Study of Campaign Rationality* (London: 1965) pp. 37-44.

⁶ Rose, *Influencing Voters*, p. 41.

parties that workers benefiting from rising wages and those employed in the expanding white-collar and service sector were deserting Labour.⁷ The number of skilled manual, semi-skilled manual and unskilled manual workers was almost 21 per cent lower in 1971 than it had been in 1951.⁸ Politicians believed the new affluent voter to be disinterested in policy and ideology, and more likely to be swayed by impressions.⁹

Just as Herbert Kitschelt argued that party culture and context affected strategies, a similar view was expounded by Richard Rose, who suggested that in the face of ‘objective’ information from pollsters and academic observers, politicians were still swayed by their own interpretations of society, which he defined as ‘egoistic’.¹⁰ Therefore, while many, if not all, politicians accepted that affluence was changing Britain, their disposition meant they were unable to adapt and react in a ‘pragmatic’ manner.¹¹ Bias shaped Labour politicians’ understanding of how affluence caused support for the party to decline. W.R. Williams argued that wives of newly promoted men were prone to ‘snobbishness’ and pushed their husbands into voting Conservative.¹² In 1961, Labour’s General Secretary Morgan Phillips offered a more considered response, though no less egotistical, arguing voters were becoming more educated, cynical, and self-serving.¹³ It was not a view unique to Labour. A year later the leading Conservative R.A Butler also highlighted the rise of popular cynicism and education, calling on society ‘to temper the acquisitive with a similar sense of service and responsibility’.¹⁴

For many, the young epitomised the emerging politics of affluence. The 1969 Representation of the People Act extended the franchise to 18 year olds, adding an estimated 2.8 million to the franchise in 1970. They joined a further 2.8 million people who had reached the voting age since 1966.¹⁵ This youthful cohort contained the highest levels of non-partisan electors

⁷ M. Abrams and R. Rose, *Must Labour Lose?* (London: 1960).; F. Zweig, *The Worker in the Affluent Society* (London: 1961).

⁸ Taken, A. H. Halsey, *Change in British Society* (Oxford: 1985)

⁹ Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970*, pp. 72-73

¹⁰ Rose, *Influencing Voters*, p. 152; H. Kitschelt, *The Transformation of European Social Democracy* (Cambridge: 1994), pp. 254-255

¹¹ Fielding, *Labour and cultural change*, p. 22.

¹² Comments from W. R. Williams, LHASC: Home Policy Sub-Committee Research Department Document 270, ‘The Non-Manual Worker’, May 1962.

¹³ M. Phillips, *Labour in the Sixties* (London: 1960) p. 17.

¹⁴ R.A. Butler, ‘Trustees of Posterity’ in Conservative Political Centre, *Accent on Youth* (February 1961) p. 40.

¹⁵ R. Rose, ‘How the electorate has changed since 1966’, *The Times*, 26 May 1970.

and so increased the pool of those who were open to vote for any of the main parties.¹⁶ While some saw the young as more radical and interested in various ‘post-material’ issues than their parents, survey evidence suggested that the motivations of child and parent were often one in the same.¹⁷ This was one reason why the Conservatives made no special effort to appeal to the young. Labour however took a more ‘egotistical’ view and produced a number of posters meant to appeal just to the new youthful voter.

Both parties believed the key to winning elections was attracting this affluent, intelligent, but ideologically unsettled cohort. Consequently, sections within the Conservative and Labour parties saw an appeal to individual self-interest as key to victory. Crucially, however, they framed their appeals in different ways. Throughout the 1960s Conservative posters often focused directly on the material interests of the ‘floating voter’. This informed the 1959 *LIFE'S BETTER with the CONSERVATIVES* [Figure 4.2] – the family prospering under the Conservative government – and the 1970 *The £ in your pocket* [Figure 4.3] which, as demonstrated below, highlighted declining real incomes under Labour.

Labour too adopted a catchall strategy, though it placed less emphasis on material wealth. This reflected its political position, as the party could not point to an improved standard of living. Heath’s victory may have been a surprise, but the Labour governments from 1964 to 1970 had failed to live up to expectations.¹⁸ Wilson’s White Heat of technology speech to the Scarborough conference in 1963 had set the tone for a new type of politics. However, the devaluation of Sterling in 1967 had created a rise in the cost of living, despite Wilson famously declaring that it would do otherwise. Just prior the election there was an improvement in both the polls and the trade balance, yet Wilson’s ‘pound in your pocket’ statement remained a phrase upon which the Conservatives would draw repeatedly. As Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky highlighted, deflationary measures may have secured the position of the currency, but it had come at a political price.¹⁹

Labour adopted slogans of the widest possible relevance, which might appeal to virtually all voters, and not just committed socialists or trade unionists. The 1964 *Let's Go With Labour* [Figure 4.4] campaign was aimed at the ‘affluent’, who voted on the basis of ‘vague

¹⁶ I. Crewe, A. Fox, N. Day, Table 2.33 Non-partisanship by age (%), *The British Electorate 1963-1992* (Cambridge: 1995) p. 112.

¹⁷ LHASC: PUB/6/6/69, NEC Minutes, M. Abrams ‘The Young Voter’, 1969.

¹⁸ Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970: Labour and cultural change*, p. 217

¹⁹ D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970* (London: 1971) p.20 and 45-46.

impressions'.²⁰ In the subsequent six years Labour deviated little from this thinking, and its 1970 posters had equally all-encompassing phrases such as *Labour's Got Life and Soul* [Figure 4.5] and *Aren't Labours Ideals Yours as Well?* [Figure 4.6]. Both poster campaigns were almost entirely devoid of any reference to class or even people. Just as in 1950 the image of the worker had all but gone, by 1970 the only members of the public who appeared in imagers were children.

Experts employed by the parties, and the techniques they adopted to better communicate with affluent voters, exerted a heavily influence on the posters of 1970. Section one shows how far commercial language dominated both parties' campaigns. This led parties to portray their respective leaders as analogous to successful company managers. In their use of external commercial expertise Labour emulated the Conservatives more than ever before. This, however, was offset by 'president' Wilson's failure to coordinate the campaign with a Transport House he held in contempt. Consequently, conflicting messages, at one moment being 'positive' about Labour's achievements in office and at another highlighting the Conservative 'threat' undermined the campaign. *YESTERDAY'S MEN* [Figure 4.1] the image that defined and its aftermath exemplified this point.

If the centrality of advertising expertise to both poster campaigns was unprecedented, 1970 was part of an evolutionary process. Advertising professionals David Kingsley, Denis Lyons, and Peter Davis were in 1970 known as Labour's 'three wise men'. The trio had helped mastermind the 1964 and 1966 campaign. As previous chapters have shown, Conservative Central Office had long relied on external advertising expertise. The employment of Geoffrey Tucker to be Director of Publicity demonstrated, however, an increasing fluidity between the political and advertising world. Tucker came directly from an advertising agency to work at Central Office, it was move that demonstrated the Conservatives had begun to match Angelo Panebianco's model of proffessionalization, one in which party bureaucracy is increasingly replaced by 'experts'.²¹ Although advertising had proved a central part of campaigns in the past, during 1970 there was as much discussion and rancour about the advertisers as about the advertising. How parties were being represented, had become as important as what was represented. Posters had themselves become as political as the message they carried.

²⁰ S. Fielding, 'Rethinking Labour's 1964 Campaign', *Contemporary British History* (2007) 21:3, pp. 309-324.

²¹ A. Panebianco, *Political Parties: organization and power*, translated by M. Silver (Cambridge: 1988) p. 231.

YESTERDAY'S MEN reflected this change. Complaints in the press about the image, and refusals to carry the accompanying press advert harked back to 1906 and posters of Chinese slaves.²² It was a poster that highlighted Heath's supposed 'otherness' represented by his bachelorhood, lack of social charm and personal warmth. His cabinet appear as shadowy figures in the dark. It contrasted sharply with other billboards in the Labour campaign that highlighted Wilson's family life and ease with young voters. Section two, demonstrates how Wilson dominated the billboards in 1970 as he had in the previous two elections. It was the visual manifestation of his belief that the image of the party was best delivered through his own 'presidential' persona.²³ This was not necessarily a modern development as some posters were reminiscent of those featuring Stanley Baldwin in 1929. Crossman certainly thought the two-warranted comparison, writing in his diary of the 'Trust My Harold' and 'Doctor's Mandate' campaign.²⁴

The 1970 election was an important staging post in the changing nature of politics. To appeal to 'affluent', 'floating' voters the parties focused more than ever on how they could better manage the economy and improve their material existence. Parties – increasingly personalised by their leaders – were less likely to promote themselves or attack each other for ideological reasons. The posters produced during the campaign give us an ideal means of assessing the transforming character of electoral activity.

4.1 Producing posters in 1970

By 1970, all three parties were using the expertise of those who worked in advertising agencies to help them produce literature and co-ordinate their campaigns. The Conservatives and Liberals had contracts with individual agencies to produce material. Labour – who maintained an at times antagonistic relationship with the industry as whole – used volunteers, who became to all extents embedded within the party organisation. Wilson – if he listened to anyone – paid greater heed to his advertising advisors than Transport House staff. Where once Conservative Central Office had employed journalists to work in its publicity department, it now used advertising professionals. Moreover, the very techniques of advertising were becoming part of the campaign. The press openly commented upon and

²² J. Thompson, “‘Pictorial lies’?: posters and politics in Britain, 1880-1914”, *Past and Present* (November, 2007) 197, p 177-178

²³ B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: 1992) pp. 554-557.

²⁴ Crossman, *The Crossman Diaries*, entry 7 June 1970, p. 724.

ridiculed the production of communication. Posters now spoke to an electorate who knew the exact methods of their production. The electoral landscape in which posters now existed had therefore, radically altered.

The first part of this section demonstrates how each party used professional advertising expertise and explains how this differed from previous elections. The second part explores the differences in how the Conservative and Labour parties' used new polling techniques and how this influenced their posters. The third section suggests how far advertisers and their methods were becoming as much a part of the campaign as the party's message.

4.1.1 The advance of advertising

The Liberal Party's overall slogan in 1970 was 'Show 'Em You Care, Vote Liberal'. That Bridge Advertising had helped develop it demonstrated the extent to which parties now relied on professional help to develop their messages. What the Conservatives had done in 1929 with 'Safety First', all now emulated. Demonstrating how far these professionals had supplanted the politicians, Bridge's managing director spoke to *The Times* to explain the purpose of the Liberal slogan. He also claimed that the party's posters were meant to contrast with the alleged negativity of the two main parties, and appeal to those 'who say they would vote Liberal if they thought it had chance.'²⁵

In 1968, Geoffrey Tucker (the Conservatives' new Director of Publicity) ended the Conservative's relationship with Colman, Prentis and Varley (CPV) and appointed Davidson, Pearce, Berry, and Tuck (DBPT) in their place.²⁶ A well-established firm, DBPT had ambitious new directors who had already won the accounts of many well-known brands including Monte Cristo sherry, Austin Reed and Texas Instruments. While not one of London's largest agencies, one anonymous commentator stated they were the most 'underrated'. Considered 'creative', DBPT had a reputation for unusual thinking.²⁷ Tucker had joined Central Office from the advertising firm Young and Rubicam, having previously worked on the Conservative account for CPV. This experience had played a role in his appointment although not everyone at Central Office staff was enthusiastic. Some were reticent about bringing in an outsider who was not used to the more sedate ways of the party bureaucracy. Critics railed against his abrasive character and were annoyed by his habit of

²⁵ P. Tisdall, 'Liberal accent on the positive', *The Times*, 20 May 1970.

²⁶ M. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite* (Hampshire: 1997) p. 10.

²⁷ "The Tories' new advertising agency and how it works" *Campaign*, 14 February 1969.

returning to an idea until he got his way. Tucker also failed to show the party leaders the accustomed deference and his relationship with Heath was often antagonistic.²⁸

Heath and Tucker nonetheless had a close working relationship and it was this, along with input from DBPT, which essentially determined the nature of Conservative posters in 1970. For thanks to yet another reorganisation of Central Office, most senior officials were kept away from this matter. Tucker's commercial background was evident in the establishment of a 'service section' in the Publicity Department, where 'Publicity Executives', were responsible for 'accounts' including television, press and general public relations, design, advertising liaison (which included posters), production and publication, and letter writing. As Tucker aimed to make the production of material as consistent as possible, each Publicity Executive reported directly to him, and he in turn to the Deputy and Chairman of the party. Ideas were generated at the top, passed down the chain for production and then aloft again for approval. A senior figure from the Publicity, Research, and Organisation departments was required to authorise poster designs, as were the Deputy and Chairman. Tucker stated of the reorganisation

The service section, as in commercial organisations, is not the actual producer of the end product. It does not make television films. It does not publish leaflets. It does not create advertisements. It commissions films and it puts out pamphlets and leaflets to be published. Its expertise lies in the area of knowing what different types of talent are available and choosing the best types of talent.²⁹

Tucker was in effect outsourcing the production of Conservative communication. Given his background he moved with ease between the worlds of politics and advertising, personifying the extent to which two now meshed, although on terms dictated by the latter. Thus Tucker did not stick to his own system if it did not give him sufficient authority. Stanley Rowland the 'Publicity Executive' in charge of 'Advertising Liason' was meant to be responsible for

²⁸ Conservation with Douglas Hurd, 3 July 2012.

²⁹ CPA: CCO 500/21/10 Tucker, 'Memo to Heads of Departments', 27 January 1969.

liaising with the agency to produce poster designs. Records show, however, that when it came to posters Tucker dealt with DPBT directly.³⁰

In contrast to the Conservatives, Labour had turned to commercial advertising more reluctantly. Although advertising expertise was at the centre of the 1970 campaign, resistance remained. As it had in the past, the party relied on expertise from sympathetic professionals – notably David Kingsley, Denis Lyons, and Peter Davis – who worked as volunteers. Superficially, Labour prepared for the election as it always had, establishing the usual ad-hoc Campaign Committee, which took responsibility for the production of posters from the Publicity Committee, in July 1969.³¹ In theory, Labour's advertising advisors proposed their ideas, which included ideas for posters, for the consideration of the Campaign Committee. In reality, however, it was Wilson and his 'three wise men' that made all the key decisions, the Committee's real function being to endorse them. There were some similarities with the centralisation occurring at Conservative Central Office. But where as there was structure to that development, with Labour it was more improvised as the advertising men gravitated towards Wilson.

The production of the *YESTERDAY'S MEN* campaign illustrated how things worked in practice. Before commissioning artist Alan Aldridge to make the models, which were to be photographed for the poster, Kingsley discussed the move with Bernard Donoughue. Donoughue was, like Kingsley, an academic; he was also a Governor of the London School of Economics (and would subsequently become an advisor to Wilson); and Aldridge's next-door neighbour and friend.³² The artist describes in his autobiography how Kingsley's 'hip advertising agency' (Kingsley Manton and Palmer) approached him, and that his first meeting was with Wilson at Downing Street and from that came a request that he produce the poster.³³ Significantly, Aldridge never met the Campaign Committee.

The ad hoc nature of proceedings was further reinforced by Wilson's aloofness. Although closer to Lyons, Davis and Kingsley than his own party staff, the Labour leader remained detached. As early as June 1969, *The Times* had identified a 'gap' between him and the 'three

³⁰ CPA: CCO 20/17/44, Sir Michael Fraser to The Chairman, 3 April 1970.

³¹ LHASC: N.E.C Minutes, 23 July 1969; Campaign Committee, 9 September 1969.

³² 'Alan Aldridge's influential next-door neighbour', *The Times*, 14 May 1970.

³³ A. Aldridge, *The Man With Kaleidoscope Eyes* (London: 2008) p. 80.

wise men'.³⁴ Marcia Williams suggests Wilson would have liked to let them 'into his thinking' more, though he did not. She claims that one consequence of this distance was they planned for a 'longer-term campaign that we would have wished'.³⁵ Williams was referring to Wilson's failure to tell his advisors' the date of the election until very late, which meant the second and positive half of the *YESTERDAY'S MEN* campaign – including a poster of *LABOUR'S WINNING TEAM* was never released.³⁶

This lack of coordination meant the personal attack contained in the 'Yesterday's Men' poster defined the campaign. There was in any case some significant uncertainty about the nature of that attack. Writing to the Publicity Committee in May 1969 Lyons had demanded, 'LET'S HAVE AN ADULT ELECTION'. The campaign, he suggested, should be 'Based on facts, on policies and on realistic plans', and should reject 'political rumour-mongering, sensationalism and mud-slinging'.³⁷ When, however, Labour commissioned Aldridge to produce the poster he was ordered to depict 'the Conservative Party Shadow Cabinet led by Ted Heath as tired, out of date old men'. These instructions he followed, although arguably Aldridge ignored the proviso that 'anything too cartoony or grotesque', be avoided.³⁸ Lack of clarity in purpose and execution was also evident in the justification the 'three wise men' gave to the Publicity Committee for the attack, claiming 'This is an attacking yet positive approach to the problem of publicising the Labour Government's very real achievements'.³⁹ Yet, even had Labour released the second and more positive poster, *YESTERDAY'S MEN* was a strikingly negative advert aimed at leading Conservatives. What Lyons was advocating was a type of attack not properly seen since inter-war elections.

Just as Labour's advisors paradoxically argued that positive politics could be pursued through attacks on the opposition, so too did certain Cabinet ministers. Repeating one of his favourite arguments of the time, Tony Benn informed the first meeting of the Campaign Committee that the electorate was better educated than ever before. This, he argued, was especially true of the young and they would therefore be immune to the old-fashioned electioneering

³⁴ R. Butt, 'The election myth', *The Times*, 26 June 1969; M. Williams, *Inside Number 10* (London: 1972) p. 294.

³⁵ Williams, *Inside Number 10*, p. 294

³⁶ *Labour's Winning Team* was a poster the party intended to follow *Yesterday's Men*. It featured models of Labour's cabinet. Any image of this second poster remains sadly lost; D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970* (London: 1971) p.133.

³⁷ LHASC: N.E.C Minutes, PUB. 7/5/6, Denis Lyons, Votes at 18 and a "youth supports Labour campaign".

³⁸ Aldridge, *Kaleidoscope Eyes*, p. 80.

³⁹ LHASC: Campaign Committee minutes, 17 March 1970, Lyons et al, 'Election Themes The Two Stage Attack'.

techniques which involved ‘extravagant attacks and personal abuse.’ However, Benn then went on to state that the objective of Labour’s campaign should be ‘To cast the opposition deliberately in a historical role that corresponds with the public’s fading memory of them as a ‘government from the past’ and to link the idea of voting Conservative with the idea of going back.⁴⁰ Benn therefore argued for a positive message that was nonetheless critical of the opposition. Unsurprisingly therefore, when he first saw the *YESTERDAY MEN* models Benn was enthusiastic.⁴¹ Barbara Castle was more reserved, stating although many in Labour’s senior cabinet thought the *Yesterday’s Men* campaign ‘clever and legitimate’ it was wrongly timed for a June election.⁴²

Castle and Benn’s contrasting reactions were indicative of Labour’s problems in 1970. During the 1960s the party yoked optimism, modernity and progress together. First Hugh Gaitskell had attempted to cast Labour in a contemporary mould, a process followed by Wilson with élan after 1963, with ‘Let’s Go with Labour’.⁴³ In 1970, however, Wilson was no longer a youthful figure and Labour had been in power since 1964 with a tricky record to defend. Labour was therefore hardly ‘new’ in 1970 and so the only way it could seem current was by associating the Conservatives with the past. This meant at the very least obscuring its positive message, difficult enough to defend with such a poor economic record. In addition, confusion at the heart of the campaign meant the party failed to release the positive part of its campaign.

4.1.2 ‘Scientific’ campaigning

Despite the greater sophistication of psephological research during the 1950s neither party utilised polling data in the design of propaganda to a significant degree.⁴⁴ When, however, after 1959 first Gaitskell and then Wilson sought to improve Labour’s image, they used the latest research techniques into public opinion to help the party shape the communication.⁴⁵ Throughout the 1960s, the information gained from polling about what issues voters considered most important, informed how the parties designed their posters. Despite this, in 1970 Labour chose to not apply what little polling information it commissioned to the

⁴⁰ LHASC: NEC Minutes, 11 August 1969, A.W. Benn, ‘First Thoughts on Campaign Strategy’.

⁴¹ T. Benn, *Office Without Power Diaries 1968-72* (London: 1988), p. 278.

⁴² B. Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1964-76* (1990) p. 403.

⁴³ S. Fielding, ‘Rethinking Labour’s 1964 Campaign’, *Contemporary British History* (2007) 21:3, p. 309-324; Pimlott, *Wilson*, p. 303.

⁴⁴ L. Beers, ‘Whose Opinion? Changing Attitudes Towards Opinion Polling in British politics, 1937–1964’, *Twentieth Century History* (2009) 17:2, p. 198.

⁴⁵ A. Abrams and R. Rose, *Must Labour Lose?* (London: 1960).

production of posters. Instead, taking a step backwards the party relied on its own ‘egoistic’ ideas.

Having achieved office in 1964, Labour’s interest in polling declined.⁴⁶ Indeed, the party seemed to ignore its own research. Before his retirement, in 1969 Mark Abrams produced a survey of the voting habits of young people, which suggested they did not differ much from older members of the electorate.⁴⁷ As the next section demonstrates, despite this Labour produced material specifically intended to attract the youthful gaze. Influential sections of the party saw young voters as very different from the rest.⁴⁸ Labour had long mistrusted survey evidence: in 1962 Abrams listed ten different reasons for ‘reluctance or in indifference’ to the use of polls.⁴⁹ He thought polls denied politicians the right to interpret the public mood for themselves and react accordingly. Nye Bevan had been an especially ardent critic and claimed polling would ‘take the poetry out of politics’.⁵⁰

The majority of Conservatives were much more willing to use polling data than Labour. Sceptics did exist: Lord Hailsham, echoing Bevan, argued polls were simply not what ‘politics is about’.⁵¹ Hailsham was in the minority, however, and in the years before 1970 senior Conservative workers emphasised its advantages. Anthony Barber, the party Chair, informed subordinates that the choice of newspapers in which the Party would advertise was based on ‘scientific investigation’ of the ‘target audience’ and the contents of those adverts had been ‘researched using the most modern techniques available.’ Barber concluded, however, rather defensively that, ‘The actual contents of the advertisements are, of course, entirely our responsibility, and not that of the advertising agency.’⁵² The Conservatives had begun exhaustive research on public opinion following their defeats of 1964 and 1966, annually spending £30,000.⁵³ Butler argued that ‘just as Mark Abrams’ private polls of the early 1960s played a major part in Labour’s escape from its cloth cap image, so in the later

⁴⁶ Butler, *The British General Election 1970*, p. 190.

⁴⁷ LHASC: PUB/6/6/69, NEC Minutes June 1969, briefing note M. Abrams ‘The Young Voter’.

⁴⁸ For the Young Socialist view see, LHASC: N.E.C Minutes 26 March 1969, ‘Vote and 18 and Youth Supporters Labour’ Campaign’; For Benn comments see LHASC: Campaign Committee Minutes 11 August 1969, ‘First Thoughts on Campaign Strategy’.

⁴⁹ M. Abrams, ‘Public Opinion Polls and Political Parties’, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring, 1963) 27: 1, pp. 9-18; Lawrence Black suggests the same see L. Black, *Redefining British Politics : Culture, Consumerism and Participation 1954-1970* (Hampshire: 2010), p. 193.

⁵⁰ Abrams, ‘Public Opinion Polls and Political Parties’, p. 14.; R. M. Worcester, ‘Pollsters, the Press, and Political Polling in Britain’, *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1980) 44, p. 550.

⁵¹ Quoted in D. Kavanagh, *Election Campaigning: The New Marketing of Politics* (Oxford: 1995) p. 131.

⁵² CPA: CCO 500/21/, Barber to Area Chairman, 14 November 1969.

⁵³ Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, p. 190.

60s the whole message of Conservative speeches was concerned with Labour's failure to satisfy the needs of its own sort of people.⁵⁴ There were parallels in the two parties' interest in polling. It was only in defeat that they really wanted to know what the people thought.

How precisely the Conservatives applied the information gained to the production of posters is unclear. Certainly polling gave the party information about which policies the electorate was most concerned, and Conservative posters concentrated on these issues. The next section demonstrates how their posters emphasised the failure of 'Labour's broken promises' and spoke to a group that had voted Labour but now felt dispossessed.

4.1.3 'Madison Avenue slickness'

The advancing role of advertising professionals over the course of the century had largely been out of the public eye. In the past when popular press reporting had focussed on posters, they rarely mentioned the agency or producer. As advertising executives moved closer to centres of power so these figures and their techniques became almost as newsworthy as what they were communicating. What was more, parties now found themselves attacked for how or who produced their advertising. In 1959, Richard Crossman had accused the Conservatives of selling Macmillan 'as though he were a detergent.'⁵⁵ During the 1970 campaign Dennis Healey claimed of the Conservative's that 'Thousands of well-paid professionals man their nation-wide machine. Their television programmes have a Madison Avenue slickness. No wonder they cannot understand why they are not getting over.'⁵⁶ Given the central role advertisers played in Labour's own campaign, Healey's claims were, however, somewhat disingenuous.

Throughout the 1960s, an increasing number of political commentators parodied and criticised developments in political communications. In 1963 Vicky drew Wilson in front of the thumbs up slogan of *Let's Go With Labour* next to a Conservative billboard with the two fingers victory sign shown [Figure 4.7] to suggest the Conservatives were leaning on the ad men. Wilson then was deemed to have been the last of the golden age of politicians free from the taint of advertising. What Vicky's cartoon did not mention was that Wilson too was reliant on ad men, the same as those working in 1970. As volunteers, however, David Kingsley and Peter Davies sat in the background, far less visible than the Conservatives and

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 197.

⁵⁵ D. Butler and R. Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London: 1960) p. 20.

⁵⁶ LHASC: General Election Book 2, Denis Healey speech at Lena Gardens School, 11 June 1970.

C.P.V. Seven years later Labour's use of advertising was more widely known. When the *Evening News* cartoonist Bernard Cookson satirised Wilson's reliance on advertising personnel, he was suggesting that those people who had once been behind the design of campaigns were now at the front of them. The advertisers are shown crying with laughter at Wilson's insistence they make him look 'credible' [Figure 4.8], thereby mocking his belief in the power of advertising. More damning still was Kevin Billington's *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer* which had to be released after the 1970 campaign, which depicted Peter Cook as a shadowy polling and advertising guru whose 'scientific' polling methods propel him up the greasy pole and into Number 10.⁵⁷

Previous chapters have explored earlier occasions when politicians and commentators questioned the ethics of party communication. By 1970, however, debates over the techniques of mass persuasion had entered the public discourse. For advertising now did not simply facilitate parties' campaigning, behind the scenes, but had become a public expression of it, and this had to have an impact on the way voters consumed posters. For if the public had ever trusted the content of posters, cynical media discussions of the ways in which posters were produced could only further erode their perceived truth claims.

The newly public role of advertising radically altered the way it spoke for the representative. In the decade before, and during the election of 1970 a new voice of concern was evident. Writing in 1970 the academic Richard Hodder-Williams complained 'There is something distasteful in the thought of British politics degenerating into a competition between two groups of electoral manipulators'.⁵⁸ Writing of television but with a position highly relevant to posters Milton Shulman argued that the 1970 General Election was 'a huckster's Petticoat Land in which the public had a choice between political detergents, between 'Omo' Wilson and 'Daz' Heath.'⁵⁹

⁵⁷ K. Billington, *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer* (David Paradine Productions) 1970.

⁵⁸ R. Hodder-Williams, *Public Opinion Polls and British Politics* (:1970) p. 96

⁵⁹ M. Shulman, *The Least Worst Television in the World*, (London: 1973) p. 157

4. 2 The posters of 1970

Labour posters sought to draw clear distinctions between Wilson and Heath. *YESTERDAY'S MEN* [Figure 4.1] overtly pointed towards the alleged inadequacies of Heath and his cabinet. Yet other Labour billboards more subtly undermined Heath by contrasting his bachelorhood with Wilson's family life. If Labour adopted an innovative visual language, its impact was however, less positive than its creators hoped. Perhaps due to Heath's own shortcomings, the Conservative campaign was less personal. In 1966 the party had feature the new leader in three billboard designs but reflecting his diminished status, in 1970, there was just one.⁶⁰ The party instead focussed on Labour's failure to improve the people's prosperity: if posters that reproduced Wilson's infamous 'pound in your pocket' line clearly attacked the Prime Minister they did so for policy reasons.

4.2.1 Labour's campaign

YESTERDAY'S MEN [Figure 4.1] was at once the most aesthetically significant and politically controversial poster of the campaign. Labour's advertising executives had originally wanted to photograph images from Madame Tussauds but its owners denied the party permission.⁶¹ Instead, Labour commissioned the in-vogue designer, Alan Aldridge, to produce the necessary figures. Using Aldridge was part of Labour's initiative to project itself as the party of the moment; he was well known for designing covers for Penguin, working for the Beatles' record label Apple, and in 1968 even designed an album cover for The Who.⁶² Aldridge fitted a concept of modernity that attracted Wilson, who saw merit in projecting Labour as being at the forefront of the new. His 1963 'White Heat of Technology' speech had famously set a tone, not just in policy terms but also in aesthetics, outlining an 'iconography of modern taste' as Mort puts it. Others in the party also sought to make Labour fit for how they saw the new Britain, a conception which moved beyond the economic. Notable revisionists like Anthony Crosland and Roy Jenkins promoted 'gaiety, tolerance and

⁶⁰ For the 1966 posters of Heath see CPA: POSTER 1966-13, *Action Not Words, with Heath into Europe*, Conservative and Unionist Central Office. ; CPA: POSTER 1966-01, *fair deal for farming*, Conservative and Unionist Central Office. For the only 1970 poster of Heath see Figure 4.23.

⁶¹ D. Wood, 'Labour Campaign to knock Tories', *The Times*, 12 May 1970.

⁶² Aldridge, *Kaleidoscope Eyes*, pp. 31, 65, 68.

beauty'.⁶³ Approaching Aldridge was not just meant to help Labour create a 'modern' poster but an attempt to be seen to be modern.⁶⁴

Aldridge was not just a 'modern' designer: he was a notorious figure. That Wilson was not unnerved by his previous work showed that at least some in the party were ready to embrace a more visceral visual language. Aldridge had after all produced a front cover for Roald Dahl's *Kiss Kiss* which showed a screaming figure being minced up [figure 4.9], and a poster for Andy Warhol's film *Chelsea Girls* which featured a nude model whose body contained various windows through which were visible a variety of sexual acts rendered in clay.⁶⁵

Aldridge used his model making skills to caricature and parody Heath and his Shadow Cabinet. The figure of Quintin Hogg mocked his reputation as an old-fashioned orator, showing him in a traditional stance, finger raised and apparently in full flow. The depiction of Heath, hands held behind his back, staring straight at the camera, makes him a distant and sinister figure: his piercing eyes evocative of the Big Brother posters in *Ninety Eighty Four*, which were 'so contrived' Orwell wrote 'that the eyes follow you about when you move'.⁶⁶ Aldridge lit the figures from below and photographed them from above, continuing the darkly malevolent Orwellian motif.

YESTERDAY'S MEN was part of Labour's wider offensive against the Conservatives. It was the visual incarnation of 'Selsdon Man'. A name Wilson had given to Heath after the January 1970 Selsdon Park conference, at which the Shadow Cabinet discussed policy for the forthcoming election. Wilson hoped that the slur would cast his rival as a reactionary figure, with extreme views on trade unionism and law and order. While the term caught on in the media, Wilson had however misjudged the extent to which Heath's policies evoked a popular response.⁶⁷

There was further misjudgement in the design of *YESTERDAY'S MEN*. Just as the policies of 'Selsdon Man' proved popular, so the inclusion of Enoch Powell in the poster may have bolstered Heath rather than damage him. Heath had dismissed Powell from his Shadow

⁶³ F. Mort, 'Competing Domains: Democratic Subjects and Consuming Subjects in Britain and the United States since 1945.' in F. Trentmann ed., *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Berg: 2006) p. 241.; Fielding, *Labour and cultural change*, p. 64

⁶⁴ 'The Beautiful People Came to the Aid of the Party', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 14 June 1970.

⁶⁵ Tate: AR00325, *Chelsea Girls*, 1967.

⁶⁶ G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: 1949), p. 2.

⁶⁷ Butler, *The British General Election of 1970*, p. 131.

Cabinet in April 1968 following his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, where he foretold a future when white people would become strangers in their own country and predicted race war. Powell’s anti-immigration rhetoric split both the country and the Conservative party, and Heath attempted to marginalize the controversial figure. For those who masterminded Labour’s 1970 campaign Powell was a demonic figure. During the 1970 campaign, Benn compared Powell’s 1968 speech with the flag raised over Belsen.⁶⁸ Powell’s inclusion in *YESTERDAY’S MEN* was intended to underline Heath’s association with someone who remained a Conservative MP. Indeed, *The Times* referred to Powell as Heath’s ‘spectre’, arguing that the only reason why his inclusion in the poster had not been effective was because it ‘was lost in the rumpus that followed.’⁶⁹

Powell was certainly a problem for Heath – he was often spoken of as future leader.⁷⁰ However, many voters did not see Powell as demonic. His dismissal met with huge public outcry, and excrement being sent to Central Office in protest.⁷¹ A significant number shared his views on immigration, to such an extent some suggested he helped win the election for the Conservatives.⁷² In 1968, Benn said of Powell, [he] ‘was more of a threat to the Tory Party than he was to us’, but Benn ignored how many of Labour’s own working class voters agreed with him.⁷³ In this climate *YESTERDAY’S MEN* may have had the exact opposite effect than was intended. It remained a poster for the people who produced it. Those who worked on Labour’s campaign viewed the world through the lens of their own cosmopolitan outlook. It was removed from much of the posters audience, hence the apparent gaffe with the inclusion of Powell.

In a campaign that cost £60,000, *YESTERDAY’S MEN* was posted on 200 sites around the country, quickly became a central feature of the election.⁷⁴ Labour partisans used the damning phrase in their speeches. Richard Briginshaw, joint General Secretary of the Graphic and Allied Trades union, argued that the Conservative manifesto appeared ‘to be [a]

⁶⁸ Benn, *Office Without Power*, p. 287

⁶⁹ ‘The Spectre that haunts Heath’, *The Times*, 15 June 1970.

⁷⁰ ‘Tories fear Powell may plan a new party’, *The Guardian*, 11 June 1969.

⁷¹ R. Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: 2000), p.187

⁷² Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky claimed that Powell and immigration had little effect on voting attitudes *General Election*, p. 341; On the popularity of Powell’s anti immigration stance in 1970 see D. T. Studlar, ‘Policy Voting in Britain: The Colored Immigration Issue in the 1964, 1966, and 1970 General Elections’, *The American Political Science Review* (March 1978) 72:1, p. 54.

⁷³ Benn, *Office Without Power*, p. 123; Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, p. 160-162

⁷⁴ Wood, ‘Labour campaign to knock Tories’, *The Times*, 12 May 1970; Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, pp. 160-162.

rehash of the policies enunciated by “yesterday’s men”.⁷⁵ The Conservatives also appropriated the phrase and turned the attack back on Labour. During a Commons debate on trade relations, Jeffrey Archer asked the Prime Minister if he had heard the rumour ‘that the country wishes to return to yesterday’s men, yesterday’s prices, yesterday’s taxes and yesterday’s unemployment situation? Is the Prime Minister aware that yesterday’s men never devalued and never fiddled by boundary rigging?’⁷⁶ Archer’s attack on Wilson using the very words of a Labour slogan, demonstrated the contestable and ill-conceived nature of the campaign, but also how *YESTERDAY’S MEN* was contributing to the construction of political communication.

Some were not yet ready for such much muscular political language. When the poster was reproduced as a newspaper advert, the *Leicester Mercury* refused to carry the ‘knocking copy’.⁷⁷ Transport House commissioned a MORI poll about the campaign and discovered that of the 30% familiar with it, 69% thought it an unfair attack.⁷⁸ Some Labour members were also unhappy: Hugh Jenkins the left-wing MP for Putney claimed ‘Personalities should be left out of politics.’⁷⁹ Although Bernard Donoughue had been part of the process by which the poster came about, even he questioned, ‘whether you should publicize the opposition leaders – why give faces to faceless men.’⁸⁰ Such was the uproar about the image, when Labour withdrew it because of the impending election (see above) their actions were interpreted as a reaction to the criticism.⁸¹

If *YESTERDAY’S MEN* attacked Heath and his Shadow Cabinet, other posters promoted Wilson’s supposed qualities. Some billboards evoked the populist images of the Labour leader from 1964 when Wilson mingled amongst the people. *PEOPLE MATTER* [Figure 4.10], for example, depicted a man relaxed in the company of those he sought to lead, an image the party wanted to revisit in 1970. Just as Crossman compared the Prime Minister to Baldwin, Wilson’s biographer Ben Pimlott claimed Wilson in 1970 was like ‘a stage personality who could share old jokes with his fans’.⁸² Labour posters played their part by highlighting Wilson’s supposedly personable character and relaxed nature. *WHEN IT*

⁷⁵ ‘Unions leaders deride manifesto proposals’, *The Times*, 27 May 1970.

⁷⁶ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 14 May 1970, vol 801, col 1443-81.

⁷⁷ ‘From our correspondent’, *The Times*, 13 May 1970.

⁷⁸ Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, pp. 189-190.

⁷⁹ ‘MPs repudiate campaign’, *The Times*, 13 May 1970.

⁸⁰ ‘Alan Aldridge’s influential next door neighbour’, *The Times*, 14 May 1970.

⁸¹ *The Listener*, 28 May 1950

⁸² Pimlott, *Wilson*, p. 555.

COMES DOWN TO IT - AREN'T LABOURS IDEALS YOURS AS WELL [Figure 4.6] suggested a figure whose affability resonated even with the younger generation.

That slogan originated in another set of posters which also used the words 'Labour's Got life and soul' [Figure 4.5]. This group formed part of broader campaign meant to show Labour was compassionate; a statement aimed to suggest that the party cared where as the Conservatives did not.⁸³ Part of Labour's appeal to youth (dealt with below) the poster also featured a prominent part of Wilson's 'stage personality', his pipe. Initially Wilson's pipe had been a television prop; something he used to emphasis points, the lighting of which creating a natural pause during broadcasts, giving him time to think.⁸⁴ It became, however, something much more symbolic, given that pipe smoking had long been associated with 'solid, dependable, common-sense masculinity'.⁸⁵ For while the Labour leader espoused modernity the pipe linked him with the traditions of British life, suggesting the former was an understanding of the latter. For these reasons, Wilson's pipe is present in both *PEOPLE MATTER* [4.10] and *WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT* [4.6]. Indeed, such was the Prime Minister's fame as a pipe smoker, in one 1966 poster the pipe became his synonym [Figure 4.11]. Given, however, he preferred in private the more plutocratic cigar, images of a pipe wielding Wilson reinforced a vision of Labour's leader constructed entirely for the benefit of the people.⁸⁶

If the pipe in Figure 4.6 linked Wilson with trustworthiness, the young people – whose class is not easily defined but they were respectable and best described as suburban – and Wilson's seemingly easy manner, shows that Labour wanted the poster to attract a youthful gaze. It also perhaps reassured older voters that Wilson was good with the youth. The election after all took place in a period following the growth in youth culture during the 1960s, when many saw the young as rebellious.⁸⁷ With use of the possessive pronoun 'yours', mention of Labour's ideals, and the image of Wilson, the poster attempts to draw all three together into a shared understanding. It was one example in a series that projected a positive message intended for the eyes of the young.

⁸³ 'Life and Soul', *Labour Organiser* (October 1969) 49:563, pp. 183-184.

⁸⁴ Williams, *Inside Number 10*, p. 100; M. Cockerell, *Live from Number 10* (London: 1988), p. 88.

⁸⁵ M. Hilton, *Smoking in British popular culture 1800-2000* (Manchester: 2000) p. 120.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 266.

⁸⁷ See for example S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, (Routledge, 2011)

As already stated, Labour chose to ignore surveys showing the young voted in much the same way as everybody else. Instead, the party produced material specifically to appeal to young votes. Advisor Dennis Lyons emphasised the need to ‘Hammer home the fact that the youth can swing the election’.⁸⁸ In September 1969, the party released a number of posters featuring the words *Labour’s got life and soul* [4.5]. These made the point that Labour had ideals, unlike the Conservatives, with Benn claiming they reflected how the party was motivated by ‘compassion’ and sought to fulfil human as well as economic needs.⁸⁹ Not all were happy with the slogan, and *Labour Organiser* recognised it would ‘not suit everybody’.⁹⁰ *Tribune* even suggested the introduction of such a vague term like ‘soul’ ‘into the political vocabulary of socialism is worthless’.⁹¹ The slogan provided satirists with ammunition to attack the vacuity of political communications. The *Guardian’s* Gibbard depicted Wilson’s cabinet as a jazz band daubed in vaudevillian blackface, in reference to the popular light entertainment programme, *The Black and White Minstrel Show* [figure 4.12]. More pointedly, Jon of the *Daily Mail* argued if Labour had ‘life and soul’ then it needed a ‘transplant’ [figure 4.13]. Despite such criticism Labour persisted with the slogan.⁹²

Labour’s appeal to youth and projection of an avuncular Wilson, had the advantage of also highlighting Heath’s aloofness and lack of family life. During the campaign, Wilson constantly appeared with his wife Mary.⁹³ In *Their health, their education, their opportunity – when it comes down to it aren’t you voting for your children’s future as well* [Figure 4.14] Mary Wilson became the first and perhaps only Prime Ministerial spouse to appear in a poster. The Prime Minister certainly believed his wife was crucial to the campaign, representing his faith in personalising politics.⁹⁴ Although political wives had participated in constituency campaigning since the early twentieth century – a message from the candidate’s wife was common feature of election addresses – Mary Wilson elevated the political spouse to the national stage.

Wilson the populist, at ease with all, good humoured, pipe in hand and grounded by his happy home life, was not the only image of the Prime Minister on show. Taking advantage of

⁸⁸ LHASC: NEC Minutes May 1969, Denis Lyons, ‘Votes at 18 and a youth supports Labour campaign’ PUB. 7/5/6.

⁸⁹ Benn quoted in, F. Boyd, ‘Campaign opens with souls versus pockets’, *The Guardian*, 1 September 1969.

⁹⁰ ‘Life and Soul’ *Labour Organiser* (October, 1969) 49:563, pp. 183-184.

⁹¹ ‘Personally speaking’, *Tribune*, 5 September 1969.

⁹² K. Harper, ‘Wilson vetoes adverts which ridicule Heath’, *The Guardian*, 12 September 1969.

⁹³ Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, p. 152.

⁹⁴ A. Langer, *The Personalisation of politics in the UK* (Manchester: 2011) pp. 99 and 102.

being head of government, Wilson was also presented as a serious statesman. The man in figure 4.16 was both ‘strong’ in word and in appearance. After successfully struggling to make the British economy ‘strong’ again in the poster Wilson looked forward to the next stage of making the country ‘great to live in’ [Figure 4.15].

Here Wilson sat fore square, staring directly at the viewer. Labour research had shown ‘straight to camera’ election broadcasts were the most popular with the public and the method was applied to the poster.⁹⁵ As with broadcasts, the technique created a direct link between Wilson and the public, one which contrasted sharply with Heath in *YESTERDAY’S MEN*. There Heath had appeared aloof, here Wilson’s gaze emphasised intimacy. Writing of politicians’ body language, Max Atkinson states that when orators keep the audience under their gaze, as opposed to looking at a script, they better hold their attention; the whites of the eyes being crucial to this effect.⁹⁶ The whites of Wilson’s eyes in *Now Britain’s Strong* [4.15] are particularly vibrant and emphasised further by his dark suit and tie. Just as Baldwin had done in 1929, Wilson stares intently at the viewer, demanding their trust.

While the visual message of *Now Britain’s Strong* was straightforward, the same was not true of its slogan. Labour’s voluntary publicity group conceived of the wording – ‘*Now Britain’s strong let’s make it great to live in’ When it comes down to it aren’t Labour’s ideals yours as well?*’ – and justified it to the NEC with a series of upbeat statements. These included: ‘Labour’s done it’; ‘There’s more to do’; ‘We want to make Britain a wonderful place to live’; ‘It’s joyous’ and ‘Benefits shared by all’.⁹⁷ The advertising executives stated that the party should not be afraid of long slogans. After all, they were ‘asking people to think about things’. They further suggested combining the two phrases with an addendum, ‘We suggest one important addition to the phrase – an invitation to the electors to make up their own minds, judge us on performance, examine the facts, thus: Labour’s Team Says “LOOK AROUND YOU: WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT AREN’T LABOUR’S IDEALS YOURS AS WELL.”’⁹⁸ In the end, ‘Labour’s Team Says’ was dropped after the second half of the ‘Yesterday’s Men’ campaign was pulled. But even without reference to ‘Labour’s team’ or

⁹⁵ Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, p. 195.

⁹⁶ M. Atkinson, *Our Masters Voices* (London: 1984), p. 88.

⁹⁷ LHASC: DK/DL/PD, Election Slogan, The Voluntary Publicity Group’s recommendations for key phrases in the election period, 17 May 1970.

⁹⁸ LHASC: DK/DL/PD, ‘The Voluntary Publicity Group’s recommendations for key phrases in the election period’, Campaign Committee Minutes, 17 May 1970.

indeed the clunky incitement to ‘look around’ the slogan remains far too long. It went against the grain of what was considered the most effective billboard communication.

The effusive message that Britain was now ‘strong’ was founded on the Prime Minister’s claim that the economy had improved.⁹⁹ It was not, however, a widely shared opinion. Writing four days before the election and comparing Labour’s 1970 campaign with that of the Conservatives in 1959, Crossman wrote that although the mood of the public was moving from Conservative to Labour – there had been an upswing in the polls – the government had offered nothing but ‘three years of hell and high taxes’.¹⁰⁰ After the campaign he recorded that Labour lost because ‘the voice of doom’ and ‘reminders of rising prices’ and ‘broken promises’ had taken their toll.¹⁰¹ Few had believed that the economy was ‘strong’ by 1970, something Conservative propaganda assiduously exploited. ‘Doom, prices and broken promises’ was central to Heaths rhetoric. On June 13th, the leader of the Opposition claimed Labour had ‘pursued a policy of diversion with a bogus story of sham sunshine’¹⁰². Reflecting the centralised nature of the Conservative campaign, its posters faithfully echoed that claim.

4.2.2 Conservative ‘pockets’

Most Conservative posters reiterated the same message: voters’ personal prosperity had declined under Labour. The party concentrated on personal finance because it believed that it strongly influenced how voters chose which party to support. In 1969 DBPT confirmed what many senior politicians believed when they told Central Office that, ‘A voter’s actual prosperity is the best measure he (sic) has of judging whether a government policies work, or do not work’.¹⁰³ The agency also proposed – in an exact mirroring of the technique of *YESTERDAY’S MEN* – that advertising should be comparative ‘Conservative promise against Labour failure.’¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the Labour approach, this message was expressed with great simplicity. Brendon Sewill of the Conservative Research Department argued people were

⁹⁹ H. Wilson, *The Labour Government* (London: 1971), p. 786.

¹⁰⁰ R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister Vol III*, entry 14 June, 1970, (London: 1977) p. 945

¹⁰¹ Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 19 June, 1970, p. 949.

¹⁰² Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, p. 154.

¹⁰³ CPA: CCO 20/25/14, Davidson, Pearce, Berry and Tuck Ltd, Proposals to the CCO For Advertising in 1969, 1969.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

turning away from politics because ‘policies are too complicated to understand. The only solid thing the man in the street can judge on is the Government’s record.’¹⁰⁵

Personal economics, simplicity, and comparison therefore encapsulated the design of many Conservative posters and were evident in the party’s pre-election campaign, launched during the summer of 1969, the first example of which featured a family and the effect of Labour taxation.¹⁰⁶ No example survives, but *The Times* described it as showing a family surrounding a car with the accompanying words ‘This family pays too much tax’ above the slogan ‘Britain would be better off with the Conservatives’.¹⁰⁷ It evoked – possibly deliberately – the party’s famous 1959 *LIFE’S BETTER* poster, the difference being that had showed the positive impact of a Conservative government on family life: its 1970 equivalent illustrated the harm allegedly done by a Labour in office.

Household finance took centre stage again in the ‘£ in your pocket is now worth’ poster [Figure 4.3]. This example, however, appropriated Wilson’s infamous television statement on 19th June 1967 that the devaluation of sterling would not harm domestic standards of living.¹⁰⁸ Wilson had been heavily criticised for the move, with Barbara Castle thinking it made the Prime Minister looked too ‘complacent’. Pimlott described it as a ‘public relations disaster’.¹⁰⁹ Conservatives used the discredited phrase as a stick with which to beat the Prime Minister. Heath and his colleagues constantly attacked Wilson with his own words as did their supporters in the press.¹¹⁰ As late as May 1970, Sir Michael Fraser, the Deputy Party Chairman argued ‘the £ in your pocket’ should be one of ‘a few key phrases for constant use in speeches’.¹¹¹ Indeed, it was a staple line of Heath’s campaign oratory, to force Wilson’s words into the political vernacular.¹¹² If pointing to one of Labour’s big economic disasters, ‘The £ in you pocket’ also raised questions about Wilson personally, firstly because he was so associated with trying to maintain the value of sterling but also because the speech suggested he was unwilling to tell the unvarnished truth.

¹⁰⁵ CPA: Policy Initiatives and Methods Meeting minutes, 27 June 1969.

¹⁰⁶ CPA: CCO 500/21/10, Geoffrey Tucker to Local Constituencies, 1 August 1969.

¹⁰⁷ D.Wood, ‘You Tory ‘alter ego’’, *The Times*, 26 September 1969.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Pimlott, *Wilson*, p. 483.

¹⁰⁹ Crossman, *The Crossman Diaries*, p. 408; Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1964-70*, p. 352; Pimlott, *Wilson*, p. 483

¹¹⁰ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 22 November 1967, vol 754 col 1314-448; *Hansard*, HC Deb, 7 March 1968 vol 760, col 646-8; Wilson, *The Labour Government*, p. 465.

¹¹¹ CPA: CCO 20/17/44, Michael Fraser, ‘The General Election Campaign’ 11 May 1970.

¹¹² P. Ziegler, *Edward Heath*, (London: 2011) p. 220.

In December 1969, Central Office produced a 48-sheet poster featuring the slogan, due to run from February to March 1970.¹¹³ This was however just one part of a wider Conservative campaign that hammered home the message that Wilson and Labour had undermined the people's purchasing power. The design [4.3] employed the trope of overlaid cards, each with a lower value. When all were seen together, they revealed the falling value of sterling. The red figures on the top cards give them a prominence, introducing a note of danger, as well as visually linking them to other Conservative posters. Red, of course, was also associated both with Labour and with debt.

Other conservative posters in this suite [Figures 4.16-4.19] highlighted Labour's 'broken promises' by crossing through 'the promise' and writing the 'true' figure in red. The corrections suggested a later modification, as if the poster has been graffitied following its display. It was a design that aimed to suggest a new authorial voice, one beyond the limits of any party. Just as Sonja Neef highlights graffiti's power to speak back and restructure, the posters faux graffiti suggested that the message came not from the Conservatives but from the people.¹¹⁴

By showing the graffiti-style 'corrections' in numerical terms the posters adhered to a well-established tradition. Numbers had been central to Victorian and Edwardian visual communication. The use of numbers grew during the twentieth century, if only because they are a useful device to close down any debate.¹¹⁵ In using figures to illustrate Labour's impact on personal finances, these posters presented a partisan argument as irrefutable fact, one that condemned Labour's competence.¹¹⁶ But the posters went a step further, not only did they 'prove' Labour's failure, their use of graffiti further validated the claim.

Not all posters that asked the public to, 'Remember Labour's Broken Promises' used figures. The slogan was a common watchword one intended to suggest that Labour could not be trusted, that the politics of White Heat had promised much but delivered little. The Conservatives most widely used poster during the campaign also featured the slogan, this

¹¹³ CPA: CCO 20/25/14, 'DPBT Contact Report', 16 December 1969; CPA: CCO 500/21/10, Tucker to Agents, 'Publicity Plans, Poster Advertising', 29 December 1969.

¹¹⁴ S. Neef, 'Killing Kool, The Graffiti Museum', *Art History* (2007) 30:3, p. 426.

¹¹⁵ J. Thompson, 'Printed Statistics and the Public Sphere Numeracy, Electoral Politics and the Visual Culture of Numbers, 1880-1914', pp. 121-143 and T. Crook and G. O'Hara, 'The 'Torrent of Numbers', p. 16 in T. Crook and G. O'Hara (eds.) *Statistics and the Public Sphere Numbers and the People in Modern Britain, c. 1800-2000* (Oxon: 2011); A. Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, trans. R. Mackay (Cambridge, 2008) pp. 1 and 3.

¹¹⁶ T. M. Porter, 'Statistics and the Career of Public Reason Engagement and Detachment in a Quantified World' in Crook and O'Hara (eds.) *Statistics and the Public Sphere*, p. 44.

time above an image of waste paper basket [Figure 4.20] overflowing with Labour's false guarantees.

Labour reacted with a poster of its own, another example of posters being not just static objects but active participants in an ongoing conversation. Using Aldridge's clay figures for a second time, Labour released a leaflet showing Heath and his colleagues stuffed into the same wastepaper basket depicted in the Conservative poster [Figure 4.21]. David Lyons told *The Times* that 'It seems to us the logical end of the campaign.' He went on, 'The Yesterday's Men campaign was going into a positive phase, but then the Tories started their wastepaper basket campaign. This seemed the logical comment to us it just came out in conversation.'¹¹⁷ The leaflet used both the iconography of the bin and the verbal suggestion of broken promises to counteract Conservative propositions. Each point of the leaflet began 'They promised' and ended by returning to the theme of 'Yesterday's Men' arguing it was they who 'broke their promises last time. These same men would in other words break their promises, given the chance.'¹¹⁸ Notably, the sinister figures of *YESTERDAY'S MEN* now appeared emasculated and absurd.

This spat pointed toward another important aspect of both campaigns. The parties attacked each other less on ideological grounds, and more on each others' competence to manage the country and trustworthiness to deliver on their promises. When David Wood of *The Times* reported of *YESTERDAY'S MEN*, he wrote 'The Transport House Committee argued that the situation is now analogous to an ousted board of directors attempting a new takeover of a business and that is its therefore fair to remind shareholders of their record in management.'¹¹⁹ Whether it was Labour's 'board of directors' and 'shareholders' or Geoffrey Tucker's wish to make Central Office a more commercial organisation, or the extensive use of figures in the billboard campaign the language of politics and the language of businesses appeared increasingly to mesh.

In the debate about who was best to able to manage the economy, Heath's image was – in contrast to that of Wilson – largely absent. Certainly, the Leader of the Opposition's public

¹¹⁷ 'Tomorrow's Yesterday', *The Times*, 5 June 1970.

¹¹⁸ PHM: "Rubbish!" leaflet, Labour Party, 1970.

¹¹⁹ D. Woon, 'Labour campaign to knock Tories', *The Times*, 12 May 1970.

image was less popular and less populist than the Prime Minister's.¹²⁰ Many within the party debated on Heath's ability to relate to the voters: one local Conservative activist echoed the views of many journalists and fellow members by describing him as 'weak' and in possession of the personality of a 'blanc-mange'.¹²¹ At the start of his career as leader, Heath had featured on billboards.¹²² By 1970, it was generally agreed that Heath was less popular than his party.¹²³ He undoubtedly believed he could win the election, but the declining use of his image on posters would have been no hardship. He was never keen on the use of his image in this way and loathed the whole idea of a slick professional presentation.¹²⁴ The Conservatives consequently produced only one poster that featured their leader [Figure 4.22]. As with Wilson, Heath appeared Baldwinesque, gazing with serious determination above the slogan *For a better tomorrow vote Conservative*. There was, however, less intensity. In part because Heath sat with shoulders turned slightly to one side, unlike Wilson's face-on approach. Given Wilson's personable public persona and Heath's aloof nature, the two posters represented something of an ironic reversal.

4.3 Displaying posters in 1970

The election had notably fewer posters than previous elections. Central Office produced 138,090 in 1966 but only 31,583 in 1970; Labour produce 27, 750 posters in 1970.¹²⁵ One reason was the parties' concentration on other forms of advertising, notably newspapers. However, it was also due to a focus on marginal seats, often occupied by affluent 'floating voters'. Labour and the Conservatives in theory ran 'national' campaigns, but such was the concentration on 'must win' constituencies, safe seats were left untouched.

As Barber told the 1969 Conservative party conference it was 'essential to concentrate expenditure wherever possible on the critical seats – those 60 or 70 marginal seats held by Labour or Liberals which we must win back if we are to form a government.'¹²⁶ The last chapter showed how the Conservatives had used posters to target specific seats in 1950, now the practice was far more intense. The Conservatives supplied the first fifty 16-sheet posters

¹²⁰ For Heath's personal belief he delivered victory see J. Ramsden, 'The Prime Minister and the Making of Policy' in S. Ball and A. Seldon (eds.) *The Heath Government 1970-1974 A reappraisal* (London: 1996) p. 30.

¹²¹ Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election*, p. 323.

¹²² CPA: POSTER 1966-01, *fair deal for farming ACTION NOT WORDS*; CPA: POSTER 1966-13, *with Heath into Europe*.

¹²³ D. Wood, 'Poll gives a boost to Tories', *The Times*, 5 December 1968.

¹²⁴ Ziegler, *Heath*, p. 220.

¹²⁵ D. Butler, *British General Elections Since 1945* (Oxford, 1989) p. 312-313.

¹²⁶ As reported in the *The Times*, 9 October 1969.

free to all constituencies, but the critical seats were allocated as many at they could use.¹²⁷ During the period of the campaign Conservative Central Office provided grants to critical seats so they could maintain the billboards under their own election expenses.¹²⁸

The focus on specific seats left other constituencies neglected. Beyond a small handful of areas posters were virtually absent once the campaign proper had begun. Frank Monkman, of the advertising firm Poster Bureau, raised the problem with Geoffrey Tucker. Although the Conservatives intended the campaign to be ‘national’, the sheer spread of the crucial seats meant it was in reality series of isolated local campaigns. At the centre of Monkman’s argument was the changing way in which the electorate saw posters. Just as it had in 1950 the Conservatives concentrated on specific constituencies but far more people were now seeing posters in different ways. The ‘mobility of electors is being completely ignored’, wrote Monkman ‘posters are a medium which requires the audience to go to it – it does not go to them.’ He suggested buying up sites in neighbouring constituencies. ‘Brighton should be posted to normal commercial advertising campaign strength to improve the campaign in Kemptown’, and Bristol inundated to improve S.W. Bristol. The result of this would be the electors of Bristol and Kemptown would have increased exposure to posters, because of ‘their normal and natural mobility’ and the ‘increased coverage will give whole campaign better impact and coverage within that area’.¹²⁹

The problem Monkman highlighted – that people had to travel to see posters, as opposed to television which came to them – underlined the changing nature of the electorate. Many now commuted to work, often out of the constituency where they lived. Between 1950 and 1959 16.3% of Britain’s population travelled to work in their own vehicle, between 1970-1979 this had risen to 44.5%.¹³⁰ There was a danger that the parties were now producing posters for people who could not see them.

Outside marginal constituencies, the national parties attempted to ‘fill the gap’ of large posters by encouraging activists elsewhere to put up smaller examples. The Conservatives made this point vociferously through a series of election memorandums. Here the party cajoled activists and supporters to make a good display of posters and window bills,

¹²⁷ CPA: CCO 20/17/44, General Election Leaflets and Posters, 20 May 1970.

¹²⁸ LHASC: General Election Book 2, Ron Hayward to local agents, ‘National Party Poster Sites and the General Election 21st May 1970’ and ‘General Election 1970 Report by the General Secretary’

¹²⁹ CPA: CCO 500/21/10, Geoffrey Tucker to The Chairman, 30 October 1969.

¹³⁰ C. G. Pooley, J. Turnbull and M. Adams, *A Mobile Century? Changes in everyday mobility in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: 2005) p.116.

especially on and in houses that faced ‘main roads and bus routes’.¹³¹ The call to use private dwellings came after the strengthening of laws against fly posting. A change to the Country Planning act in 1962 had further tightened the regulations that stated persons or organisations that posters benefited were liable for prosecution. This diminished the ability of local parties in non-critical seats to show large posters or swathes of smaller ones. Transport House reminded agents they were responsible for any indiscretions and that in previous elections agents had been invoiced for fly-posted bills and even visited by the police.¹³²

As changes in statutory law diminished local power, so too did the prevalence of centrally produced posters. Constituencies did still produce their own. These were often of a much simpler design than even the simplest nationally designed poster. As well as lowering the voting age, the 1969 legislation had for the first time added party affiliation to the poll card. Despite this local posters appeared to function as they often had, linking person to party. Judith Hart’s simple mass printed block letter design could hardly have used fewer words [Figure 4.23]; its intention to get the candidates name in the public space. Even with the production of local posters central party organisations attempted to control their design. During the 1964 *Let’s Go With Labour* campaign, local agents could add the photo – rather oddly in the form of disembodied floating head – and name of their candidate [Figure 4.4] to a pre-produced and pre-approved poster. The model continued in to 1970. One of the two Transport House posters that bore Harold Wilson’s image contained space for the addition of the candidate’s name to be applied in the constituency.¹³³ While a poster surviving in the Conservative party archive intended for people’s windows, includes space at the bottom for the addition of the candidates name in printed or even handwritten form [Figure 4.24].

4.4 Conclusion

Before *YESTERDAY’S MEN* ever went on a billboard Bernice Rhodes, a Labour Party worker, sat on the steps of Transport House to photographed holding the poster [Figure 4.25]. It is not yet clear if local or national press ever used the image. The fact that an official Labour photographer took the picture for syndication suggests the party believed that the poster itself might generate press attention. This minor event spoke of the changing role the medium

¹³¹ CPA: CCO 4/10/132, General Election Memorandum, No. 7, 30 May 1970.

¹³² LHASC: Agents Reminders, Part I, Pre-Election Period 1970.

¹³³ LHASC: Ron Hayward, ‘National Party Poster Sites and the General Election’, 21 May 1970.

would go through. As the next chapter shows, by the end of the century and into the next, the poster's launch would become as important as the object itself.

The poster that Bernice launched remains one of the great curiosities of pictorial electioneering. As a piece of design it was striking, as a piece of politics it was disastrous; from the moment Labour's advertisers claimed that the poster presented a positive message, to the inclusion of Enoch Powell, to the posters withdrawal because of Wilson's failure to inform his advisors on his planned election date. The contrast between a party who wanted to speak progress but whose own organisation was so rife with problems that it could not, was an instructive one.

Moreover, the posters infamous slogan would come to haunt Wilson. Indicating the para-political role posters were now playing 'Yesterday's Men' was the subject of *Guardian* cartoonist Gibbard's pen. Immediately after the election result had been announced, he depicted a jubilant Heath sticking up the poster, but amended to include Wilson and colleagues [Figure 4.26]. More significantly, the BBC used the phrase as the title for a documentary shown in June 1971. While the corporation had intended to show how ministers adjust to opposition, some in the party interpreted the programme as an attack on Wilson.¹³⁴

The use of *YESTERDAY'S MEN*'s the verbal and visual symbols demonstrated how discourse – in this case largely political – was being formed intertextually.¹³⁵ Demonstrating the situation whereby parties, or other organisations, begin the construction of political language like *YESTERDAY'S MEN* and how that language grows thereafter. With the mocking tone of the cartoonist, Labour supporters use of the slogan to attack opponents, and in turn those opponents use of the same words to fight back, explains how the poster entered the election vernacular, and more generally how these vernaculars are formed.

The poster also provided a shot in the arm for a muscular form of politics. Potentially this return to attack had wider impacts. Aldridge sculpted the *YESTERDAY'S MEN* puppets 14 years before Peter Fluck and Roger Law began the production of the *Spitting Image*, yet the similarities between the poster and the satirical television programme are striking. *Spitting*

¹³⁴ Benn, *Office Without Power*, p. 350; Pimlott, *Wilson*, p. 578.

¹³⁵ For a discussion of Kristeva's view see G. Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: 2000) pp. 305-36.

Image grew from the satire boom of the 1960s and arguably, if it was as completely against politics as Peter Fluck claimed then so too was *YESTERDAY'S MEN*.¹³⁶

The centrality of Wilson to campaign demonstrated his belief in the importance of his own personality to deliver elections. Posters remained a medium suitable for communicating directly between leader and people. Moreover, the appearance of Mary Wilson in a poster and during the campaign, foretold a higher visibility for the Prime Ministerial spouse in more recent British political culture such as Cherie Blair and Samantha Cameron.¹³⁷

There were fewer posters used in 1970 than previous election. Marginal seats saw most of the larger posters, a continuation from 1950. In this respect the 1970 poster campaign was a development of ongoing trends; smaller numbers of posters used in a small number of targeted seats. Learning from Conservative examples advertising expertise was now being more widely used by Labour, albeit in volunteer form and albeit by men prone to anachronistic behaviour. More significant, however, was the new visibility of the work these organisations and individuals did for the parties, which radically altered the posters function during elections. Posters no longer existed within a closed circle of party communication, but instead amongst a much larger more anomalous landscape.

¹³⁶ For Fluck's opinions of *Spitting Image* and a discussion of the programme see (forthcoming) S. Fielding, *A State of Play: British politics on screen, stage and page, from Anthony Trollope to The Thick of It* (London: 2014) pp. 287-288.

¹³⁷ For Cherie Blair's role see C. Seymour Ure, *Prime Ministers and the Media* (Oxford: 2003) pp. 46-47.

5.0 The General Election of 1997



Figure 5.1 **NEW LABOUR NEW DANGER**, 1997, Conservative Central Office, CPA, POSTER 1997-08.

The Labour party won the 1997 general election by a landslide. The new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, led a government supported by 418 MPs, the largest number the party had ever achieved. John Major's Conservatives were decimated, returning just 165 MPs, massively down from their 1992 total of 336. The Liberal Democrats under the leadership of Paddy Ashdown doubled their MPs from the 20 won in 1992 to 46.

Hoping his support would rally, and people would feel the benefit of an economic recovery, Major called the election as late as possible, and praying Labour might unravel, initiated the longest campaign in modern British history. After visiting the Queen on the 17th March to request the dissolution of Parliament, the election did not occur until 1st May. Instead of helping Major, Pippa Norris concluded that this was a disastrous move as it created a 'yawning news hole into which, like the White Rabbit, the Conservative party fell'.¹ Norris referred to the stories of sleaze that rocked the Conservatives in the first week of the campaign, but in truth, since the election victory in 1992, problems had beset the party. Sleaze and the United Kingdom's forced exit from the Exchange Rate Mechanism in September 1992 had undermined support. Moreover, Norman Lamont's decision to increase VAT in 1992 might have been born of necessity, but electorally it was a disaster.²

In 1995 Major had faced a challenge to his leadership from the Secretary of State for Wales John Redwood. The Prime Minister was widely portrayed in the media as weak and ineffectual. Most famously the attacks came from the satirical television programme *Spitting Image*, but also by Steve Bell the *Guardian* cartoonist who regularly depicted Major with his shirt tucked into his Y-fronts, 'the badge of an essentially crap superman, a metaphor for uselessness'.³ Despite Britain's improving economy – one reason Major had waited so long to call the election – it was not enough to save him from being seen as a failed and 'wimpish' leader.⁴ As Philip Cowley has stated, 'it is unlikely that *any* election campaign could have rescued the Conservatives.'⁵

¹ P. Norris, 'The Battle for the Campaign Agenda' in A. King (ed.) *New Labour Triumphs: Britain at the Polls* (New Jersey: 1998) p. 135.

² Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, pp. 2-3.

³ S. Bell, 'If only we had known back then', *The Guardian*, 1 Oct 2002,
<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/oct/01/past.conservatives> [accessed 25 Nov 2013]

⁴ M & C Strategist Steve Hilton had called Major a wimp in a 1994 interview. It was a claim that came to haunt him and the Conservatives in 1997. *Observer*, 9 February 1997.

⁵ P. Cowley, 'The Conservative Party: decline and fall' in A Geddes and J. Tonge *Labour's Landslide: The British General Election 1997* (Manchester: 1997) p. 48.

As this chapter shows, these disasters dictated the nature of the Conservative poster campaign. Attacking Labour, the party believed, was its most efficient strategy; although, what form this assault should take was less easily agreed. The party could not decide whether it should concentrate on claiming Labour was dominated by the unions and committed to high taxes; or to argue that Labour had no substantive ideas; or to attack Labour's leader for saying one thing but believing another.⁶ These themes had proved to be very successful in the 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1992 campaigns, but by the mid-1990s, perceptions of Labour had changed considerably, meaning they did not quite have the same purchase as before.

Tony Blair's assertion of a 'New' Labour had suggested a radical shift from previous party incarnations. In truth Labour had been 'modernising' since its 1983 disaster.⁷ Indeed, the party had used the 'New' slogan internally since 1989.⁸ Following 1983, leading figures had sensed that change was required if Labour was to again govern. The process had begun under Neil Kinnock, continued under John Smith, and accelerated with Blair when he became leader in 1994. Under Blair, the party abandoned the totemic Clause IV; adopted a firmer line on law and order; accepted most of the Conservative's trade union reforms; and reduced the unions' power in its own decision-making. All these changes were meant to attract suburban voters by removing those associations with the 'hard left' that had lingered since the early 1980s.⁹ Along with these matters of substance 'New' Labour also sought to recast its image through a new emphasis on communications.¹⁰ This had been tried before. In 1987 one party broadcast focussed exclusively on Kinnock's personal life in a uniquely 'presidential' manner, becoming known as 'Kinnock the movie'. While it made a positive impact, Labour still lost the election.¹¹

Amidst the apparent novelty of the 1997 campaign, posters remained one of the main means through which the parties tried to influence the election's outcome. Posters had never just been things on a wall, but the nature of political imagery was now so fluid that it crossed seamlessly between alternate platforms. Figure 5.1, for instance, the most notorious 'poster'

⁶ P. Norris, J. Curtice, D. Sanders, M. Scammell, H. Sometko, *On Message Communicating The Campaign* (London: 1999) p. 38.

⁷ D. Coates, 'The Character of New Labour' in D. Coates and P. Lawler *New Labour in Power* (Manchester: 2000) p. 6.

⁸ D. Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party* (Basingstoke, 2005) p. 137.

⁹ S. Fielding, *The Labour Party: Continuity and Change in the making of New Labour* (Basingstoke: 2003) pp. 98-101.

¹⁰ S. Fielding, 'Labour's path to power' in A. Geddes and J. Tonge (eds.) *Labour's Landslide: The British General Election 1997* (Manchester: 1997) p. 25.

¹¹ Wring, *Marketing the Labour Party*, p. 96.

of the campaign, was not really a poster at all, but a newspaper advert, continually reported as being a billboard. The Conservatives did produce and display the poster in Central Office but it never formed a core part of the Conservative campaign.¹² A process which had started in the late 1960s and 1970, was now complete. The message, the method of delivery, and the method of construction all melded into one. When Tony Blair appeared in a Party Election Broadcast signing a poster that featured his own face, and complaining that was what politics was like now, it was clear that the posters role in election had become much more than simply communicating to people in the street.¹³

The Conservatives had always spent significant sums on posters, and they did so again in 1997. ‘New’ Labour was more adept at fund raising than in the past, and much of its war chest was expended on securing billboard space. Unable to splash out on television advertising – apart from the highly regulated party election broadcast slots – the parties could spend what they wished to on posters. The chapter begins by detailing that spending and then shows how Labour produced its posters, arguing that this reflected the increasing centralisation of power in the hands of the leader associated with ‘New’ Labour more generally. This control was in sharp contrast to that evident in the Conservative party. While it brought back Tim Bell, and employed Maurice Saatchi and his new advertising agency M & C Saatchi, the Conservatives could find no single combination of words and image with which to attack ‘New’ Labour. In part this was due to ‘New’ Labour’s own elusive nature, but the Conservatives did not help themselves with their lack of coordination between the various groups working on poster design.

The making of the Liberal Democrat and Referendum Party poster campaigns are also assessed. The Lib Dems used their tiny budget for a campaign (based on one billboard site and poster trailers) focussed on separating themselves from the two larger parties. Referendum was not so constrained by a lack of money. In its attempt to win support for a referendum on Britain’s place in the European Union, the party spent a large sum on press advertising, and used posters to legitimise the claim that it was a national party.

The chapter then details the nature of the two main parties’ posters, which reflected their relative states. While the Conservatives struggled to create a coherent billboard message,

¹² For press reports of the advert being a poster see, A. Culf, ‘Demon eyes ad wins top award’ *The Guardian*, 10 Jan 1997; for reports of the being displayed in Central Office (it was reportedly displayed in the Chairman’s office) see R. Dore, ‘Mawhinney will fight dirty’ *Press Association*, 30 Dec 1996.

¹³ Labour Party Election Broadcast, 24 April 1997

Labour's was a notably cohesive message although both campaigns mixed negative and positive messages, albeit to different degrees. If Labour had any credible claims to novelty in 1997 it was not found in its use of negative campaigning. Negative posters had dominated until the post-war period, when they largely died out, only to return after 1970. Work on American politics at least has shown that while academics debated the effectiveness of such campaigning, practitioners continued to believe it could win campaigns.¹⁴ 'New' Labour's use of such tactics, despite its enormous poll lead over the Conservatives, betrayed an insecurity at the highest echelons of the party command, but also the traditional nature of what Blair promised would be a 'new politics' under his leadership.¹⁵

5.1 Producing posters in 1997

During the campaign, the Conservatives spent £13.1 million in total on advertising and £10.9 million of this on posters. 'New' Labour's 1997 poster campaign was the costliest the party had ever produced. Labour spent £7.3 million total on advertising and of that £5.9 million on posters.¹⁶ That the parties spent 83 per cent and 81 per cent of their respective advertising budgets on billboards highlighted that both thought poster communication important. This represented a shift from previous elections as the focus of spending in 1997 moved from press to poster advertising. The same scholar who wrote in 1990 that press advertising had 'eclipsed' posters was forced to concede of 1997 that the 'advertising battle has moved away from newspapers towards poster sites'.¹⁷ Billboard advertising, as this thesis has shown, has risen and fallen from campaign to campaign. Conservatives turned to the billboard due to the nature of their campaign financing, which came in piecemeal and built towards the ends, allowing much expenditure on billboards late into the campaign.¹⁸ To some extent the same was true for Labour, a major donation by Matthew Harding allowed for the purchase of billboard space. However, it was also true that Labour was using posters specifically to cement their 'new' image in the electorates' eye. As the planning for the poster campaigns

¹⁴ R.R. Lau, L. Sigelman, and I.B. Rovner, 'The Effects of Negative Political Campaigns: A Meta-Analytic Reassessment', *Journal of Politics* (2007) 69, pp. 1176–1209.

¹⁵ S. Fielding, 'The "new politics"', in P. Dunleavy, A. Gamble, I. Holliday and G. Peele (eds.), *Developments in British Politics 6* (Macmillan, 2000).

¹⁶ D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997* (London: 1997), p. 242.

¹⁷ M. Harrop, 'Political Marketing', *Parliamentary Affairs* (1990) 43:3, p. 285; M. Scammell and M. Harrop, 'The Press' in Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, p. 183.

¹⁸ D. Finkelstein, 'Why the Conservatives Lost', in I. Crewe, B. Gosschalk, J. Bartle (eds.) *Why Labour won the General Election of 1997* (London: 1998) p. 15.

demonstrates, Labour's method to produce designs and campaigns was structured and built within a grander plan. The Conservatives, meanwhile, was more haphazard.

5.1.1 ‘New’ Labour and focus groups

Labour’s posters formed just one part of a broader campaign to demonstrate that the party could be trusted with government. Their production relied much less on outside advertising expertise than had been the case in previous elections, and much more on party employees whose work was informed by focus group testing. Change was also evident in the location from where the party ran the election. In September 1995 its campaign directorate moved to a new ‘media centre’.¹⁹ Two floors of Millbank Tower, Westminster, accommodated staff working in a giant open plan ‘war room’, thereby changing the dynamic through which the party produced all its communications. Senior staff and advertising officials worked in this vast space, which meant they could quickly discuss and produce posters.

The three men ultimately responsible for Labour’s campaign, Tony Blair, the Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown and Hartlepool MP Peter Mandelson, all worked out of Millbank. In theory, they all had to sign off poster designs before production, though in practice this did not always occur. Having started out as Labour’s Communication Director in 1985, before entering the Commons, Mandelson’s experience of working on campaigns was extensive. He was Head of Election Planning and Labour’s chief ‘spin doctor’ a term that the media became obsessed with during the campaign.²⁰ Others similarly labelled (and with input into the party’s poster production) included Alistair Campbell, Blair’s Press Secretary and former political editor of the *Daily Mirror* and David Hill the party’s Chief Media Spokesman.²¹ Throughout its existence New Labour were criticised for their use of special advisors.²² While Campbell was a Blair appointment – he claimed to have devised the ‘New’ Labour slogan –, Hill, a former Director of Campaigns had spent twenty years as Roy Hattersley’s political advisor. Philip Gould was another figure with a long association with Labour. An advertising executive and polling expert, Mandelson had appointed Gould in 1985 to advise the party on creating a new image. He had helped form the Shadow Communications Agency, a group of

¹⁹ ‘Is Labour fit to Govern?’ *The Guardian*, 17 September 1995.

²⁰ ‘The spinner takes it all: Peter Mandelson, the midwife to New Labour, ...’, *The Observer*, 25 February 1996.

²¹ ‘Behind every successful politician there is a... spin doctor: Labour’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*; 18 September 1995.

²² Fielding, ‘Labour’s path to power’, p. 25.

advertising and marketing executives who advised Kinnock on strategy.²³ It was Gould who emphasised the need to change Labour's image, in nothing less than a 'political communications revolution'.²⁴

There was significant mix of expertise in this group from advertising, from parliament, and from journalism. Gould had formed his own advertising firm in 1981, and sold it a year later before opening a political consultancy in 1986. Mandelson, having worked on Labour campaigns since 1985, was well versed in all forms of political communication; the same could be said for David Hill. And despite having come from a background of journalism Alistair Campbell on the subject of advertising 'considered himself an expert'.²⁵ Added to this pool of was the agency the party employed to manage its campaign, Boase, Massimi, Pollitt (BMP DDB), which enjoyed a long established relationship with Labour. It was BMP's Chief Executive, Chris Powell, who in 1972 had replaced David Kingsley as an advisor on advertising to Wilson. Powell had gone on to play a central part in the Shadow Communications Agency. Despite these ties, not everyone was happy with appointment of BMP DDB, thinking it too small to handle the party's contract.²⁶ Indeed, at times the party did turn to a larger agency, with former Tory agency Saatchi & Saatchi producing a number of slogans.²⁷ While no longer run by the Saatchi brothers, Saatchi and Saatchi was synonymous with Thatcher's election victories, Labour's use of the firm further symbolised how the party had changed under Blair.

With Labour using the advice of another agency and the core of advertising expertise already extant in the party, it is perhaps unsurprising that BMP DDB was described by David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh as having 'subordinate status'.²⁸ There was, however, a further reason why the agency was sidelined: Labour had gone through a revolution in its use of focus group testing. Kinnock and Smith had shown an interest in the method, but it was under Blair that Labour's use of the technique increasingly dictated party strategy. Group testing also dictated poster design. It certainly shaped Gould's ideas on how Labour should structure its message, and project its image. Labour used focus group testing to shape the party message, using the qualitative data to hone the party message In the three years leading up to

²³ Wring, *Marketing the Labour Party*, p. 89.

²⁴ P. Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution* (London: 2011).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁶ Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*.

²⁷ 'Saatchi & Saatchi's New Labour of love', *The Observer*, 13 April 1997.

²⁸ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, p. 230.

the election Gould conducted one group-test a week: during the six and half weeks of the campaign proper, he held them six nights a week.²⁹ Travelling to various front rooms in a number of towns, Gould listened, argued, and challenged the electorates' opinions, using the groups to 'hear directly the voters' voices'.

Gould's findings went to Mandelson, Campbell and others and ultimately to BMP DDB, which used it to produce poster designs that Gould then took back to the groups for comment. Subject to their views, the posters were then sent to Blair or Brown for final approval. Focus groups saw every one of Labour's posters produced during the campaign.³⁰ In this manner, poster production became a closed circle. Focus group testing also recast the role of the politician and the advertising executive in the production of billboard communication. Prior claims from both of knowing how best to 'speak' to the people, were suddenly negated by the input of the people.

As with any campaign, however, not everything ran smoothly. Campbell's firm belief in his ability to produce effective advertising meant he became annoyed when decisions were made in his absence.³¹ There were also problems caused by the enmity between Mandelson and Brown. The former wrote in his memoirs of an instance in 1996 when the organisation had produced the designs for a poster claiming the Conservatives would put VAT on food. While Blair had approved the poster, Brown refused to formally respond, with Ed Miliband, Brown's aide, eventually reporting his boss thought poster too negative. However, as Mandelson never received a formal word from Brown on the subject he felt able to launch the poster as it stood.³² Personal antagonisms and individual arrogance could still play a part in even this most closed and controlled campaign.

5.1.2 Conservative organisation

Appointed in 1995, Conservative Party Chairman Brian Mawhinney seemed to have made a strong start to the role by immediately appointing M&C Saatchi to run the party's election campaign. Maurice and Charles Saatchi had formed M&C following a shareholders' revolt at Saatchi & Saatchi, the company they founded in 1970 and which had enjoyed a close relationship with the Conservatives since before the 1979 election. Indeed, before the

²⁹ Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 326-329.

³⁰ Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, p. 345.

³¹ Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, p. 345.

³² P. Mandelson, *The Third Man: Life at the Heart of New Labour* (London: 2010) p. 200.

Conservatives could appoint M & C they had to buy out Saatchi & Saatchi's contract with the party for £1 million.³³ The move demonstrated the party's faith in Maurice's ability to help them win elections. Mawhinney placed similar faith in other old hands too, bringing in Tim Bell, another figure associated with the party's success in the 1980s, to advise on the campaign.³⁴

While this team may have won elections before, the Conservatives and their opposition were now very different beasts. Conservative posters produced between 1979-92 were premised on a clear binary separation between Conservative and Labour over important policy issues. For example, the 1983 poster *FOOT PUMP*. [Figure 5.2] attacked Labour's economic policy (while also satirising its leader Michael Foot's oratorical style) which unlike the Conservatives' placed job creation before price stability. Fiscal 'irresponsibility' was one way of attacking Labour, that the party was 'weak' on defence another. The 1987 poster *LABOUR'S POLICY ON ARMS*. [Figure 5.3], which mocked its commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, being a case in point. Labour's stance on these and many other issues had, however, changed since these posters had been produced. The Conservatives were now faced with an opposition in much closer accord with the majority of public opinion and their own position. Indeed, one of the main rationales for 'New' Labour was to demonstrate that Labour had completely changed since the 1980s.³⁵

By 1997, many key voters believed that Labour had been transformed under Blair, neutralising established avenues of Conservative attack. The party's response to 'New' Labour's success was uncertain and contradictory, mainly because its leaders could not agree what 'New' Labour actually was. Maurice Saatchi believed that as the public had accepted a change in the party, so should the Conservatives and react accordingly. Yet the Chancellor Kenneth Clarke thought the party had not changed at all; while Major argued that while Blair might embody the 'New', the rest of the organisation remained 'old'.³⁶

Such uncertainty revealed itself in the Conservative party's posters. The slogan 'New Labour New Danger' first appeared in July 1996 and was illustrated with a set of disembodied eyes peering out from behind a curtain and a purse, suggesting that something dark and menacing

³³ *Campaign*, 3 November 1995.

³⁴ A. Seldon, *Major a political life* (London: 1997) pp. 615-616.

³⁵ S. Fielding, *The Labour Party continuity and change in the making of 'New' Labour* (Basingstoke: 2003) pp. 96-97; Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party*, pp. 124-126.

³⁶ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, pp. 34-35.

lay under the ‘New’ exterior. However, when in August 1996, Mawhinney, Bell and Charles Saatchi decided to reuse the eyes in a newspaper advert they moved from one interpretation of ‘New’ Labour to another. By giving Blair demon eyes ‘New Labour New Danger’ [Figure 5.1] went from a nuanced attack on the party to a visceral personal attack on Blair. Given Blair’s public popularity it remained a bold decision to turn on him, the Conservatives had attacked Labour’s strongest rather than weakest link. As Danny Finkelstein the party’s Head of Research stated, the slogan ‘New Labour New Danger’ was applied inconsistently.³⁷

The decision to move from an attack on the Labour party to a direct attack on Blair was made at the last minute by Mawhinney, Bell and Saatchi, without reference to Major, reportedly to latter’s annoyance.³⁸ It was one example of an often testy relationship between M & C and leading Conservatives. While Mawhinney agreed with Saatchi on this occasion, it was widely reported the two did not get on.³⁹ Like Labour, the Conservatives wanted to focus group test their posters but Saatchi was sceptical of their utility, claiming that the only real test was at the ballot box.⁴⁰ This reflected a wider belief amongst advertising professionals that committees did not produce effective creative copy.⁴¹ Despite Saatchi’s arguments, in March 1997 the party insisted that testing occur before any of its advertising was released.⁴²

M & C were often frustrated by the unwillingness of party leaders’ to take risks. Designs were vetoed or changed, thereby diluting their original message. Saatchi had intended the poster of a lion weeping a single red tear to be overtly anti-EU in tone, but Europhile Ken Clarke watered down the wording.⁴³ The agency had also wanted to mount a more vigorous attack on Blair, even producing a poster of a grinning Tony Blair with the message, ‘what lies behind the smile?’. Major however, did not want to personalised the campaign, and vetoed it.⁴⁴ Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Conservative campaign appeared to lurch from one highly criticised poster to another.

³⁷ Finkelstein, ‘Why the Conservatives Lost’, p. 14.

³⁸ N. Jones, *Campaign 1997*, (London: 1997) p.143; For Major’s annoyance see Seldon, *Major*, p. 665.

³⁹ ‘Tories set to split with M & C Saatchi, *Campaign*, 2nd May, 1997; Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, pp. 42-43.

⁴¹ See for example J.Hegarty, *Hegarty on Advertising* (London: 2011) p. 28.

⁴² ‘Tearful Tories to vet new ads’, *Campaign*, 6 March 1998.

⁴³ ‘Shattered Tories’, *The Observer*, 4 May 1997.

⁴⁴ ‘Election campaign, the ad campaign that got away’, *Campaign*, 9 May 1997.

5.1.3 Other parties

The Liberals rented a billboard opposite Vauxhall Bridge in London upon which to display their posters. The party used billboard trailers to tour in marginal constituencies, something the Conservatives had done in the 1980s. The trailers allowed a poster to be towed behind a vehicle around selected constituencies (see below). Without the funds to conduct a major national campaign, the party spent only £100,000 on advertising. The party did employ an agency, Knight Leach Delaney, one with a record of helping the party, but it went bankrupt in September 1996.⁴⁵

The party's Vauxhall Bridge site carried only two posters during the campaign. The first depicted Tony Blair and John Major as Punch and Judy. In an effort at integration, it was also a theme of the party's election broadcast and manifesto launch.⁴⁶ A Conservative poster from 1983 used the same motif, depicting Michael Foot battling with Tony Benn [Figure 5.4]. While that poster highlighted the internal struggles of Labour, the Liberal Democrats used Punch and Judy in 1997 to suggest that they were the party to rise above the childish bickering of their two larger rivals. They thereby sought to position their own Party as apart from the Labour and Conservatives. The second Liberal Democrat poster of 1997 did the same, this time depicting Blair and Major as Tweedledee and Tweedledum.⁴⁷ However, while both posters showed the Liberals to be different from their larger rivals the message of both was contradictory. While Major and Blair battled away in Punch and Judy battled, Tweedledee and Tweedledum were of course the same.

By highlighting its difference from the two larger parties, the Liberal Democrats had turned to a well-used technique. In Britain's three party system often one party would show the similarities of the other two to demonstrate their own difference. As Chapter Two demonstrates, this was particularly common in 1929. The emergence of New Labour and its shift to the middle ground squeezed the Liberal Democrat position. It therefore made sense for the party to articulate its difference. However, given the Liberal Democrats and Labour had been in discussion since 1995 on how to defeat the Conservatives, and had decided to

⁴⁵ *Campaign*, 27 September 1996.

⁴⁶ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, p. 100.

⁴⁷ Image can be seen 'Memorable Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat posters from previous election campaigns' *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/uknews/7582239/Memorable-Conservative-Labour-and-Liberal-Democrat-posters-from-previous-election-campaigns.html?image=6> [accessed 3/01/2014]

abstain from attacking one another, the poster appeared to go against such an agreement.⁴⁸ It was a further indication that posters as a mainly visual medium could cross lines other forms of communication might not.

The Referendum party was the other party to produce posters in 1997, putting up candidates in 547 constituencies. Despite being a party it nonetheless had the feel of one of the Edwardian leagues that had played such an important role in the 1910 elections. To begin with, the party was relatively short lived; beginning in 1994 it ended in July 1997 soon after the death of its founder (and funder) James Goldsmith. Like the Leagues the Referendum party spent vast sums: during 1997, £6.7 million went on press advertising; just £440, 000 on posters.⁴⁹ The disparity between press and poster advertising was a consequence of the party's need to establish its presence quickly. They hoped a saturation of the print media would expedite this.⁵⁰ The party also took the unusual step of sending out millions of videos to electors in marginal seats. It was clear that the party thought spending on newspaper advertising was more important than on billboards, yet Sir James Goldsmith was keen to highlight the largesse of the Referendum's poster campaign. On the 11th January Goldsmith launched, what he claimed was the largest nationwide poster campaign by a British party.⁵¹ Quite what Goldsmith judged it against was unclear. While 1000, ninety-six sheet sites was impressive, Conservative and Labour would eventually dwarf the Referendum campaign (see below). Emphasis on the size of the campaign was part of the party's attempts to legitimise its existence as a genuine electoral force. It was to some extent a symbolic measure, as to Goldsmith at least, national parties had national poster campaigns.

5.2 The posters of 1997

While the 1997 election campaign was long, the poster campaign was longer. Both the Conservative and Labour parties launched significant billboard efforts in 1996, building to a crescendo during the campaign proper. Come polling day both parties were emphasising the positive, but as the chapter shows throughout the campaign the lines between positive and negative were frequently blurred.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between the Liberal Democrat party and Labour party in the run up to the 1997 campaign see D. Brack, 'From Protest to Power: The Liberal Democrats (1988-2010)' in D. Brack and R. Ingham, *Peace, Reform and Liberation* (London: 2011) pp. 319-323.

⁴⁹ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, p. 242.

⁵⁰ N. Carter, M. Evans, K. Alderman and S. Gorham, 'Europe, Goldsmith and the Referendum Party', *Parliamentary Affairs* (1998) 51:3, pp. 467 and 477.

⁵¹ 'Left and Right deepen Tories' continental rift', *The Observer*, 12 January 1997.

5.2.1 Conservative Posters

The Conservatives began their poster campaign in May 1996 with a positive message, couched in negative language. Printed in white on a blue background the slogan *YES IT HURT. YES IT WORKED* [Figure 5.5] appeared on 1,500 billboards accompanied with statements in smaller text detailing how the growing economy was improving people's lives. The advert came at the same time Major told his cabinet that they must admit to past failures.⁵² By admitting to having made life economically difficult for people, Major hoped voters would move on and concentrate on the improving economy. Commentators however criticised the poster from the outset. *The Observer*'s Peter Kellner questioned precisely what 'it' was in both sections of the slogan. According to Kellner Black Wednesday, higher taxes and broken promises loomed large.⁵³ Although part satire Kellner's, attack highlighted whether it was advisable for any party to remind electors about their past failures. Some claimed the campaign left the Tory faithful feeling guilty; others suggested the posters were arrogant.⁵⁴ M & C Saatchi responded by stating that their research 'shows that people did not say they would vote Tory tomorrow, but we did not expect that,' adding 'The important thing is that they have got the message. This is only the first stage of a long haul.'⁵⁵

M&C Saatchi's creative philosophy was 'brutal simplicity of thought': *YES IT HURT. YES IT WORKED.* with its two three word sentences reflected that ethos. Other Conservative posters used the two sentence construction. The party's last one before the election, released in April 1997 was *BRITAIN IS BOOMING. DON'T LET LABOUR BLOW IT* [Figure 5.6]. Just as both posters used short sentences so both made prominent use of full stops. It was a definitive punctuation common to the posters designed by the Saatchis and Tim Bell in the Thatcher years.⁵⁶ Posters had of course always used punctuation to emphasise meaning. Asking a question required a sub-conscious response from viewers, while exclamation marks demonstrated strong feeling. The full stop attempted to close down an argument, suggesting there was nothing more to say on the matter. The full stop was perhaps appropriate to the

⁵² Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, p. 34.

⁵³ 'It went wrong whatever it was', *The Observer*, 19 May 1996.

⁵⁴ Tories find 'sorry' is the hardest word', *The Observer*, 16 June 1996; 'Tories put the pain in election campaigning', *The Guardian*, 15 May 1996.

⁵⁵ As quoted in 'Labour labels Tory ads 'disaster' from results of research', *Campaign*, 24 May 1996.

⁵⁶ For example CPA: POSTER 1978/9-06, *EVEN LABOUR'S BETTER WITH THE TORIES* (1978), Conservative Party Local; CPA: POSTER 1987-19 *LABOUR'S POLICY ON ARMS* (1987), Conservative Party; CPA: POSTER 1992-18 *LABOUR'S TAX BOMBSHELL* (1992), Conservative Central Office.

period when Thatcher's party commanded leads over Labour in key policy areas and their posters simply reiterated that position. It was less certain it served the Conservatives well in 1997.

The Conservatives followed *YES IT HURT. YES IT WORKED.* with a series of posters centred on a pair of demonic eyes, referred to above. The first depicted the eyes staring out from behind a pair of curtains accompanied by the slogan 'New Labour, New Danger' [Figure 5.7] and in July 1996 went up on a thousand billboards.⁵⁷ Over the next six months there were other iterations on the demonic eye theme, including *NEW LABOUR NEW TAXES*, [Figure 5.8] where the eyes stared out of a purse, and £700 [Figure 5.9] where a sinister hand was added grabbing a family's disposable income.

The eyes were those of a model, retouched and rotated 180° by an M&C Sattchi artist.⁵⁸ Agency employee Steve Hilton – who went on to become Prime Minister David Cameron's Director of Strategy in 2010 – had proposed the 'New Labour New Danger' slogan.⁵⁹ The vibrancy of the pupils was meant to alert and concern the viewer – a pair of peering eyes was a common motif for death, or a demonic otherness in art and literature – with red symbolising both danger and being the colour most associated with Labour. Perhaps not coincidentally New Labour-New Danger also evoked George Orwell's *Ninety Eighty Four* – which many Conservatives saw as an anti-socialist tract – in which Big Brother's posters were 'so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move'.⁶⁰

While the eyes symbolised a demonic otherness, there was confusion about what they exactly represented in political terms. Commentators argued that by admitting Labour was indeed 'new', the Conservatives were allowing the opposition to dictate the terms of the campaign.⁶¹ There was also some confusion as to whether the posters were an attack on New Labour in general or Blair in particular.⁶² The publication of the Blair devil eye newspaper advert referred to above in August 1996 [Figure 5.1] suggested the emphasis had shifted from the former to the latter. Yet, if commentators mocked the melodramatic nature of the imagery it seemed that it did remind some members of the public of 'Old' Labour, with one –

⁵⁷ 'Blair now No. 1 Tory target', *The Guardian*, 2 July 1996.

⁵⁸ Seldon, *Major*, p.659.

⁵⁹ 'Tories plan positive tack after 'new Labour' blitz', *Campaign*, 5 July 1996.

⁶⁰ G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: 1949) p. 2.

⁶¹ W. Fletcher, 'Winston Fletcher finds the new Conservative campaign harks back to the tried and trusted formula that depends on feel-good factor', *The Guardian*, 3 July 1996, p. 2.

⁶² 'Blair now No 1 Tory target', *The Guardian*, 2 July 1996; Jones, *Campaign* 1997, p.142.

channelling the Orwellian overtones – stating the poster reminded her of ‘reds under the bed’.⁶³

Following the negativity of New Labour New Danger the Conservatives released *AS PROMISED* in November 1996 [Figure 5.10]. It ironically featured only John Major’s eyes, which peered out of his trademark glasses, forming part of a benign smiling face. Major’s benevolent face contrasted sharply with Blair’s sinister presence. Using the Prime Minister as a positive figure was understandable. For while lampooned by satirists, and even with Steve Hilton referring to him at one point as a wimp, many voters respected Major far more than others in his party, and much more than his party as a whole.⁶⁴ Whatever his limitations, Major was the Conservatives biggest asset. However, *AS PROMISED* remained a curious way to promote the leader. Phillip Bassett of the Times questioned whether the fall in joblessness had been significant enough to warrant an entire poster campaign.⁶⁵ Others mocked the appearance of Major’s eyes.⁶⁶ Like Baldwin in 1929 and Wilson in 1970, the focus on Major’s eyes was intended to convey trust. Arguably, it failed in this respect because the key to holding viewers’ attention was the whites of the eyes, which are barely visible in the poster as Major is smiling. Furthermore, just as orators’ often remove their glasses to emphasise a crucial point, doing so in order to remove a barrier between their eyes and the audience, Major’s glasses (although a key part of his image) may well have acted as a barrier to establishing trust with viewers.⁶⁷

Following the relatively upbeat *AS PROMISED* the Conservatives again produced a series of negative posters. The first in the series *NEW LABOUR NEW FAILURE* [Figure 5.11] featured a family of three, with the mother weeping a single red tear. Children and families, as has been shown in previous chapters, were a common feature in poster imagery. Here the mother is in distress and so therefore is the baby. Just as parties had traditionally promised to make Britain better for the young, the Conservatives implicitly suggested that Labour would make it worse. In January 1990 Sinead O’Connor had famously shed a single tear in the video for the Prince penned number one hit *Nothing Compares 2U*.⁶⁸ O’Connor’s tear was a visual symbol for the pain and feeling of loss following rejection. The red tear in the Conservative

⁶³ D. Leigh, ‘Blair is the beast in the Omen – New Labour, New Damien!’, *The Observer*, 18 August 1996.

⁶⁴ ‘Despite his ‘wimp’ image, PM remains the Tory voters’ choice’, *The Guardian*, 10 February 1997.

⁶⁵ ‘As promised - Tories labour their point on employment’, *The Times*, 18 December 1996.

⁶⁶ ‘Honest John takes his turn at looking the voter in the eye’, *The Herald (Glasgow)*, 28 November 1996.

⁶⁷ M. Atkinson, *Our Masters Voice* (London: 1984) pp.90-91.

⁶⁸ J. Maybury, *Nothing Compares 2 U* [Music Video], January 1990.

poster also represented loss, namely that of the next generation were voters to elect a Labour government. If a crude effort, survey data demonstrated that high proportions of viewers who saw the *NEW LABOUR NEW FAILURE* remembered its imagery: 74% remembered seeing the posters, and 54% recognised it as Conservative. The imagery of the despondent couple and child did not resonate with the public, however; 69% of those who saw the billboard said they did not like it.⁶⁹

Given such high levels of public recognition, the Conservatives continued with the red tear theme. In February 1997, the party released several versions of a poster featuring a lion weeping a red tear, one with the slogan *NEW LABOUR EURO DANGER* and another threatening ‘£2,300 tax risk under Labour’.⁷⁰ The Conservative’s weeping lion – an allegory for British courage, and a reference to past glories – was an attempt to make an emotional appeal that Britain would go into decline under an unpatriotic Labour government.⁷¹ Its success at achieving this end was however negligible. Writing in *Campaign*, advertising executive Bill Mawhinney stated his son thought the poster was saying Labour was going to close down zoos.⁷² Mawhinney was being sarcastic, but Conservative MPs also complained their constituents failed to understand its meaning.⁷³ Cartoonists were moreover merciless: Peter Brookes of *The Times* depicted Major-as-weeping lion, with the opinion polls plummeting in his glasses [Figure 5.12]. Indeed, such were its failings the poster was withdrawn after a month.

When the Conservative campaign ended with *BRITAIN IS BOOMING. DON'T LET LABOUR RUIN IT.* [Figure 5.6] the party returned to a type of poster associated with the success of 1959. Just as Macmillan’s government had promised that ‘*LIFE'S BETTER WITH THE CONSERVATIVES DON'T LET LABOUR RUIN IT*’ [Figure 4.2] so Major in 1997 promised that the economy was in a fine shape and that Labour would do it harm. While the economy was recovering, the difference between Major and his predecessor was his inability to persuade the British public that life was indeed getting better. Ken Clarke even questioned

⁶⁹ Survey quoted in ‘Anti-EU posters win over voters’, *Campaign*, 6 March 1997.

⁷⁰ The Conservative party archive do not hold either version of the lion poster. For *NEW LABOUR EURO DANGER* see image from ‘Lord Heseltine: an apology’, *The Telegraph*, 24 November 2010, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/alexsingleton/100065162/lord-heseltine-an-apology/> [accessed 29th November, 2013]; For £2300 TAX RISK UNDER LABOUR, see Butler and Kavanagh, *British General Election of 1997*, p. 42.

⁷¹ ‘BMP sets up poster attack on Tories as Blair stays negative’, *Campaign*, 7 February 1997.

⁷² ‘Private View’, *Campaign*, 21 Feb 1997.

⁷³ Jones, *Campaign 1997*, p. 145; Butler and Kavanagh, *British General Election of 1997*, p. 42.

to what extent the electorate would believe Britain was ‘booming’, and thought the voter associated the word with bust.⁷⁴

Without the belief that things were recovering, the Conservatives were lost. Speaking after the election one party official statement summed up the campaign, ‘We were too far behind from beginning. You cannot overturn people’s image of the last four years with a six-week campaign. This is not about whether a load of posters worked or didn’t’⁷⁵

5.2.2 Labour’s posters

Labour’s poster campaign began in August 1996. An early poster *TAX* featured a warning triangle with the slogan ‘Same Old Tories. Same Old Lies.’ [Figure 5.13] The poster was not a new attack, so Deputy Leader, John Prescott, and Peter Mandelson claimed, but a response to Conservative attacks.⁷⁶ It was statement with an element of truth: the poster followed the ‘demon eyes’ images which Labour worried might be having some effect on the electorate. By responding to a poster with a poster, Labour demonstrated that the billboard wars of the early twentieth century still had a place at its end. Labour posters highlighted the Conservative record on tax. Lamont’s increase in VAT enabled Labour to present the Conservatives as promise breakers. By attacking the Conservatives on tax rises, Labour could cogently claim to be the party of low tax. In doing so they undermined one of the key points that had made Conservative electioneering so strong in 1980s.

Labour followed this attack with a group of more positive posters. In September 1996, Blair launched six designs, each one with a single positive slogan, ranging from ‘New Labour: New Britain’ to ‘New Labour: New Security’.⁷⁷ The posters went up on over 2,000 sites, the funding coming from a £1 million donation from businessman Matthew Harding.⁷⁸ With such positive but vague posters, the Conservatives (still running their ‘New Labour New Danger’ campaign) suddenly appeared a reactionary organisation bent on pessimism. Blair emphasised the point when launching the posters in his Sedgefield constituency, claiming recent Conservative campaigns were ‘lie after lie, violent images designed to frighten, a

⁷⁴ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, p. 44.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Cowley, ‘The Conservative Party: decline and fall’, p. 48.

⁷⁶ ‘Summer brings no escape from electioneering’, *Press Association*, 2 August 1996.

⁷⁷ The author can find no surviving image of the posters but the launch was reported in the press see ‘Blair spells out New Labour message’, *Press Association*, 7 September 1996.

⁷⁸ ‘Harding’s £1m helps billboard battle’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 September 1996.

campaign in the long lineage of ugly and corroding advertising'.⁷⁹ In making the statement, Blair became one of the long-line of politicians to complain about the erroneous and dangerous message of rival politicians. And as with his predecessors Blair, in damming the message of the opposition, claimed Labour's own message to be a paragon of truth. The campaign demonstrated the ability of the poster as a medium to change the nature of the political debate. Labour attempted to use the billboard to control or dominate a political moral high ground. In addition, the posters introduced the electorate to the idea of a pledge, which Labour would return to several times during the course of the campaign.

By November Blair's claims about 'ugly and corroding advertising', had begun to ring hollow. Labour again turned to the billboards to attack the Conservatives. The new designs featured a thumb pressing down on the words '17 years under the Tories', with the strap-line 'Enough is Enough'.⁸⁰ Labour took the slogan from John Howard's 1996 campaign to be Australian Prime Minister as it played well with middle-class voters; the very sort Blair believed held the key to Downing Street.⁸¹ That Labour had taken the slogan from a right wing Australian Prime Minister demonstrated the diverse sources from which it drew ideas. Polling evidence suggested the slogan had some traction with voters: an NOP survey discovered that 48% of voters believed Labour's claim whereas only 24% thought 'New Labour New Danger' had any truth to it.⁸² In January 1997, Labour returned to Lamont's VAT rise, an image appeared of a hand breaking an egg, again claiming 'Enough is Enough'.⁸³ The egg was meant to signify that the Conservatives intended to place VAT on food, something angrily denied by Kenneth Clarke, while Major called the poster a 'disgraceful smear'.⁸⁴

Despite the obvious scare tactics Labour deployed in some of its posters, many in the electorate did not see them like that. Following the election NOP discovered that 47 per cent of voters believed the Conservatives had the most negative advertisements compared to just 15 per cent for Labour.⁸⁵ This is because Labour tapped into generally held and very hostile views about the character of the Conservative government, reversing the process that underpinned the Saatchi posters of the period 1979-92 which had so vigorously attacked

⁷⁹ 'Blair spells out New Labour message', *Press Association*, 7 September 1996.

⁸⁰ 'Poll boost as Labour launches new campaign', *Press Association*, 31 October 1996.

⁸¹ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, p. 65.

⁸² Crewe, Gosschalk, Bartle (eds.) *Why Labour won the General Election of 1997*, p. 41

⁸³ An image of the poster was included in 'Wanted some wit', *The Guardian*, 20 January 1997.

⁸⁴ Clarke and Major quoted, 'Labour claims Tories will tax food', *The Independent*, 16 January 1997.

⁸⁵ 'Butler and Kavanagh', *General Election of 1997*, p. 219

Labour. By 1997 the boot was on the other foot: Conservative attacks seemed unduly harsh, even wrong, while Labour attacks chimed with many voters' newly acquired political prejudices. There was a greater willingness to accept Labour's attacks as truth. This was born out in the polling. One NOP poll questioned voters beliefs in two negative slogans, questioning 'which seems more true to you?'. Of those voters switching to Labour 83% thought 'Enough is Enough' was more true while only 2% thought the same of 'New Labour New Danger'.⁸⁶ Negativity was in the eye of the beholder, it was a suggestion that posters reflected and reinforced views rather than created them.

At the end of February 1997 Labour released their most controversial poster to date, which featured a two-headed John Major. Reworking established themes, it featured the by-now familiar 'enough is enough' and the refrain of the 22 tax rises since 1992, to make the point that Major said one thing but did another [Figure 5.14]. If this suggested a new low in the personalisation of the campaign, Blair had a vetoed a set of posters which depicted Major as a Mr Man character, called 'Mr Spineless'.⁸⁷ While Blair was happy to attack the Conservative leader, he did not want to focus on his character, although claiming Major was a liar meant this was a nice distinction. Reports suggest the poster had a strong impact on wavering voters.⁸⁸

During the final weeks of the campaign, Labour turned their posters towards the positive. Labour's pledges, which had originally appeared on a card, now appeared as posters. The idea was an innovative one, originating from a Californian referendum campaign.⁸⁹ Notably, a Labour campaign supposedly defined by novelty still utilised posters to help communicate its message. The posters simplified the message. Whereas the card stated that the party intended to 'cut class sizes to 30 or under for 5,6 and 7 year-olds by using money from the assisted places scheme', the poster asserted 'Class sizes will be smaller' [Figure 5.15]. This was a demonstration of the poster fully working into an integrated campaign. The pledge was a central part of Labour's campaign, which the party delivered across multiple types of communication but adapted to suit each one. The pledge cards aimed to persuade those who had bothered to read and engage with the text by providing a rationale for how Labour would

⁸⁶ Cited in LHASC: BMP DDB, *Review of Election '97 Advertising Activity*, Nov 1997.

⁸⁷ 'Prescott will get superman role if Labour takes power', *The Sunday Times*, 23 February 1997; It should be noted that other papers reported that the creator of Mr Men had vetoed the poster, 'The two faces of John Major; Polls have encouraged Labour to turn up the heat, writes Rob Brown', *The Independent*, 24 February 1997.

⁸⁸ 'Adverts', *The Observer*, 2 March 1997.

⁸⁹ Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party*, p. 145-212

achieve the outcome. The posters simply spoke simply and briefly to the passer by. By producing the posters in this manner, Labour demonstrated a belief (inherent in all parties throughout the 20th century) that the poster worked best produced in a simple manner to communicate with those who did not what want or have time to be communicated with.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of Labour's poster campaign – which reflected the character of its overall appeal to the British public – was the role played by Blair. The Labour party archive contains three posters bearing the Labour leader's image. One featured the future Prime Minister in a relaxed pose [Figure 5.16], with loosened tie. The rolled up sleeves reflect his ability to 'get the job done', while the thrown back head and broad smile show someone approachable and easy going. The poster also promoted Blair's 'informal' approach to politics with the open-necked shirt. This was the image of a man from a new generation of politicians brought up – as he stated to the Brighton conference in 1995 – 'on colour television, Coronation Street and The Beatles'.⁹⁰ This was not an image for the billboard, however, instead it was circulated by Labour headquarters to put up in regional campaign rooms and sold to party members.⁹¹ Such casualness was far removed from the grey faced, grey suited and buttoned up image of John Major popularised by the likes of *Spitting Image* and *The Guardian*'s Steve Bell.⁹²

Blair's ostensibly youthful, casual appearance, helped define Labour's campaign; a key point of separation between the two party leaders.⁹³ The other two surviving Blair posters contained similar characteristics. Figures 5.17 is the window card of a billboard version of that was almost the same. The difference being that the billboard image carried the slogan 'Vote because Britain deserves better' [Figure 5.18].⁹⁴ The images were graver than that of Figure 5.16, and similar to the portrait on the front cover of the Labour party manifesto, which in itself was a personal message from Blair. During the launch of the manifesto journalists commented on how serious Blair had been, the solemnity an

⁹⁰ Leaders speech, *Labour Party conference report*, Brighton, 1995

⁹¹ Thanks for Professor Steven Fielding for this information. He reported buying a version of the poster in 1996.

⁹² For example the last ever edition of *Spitting Image* features Major prominently in such a guise Episode 7 Series 19, *Spitting Image*, Carlton Television, 18 February 1996, Television; For Bell see, BCA: SBD0210, 'Hullo? Cone Hotline? I have a problem...', *The Guardian*, 18 March 1994; BCA: SBD0245, 'Hell Exists Official, *The Guardian*, 12 January 1996.

⁹³ M. Foley, *J. Major, T. Blair and a conflict of leadership: Collision course* (Manchester: 2002) p. 150.

⁹⁴ The poster does not survive but it is shown on a billboard sample sheet from the campaign. PHM: *Billboard sample sheet 1997*, NMLH.1997.43.1/1

apparent reaction to focus group results, which revealed young women thought him ‘smarmy’.⁹⁵

Blair’s lack of smile had historical precedent. Parties have continually used posters to construct a personal relationship between leader and people. The Blair posters were no different from those of Baldwin in 1929 or Wilson in 1970, or even Major in 1997 which implored the voter to trust that particular leader. Like those earlier examples there was little reference to the party Blair led: the viewer is invited to vote for Blair. It was an unsurprising that Labour adopted such a strategy: as with Baldwin and Wilson, the party sought to concentrate on the man to help deliver electoral victory.⁹⁶ The Blair images add to the existing evidence that scholars have used to suggest that the Labour Prime Minister reinforced, if not advanced, the ‘personalisation’ or ‘Americanisation’ or even ‘presidentialistion’ of British politics.⁹⁷ However, when considered as a whole with those posters cited earlier in this thesis that positively portrayed party leaders, the Blair images from 1997 were not innovations but a continuum of a already established language.

5.3 Displaying posters in 1997

The *Independent* claimed that ‘Posters have made the biggest marketing impact’ during the 1997 campaign⁹⁸ and in its final week the Conservatives displayed 3,700, 48 sheet posters while Labour displayed 2,600 of the same.⁹⁹ A MORI poll conducted at this time suggested that 70 per cent of voters had seen at least one party poster with 55 per cent having seen a Labour example and 53 per cent viewed a Conservative product.⁹⁹ Given that Labour produced many fewer posters than the Conservatives this was a remarkable result, suggesting its designs were more memorable or better situated, or both.

Poster displays concentrated on key seats, as they had increasingly done since the 1950s. But there were attempts to extend beyond marginal constituencies. Labour, held a number of poster launches in holiday resorts. In August 1996 John Prescott announced that the party intended to start a leaflet and poster campaign in places favoured by British holiday makers,

⁹⁵ H. Porter, ‘Election '97: Smile, grimace, - just follow the doctor's orders’ *The Independent*, 6 April 1997.

⁹⁶ D. Kavanagh, ‘The Labour Campaign’, *Parliamentary Affairs* (1997) 50:4, p. 539.

⁹⁷ R. Heffernan, ‘Tony Blair as Labour Party Leader’ in A. Seldon (ed.), *Blair's Britain* (Cambridge: 2007), pp. 148-149; M. Foley, *The British Presidency* (Manchester: 2000) pp. 301-323.

⁹⁸ ‘Election '97: In the marginals and beyond, news is a winner’, *The Independent*, 27 April 1997.

⁹⁹ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1997*, p. 219.

taking his war on the ‘Tory lie machine’ overseas.¹⁰⁰ Labour rented 10 billboard sites on the Costa Blanca and projected the slogans ‘no wonder you need a break’ and ‘same old Tories same old lies’ to some of the four million Britons who holidayed there annually. The party was also keen to attract the votes of Spain’s sizeable expatriate community.¹⁰¹

It is questionable if this innovation achieved much. The MP and former actor Glenda Jackson launched the Spanish campaign, dressed in formal wear more suitable to the Commons Chamber rather than the beach. It was a move, which generated much derision.¹⁰² The Conservatives had had similar plans, to at least display posters in airports, but abandoned them fearing they would alienate Britons trying to escape party politics.¹⁰³ Tellingly, Labour’s experiment was not repeated.

Lack of resources meant the Liberal Democrats also innovated to ensure their posters were seen by more than those who passed their single Vauxhall Bridge billboard, employing a mobile billboard that visited fifty key seats.¹⁰⁴ The mobile poster had long history in British electoral politics. James Thompson highlights the use of vans in Edwardian Britain, while in the 1930s Conservative film vans would carry posters too.¹⁰⁵ During the 1980s and into the 1990s both the Conservatives and Labour used the vans. The low cost was offset by other problems. As the Liberal Democrats only sent the vans to places likely to vote for the party the poster campaign had a very local feel, which potentially, the advertising executive Brendan Llewellyn argued, reinforced notions of being a minority party.¹⁰⁶

While Labour had ‘launched’ its *YESTERDAY’S MEN* poster in 1970 in an attempt to gather press support, by 1997 parties routinely held set piece events in order to unveil their latest creation to journalists. This was a cost effective device. Media reaction to and reporting of posters meant that they could reach viewers who might never see the real thing.¹⁰⁷ However, launches in 1997 often had a greater purpose. Rigorously stage managed, the launch itself became the message. Notably Labour unveiled its final series of posters at a country house in

¹⁰⁰ ‘Summer brings no escape from electioneering’, *Press Association*, 2 August 1996.

¹⁰¹ ‘A touch of sand’, *The Times*, 16 August 1996.

¹⁰² A. Duval Smith, ‘Sunshine bingo and New Labour as Glenda woos Costa Trippers’, *The Guardian*, 16 August 1996; ‘Glenda faces naked truth about voter on the beech’ *Evening Standard*, 16 August 1996.

¹⁰³ ‘Summer brings no escape from electioneering’, *Press Association*, 2 August 1996.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Marketing and advertising news in the week’s press ..’ *Campaign*, 28 February 1997.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, ‘Pictorial Lies?’ p. 203.

¹⁰⁶ B. Llewellyn, ‘Parties accentuate the negative in poster campaigns’, *The Scotsman*, 18 April 1997.

¹⁰⁷ Scammell and Harrop, ‘The Press’, p. 183; N. O’Shaughnessy, ‘The British General Election of 2005: A Summary Perspective’, *Journal of Marketing Management* (2005) 21:9-10, p. 914.

Kent, with Blair and Prescott symbolically surrounded by hundreds of eager children, who each wore a t-shirt wearing the Britain deserves better slogan. Writing in his diary Campbell stated that he wanted to launch the posters in a ‘field o dreams’. He went on to state that ‘I tried to imagine watching this at home. You’d have Major dealing with Hamilton – or not – and TB up saying he wanted a positive vision of the future, surrounded by these big bright posters doing just that. I loved it.’¹⁰⁸ The event was a novel act of political communication but one whose ostensible heart was the venerable poster.¹⁰⁹

5.4 Conclusion

The general election of 1997 did not represent a renaissance or resurrection in the poster as a form of electioneering. Rather it demonstrated that while the nature of British electioneering might change, the poster continued to develop alongside. Both Labour and the Conservative party placed money and faith in the role of the poster as symbolically important to election campaigning. But while thousands of posters went up in constituencies around the country, the posters other roles in the campaign demonstrated a new role.

Labour’s enthusiastic use of focus groups to inform its posters raised questions about the party’s relationship with the electorate. Scholars have highlighted that the use of focus groups changed the relationship between party and people; claiming it as the point when policies become products and voters became consumers.¹¹⁰ Blair did little to dispel such myths. Declaring in defence of Labour’s focus group testing, ‘Supposing you are running Marks and Spencer or Sainsbury or whatever it is, you will be constantly trying to work out whether your consumers are satisfied with the product that they are getting.’¹¹¹ Accusations of ‘selling politics like soap’ were of course nothing new. Focus group testing in 1997 did, however, diminish the power of advertisers in favour of the party. Testing reduced advertisers claims that only they had the expertise to translate the party message into a communication the public would easily understand. Focus group testing, especially the testing of posters, put this knowledge firmly back in the hands of the party.

¹⁰⁸ A. Campbell and B. Hagerty (eds.), *The Alistair Campbell Diaries: Prelude to Power 1994-1997*, 31 March 1997 (London: 2010) pp. 688-689.

¹⁰⁹ A. Parker, ‘Positive start as sun shines on poster campaign’, *The Scotsman*, 1 April 1997.

¹¹⁰ R. Gibson and A. Römmele, ‘Changing Campaign Communications A Party-Centered Theory of Professionalized Campaigning’, *Press/Politics* (Fall 2001) 6:4, p. 32.

¹¹¹ ‘Blair denies focus group rule’, *The Independent*, 30 July 1997.

A strong negative streak ran through the campaigns of both parties. As early as September 1996 *The Guardian*'s Michael White had claimed that both parties were 'scraping the barrel' with their various claims about each others future tax policy.¹¹² And yet, in a strong affirmation that posters affirm rather than change views, only the Conservative campaign was deemed negative. During Labour's final push one of the final set of posters contained the slogan that underlined the end of the campaign 'Britain deserves better' [Figure 5.19]. During the launch, press attention focussed on the positive, quoting Blair's optimistic message that he wanted to 'rise above sleaze' and 'not run down the opposition'.¹¹³ The affirmative nature of the campaign was only increased by Blair's order to remove of all of the two-faced John Major posters.¹¹⁴ Yet the message remained negative and very few commented. It was left to *Daily Express* cartoonist Hector Breeze to highlight the duplicity in the message [Figure 5.20]

Posters played a central part in the campaign. While they had never been a static form of communication, as parties confidently and with great control transposed symbols and slogans across communication, posters were now part of a general fluidity of image that stretched intertextually across the campaign. Notably the most notorious 'poster' of the 1997 general election, the image of Blair's demon eyes [Figure 5.1] was actually a newspaper advert.¹¹⁵ Blair's image, the simple text and demon eyes motif, would have worked equally well as advert or poster. The same was true of Labour's manifesto cover, which could have appeared on a billboard. There was a transmutability of imagery, which in turn was a reflection of the changing patterns of political campaigning. Where as Edwardian poster artists constructed party posters from existing known symbols, in 1997 the symbol was often the message. Blair's 'pledges' were not just a symbol to help construct Labour's communication the 'pledge' was the communication.

Such conclusions mean a dramatic change in our understanding of the posters role in campaigns. The general election of 1997 demonstrated that it was becoming increasingly difficult to talk about posters as singular identities. This thesis has throughout located posters within a broader election campaign. And during those previous campaigns, it was always possible to identify a singular series of objects distinct from, but increasingly integrated into a wider campaign. Such was the way parties now communicated, unpicking the poster

¹¹² 'Parties scrape barrel in tax attacks', *The Guardian*, 6 September 1996.

¹¹³ 'Blair promises positive poster campaign to rise above sleaze', *Agence France Presse*, 31 March 1997.

¹¹⁴ A. Pierce, 'Blair has negative posters torn down', *The Times*, 31 March 1997.

¹¹⁵ For reports that of the 'devil eyes' image appearing as a poster see, S. Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda and Persuasion* (New York: 2008) p. 157; for reference to it as an advert Jones, *Campaign*, pp. 142-144.

campaign of any party as a distinct entity had by 1997 becoming an increasingly arbitrary process. The era of the intergraded campaign had truly arrived.

6.0 Conclusion: The Death of the Poster?



Figure 6.1 *BUILDING A FOUNDATION. WEARING IT.* 2010, Labour Party

Faced with a flood of Conservative billboards in marginal seats, and no money to spend on his own campaign, Labour's 2010 general election organiser Douglas Alexander MP, argued 'At the end of the day it's people who win elections not posters – it always has been.'¹ 2010 makes a fitting conclusion to this thesis. Not only did it mark a century since the apogee of poster use in Britain, the election of 1910, it was also the campaign when Alastair Campbell, citing the onset of 'individualised' campaigning and reflecting on Barack Obama's victory of 'social networking' in the 2008 race for the White House, declared that the poster had finally had its day.²

This thesis has charted the development of posters from the delirium of 1910 to the present. At its simplest level, it has attempted to understand and locate the role of posters, not within the long narratives of art or design history, but within the context of the election for which parties intended them. It has suggested that only by locating communication in the period and culture it was produced, by attempting to understand why and how such communication came in to being, can we properly grasp the nature of political communication. Only then is it possible to truly comprehend how such communication functioned and indeed what that might mean for our understanding of politics. In that respect, it is not just a study of posters, but an attempt to create a model for future studies of communication.

In attempting this feat, what has emerged is a long thin analysis of a small part of political communication in Britain. Some of the wider conclusions from the thesis are drawn out below. But more generally what the thesis has shown, is that there is no grand narrative of the poster. There has been no lineal development where we can point to a far off point where a poster was one thing and which developed (if indeed this is the right word) to what we see now. If anything, writing communication history in this manner suggests that the grand sweeping terms often used by scholars of communication and associated with recent developments are too generalised and lacking the necessary nuance. There have been posters

¹ The majority of the information about the 2010 general election comes from C. Burgess, "The election will be won by people not posters'... Advertising and 2010 General Election" in *Political Communication in Britain*, D. Wring, R. Mortimore, S. Atkinson (Eds.), (Hampshire: 2011), pp. 181-197.; Alexander gave the statement during an interview to Alex Smith from the website Labour List on 23 March 2010, <http://labourlist.org/2010/03/this-election-will-be-won-by-people-not-posters-the-douglas-alexander-interview/> [accessed 9 January 2014]

² A. Campbell, 'Has the political poster virtually had its day?' *The Times*, 22 February 2010.

produced seventy years ago where terms such as ‘personalisation’ or ‘professionalisation’ are as applicable to those produced today.

Of course picking out individual posters and using them to debunk accepted wisdom is ahistorical, and this has not been the attention. As just one type of communication, and produced in far fewer numbers than other forms, posters cannot speak for all. However, by studying communication in such depth, and by locating it within the landscapes for its intended viewers, the result has been a reassessment of wider conclusions about the change in communication. Because as the thesis has shown, for this communication at least, that the move from one point to another was not crescendo like. Instead, it was staccato and sporadic and in the long term at least unplanned.

6.1 Mad Men

Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties all produced poster campaigns for the 2010 general election. In order to produce these campaigns each party worked with an advertising agency. Labour worked with Saatchi & Saatchi. The Conservatives contracted the advertising firm Euro RSCG, but during the campaign turned to its old friends at M&C Saatchi to assist. The agency Iris produced a highly innovative group of posters for the Liberal Democrats. By 2010, the standard model for parties wanting to produce a poster campaign was to commission an advertising agency, or sometimes two. Such a system was according to Martin Harrop, a legacy of the Conservative association with Saatchi & Saatchi. Writing in 1995 Harrop stated ‘When the Conservative Party hired Saatchi’s in 1978, it was headline news. By the end of the 1980s it would have been just as big news if a party had chosen not to use professional marketing experience in an election.’³

Harrop’s view betrayed a present-centredness this thesis has done its best to revise. As the preceding chapters have shown, as regards the production of posters, parties have habitually turned to professional marketing expertise, in whatever form it might come. During the elections of 1910 both the Liberal and Conservative parties turned to highly regarded professionals to produce billboard artwork. By employing John Hassall for instance, the Conservatives used one of the country’s most prestigious commercial artists. Undoubtedly, the relationship between the Conservatives and Saatchi & Saatchi in 1979 was not the same as that with Hassall in 1910. However, the thesis has shown that as the advertising industry

³ M. Harrop, ‘Political Marketing’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, (1990) 43 (3), p. 277

developed from the individuals and small organisations of Edwardian Britain to the large agencies extant today, so throughout that period the Conservatives hired the most technically accomplished ‘advertiser’ they could find. Such findings dispute the widespread notion that the Conservatives (or any other party) suddenly ‘woke up’ to advertising and marketing in 1978.

Labour’s drift towards the use of a ‘professional’ agency was more complex than that of the Conservatives. For much of the first half of the century Labour was a party of amateurs when it came to posters, with commissions generated through adverts in labour movement newspapers and personal acquaintances. Things had moved on by the 1960s, though there remained a strong resonance with this earlier way of doing things even into the 1980s. Just as throughout the twentieth century the Conservatives wanted ‘the best’ when it came to advertisers, so Labour wanted people sympathetic to its own aims. For just as Gerald Spencer Pryse contributed work free of charge in the 1900s, so too did the professionals who constituted the Shadow Communications in the 1980s.⁴ If the party believed effective posters helped its campaigns, many in the party were uneasy about taking the commercial route. This was on grounds of cost but also because of what they perceived to be the advertising industry’s anti-socialist ethos. Thus, when Labour appointed BMP DDB in 1997 it appeared as a more of a break with the past than it actually was: the chief executive of BMP DDB was Chris Powell who had worked with the party since 1972.

6. 1.2 The party’s changing role

Over the time period covered in this PhD advertising industry and its product has gone through a dramatic process of expansion and development. This change has quite naturally had an effect on the way posters are produced. Parties no longer work with one man, but with entire organisations who take responsibilities from designing the shape of the message, to planning how and when it will be disseminated to the public. Given this narrative, there has been a tendency to see parties as monolithic bodies who have latched on to a developing advertising industry that has helped deliver their message. This, of course is not the case. This thesis has shown that the way in which parties produce and approve posters has altered. For the Liberal and Conservatives especially, the process for approval has moved from bodies

⁴ The SCA worked anonymously for the party so as not to upset the Conservative supporting businesses that made up the day to day work of their career. Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party*, (Hampshire: 2005), 91-92

within the party structures to the very head of that structure. In contemporary politics, it remains unlikely a party would release a poster without the leader's permission. Indeed, it was not just David Cameron but allegedly also his wife who helped choose the image for Figure i.6.⁵

Edwardian Conservative and Liberal leaders played no part in the production of posters. Central Office and the Liberal Publication Department assumed overall control of their communication and even then, both effectively contracted out the work to artists or advertising companies. Labour at this time remained an anomaly. Reflecting a lack of professional personnel, a sub-committee of Labour's N.E.C, which included the leader, discussed and selected poster designs. This situation did not much change in the inter-war period. *SAFETY FIRST!* carried an image of Baldwin but he played no role in its production.⁶ As late as 1970, while the Conservative Director of Publicity, Geoffrey Tucker worked closely with Edward Heath, the latter showed no interest in communications. It was only with Margaret Thatcher and her close relationship with Tim Bell that Conservative party leaders were beginning to monitor matters much more closely.

The vetting of Labour posters remained the responsibility of one or other of its N.E.C committees until the 'presidential' Harold Wilson split from his party machine in the late 1960s. Wilson was undoubtedly more aloof than later Labour leaders would be, but he did nonetheless meet with the controversial artist Alan Aldridge before the production of the controversial *YESTERDAY'S MEN* in 1970.

Two reasons reveal themselves as to why the poster has assumed more of the leader's time latterly than at the start of the twentieth century. Certainly, the general centralisation of power in the parties explains part of the shift.⁷ Decision-making is increasingly becoming the prerogative of the leader, and this includes the production of posters. Furthermore, posters are increasingly seen as more important to campaigning, in regards the fact they are now more visible. Of all the many designs produced for the two elections of 1910, journalists commented on the effectiveness of a small handful, notably Figures 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9.⁸ As

⁵ 'Meet Dave, the 'airbrushed' poster boy: Tories launch £500,000 pre-election campaign' *Daily Mail online*, 5 Jan 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1240734/As-pre-election-campaign-steps-gear-meet-Dave-airbrushed-poster-boy.html>, [accessed 1 Nov 2014].

⁶ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values*, (Cambridge: 1999), p. 37

⁷ R. Heffernan, 'Exploring (and Explaining) the British Prime Minister', *BIPIR*, (2005) 7, pp. 608 and 609.

⁸ *The Times*, 1 December 1910; Blewett, N., *The Peers, the Parties and the People, The General Election of 1910* (London, 1972). p. 313.

the century progressed, parties produced fewer designs, each becoming increasingly physically larger. From the packed hoardings of Edwardian Britain to the large single message of the modern billboard, the poster is in a sense becoming more visible. This prominence only increased with poster launches, leading to their more habitual reproduction in the press and – in the twentieth-first century – circulation on the internet. Within this electoral climate, posters have come to define not just a party's campaign but the party itself. *SAFETY FIRST* was the first example of this process, but increasingly with single posters released and grabbing the media spotlight – even if for only for short periods – they can dominate the campaign. Given this status, it seems little wonder that leaders are increasingly moved to control exactly how posters communicate.

6.2 The changing visual nature of the political poster

Posters are entirely of the moment. They speak to an electorate, not as it is, but as political campaigners perceive it to be. And these perceptions have changed from election to election. This thesis has demonstrated that visual politics was not static. This section focuses on the broad development of the poster over the course of the study and then highlights how the thesis has informed our understanding of key visual themes.

6.2.1 Development in design

Compared to the posters of the 2010 election, those of 1910 are much more visually complex. In early posters colour, words, and symbols abound, adopted as they are from a great swathe of sources. Early posters provided far more information. A comparison between Tariff Reform Leagues *WANTED A CHANGE* [Figure 1.16] and Labour's *BUILDING A FOUNDATION. WEARING IT.* [Figure 6.1] shows that the former is overflowing with verbal and visual imagery. The artist A.B. White clearly believed the viewer would be able to translate the complexities of this message, including the dress of the two men, the oratorical stance of the working class man, the idea of Tariff Reform being a mass movement (a point made through the demonstration in the background), and the impact of Free Trade on industrial production. The 2010 poster is less visually rich, although this is not to say that it is simplistic. However, while viewers would have to know about the fuss generated by Figure i.6 (for which some commentators had ridiculed David Cameron as he allegedly wore makeup) to appreciate the pun, apart from knowing what Gordon Brown and Cameron looked like not much else was expected of the viewer.

Throughout the latter half of the century critics complained of a ‘dumbing down’ of politics, of party communication becoming a question of ‘selling’, of voters being treated like ‘consumers’. This began with the rise of television politics; the critic Milton Shulman claiming the 1970 contest was a question of choosing between the political detergents of ‘Omo’ Wilson and ‘Daz’ Heath.⁹ Posters had in fact started to become less visually rich during the inter-war period. Simplification was in part the result of party elites believing that the new mass electorate that followed 1918 and 1929 was incapable of understanding the complexities of political argument. ‘A vast number of the electorate have little inclination to reason out political questions for themselves’ wrote Labour agent for East Leyton, A.E. Burgess, in 1921, ‘They are swayed by impulses, prejudices and catchwords.’¹⁰

Change also reflected developments in commercial practice. Political posters reflected changes occurring in wider visual landscapes. The parties’ adoption of photography killed the intricacies of the draughtsman’s art. To an extent, this simply reflected a greater awareness by parties of developments in communication. Despite the Conservatives adoption of commercial advertisers, as regards design, Labour often proved the most innovative. As historians have identified this was true of Gerald Spencer Pryse’s work before and after 1910.¹¹ We saw further innovation with the party’s use of photography in 1950. Alan Aldridge’s *YESTERDAY’S MEN* poster of 1970 might have been counterproductive, but it was novel. Into the 1980s, the party continued to look to art for inspiration. The 1987 *The country’s crying out for change. Vote Labour* [Figure 6.2] with its black and white evocation of the *LABOUR ISN’T WORKING* dole queue, and the figure holding up the party’s red rose symbol, demonstrated a wish to deliver a message simply and evocatively.

Innovation for the Conservatives came in a different form. Namely with the realisation that their posters had to be recognisably Conservative, and that billboard campaigns needed to be integrated within an overall communications strategy. Insights undoubtedly learnt from advertising agency expertise. In 1950, the imagery of Conservative billboards and the imagery of Conservative newspaper adverts combined. When the Conservatives worked with Aims of Industry in 1970, we can to some extent see the continued acceptance that

⁹ M. Shulman, *The Least Worst Television in the World*, (London: 1973), p. 157

¹⁰ ‘Pictorial Propaganda’, *Labour Organiser* (March, 1921) 7, p. 16.

¹¹ J. Thompson, “‘Pictorial lies’?: posters and politics in Britain, 1880-1914”, *Past and Present* (November, 2007) 197, p.185; L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and Making of the Labour Party* (Harvard: 2010), p. 30

communication should cross campaigns. When in 1979 *LABOUR ISN'T WORKING* appeared in a party election broadcast, it was clear that the message was something that crossed between media with ease.¹² This is not to suggest that the campaigns of 1950 were the same as 1997, evidently they were not. The thesis does demonstrate, however, that the attempts at cohesive campaigning have long roots.

6.2.2 Represent and represented

This study has demonstrated that the people who occupied the political billboards of the twentieth century can be broken down into two distinct groups: the party leader and the people. Taking their cue from popular cartoons of the Edwardian era, political parties saw the poster as a method by which to undermine their rivals. These attacks often combined the political with the personal. David Lloyd George-as-child, for example, puzzled by the simplest of economic conundrums [Figure 1.23] expressed his negative capacities as a Chancellor through a suggestion of his limitable intelligence. After the Great War, this ‘vulgar’ personality politics remained.¹³ Any Labour posters, which promoted Ramsay MacDonald as a man made for leadership [Figures 2.31 and 2.32], were undermined by a Conservatives response that attacked MacDonald for being a crook and a charlatan. Such language was a demonstration of how posters would go beyond the acceptable extremes of other forms of communication. Images of a drunken Asquith [1.24] and lecherous Lloyd George [Figure 2.15] reflected reality, but also demonstrated just how far character assassination went. It also demonstrated that terms like ‘personalisation’ common to the literature relating to more recent studies of political communication can be easily applied to a more historic context.¹⁴ The posters demonstrate that the individual – albeit in negative terms and in this instance on posters – played as equally strong in at the beginning of the twentieth century as they did at the end.

Parties’ use of personalised attack posters ended with the high turnouts and unprecedented levels of party identity of the mid-century. A time when it was thought best to avoid mention of rivals for fear of giving them free publicity. Even when the personal attack returned in 1970 with *YESTERDAY'S MEN*, Bernard Donoghue questioned whether it was worthwhile

¹² Conservative Party Election Broadcast, First broadcast 19 April 1979.

¹³ Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*’ (Oxford: 2009), p. 113

¹⁴ Lauri Karvonen was clear that this personalisation was a recent phenomenon. See the introduction to L. Karvonen (Ed.) *The Personalisation of Politics*, (ECPR Press: 2010), pp.1-6

giving ‘faces to faceless men.’¹⁵ That poster did, however, begin the resurgence in the negative campaign and by the late twentieth century, attack advertising had reasserted itself. A fact demonstrated by the appearance of demonic Blair [Figure 5.1] and two-faced Major [Figure 5.12] in 1997. The election of 2010 demonstrated that personal attack remained central to political campaigning in Britain in the twenty-first century. When the Conservatives produced a billboard depicting a smiling Gordon Brown quoting some of his failed promises [Figure 6.3] it was clear that the type of personalised attack common in the first third of the last century continued as a valid method of campaigning.

Parties turned to attack during periods of fluid voter support. The onset of a mass electorate provided a host of new voters for parties to attract. Posters were just one part of this aim, but just as parties promoted their own positive elements they sought to undermine their rivals claims. Posters were used to turn voters of the other side and such attack advertising is likely to continue. A belief exists within the advertising industry that the politics of denunciation provides the most effective way of speaking to the unaligned electorate. One advertising executive who worked on Labour’s 2010 campaign said that it was increasingly difficult to ‘own’ the positive.¹⁶

Posters did not just depict leaders so as to attack them. What this study has made clear is that posters personalise politics, attempting to create a bond between leader and led. Since the 1920s each party has consistently used their own posters to praise the qualities of their leaders. Indeed, it has been a rare election where any party has not produced at least one positive depiction of its leader.¹⁷ This became increasingly more common as the century moved on, undoubtedly a reflection on wider changes to campaigning, with its greater emphasis on the personality of whoever happens to be party leader.¹⁸ This has not entirely been a late twentieth century development. As Chapter Two demonstrated, from the 1920s leader posters began to appear. Such an early start is not surprising. Leaders, and their trustfulness, are a concrete entity upon which the voter can latch, unlike the somewhat amorphous nature of party. They are all presidential in the sense that they incite votes based

¹⁵ ‘Alan Aldridge’s influential next door neighbour’ *The Times*, 14th May, 1970

¹⁶ Mentioned in conversation with the author

¹⁷ See for example Aside from the examples cited in the thesis see also Harold MacMillan in 1959 CPA: POSTER 1959-08 VOTE CONSERVATIVE, 1959, Conservative and Unionist Central Office; Alec Douglas Home. PHM: Vote CONSERVATIVE, 1964, Conservative and Unionist Central Office.

¹⁸ R. Rose, *The Prime Minister in a Shrinking World*, (Oxford: 2001), p. 10

on the man and not the party, and to this extent have remained somewhat consistent over the century.

If leaders have been depicted in similar ways across the century, the same cannot be said of the British people. Posters show that there has been a transition in male identity, which reflects changes in society and parties attitudes to it. Edwardian pictorial imagery defined masculinity through the pub. Into the inter-war period the appeal to men reflected parties perceptions of them. Labour and the Liberals concentrated on employment. The Conservatives and their fear of societal break-up, led the party to picturing men of all classes amongst a cohesive group, all of whom would enjoy the benefits of society. After 1945 new visions of masculinity emerged as parties adopted catchall election strategies and adapted to the age of affluence. As Chapter Three demonstrated, the father, a rare sight before the Second World War, became a far more regular site on British posters. Though this proved to be an aberration rather than a definite shift. Throughout the century poster designers continued to a return to a definition of masculinity through some form of paid employment. The father may have appeared and even on one instance so did the male consumer, but such depictions remained in the minority. In the majority of posters, male identity in the twentieth century was defined by employment or lack thereof.

If posters failed to move beyond narrow confines of male identity it is also true that the appeal to women has been equally one-dimensional. Since entering the franchise, those women pictured on billboards have been confined to the domestic sphere, appearing as mothers and keepers of the household budget. Aside from 1929, when some women were shown as dominant political actors, poster portrayals of femininity have remained a remarkably stable presence. Posters of the 2010 election reinforced this conclusion. Of the six posters produced for the Conservative campaign ‘I’ve never voted before, but’ one of the men was depicted in paid employment [Figure 6.4] while the other man was seen holding his child and praising the Tories for sorting out the NHS. Of the four women featured in the campaign two declared an interest in families and children, while the other two thought the Conservatives would solve Britain’s ‘broken’ society and MP’s expenses.¹⁹ Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs highlighted that during in 2010 there was across the manifestos a concentration on families with a particular focus on improving family life especially the work

¹⁹ For the whole campaign see EURO RSCG’s website, <http://conservatives.eurorscg.com/never-voted-tory-before/>, [accessed 3 January 2013]

life balance. This however, was not evident in the posters. As Campbell and Childs highlight most people do not read manifestos and ‘those watching the news or reading the newspapers would instead have seen a presidential electoral campaign with policies for women and women politicians pushed to the sidelines.’²⁰ It was clear that the Conservative poster campaign did little to disprove such a conclusion.

While we can point towards a relatively stable depiction of gender across the century, class has proved a much more fluid signifier. Until the 1950s, the class of those protagonists who populated posters was readily identifiable. The working-class man or woman was easily distinguishable by dress, by occupation and by interest. As the century has worn on, this task has become much harder. In later posters it has becomes much more difficult to determine where those individuals – when they appear in posters – might fit into the stratas of British society. The apparent absence of class is not that surprising. Class dealignment over the course of the twentieth century has naturally led all parties towards an image of the voter defined by their ambiguity as opposed to anything else. Politicians continued to catagorise the public, yet more recent posters often no clues to quite what these new definitions look like. While the posters of 1910, 1929 and even 1950 help us better understand Conservative, Labour and Liberal visions of the people, the posters of 1997 over no real clues to the appearance of what Blair called at the 1996 party conference Essex Man. While the absence (or more accurately desertion) of class is unsurprising, what, however, has not emerged is any new distinct vision of the electorate.

6.3 The changing face of poster display

Changes in the way voters experience the billboard, is the one factor that has defined the posters shifting nature and continued relevance. Edwardian and inter-war voters saw political posters packed together on the billboard. By the end of the century posters occupied huge billboards on their own, and without the contest for the eye faced by their earlier cousins. This change was a forced one, changes to legislation quelling the egress of the manic illegal and legal fly-posting that dominated the earlier decades of the century. In this respect early political poster pioneers, such as the Liberal Charles Geake, have had their arguments’ that the most effective use of posters was to visually smash the viewers sight with as many

²⁰ R. Campbell and R. Childs, “‘Wags’, ‘Wives’ and ‘Mothers’ . . . But what about Women Politicians?” *Parliamentary Affairs*, (2010) 63: 4, pp. 762 and 773-774.

different examples as possible destroyed by a common sense view that bigger and simpler was better.

Such change has altered the characteristics of the poster. While John Hassall worked on Conservative posters based on the assumption that his designs must stand out from other examples, Saatchi & Saatchi working for the same party almost 80 years later had no such consideration. They knew what space the poster would occupy, the concern was to make it stand out from the commotion of life itself. This development reflects the changing landscape which poster have occupied. They have always been an urban form of communication. But where as at the first-half of the century they would have been mostly viewed on the street and on foot, the development of the posters both in scale and simplicity has reflected the need for communication adapted to the mass transit of public transport and increasingly the car. Indeed, a singular aspect of the poster is that even as the medium has moved from the visually complex styles of the first half of the twentieth century to the simpler ones of its latter half the need to catch attention and deliver the message quickly has always been paramount. As Peter Harle the Labour Party designer put it as early as 1948, when designing a poster: ‘Remember always that the basic idea is to present a message in such a way that ‘he who runs may read’.’²¹ It was as true then as it is now.

With posters becoming in themselves less visually rich, and the way in which they were displayed matching this trend, the move towards simplicity would seem complete. However, the history of the display of the political poster does not end with the billboard. During more recent elections posters launches have become a central way of attracting press attention. Designed exclusively for the benefit of the press, the rise of these launches has meant that in contemporary Britain posters are as likely to be seen in newspapers or on television as they are on billboards. It is telling fact that Labour put up no posters in 2010 the party only launched them.

Most recently innovation in display has come online. In 2010, there were a number of images described as ‘posters’, which only appeared via computer screens. Indeed, the Conservative response to Labour’s Cameron-as-Hunt poster was only ever depicted online.²² The speed at which the Conservatives produced their response suggested a continued dynamic role for the poster. The thesis has shown that throughout the century the poster rebuttal and parody have

²¹ P. Harle ‘Designing a poster’ *Labour Organiser*, (Oct, 1949) 28: 331, pp. 12 – 13.

²² D. Kavanagh and P. Cowley, *The British General Election of 2010*, (Hampshire: 2010) p. 144

long been a feature of campaigns. The reproduction of posters by cartoonists and the reuse of symbols by rival parties was part of the cut-and-thrust of elections. Posters have never been a static form of communication, and the development of digital billboard technology looks set to increase their dynamic character. In future parties will be able to display posters which respond to events that have occurred just hours before.²³

These changes in display, from billboard to launch, from launch to internet, demonstrate that as electioneering in general has innovated, so the poster has fitted in with such innovation. Although the poster by 2010 was in election terms an ancient form of campaigning, it had not been a static form. This rather contested relationship between the, to some eyes, old-fashioned form of communication but one highly adaptable to current forms of campaigning was demonstrated with the Liberal Democrat ‘Labservative’ campaign. This launch of a spoof new party involved a series of images designed by the Iris agency and communicated via social networking sites. The campaign, which was not branded as Liberal Democrat, attempted to generate a national dialogue about the mutual failings of the other two main protagonists. The spoof party had its own logo and cynical tag line, *For more of the same* and leader ‘Gorvid Camerown’. As a parody, the Labservatives deployed the tropes associated with a genuine campaign such as a Party Election Broadcast and posters. It was a three cornered demonstration that posters were associated with the old, as they were linked to these apparently staid parties: that even in this more contemporary of campaigns posters had a role and finally and perhaps most importantly the symbolic importance of the poster to electioneering. In order to appear real, this fake campaign required posters.

If this thesis has any validity, then reports of the death of the poster have been greatly exaggerated. Parties have constantly changed the way they have communicated with those whose votes they want. Yet, despite the coming of cinema, radio, television and the internet, the poster remains a central feature of all party campaigning. But is that which appears on computers screens still, technically, a ‘poster’ or has it been transmuted into another form. If we return to Carlo Arturo Quintavalle’s definition highlighted at the very start of this thesis, we get to the heart of the poster’s longevity. It is the ‘rapport between image and word’ that defines them, and it is because of the centrality of this ‘rapport’ to British election

²³ The original Labour Gene-as-Hunt poster appeared as a digital billboard and launched by the Miliband brothers. See photograph in ‘Ed Miliband must trade in a grand plan for a careful watching brief’ *Telegraph Online*, 25 Oct 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/maryriddell/8086012/Ed-Miliband-must-trade-in-a-grand-plan-for-a-careful-watching-brief.html> [accessed 11 Jan 2014]

communication that those online ‘posters’ are defined as such. Given that, politicians will still use the poster in one form or another for generations to come.

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BL : British Library

BUSC : University of Bristol Special Collections

CCA : Churchill College Archives Centre

CPA : Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive

CUL : Cambridge University Library

Gallery Oldham

HAT : The History of Advertising Trust

HCL: House of Commons Library

JHC : University of Essex, John Hassall Collection

LHASC : People's History Museum Labour History Archive Study Centre

LSE : London School of Economics

Mundaneum :

NUSC : Nottingham University Special Collections

PA : Parliamentary Archives

PHM: People's History Museum

WLCT: Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust

Official Publications

Hansard

Party publications

Conservative Agents Journal

Labour Organiser

Liberal Monthly

Tribune

Newspapers

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