

Lewis Minkin

Born 1936. Historian of the Labour Party.
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1. Obituary by David Howell

The following obituary of Lewis Minkin was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Guardian. It was written by David Howell, and was published on 5th April 2021.

Scholar of the Labour party, its constituent trade unions and how they voted at the annual conference.

In a past that was another country the annual Labour party conference was a significant gathering. Its set-piece debates were often truculent and sometimes sulphurous. The political analyst Lewis Minkin, who has died aged 84, was a perennial spectator. His interest lay not so much in the public spectacle as in its backstage hinterland.

The party leadership was always keen to secure what was euphemistically seen as a good conference – one that avoided embarrassing defeats. Lewis became the expert on the Machiavellian arts of party managers seeking to marginalise critics and of critics attempting to defeat the leadership.

In particular he was massively knowledgeable on the complex decision-making within each major union, with its consequences for the casting of its block vote. This ubiquitous figure with his laser-like focus and his briefcase bulging with documents became a necessary and supportive adviser for journalists. His assessments eschewed the stereotypical and the simplistic; he understood and presented this hidden world in all its complexity and ambiguity.

This scrutiny gave rise to his book *The Labour Party Conference* (1978), a pathbreaking analysis of the party's internal processes. Lewis's own passionate support for the party-trade union link formed the basis for *The Contentious Alliance* (1991), which focused on the complexities of the relationship between the party and the trade unions at a time when he was relatively optimistic about its future.

The Blair Supremacy (2014) analysed changes in party management under New Labour. Lewis was highly critical of the managerial strategy developed under Tony Blair, while understanding the compelling reasons – not least electoral – that made many within the party go along with it.

The three volumes weighed in at more than 2,000 pages. Together, they offered the most rigorous, empirically based study of power within any British political party. Lewis produced not a static, ahistorical snapshot, but an examination of how the distribution of power and its exercise shifted through time.

He was committed to a more egalitarian and democratic society tempered by a robust concern with problems of practicality. These values were most

apparent in his favourite book, *Exits and Entrances* (1997), in which he explored his own complex and tortuous working practices.

Born in Leeds, Lewis was the son of Annie (Esther Ann, nee Richards) and Bob (Barnet) Minkin, who both worked in the tailoring trade. One of Lewis's earliest memories was of clothes arriving at the house for his mother to add buttons. Bob's family had migrated from Tsarist Russia around 1890, probably to escape the danger of pogroms. Annie's family had moved from Staffordshire to Yorkshire to work in the mines. Lewis was shaped by the working-class cultures of both parents.

From his mother he also inherited a pitch-perfect voice and developed a massive repertoire of songs. An early ambition was to be a comedian on the Northern Working Men's Club circuit. His skills as a raconteur with impeccable timing and a smattering of Yiddish evoked Jewish traditions of humour and story telling. His father also introduced him to rugby league at a very early age, and Lewis's commitment to Leeds rugby league endured.

At primary school he experienced appalling anti-semitism. A scholarship gave him entry to Roundhay school, where in the late 1940s working-class pupils were scarce. He left aged 15 with no qualifications and worked in a variety of clerical jobs; his national service was in Cyprus during the Eoka campaign.

His early involvement in Labour politics came as a leftwing activist in Leeds, a city whose MPs were solidly on the right. He entered Leeds University as a mature student in 1963, and impressed Peter Nettle, the biographer of Rosa Luxemburg. Lewis made a significant contribution to Nettle's *The Soviet Achievement* (1967), an account of the development of the Soviet Union.

After graduating with a first in politics (1966) he went on to postgraduate work at York University. In 1969 he joined the department of government at Manchester University, initially as a research associate, but soon becoming a lecturer and eventually senior lecturer. At his first research presentation, he bewitched his audience with a blend of humour and sheer intellectual power. He carried these skills into his teaching but was a semi-detached member of the department.

In the late 1970s, he was a political adviser on TV productions, working with the director Roland Joffé on Trevor Griffiths' series *Bill Brand*, about an eponymous leftwing politician, and on some of Jim Allen's plays, including *The Spongers*.

The higher education changes of the 1980s meant that the research culture he cherished was withering. He took a very early retirement from Manchester in 1989. His concern with creativity led him to take up visiting professorships at Leeds Metropolitan and Sheffield Hallam universities.

His politics had shifted towards what he called the centre-left. From Neil Kinnock's election as Labour party leader until the Blair years, he was involved in discussions within Labour's leadership group. Such participation did not mean any loss of rigour in his assessments of those with whom he collaborated and argued.

In this area his proudest achievement came through serving as vice-chair of a new National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, which produced the policy document *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (1999). It included Lewis's definition of creativity as "imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value" and which "is possible in all fields of human intelligence". The report was met with much interest, and a pilot scheme of creativity partnerships between schools and outside creative professionals was established in 2002, and taken up more widely in 2004.

In 1988 Lewis married Liz St David Smith (nee Hughes). She survives him, along with her son, Tom, and Lewis's son, Daniel, from his first marriage, to Lillie Plews, which ended in divorce, and four grandchildren.

2. Yorkshire Post Obituary

The following obituary of Lewis Minkin was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Yorkshire Post. It was published on 20th March 2021.

Professor Lewis Minkin, political historian.

Lewis Minkin, who has died at 84, was a scholar of the Labour and trade union movements, respected and renowned for his trio of analytical studies of the party under Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair's leadership.

His work was rigorous, based on honest and demanding research; his knowledge immense and unmatched. He developed a unique combination of academic and advisory roles, especially after writing Kinnock's 1983 speech on reforming the defeated Labour Party, and was known as someone whose independent and creative judgement came from a deep understanding of Labour politics.

"The party has to become an admired, attractive and obvious example of fairness and transparency," he wrote in 2014 in *The Blair Supremacy*.

His thinking was informed by his Leeds and Jewish working class upbringing. His father was Barnet Minkin, known as Bob, who was born in the Gorbals in 1895, but whose older brothers had come from Gomel, now in Belarus. The family moved to escape the increasing danger of pogroms, and settled in Leeds to work in the tailoring trade when Barnet was six months old.

His mother was Esther Ann Richards, known as Annie, whose family moved to Allerton Bywater for the mining work. She and Barnet married in 1935, in both Leeds Register office and the synagogue after Annie converted to Judaism.

Lewis was born in June 1936, an only child. He attended Meanwood Road Infants, and then Sheepscar Primary, suffering many instances of antisemitism which haunted him all his life.

In 1947, he passed the entrance exam to Roundhay – then a solidly middle-class institution. The teachers failed to recognise his talents and he left at 15 with no qualifications, finding work at the Burtons tailoring factory.

National Service followed with the RAF Signals in Cyprus, from where he got the last plane out to Malta before the Suez crisis. Back home, aged 26, his determination to learn got him a place at Leeds University's department of politics. He graduated with a First and later received a doctorate from York University.

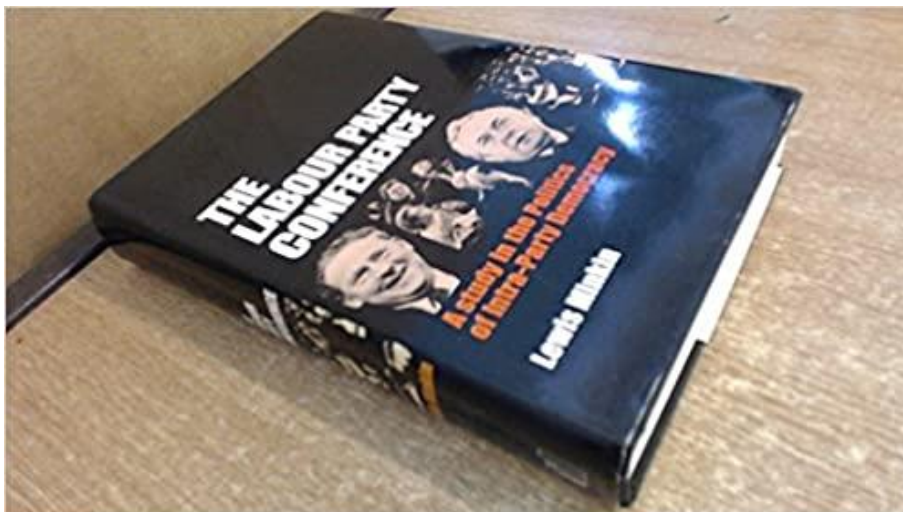
He worked at the Manchester University department of government for 20 years, becoming a senior lecturer in 1980, and was political adviser to several TV documentaries. He was visiting professor at Leeds Beckett and Sheffield Hallam Universities, and honorary professor at Leeds University.

In 1997 he published the book closest to his heart, *Exits and Entrances: Political Research as a Creative Art*. In it he wrote that failure “is not necessarily a disaster, nor need it be a full stop. It can represent an opportunity”.

He married Liz in 1988. He had one son Daniel, to his first wife, Lillie, a stepson and four grandsons.

3. Book: Labour Party Conference, 1978

Labour Party Conference, a Study in Intra-party Democracy by Lewis Minkin was published by Allen Lane in 1978.



This book was reviewed, along with two of Lewis Minkin's later books, by Eric Shaw of the University of Stirling in the journal Party Politics in 2016. Shaw's review includes the following:

Minkin is the author of two outstanding works The Labour Party Conference (Minkin, 1978) and his study of the party-union relationship, The Contentious Alliance (Minkin 1991), and The Blair Supremacy will consolidate his reputation as the party's most outstanding scholar. It demonstrates an intimate and detailed knowledge of all aspects of the British Labour Party's organisation and politics and an unrivalled grasp of the subtleties and nuances of its internal relationships.

4. Book: The Contentious Alliance, 1992

The Contentious Alliance, Trade Unions and the Labour Party, by Lewis Minkin was published by the Edinburgh University Press in 1992. The following is extracted from a review of the book by Jonathan Zeitlin, published in 1995 in the ILR Review.

The relationship between trade unions and the British Labour Party, as Lewis Minkin points out, has no direct parallel elsewhere in the international labour movement. While unions are collectively affiliated to labour or social democratic parties in Norway, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and Canada, in none of these cases does their voting power predominate at the national party level as in the United Kingdom (pp. 362, 386-87). Over the past dozen years, however, increasingly strong pressures have built up toward the diminution of the unions' role within the party, and the possibility of a separation or divorce between the two is now widely canvassed. Thus in 1990, the unions' voting power at the Party Conference, its sovereign policy-making body, was cut from 90% to 70%; in 1992, one-member-one-vote rules were introduced for the selection of parliamentary candidates, thereby reducing the weight of union bloc votes at the constituency level; and Tony Blair, the new party leader, announced immediately after his election in the summer of 1994 that the unions would enjoy no special access to a future Labour Government.



Minkin's monumental study is an indispensable guide to understanding both the past and the future of the intimate yet volatile relationship between the unions and the Labour Party.

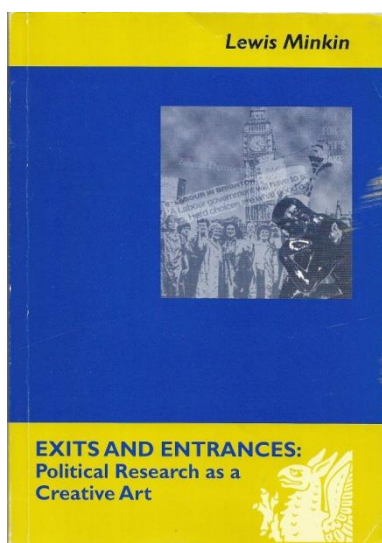
An extensive review of this book by Eric Shaw, which was published in 2003, is archived as Part 2 of this life story. It was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the www.manchesterhive.com website.

5. Book: Exits and Entrances, 1997



Lewis Minkin on the launch of Exits and Entrances at the Labour Party conference in Brighton.

Exits and Entrances, Political Research as a Creative Art, by Lewis Minkin was published in 1997 by Sheffield Hallam University Press.



The following review of Exits and Entrances by David McKie was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Guardian.

Indescribable Joy - and Pain - of Creation

In every society, and especially in one as media-driven as this one, there must be an honoured place for the awkward sod who stands in the way as the crowd stampedes after the latest fashion, waging before them a lump of awkward evidence and demanding 'But what about this?'

One such useful obstacle is Lewis Minkin, an academic specialising in Labour and union politics, whose classic book on the Labour Party

conference, published in 1978, prodded common assumptions with such diligence and accuracy that no person of judgement could afterward venture on to this territory without taking a peek at Minkin first.

Now Minkin has written an astonishing book about creative research; or to be more precise, about his own creative research, which is clearly rather more taxing than some other people's. Sometimes the book is joyful; a celebration of the pleasures that come from all forms of creation, 'producing the feeling that you want to sing at the richness of it'. Elsewhere it is full of pain. 'I went', he writes at one point, 'through psychological responses that threatened my nervous system and my personal life'. Hardly surprising, when he introduces the reader to the debates which constantly go on in his head: a sort of 'theatre of the mind', as he calls it, involving aspects of himself arranged as a cast of characters. The Detective, busily scenting and tracking; the Patternmaker, who tries to make sense of it all, and who's further sub-divided into artist and realist; and who is also a juggler.

There's his own Awkward Sod, who often starts a row in his head by saying 'No it doesn't.' or 'No it isn't.' (This character is actually wrong most of the time, but he can't be ignored, because now and then he is right.) And the Chattering Monkey. 'The fact is', Minkin confesses, 'that there is talk taking place incessantly in my head and I am nattering away like some demented old man on a park bench'. Much of it uncontrolled, patternless, meaningless: and yet suddenly something fresh and constructive will often come out of it. And then, a kind of tribunal of critics - his 'Vicious Circle' - constantly testing conclusions tell him he's plausible, or pretentious. He feels they're out there to destroy him 'the bastards').

This mental fight is sometimes hard to contain. Stress words abound: conditions of nightmare, 'bouts of deep anxiety', 'crucial moments balanced on a knife edge'. On holiday in Vienna, designed as a recuperation after he's finished a book, he wakes in the night with the revelation that the argument of chapter six is out of kilter with chapter two; for three days and nights he wrestles with this. In his preface, he apologises to his wife for 'the piles of paper and demented behaviour'. At times you suspect she's a saint.

His candour makes him vulnerable. One imagines some external circle of critics demanding to know what all this is about. What makes him think (when he's published so little!) that he's anything special? Bit of a solipsist, eh? To which one can only reply that those who have dealt with Minkin over the years have come to respect his scholarship, his integrity and his drivenness, and know it is not like that.

What he asserts, in his rash and unbuttoned candour, is the right of creative researchers to set their own boundaries. Thirty years ago, he says in a moment of uncharacteristic bitterness, he took it for granted that the

purpose of university research was not the pursuit of institutional competitive advantage but the furtherance of scholarship and learning. Now that's threatened by a presiding mentality that wants payment by results, which implicitly says to researchers: finish on time; don't get too deeply involved; if you see a risky terrain, better keep clear of it. Creativity is muffled and stifled. Of course research must be managed: but one's dealing with flux, not stasis, and work must be allowed to flow and to grow. It must even allow for failure: even failure can open a door to something good and necessary.

I cannot imagine that those who disburse scarce resources will be all that impressed by this. If all researchers worked like Minkin, drove themselves as mercilessly, re-examined and re-examined to the point of destroying large parts of the edifice and starting afresh, the sum of published research would be sharply diminished. But if nobody worked at all like Minkin we'd be left with perfunctory slices of work, tailored to fashion. As he says, it's a balance. 'the exaltation of the possible combined with the art of the attainable'. But learning in any true sense of the word, however it's funded, must always mean the continuing Minkinite practice of what T.H.Huxley described as 'the slaying of beautiful hypotheses by ugly facts'.

The following review of Exits and Entrances by Arthur Lipow was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Books section of the Times Higher.

Minkin: A Play in Several Acts

It is no surprise to research scholars to be told that academic publications rarely reveal much about the nature of the research process by which they emerged. There is, as the distinguished scientist, Peter Medawar, put it, an element of the fraudulent in most scholarly work: the finished product offered to the world obscures an important story about the true gestation of the work.

Since the mid-1970s there have been various attempts by British social scientists to reveal his other dimension to their work. However, the coverage of the research activity of academics in the field of politics has up until now not been very well served in this respect and if it does nothing else Lewis Minkin's work fill an important gap as far as political field research is concerned. But Exits and Entrances: Political Research as a Creative Art does indeed do something else - sometimes with a much broader significance in social science research. It gives us a distinctive analytical study of the creative process of the mind at work in research over a long period.

In his studies of the British Labour party, *The Labour Party Conference* (1978) and *The Contentious Alliance* (1991), Minkin has over 30 years

emerged as the defining and creative scholar in his field, producing huge and seminal texts which have changed our understanding of the way that the Labour party worked over its first 90 years.

His analytical study in his latest work of the process by which his ideas emerged and developed and of the interdependence of psychological and intellectual abilities in research work, draws from wide reading in the literature on creativity but locates it squarely within the subjectivity of the author's own experience of the practicalities and opportunities, exits and entrances, of the creative process in scholarship. He does this by an approach to his own activities that is reflective and introspective, appropriately balanced yet closely linked with personal emotional and motivational responses and with a range of autobiographical developments.

Minkin dropped out of school at the age of 15 with no qualifications or ambitions and a deep sense of failure. What he describes is the subsequent development of ambition - a personal project to understand and change the political world allied to an odyssey to develop the ability to think. Inspired as a mature student by reading the work of Brewster Ghiselin and alerted by his own observational vigilance about his mental activities this odyssey became, in time, an attempt to develop and build upon his own creativity.

Minkin's inner creative life as a researcher and writer is described in particularly illuminating terms in the coverage of what he calls his 'theatre of the mind' - that assembly of functions and characters through which the creative process takes place. In this drama we encounter not only the Detective and the Pattern-maker, as well as the Player, the Explorer, and the Pilgrim, but also the Chattering Monkey and the Awkward Sod.

At various times in this theatre there are constant battles - sometimes between two different Pattern-makers, an artist and a realist, as well as between different kinds of critics - the Destructive Critic and the Creative Critic and an entire Vicious Circle of Critics.

What emerges from the conflicts and communications of these characters is an original work and a remarkably honest self-portrayal. It is one of the many features which make this a valuable study. To an unusual degree among academics Minkin is prepared to reveal faults and weaknesses, and to dwell on the anxieties of the scholar's work - 'the sleepless nights, the daily fights, the quick toboggan when you reach the heights'. The 'Vienna Panic' that he describes is both enlightening and very funny. Even more unusual the work begins and ends with the theme of failure - a bold theme in these times and a theme which Minkin views positively in motivational and intellectually creative terms.

Throughout the work Minkin offers us an insight into a variety of his personal methods. Perhaps the section which most academics (an

particularly most postgraduate students) will find alluringly useful is the chapter where Minkin describes his various modes of heuristic thinking. These are interventions which seek to change perception, generate alternatives and enlarge possibilities in such a way as to generate the emergence of original insights. What he gives us are his personal techniques - in essence the tricks of the trade - in pursuing the creative activity of field research.

He is not claiming comprehensiveness in these techniques nor that there is one true path, methodology or mode of work. Minkin is a methodological pluralist and a believer that creativity can emerge in a variety of ways and around different methodologies. In his own work he is a classic lone scholar but he recognises that creativity can be produced jointly or in collective enterprise. The self-reliance that also marks his style of work is linked to a commitment to mutuality, not least in a convincing plea for a new sharing of experiences, a more open dialogue among research scholars about their personal creative processes, including their personal techniques of thinking. In leading the way he reveals much of his own methods in a way which will prove to be a godsend to a generation of research scholars. There is of course an acute dilemma in his account which is acknowledged in the study but might have been explored further. It is likely that only a scholar absolute secure in the achievements made and acknowledge in a particular field could have the confidence to drop so much of the protective mask and reveal so much of the real working experience. And perhaps only a scholar with the time away from the increasingly pressurised nature of university bureaucratic obligations and the neo-Stakhanovism of the research assessment exercise would find the time to involve themselves in reflection and publications with this depth of self-analysis.

All of which reinforces the case Minkin makes towards the end of his study, where he moves away from his own work to discuss briefly the potentialities of university as centres of creativity. In this he draws attention to what he describes as the degeneration of the culture of research in universities - the dangers of fulfilling quantitative targets and an over-preoccupation with the assessment of results. Here he gives some pertinent warnings about the dangers of ignoring the role of appropriate time and risk in the creative process. New government, research councils and research assessment exercise managers please note.

Exits and Entrances is a book to savour and stimulate for its insights into the nature of creativity not just in political research but in a wide variety of intellectual and artistic endeavours as well.

6. Book: The Blair Supremacy, 2014

The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour's Party Management by Lewis Minkin was published by the Manchester University Press in 2014. It is described thus by its publisher:

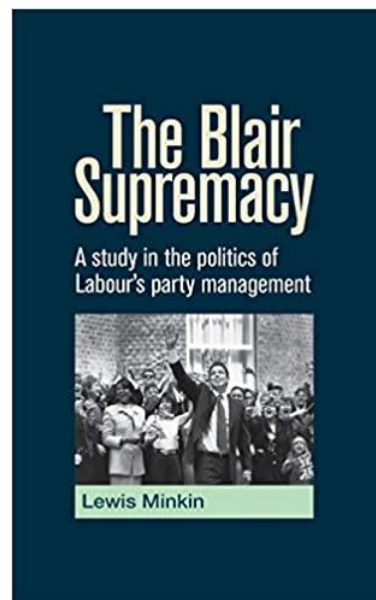
This book uncovers the under-explored function and form of Blair's party management, which attempted to control problem-causing activities, issues and developments so that outcomes were produced which the Leader and his managers considered to be in the party's best interests. The ascendancy of Blair and 'New Labour' was enhanced not only by impressive presentation of relevant positions but also in great measure by the operation of managerial facilities.

The historic origins and development of management are explored. Its relationship with trade union co-operation and restraint continued under Blair although distrustful tensions arose from his early association with ending union affiliation. Blair's managerial version brought into an intensive and extensive system some distinctive new features. Specially noted is the covert redefinition of party officials as political organisers, operating primarily for the Leader rather than as the party's civil servants.

This became the beginning of what is best described as a rolling coup, with unilateral extensions over the years enhancing the resources of the leadership and particularly promoting and defending the Leader's strong role. There were new managerial attitude, and in practice an informal managerial code of conduct, which differed from the official code.

The study reveals many Leader-managerial controlling successes yet this was not the Blair supremacy it was presented to be. The assumptions of Blair's management involved key miscalculations, and encountered and provoked important limitations. And it had counter-productive consequences, including unexpected resistance within the management itself, and later, some important adverse public reactions.

The following review was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the www.redpepper.com website. It was written in December 2014 by Alan Simpson, a backbench Labour MP throughout Labour's time in office.



Inside New Labour's rolling coup: the Blair Supremacy

Reading Lewis Minkin's new book *The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour's Party Management* is like sitting alongside a skilled forensic scientist as he dissects the multi-layered elements that contributed to the death of the body in front of him. This isn't quite where Blair (right) left the Labour Party, but it's not far short.



The book reads like a thriller. What makes it captivating is Minkin's grasp of the scrupulous planning that went into Blair's managerialist coup, which, for a time, took ownership of both the Labour Party and the country. Minkin reports a 'wry comment from Blair describing "New Labour" as "the newest political party on the scene and the smallest. It has about five people."' 'From within New Labour,' Minkin continues, 'the takeover of the party by this small minority was quietly and sometimes boastfully acknowledged to be a coup d'état over the party.'

Minkin describes it as a 'rolling coup' in that 'it involved a series of unilateral major moves over several years'. These moves are what the book reveals.

I once described how the Blairite revolution turned Labour from a political party into a Tupperware party, but I was wrong. The description is far too benign. No one falls out of love with Tupperware, at least not in the way the country fell out of love with Blair. Tupperware is also as useful to the poor as to the rich. And Tupperware never stripped meaning and values from everything it touched. Blairism did. In doing so, it ruthlessly exploited (and then dumped) a lot of decent people whose lives had been devoted to the Labour Party.

Even today, many of these – MPs as well as party loyalists – have difficulty acknowledging how extensively, and cynically, they were taken for such a ride. For them, the book should be compulsory reading.

If it has a weakness, Minkin's analysis falls short only in the absence of a meta-narrative; this is something like explaining the Chilean coup without any reference to the USA. I shall return to this later.

Reluctant admiration

The Blairite plan was never just to lead the Labour Party, but to emasculate it. To do so, every aspect of the party's machinery of governance had to be subjugated to the leader's whim. Minkin takes the reader on a step-by-step journey through this process and the machinations that lay behind it.

Minkin describes the greatest unity of the small vanguard of 'modernisers' as their shared 'negative appraisal of the party, including and particularly its affiliated unions and associated collective body – the TUC.'

Minkin's dissection covers the entirety of my parliamentary life (and more). It always puzzled me how, despite all the warnings and bollockings, I never got expelled from the parliamentary party. Now I know.

It wasn't that Blair's ultras lacked a desire for purges; it was just that they screwed up more often than they expected. Their 'managerialist' obsessions, which politically house-trained the party, created a space in which MPs, whips and others still backed away from pooping on their own carpet. The machine knew that Blair would get the blame – ultimate proof that his control-freakery had no limits. And since protecting the leader had already displaced promoting the party as the Supremacy's overriding duty, the hounds always got called off.

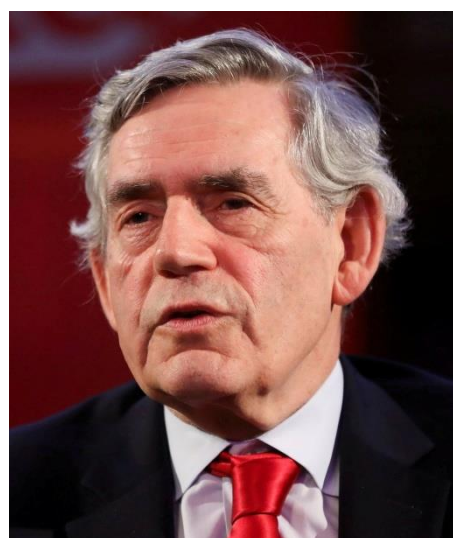
To be fair, some of this was also down to the wiser counsel of whips such as Nick Brown and George Mudie. Both were better people than the Supremacy deserved, and it was good to see Minkin recognise this in his description of events. I guess that many of the Labour rebels were also saved by divisions between the Blair and Brown (below) camps, in what was to become the running distraction throughout the Labour years in government.

The Blair-Brown distraction

For me, the friction between these two characters – equally damaged, equally obsessive – was often a manipulated divide, spun out to lock the parliamentary party into the smallness of playground politics rather than the bigger canvas of real politics. Loyalty invariably displaced integrity (or clarity) in the debates of the day.

Minkin captures this brilliantly in his description of the seminal moments surrounding New Labour's first internal rebellion – the vote on lone parent benefits.

'Dealing with the issue of a cut in lone parent benefit became a significant



landmark in the early management of New Labour in government, and had major consequences. For Blair and Brown,' Minkin surmises, 'showing prudence and control on this was all the more important because the left-wing Campaign group appeared to them to be the driving force of a limited opposition. They, the usual suspects, had to be faced down and publicly pulled into line some time or the other, so why not over this early issue and now?'

Minkin describes much of this as a tactical misjudgement on Brown's part rather than a cynical move on Blair's. Standing in the middle of it felt slightly different. Many of us saw no real divide between Blair and Brown. Neither showed an ability to step back and accept they may have got something wrong. Both were obsessed with demonstrating their power as leaders. Loyalty and obedience became articles of faith, outside of which Labour's world would crumble.

In the same way that the Mafia asks you to destroy something precious to demonstrate loyalty, Labour MPs were asked to give a kicking to some of the most vulnerable in society. This was a difficult step for many to take.

For the machine, however, it was the first big test of their ability to put the squeeze on people; and there were members of both the Blair and Brown camps who loved it. MPs could be leaned on, cajoled, abused or bullied, all in the name of loyalty. Many had their constituency officials phoned and told to kick their MPs into line. Some had their families phoned and told not to get too comfortable with an MP's life because they would be thrown out before the next election. All were told it was New Labour (i.e. Blair) that they owed allegiance to. Conscience was a liability, not an asset.

Both Blair and Brown may have wished to run with their ultras' demands for a purge of the 47 rebels who ignored these entreaties, but the impact on the parliamentary party was different. Most were reluctant to expel those who went into a division lobby that their hearts told them they should have been in too. It established an Achilles heel that was (fortunately) to remain throughout the Supremacy.

Lies, damn lies and New Labour

One of the strengths of Lewis Minkin's book is its description of how all the groundwork for this managerial coup had been done long before the 1997 election. The machine may have been surprised by the scale of the Labour victory but it already knew that it would rule by manipulation and disinformation, rather than through a new era of democratic engagement.

When Blair talked of 'an unbroken line of accountability', he meant everyone, and everything, being accountable to him. His (initial) personal popularity was played out in talk of 'direct democracy' – a leader connecting directly to the people. It was a great way of sidelining every

structure of accountability that the party had ever created. Minkin describes this with painful accuracy.

Minkin details how ‘the Blair coup’ set out to turn the parliamentary left into ‘a sealed tomb’: one that would not be re-opened by new, dissenting, Labour MPs entering parliament. Under the guise of ‘improving the quality of candidates’, Blair’s machine filleted the panel of those approved for selection by ‘eliminating candidates who “appeared not to have a pragmatic line on policy disagreements”’.

At the heart of what Minkin calls the ‘rolling coup’ was Blair himself – vulnerable, charismatic, insecure and obsessive – the centrepiece of a giant political Ponzi scheme. Truth was always a moveable feast. Statistics, or supportive polling data, would always be found to justify the latest move to ‘marketise’ and individualise everything advanced by New Labour. It wasn’t just Clause Four that Blair wanted shut of; it was the whole notion of collectivism. Business, particularly big business, wanted none of it.

So it was that, under the guise of new social partnerships, huge tranches of the social fabric of Britain were transferred into the pockets of the private sector. My only quibble with Minkin is that this was as much Brown’s agenda as Blair’s. The debacle of PFI and PPP debts that remain tied round the neck of public services is their common legacy to the country, not just a Blairite one.

The shadow of Nuremberg

Without doubt Blair was a consummate performer, with an unparalleled ability to lie for any cause. It is only fitting, however, that his greatest lie should be the source of his ultimate undoing. On most issues he simply moved on and the machine behind him swept contradictory evidence under the nearest carpet. But war doesn’t work like that – not, at least, when it is a war of choice.

As the chair of Labour Against the War, I knew how far we had gone to bring real ‘evidence’ within the reach of MPs. Weapons inspectors had come into parliament, assuring us they had no evidence of any remaining weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). International diplomats had arrived urging more time, and more diplomacy. We even circulated our own detailed pamphlet to all Labour MPs on the eve of the Commons debate, dismantling the claims made in Blair’s ‘dodgy dossier’. But most of us knew that Blair had already promised Bush the war he was looking for. Nothing was going to deflect Blair from his own jihadist inclinations.

Minkin is right in depicting the debate as one of Blair’s most outstanding parliamentary moments. It was where he pushed ‘Trust me’ and ‘If you only knew what I know’ to its limits. It was some achievement to get

decent people to vote in ways that Nuremberg would have judged an inadmissible defence.

But the war, its consequences and the absence of WMDs turned out to be Blair's unforgivable sin – the lie that will dog him to the end of his days. Hubris had given the public, and the party, something to hate him for.

The meta-narrative

The only thing Lewis Minkin's book lacks is a wrap-around. For all we come to understand about the 'how' of Blair's rolling coup, there is nothing that addresses the 'why'. It isn't enough to put it all down to control-freakery. To learn anything from this, we have to put it in a context. Psychologically, Blair was always drawn towards wealth and celebrity, and has draped himself in more of it than can ever buy forgiveness. His favoured acolytes all went the same way, becoming payroll beneficiaries in everything Blair privatised. But the brains are to be found elsewhere.

My take is that Blair had long been groomed by the neoliberalism that was running away with American politics. The agenda was not to make Labour 'business-friendly' but big business-compliant. The global agenda of the time was about turning public services into corporate profit streams.

Deregulation of financial markets, the World Trade Organisation, the TRIPS agreement on intellectual property rights and a series of US adventurist wars were all part of a bigger project. The creation of new global creatures – corporate citizens – required the creation of new cultural norms within which they could flourish. Rights were to be transferred from citizens to corporations. Duties went the other way. Somewhere along this trajectory from citizens to serfs is where we are now.

Blair was not the architect of this. His shallowness, vanity and venal interests just made him a willing partner. The real Supremacy lay elsewhere.

Accolades to the invisible

Some, in parliament, understood this. And it is in a tribute to them that I want to end this review. The Campaign group of Labour MPs barely figure in Minkin's book, but they were the only bolt-hole of real political thought that I found throughout my parliamentary years. Some of their leading voices get no mention at all, yet they were the MPs you would always find on picket lines, at trade union and social movement rallies, on anti-war marches and at the forefront of campaigns to restore rather than exploit the planet.

Epitomised by Tony Benn, these were the Labour MPs – socialists – who set out to explain that we always had bigger and better choices open to us

than the Supremacy would have had us to believe. Of course it is sad that neither the trade union movement nor the party had the courage to wrap itself around those holding out this bigger vision. But if Labour is to salvage anything from the superficiality of the Blair experience it will be the knowledge that we cannot manage our way out of the current crisis, any more than we can shop our way out.

The world is locked into a series of crises for which corporate feudalism has no answer; crises not susceptible to individualised solutions.

Tomorrow's security will only be found if we grasp just how interdependent we really are. Solutions will have to be on the scale of a new post-1945 settlement – with the planet as much as ourselves.

Tony Blair was never going to be relevant to this. But the very thing whose removal came to symbolise his rise to the Supremacy – Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution – could well be. What if common interests and common ownership/stewardship turn out to be the only viable form of tomorrow's politics?

7. Curriculum Vitae

The following Curriculum Vitae, which gives an outline of his professional life, was written by Lewis Minkin in April 2003.

Date of Birth and Childhood Addresses

Date of Birth: 25.6.36.

Place of Birth: Hyde Terrace Hospital, Leeds 2.

Childhood addresses: 13 Sedan Place, Leeds 7, and 4 Carlton Towers, Leeds 7.

Employment and Education Prior to University

Schools: Meanwood Road Infants School, Sheepscar Primary, Roundhay school. Dropped out of school age 15 with no qualifications.

Worked in a variety of locations and occupations including Montague Burtons on general duties then as a clerical assistant. RAF as signals operator during the Cyprus Emergency. Crave Dairies as clerk, Leeds City Council as Libraries assistant. Youth Employment Office as clerk. Works Department as Assistant Storekeeper on the Gipton Council Estate.

Through evening school postal courses, library research, reading and political activities, undertook a variety of educational and self-educational training. Courses included Pelmanism mind training, logic, psychology, politics and psychology. Various diplomas: NCLC diploma in Secretaryship, London Chamber of Commerce diplomas in bookkeeping (Part 1), Intermediate Diploma in Municipal Administration. Also six O levels and one A level.

Entrance to Leeds University Department of Politics age 26 after a Mature Matriculation examination.

Academic Qualifications and Employment

1966. BA Political studies, Hons Class 1. Wheeler Memorial prize winner.

1967. B.Phil examination (D.Phil qualifying) York University.

1975. D.Phil York University.

1968. Research Associate, Department of Government, Manchester University.

1971. Lecturer, Department of Government, Manchester University.

1980. Senior Lecturer, Department of Government, Manchester University.

1989. Early 'Early Retirement'. Became Honorary Fellow.

1992 -1995. Visiting Professor Leeds Metropolitan University, with special responsibility for the encouragement of a research culture.

1996 – 1999. Professorial Research Fellow, Northern Institute for Continuing Education.

1998 – 2001. Visiting Professor, Institute for Learning and Teaching, Sheffield Hallam University.

Teaching Activities at Manchester University

Department of Government: Comparative Government, British Politics.

Manchester Business School: Managing in a Changing Environment; also Executive Development Course: ‘The Political Environment of Management’.

Activities as a Visiting Professor, Leeds Metropolitan University

9.2.1993. Special University seminar: ‘The Realpolitik of Research’.

2.13.1993. Leeds Business School seminar ‘Thinking about Thinking about Research’.

Activities as a Visiting Professor: Northern Institute for Continuing Education

31.5.1995. seminar: ‘Research and the Creative Process’.

Activities as a Visiting Professor: Sheffield Hallam University

20.9.1995. Seminar: ‘Thinking about Thinking about scientific research’.

26.6.1996. Professorial Inaugural Lecture: ‘In the Theatre of the Mind’.

1999 – 2000. Post Graduate Course on ‘Creativity and the Research Enterprise’.

Publications

1967. Part co-author with J.P.Nettle, ‘The Soviet Achievement’, Thames and Hudson, London. A work commissioned to reappraise the 50 years of the Soviet state.

1974. ‘Crisis and Compact’. Proceedings of an International Symposium ‘Industrial and Labour Relations Review’, October 1974.

1977. Front page feature article ‘Labour and the Unions’, New Society, 6th October.

1978. ‘The Party Connection’ an international appraisal in ‘Government and Opposition’, October.

1978. 'The British Labour Party' (with P.Seyd) in W.H.Patterson and A.H.Thomas (Eds), *European Social Democratic Parties*, Croome Helme, London.
1978. 'The Labour Party Conference: A Study in the Politics of Intra-Party Democracy'. Allen Lane, Harmondsworth.
1979. 'Leftwing Trade Unionism and the Tension of British Labour Politics' in Browne.E. (ed) *Eurocommunism and Eurosocialism*, Cyrco Press, New York.
1980. 'The Labour Party Conference: A Study in the Politics of Intra-Party Democracy'. Extended and revised paperback edition, Manchester University Press.
1981. First edition article 'The Block Vote' in *New Socialist*, Vol. 1, No.1.
1982. 'Radicalism and Reconstruction 1943 – 48: The British Case'. In *Europa*, Tome 5, No.2.
1986. 'Against the Tide' *Trade Unions and Political Communication*. In I.Crewe and M.Harrop (eds) *Political Communications: The General Election of 1983*. Cambridge University Press.
1989. 'Mobilisation and Distance: the role of the Trade Unions in the 1987 General Election campaign'. In I.Crewe and M.Harrop (eds) *Political Communications: The General Election of 1987*. Cambridge University Press.
1999. 'The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party'. 23 chapters. Edinburgh University Press.
1991. 'The Contentious Alliance'. Updated paperback edition with Epilogue. Edinburgh University Press.
1995. 'The New Labour Party; continuities, innovations and uncertainties'. In Tony Blair and Lewis Minkin 'La Renovations du parti travailliste en Grande-Bretagne'. Two essays commissioned for the French Socialist Party from Fondation Jean Jaures, Paris.
1997. 'Exits and Entrances: Political Research as a Creative Art'. Sheffield University Press. Launched by the Secretary of State for Education.
- Forthcoming**
2002. 'Creativity as a Social Good'. Amended version of a lecture given at the re-launch of the Open University Centre for Creativity.
- 'The Politics of Party Management'. 17 chapters. A study of the relationship between the Blair Leadership, the Labour Party, and the unions.

Lectures, Seminars and Papers

Visiting Professor University of New Brunswick, Summer 1974 and 1975.

1981. Honorary Visiting Lecturer, London School of Economics.

Various presentations over the years, including Institute de Science Politique Paris, Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes en Civilisation

Britannique held at Orleans, Institute for International Relations and Economy Moscow; Department of Political Science Cornell University, New York; Department of History, Columbia University, New York; Department of Political Science, Princeton University, New Jersey; Institute of International Relations, Berkeley, California; Department of European Studies Montreal University, Department of Politics, University of Ottawa.

Recent presentations. Following the publication on 'Exits and Entrances; Research as a Creative Art', a paper titled 'All the World's a stage: Political Research as a Creative Art' was given at the London School of Economics, and at Birkbeck, Middlesex and York Universities.

Advisory Roles

Television

1975 -5 1981. Political advisor and researcher to various television drama and documentary programmes.

1975. Series Advisor to 'Bill Brand' by Trevor Griffiths, a 13-part study of the life of a Labour MP.

197 BBC film 'The Spongers' by Jim Allen. Lewis Minkin acted as advisor to the Director Roland Joffe. Winner of the Prix Italia award for drama.

1977. Political Advisor to a three part series on 'British Communism' by Roger Graef. A study of the Communist Party Congress and revisionism.

1979. 'United Kingdom', a play by Jim Allen. Lewis Minkin acted as advisor to the Director Roland Joffe.

1981. Advisor to a BBC dram documentary on the Labour Party Special Conference on the procedure for Election of the Leader.

Party

1983. Lewis Minkin wrote a speech for Neil Kinnock on the state of the Labour Party organisation and proposals for the reorganisation of the party. The speech at Stoke on 12th September 1983 embodied his commitment to the main outlines of the future modernisation of the party.

1983 – 1997. Advisor to various Labour Party officials, political and union leaders and Shadow Ministers on issues concerning party organisation and relations with the unions.

1995 – 1996. Chair of the Editorial Advisory Board of the Labour Party theoretical journal *New Socialist*.

Socialist

1992-1993. Advisor to the Labour Party National Executive Committee 'Trade Union Review Group' on the reorganisation of the party's relations with the trade union. The only full member of this committee who was not a member of the Shadow Cabinet or of the National Executive Committee. Lewis Minkin was the author of its 'Statement of Working principles, Themes and Values', 5th July 1992. The committee's work resulted in historic changes to Labour's constitution in 1993.

1995 – 1997. One of two advisors to the Labour Party NEC 'Party into Power' group on relations between the Labour Party and a future Labour Government. A member of its Steering group for the whole period and the author of the memo 'The Case for Partnership'. The committee's work was embodied in the document 'Partnership in Power' agreed in 1997 and the subsequent procedural provisions.

1996 to date. Invited by the Political Office in Downing Street to act as unofficial advisor in relation to the trade unions. Subsequently, regular communication with various officers and with party officials and union leaders. Closely involved in seeking agreement with the unions on organisational and financial issues and with issues arising from the 'Partnership in Power' relationship between the party and the Government.
Lewis Minkin

Retains an independent political position, says what he thinks and accepts neither honours nor rewards.

Government

Invited to present evidence to the Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Funding of Political Parties, session 1992 – 1993. Included a personal appearance before the committee. Ref: HMSO Minutes of Evidence and Memoranda of Evidence, 9th June 1993, pages 1-6 and 3-34.

1998-1999. Appointed to the Government's new 'National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education'. Role: the committee was established following discussions of Exits and Entrances. Lewis Minkin was appointed Vice Chair and drafted its definition and framework on creativity and also drafted the chapters concerning creativity and teaching for creativity in the final report, 'All Our Futures', in 1999.

2000 – 2003. Appointed to the Creativity Advisory Committee of the Qualifications and Curriculum authority, chaired by Lord Puttnam. Role: Chair of its framework working group. The committee continued work on the framework developed in ‘All Our Futures’. The committee is about to report to the Secretary of State and it is anticipated that its work will make a significant shift in education policy.
