Professionalizing the Millbank Tendency:
The Political Sociology of New
Labour's Employees

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Abstract

This article analyses party employees, one of the most under-researched subjects in the study of British political parties. Specifically, we draw on a blend of quantitative and qualitative data in order to shed light on the social and political profiles of Labour Party staff, and on the question of their professionalization. The latter theme is developed through a model derived from the sociology of professions. While a relatively limited proportion of party employees conform to the pure ideal-type of professionalism, a considerably greater number manifest enough of the core characteristics of specialization, commitment, mobility, autonomy and self-regulation to be reasonably described as 'professionals in pursuit of political outcomes'. It should be noted that professionalization of this type raises significant issues about the distribution of power within party organizations.

Professionalizing the Millbank Tendency:
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One of the most under-researched fields in the study of British political parties is that of party employees. This is curious given how much we now know about most other significant aspects of party life in this country, including developments in party ideology and policy; the role, powers and social background of party members and leaders; the recruitment and sociology of MPs and parliamentary candidates; and the marketing of parties. By contrast, little is known of the men and women on the organizational payroll who run the day to day operations of parties up and down the country. We believe that this is a significant oversight which leaves us with a deficient understanding of an important aspect of party organizational development.

While it surely goes without saying that party staff have always been of general importance to the operation and functioning of party organizations, it seems likely that this importance is greater now than ever before. In part this is because it is clear that the modern age of election campaigning and political marketing makes certain types of professional expertise all the more pertinent. Indeed, there is nothing particularly novel in the argument that election campaigning in the televisual era relies far more on centralized professional resourcing than on local party activism (McKenzie, 1955, p.591; Butler & Rose, 1960). In addition (and relatedly), it is certain that parties have come to rely increasingly on paid employees in the context of long-term membership decline and the 'de-energization' of local parties (Seyd & Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al, 1994; Webb, 1994). This is demonstrated by the increasing ratio of central staff to party members. Thus, in 1964 there was one Labour Party employee for every 2786 individual members, whereas by 1998 there was one employee for every 1231 members, a net change of 56% in the staff/membership ratio. The change in this ratio is even more pronounced if we narrow the focus to the real locus of staff growth, the central (extra-parliamentary) party organization; in 1964 there was one central party employee for every 16602 individual members, but by 1998 there was one for every 2263 members, a change of 86%.[2] Even allowing for the vagaries of measuring party membership accurately there is no doubt that there has been a substantial increase in the ratio of paid employees to party members, which is to say a substitution over time of paid for voluntary labour.

A single interpretive model which succinctly captures the shift from voluntary to professional labour is that of the 'electoral-professional party'. The electoral-professional organization is primarily motivated by electoral rather than ideological or expressive imperatives and is characterized, among other things, by the pre-eminence of the leadership and the centrality of professionals within the party organization (Panebianco, 1988, p.264). However, while the importance of certain kinds of professional consultant such as pollsters, advertisers and marketing experts has often been empirically demonstrated (Hughes & Wintour, 1990; Webb, 1992a; Shaw, 1994), the notion of 'professionalization' has rarely if ever been considered to extend beyond this in the context of the contemporary British party politics. Furthermore, well established models drawn from the sociology of professions have been systematically overlooked by political scientists working in this field, yet these can be valuable in assessing the nature and extent of professionalization within party organizations. It is high time such an oversight was rectified and we intend this article to constitute a step in the right direction. Specifically, we address two basic and related questions in respect of party staff. First, who are the party employees in terms of social and attitudinal profile (the *sociological* question)? Second, how far

is it appropriate to describe them, and by extension party organizations more generally, as 'professional' (the *professionalization* question)? Note that some of our findings in respect of the former question bear directly upon the latter, in so far as the sociology of party employees is central to the definition of professionalization.

Data and method

We draw on a blend of new quantitative and qualitative data on Labour Party employees in order to explore these themes. Data have been gathered in two ways. First, we conducted a series of interviews with senior officials (mainly unit heads) at Millbank and the PLP office at Westminster. These qualitative data provided broad overviews of the experience of party employment from a variety of sections within the central party, including what might be called the 'campaigning' units such as press and policy, as well as with 'routine administration' sections such as the finance and conference units. Crucially, these interviews also served to set the work of personnel in the context of overall organizational change (of which more shortly). This qualitative research was complemented by a closed-ended survey of all staff at Millbank, the PLP and the regional offices. We generated a sample of 96 responses (approximately 30% of the party's staff establishment at the time of the survey), of which 54% came from regional staff, 42% from Millbank staff and 4% from PLP officials.[3] Although the overall 'n' is comparatively small for survey research,[4] it represents an unusually large proportion of the target population (see **Table 1**) and appears to be broadly representative in terms of its distribution across the grade structure: thus, at the time of the survey 11.1% of party staff were employed at Millbank at grades above 38 (that is, Head of Unit level) while some 9.9% of our sample is, and 45.3% of Millbank staff were graded below 38, compared to 43.7% of our sample.[5]

Table 1 - Labour Party staff numbers, 1964-98

Year	Central	Sub-national
1964	50	248
1970	50	167
1979	-	128
1983	-	104
1987	71	95
1993	90	-
1998	179	150
Change 1964-98	+258%	-40%

Note: 'Sub-national' staff includes both regional office staff (employed by national party headquarters) and party agents (usually paid for by local party organizations). The figures cited for 1993 and 1998 are certainly lower than they would have been during the general election years of 1992 and 1997 respectively; since we have been unable to gather central party staffing data for 1992 and 1997, however, the more complete 1993 and 1998 figures have been cited. The main implication of all this is that the general growth in the number of party employees has almost certainly been even greater than this table implies.

Sources: Labour Party Personnel Department; Labour Party NEC Organization Committee minutes; Finer 1980.
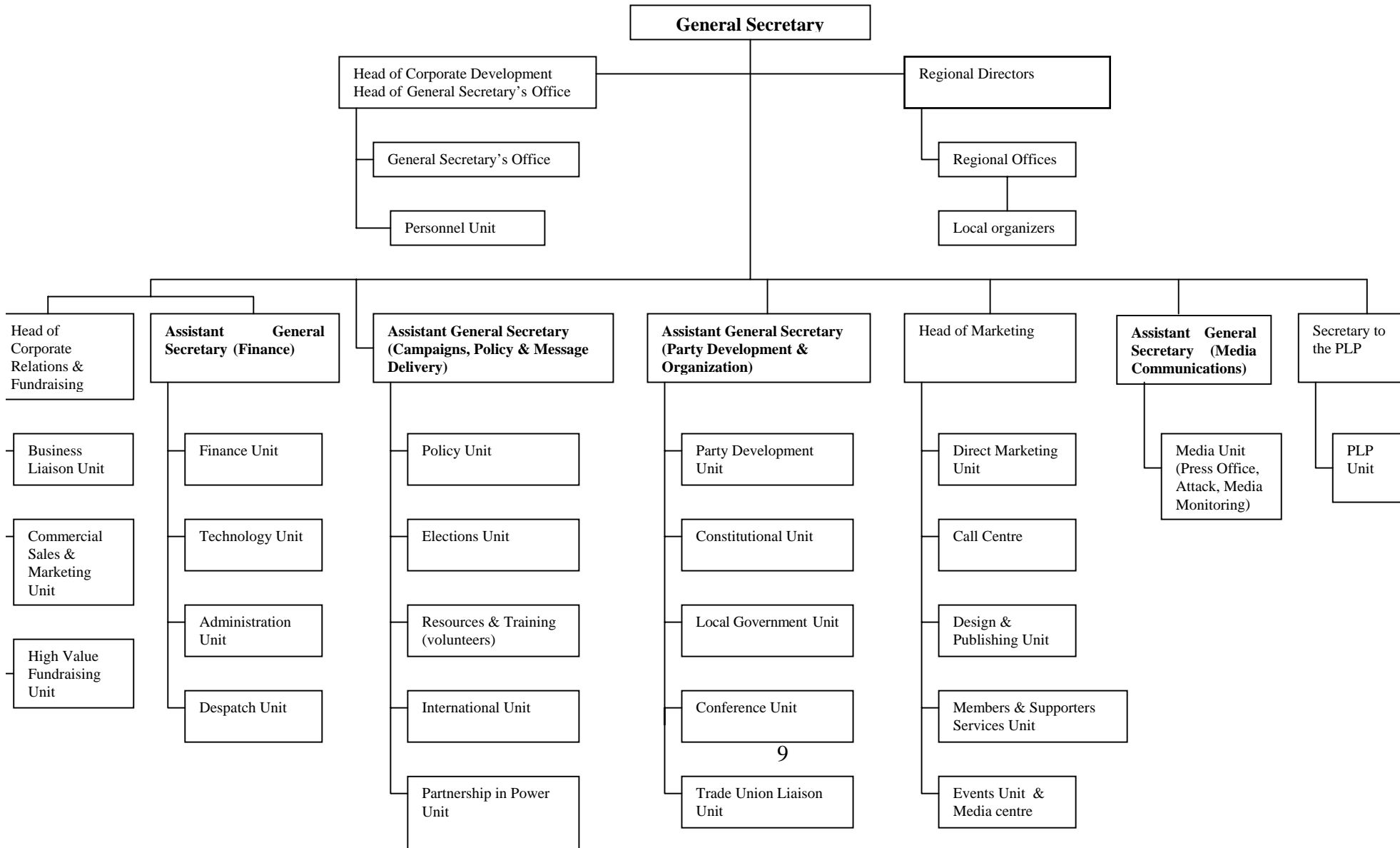
The changing party organizational context

One of the most striking features of the contemporary Labour Party is its penchant for organizational change. As one of the authors has recounted elsewhere (Webb, 2000, p.245), some Millbank employees have spoken of a culture of 'permanent revolution' stemming especially from the time that (Lord) Tom Sawyer was party General Secretary:

> *If you can't cope with change, if you can't sort of manage to think, "oh well, two years down the line we're changing again", then really it's not an organization for you. It's constantly moving. You adjust structures and you can't be too rigid in the way you do things because the nature of politics is that things are constantly changing.*[6]

The organizational transformation of Labour's national party headquarters was plainly evident by the 1997 general election campaign. This reflected not only the harsh lessons taught by repeated electoral failure previously, but a willingness to learn directly from the campaigning approach of sister-parties overseas, especially the Democrats in the USA (Braggins et al, 1993). The party shifted its media and campaign operations away from the national headquarters in Walworth Road (south-east London) to a large open-plan office development at Millbank Tower on the Thames embankment, and within a short distance of Westminster and various news media offices.[7] The Millbank operation incorporated purpose-built media facilities, and was staffed by more than 500 employees during the campaign, many of whom were on secondment (from affiliated trade unions) or were temporary; post-election, central staffing was quickly trimmed to 179. In addition to those on the payroll, the efforts of some 360 volunteers were coordinated from Millbank. Operations during the campaign were organized horizontally around a number of 'task-forces' with specific responsibilities.[8] Labour's central campaign staff were certainly significantly greater in number than at previous election, and their work was structured in a new and carefully devised fashion planned well in advance. The centrality of election campaigning to New Labour's entire style of organization and operation was underlined when the party chose to shift its national headquarters from Walworth Road to Millbank on a permanent basis in the autumn of 1997.[9] By the end of 1998, the structure of operations at Millbank was as portrayed in **Figure 1**.

Interestingly, the numerical trend in party staffing reported in **Table 1** seems to imply a process of centralization of resources, accompanied by an overall weakening of local party organization (especially when taken in conjunction with the evidence of membership decline and de-energization to which we earlier alluded). This notion of the 'centralization' of resourcing and party management becomes more persuasive when taken in the broader context of changing styles of political communication. We have already noted how modern campaigning primarily entails televisual communication with electors, and does not necessarily require large numbers of locally based officials and armies of volunteer activists. This is not to suggest that local campaigns are viewed as insignificant by the parties or expert observers, but rather that the careful targeting of resources and effort in certain localities is what counts. Nowhere was this

Figure 1: Labour Party Organization

General Secretary

- Head of Corporate Development / Head of General Secretary's Office
  - General Secretary's Office
  - Personnel Unit
- Regional Directors
  - Regional Offices
    - Local organizers

- Head of Corporate Relations & Fundraising
  - Business Liaison Unit
  - Commercial Sales & Marketing Unit
  - High Value Fundraising Unit

- **Assistant General Secretary (Finance)**
  - Finance Unit
  - Technology Unit
  - Administration Unit
  - Despatch Unit

- **Assistant General Secretary (Campaigns, Policy & Message Delivery)**
  - Policy Unit
  - Elections Unit
  - Resources & Training (volunteers)
  - International Unit
  - Partnership in Power Unit

- **Assistant General Secretary (Party Development & Organization)**
  - Party Development Unit
  - Constitutional Unit
  - Local Government Unit
  - Conference Unit
  - Trade Union Liaison Unit

- Head of Marketing
  - Direct Marketing Unit
  - Call Centre
  - Design & Publishing Unit
  - Members & Supporters Services Unit
  - Events Unit & Media centre

- **Assistant General Secretary (Media Communications)**
  - Media Unit (Press Office, Attack, Media Monitoring)

- Secretary to the PLP
  - PLP Unit

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more evident than in the 1997 election, when all parties (especially those in opposition at the time) concentrated their efforts on key seats (Kavanagh, 1997, p.31; Berrington & Hague, 1997, p.52; Denver et al 2000). The crucial point about this is that such carefully targeted campaign efforts require central coordination of resources and campaign strategies; indeed, the need for all party candidates and spokespersons to be 'on message' at all times has become a virtual caricature of centralized control within modern parties (especially New Labour). Moreover, the strict legal constraints imposed on local constituency campaign expenditure also dictate an inevitable centralization of campaign resources.

Fascinatingly, too, there is further evidence of the centralization of Labour Party organization in the sudden increase in the number of regional office staff hired since the 1997 election. To understand the significance of this, it is necessary to grasp the fact that regional offices are essentially provincial outposts of central party headquarters. Though not based in London, regional organizers are (unlike many traditional party agents) not employed by constituency organizations, but rather by the central party, and are answerable to it. In the 12 months following the Spring of 1998, the number of staff employed at Labour's 10 regional offices increased from 75 to 142, which strongly suggests that Millbank has taken steps to enhance yet further its capacity to coordinate the activities of CLPs.[10] Seen in this light, the running down of local parties in the UK may not be as significant as it initially appears for the overall strength of national party organizations. Parties certainly need resources, but more importantly, they need to deploy them in such a way as to achieve their primary purposes; thus, central coordination is a means by which parties adapt both to technological change and the loss of staff and members at the local level. Moreover, this process of adaptation does not consist only of greater relative numbers at the centre; it further depends on the development of a body of effective professional staff both there and at sub-national level. Indeed, as we shall see, the national party has taken very deliberate steps to enhance and professionalize the work of organizers in the locality.

The political sociology of Labour employees: social and attitudinal profiles

But who are these staff? Through our survey we are able to cast light on their social and political profiles. **Table 2** reports data relevant to the former of these. On average, party employees are younger than Labour MPs, party members or voters, and are more likely to be female than other party strata except voters. The ethnic mix among staff broadly reflects that of the country as a whole. One or two features of Table 2 are particularly noteworthy. For one thing, compared to other party strata, party employees are considerably more likely to see themselves as middle class or to reject the notion of class identity at all. They are also overwhelmingly more likely than members or voters to be educated to first-degree level or beyond; in this they resemble Labour MPs, 70% of whom are graduates,[11] and this corroborates the claim of one Millbank unit head that he would 'no longer recruit people who either don't want to start studying or who haven't studied'[12], and may be a pointer to the growing demand of the party for 'professional' staff. Similarly, the proportion of party employees claiming to have formal post-secondary vocational qualifications (39%) exceeds that found among ordinary party supporters in the electorate, though not by a great distance. Interestingly, only a fairly small minority of the sample (13%) have worked as paid trade union employees prior to joining the party staff. Although we cannot cite exact time-series evidence to show that the number of staff coming to the party from the unions has diminished over the years, it was certainly the impression of senior personnel that this was in fact the case,[13] and our survey reveals that younger staff are indeed less likely to have worked for the unions; while 11% of those aged up to 40 came to the party from

Table 2 - Social background of Labour employees compared to other party strata

Attribute	Employees	MPs	Members	Voters
Average age	38	47	51	48
Sex				
Male	53	78	61	46
Female	47	22	39	54
Class identity				
Yes	63	65	71	61
No	37	35	29	39
Which class?				
Middle	56	59	29	25
Working	44	41	71	75
Education				
Postgraduate	20	N/A	N/A	N/A
Degree	51	N/A	21	10
HND/OND	3	N/A	19	10
A level/equivalent	7	N/A	8	12
O level/equivalent	10	N/A	26	16
Other/none	10	N/A	27	52
Professional/vocational qualifications				
Yes	39	N/A	N/A	32
No	61	N/A	N/A	68
Ethnicity				
White	93	99	94	94
Afro-Caribbean	2	0	3	2
Asian	1	0	3	3
Other	4	1*	0	1
Union member				
Yes	96 **	97	41	26
No	4	3	59	74
Union employee prior to party employment				
Yes	13	N/A	N/A	N/A
No	87	N/A	N/A	N/A

Notes: All figures except for average age are percentages.
* For MPs, this figure is simply the % for 'non-white' respondents.
** For employees, this figure refers to % that were union members before becoming party staff.

the unions, 14% of those between 41-50 had done so, and 18% of those aged over 50 (n=95). Indeed, senior staff claim that one of the more notable changes to Labour's staff recruitment policy over the past decade has been a growing willingness to recruit individuals with appropriate qualifications and professional experience on a 'meritocratic' basis rather than look to the labour movement (though the latter route remains important in respect of certain types of work with the membership).[14] Thus, one gains an impression of a new type of party employee who is well-qualified and who may well be a 'high-achiever', but who, as we shall see, is mindful of the relatively poor pay and lack of promotion opportunities which party work affords, and perhaps because of this only expects to work for the party for a few years before moving on.

Other than those who came into party employment via the unions, the most notable sources of previous employment appear to have been higher education or research (17%), the media (8%) and various types of secretarial and clerical work (8%); these apart, the non-party backgrounds of staff are very diverse, with three-fifths of employees having some previous experience of employment outside the party (see **Table 3**). Thus the typical Labour employee of today will be thirty-something, middle class, well-educated and white, almost as likely to be female as male, and will probably have prior experience of non-party (and indeed, non-political) employment. A Labour employee is also quite likely to have prior vocational or professional qualifications, and may well only work for the party for a few years before moving on to a new employer.

Table 3 - Previous non-party work experience of Labour Party employees

Number of previous non-party posts	% of staff
0	39
1	28
2	14
3	12
4	3
5	2
6	1
Total	99 (n=93)

Where do the party staff stand politically? **Table 4** reports the overall distribution of Labour employees in terms of core political beliefs, that is, those pertaining to the ideological tensions between socialism and capitalism on the one hand, and liberty and authority on the other (Heath et al, 1993). Overall, it is clear that - unsurprisingly - staff are located in left-libertarian ideological territory. Thus, they are emphatically of the view that trade unions still offer a necessary protection for workers in British society, and they are almost equally convinced that wealth is unjustly distributed and that the poor do not receive the full protection of the law. While they are sceptical of the ability of private enterprise to offer solutions to Britain's economic problems, they are nevertheless equivocal about the role of the state in guaranteeing full employment and unimpressed by the notion that state ownership of industry should be a goal.

Table 4 – Political attitudes of Labour Party staff

Left-Right Attitudes	Employees	MPs	Members	Voters
Ordinary people get their fair share of the nation's wealth*	55	88	85	67
It is government's responsibility to provide a job for everybody who wants one*	8	26	59	58
Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain's economic problems	30	33	37	31
Major public services & industries ought to be in state ownership*	-10	26	70	34
There is one law for the rich and one for the poor	21	87	79	77
There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees= working conditions & wages	96	82	61	52
Average	*33.3*	*57.0*	*65.2*	*53.2*
Libertarian-Authoritarian Attitudes				
Even parties which wish to overthrow democracy should not be banned	-6	-10	-27	-37
Censorship of films & magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards	36	5	-44	-49
Homosexual relations are always wrong	94	88	15	19
People should be allowed to organize public meetings to protest against the government	100	98	78	66
People in Britain should be more tolerant of those who lead unconventional lives	96	91	46	38
Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values	35	13	-36	-53
Average	*59.2*	*47.5*	*5.3*	*-2.7*
Postmaterialist-Materialist Attitudes				
% Postmaterialist - % Materialist	*19*	*4*	*-4*	*-11*
European Integration Attitudes				
11-point scale, low score = pro-integration	*3.8*	*4.0*	*3.9*	*5.9*

Notes: All Left-Right and Libertarian/Authoritarian cell entries are percentage difference index (PDI) scores; a positive figure represents a preponderance of left-wing or libertarian attitudes within the sample, while a negative figure represents a preponderance of right-wing or authoritarian attitudes. First devised by Norris (1996), these scores are calculated by subtracting the percentage of respondents favouring right-wing or authoritarian responses to the political statements listed from the percentage favouring left-wing or libertarian responses. The statements are standard indicators of core values first devised and tested by Anthony Heath and colleagues (Heath et al 1993). Scores do not always total 100 since some respondents answered 'neither agree nor disagree' to questions.

Respondents are located on the materialist/post-materialist dimension through their responses to the classic Inglehartian question which requires respondents to prioritise their first and second most important policy objectives out of a list incorporating 'maintaining order in the nation', 'fighting rising prices', 'giving people more say in government decisions' and 'protecting freedom of speech'; while the former two options are taken to be indications of a materialist disposition, the latter two are indications of post-materialism.

Data sources: Employees – Labour Party Employees Survey 2000 (n=47, unless marked by an asterisk, in which case n= 95); MPs - British Representation Survey 1997 (n=161); Members - British Election Survey 1997 (n=50); Labour Voters - British Election Survey 1997 (n=878).

for the party to pursue - which is, of course, entirely appropriate in a New Labour context. While the distribution of values on these items places the employees consistently left of centre, it is equally evident from Table 4 that they are not as far left as other party strata: MPs, members and voters all have significantly more left-wing value distributions

By contrast, however, party staff are more radical than other party strata on the other three ideological dimensions. First, there is no doubt that they can also be located well within libertarian territory. Only the question of the legal status of anti-democratic parties elicits an 'authoritarian' streak in their thinking; otherwise they are consistently in favour of toleration and freedom and to a far greater extent than party members or voters. Second, in respect of the Inglehartian tension between post-materialism and materialism, we see that - as might be expected of modern generations of educated left-libertarians - Labour Party staff lean towards the former option overall, consisting as they do mainly of those with post-materialist or mixed ideological dispositions. Finally, we asked party employees to tell us something about their attitudes towards European integration by requiring them to locate themselves on a scale from 1-11, where 1 represented 'a fully integrated Europe with most major decisions taken by a European government' and 11 represented a preference for 'complete British withdrawal from the EU'. The mean position of party staff on this scale was 3.8 and the median just 3 (standard deviation=1.95, n=46); this places them in very similar territory to Labour's parliamentarians and grass-roots members, which is notably more pro-European than the party's ordinary supporters in the electorate. In short, party employees are plainly pro-European, centre-left libertarians who incline towards post-materialism, a profile essentially compatible with the political identity of New Labour.

The professionalization of Labour's employees?

To what extent are Labour's employees 'professionalized'? Given some of the developments we noted in the introduction – the decline of voluntary labour, the demands of modern political communication and the standardization of campaigning – it seems logical to expect parties to respond by creating a stronger corpus of paid expertise within their organizations. Before furnishing a satisfactory response to the question of professionalization, however, we need to establish a clear definition of the term.

The sociological literature on professions recognizes 'a continuum of professionalization on which groups can be located according to the number of professional characteristics which they exhibit' (Romzek & Utter, p.1254). A review of some of the key items in this literature (Wilensky, 1959; Brante, 1990; Raelin, 1991) suggests that the characteristics most usually emphasized include the following:

- *Expertise*: At the heart of the notion of professionalism lies the notion of some special competence which sets the professional apart from other workers. This will most probably reflect a particular education and perhaps formal vocational training or qualification.

- *Autonomy*: In view of the professional's expertise, s/he tends to be entrusted with an unusual degree of job autonomy; though answerable to the 'client', the professional's specialist knowledge means that s/he cannot be dictated to by line managers. To some extent this distinguishes a professional from a mere 'bureaucrat', who is a general functionary under the supervision of a manager.

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- *Mobility:* Angelo Panebianco (1988, p.227) points out that, by virtue of their expertise and autonomy, professionals are usually in a good position to sell their labour on the external job market if they so choose. Traditional party bureaucrats, however, will typically be engaged in work such that it would be difficult for them to find an equivalent job in the external market; this relative non-transferability of their skills helps explain the bureaucrat's subordination to line-managers and political leaders.

- *Self-regulation:* Given his or her specialist knowledge, only the professional is in a position to protect clients against entry into the job market of charlatans or incompetents. Hence, a profession will typically have the right to establish and police its own code of vocational ethics. This is readily apparent if one considers the roles of bodies such as the British Medical Association or the Law Society in regulating and disciplining their members.

- *Commitment*: Though an archetypal professional may enjoy a considerable degree of job autonomy, s/he will be expected to display a special level of devotion to the tasks undertaken.

These key characteristics provide us with an ideal-type of professionalism. Thus, a professional may be regarded as *a member of the workforce with a relatively high status and strong position in the labour market flowing from a special degree of expertise, commitment, autonomy and capacity for self-regulation which in turn reflects a particular education and formal training*. By implication, therefore, professionalization refers to an institutional process by which professionals become more central to an organization (in our case, a political party organization). By contrast, traditional party bureaucrats will have less status, expertise, job autonomy or capacity to regulate their own activities, and are less likely to have been through a special formal education. Given that their status and rewards will usually be lower, moreover, they are less likely to be expected to demonstrate a special devotion to duty. This calls to mind work conducted more than three decades ago by Kornberg, Smith and Clark (1970) on party workers in North America, where they described the prevalence of an amateur ethos, lack of career prospects, low prestige and pay, poor commitment and a lack of any professional reference group among party workers; this syndrome would seem poles apart from our notion of a political professional.

Notwithstanding the foregoing discussion, it is notable how often people use terms like 'professionalism' and 'professionalization' in a rather less rigorous sense than we have adumbrated here. More colloquial usage seems to imply that professionalization can consist simply of an enhanced degree of work-place effectiveness flowing from a greater sense of commitment or devotion to work-related duties among employees. This may well go hand in hand with the introduction of new working procedures designed to facilitate greater effectiveness. This 'soft' notion of professionalization contains some elements from our pure ideal-type (commitment and effectiveness), but lacks the classic elements of specialist training, expertise, autonomy and self-regulation. As we shall see, while professionalization in the classic ideal-typical sense has partial relevance to the story of Labour's organizational change, professionalization in the soft sense seems to have become far more diffuse throughout the party apparatus.

So how do our findings bear upon this notion of professionalization? First, it should be said that there are obvious limits to the professionalization of British party employees in terms of the specialist ideal-type. This is most apparent in respect of the limited number of party employees who are essentially autonomous self-regulating professionals. As we shall see, relatively few among our sample could be classified in such a way. There is a major institutional and systemic constraint at work here which helps explain why classic professionalization in the sense laid out above is most unlikely to develop in the UK to the extent that it has in a country such as the USA. In America, the candidate-centred nature of politics is such that an extensive profession of political consultancy has emerged which conforms closely to the ideal-type (Sabato, 1981; Thurber, 2000; Thurber & Nelson, 2000); in the UK and most other parliamentary democracies political life remains more party-centred notwithstanding the encroachment of personality politics, and there simply is not the same scope for such a large autonomous body of political professionals. Thus, although congressional candidates in the US are assisted by their parties, they are largely free to direct their own election campaigns; in doing so, they hire in the services of professional consultants. By contrast, there is far less sense of a separate campaign being fought in each constituency in Britain as the major parties coordinate national electioneering efforts. Such an approach only requires the professional services of relatively few consultants at the centre, and this limited demand cannot sustain a large professional corpus of independent, self-certifying and regulating political consultants.

This is not to say that there is no scope for professionals, however, and indeed, we have seen them becoming far more important in certain spheres of party work for some years now, most obviously in respect of opinion pollsters, advertising consultants and related fields of political marketing and media presentation. This much is well known (Scammell, 1995; Kavanagh, 1995). However, our qualitative research on New Labour revealed another sphere of party work in which specialist professionals have become more prominent: that of fund-raising. Over the past decade, Labour has become less reliant on its traditional financial benefactors, the unions, and has become far more adept at raising money from alternative sources, notably business corporations and wealthy individuals. In 1983, some 96% of all central party income (including General and General Election Funds) could ultimately be traced to the unions (Webb, 1992b,pp.20-22), but within a decade no more than two-thirds could, and by 1997 the figure stood at just 40% (Neill, 1998, p.31). Subsequent developments suggest it has dropped yet further (Labour Party, 1999, p.56). This has largely been achieved through a determined and conscious effort to professionalize the task of fund-raising, something which became apparent with the appointment of Amanda Delew as a fund-raising consultant to Tony Blair in 1996; the following year she moved from Blair's private office to Labour's former headquarters at Walworth Road where she became head of the new High Value Donors Unit, a move which placed her on the party payroll.[15] After 1998, funding became concentrated in the Corporate Relations and Fundraising department at Millbank (refer again to Figure 1), which was created to coordinate the work of three pre-existing units (Business Liaison, Commercial Sales and Marketing, and High Value Fundraising). These developments resemble the kind of changes which many charitable and commercial organizations have undergone in recent years, and indeed, several of the dozen or so regular employees working in the department have previous experience in the charitable and commercial sectors. Such an approach has proved especially successful in generating small personal donations as well as the high value contributions which tend to attract greater notoriety; thus, Labour claimed to raise some 40% of its funding from such sources by the late 1990s, with some 70,000 members paying regular monthly subscriptions, and a further 500,000 making ad hoc donations each year (Neill, 1998: 32). A particular success has been the

party's *Business Plan*, established in the late 1980s in order to attract individual donations through activities such as fund-raising dinners; within five years of its foundation, this accounted for nearly one-fifth of the Labour Party's central income (Fisher, 1996, p.80). These changing financial connections demonstrate graphically the transformation of New Labour at the levels of both political linkage and organizational style, and they illustrate the value to the party of the professionalization of fund-raising.

What other indicators of professionalization may we point to? A number of the quantitative indicators that we have already encountered in the social background data are relevant (**Table 2**). Thus, our first expectation of a professional workforce would be that it would be highly educated and formally trained. Indeed, as already noted, Labour employees do appear to be unusually well educated, which is generally either a pre-requisite for or a concomitant of the acquisition of specialist knowledge. To recollect, nearly three-quarters of our sample is educated to first-degree level or beyond. In addition, approaching two-fifths claim to have formal vocational qualifications, a figure somewhat, though not greatly, in excess than of the proportion of Labour voters claiming post-secondary vocational qualifications of some type. Closer examination of the data enables us to further disaggregate them in relevant ways. This shows that the proportion we might think of as conforming to the classic ideal-type of professionalism is more limited than our initial figures on qualifications seem to suggest. Specifically, 19% (n=17) of respondents have degrees plus vocational qualifications or 'vocational' degrees (in subjects such as engineering or law), while a further 19% have post-secondary vocational qualifications but are not educated to degree level. Since this latter group offers prospective employers a lower degree of expertise and enjoys less status, its members are unlikely to be as mobile in the external labour market, and cannot really be said to conform to the specialist professional ideal-type. The remaining 61% have no vocational qualifications, although the bulk of these (54% of the total) are graduates; thus only a small minority of our sample (9%) lack either a degree or a vocational qualification of some description. This analysis suggests, therefore, that less than one-fifth of Labour employees might be described as 'professionals' in the most exacting sense of the term, although most respondents have higher educational or vocational qualifications of some type. Of course, it might be argued that the classic ideal-type is not entirely realistic in the context of modern party political employment; a more flexible yet still meaningful definition of 'professionalism' would propose that in such a context, a professional is one who has been educated to degree level and then achieved the relevant degree of specialization through on-the-job experience and training. The elements of autonomy, commitment and mobility (though perhaps not self-regulation) remain pertinent to this 'flexible' definition. On this basis, as many as half of Labour's staff might qualify for the label professional.

We can gain a better insight into this by examining the evidence of vocational mobility, training, autonomy and commitment of party staff. First, do those we might consider to constitute Labour's professional 'core' really enjoy greater mobility on the external labour market? To reiterate, Panebianco argues that job mobility is likely to be a key attribute of autonomous professionals but not of traditional party bureaucrats. Recall that, overall, some 60% of party staff have previous non-party work experience (**Table 3**), and indeed, many have had more than one previous external job. More to the point, however, our core professional groups are indeed more likely to have external work experience than other less qualified colleagues. **Table 5** reveals that while 71% of vocationally qualified graduates has previous external work experience, along with virtually the same proportion (68%) of non-vocationally qualified graduates, just 59% of non-graduates with vocational qualifications has and only 25% of those with neither degrees nor

vocational qualifications. A distinction here seems to lie between graduates and non-graduates, though non-graduates with vocational qualifications do not lag very far behind in graduates in terms of external employment experience. Note too that graduates (both with and without vocational qualifications) are somewhat younger than non-graduates among party staff, something which may well reflect the growth of access to higher education in the UK. This hints at two broad categories of Labour Party professional, an older generation which has had less access to higher education but which is nevertheless vocationally formally qualified, and a younger generation of graduates.

Table 5 – Attributes of different categories of party employees

Category of employee	*% of group with non-party experience*	*Average age*	*% at senior grades*	*Ever received party training?*
Graduates with vocational qualifications	71	37	67	59
Graduates without vocational qualifications	68	35	73	52
Non-graduates with vocational qualifications	59	46	58	65
Non-graduates with no vocational qualifications	25	41	40	25

Note: 'Senior grades' are defined here as Millbank employees with a job grade of 28 and above (including party officers and heads of unit) and regional staff with a grading of 27 and above (grade 2 regional organisers, regional officers and regional directors). N=95.

In general terms the quantitative data on job mobility of party staff are corroborated by qualitative interviews. These point to a clear phenomenon of employees coming to the party for a few years as part of a pattern of career development. There seems to be a clear expectation on

the part of many staff that they will only serve a few years in the party before moving on to more lucrative external positions. This impression is supported by the fact that the average length of paid service for the party among our respondents was 5 years 8 months. In part, this high staff turnover owes something to the relatively 'flat' organizational structure of the party which provides few opportunities for long-term career advancement:

I think that if people do start here thinking this is where they will have a career then they soon realize that it isn't: ...it's a place to buy into your job, do your job and then perhaps move on.[16]

While some employees realize that there is little prospect of long-term progression within the party, and most (85%) feel they could be better paid working externally, many nevertheless regard party work as invaluable and interesting experience for a defined period of their working lives.

...there are those with bright ambitions that see this as a help or stepping-stone and a good experience. I do say to people coming in that the kind of experience you get at the Labour Party is excellent training for almost any kind of work. You meet a wide variety of different kinds of interesting people, doing a variety of roles that benefit.[17]

One of the growing areas of post-party work opportunity to which political professionals might aspire is that of political lobbying, (described as 'the biggest draw' by one unit head at Millbank). This is not a phenomenon that draws universal approval, however; one particularly vocal critic argued that:

It is becoming a problem for some of the lobby firms where they take on people who say 'Oh, I ran Tony Blair's Business Unit during the general election', which is absolute rubbish; they have all these titles and almost prostitute themselves with their CVs saying that they know all these people.[18]

Another future career for which Labour Party employment has equally direct relevance to the aspiring political professional is representative politics. Our survey reveals that 20% of respondents intend to seek future adoption as parliamentary candidates and 11% as European parliamentary candidates (see **Table 6**). One unit head opined:

I think some people deliberately seek employment in Head Office or at regional level as a basis for promotion themselves as members of parliament. If you look across at the intake of people, particularly over the last few years, the last two general elections, there have been officers here who have gone straight in to parliament.[19]

Interestingly, British Representation Survey data suggest that some 7% (or 29) of the newly elected PLP in 1997 were former party employees.

Table 6 - Party employees and elective politics

Elective office	% which has already attempted selection as:	% intending to seek future selection as:
A parliamentary candidate	9	20 *
A European parliamentary candidate	4	11 *
A local councillor	38	28 *
A candidate for Scottish Parliament/Welsh Assembly	4	2 *

Note: n=95 unless marked with an asterisk, in which case n=47.

So we have seen that many of the party's best qualified employees tend to be professionally mobile and regard their period with the party as valuable for their professional development and future aspirations. As we would expect, the groups we have identified as most likely to consist of political professionals are also more likely to be employed at relatively senior grades within the party (refer again to **Table 5**). This is especially true of the two graduate categories. Note that this holds more strongly for staff at Millbank than those employed in the regional offices; in that latter, 88% of those without degrees have nonetheless made their way to senior grades, whereas only 12.5% of those working at Millbank have done so. To put it slightly differently, 95% of senior Millbank staff in our sample are graduates (23% also having vocational qualifications), while only two-thirds of our regional staff are (21% with vocational qualifications). This tends to suggest that the push for 'professionalized' staff may have gone further in the central party organization than in the regions (though note our findings on the development of a professional organizers' training programme below).

Professionalization is process which can be directly facilitated by the party itself to some extent. That is, an organization intent on developing a professional body of personnel can take responsibility for effecting this by engaging with programmes of staff development and training. Such activities might include paying for staff to take courses and qualifications provided externally (for instance, in accountancy) or the direct in-house provision of training in relevant skills; for example, the party provides training for local organizers, on getting out the vote at elections, on call handling and so on. We might especially expect such training to be focussed on those most likely to be identified as the party's 'professionals'. Tables 5 and 7 confirm that this is broadly accurate. Thus, the final column of Table 5 shows that the clear majority of staff with formal qualifications (though not just graduates) have benefited from some kind of training by the party, while only a quarter of unqualified staff have. Similarly, **Table 7** shows that the party's investment in training is directed principally at senior staff, especially in the Millbank headquarters. This table also suggests that the staff involved are highly likely to regard such training as beneficial.

Table 7 – Training by grade

Grade of employee	% having received training by party	% of these finding training very/quite useful
Millbank senior	77	71
Millbank junior/intermediate	38	83
Regional senior	63	92
Regional junior/intermediate	57	100

However, the sub-national party organization has by no means been excluded from the process of professionalization. Thus, one group of personnel subject to notable changes in training has been the organizers. While there is of course nothing new about Labour having local agents and organizers, their role and training has clearly evolved over the past decade or more. In particular, organizers are now generally expected to take more strategic responsibility than in the past:

The work of the old fashioned agent was a person that would call the meetings, take the minutes, send out the correspondence, receive it, pay the cheques, administer the party, run the local elections, run off the notices for branch meetings - sort of act as a secretary or administrator to the party running elections. The new organizer would expect volunteers to do all that and he or she may be responsible for finding those volunteers. Then it is (a question of) looking at how the party is going to develop, what (will be the) membership base, what the fund-raising base, where the potential new councils are coming from, looking ahead to the local elections as to what the strategy is for defending or attacking seats in local authority…So the job has changed, it is more professional and the membership is more professional, and I expect to have professional people employed to do a professional job. The happy amateur who was employed in many constituencies is no more.[20]

After the 1987 General Election, the party headquarters took responsibility for training organizers centrally. This training was initially provided for both parliamentary candidates and their organizers in target seats. The process of professionalization in this sense was given impetus by the computerization of party organization during the 1990s; this directly required training in IT skills, while increasing the scope of the work that organizers could do in local and regional offices. For instance, it became far easier for local parties to 'segment' different groups of voters and to target election literature accordingly. It also, as the quotation above implies, led to the development of coordinated training programmes for volunteer activists: this re-skilling of activists freed up professional organizers to take on a more strategic coordinating role. The growing significance of professional organizers in the regions is apparent in the efforts made by Millbank to 'think long-term' about the development of the party apparatus through the identification and training of individuals with long-term managerial potential. The purpose of such professional development is not simply, as in the past, to ensure a short-term supply of organizers to constituencies lacking agents in the run-up to an election campaign,

...but to fundamentally look at the calibre of people that will be coming on as potential managers, middle and top managers of the party in ten to twelve years time. We're not just bringing people on to run the next election; we're actually trying to change the organizational path of the party

so there are people there who can be identified very soon as being the future regional officers, regional developers, press officers and Head Office managers. [21]

To this end the party introduced, for the first time, a professionally designed training programme in May 1999. 25 recruits were selected from over 300 applicants who responded to an advert placed in the national press. Most were graduates, and they embarked on a mixture of residential training and placements in regional offices and constituencies designed to develop knowledge of the party and its policies, skills in computing, campaigning, public relations and handling the media, communications and opinion-formation, leadership and team work. At the end of the course trainees are formally assessed and those successful are awarded a diploma through the Open College Network (Braggins, 1999).

The professional ethos

Before concluding our discussion there is one final aspect of professionalization to which we must draw attention. It is perhaps less tangible though those discussed so far, though none the less significant since, we would argue, it provides the underlying impulse for the process of professionalization. It is particularly important to the core professional qualities of commitment and autonomy. There is abundant qualitative evidence of the *changing ethos* of the party under since Tom Sawyer became General Secretary in 1994. Repeatedly, we were told by staff who had worked for the party though the changes that a remarkable transformation of the workplace culture occurred within Labour's organization during the 1990s, especially at the centre. Thus, changes in organizational structure were accompanied by a growing emphasis on the need for flexibility, competence, commitment and adaptability among party personnel. One unit head at Millbank illustrated this by referring to an incident in the party=s former head office at Walworth Road, in south-east London:

I think it started to come with the appointment of Tom Sawyer as General Secretary: he brought in a fresh approach when he was appointed...there was this old tatty chair in the Boardroom at Walworth Road and he had a full staff meeting, and he picked up this chair...and said: 'this chair isn't good enough for our organization. It isn't good enough for our members and it isn't good enough for you as Party staff. We need to start treating people with more respect and we need to start looking at ourselves, the way we organize ourselves, and all the rest of it.' And it was..all about that chair really. We were shoddy....You walk around this building now and you see the way we organize ourselves, the way we are, and there is a different feel... you feel like a professional and that you've come to work ...whereas Walworth Road...it was tatty and it did, in a sense, reflect the way we were back then.[22]

Part and parcel of this new ethos is a strong sense of professional commitment; many interviewees stressed the unusual sacrifices they had to make in order to do the job, and as we have already seen, most were aware that they were foregoing more lucrative opportunities in order to devote themselves to party work, at least for a few years. On the other hand, a number of interviewees felt this was offset by a developing ethos of initiative and autonomy. The following two comments give a flavour of this:

They may pay crap or whatever but they give people a lot of responsibility to do their own thing, to strike out, to come up with their own suggestions and to try out new ideas. [23]

We have an annual get-together with all organizing staff in the regions and Head Office; it was last year that Margaret McDonagh (the current Party General Secretary) said to all staff: 'I want you to be entrepreneurs, I want you to be imaginative. I want you to make mistakes because if you don't make mistakes you can't learn from them. We need to be thinking all the time of doing things differently, doing things better, embracing new ideas. Don't be afraid to try new things, don't be afraid to fail - from that we go on.' [24]

The scope for autonomy which these comments suggest is afforded to some staff at least is entirely consistent with our concept of professionalism, of course.

Conclusion: party employees in an 'electoral-professional' era

Employees in the contemporary Labour Party are mainly white, middle class, well-educated, young-to-middle aged, libertarian, post-materialist, pro-European and of the centre-left. Almost all are trade unionists, though only a small (and probably diminishing) percentage have prior experience of paid employment in the union movement. The majority have previous occupational experience outside the party, and turnover in some units is comparatively high; indeed, it may be increasingly common for staff to remain with the party for just a few years in early or mid-career. A significant minority have experienced, or intend to experience, elective office and some may well see their work as enhancing long-term ambitions in this direction.

It would be wrong to imply that professionalization suffuses every aspect of the party's working practices now: neither is it accurate to suggest that every party employee displays all the core characteristics of the ideal-type professional, such as expertise, job autonomy, commitment, vocational identification, a code of professional ethics and membership of a professional body which regulates its members. Nevertheless, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that a more flexibly defined notion of professionalism applies much more widely throughout the party organization. That is, while relatively few display *all* the core characteristics of the ideal-type, many now manifest enough characteristics to reasonably be described as 'professionals in pursuit of political outcomes' (Romzek & Utter,1997, p.1263). This is broadly implicit in the growing sense of specialized expertise which party staff in general exude, the substantial if qualified autonomy which some of them enjoy, and the fairly widespread commitment to political enterprise found among party employees. These points come through in a number of ways including: the prevalence of academic and vocational qualifications among staff; the external experience that many have before coming to Labour, and the sense that some clearly have that working for the party is in itself intrinsically valuable to their professional development; the capacity enjoyed by some staff to exercise a degree of initiative, enterprise and autonomy; their shared commitment to the underlying goals of the organization for which they work, and the sense that such a commitment could and should entail an abnormally high workload, even though there are significant opportunity costs in working for the Labour Party. We believe that such expertise and commitment can plausibly be defined as a variety of 'political professionalism', and that these developments have been driven by a conscious effort to reform the procedures,

structures, ethos and training of personnel. Hitherto, political scientists have tended to understand the term professionalization very narrowly in the context of political parties; the standard inference has been that it implies an organization more heavily reliant on the use and influence of external professionals with special expertise of use to the party, such as opinion researchers, marketing and advertizing consultants. Now we have evidence which strongly suggest that professionalization is far more diffuse than this, embracing as it does many of the governing party's regular pay-roll employees, something which has almost certainly been deliberately engineered by party managers who regard such professionalism as a necessary part of the organizational mix required for success in a competitive political environment. Thus, if we take as a rough measure of the extent of professionalization those staff in our sample who are graduates (or non-graduates with formal vocational qualifications); have enjoyed previous non-party employment experience; and have benefited from formal training by the party, we find that 33% (n=30) of Labour employees can be designated professionals. 80% of these occupy senior posts in Millbank or the regions and might therefore reasonably be considered the professional core of the party organization.

While our goal in this article has been limited to defining and describing the professionalization of the contemporary Labour Party, it is worth concluding by emphasizing that this line of research inevitably provokes further questions. One of the most interesting, we believe, is that of intra-party power: does professionalization serve to enhance the leadership's grip on the party organization, or does the autonomy which professionals characteristically enjoy threaten to undermine the managerial control which party elites seek? Though not within the scope of our work here, it will be important not to overlook this theme in tracing the continuing evolution of party organizations.

Notes

2. For data sources see Webb (2000), p.193 and p.243.

3. We gratefully acknowledge all those Labour Party employees who have cooperated with us in this research, particularly those who gave their time to be interviewed. We especially appreciate the assistance given to us by the party's Director of Personnel at Millbank, Jonathan Seller.

4. That said, it is likely that the response rate suffered from the concerns shown by some party officials about the political sensitivity of this research project. Note that these concerns explain why the employees' sample size is considerably smaller in respect of some items in Tables 4 and 6 than elsewhere. In general terms political parties are not surprisingly sensitive about research which is conducted into their employees, members or elected representatives. After some negotiation Millbank distributed a questionnaire approved by the General Secretary's office to half the employees at the beginning of 2000. Unfortunately, one unit at Millbank subsequently objected and the approval was rescinded; even so, some 47 employees (almost exactly half of our overall sample) completed and returned this questionnaire and we have incorporated these responses into the data set. After further negotiation, a slightly revised questionnaire was approved and distributed to the remaining staff. Clearly, this is less than ideal in terms of data quality; fortunately, however, comparison tests reveal little difference between the two 'half-samples' in the overall distribution of responses for most variables. However, sample size for some items is notably smaller than for others in Tables 4 and 6 (that is, for variables which were included in the first half-sample's questionnaire but excluded from the second).

5. Unfortunately, we are unable to obtain a breakdown of regional employees by grade, so a comparison between known population characteristics and sample is only possible for Millbank employees.

6. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

7. The Millbank operation borrowed directly from the US Presidential campaign structure employed by Bill Clinton in 1992. Moreover, individual experts from Clinton's team, such as pollster Stan Greenberg and spokesman George Stephanopolis, were seconded to Labour in the months preceding the 1997 campaign (Braggins et al 1993; Kavanagh 1997).

8. There were 13 election task-forces, covering: election coordination, campaign message and delivery, Leader's tour, finance and administration, party (that is, members), media, policy, key campaigners, regions, key seats, projection (that is, visual presentation), rapid response, logistics (covering computing and IT needs).

9. Insights into the structure and of Labour's Millbank operation in the election campaign and after are derived from interviews conducted at Millbank, 25 March 1999 and 20 August 1999 (see also Farrell et al 1997).

10. Interviews at Millbank, 20 February 1998, 25 March 1999 and 15 October 1999.

11. This figure is derived from the British Representation Survey 1997. Note that we have not entered educational data for MPs in Table 2 since the BRS codes the relevant variable in a manner incompatible with the other data sets used here.

12. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

13. Interview conducted at Millbank, 29 March 1999.

14. Interview conducted at Millbank, 29 March 1999.

15. Interview conducted at Millbank, 22 November 1999.

16. Interview conducted at Millbank, 22 November 1999.

17. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

18. Interview conducted at Westminster, 29 February 2000.

19. Interview conducted at Westminster, 29 February 2000.

20. Interview conducted at Millbank, 15 October 1999.

21. Interview conducted at Millbank, 15 October 1999.

22. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

23. Interview conducted at Millbank, 22 November 1999.

24. Interview conducted at Millbank, 15 October 1999.

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2. For data sources see Webb (2000), p.193 and p.243.

3. We gratefully acknowledge all those Labour Party employees who have cooperated with us in this research, particularly those who gave their time to be interviewed. We especially appreciate the assistance given to us by the party's Director of Personnel at Millbank, Jonathan Seller.

4. That said, it is likely that the response rate suffered from the concerns shown by some party officials about the political sensitivity of this research project. Note that these concerns explain why the employees' sample size is considerably smaller in respect of some items in Tables 4 and 6 than elsewhere. In general terms political parties are not surprisingly sensitive about research which is conducted into their employees, members or elected representatives. After some negotiation Millbank distributed a questionnaire approved by the General Secretary's office to half the employees at the beginning of 2000. Unfortunately, one unit at Millbank subsequently objected and the approval was rescinded; even so, some 47 employees (almost exactly half of our overall sample) completed and returned this questionnaire and we have incorporated these responses into the data set. After further negotiation, a slightly revised questionnaire was approved and distributed to the remaining staff. Clearly, this is less than ideal in terms of data quality; fortunately, however, comparison tests reveal little difference between the two 'half-samples' in the overall distribution of responses for most variables. However, sample size for some items is notably smaller than for others in Tables 4 and 6 (that is, for variables which were included in the first half-sample's questionnaire but excluded from the second).

5. Unfortunately, we are unable to obtain a breakdown of regional employees by grade, so a comparison between known population characteristics and sample is only possible for Millbank employees.

6. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

7. The Millbank operation borrowed directly from the US Presidential campaign structure employed by Bill Clinton in 1992. Moreover, individual experts from Clinton's team, such as pollster Stan Greenberg and spokesman George Stephanopolis, were seconded to Labour in the months preceding the 1997 campaign (Braggins et al 1993; Kavanagh 1997).

8. There were 13 election task-forces, covering: election coordination, campaign message and delivery, Leader's tour, finance and administration, party (that is, members), media, policy, key campaigners, regions, key seats, projection (that is, visual presentation), rapid response, logistics (covering computing and IT needs).

9. Insights into the structure and of Labour's Millbank operation in the election campaign and

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after are derived from interviews conducted at Millbank, 25 March 1999 and 20 August 1999 (see also Farrell et al 1997).

10. Interviews at Millbank, 20 February 1998, 25 March 1999 and 15 October 1999.

11. This figure is derived from the British Representation Survey 1997. Note that we have not entered educational data for MPs in Table 2 since the BRS codes the relevant variable in a manner incompatible with the other data sets used here.

12. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

13. Interview conducted at Millbank, 29 March 1999.

14. Interview conducted at Millbank, 29 March 1999.

15. Interview conducted at Millbank, 22 November 1999.

16. Interview conducted at Millbank, 22 November 1999.

17. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

18. Interview conducted at Westminster, 29 February 2000.

19. Interview conducted at Westminster, 29 February 2000.

20. Interview conducted at Millbank, 15 October 1999.

21. Interview conducted at Millbank, 15 October 1999.

22. Interview conducted at Millbank, 20 August 1999.

23. Interview conducted at Millbank, 22 November 1999.

24. Interview conducted at Millbank, 15 October 1999.