

Chapter 9

Conclusion

From Old Labour to New Labour: Shifts and Evolution

In this thesis the ideological and strategic shifts from Old Labour to New Labour in Malta have been analysed. Research using the historical and comparative approach has been used. A Gramscian and Althusserian theoretical framework has been applied in order to understand the shifts in question within their respective social contexts.

This thesis has used a number of theoretical concepts, which can be grouped under the following headings:

- A. Overdetermination and Conjuncture
- B. Political Ideology and Strategy
- C. Hegemony and State Power
- D. Crisis of Hegemony

In turn, variables in each theoretical concept have been compared and contrasted by means of a systematic comparative approach which singles out unique features in each concept, in order to

explain change and/or continuity. In this way, an analysis of ideological and strategic shifts has been conducted, incorporating important variables within the Gramscian and Althusserian theoretical frameworks. These revolve around hegemony and overdetermination.

This methodological approach permits a systematic analysis of data, in such a way that arguments are based on evidence, related to discourse or empirical evidence such as statistical data.

The overdetermining factors that have been taken into consideration reveal that Old and New Labour in Malta were operating within conjunctures which were different in many aspects yet similar in others. Between the early 1970s and the late 1990s economic, political and ideological factors that differed included the role of the state, the class structure, international political influence as well as a less polarised political scenario.

It has been shown that during the period in question, the Maltese economy underwent various shifts within a mixed-economy industrial framework. It was transformed from a newly industrialised economy with heavy state intervention, import controls and wage/prize freezes to an increasingly liberalised economy within which consumption rates increased by hefty amounts. Therefore, by the time that New Labour was in power the state had a much less central role in the economy. The economic changes were accompanied by a shift within the class structure of Maltese society, which changed from being predominantly working-class during the Old Labour era to being predominantly middle-class during the New Labour era.

It has also been shown that both Maltese society and the Malta Labour Party were influenced by the economic, political and social changes within an international framework. The post cold war

political setting had become increasingly globalised. In many instances free markets and liberal democracy replaced command economies and state centralism. Social Democracy in Britain and Europe witnessed several shifts. Various Social Democratic Parties, including Britain's Labour Party, moved from the concept of traditional Social Democracy which relied almost exclusively on working-class support and which was based on a post-war traditional welfare state, a national economy and strong state bureaucracy, to a renewed idea of Social Democracy. This also incorporated and still incorporates the middle-classes, and which was and still is based on a free-market economy, social responsibility and a reformed welfare state within a globalised framework and with pro-European Union policies. Certain ideological and strategic shifts carried out by the British and European Social Democratic Parties – such as the incorporation of the middle class within its strategy and the ideological commitment to open up markets - influenced the Malta Labour Party. However, a major difference concerned their foreign policies – for example the Malta Labour Party did not incorporate pro-EU policies. At the same time, while Old Labour was very much influenced by anti-colonial politics which emphasised national liberation, this did not apply to New Labour.

On the other hand, one important factor that was quite similar in Malta between the 1970s and the 1990s was the peoples' prioritisation of materialist and traditionalist values. Post-materialist values were present in both periods, most probably to a larger extent among the upcoming generation of the 1990s, but materialism and traditionalism consistently prevailed as the dominant ideologies. Thus, the dominant ideologies during the two periods evolved. This means that if one were to use Mill's method of agreement (See Chapter 2), one could conclude that while all other factors greatly influenced the changes within the Malta Labour Party, the similarity of value systems between the 1970s and the 1990s was an important factor which had to be prioritised by both Old and New Labour in order to be electable and hegemonic.

Regarding political polarisation, however, there were differences between the two Labour eras. During the New Labour era Malta was much less politically polarised than during the Old Labour era. This showed a shift from political polarisation to political openness.

With regard to political ideology and strategy, one conclusion of this thesis is that the resultant shifts which took place from Old Labour to New Labour included the Party's *ideological* embracing of a free market economy within a stable modern democratic framework which optimises efficiency, deficit reduction and pluralism. While both Old and New Labour emphasised the importance of the mixed economy and a strong welfare state within an industrial framework, New Labour no longer stressed heavy state intervention and the State's obligation to provide or guarantee work, as was the case with Old Labour. Under Sant's leadership the Party experienced a shift in its economic policy with regard to its emphasis on the private sector as the motor of the economy, as well as in the priority of austerity measures to tackle the country's deficit.

The shifts also included the Party's *strategic* method. Old Labour was strategically *exclusive*: It aimed to be pro working class and created a durable historic bloc with the General Workers' Union, thereby ushering in state capitalism and enhancing industrialisation. It was also repressive in certain aspects and discouraged pluralism. The Mintoffian slogan '*min mhux maghna huwa kontra taghna*¹' summed up the strategy of Old Labour.

Conversely New Labour was strategically *inclusive*. It aimed to include the middle class together with the working class in its strategy, thus creating a historic bloc. It also aimed to be

government for all Maltese citizens, irrespective of their political beliefs, thus doing away with Old Labour repression and lack of pluralism. New Labour strategy could be symbolised by Alfred Sant's slogan '*min mhux kontra taghna huwa maghna*²'. Therefore, a shift towards inclusiveness occurred from Old Labour to New Labour. New Labour managed to emerge victorious in the 1996 general elections, but, unlike Old Labour, it failed to bring about a historic bloc.

As regards ideology, the major shift from Old Labour to New Labour was that *pragmatism was now prioritised over socialist ideology*. While Old Labour emphasised socialism, workerism and patronage, New Labour emphasised pragmatism and accepted change. On the other hand, New Labour evolved from Old Labour in some other aspects, thus maintaining continuity with its predecessor. These included the *prioritisation of materialist aspirations*, whether in terms of Labour's strong nationalistic tendencies or in terms of the Party's prioritisation of industrial growth within a strong welfare state.

Regarding Labour's foreign policy, Old Labour emphasised the need for neutrality and non-alignment, Malta's Mediterranean credentials, and the economic dimension of international relations within a nationalistic ideological setting. New Labour's foreign policy was also based on nationalistic ideology, and prioritised Malta's Euro-Mediterranean credentials. New Labour opposed Malta's membership within the European Union. While the foreign policy of New Labour evolved in various aspects from that of Old Labour, a shift occurred in that New Labour emphasised the need for free trade in its international policies.

¹ Tr. from Maltese: 'those not with us are against us'

² Tr. from Maltese: 'those not against us are with us'

One important aspect of the evolved continuity from Old to New Labour was the strength of the Party's leader. Both leaders had extensive control over the Party, but they used radically different leadership styles. This degree of power could be related to the traditionalist Maltese values which legitimise the authority of the father figure. Thus, while Dom Mintoff was a charismatic leader whose personality cult also prevailed under Mifsud Bonnici's leadership of the country, Alfred Sant was a leader who used modern managerial methods and who controlled the Party machine. Although the degree to which Dom Mintoff was able to control the violent and corrupt elements of the Party is a matter of debate, it could be argued that Mintoff did not do much to stop such elements from causing havoc.

With regard to the downfall of Old Labour and New Labour, materialist values within Maltese society had a very important role to play. On the one hand one reason why Old Labour crumbled could be related to its conflicting economic policies. The inward-looking and protectionist policies did not meet the economic aspirations of certain classes and categories of people. Indeed, Old Labour experienced conflicts with or lack of support from sections of middle class as well as parts of the working class such as the upwardly mobile ones.

On the other hand the austerity measures taken by New Labour did not go down well with people who had become used to a relatively stable and comfortable economic situation brought about by the economic liberalisation policies under the Nationalists. This alienated working-class voters and disappointed the self-employed who expected much more from the New Labour Government.

Both Old and New Labour faced unstable situations during their years of rule, the former principally due to violence and the instability after the perverse result of the 1981 elections, the

latter primarily due to the fact that the Government, having a one-seat majority, was held ransom by Dom Mintoff.

With regard to internal Party struggles, this factor was not of major significance under Old Labour, but on the other hand many non-Labourites were alienated due to repression and patronage. Conversely New Labour faced considerable internal struggles, resulting in the departure of influential members. Moderate elements such as Lino Spiteri and George Abela and Mintoffian elements like Dom Mintoff himself and Alex Sceberras Trigona were alienated from the Party. Besides various Labourites were dissatisfied with the New Labour '*min mhux kontra taghna huwa maghna*' policy.

Both Old and New Labour faced Nationalist counter-hegemonic forces which were perceived by the majority of the electorate as being more socially conscious and conducive to a better economic situation and political stability. The Nationalist Party under Old Labour rule presented itself as a populist, modern and moderate alternative which would bring about national unity. Under New Labour, the Nationalist Party presented itself as being socially conscious, moderate and credible.

In short, in its development from Old Labour to New Labour, the Malta Labour Party was characterised both by ideological and strategic shifts as well as by an evolutionary process.

Further Research

It is suggested that further studies should be undertaken to enrich the sociological analysis of the relationship between Old Labour to New Labour in Malta.

- *A quantitative survey on peoples' perceptions of Old Labour and New Labour:* Such a survey would interview people by means of quantitative techniques, whereby the respondents would be asked to give their opinions on what they think of Old Labour and New Labour, whether they identify shifts and similarities, and their opinions of the successes and failures of the two variants of the Malta Labour Party from the 1970s onwards.
- *A qualitative survey of the perceptions of Labour's key figures:* This would involve extended interviews with key figures of the Malta Labour Party, who would be asked to give full accounts of what they consider Old and New Labour to represent.
- *A comparative study which also incorporates the pre-1971 Malta Labour Party:* This could utilise methodological and theoretical frameworks similar to those used in this thesis, wherein stages of development and possible shifts within the Party could be analysed.
- *A study on the strategy and ideology of the post-1998 Malta Labour Party:* This study would utilise methodological and theoretical frameworks similar to those used in this thesis. It would be verified whether post-1998 Labour is an extension of New Labour, or whether it represented another phase in the history of the Party.
- *A study on change in leadership styles from Old Labour to New Labour:* This study would adopt a Weberian approach to analyse the possible shift from a Party led by a charismatic leader to a Party led by a legal-rational leader and equipped with a professional bureaucratic party machine.

Conclusion

This thesis has tested the hypothesis that various strategic and ideological shifts have taken place from Old Labour to New Labour in Malta and that simultaneously, Old Labour and New Labour also shared common evolutionary features. The hypothesis also stated that the shifts and evolutions from Old Labour to New Labour, as well as the respective degree of political success were directly related to economic, political and ideological factors arising from the social contexts within which Old and New Labour operated.

The findings, have confirmed the hypothesis. Therefore, the thesis concludes that various strategic and ideological shifts have taken place from Old Labour to New Labour in Malta. These include ideological shifts in economic policy and the role of the state, as well as strategic shifts in political strategy and class and Party interests. Old Labour was characterised by its pro-working-class and pro-Labourite exclusive strategies and policies, as well as its ideological commitment in favour of heavy state intervention within the economy. On the other hand New Labour was characterised by its inclusive strategies which also aimed to incorporate, among others, the middle class and non-Labourites, and by its ideological stance in favour of the dominant role of the private sector within the economy. Within the industrial mixed-economy, Old Labour emphasised the obligation to provide or guarantee work, while New Labour stressed the need to tackle the deficit problem.

The shifts in question were very much influenced by the political and economic changes in Maltese society between the 1970s and the 1990s. By the 1990s the world had become

increasingly globalised. The free market and liberal democracy had gained the upper hand over centralised statism of the command type. In turn Malta was transformed from a newly industrialised mixed-economy with heavy state intervention to a progressively liberalised mixed-economy with high consumption rates. During the period in question Malta was also transformed to a middle-class society and political polarisation decreased considerably.

On the other hand Old Labour and New Labour shared common evolutionary features such as the ideological emphasis on the importance of the (industrial) economy, nationalism and the welfare state. They also were both similar in that the Party leader was very powerful within the Party. The evolutionary features were very much influenced by the continued dominance of materialist and traditionalist values among the Maltese.

By means of this thesis that I have shown that Old Labour and New Labour were not characterised by simple straightforward continuity. Neither were they two forms of distinct entities, with no relationship to each other. It was a question of shifts and evolution at the same time.