

Television Coverage of British Party Conferences in the 1990s: The Symbiotic Production of Political News

James Benedict Price Stanyer

**PhD thesis submitted in the Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science**

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Abstract

Studies of political communication in the UK have focused primarily on election campaigns and reportage of parliamentary and public policy issues. In these contexts, two or more parties compete for coverage in the news media. However, the main British party conferences present a different context, where one party's activities form the (almost exclusive) focus of the news media's attention for a week, and that party's leadership 'negotiates' coverage in a direct one-to-one relationship. Conference weeks are the key points in the organizational year for each party (irrespective of their internal arrangements), and a critical period for communicating information about the party to voters at large, especially via television news coverage, which forms the focus of this study. The visual and audio impressions generated in the conference hall shape the way in which citizens not involved with that party perceive its organization, membership and policies. This thesis is the first specialized study of how TV news coverage of party conferences is shaped.

Source-centred approaches to understanding the production of news focus on the activities of extra-media actors such as party elites in shaping coverage. Media-centred approaches substantially disagree, stressing the media elites' exercise of discretionary power or licensed autonomy in framing news. Party conference coverage reveals the activities of both party and media elites in an exceptionally clear and uncluttered form. Using qualitative interviews with party and media influentials, content analysis of TV news coverage and transcripts, direct observation of conferences and newsrooms, and collateral material from press coverage, historical material and other sources, this study explores the main stages in the production of news. Parties and media organizations both undertake detailed pre-planning for conference week, in the process negotiating key parameters which shape coverage. Journalistic news gathering activities shape the emergence of stories once the conference week begins. The parties have developed specialist teams to handle immediate news management, taking account of media strategies, but coverage can also be affected by internal dissent inside the parties, and by collective and individual responses among TV organizations.

The production of conference news is symbiotic at many levels. The one-to-one character of party-media relations in conference weeks demonstrates clearly that broadcasting organisations exert a disciplinary effect upon political parties. Media pressures have fostered a degree of homogenization in parties' internal structures, and a certain standardization in their previously unique organizational cultures and modes of public self-presentation. Party conferences have come to look and sound similar, partly in response to

the organizational demands of media professionals and the emergence of media-oriented party cadres. But access to TV news is also an increasingly effective tool for party leaderships to influence the internal debates and power struggles within the parties themselves.

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Introduction

The Symbiotic Production of Party Conference News

Television news from the annual autumn party conferences matters for both the political parties and the broadcasters. Coverage of the party conferences started in 1954, five years before the first fully televised election campaign¹. Since these early days the conferences have grown in significance for all three parties and for the BBC and ITN. Kavanagh notes:

'There are certain predictable high points in the political calendar. Local elections, the Queen's speech and the budget are pencilled in at each party's headquarters and the media devote acres of newsprint and hours of broadcast time to each. Yet none of these compare in duration to the season of party conferences, which last for the best part of a month. For political commentators and activists they are the political equivalent of an Olympic games for sports fans and competitors'².

Rosenbaum concurs that: 'These autumnal seaside gatherings are the most important occasions in the annual calendar of the main political parties'³. Yet there are only two major academic studies of the Labour and Conservative conferences (Minkin, 1978 and Kelly, 1989). And despite academic recognition of the importance of the news broadcasters in British politics, and of the conferences as key political events, the production of party conference news has not so far been specifically analysed in a full-length study.

Television news in the 1990s is widely seen as an increasingly important conduit for publicity-oriented political parties to get their messages across to an audience (Blumler et al, 1995; Franklin, 1994; McNair, 1995; Scammell, 1995). McNair notes that 'political actors have come to believe in the importance of "free media" in achieving their goals as opposed to the paid for variety'⁴. The party conferences are the one time in the year when the main political parties are guaranteed exclusive coverage. At each conference the other parties are relegated to the 'sidelines'; the sole focus of the broadcasters' attention is the party hosting the conference. In an age when political communication is deemed of vital importance, the conferences have become an important platform for achieving 'free media' - in particular, television news coverage and an audience of millions. Kelly (1989, 1994) and Minkin (1978) mention in passing the growing importance of television coverage for the parties in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s its importance has increased. News coverage of the conferences provide the parties with a publicity window which is 'less manufactured than advertisements and, as such, may be thought to carry more legitimacy and credibility'⁵ with the audience. It enables them to promote new policies and present an appropriate image of their organisations to the viewers beyond the conference hall.

News broadcasters see the conferences as key events, as one broadcaster suggested: 'It kind of shapes the whole of the new year, because the television new year is really September the first... it is when the autumn schedules hit the screen. The conferences provide a useful injection of manageable politics in that early phase of the television year⁶. Along with coverage of other political events, such as the state opening of parliament and general elections, the party conferences are events of significance and warrant not only extensive news coverage but live coverage as well. Conferences also provide the news broadcasters with a series of opportunities not available in their 'run of the mill' programmes based at Westminster. They gain greater access to the whole political party, not just the parliamentary party and the leadership but also to the delegates, providing almost their only opportunity to test activists' opinions. Second, conference coverage is an outward sign of the political seriousness of the broadcasters. Coverage of the conferences remains part of the news broadcasters' public service remit, a sign of their commitment to the coverage of politics. To explain the structure of this study: I begin with a brief review of the existing literature, and then set out the framework for a new study. The final section of the chapter elaborates some key themes which guide the subsequent research.

1.1 Literature

The thesis draws on many different sources of literature, including works on news production, news organisations, political party organisation, election studies, interactional studies, and studies of media events (not all within the rubric of political communications). The differences within the literature on news production are ones of focus and location of power. A range of approaches have stressed the complexity of the news production process and the variety of factors which need to be considered.

In examining these differences a useful place to start is with a classification provided by Schlesinger (1990), who argues that most studies within what he terms the sociology of journalism have been 'far too media centric'⁷. The focus of the studies has mainly been on the activity of journalists and other news professionals in the construction of news (the best known of these studies being works by Gans 1979; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Schlesinger, 1987; and Tracey, 1978). While not completely ignoring the news sources, their emphasis was on how journalists make use of such sources. In political communications terms, the most numerous studies of the role of news broadcasters in the production of political news have been produced by Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995 and with Nossiter 1985, 1989, 1995. These studies have re-emphasised the importance of journalists in the construction of campaign agendas, and are based on observations carried out during the general election campaigns through the 1980s and 1990s. They also focused

on editorial decision-making, looked at journalistic attitudes towards political parties and their publicity initiatives, and examined the intricacies of the news-packaging process.

Another body of literature focuses predominantly on the activity of source organisations in the production of news (most notably Deacon, 1996; Ericson et al 1989; Schlesinger, 1990 and with Tumber, 1994). These frameworks have examined the ways in which sources increasingly manipulate the news production process. They focus on the strategies such organisations use to manage the news, often categorised into a series of dualities, such as offensive and defensive strategies (Ericson et al, 1989), and promotion and the avoidance of risk (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). Recent studies in political communications (Bruce, 1992; Franklin 1994; Harrop, 1990; Jones, 1995; McNair, 1995; Negrine, 1996; Scammell, 1995; Seymour-Ure, 1991) argue that political parties and certain communication professionals have numerous influences on news content. These studies demonstrate that parties are not passive sources of news, but actively try to influence its content to benefit themselves. According to these studies, parties can influence a report's subject matter, its visual nature and the individuals who appear. These studies give precedence in analysis to strategies, particularly 'marketing' and 'public relations', as the main form of party influence on news production. The parties develop strategies to manage the media such as Franklin's (1994) four strategies of agenda setting, or McNair's (1995) four types of media management.

Cutting across this division is a little-mentioned but important difference of focus between studies centred on organisations or institutions studies and studies centred on events. Both source-centric and media-centric studies can be either organisation-centred or events-centred. Media organisational centred studies (including Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Blumler et al 1985, 1989, 1995; Gans, 1979; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Schlesinger, 1987; Tuchman, 1978) have examined the organisational structure of news organisations, the attitudes of journalists, and the broadcasting organisations' norms and values. Studies of source organisations (Ericson et al, 1989 and Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994) have particularly focused on their structure and media orientation. There has also been a movement in focus toward news events. Glasgow University Media Group's numerous studies were early media-centric research into non-routine news events, and there have also been studies of the relations between journalists and the military during war (Taylor, 1992). There has been further research into events, particularly Dayan and Katz's (1992) study of media events; Boorstin's (1961) study of pseudo-events; and Molotch and Lester's (1974) study of the organisation of routine news events. In political communications in Britain, one routine event in particular has generated numerous studies: general elections. Studies of the British election news (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997; Crewe and Harrop, 1986, 1989; Crewe and Gosschalk, 1995; Harrison 1992, 1997; Semetko et

al, 1991) have focused on the activities both of news organisations and of political parties.

Although vastly different in their subject areas, all these studies are centrally concerned with 'definitional power' (Schlesinger, 1990) - that is, the power of source organisations and/ or the news media to set news agendas. From a neo-Marxist perspective Hall et al (1978) argue that news media exist in a relationship of structured subordination to powerful source organisations, particularly the state. The news media act as 'secondary definers' amplifying the 'primary definers' definition of events. As McNair (1995) points out, the news media for Hall et al are not only 'biased towards elite groups... [but show] deference to, recognised authority'⁸. The autonomy of the media is severely constrained by their own attitudes and their position vis-a-vis the primary definer. Curran (1990) argues that Schlesinger 'fired a devastating Exocet'⁹ against Hall's source-centric approach, criticising it for not taking account of the differing influence of sources and their changing composition, and for overstating the passivity of the media. Schlesinger (1990) and with Tumber (1994) attempt to rework the primary definition thesis. Primary definition is no longer a status but an aim which sources compete to achieve within a given arena.

There are also those studies, particularly within a pluralist 'agenda-setting paradigm', that focus on the definitional power of the news media (Semetko et al, 1991). Within this literature there is an argument that the news media do possess a 'discretionary power' or relative autonomy. The news media do not merely reflect the definition of events constructed by political elites. Semetko et al (1991) argue that the contribution of the news media to the construction of an agenda needs to be considered in terms of a continuum 'from agenda-setting to agenda-reflecting, with agenda-shaping and agenda-amplifying falling in between the two extremes'¹⁰. Definitional contestation occurs not only between sources but also between different sources and the news media.

To such attempts to locate definitional power, however, should be added those studies which hold what could be termed an interactionist perspective (mainly work by Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Mancini, 1994; Sigal, 1973 and Tunstall, 1970). These studies focus on interaction and the relationships between journalists and news sources, with Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) and Tunstall (1970) examining the Parliamentary lobby (the privileged group of Parliamentary correspondents). They develop a wider interactionist theoretical framework, analysing the interrelationship between political parties and the broadcasters. These interrelationships have been characterised in different ways. Tunstall (1970) sees the relationship as exchange-driven, based on a complex series of interactions. For Sigal (1973) the relationship is based on bargaining, consensus and routine. For Mancini (1994) it fluctuates between trust and suspicion. And Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) argue that it is based on dependence and adaptation.

There are several shortcomings within the existing communications literature. One problem with existing studies is the unresolved question of primacy. Definitional power can never be satisfactorily located in either the activities of sources or of the news media alone. Despite the contribution of source-centred studies to the understanding of the competitive nature of source activity and the fluidity of definitional potential, the role of the news media in the representation of definitions is placed on the 'back burner'. Indeed, it could be argued that Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) need to give greater prominence to the role of the news media in reporting crime. Similarly, while there has been some attempt to highlight the role of the media in agenda construction and definitional processes, such attempts have seen the role of news sources largely from the perspective of the journalists. The focus has been on the internal organisational processes that go into the formation of a finished report. The question of definitional primacy is not resolved. Further, the organisational bias of the source-centric and media-centric approaches largely means that the question of definitional primacy remains located within context of organisations, oscillating from source to media according to the approach of the different studies.

The existing political communications literature pays insufficient attention to the organisational structure of political parties, despite the wealth of research in this area (McKenzie, 1963; Katz and Mair, 1995; Kelly, 1994b; Kelly and Foster, 1990; Panebianco, 1988; Webb, 1994; Whiteley et al 1994). In fact, one of the main problems with existing studies of political communications is the examination of the organisational structure of political parties. Schlesinger (1990) does recognise the complex nature of primary definition and interestingly raises the importance of competition between sources for primary definer status. But the structural make-up of primary definers is not really examined. The political parties, commonly considered to be primary definers, are complex heterogeneous organisations. Indeed, there has been a vast amount of literature on the structure of political parties which seems to have been largely ignored in the field of political communications. One question which needs to be considered is: Where does definitional power lie within a primary definer? If, externally, parties are competing with each other to set the news agenda, there is also competition within the parties. While the growing importance of news management and the professionalisation hypothesis (Blumler, 1990; Harrop, 1990; Scammell, 1995) is difficult to refute, it tends to under-emphasise the heterogeneous nature of parties and the continuing importance of relationships between news broadcasters and political parties. Parties are made up formally of different sections - such as conference delegates, MPs, in Labour's case the trade unions, and the leadership - and informally divide into different 'ideological factions' (loosely described) on particular issues.

There is a tendency for most party-based studies to focus on the activities of the

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parliamentary parties and the party leaderships, and to ignore the activities of the rank and file - although there are extensive survey-based studies of party members' attitudes (Whiteley et al 1994). The conference, however, is a somewhat different and indeed unique contest, because to some degree the whole party becomes involved in the production of news, not just the parliamentary party. So the question 'What role do the parties play in political communications?' should raise the further question 'What part of any particular party are we talking about?' Parties are hierarchical organisations, but is it safe to assume a necessarily dominant role for the party elite in the news production process for the whole party? Existing events-studies in party political communications tend to focus on election campaigning, while relatively few examine other events over the lifetime of a parliament (Negrine, 1996; Franklin, 1992).

None of these studies deals specifically with the question of news production at the party conferences. Instead, they tend to use the conferences in passing as an example of the political parties' success in being able to strongly influence the news production process. Conferences have been classified as 'pseudo events'¹¹ (Boorstin, 1961; McNair, 1995) or as 'media events'¹² (Dayan and Katz, 1992), because they are designed by party elites very much with the broadcasters in mind, and intended to attract their attention and their compliance with party-designed messages. Analysts who argue such positions place too much emphasis on party promotional activity, ignoring the active and partly counter vailing role of the news broadcasters at the conferences. Conferences are an arena of interaction between different party and broadcast actors. Although, increasingly, promotional activity is perceived as important by certain members of the parties in order to frame a positive public image for their organisations with the news broadcasters, this perception is not always shared within the parties. With limited resources, excessive promotion is seen by some as potentially counter productive.

Existing organisational-centred studies tend to concentrate either on the interrelationship of the journalists within the news organisation (Gans, 1979; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Schlesinger, 1987), or on actors within the source organisation and the processes of selection and construction that take place there (Ericson et al, 1989; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994). While the interrelationships examined by these studies are important, in the context of a media event equal if not more significance needs to be attached to the interrelationships between journalists and the political actors. There are few actual interactional studies of how parties and journalists portray 'pseudo' or media events. The analysis tends to focus either on the activities of the journalists in reporting such events (Blumler et al, 1985, 1989 and 1995) or on the activities of the political parties or other source organisations in trying to originate coverage (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Scammell, 1995).

The existing analyses of the interrelationship between the parties and the broadcasters almost universally see relationships in a triadic way, with party A competing with party B to shape media coverage under the normal strong 'bi-partisanship' conventions of political balance under which regulated broadcasters must operate in Britain. Based on encounters in the Westminster lobby, they focus on the relationship between the different political parties and the news media, but always within the expectation that media-party relations are permanently located within a framework of inter-party competition. But in conference week party A does not have to be constantly looking over its shoulder at the interpretative or promotional plays being made by other parties. For that week, uniquely in the political year, the party-in-conference commands the almost undivided attention of the news media.

1.2 The Framework

This thesis does not set out to provide another media-centric or source-centric analysis. Any new framework for understanding the production of conference news' reports needs to draw on a media-source centred approach. This study adopted an extra-organisational approach (Curran et al, 1982). It took account both of the activity and decisions made by journalists and members of the respective political parties, and of their complex and multi-level relationships. It focused on conferences as a news events constructed in a dyadic way by both the parties and the news broadcasters, responding to their own imperatives, values and beliefs. Both organisations possessed definitional power and used it. The framing of conference news needs to be considered as a negotiated process involving the activities of both sides. The news production process was symbiotic (Lance Bennett et al, 1985), a product both of the activities of the news broadcasters at one level and of the political parties at another level: it was produced through interaction between actors with close working relationships and multiple inter-dependencies.

Existing studies of news production categorise news-producing activity using informal typologies of various 'stages', each typology slightly different from the other. Thus Golding and Elliott (1979) identify planning, gathering, selection and presentation stages, while Gans (1979) distinguishes gathering, selection and processing stages. These informal structures can be simplified into a two-stage production cycle: advance planning for the event; and gathering, selection and presentation of news stories at the conferences. Conference news was the product of the sum total of these different stages. What is more, at all the conferences the political parties have to be considered as an integral part of the news production cycle. Conference news was produced through the interrelated activity of

both the broadcasters and the political parties at each stage of the production cycle (see Figure 1.1). And relationships during each stage of the news production cycle were dyadic, not triadic. The nature of the conferences meant that - unlike any other time of the political year - the parties and broadcasters are in a one-on-one relationship for roughly a week.

Figure 1.1: Activities in the conference news production process.

	Party	TV News
Pre-conference	Planning	Planning
At conference	Disseminate	Gather / select / present

It is important to note that the activities at each stage of the production process were linked horizontally to the next stage. Planning by the broadcasters and parties was a fundamental prerequisite for later news dissemination and gathering. The essential logistical elements of conference coverage all had to be in place prior to the conference starting. These elements made the next stages possible. In addition, the activity of broadcasters and party actors was routine and organised. Their activities were not random, but instead planned and directed to the production of a final product: news.

1.3 Themes

This study looks at certain themes within the overall structure of the news production cycle. It locates those actors involved in the production process in their respective organisational settings. It examines their relationships and interaction at each stage of the production process, the development and implementation of strategies of promotion and control by the parties, and their shared and divergent interests.

Organisational Settings

It is important to identify which actors in the three main political parties and the news broadcasters were involved in the different stages of the production cycle. Each part of the production cycle involved different parts of the two complex organisations, although activity was co-ordinated from the centre of each. Conference planning was carried out six to nine months prior to the start of each conference. It was conducted at different levels within each organisation. First, the professional 'machine bureaucracy' (Mintzberg, 1983) at party headquarters were involved, working with 'conference units' within the BBC and ITN. They were concerned with conference logistics such as camera positions, venue space and accreditation. Second, a key role was played by the parties' 'adhocracy' structures

(Mintzberg, 1983), consisting of specially formed committees and work groups, involving a range of media specialists within each party and often co-ordinated by leadership figures directly. They focused on aesthetic planning, including the design of the main stage set, management of the agenda timetable and communication strategies. Third, maybe weeks or days before conference, various factions and actors within the parties entered into the process, along with producers, editors and journalists. Indeed, planning by the news broadcasters was last-minute, and they met shortly before the conferences began and daily throughout their duration.

Gathering and processing of information was conducted by journalists working as part of a hierarchical broadcast news team quite separate from the conference units. The political editors were responsible for the output and were in charge of the news team. Each of the news channels had their own editors, correspondents and reporters. In the case of Newsnight and Channel Four News the presenters were also at the conferences, producing reports of their own. Some members of the conference news teams, particularly the programme producers, were in continuous contact with the main London news rooms. Their plans were relayed back to the capital, covering matters such as which politicians have consented to be interviewed and the possible story angles for each main slot. The main news editors in London decided on the amount of time to be allocated to the whole party conference report, the salience and running order, and whether additional news items would be required.

A key role in dissemination was played by the parties' leaderships and by communications specialists who were part of the parties' adhocracy. All the senior party spokespersons, ministers and shadow ministers were the main speechifiers during the conferences. Each of the parties' leaderships employed a team of spin doctors for the duration of the conferences. They assumed a central co-ordinating role, implementing agreed strategies and regularly monitoring the latest developments at the conferences. Other party actors were also engaged in the dissemination of information: the parliamentary parties; the constituency parties; affiliated groups, such as the trade unions in Labour's ranks; 'old stars' and disaffected former ministers; and factions divided by differing ideologies which cut across existing hierarchies.

Interrelationships

A dyadic interrelationship existed between different parts of both organisations. Thus, different parts of the organisations were interdependent at different stages of the production cycle. The parties' and the broadcasters' bureaucratic apparatuses were heavily

interdependent during the planning stage. Once conferences started, the relationship shifted to that between various political actors in the party hierarchy and its bureaucracy, and the correspondents, political editors and producers. These relationships too were differentiated.

The planning stage was marked by a strong level of co-operation and repeated interactions between the party professional machine and the conference units. These two parts of the organisations were dependent on each other for a successful outcome. This stage was also marked by a striking amount of adaptation on both sides. Both the news broadcasters and the political parties adapted many elements of the conference in the planning stage to meet the requirements of the other. To a large extent such adaptations formed part of the routinised procedures which had taken place over a long period of time, but both sides tended to be flexible in meeting new demands. The planning exercise culminated in a series of meetings at each venue where final decisions were made jointly over the space allocated to the broadcasters, the position of the cameras, the lighting and sound arrangements, editing facilities for live TV camera crews, broadcast booths looking on to the main arena and special rooms for press conferences.

During the conference week there was a large amount of personal interaction between the party actors and broadcast journalists. Both were dependent on the other, the journalists for information and the parties for publicity. Tunstall notes that in the 'role as news gatherer, in relation to news sources, there is an exchange of information for publicity'¹³. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) concur that each side benefits from offering the other a resource it considers valuable. 'The mass media offer politicians access to an audience through a credible outlet while politicians offer journalists information about a theatre of presumed relevance, significance, impact and spectacle for audience consumption'¹⁴. Conferences amplified this dependence. In the case of a similar media event - the presidential conventions in the US - Fant notes:

'The networks and the parties share a common desire to attract as many television viewers as possible. the co-operation between them in attempting to achieve this end has over the years developed into a strong reciprocal relationship from which the parties receive free, national exposure and the networks are given a rare opportunity to present live, emotional programming and to promote their news departments'¹⁵.

Adaptation was also manifest during the conference week. As Blumler and Gurevitch also note, politicians must:

'Adapt their messages to the demands of formats and genres devised inside [news] organisations and to their associated styles, story models and audience images. Likewise, journalists cannot perform their task of political scrutiny without access to politicians for information, news, interviews, action and comment'¹⁶.

Parties have adapted to the presence of the broadcasters in a strategic fashion, developing strategies of promotion and control. But the broadcasters have in turn learnt to fit into the controlled environment this created at conference.

Actors in the parties' and the broadcasters' bureaucratic apparatuses often had close professional relationships. The broadcast journalists and politicians from the parliamentary party had pre-existing relationships as actors in the Westminster lobby. To this extent, conference could be seen as a continued extension of lobby relations but in a different location. There were some differences, though. Journalists interacted with party actors with whom they had had little previous contact. They often had no direct relationship with the delegates outside the conference season, although some non-Westminster sections of the party may have built up relations with broadcast journalists during previous conferences. Journalists' relationships with them were not as close as with their parliamentary colleagues. On the whole, most contact tended to be between journalists and those parliamentary actors whom they knew, those who had a track record, the party leadership and senior MPs - what Tunstall (1970) calls 'key individuals'. Such individuals made up a substantial amount of the news' raw material. Broadcast journalists were dependent on and favoured these sources over the others. In particular, journalists were reliant on these senior sources to provide novel or distinctive information. This dependency increased when these sources were newsworthy, allowing them, as Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) argue, 'to ration the goodies, use them as bargaining counters and direct reporters' attention to their pet themes'¹⁷. Journalists were dependent realists with deadlines to meet and therefore normally compromised in order to obtain information. The rank and file only found themselves courted if they were particularly newsworthy.

Gathering also brought broadcast journalists into contact with the wider 'news community' (Sigal, 1973) and colleagues from the Lobby. There was much discussion between broadcast journalists and their colleagues from the national press. Tunstall (1970) describes the relationship between journalists working in the Lobby as one based on competition and co-operation: they are to all intents and purposes 'competitor colleagues' (Tunstall, 1970). Competition focuses on: speed, being the first with the news; exclusivity; interpretation; and finally, strength, the quality of the story. A BBC correspondent when interviewed said: 'Yes, there is considerable competition between the various outlets... and stories will often be treated in different ways... But one bulletin would not go out at a complete tangent and say the opposite of another bulletin or programme. That would prompt an intervention at a senior level'¹⁸.

Promotion and Control

All the parties regularly used promotional strategies and sought to control the conference environment in order to ensure they received the best coverage possible. Promotional strategies focused on adapting dissemination to the demands of the news medium.

Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) suggest that a 'promotional dynamic' impels all source organisations: 'news sources... continue to be driven by the promotional dynamic to attain new heights of sophistication in trying to manage the news'¹⁹. Strategies of control focused on regulating party actors and access to information. Shaw (1994) argues that these two dynamics reached a height at the Labour conference.

'In the past, party conferences tended to be sources of political embarrassment and poor publicity. The control the leadership now wielded over conference... enabled Labour strategists to convert it into a media event. The whole operation was aimed at securing maximum favourable media coverage; in Mandelson's words: "Totally unashamedly, we have used the conference to project the party, to make an impact on the public" ...'²⁰.

Each party's adhocracy was geared up for promotional planning which occurred simultaneously with logistical planning. This took account of the aesthetic aspects of the conference, the conference agenda and timetable, and communication strategies. The main hall was treated as a promotional platform by the parties. A great amount of concerted attention was paid to the 'look' of the conference hall. The design of the main platform has changed greatly over the last twenty years, becoming, one could argue, a stage upon which the main drama unfolded. Particular attention was paid to its colour, its shape, the logo, the platform seating arrangements and the position of the rostrum. The parties hired specialists to design the hall and main platform to produce a professional set. The specialists over the years have adapted their designs to the requirements of the broadcasters, ranging from specific technical realities raised during discussions with the BBC and ITN through to the general demands of the medium based on experience from previous events. Both organisations had to adapt their planning to make use of a series of technological innovations. Planning also enabled both sides to determine what was permissible and what was possible.

Unlike aesthetic planning, the planning of the conference agenda and timetable was carried out by elected and selected members of party agenda committees, in liaison with the parties' leaderships and other specialist groups. While there was no direct contact between the broadcasters and the parties on agenda and timetable control, the presence of TV had become an important factor to be taken into account. Planning committees in all three parties met frequently prior to the start of each conference; motions from the constituencies and other party bodies were examined and a rough timetable and agenda fashioned. There were numerous forces influencing the decision-making processes within these committees over what to select and what to reject. In a practical sense the sheer number of motions received by the arrangements committees meant that not all could be included and many disappeared either being amalgamated in a compositing process or were simply not selected for debate. The media-oriented leaderships, through the agenda committees, were keen to

adapt the timetable and agenda to the demands of the televisual medium in order to maximise the promotion of party policy. For example, an increasing amount of time was set aside in the timetable for speeches by the parties' leaderships. Speeches were seen as a more televisually effective way of promoting party messages. Particularly detailed attention was paid to the leaders' speeches. The parties had built up these speeches to become the centre piece of each of their conference weeks. The cabinet and shadow cabinet met with members of the party's media arm to plan a co-ordinated release of information through the various speeches during themed debates. Key announcements by the various ministers and shadows were saved for the leaders' speeches. This late planning sought to orchestrate the announcements in each speech to avoid repeats and contradictions.

Communication strategies were then developed and employed to sell these announcements to the broadcasters. All parties' communication teams regularly used public relations strategies to aid the promotional process. These strategies worked through adapting to the demands of the broadcasters but in a way that was advantageous to the leaderships. The information had to be 'framed in optimal terms capable of satisfying news values'²¹. The strategies allowed information to be targeted toward the appropriate news outlet, taking account of deadlines. Speeches made after the journalists' deadlines would not receive the attention they would have if made earlier. Schlesinger writes: 'journalists are among those occupational groups... for whom precision in timing... is necessary'²². And of course party actors realised this and so timed their own activities and announcements accordingly. Expectations of the news broadcasters had to be accounted for. The leaderships used spin doctors to 'hype' or 'talk down' the significance of certain forthcoming events on the conference timetable, in order to increase or decrease the attention paid to these events.

As part of the promotional process, the parties' leaderships and their teams of spin doctors also sought to offer journalists 'information subsidies' (Gandy, 1982) - that is '...reduce the price of information to the media and provide them with a subsidy'²³. Every conference had a press office. It provided computer terminals, fax machines, other facilities journalists required and, importantly, transcripts of speeches, policy statements and press releases. The aim was to make the gathering of information that much easier and quicker for the journalists. Other factions within the parties were excluded from using the main press office, but this did not stop them producing their own information for journalists. Heffernan and Marqusee (1992) and Minkin (1978) suggest that factions may 'hire a couple of rooms in a hotel as headquarters from which a daily bulletin is published'²⁴, and will often print and distribute press releases.

At a personal level the promotional dynamic led to the leadership in particular taking

an increasing interest in their appearance and in techniques used in speech delivery. This has been well documented outside the conference period (Cockerell, 1989; Franklin, 1994; McNair, 1995; Seymour-Ure, 1996). At the conferences the near-saturation coverage by the news provided leadership actors with an important opportunity to present the public with a particular image. Personal presentation required planning; senior members of each party regularly rehearsed major set piece speeches in the presence of media professionals. Speeches needed to 'satisfy "the journalists" requirement for easily-reportable "bits" of political information'²⁵. Speeches were constructed with the expectation 'that only a small part of it will be reported... [they] are loaded with "sound bites" -convenient, memorable words and phrases which can become a "hook" around which journalists will hang the story'²⁶. The key phrases needed to be emphasised and speakers' voices raised accordingly. The parties' leadership normally used a well-known minister or senior party figure to start or conclude a debate. These points aggregated together show that decisions taken over the conference promotion endeavoured to employ the logic of the communicator, or according to Altheide and Snow (1990) a 'media logic'. Promotional activity had to tread a 'thin wire' between transparency and being ignored. The success of the activity depended on the ability of parties to use their limited budgets and resources to bring about the desired effect. However, there were occasional conflicts at elite levels about the necessity of promotional activity, its cost and potential success.

In addition to promotion, the leaderships of the parties also sought to control conference proceedings. Timetable and agenda management was not only to 'project their leaders, propound policy, launch initiatives and attack the opposition, with no rights of rebuttal, or interventions by television interviewers...'²⁷ but also to avoid the risk of embarrassment. The leadership and their staffs possessed and increasingly used their ability to control and influence the agenda committees' selection of issues for debate and the positioning of these issues in the conference timetable. As the broadcasters conveyed the conference to a wide audience, there was increasing pressure from the parties' leaderships to avoid public embarrassment and negative publicity by avoiding issues over which there was disagreement within the party. Existing studies (Franklin, 1994; Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992; Scammell, 1995; Shaw, 1994) show that such activity had increasingly become the norm in each party, although at conferences it is not always successful by any means. Scammell (1995) talks about the increasing amount of effort leaderships spent on eliminating risk and increasing the discipline of the overall communication operation. Through the agenda committees party leaderships were able to have some influence on the selection and positioning of speeches and debates, either blocking them because the issues they raised may be controversial, or placing them in a position in the conference timetable where it was judged that they received less attention from the journalists.

During conference the communications teams sought to control the availability of and access to leadership actors. Communications teams were aware that news reports were heavily influenced by the availability of particular sources (Bruce, 1992; Jones, 1995). Through regulating availability and access they were able to control centrally, to some extent, who appeared, on what bulletin and when. The competitive bulletins hoped for exclusive access and usually co-operated, although more often than not leadership actors were made available to several outlets. Outside the main conference venue the presence of leading party actors and the leaders was also regulated. All three parties provided regular photo opportunities essential as 'visual fills' for television news reports.

While the odds were stacked in favour of the parties' elites, this is not to suggest that they were always successful. The control of information could never be total. Despite the increasing discipline with which communications were orchestrated, the parties did not play to one tune alone. All three main parties were far from a unified whole, consisting of various groupings which might be in conflict at the conferences. Each of the leaderships faced a certain amount of intra-party competition for the journalists' attention.

Party elites could not completely control the conference agenda and timetable, and dissent by party actors could not be completely silenced. During the period of the study dissent was expressed at the Liberal Democrat conference in 1994, where the delegates voted in favour of several motions (such as the legalisation of cannabis) against the express wishes of the leadership. Some trade unions were in open conflict with the Labour leadership at the 1993 Labour conference over voting reform and again in 1994 over the issue of Clause 4 of the party's constitution. At the Conservatives' 1994 conference factions within the parliamentary party were in conflict over Europe.

Despite the fact that these groupings often did not command the same resources or have the same contacts as the leaderships, they regularly planned to attract TV broadcasters' attention by using fringe meetings. Any faction could plan a fringe meeting, a timetable of which was sent to all journalists, to widen the agenda being debated in the main hall. They also planned their meetings to coincide with that debate and use well-known speakers in order to attract journalists' attention. Recent examples of factions successfully doing this include the Campaign Group at the Labour conferences; and the 'Bruges Group', the 'No Turning Back Group' and the 'Selsdon Group' at the Conservative party conferences. The above groups all featured in news reports analysed. Such fringe meetings would not occur when they did, nor feature the senior politicians they do, if it were not for the possibility that TV broadcasters would be present.

The proliferation of journalists at the conferences meant that there was a constant

demand for comment which could not be completely managed. Party factions realised that, because of external regulations and professional norms, broadcast journalists were limited in being able to provide an editorial opinion of their own, and so often required reactions broadly for and against the issues under debate. Indeed, factions within the parties planned to target certain sympathetic journalists, providing them with a list of contacts should balance considerations mean a particular reaction was required.

Conferences also provided opportunities for gaffes by leadership actors which could undermine the promotion of a particular policy. Planned speeches could be overshadowed by newsworthy external events. The co-ordination of the communications operation did not always go according to plan. The spin doctors sometimes found themselves in competition with their colleagues, trying equally to 'hype' or 'talk down' the significance of a particular announcement or occurrence.

The parties' leaderships and their spin doctors partly anticipated such developments and had instituted reactive communication strategies. These strategies of damage limitation involved the in-house team of public relations specialists in providing an interpretation of events friendly to the leadership. They were aimed at ensuring not only that the broadcasters reflected these views but that these views became the dominant interpretation of events. If the circumstance required, the reactions of senior party actors had to be mobilised to condemn a particular actor or perspective. Such strategies were an essential part in maintaining their position as conference 'primary definer' (Hall et al, 1978).

The ultimate goal therefore of promotion and control was in Minkin's words to achieve 'a "good" conference'²⁸. A good conference, Kavanagh suggests, 'is defined by managers as one which does not have unseemly divisions'²⁹, and, one could add, one that enabled the promotion of party policy through the news broadcasters to a wide audience. Such an aim could not be taken for granted and required substantial effort of behalf of the leadership.

Shared and Divergent Interests

The different parts of the organisations had shared interests at each stage of the production cycle. On a general level both the news broadcasters and the parties had an interest in seeing that they were a 'success'. As Blumler and Gurevitch note; 'each side of the politician-media professional partnership is striving to realise certain goals vis-a-vis the audience; yet it can not pursue them without securing in some form the co-operation of the other side'³⁰. Both had a shared interest in the conferences being a success in terms of

attracting high audience viewing figures. In the planning stages both organisational bureaucracies wanted the event to run smoothly, so that the operation looked slick and professionally produced to the viewing audience. They therefore co-operated on the logistical prerequisites of broadcasting, making sure that they were in place prior to the conferences starting.

Shared interests, in part, continued to characterise the activity of dissemination and news gathering. But interests also diverged. The divergence centred around the perceived role of the broadcasters at the conferences, as Blumler and Gurevitch note:

‘...Journalists are primarily aiming to hold the attention of a target audience through some mixture of alerting, informing and entertaining them; politicians are primarily trying to persuade audience members to adopt a certain view of themselves, or of their parties or factions, and of what they are trying to achieve in politics’³¹.

The broadcasters and the journalists who worked for them were generally reluctant to be passive relayers of information, a conduit for politicians’ gambits. The parties wanted to reach as wide an audience as possible, and news, unlike live coverage, provided an audience of millions, which ordinarily the political parties would not expect outside elections. While the broadcasters reflected the issues raised in speeches and debates, they also reserved the right to inform their audiences as they saw fit.

Each bulletin had a target audience, with the BBC’s and ITN’s main bulletins in particular being in ratings-driven competition. The bulletins wanted to make sure that their conference coverage was not a ‘turn off’ and did not adversely affect their ratings. Even the longer bulletins provided by Channel Four News and Newsnight had to cater for and maintain their audiences. The content of all reports had to fulfil certain audience criteria, even if the audience might be ‘a concept more than a real force’³². Gans (1979) argues that while source considerations ‘weigh on’ a journalist’s mind in the gathering stage, during the selection and presentation stages audience considerations became more important. Pace was one such criterion. Schlesinger suggests that reports needed to be constructed to ‘try and “hook” the audiences attention’³³.

The determination not to be used, along with the conventionally journalistic instinct for a ‘new angle’ on the news, meant that the communication teams could not force any agenda upon the news bulletins. The parties could do little to prevent the broadcasters reporting intra-party conflict or shining a light on and amplifying other newsworthy issues which they would have preferred to remain unseen. While the journalists expected interaction to be strategically guided to a certain extent, and the strategies developed by the parties were aimed at minimising divergences while providing journalists with what they required, they resented attempts at editorial interference - particularly complaining.

Broadcasters' Attitudes

The broadcasters' 'discretionary power' (Semetko et al, 1991) was an important factor in the framing of conference news. Important decisions on coverage were made on a daily basis independent of the parties. These decisions were influenced by attitudes. The broadcasters approached the conferences with a particular attitude. Studies on parliamentary broadcasting by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) and on general elections with Nossiter (1985, 1989, 1995) show that the broadcasters' approach to political events was clearly attitudinal.

The broadcasters decided what events would be covered, which sources would be included and which excluded, the amount of coverage an event would receive and its prominence. In addition they provided an extra element of journalistic input to the framing of the conferences. This was similar to what Blumler et al (1995) describe as the BBC's response to parties in election campaigns. 'It was reactive in the sense of being obliged to report the parties' main campaign initiatives day by day... [but] the BBC's role was also able to "add value", however, by putting party statements in a context helpful to viewers'³⁴. The value added in the context of conferences could be seen in reports. These comprised a mix of speeches and debates or several speeches or several debates. They were a package of the day's events produced by a 'process of selecting, collating and juxtaposing statements which may have been made independently of each other'³⁵. They were bound together by a narrative which often included assessments of party leadership performance and the state of party unity. Added value was also introduced in a series of additional news items such as two-ways and interviews. Bulletins regularly used two-ways. These were live link ups between the anchor and the correspondent or political editor in which a series of questions were asked. The questions encouraged speculation about and explanation of the significant events of the day. Finally there were interviews with the party leadership and, occasionally, delegates.

The final television news agenda was the product of this interrelationship. News agendas from the party conferences manifested themselves in an ideal sense in a series of two-and-a-half to three-minute reports designed to fill an available time 'slot', often accompanied by additional news items. The reports were a 'boiled down' montage of the day's issues, conveyed in debates and speeches and reactions from party actors, with a voice-over narrative. The range of issues portrayed varied from bulletin to bulletin. The news broadcasters and the parties were the co-producers - they were the co-constructors of the conference news agenda. While the parties were the originators of the information, the broadcast journalists repackaged the material for the viewing audience.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The nature of the conferences meant that the political parties and broadcasters were uniquely in a one-to-one relationship, without their political rivals and in close geographical and social proximity to each other. The framework sketched above places at its centre this unique dyadic and symbiotic relationship. This relationship was not formed anew at each conference, but was instead based on numerous previous relationships, and its distinctiveness was amplified by the lack of political rivals. The interrelationship was characterised by several factors: an exchange of news for publicity; dependence upon each other; adaptation to the demands of the other participant; the mixing of shared interests with aims that can diverge at different times; and the routinisation of interactions around a series of events.

The thesis concentrates on the activities of the 'prime movers' in the production of conference news. In planning these activities the parties' bureaucracy and adhocracy elements and the broadcasters' logistical planners were the key actors. In dissemination and gathering, the parties' leaderships and the broadcast journalists took over. The relationship placed both groups of actors under pressure. The news broadcasters may be the subject of complaints from the parties' leaderships but the leaderships' also come under the broadcasters 'gaze'³⁶. However, neither party nor media elites were ever in total control of the conference. Events often occurred that interrupted the routine, placing the parties' leaderships on the defensive.

News from the conferences and the agenda it conveyed was a product of this symbiotic relationship between the different constituent parts of both organisations but also revealed the mutual adaptation of both to the needs of the other. The thesis seeks to examine further each part of the news production cycle and the issues raised in this chapter.

The thesis is structured in same the way as the news production cycle. Chapter 2 examines the joint planning of coverage and the relationship between the two broadcasters (BBC and ITN) and the political parties. This relationship was based on a series of discussions, some of which were routine confirmations of existing plans whereas others involved a certain level of negotiation in order to bring about a desired change. Both were able to affect certain key decisions made during a process of negotiation, either through blocking them completely or forcing a compromise. There was also strong inter-organisational co-operation between the BBC and ITN during the planning process. This chapter outlines organisational structure and the parts of the organisations involved in planning. It focuses on the personnel and coverage logistics and the negotiation and co-

operation between the broadcasters and the parties.

Chapter 3 focuses on the co-ordination of conference planning by the parties' leaderships. The chapter argues that in order to avoid embarrassment and promote themselves and their policies the leadership galvanised the adhocracy into promotional planning to take full advantage of the presence of the broadcasters. Planning across the different parts of the parties' adhocracy was focused on publicity opportunities provided by the conferences, and on the risks. The planning goal of the adhocracies was to maximise the use of the broadcasters in promotional terms while simultaneously minimising potential risks. The chapter focuses on the structure of the adhocracy, the agenda and timetable, the planning of communications strategies and aesthetic planning.

The analysis then moves on in the fourth chapter to examine the organisational structure of the broadcasters and parties at the conferences, highlighting the different actors involved in the processes of gathering and dissemination of information. It focuses on competition and co-operation between both groups of actors and the attitudes of the broadcasters towards different events during the conferences.

The fifth chapter picks up on the divergences of interest. The broadcasters' goals did not consistently match those of the parties' leaderships to provide a favourable account of events at conference. The broadcasters exercised a certain amount of autonomy, particularly over considerations of newsworthiness but also in providing comment, criticism, speculation and interpretations of events. The chapter focuses on the implementation of communication strategies and management techniques and the response of the broadcasters. Such strategies were used in order to minimise divergence and make sure that the broadcasters' news agenda corresponded to the planned agenda in the main hall.

The sixth and seventh chapters examine the news coverage of a series of debates, the fringe and the leaders' speeches. Chapter six, through content analysis and interviews, empirically examines the reportage of debates at the Labour and Liberal Democrat party conferences and the reportage of the fringe at the Conservative conferences on six evening news bulletins (ITN's News at 5.40 PM, BBC Six O'clock News, ITN's Channel Four News at Seven O'clock, BBC Nine O'clock News, ITN's News at Ten O'clock and the BBC's Newsnight at 10.30 PM). It highlights the manifestation of certain journalistic attitudes towards events and the party actors involved, and the value added contributed by the news broadcasters. Chapter seven similarly examines the coverage of the leaders' speeches.

1. Rosenbaum (1997) notes: 'Following a series of approaches from the BBC to both parties, the Conservatives' agreed to their conference being televised in 1954. Labour however... refused to let the TV cameras in. Nevertheless, the coverage of the Conservative conference was regarded as such a success that Labour was reluctantly forced to follow suit the following year'. p 140. Cockerell (1988) concurs: 'In autumn 1955, the BBC for the first time had cameras at both main party conferences'. p 41. An authoritative source noted when interviewed that Granada provided the first coverage of the TUC conference in 1957 for ITV, followed by the Liberal Assembly in 1959 and Labour and Conservative conferences in 1960, and ITV continued to cover the three main party conferences live until 1982. Live coverage continued on Channel Four until 1985, including the SDP conference. Now Channel Four only covers the leaders' speeches live. The BBC still covers the party conferences live but the amount of air time has been reduced. Interestingly in the US, according to Fant (1980), television coverage of presidential conventions began in 1948 and extensive coverage started in 1952, only two years before Britain.
2. Kavanagh, 1996, p 27.
3. Rosenbaum, 1997, p 139.
4. McNair, 1995, p 110.
5. *Ibid*, p 111.
6. Interview with Jon Snow.
7. Schlesinger, 1990, p 62.
8. McNair, 1995, p 138.
9. Curran, 1990, p 143.
10. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 96.
11. A 'pseudo event' is a 'happening which bears only a tenuous relationship to political reality. It has meaning in and of itself, primarily as a media event. It lacks authenticity and rationality... Closer perhaps to the "pure" pseudo event are occasions such as party conferences'. McNair, 1995, pp 118-119. The party conferences may bear some relationship to a 'pseudo event' but this is tenuous at best and only in certain parts.
12. Party conferences are not a true media event by Dayan and Katz's (1992) definition. They suggest media events are 'transmitted and occur in real time... The organisers typically are public bodies with whom the media co-operate... There may well be collusion between the broadcasters and organisers... The events are pre-planned, announced and advertised in advance... These broadcast events are presented with reverence and ceremony... These ceremonials electrify very large audiences'. pp 5-7. Party conferences clearly fit some of these criteria but not all. They are certainly not presented with reverence nor do they electrify the audience. Dayan and Katz argue that 'an event that fails to excite

the public or one that is not presented with reverence by the broadcasters... does not qualify according to the definition, but they are particularly interesting because they suggest a pathology of media events, of which the former is an event "manqué" and the latter an event "denied" by the broadcasters'. p 10.

13. Tunstall, 1970, p 13.
14. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 33.
15. Fant, 1980, p 130.
16. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 33.
17. Ibid, 1995, p 33.
18. Interview with Nicholas Jones.
19. Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994, p 38.
20. Shaw, 1994, p 127.
21. Schlesinger, 1990, p 79.
22. Schlesinger, 1987, p 84.
23. Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994, p 31.
24. Minkin, 1978, p 156.
25. McNair, 1995, p 120.
26. Ibid, p 120.
27. Kavanagh, 1996, pp 28-29.
28. Minkin, 1978, p 133.
29. Kavanagh, 1996, p 29.
30. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 32.
31. Ibid, 1995, p 33.
32. Blumler et al, 1995, p 76.
33. Schlesinger, 1987, p 103.
34. Blumler et al, 1995, p 71.
35. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 134.
36. Thompson argues: 'If Foucault had considered the role of the communications media more carefully, he might have seen that they establish a relationship between power and visibility that is quite different from that implicit in the model of the Panopticon. Whereas the Panopticon renders many people visible to a few and enables power to be exercised over the many by subjecting them to a state of permanent visibility, the development of communications media provides a means by which many people can gather information about a few and, at the same time, a few can appear before the many. Thanks to the media, it is primarily those who exercise power rather than those over whom power is exercised, who are subjected to a certain kind of visibility'. 1995, p 134.

Chapter 2

Advanced Planning of Conference Coverage

Both the broadcasters and the parties were involved in planning the party conferences' TV coverage¹. It was an increasingly important aspect of the overall planning process because of the large number of news outlets broadcasting from conferences. Conference coverage took a relatively long time to plan, starting in one interviewee's words 'as soon as the conferences were finished'². This year-long process, however, really began in earnest in the February before the autumn conferences, 'slowly at first, then come June, July it starts hotting up in to a sort of planning whirl'³. The broadcasters and the parties therefore were engaged in a cycle of planning: as soon as one round of conferences finished they started planning for the next.

Planning occurred at different levels within the organisations but in the 1990s the great majority of coverage planning was carried out simultaneously by a series of professionals within the main body of both the broadcasting organisations and the parties and formed part of a wider process of logistical planning for the conferences. Although not all logistical planning was coverage-oriented, the planning of conference coverage was essentially a joint exercise involving co-operation first between the parties and the broadcasters, and second between BBC and ITN and other broadcasters such as BSkyB.

The two broadcasters and the political parties had a close relationship, developed over time through a series of formal and informal contacts. Contact took the form of a series of discussions, some of which were routine confirmations of existing plans, whereas others involved a certain level of negotiation to bring about a desired aim. Both sides were able to affect certain key decisions made during a process of negotiation, either through blocking them completely or forcing a compromise.

This chapter focuses on those elements of logistical planning that concern conference coverage. It outlines the organisational structures and the parts of the organisations involved in planning. It focuses on the logistics of personnel and coverage. Finally it examines joint planning, negotiation and co-operation between the broadcasters and the parties.

2.1 Organisational Structures and Logistical Planning

The political parties are complex organisations but they shared a similar organisational structure. Within each party there was a relic of the 'old mass party' apparatus housed in the party headquarters. This was the bureaucratic heart of each party, directed by the leadership and concerned mainly with organisational and logistical matters. It was essentially a 'machine bureaucracy' (Mintzberg, 1983) operated by professionals oriented towards particular routinised goals. In some ways the broadcast organisations resembled Schlesinger's description of the BBC as a 'formal bureaucratic hierarchy'⁴. However, in operational terms this is too vague a description of organisational structure. Despite their difference in size, both broadcasters were more akin in structure to what Mintzberg (1983) calls a 'divisionalised form' of bureaucracy: 'Not so much an integrated organisation as a set of quasi-autonomous entities coupled together by a central administrative structure'⁵. Conference coverage involved at least one of these entities, or units, and parts of the departmentalised administrative structure at the BBC and ITN headquarters. Political news on an everyday basis was gathered and produced within both organisations' political units, based mainly at Millbank and the press gallery at the House of Commons. The units were organised hierarchically and consisted of both appointed managers and operators (producers, editors and correspondents). The political unit produced political news for the main news bulletins. Broadcasters' programme-level planning occurred within the units and was last-minute, taking place within existing regular meetings a few days before conference started and, importantly, at the conferences themselves.

Both the political units' policy direction and the level of commitment to conference coverage (the amount of live coverage and the number of programmes being produced at conference) was decided by the apex of the administrative structure, while operational decisions were made at the unit level. The political units were also reliant for logistical prerequisites on logistical actors within the administrative structure. There were of course variations between the BBC and ITN. At ITN the logistical prerequisites were controlled within the administrative structure at Grey's Inn Road, whereas at the BBC the political unit contained its own small administrative body⁶. Logistical planning was carried out by these administrative units operating in a 'machine bureaucracy' fashion (Mintzberg, 1983). They were goal-oriented, running without necessarily direct supervision, but they remained accountable. In the case of parties' logistical planners, they reported to the parties' leaderships and other committees, in the case of broadcasters they were accountable to the administrative apex. There was both intra-departmental interaction within the broadcasters and interaction also between the broadcasters and the parties' machine bureaucracies.

The parties' machine bureaucracies were staffed by professional managers and located at party headquarters. For the Liberal Democrats, this was the Conference and Exhibitions Office (CEO) at Cowley St, for the Labour party the Department of Development and Organisation at John Smith House (now Millbank Tower) and for the Conservatives the Administration Department at Conservative Central Office. These departments were hierarchically run and centrally co-ordinated by directors. The responsibility for conference planning was devolved to particular administrators who then focused on specific aspects of logistical planning. The size of the machine bureaucracy within each party varied. At the Liberal Democrats, logistical planning was conducted by the Press and Broadcasting office and by a small team of three in the Conference and Exhibitions Office⁷. In the other two parties aspects of logistical planning were spread between a greater number of individuals. At the Labour party it involved the Campaigns Office, the Conference Office, the Exhibitions and Events office and the Press and Broadcasting office. At the Conservative party the Conference Unit, Press and Broadcasting Office, the set designers and the National Union were all involved. The number of administrators involved increased and the departments' activity became more conference-oriented nearer to the start of each conference. A Labour source suggested that, 'The different departments... in head office... came together to plan'⁸, with the different sections having their own areas of planning responsibility. 'It is a very big event. People became very professional about it and knew their own area of work extremely well'⁹.

The overall responsibility for logistical planning at the BBC lay with its Westminster political unit at 4 Millbank. Logistical planning was co-ordinated by the Conference Unit in liaison with Sports and Events (the Outside Broadcast Unit, OBU). The manager of the Conference Unit (CU) at Millbank acted as the central co-ordinator. Their conference commitment was decided by BBC News and Current Affairs and relayed to the unit, who then planned accordingly. As much of the commitment was the same as in the previous years, there was a certain element of routine. There was no need for senior personnel to issue instructions to the CU manager. A senior BBC source remarked '...these things are so much in the history and culture of the place... if there are any problems, we have discussions, but because we have always done it like that it tends not to vary from year to year'¹⁰. The CU then got involved in making key decisions on matters such as personnel numbers, allocation of resources and timing, as well as meeting with the parties and liaising with the engineers of the OBU.

Logistical planning at ITN in the main was carried out by News Resources at its headquarters on the Grey's Inn Road¹¹, and at a programme level by ITN's Westminster operation at Millbank. Logistical planning was co-ordinated by a News

Resources manager at headquarters:

'My role in terms of the party conferences is [to] look after the budget and the overall strategic part of conference planning. So I liaise with the various customers that ITN has for the service which are: our main news outlets on ITV and Channel Four; the ITV regional companies; and one or two other people who make programmes at the conferences'¹².

His role also involved him co-ordinating with ITN's equivalent of the OBU. However, on a general level the role of the ITN planners seemed less delineated than at the BBC. There was more 'multi-skilling', where individuals charged with planning would be responsible for a combination of different tasks. One ITN news engineer suggested comparing his role with those at the BBC:

'The difference is people like myself are engineers as well. I'll sit and plan everything, I'll book all the phones, I'll book all the circuit, I'll then go on site and put all the cables in and stay there and do the work during the week. Whereas the BBC would go along and do the planning then hand over to all their rigging teams who will put everything and they will then check it out'¹³.

So News Resources were at the centre of the planning operation. The process was marked by a certain degree of routine, with the commitments of News Resources' customers not changing in any significant way throughout the period of the study. As with the BBC, logistical planning involved accommodation, the allocation of resources and the timing of operations.

The Logistics of Personnel

Not all logistical planning was directly coverage-oriented. It was also directed towards making sure that certain basic prerequisites for coverage were in place. For the news teams to operate efficiently they needed to be kept in a team with accommodation near the venue, and office space. The facilities such as studio and editing booths also needed to be in place. Planning the accommodation of journalists and the movement of equipment and personnel was carried out by the CU manager at the BBC and by News Resources at ITN, whereas the logistics of coverage were left to the outside broadcast units (OBU).

Both the BBC and ITN were involved in planning accommodation for the staff and journalists. This was crucial for the efficient operating of news teams when conference started. The news teams had to be kept together in hotels that were preferably near the main conference venue, and affordable. The need to keep news teams together was also an important consideration when planning the venue work space. One source noted:

'I keep radio news and television news together plus current affairs radio, Breakfast News and the political correspondent I keep sort of at one end of the building. And the Live Coverage and the Political Research Unit have another office. And then Newsnight, regions and World Service and the others have an office'¹⁴.

Keeping the crews together made subsequent news-gathering that much easier. One source explained the problems which arose when crews were not near each other:

'The real problems are logistic problems where the spaces become disconnected so they find themselves spending half their time walking from one bit of ITN's base to another. When the conference venue is full of people that certainly doesn't become a trivial thing. They are working to very tight deadlines and it can make big differences. The other thing is that you can become disconnected from your camera man. You might say to him: "There is nothing going on and go and have a coffee". Then two minutes later news breaks that some body has just said something and you need your camera man back'¹⁵.

The BBC and ITN also had to plan the allocation of their main resources - camera crews and equipment. Planning for the required number of camera crews became the responsibility of the CU manager at Millbank for the first time in 1995. Decisions over the number of crews to be sent were worked out in advance according to the number of programmes that would be broadcast from the conferences.

'We are actually providing the crews this year for news. So if some one says we want seven one man crews which will cover breakfast news and news for the regions, they have to be provided. Newsnight will provide their own camera men, their own editing equipment and their own staff who they are used to working with, whereas the rest of it we will take from a pool'¹⁶.

At ITN, a source suggested that at the conferences:

'There would be two crews for each of the main customers. So Channel Four would have two crews there, ITV news would have two crews. I would take three crews for general use and they are hired out by the hour and half hour to the regional clients. Then there would be OBU camera men in the hall covering the proceedings. If a big story broke they could easily send more, so they will probably send one to start with and wait to see what comes up on the agenda. If the... conference[s] move up the running order of the bulletin they will send extra resources'¹⁷.

Planning the necessary equipment required for the news rooms had also been centralised with the CU manager. As she suggested: 'Millbank has taken over... ordering all the tables and chairs; who needs special kinds of chairs, who needs ordinary chairs.. So all the logistics of how many terminals you are going to need, how many modems, photocopiers and stuff'¹⁸. This presented a particular problem, as equipment had to be moved from one conference venue to another and put in the appropriate place: 'It all congregates in London and then we'll go up to Glasgow and come back, then to Brighton and Blackpool so actually it is co-ordinating all the timing'¹⁹. In addition the Political Research Unit (PRU) at Millbank were also involved in their own planning for the conferences. The PRU produced 'The Conference Guide' for journalists, which was a comprehensive 270-page book. The Guide provided explanations of conference procedure at the three main parties' conferences, as well as detailed background information on the issues likely to be raised at conference.

Accreditation

Having the right number of broadcasting personnel was crucial for conference coverage. All personnel, however, needed to be accredited by the parties for security reasons. Both the parties and the broadcasters realised the importance of having the relevant staff present and while there were tensions at the margins of any negotiations, they were marked mainly by co-operation between the two. Accreditation involved the logistical managers organising the registration of their staff with the parties and also negotiating on the numbers. The numbers of staff the broadcasters needed for any one conference varied according to their commitment: 'It moves up and down. We had a very busy year last year [1995], we had extra editing in. There were one or two people in trying to make special programmes, and we had some regional companies who were not normally customers of ours'²⁰.

Negotiations over accreditation were on-going during the whole planning period. Overall the number of media personnel attending conference had increased; one party source suggested the figure to be as high as two thousand. 'We issue 2,000 press and media passes. Two thousand of these guys [sic] running round - not all at the front with cameras, thank God! But there is 2,000 people of press and media'²¹. However, as not all of these were broadcast staff and the parties' organisers did not place strict limits on them attending, the same source suggested that there was no immediate intention of controlling the numbers: 'We can't keep a lid on it. What keeps a lid on it is their own financial situation'²².

A differing picture of negotiations emerged between the broadcasters. A source from ITN suggested that: 'They are very understanding about the number of people we need...We have a very good relationship over accreditation'²³. But one BBC source referred to the parties questioning the number of their staff and saw a degree of conflict:

'The BBC has a constant battle over credentials. We have far and away the hugest output of any of the organisations covering the conferences. So, say *The Times*, a daily newspaper, maybe it would credit a dozen people. We probably need something like 180. And they'll just say: "Hang on a minute. *The Times* has only got 12 and you've got 180" ...'²⁴.

When asked about the numbers of BBC staff that were accredited, a CU manager refused to divulge a number, saying: 'This was a problem. I don't think I should really tell you that... enormous'²⁵. But he added: 'for the Liberal Democrats obviously less [were] accredited than for Tories and Labour'²⁶.

The Independent suggested that for the 1996 conferences '... the BBC had more than 400 staff at the Labour party conference in Blackpool, and more than 500 converging on Bournemouth for the Conservative conference'²⁷. The Labour leader's press secretary

Alastair Campbell noted in *The Sunday Times* that the BBC had accredited 410 people to the party conference²⁸. The lack of willingness to discuss numbers was in part explained in terms of pressure from ever-questioning parties but also from the press.

‘It gets into *The Evening Standard*, you know, all the sort of BBC freebies, millions of people there, free parties, John Birt parties. And it makes it sound like a debauched set up rather than something everybody works extremely hard for’²⁹.

The impact of these pressures was a decision by CU managers to make an across-the-board cut in the numbers of BBC staff accredited: ‘We are having an accreditation bash at the moment. This has been going on since last October-November to keep numbers down. We are trying to cut it down by some 7% which might not seem a lot’³⁰.

Even with the cut, such numbers were far in excess of the other broadcasters present. A source from ITN suggested: ‘Fifty to fifty-five people. I take a team of about somewhere between eighteen and twenty. And then there are a few more technical people and then the journalists/presenters, so it is around the fifty mark’³¹. Sky News suggested: ‘We probably put in eighty applications and out of that send twenty-five to thirty people’³². One reason for the BBC’s need to accredit so many staff was their wide-ranging commitment to conference coverage. However, in addition, a problem facing all the broadcasters was that they never knew exactly how many people they would need and so accredited far more than actually went. One broadcaster explained:

‘We tend to accredit more people than we need, which is a privilege really. From a security point of view [the parties] would like to accredit the fewest number of people possible. But they understand our difficulties - that the one person we may have accredited might be on a story somewhere and not be able to get back’³³.

Another said simply: ‘Because we don’t know who is going to be around at that particular time... we accredit a lot more people than actually go’³⁴. The parties indeed recognised this and made allowances.

The Logistics of Coverage

The other important area of internal logistical planning directly concerned, and was carried out by, news engineers within the OBUs of both the BBC and ITN. The OBUs’ planning was determined by the requirements of BBC Westminster and ITN. Many of these commitments were fairly stable and routinised, so that the planners were aware of them and were able make their decisions accordingly. Any changes were relayed via a series of inter-departmental meetings. The OBUs of both organisations were charged with making sure the prerequisites were in place prior to the conferences starting. Planning was an incremental process from drawing board to assembly and disassembly of equipment. The OBU’s equipment included a scanner (a large vehicle which acts as the control room for

live television coverage), floor cameras, lighting, a sound system and television sets. In addition, the OBUs needed to hire portakabins in which to house this equipment and edit suites. The news engineers at the BBC and ITN were committed to providing certain facilities for their 'clients'. The commitment of the two organisations differed in size, with the BBC providing, in addition to television news coverage, live, regional, national and international, radio and television coverage. As one BBC source said: 'We've got three national radio stations... 38 local stations, the World Service, news bulletins, live TV coverage, Breakfast News, [and] On the Record'³⁵. This presence was partly replicated in the commercial sector. ITN was committed to providing news coverage on ITV and Channel Four, as well as coverage for the use of the ITV regions and others who wanted the service. An ITN source suggested:

'The ITV commitments are usually just the news room requirements, editing requirements and the stand up positions so that they can interview somebody. Channel Four 4 News always fronts from the two major conferences on site so we'll actually do the majority of the programme, the first twenty, twenty five minutes and the last ten minutes of the programme, from site so Jon Snow will actually be with us at the conference and he will present the programme from there'³⁶.

However, both the BBC's and ITN's commitment varied between the conferences. Both organisations put fewer resources into the coverage of the Liberal Democrats' conference than into Labour's and the Conservatives'. As one source suggested:

'There is a difference between say the Liberal Democratic conference and the Labour and Tory conference. I refer to the Liberal Democratic conference as a minor conference and to the others as major conferences[.] As far as we are concerned we don't normally front programmes from the Liberal Democrats, whereas we do from Labour and the Tories'³⁷.

ITN's commitment further varied between Channel Four and ITV on the day of the leader's speech and the other days. Channel Four was committed to covering the party leaders' speeches live, whereas ITV news was not:

'Now the problem with that is the leader's speech day on the major conferences. We do the leader's speech programme from site. At the Liberal Democratic conference for the last three years we haven't done that. We have actually presented the programme from London, Jon [Snow] has been in London and we have just interviewees on site'³⁸.

Bearing these commitments in mind, ITN had to decide upon the necessary levels of equipment; the same informant suggested that Channel Four's coverage needed an OBU, because 'it requires say three cameras or maybe four cameras, whereas the Channel 3 commitment doesn't. We can do it on one camera, but it is nice sometimes to have two which we can switch around'³⁹. Similarly for 'the Labour and the Tories' conferences we need an OBU. For the Liberal Democrats we don't actually need one, we actually get away with one camera'⁴⁰. In planning ITN's coverage, decisions needed to be made on the necessity of outside broadcast equipment. This was particularly important for ITN because, as a source pointed out, 'we don't have our own unit, we actually sold our unit to some

people who used to work for us'⁴¹. The planning process therefore had to incorporate into it the use of an OBU where it was seen as necessary: 'The first thing we do is look to see if we need an OBU'⁴². If needed, the OBU facilities were provided by an outside contractor after being put out to tender⁴³.

The alternative to hiring an OBU was to take the pictures from somebody else, as one source suggested: 'We might decide to take the core coverage from somebody else. It might be that Sky is the originator or we will take it from the BBC or whoever'⁴⁴. But ITN did not do this, for cost and technical reasons. 'We stopped taking it from the BBC because it was too expensive and it wasn't really the sort of coverage we wanted. The BBC are doing live television whereas we are interested in editing, so it is a different type of coverage'⁴⁵. Once this issue had been decided, then the technical managers needed to plan the installation of the equipment, which was done with the aid of a designer shared jointly by the BBC, ITN and Sky. When the final designs were drawn up, then the equipment was installed by the same technical managers.

Those planning coverage faced the same problem as the CU managers. Because the three party conferences were now in a row, and there was only enough equipment to cover two venues, a 'leap-frogging' of the conferences had to be planned. This meant that the equipment for the first conference had to be disassembled and reassembled for the last.

2.2 Joint Planning: Negotiation and Adaptation

Planning of television coverage was a joint exercise. It was a three-way process of interaction: broadcaster to broadcaster, and the broadcasters as a group to each party. The process involved first a series of negotiations and co-operation between ITN and the BBC (and Sky News), and second a simultaneous set of negotiations between the political parties and the news broadcasters. Negotiations and contacts between all actors took place on a regular basis in the build-up to each conference, informally over the phone, and also in a series of formal meetings convened by the parties at the conference venues.

Co-operation amongst broadcasters manifested itself in a series of meetings between the organisations, and in the centralisation of conference layout design. Through co-operating, information vital for planning was passed between the organisations and within departments inside each. The broadcasters hoped first to gain future cost benefits through reducing the duplication of technical resources, and second, to utilise efficiently the existing venue space, partly because of its inherent scarcity, and partly because the

parties limited the space broadcasters could have.

CU managers and technical managers at the BBC, ITN (and Sky) were in contact with each other. In the planning stage, although a lot of information was passed on informally by phone, there were a series of formal meetings at the conference venues prior to the conferences starting. In the case of the planning managers this contact was facilitated by the fact that they were based at 4 Millbank and its vicinity. As one source said, 'I do meet up with them other than at the meetings we go to, because they work in this building'⁴⁶ and added 'the relationship between us, ITN and Sky is very good and it's helpful'⁴⁷.

Negotiations with the parties took place in a series of meetings and subsequent smaller meetings. The main meetings occurred in February, March or April each year before the autumn conferences. An ITN source suggested: 'it starts off with a get-together. We all sit round a table'⁴⁸. These meetings acted as a forum for discussion between the principal actors and other interested groups - such as the venue's management, the fire brigade and the police. 'There were 50 people there, for big ones, Labour and Conservative, that's the average. You'll find there is more there than at the Liberal Democrats...' ⁴⁹. For example, prior to the Conservatives' conference in Bournemouth in 1994:

'You've got the Conservative party themselves, Securicor [running conference security], the Bournemouth Centre people, Sky news, the conference hotel, BBC news, Linda Parker [BBC], a producer, director engineering manager, Roy Graham [architect], Meridian, BBC Public Affairs, GMTV, two from ITN, ITN press office they were trying to get space for a stand, police and Central Broadcasting. It's just a big talking shop round a huge square or rectangular table or whatever'⁵⁰.

At these meetings both broadcasters and parties negotiated around a series of topics to do with coverage. As one source suggested, 'We'd go along and listen to what they have to say... and we would all sit there and discuss it'⁵¹. An agenda was drawn up for the meetings with points for discussion on: conference sessions, accreditation, entrances and security, stage, lighting, cameras and commentary positions, sound, radio broadcasters, media facilities, media technical vehicles, TV sets, hotel and other matters⁵². Of the thirteen items on the agenda there were five areas where negotiation arose. These were: media facilities (space), camera and commentary positions, accreditation, lighting and courtesy TV sets ⁵³.

Like all regular meetings that have developed over the years, these events were routinised. As one party source said: 'We'll sit there and say "The same as last year, or is there something else?".. We've been doing it long enough, and if there is no objection to how it was done last year they [the broadcasters] say "Fine", unless they have a particular

request’⁵⁴. The broadcasters often had particular requests concerning coverage. They presented their opinions but it was the parties that had the final say. As one party source said: ‘They tell us what they want, we then tell them they can’t have half of it’⁵⁵. Another suggested: ‘They constantly make demands. We go through this thing every time you know... They want the best for them - that is their job. My job is to fight for my party’s interests... But we always reach an amicable agreement’⁵⁶. Another party source suggested: ‘We try to play fair. We give them a little bit but we won’t go over the top. In the end they take what we are prepared to give them, and we give quite a lot, to be honest’⁵⁷. An ITN source suggested: ‘We then say what our requirements are for space, where we want our camera positions, what we want to change from previous years, if anything, and they tell us why we can’t’⁵⁸. However, the broadcasters were more limited in what they were allowed in some areas than in others. Some topics on the agenda provided more scope for negotiation, if not at the main meeting then in the long run over several conferences.

Coverage was also negotiated in a series of smaller informal meetings on specific agenda areas: ‘We close the meeting and all go away and have a hundred little meetings: everyone has got their own little packages they want to discuss’⁵⁹. Another source agreed:

‘We usually finish going up several times. The party obviously have theirs first... After the party has gone we can deal with the venue management and their engineering people. Very often, not long before [the conferences], say a couple of weeks sometimes, we have another quick meeting at the venue just for the technical people’⁶⁰.

But broadcasters’ coverage discussions were not confined to these events and were carried out informally where necessary. Another source suggested: ‘We normally have a chat about what we are going to do, and occasionally we’ll either meet here or at the BBC’⁶¹.

Venue Space

Discussions about media facilities concerned, according to one source, ‘where we are going to build and what we all want, offices and everything else besides’⁶². Space was vitally important for the broadcasters. They needed enough space to utilise all the facilities they needed to ensure coverage. While they required a large amount of space, the actual space available at each venue was limited. Negotiations surrounded the amount of space set aside out of sight for edit suites, office space and the transmission trucks.

The size of each conference venue was the main influence on the amount of space available for the behind-the-scenes news rooms and vehicles. Of the four venues used by the parties since 1993, Blackpool, Brighton, Bournemouth and Glasgow each produced

different spatial problems for the broadcasters. While the amount of space at each venue had remained fixed, the demand for space by the broadcasters had increased. At Blackpool Winter Gardens the broadcasters used 1230 sq. metres for studios and offices and had a further 1066 sq. metres for vehicles in a car park. The Scottish Exhibition Centre in Glasgow provided a huge hangar of 3592 sq. metres of which a small area was used by portakabins and the OBU vehicles. At the Bournemouth Centre the broadcasters occupied 597 sq. metres of space and had a further 165 sq. metres for vehicles. At Brighton the broadcasters used some 811 sq. metres over several floors and there was no parking space for vehicles, which had to be parked in the street⁶³.

The Blackpool Winter Gardens, the Bournemouth Centre and Glasgow's Scottish Exhibition Centre provided the planners with a large open space in the form of a car park or hall next to the venue. The broadcasters then filled this space with prefabricated structures which became the news rooms. However, at the Brighton Conference Centre the space available behind the scenes was more restricted. 'Brighton is quite small and it's not great, in some ways it is better working at the other venues', said one source⁶⁴. And another commented: 'Brighton is very bad, there is hardly any space there at all. We can just about survive with a small conference. The Tories won't go there any more. Labour were there last year and we barely survived'⁶⁵.

The large growth in demand for space by the broadcasters created problems. As one BBC source suggested: 'Space is at a premium now... [We] assume every year [we] can have more but in fact [we] can't. I suspect we are probably at saturation point: the venues won't get any bigger. In fact we've played around with the plan to make it more roomy'⁶⁶. A reason for the pressure on space, a source suggested, was 'the news room ha[d] increased in size...' ⁶⁷ because, in his words:

'There was an awful lot more things happening that never used to. For instance [the BBC] have moved radio in, which has four edit suites and five studios, and they have things like the language service and Newsnight and Breakfast News. These are all separate programmes that they do while they are at the conferences which they never used to do. They've changed everything over to what they call bi-media. At one time the radio and television were separate units, but now they have all moved together so they can pool information and everything else. There are seven edit rooms in all just for the hand held cameras, the live cameras are controlled from the vehicles'⁶⁸.

The greater demand for space was not limited to the BBC, because the commercial television sector had increased its presence at conference, so they had 'eaten' in to the space available for the BBC: 'ITN managed to get a bit of space off the BBC at each of the venues'⁶⁹. But as an ITN source suggested: 'Overall we use less space than the BBC'⁷⁰.

The allocation of space was routine: 'Most of these things have a history to them.

They have sort of grown up over the years, so there is a sort of status quo about who has what space⁷¹. Another interviewee concurred:

‘It is set in stone really. What we do say is that we are not using that space this year, so the BBC say “we will take it up” and we say “Yeah, that is fine for this year. Next year it goes back to the status quo”. We have a set amount of space and we give it away on a yearly basis.’⁷².

Co-operation between the broadcasters enabled an efficient allocation of space at each venue, and between 1993 and 1996 it reduced the amount of conflict that used to exist. According to one source: ‘[space is] where the fights all started and that’s a problem that has been solved. Now it’s on a very friendly basis. Everyone is aware of everybody’s problems and they all try to help each other’⁷³. Another summary view was that: ‘Well, there is some competition, although we co-operate where we can, because it is silly not to, it is obviously cheaper to’⁷⁴.

The broadcasters’ co-operation was manifest in the fact that they had centralised the design of the conference layout with one designer, which avoided unnecessary conflict and allowed them to present a united front in negotiations with the parties. This arrangement has prevailed since 1989. The designer, Roy Graham, produced the plan on which construction was based: ‘We share the same designer, who will plan exactly where everything is going to be. And he also sorts out the office accommodation for everybody as well’⁷⁵. Graham was responsible for designing the layout of the news area for the BBC, ITN (and Sky), as well as the positioning of the cameras and commentary booths in the main conference hall. The final design evolved out of a series of meetings between the various managers and Graham in which the design was continually modified according to their requirements. From his viewpoint:

‘I get a breakdown from [the BBC and ITN]... I then work out the area I think we need. Having done that I submit it back to [the BBC and ITN] so that they are happy with it... They all go away and come back and say “Yes, No, but maybe, could we alter this and could we alter that?”. When every one is more or less happy I send off to the venue itself saying “This is what we are trying to do” and I send it to the party, the Police and Fire Brigade and any body else who has an interest in it, and they say “Yes or No” and again we come back and things get altered or they stay the same’⁷⁶.

It took six drafts to complete the final design on which the assembly of the news rooms was based. The same source suggested it was not until ‘you have got a drawing that is approved by everybody that you send them an open construction plan, price it and send off to the companies see if they all approve; and from then on it is a question of draw it all up, get it built and go fit it all in’⁷⁷.

At the formal meetings there was pressure on the conference administrators to concede more space to the broadcasters. The response of the parties has been two fold.

First, to try to charge commercial rates for the space occupied. As one source remarked:

'The thing that all the parties do is they want the space for exhibitions because exhibitions make money. Space is at a premium for exhibitions so that is one of the things you are always fighting over. Some times if you want space in an exhibition area the party will try and charge you exhibition rates, which are not cheap, and there are always rows about that'⁷⁸.

The broadcasters either refrained from using such a space or negotiated a reduced fee. An ITN interviewee suggested:

'They would like to charge us exhibition rates but our argument is that we have to build the place, we have to carpet it, air condition it properly and we have to build the walls. My argument is that we shouldn't actually pay the full rate, but in fact we do a deal so we don't really, although on paper it might say we do'⁷⁹.

Second, to block any encroachment by the broadcasters, decisions were weighed up by the party managers against the requirements of the party members present to have a good view of the main platform. A party manager commented:

'We have to draw a line. It would be to easy to go too far over to TV. But at the end of the day it is no good if our activists in the hall are unhappy: that will come through the television screens as well. So we have got to keep them happy as well... So it is a balancing act and we try to walk the line really'⁸⁰.

This point was reinforced by what seemed to be a general belief amongst party actors that conceding too much space to the broadcasters during negotiation could be counter-productive and not beneficial to the conference, a point echoed by the same person, who suggested: '...If they had their way, they'd take all the audience out... and just turn the whole thing in to a big studio...'⁸¹.

Camera Positions

In terms of cameras and positions there was both competition between the broadcasters, who were looking for the best angles and the best shots to improve their coverage, and co-operation due to economic necessity. As one source suggested:

'There is good co-operation between ourselves, the BBC and ITN in conference coverage... We do help each other out. At the end of the day it comes down to costs as well. Say you have got three cameras in the same position, all within six feet of each other, it's better if two of you can agree and split the cost. It is of course only the core coverage. We still have our own cameras there to do other things'⁸².

In their negotiations with the parties, broadcasters tended to push for closer and more revealing positions for their cameras. As one Conservative source put it: 'They want coverage right up on the platform so they can cover people sitting on the platform and zoom in on their notes. They wanted a camera back stage so they could see all the ministers as they go on'⁸³. Space for cameras was also at premium and their positions and numbers

were controlled. The large studio cameras were not allowed on to the main conference floor, but were instead situated strategically around the hall balcony. One Liberal Democrat conference manager explained: 'A visit is made to the venue with an experienced conference organiser during which camera angles are decided'⁸⁴.

While hand-held cameras were allowed on to the conference floor, their presence and numbers were still something the conference organisers needed to decide upon. However, evidence pointed to long-term concessions over the years to the broadcasters demands on this point, although the parties were 'sticky' about it. As a broadcaster suggested: 'The parties are very good up to a point until it becomes intrusive'⁸⁵. Another said that 'they will only allow you to go so far'⁸⁶. But this resistance had not stopped the broadcasters' pressure: 'We'll push for whatever we can get away with. And if they agree to it, fine! If they don't, we'll push it a bit'⁸⁷. He gave as an example: 'During the leader's speeches we like to have a radio camera on the floor. They don't like that but they accept it... But it is usually fairly amicable: we'll warn them usually'⁸⁸.

The camera's possible intrusion was of particular concern to the parties, as a broadcaster noted:

'What they [parties] have been hot on in recent years [was] cameras on the floor. You have to have close-up cameras, and you are probably talking about fifteen foot [away] from whoever is speaking. And if you have manned cameras they are fairly high. You are blocking off quite a lot of the audience's view. Then they say "right there is no more floor cameras with men" ...'⁸⁹.

Another broadcaster said: 'The parties aren't going to be too pleased to see another camera appear in the middle of the hall. The real problem is down at the front. To get a decent shot of the main speaker you need a camera right down at the front'⁹⁰. A party manager commented: 'They get their cameras at the front of the hall which is very irritating for our own people. They promise they'll stay in one place. Two minutes later they're in another. They are a law unto themselves'⁹¹. The parties therefore sought to limit this intrusion but still enable the broadcasters to get the shots they wanted and which would ultimately benefit the parties. This led to an innovative compromise which was accepted by the parties. Some of the broadcasters outlined the solution. 'What they have agreed is that we can put little hot heads on, which are small cameras on top of a pole. And some one is sat in a chair below them with a little control box to move the camera so there is no need for standing'⁹². Another concurred: 'we have a floor camera which is on a pedestal so the chap can actually sit down and manoeuvre from the bottom so he doesn't block the view'⁹³.

While the parties were wary of the intrusive nature of cameras into the conference hall, they also negotiated with the broadcasters to get the best possible shots of the main

stage. As one party manager explained:

‘When designing the stage set I consult with the media for the look on television. You don’t want [things] coming out of the left ear or something, so you look at that carefully. We don’t actually put up the... logo and the words until we are doing a camera position check so we have got somebody at the lectern and we can get the height and the distancing right and just the right camera angles. Prior to that we have drawn up the camera angles on the stage set design and the seating area so [we know] where they are coming from and what are they looking at’⁹⁴.

There was also a ‘me too’ process in planning camera positions. If one of the broadcasters managed to negotiate a new camera position then the others would insist that they had it too. This was particularly the case with new ‘pin hole’ cameras placed in the set behind the speakers’ rostrum to ‘get a shot over the shoulder or of the delegates sitting’⁹⁵.

One broadcaster confided:

‘The BBC had.. a rear view camera coming out of the back of the set. Then we wanted one, to which [the parties] said “No” to begin with because we were too late in the day to start drilling holes in the back of the set. But they agreed the following year... If the BBC or ITN say we want an extra camera... that is going to get a much better shot that nobody has had before, the answer is so do we’⁹⁶.

Another broadcaster agreed: ‘Obviously if it is something that will augment our coverage then we would want to do the same’⁹⁷.

The parties took a fairly pragmatic approach to the competition between the broadcasters for closer and closer coverage. Overall the parties ‘try to be very careful not to get into any disputes between ourselves and the BBC or BBC and Sky’, as an ITN respondent put it⁹⁸. The parties forced the broadcasters to share any new camera positions or blocked them completely⁹⁹. On critical shots, the broadcasters therefore shared camera positions: ‘You can’t physically get three cameras in the one spot that every one wants. And by and large ourselves and the BBC we sort of worked on the set design together to make sure we can get two clean shots from angles that suit both of us’¹⁰⁰. Another broadcaster agreed:

‘The party says “Unless you can sort it out between you, none of you are going to get it”. So they don’t actually say to the BBC or us or ITN “Yes, that is yours and nobody else can have it”. They have got to keep everybody happy. If it is a really nice shot and we have got a camera there, every body gets it’¹⁰¹.

Another source suggested: ‘Normally what happens is that we will have a big row about it and we will end up sharing the camera’¹⁰².

Commentary Booths

Within the conference hall, space was also at a premium. With three main TV broadcasters presenting coverage live, and radio, the pressure for the balcony studio sites overlooking

the venue was strong. Each broadcaster wanted to have its own balcony studio from which to present commentary on the conference, conduct interviews and generally provide the best coverage for its network. While the construction of such studios was the responsibility of the broadcasters, their location was decided through negotiation. Broadcast booths were a broadcaster-inspired idea first used on the balcony overlooking the Empress Ball Room in Blackpool. They had now become a standard feature situated in the conference halls at all venues. Indeed, Channel Four News and occasionally Newsnight anchored their news coverage out of these 'observation hides'.

The need for booths was due to two main factors: first, the demand for space in the news rooms for editing facilities and from the regions and radio meant that studio space could no longer be located there. In the case of Blackpool one manager noted: 'studio space... has been reduced; they have done away with hard studio presentation'¹⁰³. The second factor concerned changes in ideas on programme presentation, and here

'[ITN]found that they were always stuck for presentation areas and they were always looking for something so that they could see the stage and audience and present the presenters so that the viewers could see the conference in the background. So we finished up building a booth with a huge window in it so that they could see and do interviews... The BBC said "That's a good idea" and Sky now has one too'¹⁰⁴.

As conferences were not set in one venue, the standards pioneered at Blackpool were replicated at other venues. However, these venues, unlike Blackpool, did not have either the balcony space or balconies at all. The solution was that broadcasters planned and built their own booths in the main hall. In Glasgow for the 1995 Liberal Democrat Conference, a BBC interviewee recalled: 'We built a huge double-decker which was a studio and a production [desk], so we had the production desk down stairs and a flight of stairs up to a studio'¹⁰⁵. Bournemouth also created the need for a similar structure because:

'There are no booths in the actual hall apart from those at the back which are used as a sound and lighting control. One of the problems we have here is that we have to build a studio in the main hall. The "big hut" it became called, with a window looking on to the Windsor hall'¹⁰⁶.

Not to be outdone, ITN planned to build additional booths on a balcony to the side of the main conference hall at Brighton and take the same structure to Bournemouth:

'What I want to do is build a structure on the balcony at Brighton, I then want to transport that down to Bournemouth and have it actually in the hall. The BBC built something similar last year and I want to build something the same on the other side of the hall'¹⁰⁷.

The main reason, another source suggested, was to help coverage:

'What we found last year was that we ended up at the mercy of the weather. We were outside, it was a great shot, everybody was very happy with it. But if it had been foul weather we would have been caught short because we would have had nowhere that would have told you that we weren't standing in front of a board in London and that doesn't look good. So this year we decided that we will build a studio in the hall a bit smaller than we would normally use'¹⁰⁸.

Again the problem of intrusion arose. For the parties these were intrusive structures, particularly where they had to be built on the spot. The broadcasters had to engage in negotiation to persuade the parties to let them build them at the venue. As one source suggested: 'I think also one or two of the reservations of the parties to us building these things in the hall are a bit less strong than they used to be'¹⁰⁹. The same source was mindful of the imposition the broadcasters caused in constructing the commentary booths:

'It is a question of you are better off asking the parties to know how they feel. We are very mindful that we have got to get their delegates in. It is very easy to say: "Well, can't we just nick a few seats here and a few seats there?" And they go: "That means somebody doesn't get a seat in the conference venue". I think it is a difficult balance for them, they have got to balance how it looks on the TV where they have the audience which they need to address, against the party members who want seating in the auditorium'¹¹⁰.

This was why he suggested the broadcasters offered a 'carrot' to the parties during negotiating. 'I think that is why we do things like provide a video wall, it is part of helping that balance. It's saying "Well we know we impose a great deal, but you want us there". It is a balance you strike, you have to be sensitive'¹¹¹. In a partly related development, the broadcasters also shared in the provision of courtesy monitors for the parties for the transmission of speeches and debates to other areas of the venue. The cost of these sets was met by the three broadcasters and was an area of some conflict:

'The TV sets, that always starts a row, because at one time the television companies used to provide these monitors free, gratis. And it ended up becoming bigger and bigger. The accountants started cutting down and saying: "Why are we providing the parties with all these free monitors?" It was ridiculous - it is not actually the monitors, it is the cost of wiring them all up. Some of the cables go for miles, so we all chip in six monitors each'¹¹².

Lighting and Sound

The lighting and sound were an integral part of television coverage of the conferences and the negotiation on these matters was marked largely by co-operation. In the past the BBC took a leading role in the provision of lighting, as one interviewee noted: 'The BBC used to light the whole thing, they used to light the stage, and they used to light the audience because they needed audience shots'¹¹³. However, with the advent of new technology the broadcasters did not need to floodlight the whole proceedings¹¹⁴ and did not think they should bear the cost for it all. A broadcaster said:

'We objected [the BBC, ITN and Sky] to paying and everybody else benefiting. The party is benefiting from it, all the foreign broadcasters benefit from it and anybody else who puts cameras in is benefiting. And we had a meeting a couple of years ago with the parties and said "Something has got to be done" ...'¹¹⁵.

The result of these discussions was a scheme whereby 'the stage lighting [was] done by the parties... and the BBC [lit] the audience...'¹¹⁶. A party source confirmed the point: 'We all came to an arrangement. We will light the stage and they light the audience. As

simple as that. Because I've taken care of them by lighting the stage, the audience can see, can hear. That is as far as I will go. I won't pay for the television to light the audience'¹¹⁷. The BBC retained its responsibility for sound. It provided the sound for the broadcasters: 'All the broadcasters take a feed from the BBC. [The BBC] rig the microphones and everybody gets their own feed from that'¹¹⁸. This was confirmed by another source: 'The sound we take from the BBC. What happens is... they put their own sound in and they just split it off to everybody'¹¹⁹.

There were real benefits for the broadcasters in sharing the costs of the technical operation amongst themselves. As the largest broadcaster present, the BBC took the leading role in technical planning. To some extent the technical planners at ITN and Sky co-operated with them in this process because, first, they lacked the resources and, second, the costs were too prohibitive. In the planning stage the BBC guaranteed to provide some of the basic technical prerequisites for broadcasting such as scaffolding, lighting and sound. 'The BBC light the audience and the companies split the cost... Everybody chips in their share of the lighting money, [and] anybody who comes in with a camera'¹²⁰. Another source concurred: 'We provide the lighting for the audience because obviously we want the best shots. And we share the cost of that between us and anybody else who wants to put cameras in'¹²¹.

The cost of these technical prerequisites (space, cameras, booths and lighting) was discussed amongst the technical managers and varied from venue to venue according to its size. The BBC benefited as it shared the cost of provision with ITN and Sky, as a CU manager suggested: 'When we do the scaffolding and lighting then obviously they have got to put in a share of the costs as well, because there is no point them doing it: so we share'¹²². None of the sources were willing to reveal the cost of the operation. As to the manner of how the costs were distributed, one informant suggested that the BBC paid the 'lion's share', around 65%. 'I get a cost from Geoff Taylor [BBC] and say can you tell me how much it is going to cost to scaffold and light all these various places. He will then say if I were you I would charge 25% to ITN, 10% to Sky or something like that'¹²³. The costs were also shared according to the amount of space occupied by the broadcasters: 'It is done on square footage basically, on the percentage of area we use'¹²⁴. Overall, the sources interviewed were very cost-conscious and a general theme of many interviews was a conscious desire to reduce the overall cost of the operation.

Conclusion

The vast majority of logistical and long-range planning was carried out by 'machine

bureaucracies' within both the parties and the broadcast organisations. Their interactions focused on making the production of conference news easier and more effective, and trying to provide the best possible coverage of the event. Both sets of organisations were mutually dependent on each other and shared many of the same overall planning goals. The period of planning was essentially routine and characterised by intermittent interaction between party conference organisers and their opposites in the BBC and ITN (and Sky), focused in formal and informal meetings on a specific agenda. At such meetings, amongst many routine issues, active negotiation occurred around certain key issues crucial for coverage. In these areas the broadcasters had pushed for change, which was rejected and then sometimes conceded, either because the parties saw benefits for themselves in coverage terms, or because the broadcasters compromised.

This was not to deny that there were occasional conflicts in certain areas of negotiations. But compromise solutions always seemed to be reached. The broadcasters in particular were willing to make a trade-off to ensure that they achieved the best coverage possible. Practical limitations and costs meant that co-operation was necessary between the broadcasters, and between them and the parties, if goals were to be achieved. Co-operation was aimed at sharing facilities and coverage and at the problems involved in allocating limited space at each venue in the face of increased demand created by an expanding broadcaster presence. These meetings highlighted the extent of mutual adaptation and co-operation between all the actors involved in logistical planning, and were an important part of TV coverage of the conferences.

1. There were some striking similarities between planning of the party conferences and planning of the US Presidential conventions. Waltzer's study of the conventions notes: 'Political parties and television networks cannot separately plan national conventions or coverage of them. In 1964 a television advisory committee worked with the parties in planning the conventions and coverage of them... Meetings were held between the networks and each of the parties to deal with such matters as convention site; facilities and schedule; sponsors; network space; location and credentials; access and coverage'. 1966, p 36.
2. Interview with Linda Parker.
3. Ibid.
4. Schlesinger, 1987, p 135.
5. Mintzberg, 1983, p 215.
6. The period of study coincided with a transition in conference planning at the BBC. Previously logistical planning was carried out by News Resources but from 1995 it had now been centralised under BBC Westminster. The centralisation of the planning process was seen as an improvement by one BBC source. 'It is much better because everything is under one roof. It is more sensible because all political correspondents are there and all the news producers are there too, there is a small team actually of producers coming in from television centre who are used to working on the One, Six and Nine O'clock news as well' (Interview with Linda Parker).
7. The Liberal Democrats' Conference and Events Office may be considered too small to count as a machine bureaucracy in the sense that Mintzberg (1983) intended. A party source noted: 'At the present I have one full time assistant [who] is paid by me three days a week and my other assistant is a volunteer and works two days a week and I do the whole lot with that staff' (Interview with Penny McCormack). But it was nevertheless part of a wider bureaucratic machine with devolved responsibilities specifically for conference planning.
8. Interview with Joyce Gould.
9. Ibid.
10. Interview with Ric Bailey.
11. Like the BBC and ITN, Sky's political unit was housed in the vicinity of Millbank. However, unlike the BBC's and ITN's political unit, it was much smaller in staff size and did not have access to the same level of internal resources. Logistical planning was co-ordinated by the equivalent of a CU manager in Osterley. Sky's manager had no assistants although he had the same logistical planning liabilities as the ones at the BBC and ITN. He was responsible for accommodation, accreditation, the allocation of crews and equipment. The decisions in such areas were influenced by similar factors to those influencing the BBC and ITN: the parties, cost and the need to keep programme teams together. Sky had no

equivalent of the OBU on which to rely, so it had to hire one or take pictures from ITN or the BBC for its live coverage. In 1995-96 it took its coverage from ITN.

12. Interview with Martin Smith.
13. Interview with Steve White.
14. Interview with Linda Parker.
15. Interview with Martin Smith.
16. Interview with Linda Parker.
17. Interview with Martin Smith.
18. Interview with Linda Parker.
19. Ibid.
20. Interview with Martin Smith.
21. Interview with Chris Poole.
22. Ibid.
23. Interview with Martin Smith.
24. Interview with Bill Bush.
25. Interview with Linda Parker.
26. Ibid.
27. Walker, 1996, p 15.
28. Campbell, 1996, p 6.
29. Interview with Linda Parker.
30. Ibid.
31. Interview with Martin Smith.
32. Interview with Bob Oliver.
33. Interview with Martin Smith.
34. Interview with Bob Oliver.
35. Interview with Bill Bush.
36. Interview with Steve White.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. A source suggested: 'Last year we asked people to tender for it, we chose Border' (Interview with Steve White), a point confirmed by another source: 'ITN used Border television because ITN don't have an OBU fleet. They got rid of it... the whole unit with all the cameras and crews work for ITN as a subcontractor' (Interview with Roy Graham).

44. Interview with Steve White.

45. Ibid.

46. Interview with Linda Parker.

47. Ibid.

48. Interview with Steve White.

49. Interview with Roy Graham.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. There are striking similarities with Waltzer's study of US Presidential conventions. He notes: 'Network representatives attend meetings of the conventions sites committees to explain television's needs... The networks and the parties consulted about the physical appearances, programs, and schedules of the conventions. Lighting was left largely to the determination of the television networks'. 1966, p 36.

53. Security was also an area that several interviewees raised as important. In particular they mentioned the sharing of venue and security costs. The BBC CU manager suggested: 'We have to have extra police in to man the doors, because Breakfast News comes on at four / four thirty in the morning and in the evening obviously we do World Tonight and Newsnight so the office has got to be kept open longer and stewards, Securicor and police will keep it open, so we have to pay extra to get that' (Interview with Linda Parker).

54. Interview with Roy Graham.

55. Interview with Chris Poole.

56. Interview with Penny McCormack.

57. Interview with Chris Poole.

58. Interview with Steve White.

59. Interview with Roy Graham.

60. Ibid.

61. Interview with Steve White.

62. Interview with Roy Graham.

63. All information was calculated from scaled architectural drawings of the venues provided by Roy Graham.

64. Interview with Linda Parker.

65. Interview with Steve White.

66. Interview with Linda Parker.

67. Interview with Roy Graham.

68. Ibid.

69. Interview with Linda Parker.

70. Interview with Steve White.

71. Interview with Martin Smith.
72. Ibid.
73. Interview with Linda Parker.
74. Interview with Steve White.
75. Interview with Linda Parker.
76. Interview with Roy Graham.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Interview with Steve White.
80. Interview with Chris Poole.
81. Ibid.
82. Interview with Bob Oliver.
83. Interview with Chris Poole.
84. A written reply to questions by Judith Fryer, Head of Press and Broadcasting at the Liberal Democrats.
85. Interview with Martin Smith.
86. Interview with Roy Graham.
87. Interview with Steve White.
88. Ibid.
89. Interview with Bob Oliver.
90. Interview with Martin Smith.
91. Interview with Chris Poole.
92. Interview with Bob Oliver.
93. Interview with Roy Graham.
94. Interview with Penny McCormack.
95. Interview with Roy Graham.
96. Interview with Bob Oliver.
97. Interview with Steve White.
98. Interview with Martin Smith.
99. Interestingly, Waltzer notes a similar occurrence in planning coverage of the US Presidential conventions. 'To avoid possible allegations of preferential treatment... the parties made over-all bloc assignments to the television networks and other media, and delegated to them the task of dividing [it] among themselves'. 1966, p 36.
100. Interview with Martin Smith.
101. Interview with Bob Oliver.
102. Interview with Steve White.
103. Interview with Roy Graham.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Interview with Steve White.

108. Interview with Martin Smith.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.

112. Interview with Roy Graham.

113. Ibid.

114. Rosenbaum notes of early conference coverage: 'One down side of televising was that it subjected those sitting on the platform to the intense and uncomfortable glare of early TV lighting. Many Labour politicians in particular (even including party leader Hugh Gaitskell) responded by wearing dark glasses, making this political assembly look more like a convention of gangsters'. 1997, p 140.

115. Interview with Steve White.

116. Interview with Roy Graham.

117. Interview with Penny McCormack.

118. Interview with Roy Graham.

119. Interview with Steve White.

120. Interview with Roy Graham.

121. Interview with Steve White.

122. Interview with Linda Parker.

123. Ibid.

124. Interview with Steve White.

Chapter 3

Long-Range Media Planning by the Parties

The political parties set long-range media management strategies for their conferences each year, using a very different approach from the planning of logistical issues. Each party's deliberations were completely private to it and kept secret from the broadcasters. Decisions were made not by large machine bureaucracies but instead by fluid, organic groupings close to the political leadership and mostly assembled specifically for this task. The organisational forms used in all three parties most closely approximate what Mintzberg terms 'adhocracies'. An adhocracy is a series of task forces or committees, 'a system of work constellations each located at the level of the hierarchy commensurate with the kinds of functional decisions [the organisations] must make'¹. The adhocracy in each party existed to service the parties' 'inner core' in carrying out numerous specific planning goals. The committees drew flexibly on experts in particular fields from inside or outside the parties' ranks in order to complete key tasks - people such as media experts, spin doctors, heads of departments, an advertising agency or campaign teams, and pollsters. The exact mix varied between parties, and responsibilities were delineated formally. Through placing actors on these committees, the parties' leaderships (usually the party leader and one or two advisors) managed and monitored the adhocracy's planning progress. The inner core was a clique, supplementary to the adhocracy, that ran with the leaders' authority. It planned and made decisions with the leaders' blessing and was accountable to him or her alone.

The concentration of power in the hands of the parties' leadership has been well documented in British politics (Heffernan and Stanyer, 1997; Kavanagh, 1996; Kelly, 1994; McKenzie, 1964; Panebianco, 1988; Shaw, 1994; Webb, 1994)². Many observers have also claimed to detect an increasing sensitivity amongst the parties' leaderships to news coverage (Franklin, 1994; McNair, 1995; Scammell, 1995). The parties' leaderships created adhocracy structures to: undertake active promotional planning well in advance of the conference; take full advantage of the presence of the broadcasters; create positive publicity opportunities; convey a key sense of strategy; and plan ahead for potential risks and methods for combating them. The primacy of promotional-oriented planning led the leaderships and other actors in the parties' inner core first to 'politically fix' existing committees within the party structures with similar or overlapping remits, and to centralise

effective control instead in special informal teams. The adhocracy structures were much more 'sensitised' to the presence of the news broadcasters, and much less concerned with internal party organisation or conference housekeeping - so long as these areas did not threaten to impact on media reporting of the conference.

Key issues that the planning adhocracies focused on included the planning of conference communication strategies, the broad agenda and timetable, and the aesthetics of designing the main stage and the conference hall: 'The agenda gets organised timetable-wise more for the media than in the past'³. Promotional-oriented planning was not only a 'science' of detail, with nothing being left to chance - it was also 'reflexive' (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Thompson, 1995). The planners continually sought ways to improve presentation by taking account of failures or perceived defects in the previous year's conference. This chapter discusses the structure of the adhocracies and who was involved; the advance planning of communication strategies; the construction of the agenda and timetable; and aesthetic planning.

3.1 Basic Conference Planning Arrangements

Conference planning was controlled and directed, with final decisions resting with the leaderships. Each party's planning effort was centrally co-ordinated by at least one senior party actor (the Director of Strategy and Planning for the Liberal Democrats, the General Secretary for Labour, and the Party Chairman for the Conservatives) who liaised with the various committees and department heads and provided a strong link to the leader's offices. In each party the conference agenda and timetable were the responsibility of a formally institutionalised committee. These committees were responsible for sorting through and selecting the motions for debate - the Liberal Democrats had the Federal Conference Committee (FCC), Labour the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) and the Conservatives' the Conference Agenda Subcommittee (CAS)⁴. Responsibility for planning communication strategies fell both to communications departments (the Communications Office at the Liberal Democrats, the Press and Broadcasting Department for Labour and the Communications Department for the Conservatives) and to informal committees drawing on specialists from various departments to provide input. Each party used a special organisation to design the main conference platform and hall.

These different committees did not plan in isolation but were interconnected and

interacted during the planning process. They were joined through their members sitting on other, usually more senior, committees and by overlapping links with departments. Together they formed an interlinked planning network. Certain key actors, particularly those in the inner core of each party, had an input on several committees, whereas others were confined purely to their own department or to one committee. There was often a complex relationship between the committees and departments. While departments were essentially the domain of professional managers, department managers often sat on committees where their expertise was needed.

In the Liberal Democrats' structure, the Federal Conference Committee was linked to other committees and departments. For example, two of the unelected representatives on the FCC were also members of the Federal Executive (FE), the party's directing and co-ordinating committee, and two were from the Federal Policy Committee (FPC), which was responsible for developing and initiating policy proposals. Represented on all committees was the Party President and the Chief Whip. A Liberal Democrat source highlighted how the FCC was further linked to the Leader's Office, the Organisation and Event Office and the Communications Committee.

'The FCC is open to members of party staff and obviously we have our own conference organiser on the staff, the Director of Policy and at least one of his people is always there, Alan [Director of Strategy and Planning] comes to about half of them, Judith [the chief press officer] comes to about half of them and there is usually someone from the general election team if we are that stage of the cycle. It is important that they know what is going on and they can contribute as well: they are not forced to sit there and be silent'⁵.

The Communications Committee was an informal advisory group formed by the Leader's Office and run by the party's Director of Strategy and Planning after their 1994 party conference. The Committee consisted of the Director, Head of Communications, Director of Organisation and Events, party press officers, the leader's press officer and other outside specialists. The Committee's aim was to plan the promotional aspect of the motions that had been put forward by the FCC. The Director of Organisation and Events was responsible for liaising with the company hired to design the stage set. Both the Federal Executive and the party leadership were kept informed of the motions that had been selected and the promotional strategies being considered.

At the Labour party the main planners were the Leader's Office, the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC), the General Secretary, and the Campaigns, Elections and Media Department. The CAC maintained links to the Leader's Office and the General Secretary and with the National Executive Committee (NEC) - Labour's official governing

body. Formal links were maintained through the chair of the committee and the secretary. Minkin (1978) in his study describes several informal links between the CAC and the party's leadership, the General Secretary and the NEC. 'It is possible to discern a subtle and discreet pattern of interactions... between leading administrative and political figures'⁶. Within this pattern of interaction soundings⁷ were taken.

Minkin argues that there was a crucial link between the Leader's Office and the CAC through the CAC's Secretary. The CAC's Secretary sounded out the leader's opinion on the resolutions and amendments selected, in order to avoid an open clash at conference and subsequent negative publicity. One Labour source reaffirmed that, 'There would be a discussion with the Leader's Office'⁸. This sounding-out process was not limited to the leader but also included important members of the inner core. The same source suggested there would be discussions with the General Secretary outside the time allotted to the official meetings. Another insider noted: 'Sometimes [the General Secretary] would come to the CAC and the link would be through regular contact with the Secretary'⁹. Such links were routinised:

'We were going through a ritual... The CAC would write to the NEC and so I would write to Larry [the General Secretary] and Larry would write to me. Everybody knew what you were doing, that some request was being made, or you were putting a case drawing the NEC's attention to certain things'¹⁰.

The General Secretary played a pivotal role in the planning process within the Labour party, bringing decisions and queries raised by other groups to the attention of the CAC and vice versa. As a former General Secretary admitted, 'I hold the ring really'¹¹. His role was the 'lynch pin in... decision taking'¹². The two other important elements in the planning process - the main party machine bureaucracy and the communications operation - had directors who were also important to the overall planning process. The same source continued: 'The lynch pin in keeping things rolling... [would be] the Director of Organisation and the lynch pin in the creative presentational side would be [the Director of Campaigns, Elections and Media], but the lynch pin on the decisions is still the General Secretary'¹³. Through a series of meetings the General Secretary was able to monitor what was going on and keep the Leader's Office informed. 'There was a running conference meeting which either I or [Director of Organisations]... would run'¹⁴.

Conference communication strategies were planned by the Campaigns, Elections and Media Department, but in liaison with the General Secretary and the Leader's Office. The Campaign Department's planning was given the final approval by the General

Secretary. He commented that planning was:

‘Done between the campaigns people and myself, decisions like whether we had a band at the conference or played “We are the Champions”. And that basically is my decision to tell them to go ahead. The campaigns people would come up with these propositions and you would have to say yes or no to them. It’s a decision every year if you sing “The Red Flag” or not [...]. There was even one year where we had to make a serious decision whether to sing “Auld Lang Syne” or “Jerusalem”. John Smith didn’t like “Jerusalem” because it referred to England’s mountains green. So there are some decisions which are trivial [and some] which can only be taken by the General Secretary because people get so upset by them’¹⁵.

The Campaigns and Communications Office was also in contact with the Leader’s Office.

‘In general it was wise to tell the Leader’s Office early on about presentation [...]. The Leader’s Office would be involved in some of the presentational decisions and normally the campaigns people would talk directly to the Leader’s Office and if there was a problem it would come back to me and so I would already know broadly what the campaigns people were proposing’¹⁶.

The NEC was kept informed of the progress of planning by the CAC and the General Secretary. While the NEC and CAC did not officially meet until the Friday before conference, there was plenty of time for informal interaction. A former CAC member suggested: ‘We had two members of the NEC on the committee in the CAC meeting the August before conference. So their role there was to explain to us the views of the National Executive and also to take our views to the NEC’¹⁷. NEC members also attended the conference meetings initiated by the General Secretary. One source noted: ‘members of the NEC were getting upset about various decisions we had taken. That didn’t have much impact but it meant that you were more conscious of the need to take the NEC along’¹⁸. The NEC had some influence on the planning process, although its influence in no way rivalled that of the Labour leadership.

In the Conservative party, conference planning involved the Leader’s Office, the directors of departments housed at Conservative Central Office (CCO), particularly the Communications Department, the set designers, the Party Chairman, and the CAS. The conference agenda and timetable were planned by the CAS, and media strategy and conference aesthetics were the responsibility of the relevant departments at CCO. The Party Chairman was the key link person overseeing planning. He provided a link between the Leader’s Office and CCO and, via the National Union Chairman and Secretary, to the National Union (NU). The Chairman was left to his own devices to organise the conference themes, and was only constrained by the desires of the Cabinet and to a lesser extent the wishes of the NU. As the Party Chairman sat in on meetings of the cabinet and the National Union Executive Committee (NUEC), of which the CAS was part, he was the

main conduit through which information passed between both bodies. The Party Chairman dealt with and had direct access to the Prime Minister, as a former Chairman stated:

‘On a Monday morning, at 9.30, I would have a bilateral with the Prime Minister, one-on-one until at least ten o’clock. We would discuss issues between ourselves. Very often in the build-up towards conference season he would be asking me whether there was a need for him to discuss with others as to what he should be saying and doing. This particular Prime Minister [was] always keen to know what the format of the party conference is going to be and if there are any changes. Then between 10 and 10.30 we had our business meeting - the week in parliament of course - and then 10.30 until 11 was usually the Cabinet Committees. But in that first half hour, the bilateral between the Chairman and the Prime Minister, he would often say “Let’s have a meeting to discuss the Party conference”... It is a very important part of the planning process’¹⁹.

The Chairman further had access to the rest of the Cabinet. ‘The Chairman’s leadership [was] so important within the cabinet - that is why having a Chairman who is a Cabinet minister is vital because we go from main cabinet into political cabinet on Thursday, the civil servants leave and you are purely a political cabinet’²⁰. The political cabinet provided the forum where communication strategies were discussed, along with presentations by the set designers. Armed with such information, the Chairman then talked to the NU: ‘I very much took his [the leader’s] and the Cabinet’s particular thoughts into account when helping to suggest to the NU and others involved how conference should be run’²¹. These decisions were then conveyed to the CAS. The Party Chairman was also involved with the Communication Department in formulating an overall communications strategy for the conference.

3.2 The Agenda and Timetable: Promotion

In each party, as we have seen, the agenda and timetable were planned by an agenda committee²². In the 1990s planning the agenda and timetable was not just concerned with inviting resolutions or motions from affiliated organisations, deciding from the submitted resolutions what would be selected to form the conference agenda, then placing both speeches and debates in particular slots. A sizeable amount of agenda and timetable planning dealt with policy that originated from the parties’ policy committees, government departments and policy units - rather than from activists’ or affiliated members’ motions. Agenda committees did not abandon their former task, but planning nevertheless focused primarily on the promotion of formulated policy, not on facilitating a broader policy-making process inside the party²³. A key part of the promotional dynamic was seen in the

adaptation of the conference timetable to the presence of the broadcasters. The agenda committees not only gave precedence to formulated policy but also sought to reserve the slots in the timetable that would provide maximum television coverage. In addition the agenda committees' planning took on a 'managerial air'. The agenda committees were intent on avoiding controversy, or at the very least preparing for it in advance. This was especially true with debates that attracted adverse publicity or showed the party leadership in a poor light. The agenda committees sought to minimise controversy or distractions in the planning stages through managing the contribution from party activists, either by rejecting motions²⁴ or manipulating their position within the timetable to reduce their coverage.

The desire by the parties' leaderships and the communications committees to use conference as a platform to promote key policies and individuals had a major impact on the agenda committees, who actively co-operated with these aims. The agenda committees acted as the planning conduit through which the promotional desires of the inner core were brought about, whether the agenda committee was elected or appointed. Despite their democratic credentials, the agenda committees of Labour and the Liberal Democrats like that of the Conservatives, sought to give most attention to prepared policy motions rather than those submitted by delegates, provided more space in the timetable to promote members of the parties' leaderships and aimed to control the agenda and timetable to avoid embarrassment. As Minkin (1978) noted of Labour's CAC, and as is equally applicable to the other two parties' committees, the agenda committees were amenable to being influenced - amenable in the sense that they saw themselves as insiders and were therefore 'prey to that sense of joining in the burdens of the mighty'²⁵. This led to some members of the committee perceiving their role in terms of the party interest as a whole. This amenability was the key to the development of a consensus between the members of the agenda committees and the leaderships on what Minkin describes as the 'managerial fundamentals' in the attainment of a successful conference. It was a consensus that affected the decisions by the committee: 'the degree of agreement on the basic elements of a "good conference" resulted in a significant mobilisation of bias in the conference agenda'²⁶.

The conference agenda and timetable, therefore, were not the product merely of the deliberations of the agenda committees; their planning was interconnected with the promotional desires of other sections within the party adhocracy, particularly the leaderships. A Labour source said:

'There would obviously... be a broad kind of agreement between the Chair and the secretary taking account of what the Leader's Office wanted, not necessarily

delivering on everything but certainly taking a strong account of that... There [was] also a kind of unwritten code... that turning out a good conference meant the leadership not being overturned and therefore some recognition of planning the conference accordingly'²⁷.

Another source underlined the CAC's readiness to take account of the leadership. 'It is independent and on occasion asserts its independence, but it was always trying to be helpful'²⁸. The amenability of the CAC stretched to adapting the timetable in line with the leader's wishes.

'The decisions on timetabling and the balance of debates would be taken very much with the Leader's Office on board and those political decisions would basically be taken with me in the chair. In most cases obviously the leader himself may have some views. [The] Leader's Office would be kept informed by a series of "fairly informal meetings" and continually in contact by phone'²⁹.

In addition the CAC was also amenable to the bodies where policy was formulated, particularly towards motions coming from the National Policy Forum³⁰ and to motions which

'the NEC or particular Shadow Cabinet members want[ed] to put through conference, which [were] decided to be of political importance[...]. It meant that what [was] actually being presented was a lot of work which had already been prepared by the major actors before you [got] to conference. Therefore what was debated at conference is much less of a range of ritual debates... because a lot of it had been prepared beforehand'³¹.

The Liberal Democrats' FCC was also amenable. The FCC co-operated with the policy-making committee and the Communications Committee. In particular, the FCC gave preference to motions from the Federal Policy Committee (FPC), the main policy forum, and in many cases asked for motions and advice. One source suggested:

'We will certainly take a policy motion [and] we would normally take an ordinary motion from the FPC. We can suggest things to them as well, for instance, economics - any economic issue is difficult for a local party to draft. So what one wants to say in those circumstances to the policy committee is: "Look we have got a problem here, we want a decent motion on this subject. We haven't got one at the preliminary agenda stage, so we will reserve a slot here on the agenda". So if we find we need a particular topic on the agenda we have the facility at the preliminary agenda stage to reserve a slot for a topical motion. The representatives from the FPC would be expected to get back to the policy committee and say "Well, this is what the conference committee wants: can we collaborate?". And in a sense it is the same issue with the Federal Executive over business issues'³².

Advice from the Communications Committee was readily accepted by the FCC. One source noted that the communications department were important 'in bringing together the various strands... If they say they are going to launch a campaign on homelessness we will have a motion on housing. It may not be the one they wanted for the campaign but in most cases it will be. But there will be a peg on which they can hang their campaign'³³.

A key aspect in planning the promotion of policy was the division of the conference agenda into themes. All conference agendas had a large planned thematic element to them. The aim was to provide the news broadcasters with a coherent, easily reportable package of policies on an issue rather than a series of unrelated debates and speeches. Asked about the use of themes, a Liberal Democrat source suggested: 'That is something we have not historically done but we have begun to do... I think it has been generally appreciated that it has worked reasonably well'³⁴. A Labour source similarly pointed towards such a change:

'Instead of having the structure of debates determined by the number of resolutions..., there was a structure put on it. So we had an overall link in the debates... So instead of having umpteen mini debates we had an economic debate, an international debate which was put in an overall context by a major presentation of our political stance at the beginning of that debate. I think that has changed and improved the coherence of conference to a large extent'³⁵.

Themes also took precedence in the planning of the Conservatives' conference agenda³⁶. The themes of the conference were already decided upon and the meetings sought to slot ministerial speeches into these themes.

'It is then enforcing, with the Prime Minister's backing, what the theme is and the order of the speeches, which matters a great deal to Secretaries of State. This last time [1994] the idea of two Secretaries of State speaking in one debate, one at the beginning one at the end, was to make the themes of the conference more cohesive. Rather than having four or five or six separate debates - i.e. one debate's gone, on with the next debate - the idea was to get it more on to a theme, a coherent whole for those attending. This is an important challenge, but it can only be done basically by agreement and then by political will'³⁷.

The focus on themes led to much tighter control, particularly by the Prime Minister's Office, over the content of the Tories' speeches. One source noted: 'We have a system of liaison with the special advisers of the ministers. Virtually every minister who speaks has a special adviser, what was different this year [1995] compared to some past years was that there was more central involvement, which was as much Downing Street as Central Office'³⁸.

In Major's later years certain requirements were placed on the planning of major Tory speeches in order to make sure they conformed to these themes:

'Generally speaking, ministers write their speeches or write it with their own team. They don't consult us, but this time we imposed on them two demands. One was they had to be forward-looking and had to have announcements to go in with the general theme of the conference. And the second was that the speech had to be cleared in advance by Downing Street. Generally speaking, in the past that hadn't been done: they were allowed to do their own thing. The Prime Minister's political position was so much stronger and therefore he was in a position to insist on that in a way in past years he probably wouldn't have been'³⁹.

Intimately connected with the promotion of policy was the promotion of key individuals, usually part of the leadership cadre. These individuals were used to attract the news broadcasters' attention to policy announcements. The parties' leaders in particular were the peg on which numerous policy announcements were hung. In order to enhance the promotion of policy announcements, the agenda committees sought to manage the timetable to leave more slots open for speeches by key individuals. While the Conservatives' conference always featured speeches by ministers (Kelly, 1989), speeches by party spokespersons in the other two parties were also a dominant feature. More time was also allotted in the conferences prior to general elections to give television exposure to certain parliamentary candidates and backbench MPs. A Liberal Democrat source underlined this point: 'Of course not all the conference is actually physical debate: we do have presentations from party spokesmen'⁴⁰. The FCC were active in making sure in the planning stages that slots were available in the conference timetable for presentations by party spokespersons. The initiative behind this process came from the Communications Committee. The Communications Committee also made sure that speakers were prepared to maximise the use of the slots afforded them. One source noted:

'There is a bit of a trade going on with the MPs which is: they will get the better slots, longer slots, but in return for that they will have to prepare themselves properly [...]. We just encourage everybody to make sure that they know this is a big event. They have the whole summer to prepare and we've laid on some training in speech-writing'⁴¹.

In some circumstances the Liberal Democrat timetable was especially adapted to allow key spokespersons within the party to contribute to a particular debate and gain coverage.

'If Menzies Campbell, our Foreign Affairs spokesman, was abroad somewhere away from the conference and whilst we don't have a duty to make sure he is available for the foreign affairs debate it is obviously sensible if we can arrange to have the foreign affairs slot at a time that he is going to be around. Alan Beith the Home Affairs spokesman won't do any public political activity on a Sunday for religious reasons. It doesn't mean we won't take home affairs stuff on a Sunday. But it does mean that we will be careful about it'⁴².

A similar picture emerged in the planning of the Labour conference timetable. Debates at Labour conferences were 'presented by shadow cabinet member[s] who [were] not necessarily members of the NEC and wound up by a member of the NEC'⁴³. The Shadow Cabinet and members of the NEC were given more time to reply to debates, as Wintour notes: 'more shadow cabinet members are given a chance to speak, consuming time that used to belong to delegates... even more presentable prospective parliamentary candidates in targeted seats are called to the rostrum to make a local media splash'⁴⁴. The CAC changed the timetabling of conference to make sure that key individuals received television coverage.

‘There have been marginal changes to fit in with media schedules. They [the broadcasters] don’t start until after half an hour into the morning which is a problem because we would like to start the debate, say, on the environment first thing in the morning with a speech by Michael Meacher or Frank Dobson, or whoever, whereas we have to find some business to fill up the first half hour’⁴⁵.

A CAC source concurred.

‘We actually changed the timing of conference... to fit with the transmission times because they [the broadcasters] were coming on at quarter past [2.15pm] and our conference started at two and our keynote speakers were coming on at five past two or ten past, so conference times were changed to fit that’⁴⁶.

The Conservatives also paid similar attention to making sure that key actors spoke at certain times; a senior source noted in terms of news coverage that ‘placing of certain individuals and certain debates is an important matter’⁴⁷. Another source suggested that the ‘stars’ needed to be spread throughout the week: ‘You have your big beasts, your great speakers, your great orators, people who move the conference, they need to be spread out. There is no point having them all speaking on the same day’⁴⁸. Another Conservative source stressed it was ‘using the potential you have got’⁴⁹. The communication specialists used their main players to add gravitas to announcements on policy which they wanted to make.

The leaders’ speeches attracted the most news attention and were the promotional centrepiece of the conference week. Consequently a lot of planning went into the speeches as specific events. The parties’ leaders started to focus on the preparation of the speech in early September. Working with their advisers they prepared a series of drafts; the speech then went through a continuous process of revising, in which drafts were commented on by the key members of the party’s inner core. The speeches were written to include a number of themes - the health service, foreign affairs, home affairs - and, importantly, to deliver newsworthy policy announcements. In fact such announcements were saved for delivery in the leader’s speech to enhance the coverage they would receive. The presentational aspects of the leaders’ speeches were also planned carefully. Dan Clifton, a former Labour broadcasting officer, described a meeting prior to Blair’s 1996 speech with himself, Peter Mandelson, Jackie Stacy and some media professionals to discuss the presentational elements of the Labour leader’s speech.

‘Sitting on the sofa we batted around a number of ideas. Could the leader’s speech be moved into television prime time? The broadcasters would be compelled to cover it, securing a better audience. We talked about improving the seating arrangements during the speech, radically redesigning the set by extending the stage, and using video inserts to improve the presentation. Most of the suggestions proved impracticable, but some ideas were incorporated by Jackie Stacy’⁵⁰.

Similar ideas were discussed and implemented by the Conservatives prior to the 1994 conference. A party source commented.

'He (Major) is a magnetic character when close to people, you get within five feet of John Major and you're hooked, so it was bringing him further forward down towards the front of the platform, so that he was very much closer to the audience, that was something which maximised his natural talents and that was something that was done in conjunction with the conference organisers'⁵¹.

There was also careful consideration of their placement within the conference timetable. In this respect two major changes had occurred by the 1995 conferences in the location of leaders' speeches within the timetable, aimed at improving their coverage. For the Liberal Democrats one source suggested: 'Paddy's speech must be on television live. So we schedule his speech for a time when there is live coverage'⁵². In order to benefit Ashdown and enhance publicity, the Liberal Democrats moved the slot allocated for Ashdown's speech from the Thursday, the last day of conference, to the Tuesday afternoon. This was partly to stop the need for Ashdown to update the content of his speech continually throughout conference week. As one source noted: 'He is constantly working on [it] and is getting uptight because there are more changes. He is constantly being looked for by the media to do interviews - his time is not his own. We tried the experiment last year [1995] of him speaking on the Tuesday'⁵³. Several additional promotional advantages flowed from the move:

'It gives the opportunity to schedule different items pre and post Paddy's speech. Before, everything was before Paddy's speech - anything could have happened. This way he can make comments on so and so's remarks or on such and such. Afterwards, he can concentrate on the message he wants to get across on behalf of the party to the world at large'⁵⁴.

Another party source concurred:

'By having the speech at the end of the conference we are actually losing some of his best skills. We put to Paddy the suggestion that he might like to move it, both to make it easier to himself and to make it easier for our people to be more constructive in the use of the [media] - and he jumped at it. Also if things are beginning to go wrong - which will inevitably happen some times - it gives him an opportunity to rescue it rather than just letting it build'⁵⁵.

John Major's speech was also brought forward in 1995 from its usual slot on the Friday afternoon to the Friday morning, replacing a second balloted motion and a second speech by the Party Chairman. The idea behind this decision, taken by the party's leadership and the Party Chairman in particular, seems to have been twofold, first, freeing up the Party Chairman to take a more active role in media management and, second, providing greater publicity opportunities for the Prime Minister's speech. By relieving the Party Chairman of having to make his second speech, this freed him up to act as an

important media briefer for the party after delivering his first speech to conference on the Tuesday. The Chairman was 'able to take a more strategic overview of management of the conference and also in part the arrangements for the media because he didn't have this other thing at the back of his mind'⁵⁶. In addition, another source suggested, 'and of course it was difficult to interest the media in the second speech by the same person'⁵⁷.

Bringing the Prime Minister's speech forward created greater publicity for it, as a former Chairman suggested:

'The added advantage of bringing the Prime Minister forward to before lunch was that his speech could be on the lunch time news, which is increasingly important, rather than having his speech in the afternoon on the Friday and missing the lunch time news and then having crowded evening news programmes. And that seemed to go very well indeed'⁵⁸.

This point was reinforced by another source who suggested:

'I think it turned out to be right to move. First, by putting him on in the morning he of all the three party leaders was the only one who was televised on BBC 1 as opposed to BBC 2. And you will know an identical programme at an identical time will get double the ratings just because it is BBC 1 compared to BBC 2. So he spoke to a live audience of between three and four million people when you count that Channel Four was on air at the same time, whereas Blair and Ashdown spoke to less than half that simply because they were BBC 2. We also had a perennial problem in terms of the lunch time bulletins... You have a different audience, although there may be an overlap, it is a different audience and quite an important audience separate from the evening bulletins. Also by bringing it forward into the morning it was felt that the atmosphere in the hall would be even more stoked up than it had been in the past - because they [representatives] wouldn't all have to sit twiddling their thumbs through lunch'⁵⁹.

All three leaders were additionally used as a key promotional resource in conference week. They had their own timetable of engagements planned by their office. Particularly important were the rounds of interviews they did with, and exclusives they offered to, the broadcasters. In 1996, in addition to the main speeches, the parties' leaders made further active appearances on stage. Tony Blair joined John Prescott in saluting the audience on the final day of Labour's conference, and Paddy Ashdown made an impromptu speech on the last day of his conference. The Conservatives' communications team devised and timetabled a special question-and-answer session in which John Major fielded questions from the audience in the hall⁶⁰.

3.3 Setting Party Communication Strategies

Responsibility for planning conference communication strategies was delegated to the communications departments and various specialists who with the leaders' authority carried out specific tasks. All parties felt that their communication strategies needed to be in place well in advance of conference in order to 'sell' the planned policy announcements. The planning of communication strategies was conducted by leading members of communications departments in liaison with the leaderships and the relevant heads of ministerial or shadow departments. As a committee, those managers in the communications departments learnt about what the other sections within the party were planning, what the themes of the conference were, who was making speeches and what debates would be held. Communication planning involved three areas: first, logistics; second, advice to other committees and the party leadership; and, third, the development of communication strategies.

The success of communication strategies depended heavily on logistical factors being in place. At the Conservative and Labour parties there was one section of the head office especially devoted to the informational needs of the broadcasters. As one source said, 'There were the media people... working with the television companies and the press about all the arrangements that had to be made for them at conference...'⁶¹. Within all three parties conference managers were responsible for planning the installation of the media information (press) office. Planning needed to take account of all the equipment necessary for the functioning of the press office and to oversee the shipment of such equipment to the venue. Not only did the press office require numerous photocopiers and printers to produce the sheer bulk of speeches and press releases demanded, but it also required an army of staff. All three parties expanded their press office during conference using volunteers. A Liberal Democrat source remarked how the operation of the press office had grown: 'It is a much more professional operation this year, unlike the days I remember, when it used to be "two men and their dog"[sic], and the job of the media office was to hand out press releases. And the journalists would probably go away and follow them up'⁶². One Conservative source noted: 'We always expand greatly for party conference week. We bring in a lot of volunteers...'⁶³. The conference managers also had to provide a suitable space for press conferences, usually consisting of a platform and a series of chairs. Internal party communications were also planned. Bleepers and cell phones were distributed to the main personnel who required them so that they could be easily contacted.

The communications departments frequently advised other committees, particularly the agenda committees and also the parties' leaderships, on the communications aspect of their planning. As a Liberal Democrat source noted: 'Members of our media team would suggest X debate could be iffy in the media and the FCC [would] say "I'm sorry, No it has got to go in that spot" or the FCC [would] say "Maybe we could fit that one there and that one there"...'⁶⁴. Another suggested: 'We give our advice... on both policy and communications - obviously that concerns the topic and the way it should be presented'⁶⁵. The communications departments needed to persuade the leaderships of the value of such strategies for the promotion of policy announcements, but this did not mean that such endeavours would be accepted. They were at times rejected. In the case of the Conservatives, one source noted that under Major: 'There was strong resistance particularly from Downing Street to any idea of trailing'⁶⁶. He continued:

'The fault being that if you trailed it you would spoil the story for the day when it came out. I in particular was bashing my head against a brick wall, when you would see Tony Blair for example get three or four days' worth of publicity out of a speech which we would desperately like to do with a speech of the Prime Minister's. For a long time he and his team absolutely forbade, now we are finally beginning to be allowed to do what [Blair's] team do'⁶⁷.

Such resistance hampered the planning of a nuanced strategy or led to a rethink by the communications departments, in the short run. The communications departments made demands of their own on the other planners and party actors which generally required a more media-centred approach to conference planning by those involved .

The presence of the broadcasters provided the planners with a major publicity opportunity, a vital chance to develop new ways to present policies and personalities to a TV audience⁶⁸. However, the 'oxygen of publicity', in Margaret Thatcher's phrase, also carried risks. Communication strategies were developed in two main forms, proactive and reactive (Heffernan and Stanyer, 1997; McNair, 1995). Proactive communication strategies were planned, first, to enhance the dissemination of formally agreed party policies, namely those that were the product of professional committees, and, second, to aid the presentation of personalised information, namely the leaderships' views on existing policy and new directions in party policy. Their planning also needed to satisfy the broadcasters' demand for visuals. Reactive communication strategies were planned to limit potentially damaging negative publicity and to second-guess and contain any problems that might arise for the parties and their leaderships.

All proactive or reactive strategies were targeted. Targeting was in part a response to the broadcasters' desire for exclusives and also to allow the spin doctors time and effort

to be more effectively utilised and monitored. Communications departments were aware which of the broadcast outlets present at conference might be most compliant in using an exclusive and most likely to frame it in a way they liked. Hence they would try to plan to target a particular broadcaster with exclusive information.

Certain basic proactive strategies were developed in all three parties: making sure if possible before hand that each speech made significant policy announcements; ensuring that these announcements were trailed before a speech and followed up by further briefing; and checking that there were numerous photo opportunities. The planning of proactive strategies not only adapted to the broadcasters' demands for newsworthy information but also went beyond that, seeking to provide some with exclusive pre-packaged stories. There was a noticeable belief amongst those interviewed that the journalists at conference needed a 'story', a 'big idea', an 'interesting angle', or else they would go and find one themselves and that would mean trouble. One Conservative spin doctor suggested: 'The alpha and omega of all media relations is that they are interested in a story. If you have got a story, it is much easier to sell than if you haven't'⁶⁹. Another Liberal Democrat spin doctor suggested: 'The strategy as far as the media is concerned is to make it interesting and keep supplying them with stuff which keeps them occupied'⁷⁰. He added:

'You have to be able to keep one step ahead of the journalists because if you are not very careful and not supplying them with material and interesting angles they'll go off and do their own stuff. I think I can tell when things go wrong, it's when they [journalists] start interviewing each other about how they think the conference is going. It's a sure sign that it's not going very well, they really [should] be interviewing our people'⁷¹.

The importance of a story and announcements in speeches was also emphasised by two sources at Conservative Central Office. The first suggested: 'You can't gag them. What we try to do is to make sure that there are stories all ready for the taking, so that they don't make them up themselves'⁷². The second added:

'To my mind content is more important than how it is sold. There were always going to be problems in selling party conference speeches in the past where the only announcement was a new motorway service station, or widdle stops as the *Daily Mail* calls them. And equally it is going to be much easier to sell a speech of the sort we had last week [1995] which had a big idea, 'The Enterprise Centre of Europe', but also a range of significant announcements, such as five thousand extra policemen'⁷³.

The trailing of announcements - a method whereby the communication departments provided an extract of the announcements to be made in forthcoming speeches - was planned in detail. Such announcements were either selectively trailed or generally trailed for all the media. Trailing had been successfully practised by all three parties' spin doctors for

some time. The main advantage of trailing, a source added, was that 'you do get better coverage. News broadcasters will give extensive coverage if they think it's either an exclusive or it's a trailer'⁷⁴. The same source suggested that problems had arisen if they didn't trail announcement from a speech. 'We had learnt from bitter experience in the past that if you don't give them things, it doesn't mean that they don't trail them: they just make it up. So it is far better if you can trail things'⁷⁵.

'Photo opportunity' planning was the last ingredient in long-run promotional planning. While the main conference hall proceedings provided a continuous supply of photo opportunities, there was still a demand from the broadcasters for opportunities to film the party elite in other distinctive locations. In this respect the Liberal Democrats lead the way in producing a daily bulletin planned in advance, detailing the whereabouts of their senior spokespersons. The other parties provided similar information but not in the same regular documented format.

Reactive strategies were essentially reflexive, based on experience from previous conferences. Basic steps included making sure key members of the leadership were on hand to react to stories, and developing strategies aimed at diverting journalistic attention from 'ugly' stories. The needs of the broadcasters shaped the nature of the strategies being planned. Successful plans were reused, but to some extent the onus was still on the communications departments, with their daily experience of journalists, to persuade the agenda committees and the leaderships of the benefit of new strategies for promoting policy.

3.4 Minimising Risk

The agreement amongst party leaders and managers about what constituted a successful conference led to a concerted effort during planning to control the agenda so as to prevent awkward motions being timetabled or locate them in such a position that they received as little attention from the broadcasters as possible. Judgements of timing, as Minkin (1978) called them, were very important to the overall success of the conference. Controversial and disciplinary matters were always scheduled at an appropriate time, preferably before the TV broadcasters came on air or after they went off the air. A Labour CAC source suggested that the broadcasters were an important consideration in timetabling certain debates.

'There was a tacit understanding that we would timetable things not to run into the news or whatever... but some of it is exaggerated: you cannot, except for closed

sessions of conference, completely block debates off air. They used to say the Lesbian and Gay debate was always on during "Play School" [a children's programme break in BBC2's coverage] - that takes the reality and adds to it in a sense. Yes, okay, you would not have had a debate like that, perhaps not at peak viewing time, because of people parading and shouting from the platform or whatever'⁷⁶.

In addition, at the Labour conference 'all disciplinary issues have been effectively taken away from conference[...] So those things have been changed in the procedure with the agreement of the NEC and the CAC pulling together'⁷⁷.

Another gambit was to position controversial items before or on the same day as the leader's speech in order to prevent the conference being overshadowed by them and broadcasters being distracted from other planned events⁷⁸. A CAC source suggested:

'[The CAC are] not eunuchs: they understand what it is all about. My motto was get the blood off the floor by Monday night. I didn't want controversial things hanging over beyond the leader's speech and if there was anything highly controversial and which had been hyped by the media at the weekend then we knew beforehand that the idea was to get it over and done with on the Monday. Hopefully the leader [in his Tuesday speech] would then set the tone that carries you through'⁷⁹.

Another CAC source suggested: 'we put things in front of the leader's [speech] in the half past nine [am] slot. This year [1995] it was Clause Four and the NUM messing around, because [at that time] the media are doing interviews and the delegates aren't awake'⁸⁰. Another source concurred: 'You also take unpopular stuff immediately after the leader's speech because [on TV] there will be a review of the leader's speech. They [broadcasters] will have taken it [the conference session] all off-camera, and half the delegates will have walked out the hall'⁸¹.

Similar tactics were also used in the planning of the Liberal Democrats' conference timetable. 'The media are interested in seeing debates - the more hassle the better, of course, for the media . And sometimes we think "Yes" and sometimes we think "No" because very often you know what the headline is going to be'⁸². One possible tactic open to the FCC was to place awkward motions for debate in the Liberal Democrats' spring conference instead of the autumn conference, which received far more media attention. A source suggested that this could be done, but added it was difficult to 'juggle things to that extent'⁸³. Party business was discussed on days when there was no television coverage usually the Sunday of conference. As one source suggested: 'There are certain things which are pretty boring to be on television - business motions, report of the FCC, report of the Federal Executive'⁸⁴. This latitude provided more time and space for the presentation of policy motions.

Another strategy was to turn down motions and amendments submitted by constituency parties. The FCC had special powers to reject constitutional and standing order amendments and any other amendment could be batted back if 'in the opinion of the committee it is insubstantial, outside the scope of the motion, or tantamount to a direct negative of the motion'⁸⁵. As for the selection of topical or emergency motions, it was the committee that decided whether or not it had time for a topical motion and the particular subject of that motion. The FCC had no similar power to exclude reports submitted to conference for debate by the FPC or the FE. A Liberal Democrat source commented:

'By and large they [constituency parties] tend to draft the same sort of stuff, good Liberal Democrat philosophy and all the rest of it. But it has been debated 403 times before and really is desperately uninteresting.[.. We would say] "We could only put twenty motions in the preliminary agenda and we received 250 and that is why yours is not selected". And in that sense that is always the truth. There are queries to the rejection letters, anything from factual errors to triviality: [We would also say] "Yes this is something that ought to be party policy but isn't something we ought to spend any time at conference on television debating". We tend to get quite a lot of those sorts of motions you know: "When you build roads you ought to provide badger tunnels because of the migrating habits of badgers". And, yes of course you should. But it is not something you debate at conference. So we do have to give credible reasons for turning things down and sometimes it is legitimate to go back to the local party and say: "We don't think this is going to enter into the debate as a particular motion".'⁸⁶

This was particularly the case in the conference before a general election. One source noted: 'There is a sort of rule for the first couple of conferences after an election: you let it hang out a bit. And part of the role of conference is to enable people to move on and enable people to come forward with new ideas. But the nearer you get to an election it does become more serious'⁸⁷.

Another source also suggested that potentially unpopular issues were unlikely to find their way on to the conference agenda immediately prior to an election:

'Now you could take some other issue where we could potentially as a party take a very unpopular view, like gypsies for instance, where anything vaguely supportive of gypsies is an [electorally] unpopular view. And I think you'd find that would not find its way onto the agenda if the truth be told six months or eighteen months before a general election.[..] And we said: "We are not going to take this before a general election. We don't think it would be in the party's interest. Put it into the conference after the general election and it will have a very good chance of being taken".'⁸⁸

Similar practices emerged in the planning of the Conservatives' conference timetable. With practical time limits in mind and no power to composite motions, only a tiny fraction of the motions that were submitted were called for debate. In 1995, of the 1250 motions submitted, only sixteen were debated. The subject areas for debate were pre-fixed by the CAS, with some subject areas always being debated and others intermittently

so, as a Conservative source stated:

'We have to accept no matter how good the motions are on certain subjects, the audience both in the hall and out in the country are going to want to see or hear Ken Clarke, Michael Howard etc. So we are in a way limited to the subject headings. There has got to be one on the economy; there's got to be one on law and order; there's got to be one on foreign affairs, education, whatever. So we take that as a framework and if you like we look at the subject headings first - which of the subjects should we discuss? Some of them come up every year, some of them some years they're in some years they're out. Northern Ireland was out two years ago, came in last year and is going to be in again this year. Housing comes and goes. But the big ones come every year and smaller ones come in after that. So we look at the framework'⁸⁹.

Within the preordained subject areas it was generally accepted that the motions selected would be as general as possible in order to facilitate debate (Davies, 1995). As Kelly noted: 'the committee chooses ones that will give an opportunity for discussion and criticism where necessary'⁹⁰. A Conservative source concurred:

'We'll look at all of the motions that have come in on the conference and we will come up with one that we believe is not so narrow that it's blinkered and will have a limit on the sort of debate that you can hold. So we do tend to have fairly bland motions in the main, but simply because we want to make it all-embracing'⁹¹.

These general motions were also importantly non-controversial in nature. Ball (1996) argues that many critical motions, from associations, very often did not get the required support of the Area Offices 'for fear of being tarred with the brush of disloyalty. Supportive motions have an easier ride especially if they are being "pushed" by the professional section of the party'⁹². He further suggests that the main 'cause of exclusion is the charge that the motion is unhelpful to the government's [i.e. the leadership's] position, particularly where it is made in sensitive areas of policies'⁹³.

When asked whether potentially embarrassing motions, however broadly worded, were passed over because of the presence of the broadcasters, the NU Secretary suggested:

'If you're trying to put on a conference for whoever and you get a motion that says that "This government has got to bring back the death penalty tomorrow" or else "This conference has got to hold a referendum on Europe", are you going to urge everyone to put that in to the agenda knowing the sort of publicity the press would give it? Or do you want to steer away from it? If there is going to be any bad publicity, well, we'll leave it to the Labour party to try and hit us with it rather than go and give the media the luxury of getting it on a plate. We don't actually want motions that are pure back-slapping, they need to be constructive, but to be constructive they have got to be reasonably supportive in the first place, we just don't want the country to have the impression that the Conservative party is at each other's throats on every subject. So we end up just saying "No, we won't go for the difficult ones" '⁹⁴.

3.5 Aesthetic Planning

The main conference hall was the central showpiece of the conference. A setting with strong aesthetic appeal was now a minimum requirement - the 'bottom line' below which no party would want to fall for fear of undermining the presentation of policy on television. A large amount of time was spent in planning in three respects: the design of the main platform, the use of special effects and the seating arrangements. The main influence on the decisions reached by the conference managers was the leaderships of the respective parties. The parties' leaders were image-conscious, seeing the potential of set design and choreography to enhance the presentation of policy to a television audience. They therefore took a particular interest in the planning process that led to the final platform design, logo and seating arrangements and made their own inputs to that. Any suggested changes were incorporated into the final product by specialised design organisations and by those responsible for planning the seating, both on the platform and in the hall. Jackie Stacy, Labour's head of organisation, quoted in *The Times*, suggested: 'I don't get involved in policy. I just think about presenting what they come up with in the best way'⁹⁵.

The main platforms were designed by specialist organisations. The Liberal Democrats tendered design out to a private firm called 'Moving Experiences'. A Liberal Democrat source suggested: 'We'll put it out to tender and they come forward with designs'⁹⁶. Labour created in January 1994 a specialised internal body for the job, the Events and Exhibitions Unit, consisting of a manager, an events officer and an exhibition organiser, whose tasks included 'designing the floor plan, marketing and promoting the exhibition, liaising with exhibitors...' ⁹⁷. The proposed design of the main stage would be relayed to the General Secretary, who made a final decision:

'There is early preparation for what conference is going to look like, any changes that you have to engage in, and budgets... The financial and presentationally stuff starts then, although quite often the final decisions on the look of the stage isn't taken until July'⁹⁸.

The Conservatives' design was carried out since April 1994 by CCO Conferences Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of World Conference Travel, an international firm of conference management and organisers. A Conservative source said that 'We basically tell them what we want. They then go away and come back with ideas'⁹⁹. As noted, these specialist organisations worked in tandem with the communication departments and committees and the parties' leaderships.

As the centrepiece of conference, and therefore of its coverage, the design of the

main platform was hugely important. While the broadcasters placed certain practical limits on the size of the platform and its colour, it was parties' leaderships that had the greatest influence on the design. The design needed to combine shape, colour and logo to provide a new and different product, which acted as a presentational springboard creating the right ambience for speeches and debates¹⁰⁰. Changes in the design of the set were pioneered by Harvey Thomas for the Conservatives in 1979, and Labour followed:

'The first time that Labour had a custom-built set for the platform... was at Brighton in 1983. Kinnock wanted a proper set for what would be his first conference as leader. Labour's publicity team had no idea who to get to build it. So... they phoned Conservative central office to obtain the details of the company that had constructed the Tory conference set in Brighton the previous year'¹⁰¹.

In the 1990s, having a different platform design each year, one which overcame the mistakes of previous years and provided a new aesthetic look to the hall, was of the utmost importance for both the Tories and Labour. Resources were the only limiting factor, particularly in the case of the Liberal Democrats, who had a much bigger resource constraint and so wanted a design which 'serve[d] a number of conferences'¹⁰². With the advent of the professional set design some fifteen or more years ago, there have been numerous subtle trends. One in particular was a move away from high-fronted platforms to ones which looked less formal and obtrusive on television, as one Conservative source noted:

'The stage has got to be user-friendly and viewer-friendly. We got to the stage a few years ago of a very big stage set which looked more like the Kremlin, a lot of people sitting up there, all you could see was their heads... So last year [1994] we changed it and used steps up so it made a gradual rise to the level of the platform'¹⁰³.

The platforms also began to change shape during the conference, a fashion again led by the Conservative party. The main idea here was to augment the presentation of the leader's speech on television. The platform, the evening before the leader's speech, was extended into the audience - something a former Party Chairman took credit for:

'Instead of speaking at the podium in the middle of a long platform...we brought him [Major] further forward, down towards the front of the platform, so unlike all the other speakers he was very much closer to the audience. That was something which maximised his natural talents and that was something that was done in conjunction with the conference organisers'¹⁰⁴.

While it may have been this informant's idea, John Major also took an active part in changes to the design. 'He was.. of course, naturally, being so exposed and out at the front there, I won't say he was concerned, but naturally he wanted to take part in going through the planning of that particular staging'¹⁰⁵. The Liberal Democrats in 1995 also changed the shape of the platform, at the insistence of Paddy Ashdown, for his speech. One Liberal source said: 'The set this year [1995] was slightly redesigned because Paddy wanted to

change his style of presentation on the leader's speech, so it was less talking from top table and more talking from nearer the people' ¹⁰⁶.

Just as much planning went into choosing the colour of the main platform. Colour schemes were worked out between the party organisers. An important consideration was whether the colours were easily picked up by the cameras. One Conservative source suggested that the colour blue 'is a very difficult colour for the cameras' ¹⁰⁷. There was much experimentation with colours. Labour's 1994 conference backdrop of 'pistachio green' was thought to have looked poor on television and was replaced with a more sober 'television white' in 1995, merging into red and white in 1996. Quoting Joy Johnson, Labour's former Director of Campaigns, Election and Media, Wintour notes: 'TV white, she said, is clean and sharp on TV - even though in real life it is grey. By contrast, pistachio green... was "hideous, awful and cold" and "did not combine well with human flesh"...' ¹⁰⁸. Colour was important in that its function was to complement the general ambience of the platform, without being the focus of news media attention itself. The Liberal Democrats changed the colour of their set to make the most of yellow, the party colour, one with which a television audience could easily identify. A source noted: 'Up to [1993] yellow wasn't being used at all, the only yellow you saw was a tiny little bird. All the rest was black and grey which I thought was wrong. [...] Yellow is a cheerful colour, it's an optimistic colour and makes a bright and futuristic image' ¹⁰⁹.

A lot of thought also went into the planning of the conference slogan on the platform backdrop. The slogan and logo were designed to capture the theme of the conference and were placed in a position clearly visible to the television cameras. Each year there was a different slogan ¹¹⁰ selected by the parties' leaderships. In the Conservatives' case, the Party Chairman recommended certain slogans to the leader.

'He [the leader] was terribly involved in the choice of slogan. The slogan, after all, is now more and more important. And I can remember for Bournemouth, for instance, I actually put to him a wide range of slogans, which could be narrowed down to two and he very firmly picked one' ¹¹¹.

Great attention was paid to selecting the right slogan for the conference. Hogg and Hill (1995) note that conference themes encapsulated in the slogan occupied many anxious hours of discussion in party headquarters. 'Some words bob up time and again: "Britain", "winning", "forward", "right", "strength", "future"...' ¹¹². The reason for the attention to detail was that the wrong conference slogan, like the wrong colour, could divert news media attention. The backdrop to the main platform for Labour's 1990 conference, with the slogan, contained five eight-foot-high pictures of so-called 'ordinary Labour voters', one

of whom was a woman. Attention for the week, particularly amongst the press and then amongst the broadcasters, focused on finding out who the woman was; for the party it was 'irritating, unpleasant and unrelenting as toothache'¹¹³. Since then, the platform backdrop has never featured photographs.

The latest technological gadgetry was also included in the design of the main platform, mainly to improve the presentation of speeches on television. Key innovations were introduced by the Conservatives, via Harvey Thomas. The 1982 Conservative conference saw the introduction of the 'head-up display unit'. This so called 'sincerity machine', now widely used by the other parties, allowed 'the speaker to read his/her text from unobtrusive, transparent perspex screens, thus creating the illusion that the orator is speaking without notes'¹¹⁴. Its introduction was of mutual benefit to both parties and broadcasters, allowing the speaker to look directly into the cameras and providing clear shots of the speaker. Also pioneered at the 1982 conference was the 'electronic adjustable height lectern' which could be raised when in use, and then lowered, allowing the cameras a clear view of the platform and speaker. These innovations were incorporated by the other two parties in subsequent conferences and have now become standard features of all the conference sets. While Thatcher embraced such technology and rarely spoke in public without it¹¹⁵, John Major abandoned it in favour of reading his speech from a script. However, the rest of his ministers and the other parties still used such equipment, and it remained part and parcel of the main platform.

All the parties, for the leader's speech, used visual technology to inform and entertain the conference audience, with the aim that the pictures would be captured by the cameras present for the wider television audience. The main platform for the 1993 conferences and for the next three years included one or more large video screens on the platform backdrop. Such technology was integrated into the conference set design. These screens showed short films, mainly party promotional material set to music. The number of screenings increased over the period of this study, with every speech by major party actors being introduced by a short film. The Labour platform backdrop acted as a screen on which images were projected, mainly the information on the results of ballots, particularly the results of the NEC elections. But it was also used to entertain the delegates present. All three parties sought to enhance such visual displays through using a technique pioneered in US Presidential conventions of dimming the main lights in the hall when such a film was shown,¹¹⁶ thus forcing the TV cameras to focus on the big screen. This was particularly true in the build-up to the leaders' speeches, which were trailed with biographical videos of

each of the leaders. However, broadcasters in turn sometimes scheduled small out-takes or commentary slots for such occasions, to avoid the impression of carrying 'party propaganda'.

The organisation of the seating arrangements at conference was nothing new in itself¹¹⁷. Conference organisers spent an increasing amount of time planning the seating arrangements on the main platform. With the cameras in mind, the attention to detail even went as far as choreographing the movement of people on to the main platform and reducing their overall number. According to Harvey Thomas, 'generally there are too many bodies on stage... I've fought with this problem for years and gradually we have been able to improve the situation. If you compare the platform parties of the middle and late eighties with those of 1979, the effect is quite noticeable. We set the tone at the Tory conferences and the other parties have followed suit'¹¹⁸. Further, to make sure the cameras focused only on the speaker, and any distractions were minimised, the speaker's rostrum was isolated from the rest of the platform¹¹⁹. The practice has continued since Thomas's time. At each conference, the number of seats on the main platform was carefully planned for each speech and debate in order to avoid any excess seats, which might give the impression to the broadcasters that either had been underattended.

Conference organisers used advance information to regulate the number of people who were able to sit on the platform at any one time. A Conservative source suggested:

'The planning that goes into it has increased over the last two years, simply because one believes in attention to detail. And certainly up until two years ago we always made sure that the front row of the platform was clear, that there weren't rows of seats behind. In the past, people could just pop up if they wanted to, but in most cases we found that there were empty seats at the back and the front row was full. Well I don't think you can do that on television'¹²⁰.

At the Labour conference seats on the platform were strictly limited to members of the NEC, and the general consensus amongst observers was that delegations and individuals who were particularly hostile to the main platform were seated away from the front of it¹²¹. For the Liberal Democrats' conference, access to the stage was controlled for key speeches and allocated to senior party members. The regulation of seating arrangements led to the need for detailed planning - in the Conservatives' case, for each debate, a responsibility which fell to the NU Secretary, who suggested:

'I now, session by session, debate by debate, three times in the afternoon, three times in the morning have a different seating plan. You're talking about fifty people, so every debate it changes. Different people come on, other people come off, there is an average six and half minutes between one debate finishing and the next one starting because of the turnover and ministers getting ready and all the rest. So now this year what I'm doing is people sitting in the second row are the

people who are going to be in the front row in the debate afterwards. So as soon as the debate finishes, the front row leaves, they just come forward and we are ready to go again... They [those on the platform] have all got to have a detailed seating plan of every debate so they know when they are going to be on the platform. On the Friday, the last day of conference, you are talking about ninety people on the platform and you cannot afford to have mistakes... they can't just meander on. This year [1995] they are going to be regimented backstage into a line'¹²².

He also suggested that the party leadership took an active interest in the planning of their own seating arrangements to make sure that there was no adverse publicity.

'The position of each Minister on the platform has to be planned, I have to go to 12 Downing street and go through it with the Chief Whip so that we are both happy that it is right. There are no two ways about it, you have got the PM in the middle, Michael Heseltine nearest him, but then you've got Ken Clarke that side so you move out that way, so you end up every one next to each other to each end. Again if you get it wrong (a) they'll be unhappy; (b) the media will pick it up. That's why Peter Lilley, demoted, will be one down lower than Virginia Bottomley, when he should have been one above her'¹²³.

Like control of the agenda and timetable, aesthetic planning was to a large extent the product of a reflexive process by which the managers sought to improve on the previous year's aesthetic planning, making conference more effective for presenting policy. This process was driven in large parts by the presence of the broadcasters and the audience they provided.

Conclusion

Long-range conference planning was focused on promotion and control, directed towards the promotion of certain policies and actors at conference and the shaping of how conference proceedings would be perceived so as to avoid embarrassment for an increasingly image-conscious party leadership. Final decisions were taken by an inner core close to the leader. Planning the aesthetics of the hall and the contours of the agenda and timetable was done mainly with broadcasters in mind. Although the press were also an influential factor taken into account, their reactions were in part premised on whether these other decisions had been effectively managed to create a favourable TV impression. Communication departments took a more active role in planning promotions of policy and individuals and in advising committees. Agenda committees were encouraged to take the broadcasters more into account by other committees, especially those involved with communications, but agenda committees were generally amenable to such influence anyway. Agenda committees maintained some balancing tactics, trying to take account of the input of motions from the party activists but giving precedence to the promotion of

policy formulated within the adhocracy. Timetabling worked to promote policy and individuals within the party. The promotions of policy and individuals in the timetable was adapted to television's presence.

A 'promotional psychosis' permeated all parts of the adhocracies which controlled effective decision-making in all three modern political parties. All planning that was not logistical was promotionally oriented, focused on trying to maximise the promotional potential the broadcasters' presence offered and minimise the risk presented by motions and certain individuals. Plans were continually improved to enhance the achievement of these goals. The final product of the planning process was a complete promotional package. Pre-prepared policy announcements, deliberately newsworthy, were delivered by a recognisable member of the party leadership, on a platform designed to minimise distraction and amplify both the policy and the presenter¹²⁴ - all for the benefit of the television news audience.

1. Mintzberg, 1983, p 265.
2. The centralisation of power has been particularly evident in the Labour Party in the 1990s. One of the main recommendations of an internal party memorandum, 'The Unfinished Revolution', leaked in September 1995, was that Blair and his office should be 'sole ultimate source of campaigning authority', Helm, 1995, p 20. See also Butler and Kavanagh, 1997, p 57.
3. Interview with Larry Whitty.
4. Although their roles were similar, there were some differences in their structure. The FCC was a partially elected body consisting of 26 members, of whom 11 were elected each year by the conference and 15 were appointed. The CAC consisted of 7 members, 5 of whom were elected directly by the conference and the remaining 2 by the constituency parties. The CAS was a wholly-appointed sub-committee of the National Union Executive Committee, consisting of 11 people the most notable of whom were the NU Chairman, his secretary, three vice presidents, the previous NU Chairman, the Chairman of the National Advisory Committees, the Party's Chief Whip, and the Chairman of the 1922 Committee.
5. Interview with Alan Sherwell.
6. Minkin, 1978, p 72.
7. Soundings, according to Minkin, were a delicate process of taking 'cues and hints and elliptical comment' on board, 1978, p 72.
8. Interview with Sally Morgan.
9. Interview with Derek Gladwin.
10. Interview with Sally Morgan.
11. Interview with Larry Whitty.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Interview with Derek Gladwin.
18. Interview with Larry Whitty.
19. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. The tasks of these committees were as follows. 1. They invited motions and

resolutions to be submitted at least three months before the conference. 2. Once the motions had been received they were classified into subject areas. 3. In the case of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the most popular were selected for debate. 4. They were then sent back to the affiliated organisations who were then invited to submit amendments. 5. Once the amendments had been received they were then compiled with the resolutions into a preliminary agenda so as to form some sort of rough timetable. 6. The CAC then took on the task of compositing similar resolutions and amendments. The FCC also had the power to alter and composite motions. The CAS had no similar power and all the motions were published in the conference handbook in the September before conference, under their relevant subject headings. 7. Once this process was finished, the final agenda was published. In the Conservatives' case, the final agenda also left room for a balloted motion to be decided at conference and provisions for amendments to the motions on the agenda. Only the chairman, agents or secretaries of a constituency association were able to submit amendments, which had to be received prior to the conference, the successful ones being published in a supplementary agenda on the first day of conference.

23. In the Labour Party there has been some disquiet about the downgrading of the policy formulating role of conference. In particular, changes proposed in 'Party in Power' to limit the say of delegates on policy matters caused a backlash. More than 100 motions critical of the reforms or calling for delay had been submitted by the constituencies and unions for the 1997 annual conference. Wintour, 1997, p 2.

24. For example, in the Labour Party there were three orders of priority for the selection and rejection of resolutions and only items that fell in to a pre-ordained top-priority category were scheduled for the conference agenda. Minkin suggests these priority listings were the 'major determinant of whether or not an item was scheduled for debate'. Minkin, 1978, p 73. Now while some were determined by the sheer number of resolutions and amendments, many fell in a grey area where decisions were taken in 'reference to general political criteria. When was it last discussed? Have the other parties been discussing it? Is it of major public interest?'. Ibid, p 73. It was in this grey area that outside influence could be exerted through the CAC Secretary and Chairman, particularly before the final agenda was decided: 'in practice it might have gone through six drafts before it reached the committee'. Ibid, p 73.

25. Ibid, p 74.

26. Ibid, p 76. Kavanagh (1996) also argues that a good conference 'is defined by managers as one that does not have unseemly divisions or, if they occur, results in an overwhelming victory for the leadership'. p 29.

27. Interview with Sally Morgan.

28. Interview with Larry Whitty.

29. *Ibid.*

30. The Labour Party have a rolling policy programme with key subjects reviewed over a two-year cycle by a 175-strong National Policy Forum. It is elected for two years and includes 30 trade unionists, 54 constituency members and representatives from the regions.

31. Interview with Larry Whitty.

32. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Interview with Larry Whitty.

36. Former Party Chairman Norman Tebbit took credit for introducing themes after the 1985 Conservative conference. 1988, p 244. However, one Conservative source, when interviewed, did raise some problems with sticking to themes. 'If you wanted to do an economy theme-day in the years when Michael Heseltine was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry you couldn't do it because you couldn't have him and the Chancellor speaking on the same day. Yet to say that one day is an economy theme-day when the Chancellor isn't speaking or the President of the Board of Trade... simply won't work' (Interview with Tim Collins).

37. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

38. Interview with Tim Collins.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

41. Interview with Alan Leaman.

42. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

43. Interview with Larry Whitty.

44. Wintour, 1995b, p 25. Grice also notes for the 1996 conference. 'Labour headquarters ordered regional press offices to suggest one or two potential star speakers from constituency delegates and parliamentary candidates'. 1996, p 7.

45. Interview with Larry Whitty.

46. Interview with Sally Morgan.

47. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

48. Interview with Tim Collins.

49. Interview with Chris Poole.

50. Clifton, 1997, p 23.

51. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

52. Interview with Penny McCormack.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

56. Interview with Tim Collins.

57. Ibid.

58. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

59. Interview with Tim Collins.

60. Continuing this trend, Labour's 1998 conference used a similar format, with one difference: the question-and-answer sessions between ministers and delegates took place behind closed doors. Grice (1998) notes: 'The sessions on welfare reform, health, crime and Europe will take place behind closed doors, with the media excluded. Party officials are adamant that the lock out will be enforced. "The aim is to encourage debate, not prevent it... we want people to ask questions they really want to ask, without feeling constrained by an outside presence. We don't want them to feel they have to toe the party line"....'. p 4. Grice further notes: 'Blair's people were getting very twitchy about the question-and-answer session; they didn't want the TV coverage dominated by delegates attacking ministers or asking difficult questions'. p 4.

61. Interview with Joyce Gould.

62. Interview with Alan Leaman.

63. Interview with Tim Collins.

64. Interview with Penny McCormack.

65. Interview with Alan Leaman.

66. Interview with Tim Collins.

67. Ibid.

68. Grice notes that for their 1996 conference 'Labour drew up a "conference planning grid" to plot hour-by-hour the debates, speeches, fringe meetings and media appearances by front bench spokesmen. It listed the main theme for each day, Labour's preferred media story and the potential problems which might dominate the headlines instead'. 1996, p 7.

69. Interview with Tim Collins.

70. Interview with Alan Leaman.

71. Ibid.

72. Interview with Chris Poole.

73. Interview with Tim Collins.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Interview with Sally Morgan.

77. Interview with Larry Whitty.

78. One controversial issue which the Labour leadership wanted to minimise broadcast coverage of through timetabling it on the same day as the leader's speech was the deselection of Labour PPC Liz Davies in 1995. When asked if the CAC was involved in the timetabling decision, a source replied: 'Totally involved, but I would say in reality it is the Chair and the secretary, the Chairman and the secretary are the political operators'.

79. Interview with Derek Gladwin.

80. Interview with Sally Morgan.

81. Interview with Larry Whitty.

82. Interview with Penny McCormack.

83. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

84. Interview with Penny McCormack.

85. Liberal Democrat Conference Agenda, 1995, p 40.

86. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

87. Interview with Alan Leaman.

88. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

89. Interview with Chris Poole.

90. Kelly, 1989, p 139.

91. Interview with Chris Poole.

92. Ball, 1996, p 4.

93. Ibid, p 5. Ball also provides a detailed account of the submission of Euro-sceptical motions to the Conservatives' conference between 1992-95.

94. Interview with Chris Poole.

95. Landale, 1996, p 10.

96. Interview with Alan Leaman.

97. Morris, 1994, p 43.

98. Interview with Larry Whitty.

99. Interview with Chris Poole.

100. All the parties wanted to avoid the platforms of the past. 'In the 1960s and 1970s, the average platform consisted of politicians crowded onto a serried row of tables draped in cloth and cluttered with microphones, carafes and papers'. Rosenbaum, 1997, p 142.

101. Ibid, p 145.

102. Interview with Alan Leaman.

103. Interview with Chris Poole.

104. Interview with Jeremy Hanley. Rosenbaum notes of the same innovation: 'This reinforces his image as an accessible "man of the people" rather than a grand and aloof figure'. 1997, p 143.

105. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

106. Interview with Alan Leaman.

107. Interview with Chris Poole.

108. Wintour, 1996, p 7.

109. Interview with Penny McCormack.

110. The slogans for the twelve conferences in the period of study were:

1993. Liberal Democrats: 'Facing up to the Future'; Labour: 'Building for the Future'; Conservatives: 'Building on the Recovery'.

1994. Liberal Democrats: (no slogan); Labour: 'New Labour New Britain'; Conservatives: 'Britain Growing Stronger'.

1995. Liberal Democrats: 'Britain's People Britain's Future'; Labour: 'New Labour New Britain: Lasting Prosperity'; Conservatives: 'Our Nation's Future: Conservative'.

1996. Liberal Democrats: 'Take Courage for the Future'; Labour: 'New Labour New Life for Britain'; Conservatives: 'Opportunity for All'.

111. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

112. Hogg and Hill, 1995, p 128.

113. Bradshaw, 1991, p 17.

114. Scammell, 1995, p 101.

115. *Ibid*, p 101.

116. Fant notes: 'During recent US Presidential conventions the parties have virtually forced the networks to televise their films by dimming the house lights, thus discouraging coverage of asides'. 1980, p 132.

117. On the management of platform seating Cockerell notes of the early televised party conferences: 'The Tories' publicity men had arranged for the Party's most attractive women to be seated behind Churchill for his conference speech'. 1989, p 21.

118. Scammell, 1995, p 101.

119. Rosenbaum notes that Thomas 'Managed to create a separate speaker's rostrum as a visual focal point and to clear the area around and directly behind this to provide a cleaner TV image'. 1997, pp 142-143.

120. Interview with Chris Poole.

121. Channel Four News, 6 October, 1995 noted: 'Before delegates go to conference they were asked to attend briefing sessions around the country. 85% did. While they chatted and socialised their sympathies were noted. The end result is when speakers are selected the officials can with reasonable accuracy predict their views'.

122. Interview with Chris Poole.

123. Ibid.

124. This trend seems set to continue. A confidential Labour National Executive Committee report leaked to the *Sunday Times* noted: 'The [1998] conference will be more stage managed than ever. The platform set and hall will be designed to provide a "united look". While the aisles will be carpeted to make everyone feel part of the proceedings.

"Presentation needs to be both physically and visually egalitarian and inclusive"...' Grice, 1998, p 4.

Chapter 4

How the Broadcasters and the Parties Arranged News Production at Conference

The next stage of the production cycle involved dissemination and gathering of information, the first conducted by the parties and the second by the political news teams. Interaction occurred first between these two sides and second between competing journalists. All the actors involved had established relationships prior to each conference and were familiar with lobby rules and immersed in its culture. This chapter examines the institutional structures adopted by both the broadcasters and the political parties to disperse information at conference, the long-term relationship between them, and the broadcasters' attitudes.

4.1 The Broadcasters' Set-Up at Conference

Each news bulletin employed a team of political journalists composed of those who worked in their Millbank studios plus additional producers and editors. The hierarchical organisation of these teams did not change greatly for the party conferences. At the top of each team were the editorial staff, most notably the programme editor, and under the editor one or two producers and the political correspondents; as one correspondent noted: '[In] the hierarchy the editor is the boss'¹. There were some differences in structure between the broadcasters. The BBC were the largest broadcaster present, with on average 60 presenters, editors, producers, assistants and correspondents in regular attendance at Labour and the Conservative conferences². The BBC Millbank team provided news items for all the BBC news outlets. A BBC source noted: 'My aim really [was] to develop conference coverage as our normal Millbank operation... to provide political coverage to all the different outlets across the BBC'³. In charge of the Millbank team was the editor of political news and an assistant editor. They worked alongside the political editor and chief correspondent and other political correspondents. They formed a news-gathering core which individual BBC programme editors could draw upon. However, Newsnight was editorially independent from this structure: its team included its own programme editor, along with a producer, a presenter and a maximum of two or three correspondents. The ITN and Channel Four teams were much smaller. Both were editorially independent of each other. ITN 5.40 news and News at Ten had their programme editors, producers, a political editor and a team of one or two correspondents. Channel Four's editorial set-up

was similar, with the addition of the programme's presenter:

'You'll have the editor of the programme, the home desk editor, the political producers and political reporters and myself, plus our two producers and the on-the-day programme producers... In conference weeks one of those producers will go to the conference venue and will be specifically in charge of everything that comes out of there and the one other programme producer stays at home and does everything else'⁴.

Within each news team the political editor and senior political correspondents were the key news actors. The majority of information was gathered and processed by them. As Schlesinger notes, 'The stories which lead the bulletin or are given the longest duration go to the most senior [people]'⁵: conferences were no different in this respect. Tables 4.1 to 4.4 show who these key actors were.

Table 4.1: The number of reports produced by the different members of the main BBC news team at the conferences 1993-1996.

	Liberal	Labour	Conservative	Total	% Total
Oakley (Pol Editor)	11	21	21	53	(30%)
Sergeant (Chief Corres)	11	19	19	49	(28%)
Richards (Pol Corres)	1	4	2	7	(4%)
Pienaar (Pol Corres)	1	2	3	6	(3%)
Other Pol Corres	2	4	8	14	(8%)
Non-Pol Corres	0	5	18	23	(14%)
Anchor only	4	10	8	22	(13%)
Total	30	65	79	174	(100%)

(Pol = Political; Corres = correspondent)

Table 4.2: The number of reports produced by the different members of the ITN news team at the conferences 1993-1996.

	Liberal	Labour	Conservative	Total	% Total
Brunson (Pol Editor)	5	23	19	47	(34%)
Pym (Pol Corres)	18	10	10	38	(28%)
Ashley (Pol Corres)	0	6	3	9	(6%)
Bradley (Pol Corres)	0	5	4	9	(6%)
Webster (Pol Corres)	0	0	7	7	(5%)
Andrews (Pol Corres)	6	0	0	6	(4%)
Mathias (Pol Corres)	0	3	0	3	(2%)
Non-Pol Corres	1	3	3	7	(5%)
Anchor only	2	3	9	14	(10%)
Total	32	53	55	140	(100%)

(Pol = Political; Corres = correspondent)

Table 4.3: The number of reports produced by the different members of the Channel Four news team at the conferences 1993-1996.

	Liberal	Labour	Conservative	Total	% Total
Goodman (Pol Editor)	11	16	20	47	(48%)
Gibbon (Pol Corres)	2	8	10	20	(21%)
Perkins (Pol Corres)	0	5	2	7	(7%)
Non-Pol Corres	3	4	7	14	(14%)
Snow (Anchor)	0	3	1	4	(4%)
Other Anchor	2	1	3	6	(6%)
Total	18	37	43	98	(100%)

(Pol = Political; Corres = correspondent)

Table 4.4: The number of reports produced by the different members of the Newsnight news team at the conferences 1993-1996.

	Liberal	Labour	Conservative	Total	% Total
Mardell (Pol Corres)	7	13	13	33	(33%)
Kellner (Pundit)	2	4	4	10	(10%)
Cox (Corres)	2	0	5	7	(7%)
Brewer (Corres)	0	1	3	4	(4%)
Howard (Corres)	0	3	0	3	(3%)
Crick (Corres)	0	1	2	3	(3%)
Non-Pol Corres	0	4	6	10	(10%)
Paxman (Anchor)	0	1	6	7	(7%)
Snow (Anchor)	1	9	1	11	(11%)
Wark (Anchor)	2	4	0	6	(6%)
Other Anchor	1	2	3	6	(6%)
Total	15	42	43	100	(100%)

(Pol = Political; Corres = correspondent)

The four tables show the dominance of a small number of journalists. For the main BBC news, the political editor and the chief political correspondent produced 58 per cent of all reports, on Newsnight 32 per cent, on ITN they accounted for 62 per cent and on Channel Four News 69 per cent. On Newsnight the anchors also produced 33 per cent of the reports. The tables show that the broadcasters also used other non-political correspondents to produce additional reports, 'pegged items', on issues raised in conference debates and speeches.

Meetings

The news teams met daily. The BBC and Channel Four met at least twice in the morning before the official start of conference proceedings. A BBC source suggested:

'One of the things we are trying to develop there [the conferences], which reflects what happens here now, is to have our own editorial meetings in the morning of all the correspondents, producers, the news organisers, the Research Unit and the Live Programme'⁶.

A Channel Four source noted: 'We'll tend to sort of meet for breakfast in a hotel, then there will be a fuller meeting at nine o'clock, just before the first conference debate'⁷. But an ITN source argued:

'You don't need a meeting - it sorts itself out. We are a much smaller team. We tend to say: "This is the story, let's do it". You go down on the floor, you come back and ring the programme editor, who says: "Right, go and do it". I think that's the way it works best. I think meetings can be rather pointless'⁸.

Where meetings did take place, their main aim was to determine what the 'big' story or the most newsworthy event was going to be. On certain days, such as when the parties' leaders delivered their speeches, decisions were relatively straightforward. However on others, as one source noted: 'You see we try and make so many guesses beforehand... [about] what is going to be the big story on the day, and worrying what we are going to put

in it'⁹. On these days the news teams were faced with a series of dilemmas. Was the most newsworthy event going to be the planned debates and speeches in the main hall or a wider issue affecting the parties, such as their electoral standing or internal divisions on certain policy issues evident on the fringe? While everyone attending these meetings had a say, the editorial team's preferences were made clear to the others and the final selection of stories rested with them:

'It'll be carved up. The political editor... has really quite a lot of say. But sometimes the programme producer has a very strong idea in their head and they just pull rank and say "It is my programme. I'm doing it this way". But for the most part the political editors can get their way'¹⁰.

The meetings also sought to determine whether the news teams were going to expand upon the issues raised in an event they were covering through an additional news item. The number of additional news items that were commissioned depended in part on the newsworthiness of an event and could also be seen importantly as evidence of a bulletin's conference commitment. There were three forms of additional news item. (1) The 'pegged' item or report - additional reports scrutinising the impact of policy proposals made in a particular speech and seeking the reactions and opinion of other elite players, both in and outside the parties. (2) Two-ways (between the anchor and the journalist) which sought 'to assess or make sense of a political event... from a position of authority, based on [a] track record as an expert in broadcasting terms, and on... access to reliable elite sources'¹¹. But besides explanation, two-ways also importantly involved speculation¹² and scrutiny of events. (3) Interviews and discussions with members of the party leadership, with the rank and file or with journalists. These also sought to explain, speculate and scrutinise and were at times confrontational (Franklin, 1994; McNair, 1995), particularly with members of the party leadership. Table 4.5 shows the various forms of additional news items used.

Table 4.5: The type and number of additional news items used by bulletin 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	BBC6	ITN10	BBC9	Ch 4	NN	Total
Pegged Items	1	18	21	24	31	42	137
Two-ways	26	12	10	9	15	8	80
Interviews	0	1	1	0	59	69	130
Total	27	31	32	33	105	119	347

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight)

The most widely used form of additional news item was pegged reports, closely followed by interviews, with two-ways being used the least. The table also shows that the different bulletins had preferred different ways of expanding the conference agenda. The BBC and

ITN almost solely used pegged items and two-ways, with the overwhelming majority of the ITN 5.40's additional news items being two-ways. Channel Four News and Newsnight largely preferred the use of interviews and to a lesser extent pegged items and two-ways.

The decisions reached at meetings largely determined the subsequent gathering activity of the news teams and the deployment of additional ENG camera crews. Of course they could be 'blown out of the water' by an issue which suddenly and unexpectedly arose, such as an MP's defection from the party (which happened at the 1995 Conservative conference). Decisions were not made by the news teams alone. There were important links between them and the London news rooms. London decided the running order of the bulletins, and the amount of time allocated to each slot. Conference news stories, particularly from the Labour and Conservative conferences, were guaranteed at least one slot in the running order - although its position and length were determined according to a shared concept of new values within the organisation. There was constant contact between the news teams and London, usually by computer. This contact kept the London news room informed about developing events. Of course there were both agreements and disagreements over the newsworthiness of particular conference stories. A BBC editor saw his task as providing a 'balance between what [Television Centre] see as the story and what we feel is the story being there'¹³. Where there was agreement, such as on the coverage of a major event like the leader's speech, the conference news teams had some influence on the size and positioning of the slot and on the space allotted for an interview or pegged item. Where there was a disagreement on the news value of a conference story, the size and positioning of the slot and the space for an interview or pegged item were subject to a process of negotiation. However, overt differences of opinion over a story's newsworthiness were rare: the only conference example concerned the coincidence in 1995 of the Labour leader's speech and the OJ Simpson trial verdict¹⁴. Newsnight and Channel Four's news teams carried greater weight in these negotiations compared to the other bulletins. This was primarily because of their commitment to conference coverage. As one Channel Four source suggested, 'It would take a very big story to dislodge the conference coverage from the top of the programme'¹⁵.

The News Community

Outside their immediate news team, broadcast journalists were part of a looser 'news community' (Sigal, 1973), 'which sets standards and shapes perspectives for its members'¹⁶. This community incorporated both rival broadcast journalists and those from the press. There was frequent contact between members of the news community, as one source suggested: 'We are constantly nattering to each other all the time: "What did you

think of that speech? Do you think they were applauding much? Do you think the conference like him? Doesn't he look hung over?" and that sort of thing'¹⁷. Another source commented: 'I would say as much time is spent lurking around with the hacks, as is spent with the politicians, spinning between ourselves'¹⁸. All the parties indirectly facilitated contact by providing a press room. The vast majority of contact took place within this space and it was frequently visited by the broadcast journalists, as one acknowledged: 'I would normally go in there in the morning, maybe for twenty minutes, to see what everyone is up to, and then go back late afternoon. By then they will know what their stories are'¹⁹.

The news community was a source of information in addition to that provided by parties, a source whose actors were known to each other from the Westminster lobby. The news community played an important part in forming a consensus about what the main story was and aided in interpreting party policy. The community had its own 'opinion formers'. These were usually senior journalists with close relationships to members of the parties' leaderships and able to provide insights into the reasoning behind the latest policy announcements or generate informed speculation. Certain members of the community had specialised knowledge on policy areas which the broadcast journalists did not. One noted:

'I might talk to them. Peter Riddell [*The Times*] is a very experienced guy and very friendly. And you might say: "What do you think about that?" and he'll say "I was very struck by x,y,z". If they have got time it will be helpful to put something in context, because they have been doing the job a lot longer than you have'²⁰.

The opinion formers were also important sources of information for news reports. Over the period of the study, they were used to provide comment and speculation for the bulletins on particular developments at the conferences.

Table 4.6: The number of times news community members appeared as sources in conference reports 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	BBC6	Ch 4	BBC9	ITN10	NN	Total
Independent (Editor)	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Guardian (Editor)	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Guardian (Political Editor)	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Sunday Times (Editor)	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
Times (Sketch writer)	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Telegraph (Political Editor)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Daily Mail (Political Editor)	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Daily Mail (Editor)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mirror (Political Editor)	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
Sun (Political Editor)	0	0	3	0	0	1	4
Other Media	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
Total	2	2	5	2	4	14	29

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight. Other Media = regional press, broadcasters, and news agencies)

Table 4.6 shows that the majority of news community sources used were senior members of the national press, either the editors of major papers or their political editors. It also

shows a wide a variation in their use between the bulletins, with *Newsnight* using far more than the other bulletins. The BBC and ITN's use of opinion formers was limited to the 1993 Conservative party conference and the publication in the *Daily Mirror* of leaked extracts from Thatcher's autobiography criticising John Major. In this case both the *Mirror* and the *Sunday Times* were a key part of the story.

The news community also acted as a 'safety blanket' (Mancini, 1990) for its members, a source of reassurance during periods of uncertainty. It enabled broadcasters to check their interpretations of events against the interpretation provided by party sources. As one source noted: 'The story often emerges after the event when people talk about whether it was what it really was'²¹. In addition the news community provided an idea of what stories were being followed by which outlets. It enabled a confirmation of the broadcast journalists' news priorities - a test to see if they were widely held. The same source noted: 'There is a lot of "Hey chaps, [sic]what's the line? What are you doing? What are you up to? Well the *Mail* are doing this, are they". They are keen to know what *News at Ten* are leading with and you are always keen to know what the papers are going to say'²². Another source indicated that the news community acted as a sounding board: 'Initially it informs priorities. You test to see if they agree with you that x is a priority, that it may be at the top of a story rather than the extent of the story or the bones of it. But then equally on some issues it may assist with an analytical structure'²³. If challenged by the programme editors, the correspondents could always point to the common definition originated within the news community.

'They are quite happy to tell you, because if *News at Ten* runs something that they are not a bit certain about, it gives them a bit of back up that the broadcasters have done the same thing. But it is incestuous, I have to admit that. It is not as if everyone there comes to their own conclusions'²⁴.

The BBC brought their Political Research Unit (PRU) to the conferences, although ITN did not have such a facility. They acted as an important source of information for the BBC, providing back-up research and a conference guide. They enabled journalists and presenters to have 'instant access to... knowledge'²⁵. A senior BBC source suggested: 'To have that in-house, as part of our own editorial structure, is just fantastically useful'²⁶. The PRU also acted as a further 'security blanket' for the BBC journalists. The same source suggested of the PRU:

'It really does come into its own at conferences, because what it specialises in is policy, background, knowing the history of particular policy areas and so on in a way that the cab rank correspondent [doesn't] - I mean correspondents have to cover a wide range of stories and cannot be expected to be up on policy in every single area. Often at conferences that is what it is about, it's being able to spot the nuances of differences between different parts of the party, between what people are saying... [and]... to have people who have that at their finger tips is a fantastic resource for the correspondents. You could see if you were working without that, and other organisations do, you would feel you are often in the dark. If nothing else

it is a security blanket'²⁷.

The presence of the PRU meant that BBC journalists did not have to be as reliant on the views of the news community on certain issues.

4.2 The Political Parties at Conference

In terms of identifying those engaged in the dissemination of information at the conferences, each party could be doubly divided - first, into a series of concentric circles, with an inner core, an outer core and a periphery. The inner core consisted of the party leaders, aides and confidants, some cabinet ministers and shadows, and some communication specialists. The outer core included other communications specialists and other cabinet ministers and shadows²⁸. The periphery, was a loose heterogeneous collective of recognisable personalities (Heffernan and Stanyer, 1997) composed of prominent back-benchers, external power brokers (such as the unions in the Labour party) and 'old stars'. Second, the inner and outer core could be further divided between front region and back region actors (Ericson et al, 1989). The front region actors were those officials who visibly disseminated information - the party leader, the ministers and spokespersons who appeared in reports; the back region actors were the communications specialists or spin doctors²⁹ who had been active in planning conference communication strategy but remained largely invisible to the viewer even though they were crucial in the dissemination of information.

The spin doctors were a group of individuals sometimes brought together specifically for the conferences whose task was primarily to push a particular agenda or interpretation of events and issues. Bruce argues that their main task was to be the 'public voice of the principal; to fill in the background facts; to provide a context for events and issues for the day; to correct misconceptions and factual errors; and to act as a liaison for media "bids" ...'³⁰. The term spin doctor is, however, vague and could be applied to all those who were engaged in briefing journalists at the conferences. It does not allow for differences, say, between Peter Mandelson and a perfunctory press officer.

The spin doctors at each of the conferences could be classified in two ways. First into those who worked for actors in the inner core and the outer core, and second into three loose groupings: those who were 'principals', sometimes famous in their own right; other professionals; and part-timers and volunteers. If we take the inner core spin doctors first: the principal spin doctors did not have a formal constitutional role but were courtiers who served the inner core rather than the party as a whole. These were former full-time media

professionals or journalists, now MPs, Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) or media aides, whose reputations had been honed over numerous years. They formulated and controlled the dissemination of inner core's perspectives to the broadcast journalists, because they were very close to or part of it. Peter Mandelson in this period was both a member of Labour's inner core and a spin doctor - there was no distinction. Equally this distinction had become more blurred in the other two parties.

As 'access to the inner core elite was not automatically granted to the electoral professionals however talented'³¹ the second group worked under the direction of the inner core. This group consisted of the full-time professional employees, directed by the heads of the communications departments who themselves were in constant contact with certain principal spin doctors. Their utility lay in their professional experience, and they were active in co-ordinating and implementing strategy on behalf of the party. The third group consisted of part-timers and volunteers. These were party staff and activists who had experience of the broadcasters, or MPs with a specialist knowledge of a particular area of policy. They were called upon by the inner core to be spin doctors for the duration of each conference. The spin doctors who served the ministers and their shadows in the outer core were outside the inner spinning sanctum and consisted largely of their press secretaries or like-minded junior colleagues.

A distinction also needs to be drawn between the strategic tasks performed by these communication specialists. The principal inner core spin doctors had two main tasks. First, as they were part of the inner core, they disseminated personalised information on their behalf. This information concerned indications of new directions in party policy and the inner core's opinions or perspectives on an issue or existing policy. The term 'perspective' refers to a 'set of views, arguments, explanations and policy suggestions...' ³². Second, they implemented specialised communication strategies to 'sell' this personalised information. The principal spin doctors knew what party policy was, but they were engaged in trailing something different to journalists - exclusives on the latest inner core policy announcement or opinions, providing a new direction or angle for journalists during follow-up briefing. In some situations they were also key decision-makers in the implementation of conventional communication strategies. The heads of the communications departments and their personnel, as professionals, did not deal with personalised information but with conventional information such as the official, formally agreed party message. While the heads were also key decision-makers, they and their staff implemented conventional communication strategies aimed at 'selling' the collective party message to journalists. The part-timers followed agreed strategy and focused on their specialist areas and official party policy and sold that. Those spin doctors who served the outer core used strategies to sell their perspectives whether they coincided with the

collective party message or not.

The inner core spinning operation at the Liberal Democrat conferences involved a mixture of the three groupings. A key role was played by the Director of Strategy and Planning (Alan Leaman), a personal friend and former aide to the leader, whose official role included the co-ordination of communications strategies, which involved working closely with the principals, with knowledgeable individuals and with the Director of Communications. There was also the leader's press officer and the spin doctors/researchers of key spokespersons close to the leader. This group of actors was responsible for specialised strategies and personalised information. Organisation of the conventional media operation was conducted by the Director of Communications with the Head of Press and Broadcasting and sixteen professional press officers³³. The Liberal Democrat inner core also drew heavily on a series of actors with specialised knowledge - in particular, the Chair of the General Election Campaign (Lord Holme), General Secretary (Graham Elson), Director of Campaigns and Elections (Chris Rennard) and senior MPs.

Labour's inner core spinning operation was dominated by Alastair Campbell, the leader's press secretary, and Peter Mandelson³⁴, in 1996 officially the Chairman of the party's General Election Planning Group. The centrality of Mandelson derived from his experience and from 'his close personal association with the Labour leader and his membership of the Blairite inner circle'³⁵. Mandelson played a central co-ordinating role, displacing the role of Director of Media, Campaigns and Elections. This involved him working with other principal spin doctors and the Head of Press and Broadcasting (David Hill) to provide a central coherence to the implementation of communication strategy. In addition, members of the Shadow Cabinet close to the leader had their own press officers. Richards argues that these personal officers were becoming 'the equivalent for Labour of senior civil servants... Gordon Brown [the Shadow Chancellor] has his own press officer... and not to be outdone, John Prescott [the Deputy Leader] has got one too'³⁶. In fact most of the Shadow Cabinet had their own press officers 'who are, in the main, energetic and assiduous in the promotion of the interests of their charges - Charlie Whelan, who works for Gordon Brown, commonly being regarded as the doyen of the breed'³⁷. The conventional media operation, until the 1996 conference, was run by a Director of Media, Campaigns and Elections, and after that date by the Head of Press and Broadcasting. Under him there were a Chief Press and Broadcasting Officer, a Parliamentary Officer and Broadcasting officer and around six further press officers. In addition there were also press officers from regional headquarters and Scotland and Wales present. There were also notable part-timers used by the Labour inner core. These were MPs or PPCs like Steven Byers, not part of the shadow cabinet but ideologically in tune with the inner core.

In terms of inner core spinning, at the Conservative conference the party leader had his own team, consisting of his political secretary and the Head of the Downing Street policy unit. In addition each senior cabinet minister had his own spin doctor. The central co-ordination of communications rested with the Party Chairman and to a lesser extent his media advisor and the Director of Communications. Communications strategy was co-ordinated through a daily meeting between inner core members:

'This last conference (1995) we had a meeting at 7.30 in the morning chaired by the Party Chairman and present there were, Michael Heseltine, Tony Newton, Alistair Goodlad the Chief Whip, Howel Jones the Prime Minister's Political Secretary, Norman Blackwell head of the Policy Unit, Hugh Colver and myself. Michael Trend was also present as Deputy Chairman'³⁸.

This group of party actors and senior communication personnel formed an inner circle. In addition there was also a group of leadership loyalists used by the inner core, mostly MPs with specialist knowledge on certain specific policy areas. The same source suggested that this group would be briefed after the daily meetings. 'Hugh [Colver] and myself [would then] go to a meeting with the outer circle, if you like, of spin doctors, which this year for the first time had some Members of Parliament - Michael Mates, David Liddington, David Willets [and] in particular Alan Duncan, who's the Chairman's PPS'³⁹. The conventional media operation was conducted by the Director of Communications and 22 staff, including a media consultant, the Head of News, the Head of Scottish Media, four broadcasting officers, three press officers, two photo opportunities officers, two information officers, a press office manager, three secretaries and two messengers.

Party actors on the periphery did not have the resources of the inner core elite to employ a back region team of communication specialists. They engaged in the dissemination of information themselves but also relied on sympathetic political actors to propagate their views on their behalf. They tended to be interested in promoting a single issue or providing an alternative interpretation of events to that being disseminated by the inner core. Their status was a product of a position formerly held within the inner core and of their recognisability by the broadcasters. Their backgrounds provided the peripheral actors with legitimacy in the eyes of the broadcasters and a quasi-elite status. This legitimacy and status went some way to counterbalancing the resource differentials that existed.

In the Liberal Democrats the peripheral elite was small in number and tended to be mostly 'old stars': the founders of the former SDP, Lord Jenkins, Lord Rodgers and Baroness Williams, as well as Sir David Steel, the former party leader. There were also prominent back-benchers, such as Liz Lynne and other actors such as Lord Russell. The Labour party peripheral elite was larger, consisting again of 'old stars': Tony Benn MP,

Lord Hattersley, Neil Kinnock (former leader), Gerald Kaufman, Lord Shore, Baroness Castle. It also featured prominent back-benchers. Some in this period were critical of the inner core, such as, Dennis Skinner, Peter Hain, Ken Livingstone, Dianne Abbott, Dale Campbell-Savours and Tam Dayell. Others were favourably disposed towards it, such as Giles Radice and Steven Byers. Within the Conservative party there were also prominent 'old stars' - Thatcher and Heath in their capacity as former party leaders, and Lord Howe, Lord Lawson and John Redwood and Norman Lamont, all former recent members of the party's inner core. There were also prominent back-benchers in the form of a grouping of Eurosceptic MPs.

In addition, at the Labour conference there were also external power brokers. The union leaders had the resources to be able to employ spin doctors of their own. The large unions did not suffer from the same resource problem as other members of Labour's peripheral elite and maintained a position of power in conference. While the block vote had been reduced between 1993 and 1996, they still commanded 50 per cent of the votes at conference. The unions were particularly eager to get their interpretation of events across to the journalists, aware that the Labour leadership had improved its media operation. Over recent conferences the unions had become more sensitised to the need to run a similar operation. Jones suggests: 'Like the party, they too had developed close links with many journalists. If the unions considered their interests were at stake then obviously they would do all they could to take advantage of the access and opportunities which the news media afforded them'⁴⁰. Some of the unions were in active opposition to One Member, One Vote reforms put through by Labour's leadership at the 1993 conference. Each of the union leaders present had their own press officers and some (particularly the Transport and General Workers and the General and Municipal Boilermakers) used the resources at their disposal to pursue actively an agenda of opposition to the party's inner core.

Finally the delegates or representatives signalled their mood, either through the length of an ovation at the Conservatives' conferences or in ballots at the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties'. Even the attendance at a particular fringe meeting or the kind of motions submitted provided indicators of delegates' moods or opinions. Organised groups of activists did seek to engage in the dissemination of information (Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992). Without the resources or contacts with journalists, such attempts were only successful if they could mobilise enough delegates or could forge alliances with members of the inner or outer core elites, the periphery or the external power brokers.

4.3 Events, Gathering, Interaction and Relationships

Each conference consisted of a series of planned events. These events were the focus of the dissemination and gathering of information and could be seen, in a basic sense, as a series of channels along which information flowed. Sigal (1973) argues that there are three types of 'information channel' between journalists and political actors: Routine, Informal and Enterprise⁴¹. Similarly at conferences there were three types of event. First, routine events. These were the pre-planned debates and speeches in the main hall, plus meetings on the fringe, but they also included press conferences and interviews. They were routine in the sense that they occurred at every conference. The main aim behind routine events was to communicate conventional information on policy and the views of party actors to a wider TV audience. Second, informal events. These were the non-timetabled behind-the-scenes background briefings, leaks and conversations with colleagues. Third, there were unexpected events. These included gaffes, spontaneous external events or ones which arose out of interviews conducted at the journalist's initiative, or from independent research.

Gathering of information and video footage occurred in linked stages. The first involved gathering from routine events the news teams had decided to cover. The second, gathering from informal events and through independent research. This was a continuous process throughout the period of the conferences, with deadlines acting as pressure on journalists to get all the film material available, and prepare scripts, in time for the link-line to London. In the first stage, gathering was largely passive and required little effort. Footage of speeches and debates came from cameras already in the main hall, and further information on these events was given to the journalists in the form of press releases or came from newspapers and the wire services. The second stage provided scope for active gathering⁴². Journalists actively went in search of the views of party actors, particularly the inner core's, and camera crews went to find new sources of visual material. Active gathering was driven by the need to incorporate new material into reports before the next deadline, and there was certainly more pressure on those journalists working with more than one deadline. Some of their behaviour observed at several conferences⁴³ involved 'door stepping' senior party members for comment in numerous different locations, talking to the spin doctors in the press room and taking notes from impromptu briefings. In particular the conference hotel was the haunt of evening news gathering (Baker, 1993; Prior, 1986). One former Tory Party Chairman described a typical scene in the hotel foyer. 'Radio mikes are pushed in front of you; television crews record you entering, being searched, checking in and chatting to friends. If you have to wait for the lift then you are trapped, and comment can only be refused by being churlish'⁴⁴.

The passive gathering of information from routine events involved little direct interaction, whereas active gathering at informal events often involved direct face-to-face contact whether on or off camera. Direct contact between the news teams and spin doctors occurred off camera around the press room, usually after a speech or debate in the main hall, but also in a social setting in the evenings. Journalists also interacted spasmodically with actors on the periphery and delegates, but on the journalists' terms: 'Of course you go out of your way to talk to activists. But you probably go with a pretty prejudiced and uninformed idea of what they are going to be thinking when you chat to them'⁴⁵. All interaction between journalists and party actors was exchange-driven (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Jones. B, 1993; Tunstall, 1970). As Tunstall argues 'the interaction of any journalists with news sources can be seen as an exchange of information for publicity'⁴⁶. Conferences were no different, in this respect, from Westminster. 'Each side... is in a position to offer the other access to a resource it values. The mass media offer politicians access to an audience through a credible outlet, while politicians offer journalists information about a theatre of presumed relevance, significance, impact and spectacle for audience consumption'⁴⁷. For instance, new policies raised in speeches and elaborated upon through informal events were provided with publicity in a news report. As one correspondent suggested:

'It is a lot like it is in Westminster, it's symbiotic. We look to them for favours and any gossip. We look to them to give us off-the-record a line which they haven't given the BBC, they haven't given a colleague. They look to us presumably to get their point across. I don't think they look for exceptionally favourable coverage: they don't expect us to be totally uncritical'⁴⁸.

Another correspondent concurred: 'If you like, it is a trade off'⁴⁹.

The majority of interaction that occurred during news gathering was largely between actors with pre-existing exchange relationships established within the lobby at Westminster.

'You walk in and there is one familiar face after another and it's a journalist's joy [...]. It is a road show, you meet them at by-elections, you meet them all day long at Westminster, all year round I should say. Once a year you meet them away from home like a sort of journalist's holiday and there are an awful lot of familiar faces there'⁵⁰.

The journalists tended to be at least familiar, if not on first-name terms, with the spin doctors and members of the parties' inner and outer core. The depth of the relationship built up between the journalists and party actors, in particular the spin doctors, was an important factor when considering the exchanges that occurred. As one correspondent suggested: 'I think you'd be right in thinking that you have the most contact with the people you are most familiar with'⁵¹. Spin doctors had both formal and close relations with journalists - indeed, they could not hope to 'operate successfully without first having established a coterie of trusted reporters and other contacts'⁵². They had formal relationships with many

journalists. These were based on the routinised exchange of conventional information and dictated by their role as communication specialists. Indeed, conferences provided a greater opportunity for this to happen than at Westminster. While at the conferences I noted frequent discussions between spin doctors and lower ranking correspondents. However, the spin doctors also had a series of close relationships. Many of these relationships had been cultivated over lengthy periods of time. Such closeness was also the product of the provision and reporting of accurate information and insight into inner core elite thinking.

Bearing in mind the hierarchically differentiated nature of relationships (Franklin, 1994), principal spin doctors built up a series of close relationships with correspondingly senior journalists. The dissemination and gathering of personalised information took place between the principal spin doctors of the inner core and the political editors and 'star' presenters. This was the inner sanctum of information exchange. The exchange was personal and intense and involved the trade of exclusive personalised information for informed representation. In addition, the continued use of particular journalists as recipients for the latest personalised information subsequently maintained and raised their status in a competitive broadcast hierarchy. One source highlighted the courting of the journalistic elite by the principal spin doctors:

'Their [the spin doctors'] most valuable and remorseless expenditure is on the electronic media. Oakley and Brunson are powerful. If you go back a decade or more I don't think you would find the political editors of the electronic media anything like as influential as they are now. Influential because they get attention from the parties and influential because they are the sort of mouth pieces, the first brig in the political line. They are courted the whole time by the parties'⁵³.

Oakley, Brunson, Goodman, the Snows, Wark and Paxman shared a privileged relationship with the inner core elites' spin doctors in each party. As their interpretations carried a lot of weight with their junior colleagues, and they had tremendous credibility with other journalists in the news community, they were the conduit through which such personalised information passed. To a certain extent this 'matchmaking' did not exclude brief exchanges developing between 'suitors who would generally consider themselves above such a partner'⁵⁴. However, in the main, the relationships between the spin doctors and the correspondents and producers were formal and based on publicising conventional information. The author observed such journalist briefings in 1994, 1995 and 1996. For example, the Shadow Scottish Secretary (George Robertson) and his press secretary held regular briefings for Scottish journalists, and there were several other briefings by the press secretaries of the other members of the shadow cabinet on their specialist areas, a pattern followed at the other two parties' conferences. The conferences also provided journalists with the opportunity to renew acquaintance with other party actors on the periphery, and delegates, but these relationships in the main remained formal.

4.4 Competition

The resources which both the broadcasters and the parties had to offer in terms of information and publicity were finite (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Therefore actors in both organisations had to compete for them. While the nature of journalistic competition remained the same at the conferences as at Westminster, party competition for publicity was transformed from inter-party to intra-party competition, often pitching the inner core against the other actors. However, intra-party competition at conferences was imperfect and did not take place on a level playing field. The aim of the competition was to achieve and maintain the role of party 'primary definer'⁵⁵ (Hall et al, 1978) throughout the conference. In achieving this aim, the inner core had organisational and informational resource advantages as well as ones which arose from experience and close relationships. In simple terms the competitive advantage and the ability to achieve primary definer status decreased the further down the party hierarchy an actor moved. The advantages of the inner core elite could be compared to those which lay with the government vis-a-vis the opposition or other source organisations. As chapter three showed, the inner core were able to gain a significant advantage from being able to exert influence on the issues raised in speeches and debates and their timetabling. This control of planning allowed them to prepare the necessary strategies prior to the start of the conferences. The inner core elite had substantial help from the cadre of spin doctors, experienced in dealing with the broadcasters and their demands. Such a cadre was an indispensable tool in the provision of interpretations for the broadcasters at informal events.

The inner core spin doctors controlled to a greater extent than the other groups the key elements required in any information exchange with journalists. As part of the conventional media operation they were able to provide 'information subsidies' (Gandy, 1982) in the form of press conferences, press releases, factual information and copies of speeches, so reducing the 'cost' of information for the broadcast journalists and its ease of capture. Through specialised media operations, the principal spin doctors controlled the flow of advanced information and also journalistic access to the inner core for interviews. The inner core faced relatively little competition from other actors for interviews. As they were deemed to be important news sources they were often in a dominant position to decide who would be fielded in interviews on Channel Four and Newsnight.

Control of these informational resources enabled the inner core to ensure their dominant role as the party's 'primary definer'. This advantage was not a permanent state of affairs. It provided them with a relative and not an absolute advantage over other sections of the party. The inner core elite continually needed to make sure that such an advantage

was maintained in the face of continual challenges from other actors and groups, particularly on the periphery.

The journalists similarly were in competition with each other. While competition at conferences was somewhat less strong than at other times of the year, broadcast journalists were still 'competitor colleagues' (Tunstall, 1970) at both an inter-organisational and intra-organisational level. Inter-organisational competition took place between journalists at ITN and the BBC, and also between the broadcasters and the press. Intra-organisational competition took place between different programmes within the same organisation and was more prevalent between the BBC news programmes than at ITN. Like that described by Tunstall (1970), the competition that was observed took three forms: first over speed; second over exclusives; and third over access.

Concerns with speed manifested themselves in the competition to be first with particular information. A BBC source suggested: 'There is considerable competition between the various outlets, for example, which programme got the first full-length Blair interview; which outlet was first to report the Clause Four conference defeat'⁵⁶. There was also competition importantly 'not to be last with the news'⁵⁷. This point was illustrated by a senior BBC source's expression of worry about missing a story:

'One of our difficulties often is the fact that the newspapers, even more so than at Westminster, are all under the same roof. At a lot of conference venues they are at one end of the building: we are at the other. The newspapers are all together, so a rumour can go round like wild fire, which if we are not careful we can be completely excluded from. Often ITN, because they are much smaller, their proximity to the newspapers will be much better than ours. And it is quite possible, even though we have lots of people at the conference, for us to miss a story which suddenly finds itself across the newspapers and ITN. So we are quite vulnerable to stories slipping by us there, and it is something you have always got to be aware of at conferences because it is a rumour mill'⁵⁸.

Conferences were an information-rich environment, as one source suggested: 'Because of the competition with your colleagues, they might get a story you missed. But on the whole, the story happens in the arena, so you tend to get it'⁵⁹. In such an environment, with all journalists in close proximity, the chances of one journalist or organisation getting an exclusive were reduced. 'Competition comes to mean getting the same stories as the competitors, but getting the information earlier and in more detail'⁶⁰. However, this did not stop bulletins and their journalists competing for exclusive information from, or access to, the inner core. There was much competition for the newsworthy personalised information provided by the principal spin doctors to supplement conventional information from a speech. The journalists were interested in and anxious to learn the opinions of the inner core elite, who were often unavailable for continuous comment. Jones suggests that: 'journalists were often desperate to speak to authoritative

sources capable of giving them an instant interpretation of what happened and also the background guidance on the likely consequences'⁶¹. Some broadcast journalists, particularly the political editors, selectively sought to use existing close relationships with principal spin doctors to establish the views of the inner core, so as to get an exclusive insight into their opinion on an issue, which their rivals did not have. The BBC and ITN regularly held receptions at each conference, to which the inner core was invited, to aid the gathering of exclusive information.

In addition, competition did manifest itself in a limited way in the drive to gather additional comments to make the reports look fresher. With only a finite number of newsworthy individuals around, the gathering journalists were forced into 'door stepping' in the hope that they would get a short exclusive answer to a question. The search for exclusive sources of information to provide fresh insights and opinions for reports also took place at fringe meetings. A Channel Four source summed up his experiences:

'A typical day will begin with a breakfast. [If] it is an event-breakfast, like one that Channel 4 stages, in which case you are likely to be sitting between two cabinet ministers or a cabinet minister and somebody else's wife[...]. Then you go on to the 9.30 opening of conference and that morning period, first, in immediate terms, is to find what's swilling about for the day. And second, for a more long term period, is to get people in the margins who came out of a debate bored perhaps with the immediate subject in hand and more than happy to have coffee and grit through some of the things which are not immediately on the agenda. I team up with the assistant editor of *The Times* and we in fact have a remorseless programme of dining cabinet ministers and front bench spokespersons throughout the week. I mean my diary for last year, there would certainly be a lunch and a dinner every day with somebody who was worth having dinner with [...]. The fringe obviously is a moment, again in immediate terms, to see how passions are running on particular subjects. And in the more long term it's possible to make contact with people who are rather germane to a subject but do not have heads above the parapet. They may be people from think tanks, pressure groups or whatever, who in subsequent times will become useful, should the issue be important. Take Europe for example: obviously there are endless people who materialise to input in a European debate in the fringes who may well subsequently become useful'⁶².

All journalists jealously guarded any exclusives they were given, not sharing them even with other programmes in the same network. As one source noted: 'if you've had a private chat with someone [in the leadership] you keep it to yourself and run it as an exclusive'⁶³.

Competition between the evening bulletins for access to leading actors for formal interviews was less intense. Only Channel Four News and Newsnight had the time available within the programme for extensive live or pre-recorded interviews. Both bulletins, because of their large time slots, were able to get the interviews with the political actors. Channel Four News conducted a total of 58 interviews between 1993 and 1996: 6 at the Liberal Democrat conference, 25 at Labour's and 27 at the Conservatives'. Newsnight conducted a total of 67 interviews: 11 at the Liberal Democrat conference, 27 at Labour's and 29 at the Conservatives'. But News at Ten and the BBC Six conducted only one

interview each between 1993 and 1996. However, the late-evening bulletins on ITV and BBC did include highlights of interviews in some reports, either conducted by themselves or by Newsnight or Channel Four News.

At the BBC there was some movement at an editorial and managerial level to co-ordinate competition between outlets. The BBC had begun to co-ordinate centrally its news gathering operation at conferences, seeking to increase co-operation between the various news programmes. As a BBC source suggested:

‘We don’t want to pull in all the BBC’s coverage and make it the same, but inevitably if you are not going to be competing in a way that is counter-productive you need to at least have that form of trust and communication between the outlets. So I’d like to think if Newsnight had some form of exclusive they would at least be able to plan how it came out by talking to me’⁶⁴.

While content remained the responsibility of the programme, an overall news co-ordinator brought editors and producers together. The aim was to improve the BBC’s internal transfer of information at conference using the existing series of daily meetings. The same source suggested:

‘We are trying to pull them all into pooling information. So I will take part in a “conference core” for instance with the television morning editorial meeting and then a little later we will have some form of editorial meeting whereby we try and pull all the strands together’⁶⁵.

He admitted, however, that ‘they wouldn’t be proper journalists if they didn’t want their own exclusive and there is an enormous amount of competition’⁶⁶, but that there were in place ‘editorial structures whereby these things can be sorted out’⁶⁷. These editorial structures, he argued, were ‘to make sure the channels of communication between programmes and ourselves exist without trying to standardise everything’⁶⁸. They were also part of an effort to avoid an incoherent interpretation of events within the BBC. One journalist suggested: ‘One outlet would not go out at a complete tangent and say the opposite of another bulletin or programme’⁶⁹. The same senior BBC source noted: ‘It is something you would want to avoid’⁷⁰.

4.5 Broadcasters’ Attitudes

The broadcasters at conferences were faced with a large amount of information from events, not all of which could become news or be given the publicity the parties desired. They had a certain amount of discretionary power (Semetko et al, 1991). They were able to choose, make suitability judgements (Gans, 1979), firstly about what events and what information were to be selected or rejected, secondly about its importance and thirdly about whether to ‘expand the agenda beyond the issues of the day...’⁷¹. These judgements, made with daily deadlines in mind, were routinised (Sigal, 1973) and guided by a series of professional, organisationally-derived attitudes toward the conferences and events.

A study of broadcasters' attitudes towards Parliament, by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), provides a structure which could be transposed to the coverage of the party conferences. They argue that broadcasters had two fundamentally different attitudes to Parliament as a source of news. The first was 'sacerdotal': it considers that parliamentary developments 'deserve a regular and prominent airing as an inherent right and regardless of news value calculations'⁷². The second was 'pragmatic': in this approach, 'the treatment of politicians' activities is based on... assessments of their intrinsic newsworthiness... [so] that consequently the prominence given to the stories reporting these activities, the amount of time or space allocated to them will be determined by a strict consideration of news values'⁷³. Choices were therefore routinely made on both a sacerdotal and pragmatic basis.

However, such attitudes were not distributed randomly but differed according to people's roles (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) and between bulletins. There was 'a tendency for broadcasters in certain roles to adapt one set of attitudes, while incumbents of others exhibit different orientations'⁷⁴. While there was a hierarchical divide, attitudes also varied across the different groups involved in covering conference. Those involved in news gathering (namely the correspondents and the political editors) had a different attitude towards the conferences as a source of news from those further removed from its proximity. The correspondents' attitudes towards events at conference, as to parliament, was more sacerdotal than pragmatic, even though it was critical, because, as with Westminster, they were immersed in the conferences (like their subjects), and they were dependent on access to party actors to do their job.

The editors and producers, and the higher executives within the organisations at the periphery of conference broadcasting, were less involved in news gathering. They were more pragmatically oriented towards conference as a source of news, although sacerdotal in their attitudes towards some news events within it. For the news rooms in London, news values were an important determinant of the amount of time and the position of conference reports allocated within the overall bulletin running order.

The broadcasters were both pragmatically and sacerdotally oriented towards the conferences. Blumler and Gurevitch argue that orientations 'towards a given institution will reflect the interaction between two sets of influences - its more or less abiding sacerdotal standing... and its momentary weight on news value scales'⁷⁵. These attitudes were revealed in the prominence and amount of attention given to the various conferences and in the selection of routine events for coverage.

Attitudes Towards the Conferences

An analysis of conference news revealed that there were variations between the bulletins' editorial attitudes. Channel Four News and Newsnight were more sacerdotal towards the conferences. Both were anchored out of the Labour and Conservative conferences and both programmes devoted more time to additional news items. In addition, both were more committed to them as significant political events. The main BBC news and ITN showed a more pragmatic editorial attitude; they treated the conferences as news events which had to compete on their newsworthiness. The different editorial attitudes towards the conferences were indicated in the number of reports produced; their prominence, as Schlesinger notes, the 'prestige' of any news item, is importantly shown in its 'placement in the running order'⁷⁶; and in the amount of additional news items. Tables 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9 show the total number of reports⁷⁷ and their prominence on all six bulletins over a four-year period.

Table 4.7: Prominence of Liberal Democrat conference reports by bulletin 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
ITN 5.40	2	0	0	3	10	15
BBC 6	1	2	0	3	9	15
Ch 4	0	1	2	2	13	18
BBC 9	2	0	0	4	9	15
ITN 10	0	2	0	1	14	17
NN	2	1	5	0	7	15
Total	7	6	7	13	62	95

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 4.8: Prominence of the Labour conference reports by bulletin 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
ITN 5.40	7	5	3	2	4	21
BBC 6	7	9	5	4	7	32
Ch 4	12	7	6	5	8	38
BBC 9	9	6	7	5	6	33
ITN 10	8	5	4	5	9	31
NN	14	6	7	3	12	42
Total	57	38	32	24	46	197

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 4.9: Prominence of Conservative conference reports by bulletin 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
ITN 5.40	15	5	1	2	1	24
BBC 6	11	10	6	4	10	41
Ch 4	14	9	6	4	12	45
BBC 9	11	10	6	6	4	37
ITN 10	14	6	3	3	5	31
NN	13	7	8	4	13	45
Total	78	47	30	23	45	223

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

A comparison of the three tables shows that the Liberal Democrat conference was considered the least newsworthy. It received the least amount of coverage in terms of the number of reports and was never the lead item on Channel Four News or News at Ten. The vast majority of their reports - 62 out of 95 (63%) - featured in the fifth slot or below. In comparison, the Labour and Conservative conferences were the subject of a far greater number of reports. At the Labour conference 57 out of 195 reports (29%) were lead news items. Labour conference reports were rarely further down the running order than fourth, with only 46 out of 197 reports (23%) in the fifth slot or below. A similar picture emerged in the treatment of reports from the Conservative conference. There, 78 out of 223 reports (35%) were lead items, with the vast majority featuring in the top four: only 45 out of 223 (20%) reports featured in the fifth slot or below. This difference in attitude was further

revealed in the number of additional news items produced for each conference.

Table 4.10: The number of "additional" news items broadcast by conference 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	BBC6	ITN10	BBC9	Ch 4	NN	Total
Liberal Democrat	2	2	1	0	8	14	27
Labour	14	9	17	12	47	53	152
Conservative	11	20	14	21	50	52	168
Total	27	31	32	33	105	119	347

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 4.10 shows that events at the Liberal Democrats' conference triggered the least number of additional news items and the Conservatives' the most. At each conference, the table shows that Channel Four News (105 items) and Newsnight (119) consistently produced the greatest number of additional items when compared to the other bulletins. There were also small differences between the BBC and ITN. While there was little difference editorially between them at the Liberal Democrat conference, ITN produced more additional items for the Labour conference and the BBC for the Conservative conference.

Despite differences across all bulletins, the editorial apparatus judged the Conservative conference to be the most newsworthy and the Liberal Democrats the least. Routine events at the Labour and Conservative conferences were seen as more newsworthy by comparison with those at the Liberal Democrats. As one source indicated:

'There is a difference between say the Liberal Democratic conference and the Labour and Tory conference, I'll get in to trouble immediately I refer to the Liberal Democratic conference as a minor conference or if I refer to the others as major conferences, but as far as we are concerned the Lib Dems are' ⁷⁸.

Attitudes Towards Speeches

In terms of deciding what to cover at each conference, the bulletins and their journalists were oriented towards particular routine events such as speeches and debates, with a more pragmatic attitude being indicated by prominent but irregular coverage and a sacerdotal orientation by regular and prominent coverage. The party leader's speech was consistently given a high degree of prominence and received a lot of attention, whereas the attention given to the other party actors' speeches was more irregular. The broadcasters treated speeches of inner core elite actors with a mixture of pragmatic and sacerdotal attitudes. Ministers, their shadows and senior spokespersons' speeches received attention, but the amount and prominence depended upon the policy announcements the speeches contained.

The more radical and significant an announcement, the greater its newsworthiness and the more prominent coverage it received.

Home affairs speeches provided a mixed picture between the conferences (Table 4.11, next page). The Shadow Home Secretary's speeches were treated pragmatically and received prominent coverage only in 1993 and to a lesser extent in 1995. The Liberal Democrats' spokesperson's speech was deemed completely unnewsworthy and received no coverage at all. The Home Secretary's speeches received regular coverage but the striking prominence of some of his speeches was determined by the newsworthiness of their content. Those speeches which contained the major policy announcements in 1993 and 1995 were given greater prominence by all broadcasters.

Table 4.11: Prominence of all reports on home affairs speeches by conference 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
Conservative						
1993	6	0	0	0	0	6
1994	0	1	0	2	3	6
1995	5	0	1	0	0	6
1996	1	2	0	0	1	4
Total	12	3	1	2	4	22
Labour						
1993	1	0	0	2	3	6
1995	0	0	1	0	1	2
1996	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	1	0	1	2	5	9
Liberal Democrat (No reports)						

Speeches by the Chancellor, his shadow and the Liberal Democrats' Treasury spokespersons were treated more sacerdotally than speeches by their counterparts (Table 4.12, next page). There was little doubt that they were considered important, with regular coverage across the time period. However, each speech was not considered equally important and news values largely determined the prominence of the coverage. The Shadow Chancellor's (Gordon Brown's) speeches were regularly given greater prominence by the broadcasters than those of either of his rivals, while again the Liberal Democrats' spokesperson attracted least attention. Brown's speeches were considered more newsworthy, perhaps because he used them as an opportunity to present ideas on new

directions in Labour party economic policy and because of his centrality to New Labour. In addition, Brown's speeches were on the Monday opening of the conference and as a senior party figure he received little or no competition from his colleagues. The Chancellor's speeches, surprisingly, received less prominence, with the exception of 1996, than those of his Shadow, partly because of their content: he never used them to make major announcements of economic policy. This was also due to competition in the announcement stakes in 1994 and 1995, when the Home Secretary made important policy-laden speeches on the same day.

Table 4.12: Prominence of all reports on economic speeches by conference 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
Conservative						
1993	1	2	2	1	0	6
1994	0	0	0	0	2	2
1995	0	2	1	0	1	4
1996	6	0	0	0	0	6
Total	7	4	3	1	3	18
Labour						
1993	3	2	0	0	0	5
1994	4	1	1	0	0	6
1995	5	0	0	0	0	5
1996	1	2	1	2	0	6
Total	13	5	2	2	0	22
Liberal Democrat						
1993	0	2	1	1	0	4
1994	0	1	0	0	5	6
1995	0	0	1	0	4	5
1996	0	0	1	4	1	6
Total	0	3	3	5	10	21

The further one moved out along the series of concentric circles from the parties' inner core elite, the more pragmatically oriented journalists were towards speeches featuring those party actors. The peripheral elite or external power brokers received coverage according to a 'strict consideration of news values'⁷⁹. Speeches by back-benchers, 'old stars' and the unions received attention only if they were particularly newsworthy, and that almost always entailed being critical of the party leadership and party policy. As one journalist suggested:

'...If there is dissent we report it. You've got to be a little bit careful though [...]. I think sometimes rightly they get a bit upset if you are giving too much credence to one voice who's really, well out on the fringe. But equally if there is a fringe meeting when the line is criticised then we will probably use it because you are reflecting what is a real tension in the party'⁸⁰.

Table 4.13 (next page) shows the prominence given by broadcasters to critical speeches made by members of the parties' periphery.

Table 4.13: Prominence of all reports on critical speeches by conference 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
Conservative						
Lamont	6	0	0	0	0	6
Redwood	3	1	0	0	0	4
Labour						
Hattersley	3	2	1	0	0	6
Castle	0	0	2	2	2	6
Liberal Democrat						
Rodgers	0	0	1	3	2	6
Total	12	3	4	5	4	28

(Lamont = speech by Norman Lamont. Redwood = speech by John Redwood MP. Hattersley = speech by Lord Hattersley. Castle = speech by Lady Castle. Rodgers = speech by Lord Rodgers.)

Old star Roy Hattersley's five-minute speech criticising Labour education policy at the 1995 conference received prominent coverage, as did major speeches delivered outside the main hall on the fringe by SDP founder Lord Rodgers in 1996 and by former Conservative ministers Lamont and Redwood in 1994 and 1995. All the parties' inner core had their critics on the periphery, but the newsworthiness of what they said faded over time and their critical credentials became routinised. If a recent member of the inner core elite who was sacked or resigned made a critical speech, it received a lot of attention; the following year a similar speech would receive less attention⁸¹. When a speech happened was also important. A speech critical of the inner core would increase in newsworthiness with its ease of capture. If it coincided on the same day with a speech in the main hall it was more likely to receive coverage than if it did not.

Speeches by the peripheral elite were covered only if they said something very newsworthy, which meant being critical. The bulletins and journalists otherwise saw speeches by the inner core elite as more deserving of an airing because of their status in the party: their contributions were amplified even more if they were newsworthy. Conference

delegates, however, were used primarily as a 'vox pop' element in reports, largely as an illustrative device, a way of registering party opinions.

Attitudes Towards Debates

The broadcasters were pragmatically oriented towards conference debates. The prominence of debates depended on their newsworthiness in the broadcasters' eyes - for instance, the journalists expressed a particular preference for contentious issues where there was a level of overt conflict and clearly divergent perspectives between the sides. The constraint of television as a medium meant in practical terms that debates were hard to relay unless there were obvious differences of opinion identifiable with particular actors.

'...It is very difficult once you have got to condense it into, let's say, News at Ten's three and a half minute report or even Channel 4's twelve minute report. It is very hard to say: "Okay, lets devote four minutes of that to Robin Cook commentating on the debate on foreign affairs" [...] It is a ten ton pencil, it is the most dreadful medium to operate creatively, the worst and yet the best when something physically happens. But for politics television is death unless there is a real fight'⁸².

The newsworthiness of conflict was further enhanced by the personnel who were involved and the issue. Conflict that involved the inner core was more newsworthy than conflict that did not. As for the issue, broadcasters preferred issues to be ones which were significant to the party and their viewers. In addition, one source suggested of debates: '...interest is inevitably nearly always a function of the extent to which there is criticism of the leadership, particularly in the case of a government. But I find in the case of the Labour party, we are titillated, scintillated and attracted by conflict'⁸³. Table 4.14 shows the prominence given to debates with overt conflict by the broadcasters at each conference. A fuller exposition can be found in chapter six.

Table 4.14: Prominence of reports on conflictual debates by conference 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
Conservative						
VAT	1	2	2	1	0	6
Labour						
OMOV	10	7	1	0	0	18
Liberal Democrat						
Cannabis	1	1	0	2	7	11

(VAT = debate on Value Added Tax on domestic fuel. OMOV = a debate on One Member, One Vote.

Cannabis = a debate on the legalisation of Cannabis.)

These debates occurred over the introduction of OMOV (One Member, One Vote) and the downgrading of the block vote in 1993, over the introduction of VAT on fuel and public expenditure also in 1993, and over the legalisation of Cannabis in 1994. These debates were particularly prominent because they were on important, salient issues, and there were openly divergent views on them, held by members of the inner core and their critics on the periphery. These critics at the Conservatives' conference included a former Chancellor, at Labour's some of the main union leaders and at the Liberal Democrats' the majority of party delegates. Table 4.13 shows that the OMOV debate in particular received very prominent coverage across all the bulletins. The broadcasters were more sacerdotally oriented towards debates in the main hall and pragmatically to ones on the conference fringe. A senior Channel Four source suggested:

'For the moment it's still the convention that we are going to party conferences to report what the parties say. It is very difficult, given the concrete structures of, security passes, programme agendas, the physical arena, the backdrop built at great expense and the star performers, to break out and say "No, that's all bollocks, actually we are here to report the minor volcanic eruptions outside what you can see" ... '84.

Attitudes Towards Party Actors

The content analysis revealed that journalists exhibited preferences for indexing particular front region party actors during routine events. Seymour-Ure (1996) argues that decisions about which political actors received coverage, and the amount of coverage, were based on a hierarchy of status or power. The amount of coverage party actors received at conferences conformed to a similar pattern, with the inner and outer core elite receiving the most attention and the individual delegates the least. For Seymour-Ure those at the top of the hierarchy were assured coverage; their problem was to 'ensure good media coverage'⁸⁵. Those at the bottom had to struggle to gain news coverage: 'the further you are toward this end, the more likely will your publicity depend on... news values'⁸⁶. The inner and outer core were the sources most frequently used by journalists. Tables 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17 (next page) show the frequency with which sources were used by the broadcasters in reports at all three parties conferences over a four year period.

Table 4.15: The frequency of appearance of Liberal Democrat sources in reports 1993-1996 (cell contents show number of appearances).

	ITN5.40	BBC6	Ch4	BBC9	ITN10	NN	Total	No*	Freq
Leadership	22	31	32	27	24	23	159	11	14.5
Non Leader	15	18	62	13	20	48	176	147	1.2
Total	37	49	94	40	44	71	335	158	2.1

(* = number of actors. 'Leadership' sources are inner and outer core sources. Non-leadership sources include everyone else. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 4.16: The frequency of appearance of Labour sources in reports 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of appearances).

	ITN5.40	BBC6	Ch4	BBC9	ITN10	NN	Total	No*	Freq
Leadership	26	39	45	41	43	44	238	16	15
Non Leader	23	54	161	75	65	107	485	269	1.8
Total	49	93	206	116	108	151	723	285	2.5

(* = number of actors. 'Leadership' sources are inner and outer core sources. Non-leadership sources include everyone else. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 4.17: The frequency of appearance of Conservative sources in reports 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of appearances).

	ITN5.40	BBC6	Ch4	BBC9	ITN10	NN	Total	No*	Freq
Leadership	35	52	51	52	52	56	298	24	12.4
Non Leader	16	76	176	76	59	158	561	323	1.7
Total	51	128	227	128	111	214	859	347	2.5

(* = number of actors. 'Leadership' sources are inner and outer core sources. Non-leadership sources include everyone else. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Across the three parties there was a clear preference for leadership sources, who appeared more frequently than the other sources. This was because of the status of leadership actors within the parties. Journalists saw leadership actors as authoritative sources of information and, importantly, were familiar with them. Non-leadership sources were indexed less frequently. ITN and the main BBC news programmes used substantially fewer non leadership sources than Newsnight and Channel Four News. Schlesinger et al argue that Newsnight, and the same can be said of Channel Four News, 'see themselves as well informed, open minded and sceptical - they feel freer to present issues in a more complex way which allows greater scope for consideration of alternative views and positions'⁸⁷.

The broadcast journalists were less receptive in general towards the information provided by peripheral actors and delegates unless they had something newsworthy to contribute. Journalists had preconceptions about the particular political views of these actors. These shaped their preferences in choosing non-leadership sources. Journalists would pick a source to represent a particular view that they thought was prevalent in the party. As a Channel Four source confirmed:

‘One does find a risk that you go towards the person who you think will reinforce your prejudice. And you ask them whether they think John Major is a weak leader, and funny enough they say, well, yes actually. Because we are not immersed with these people, we really are in that greenhouse across the road all year round, and once a year we are supposed to know what the grass roots are like’⁸⁸.

While leadership sources were indexed because of their status, non-leadership sources were indexed as representatives of particular views which the journalists thought were held by different sections within the parties.

Conclusion

Dissemination and gathering focused around events at conference. The structure of both organisations was shaped by information dissemination and retrieval around such events. The parties' inner core employed a large number of actors to deal with information dissemination, in addition to existing party members. Parties were structured in such a way as to facilitate the effective dissemination of both conventional and personalised information to the broadcasters. Control of this information resource was almost exclusively in the hands of the inner core elite within each party. Conventional spin doctor activity was carried out by party employees in the press office, whereas personalised information was dealt with by principals acting on behalf of the inner core elite. The inner core elite controlled timetabling and had the resources to provide information subsidies. The broadcasters were structured hierarchically. Editorial control rested with producers and editors in the London news room and the conferences. News gathering was conducted by small news teams dominated by the political editors and centred around routine and informal events.

The parties and the broadcasters enjoyed a strong routinised relationship characteristic of the lobby system and (as in the lobby) this relationship was based on a well-established exchange of information for publicity (Tunstall, 1970). Both groups were dependent on each other. The relationships were hierarchically differentiated, with the dominant relationship being a largely exclusive one between the inner core and a journalistic elite of political editors and correspondents. Formal professional relationships also existed between editorial staff and party press officers, surrounding the routine matters

of conference coverage. Relationships outside this inner coterie were infrequent, occurring sporadically at the conferences only. Both sides competed for the limited resources the other had to offer.

Conference coverage was also importantly shaped by the attitudes of the broadcasters. The broadcasters were sacerdotally-oriented to events featuring the inner core, particularly the party leader. The inner core elite possessed an overall advantage. They had an established relationship with the broadcasters; they had a competitive advantage over other sections of the party in terms of the resources at their disposal; and they benefited from the largely sacerdotal attitude of the broadcasters to events featuring them. The broadcasters also derived certain advantages from the way things were organised - guaranteed access to sources, and a stable environment essential for planning day-to-day coverage. It was in both their interests to co-operate, as there were mutual advantages from the conference set-up. However, the advantages which the inner core elite possessed were not permanent, and there was a tendency for such advantages to be undermined in certain circumstances by news values.

1. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
2. Parker, 1994 , pp 5-8.
3. Interview with Ric Bailey.
4. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
5. Schlesinger, 1987, p 99.
6. Interview with Ric Bailey.
7. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
8. Interview with Hugh Pym.
9. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
10. Ibid.
11. McNair, 1995, p 76.
12. Speculation in this case is understood to mean a series of conjectures about the consequences of a particular event at some future point in time; and explanation to mean the interpretation of events so as to aid the audience's understanding.
13. Interview with Ric Bailey.
14. For a fuller exposition of the O.J Simpson trial verdict and the Labour conference, see chapter seven.
15. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
16. Sigal, 1973, p 39.
17. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
18. Interview with Jon Snow.
19. Interview with Hugh Pym.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Interview with Jon Snow.
24. Interview with Hugh Pym.
25. Interview with Ric Bailey.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. The inner and outer core together make up what would commonly be called the party leadership.
29. Bruce notes: 'The concept was invented in the US and developed as part of the process whereby the briefers fought to claim victory in the Ford-Carter debates'. 1992, p136. Kerbal calls them 'campaign operatives who vehemently attempt to get reporters to accept their version of the story'. 1994 p 45. Routledge notes that 'a spin doctor according to Brewer's definition is a campaign official or public relations expert attached to a party or a

candidate whose task is to channel the facts to the media which put the best possible construction on events [...]. This is certainly one way of describing it, but it misses out the threats and cajolery, the screeching of obscenities, the threats to get people sacked'. 1995, p 3.

30. Bruce, 1992, p 133.

31. Heffernan and Stanyer, 1997, p 175.

32. Schlesinger et al, 1983, p 2.

33. Between 1994 and 1996 the number of press officers increased from 16 to 18.

34. Peter Mandelson became a key figure with the election of Tony Blair in 1994 to the party leadership. Mandelson's prominence in deciding and implementing strategy can be seen as a continuation of his role under Kinnock. Smith's period as leader marked his absence from conference spin doctoring in an official capacity. Richards notes: 'one of the most marked differences between Blair and John Smith [was] the former's preoccupation with the media. Whereas Smith was relatively indifferent about political coverage, Blair has placed the projection of his party and himself at the top of his priorities'. 1995b, p 17.

35. Heffernan and Stanyer, 1997, p 176.

36. Richards, 1995b, p 17.

37. Gaber, 1995, p 7.

38. Interview with Tim Collins.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Jones, 1995, p 146.

41. Sigal, 1973, p 121.

42. Unlike those in Tracey's study, the journalists at conference were not limited to '... an essentially mechanical role, functionaries who made the programmes 'happen', but who ultimately were not creatively responsible for that happening'. 1978, p 218.

43. The observations were made at fringe venues, the conference hotels and press rooms at Labour and Liberal Democrat conferences 1994 and 1996, and Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative Conferences 1995.

44. Baker, 1993, p 295.

45. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

46. Tunstall, 1970, p 43.

47. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 33.

48. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

49. Interview with Hugh Pym.

50. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Jones, 1995, p 123.

53. Interview with Jon Snow.

54. Franklin, 1994, p 19.

55. Here the concept of a 'primary definer' is one which fully acknowledges the critique developed by Schlesinger (1990) and Schlesinger and Tumber (1994).

56. Letter from Nick Jones.

57. Tunstall, 1970, p 81.

58. Interview with Ric Bailey.

59. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

60. Tunstall, 1970, p 96.

61. Jones, 1995, p 123.

62. Interview with Jon Snow.

63. Interview with Hugh Pym.

64. Interview with Ric Bailey.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Letter from Nick Jones.

70. Interview with Ric Bailey.

71. Semetko et al, 1991, p xvii.

72. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 50.

73. Ibid, p 50.

74. Ibid, p 52.

75. Ibid, p 56.

76. Schlesinger, 1987, p 99.

77. The tables include the position of both normal reports and pegged reports sometimes initiated by the broadcasters, but not two-ways and interviews.

78. Interview with Steve White.

79. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 89.

80. Interview with Hugh Pym.

81. This was the case with Norman Lamont. Lamont made a speech attacking government policy to fringe meetings at the 1993 and 1994 Conservative conferences which received wide attention. Similar speeches in 1995 and 1996 received hardly a mention on any of the bulletins. For a more detailed account see chapter six.

82. Interview with Jon Snow.

83. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

84. Interview with Jon Snow.

85. Seymour-Ure, 1996, p 10.

86. Ibid, p 10.

87. Schlesinger et al, 1983, p 41.

88. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

Chapter 5

Strategies and Responses in Conference Interaction

During the conferences the communications teams wanted the broadcaster to provide the maximum positive publicity for the events they had planned and promote their perspectives. The broadcasters, driven by a mixture of pragmatic and sacerdotal attitudes, saw their duty as not only to relay information on the main events but also to inform their audience as they saw fit. While the broadcasters' agenda did broadly coincide with that the parties had planned, in the period surveyed here there were also significant divergences - a commissioned opinion poll¹, a lost vote, a speech on the fringe, a policy gaffe and issues generated outside the conference environment. The need to achieve a 'good conference' led the spin doctors to try and reduce the risk of divergences occurring by controlling conference dissemination.

Divergences were minimised in two ways: by using communication strategies that adapted to the demands of the broadcasters but in a way that was beneficial to the parties' leaderships, and by managing the conference to make sure that there were few if any surprises that would deflect journalists away from reporting the chosen agenda. The aim of all communication strategies implemented throughout the duration of the conferences was to ensure, first, that the broadcasters reflected the main conference agendas. If the spin doctors wanted a particular speech to receive publicity, it had to take account of the pragmatic attitudes of the broadcasters and include newsworthy announcements. Second, the aim was to ensure that the inner core's opinions on events were not just heard but became the dominant perspective on events vis-a-vis other sections of the party. Third, to ensure that negative publicity was 'killed off', whether it was a news agenda set elsewhere or comment and criticism. The communication teams also had to limit sources of possible divergence within the party through co-ordinating the activities of the spin doctors, controlling the flow of information to journalists and managing the activities of the party as an entity. Conference management complemented the communications strategies. The implementation of communication strategies and conference management was designed to:

*'Maintain a positive politician-media relationship acknowledging the needs each has of the other, while exploiting the institutional characteristics of both sets of actors for maximum advantage. For the politicians, this requires giving the media organisation what it wants, in terms of news or entertainment, while exerting some influence over how that something is mediated and presented to the audience'*².

The strategies were continually being improved by reflecting on the successes and failures of previous conferences. The process of adaptation was long-term and was fed by conference experiences.

Divergences could never be eradicated. The party elites were not always successful at managing the party, despite planning. Other factions within the parties sought to influence the broadcasters with their perspectives and agendas. Communication professionals had little or no control over information disseminated in fringe debates, speeches, 'maverick' politicians and delegates, or the interpretations which were provided by such events - whose importance as a source of information generally rose for the broadcasters.

The broadcasters in turn adapted to the information environment constructed by the parties. They were aware of management strategies but co-operated. While several interviewees grumbled about the stage managed nature of the conferences, there were certain advantages to the set-up. They received a regular supply of newsworthy information, the access they needed to senior party actors, a share of exclusives - indeed, the regulated flow of information made gathering predictable and enabled a more efficient allocation of resources. However, their acquiescence did not stop them focusing on the issues they perceived as newsworthy and reflecting other opinions and concerns circulating at the conferences. The spin doctors could not determine how much coverage an event received, the nature of that coverage or the sources used, and attempts at editorial interference were actively resisted. This chapter examines the implementation of communication strategies by the spin doctors, their management of the conference and the problems encountered.

5.1 Implementing Communication Strategies

Dissemination at informal events used well-established and routine proactive and reactive communication strategies. The strategies were aimed at 'selling' collectively agreed policy announcements and personalised information and minimising the impact of any negative publicity when it arose. The spin doctors in each party were the main users of these strategies, although other party actors sometimes applied such strategies to generate publicity for their views. The strategies were constantly refined by the spin doctors in the light of their experiences with the aim of improving the communication process.

Targeting and Monitoring

All strategies were targeted by journalist or broadcaster; by medium - television, radio or newspapers, with a national and regional variation; and finally by time, and deadline. All forms were used during each conference. As one spin doctor suggested, 'it's horses for courses to some extent'³.

Senior spin doctors were well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the journalists present at the conferences. They knew which journalists would be the most appropriate receivers of a particular piece of information. It was in this light that the 'poachers turned gamekeepers' proved invaluable with their contacts. Former journalists Hugh Colver and Charles Lewington at Conservative Central Office had built strong contacts in the media in their previous roles. Similarly, for the Liberal Democrats Jane Bonham-Carter and previously Olly Gredner, and for Labour Joy Johnson before her resignation and Alastair Campbell. Jones notes: 'Campbell will... be able to advise on the likely bottom line of political journalists... he knows the strengths and weaknesses of individual lobby correspondents - the journalists Blair should avoid, those who will be most receptive or, if they have stepped out of line, most vulnerable to discreet pressure'⁴. These actors also had an intimate knowledge of the nature of the organisations the journalists worked for - in broadcasting, who the editor, producers and senior personnel were. Jones notes:

'No spin doctor can hope to prove effective without an intimate grasp of the complex and confusing hierarchies of... broadcasting organisations. If a complaint is to be taken notice of, or if an attempt is being made to influence new coverage it will have to be pitched at the right point'⁵.

Such knowledge enabled a more effective targeting of information.

The spin doctors also targeted the different media present at the conferences, as one source suggested: 'You can organise it by medium, so you give some to the newspapers and not to the broadcasters or vice versa'⁶. This allowed the spin doctors access to different audiences. At one extreme, regional and local newspapers and broadcasters were targeted with information that was relevant to that particular region. Each party held regular briefings for Scottish and Welsh journalists, providing information that was solely of relevance to them and would be overlooked by journalists working for the national broadcasters. As one source suggested, 'We have got a set of what are called regional media co-ordinators who work for all the party in that region and they spend a lot of that week liaising... [with] regional broadcasters'⁷. All the parties for the 1996 conferences -

the last before the 1997 General Election - actively targeted the regional broadcasters in those areas where their PPCs stood the greatest chance of winning.

Targeting also took account of the broadcasters' deadlines. The spin doctors had a knowledge of each bulletin's deadline, and the impending presence of a deadline offered them an opportunity to exert greater leverage over the interpretation of events. The nearer a news event occurred to a deadline, the less time the journalists had to seek out alternative perspectives to that provided by the spin doctor. This tactic was compounded by the pressure to meet feed times and also update the report to include the latest developments at conference or just to rework it for a fresher feel. In such an environment the journalists were more receptive to spin . One journalist gave an account of how this process worked in 1994:

'Peter Mandelson, acting as Tony Blair's unofficial spin doctor, was bleeping us all day long. He'd rung the news desks to say what Tony was saying in his speech. Tony was speaking quite late, about an hour before the feed-in by satellite down to London. Basically the rule of thumb is that it takes an hour to edit a minute and I was editing something like four minutes in one hour. I knew ahead what was the interesting part of Tony's speech [because] I'd been told what the interesting part was. At least I could write the script line in to it saying "Tony Blair's going to call for this, this and this". It just speeds the whole process up so you're very grateful for it. He [Mandelson] got his lines in my script and a few other peoples' scripts. That's how they do it. They know when to give you help. They know when your deadline is pressing. The best of them know exactly when to offer you their helping hand'⁸.

A senior Channel Four News source also confirmed the vulnerability of journalists to spin as deadlines neared:

'They have structured their moments to pounce. There is no doubt that seven o'clock is a very good time. There is only twenty-five minutes to the first edition. Or the timing of their strikes are just before lunch time where there isn't really time. You know Robin Oakley or Michael Brunson have got to get it on the air and the last conversation they have is with Peter Mandelson or is with Brian Mawhinney, or whoever it happens to be that is the dominant spin doctor. So their availability at moments of panic and crisis for journalists is a critical factor and they certainly make themselves available or choose their times to call when it is least easy to resist'⁹.

All the communication operations monitored news reports throughout each day of the conference. Rather like 'watching a radar screen for dangerous blips'¹⁰ monitoring enabled them to react to the interpretations given to events by various news reports and errant comments, as one senior Liberal Democrat source suggested: 'Somebody can be saying something that can dominate the whole day's coverage and becomes the story, so we have to make sure that's monitored all the time...' ¹¹. Monitoring also allowed the spin

doctors to assess the success and failure of the strategies being used. In addition, there was another variation of straightforward monitoring: media 'minding'. Principal spin doctors acted as 'media minders' for their employers, preventing them from being caught unawares and making sure they received the best publicity possible.

Proactive Strategies

Two forms of proactive strategy - trailing and follow-up - were widely used. The *raison d'être* behind trailing was that 'the media are much more interested in something that is about to happen than they are in something that has just happened. And, if it is big enough, they will report it after it has happened, as well as before it has happened'¹². A Conservative source suggested that virtually every speech was trailed at the 1995 party conference.

'We tried every day to have something on the Today programme that looked forward to what was going to be happening later that day and what announcements were going to happen. So for example on the Wednesday morning they were trailing the fact that Gillian Shephard was going to be making announcements about new qualifications for Headmasters. On Thursday morning the fact that Michael Howard was making new announcements on sentencing policy. On the Friday morning we gave them the story about the assisted places scheme in the Prime Minister's speech. Now in most of those cases they weren't necessarily the biggest thing in that speech but they were enough for a programme'¹³.

Expectations on the outcome of forthcoming events were also trailed (Bruce, 1992). The expectations game played by the spin doctors was based on the construction of a deceptive set of expectations about the likely outcome of future events. Particularly at the Labour and Liberal Democrat conferences, where motions and composites debated were balloted and the leadership's position endorsed or rejected, the outcome of such affairs was of considerable interest to the journalists. The aim of the game was to trail lower expectations of the outcome in advance of the event. The trailing of these low expectations performed two functions: if the results were known to be close, it gave follow-up spinning more credibility and enabled a planned favourable interpretation to be put on the loss. It also enabled the spin doctors to claim a victory for the leadership's policy proposal if defeat was avoided, however narrow the margin. The expectations game deliberately reduced expectation in order to maximise the publicity from a victory and minimise the bad publicity from a loss.

The aim of follow-up was in part to continue the process of publicity maximisation,

reinforcing the agreed message and reducing the risks that arose from misinterpretation of events and announcements. Follow-up included all activities after an event with these goals. As a strategy it was employed in varying strengths and forms. It relied on the established relationships with journalists and a degree of co-ordination between the spin doctors. Follow-up strategies were designed at one level to help. Liberal Democrat spin doctors talked about their role as helpers, and as in the other parties, they were available for queries, explaining the mechanics of the conferences. Such help and advice was important for the less experienced journalists who regularly descended on each of the conferences. In this sense it was a basic form of risk minimisation, preventing mistakes over interpretation developing which could be harder to correct in the future.

Follow-up also employed a classic 'carrot and stick' approach. The carrot, so to speak, was the authoritative personalised information they possessed. Competing journalists were eager to find out the leadership line, and speaking on the behalf of their masters gave principal spin doctors in follow-up mode considerable weight in the interpretation of events. Hours were spent in social functions and the press rooms briefing journalists about the detail behind a policy proposal indicated in a speech, or what the result of a ballot or vote meant for the leadership. Such interaction also enabled the spin doctors to see what interpretation of events was emerging within the news community and whether there was a divergence from or similarity to the party elite's perspective.

When there was a divergence between the party elite's line and the perspective held by the journalists, then the stick replaced the carrot. The messages had to be kept on course; the higher the stakes, and the more the message that had been delivered looked like going off course, the stronger the use of the stick. The mildest form of this follow-up manifested itself through complaints and the strongest through bullying. Complaints were delivered directly to a particular journalist in the form of a rebuke. Routledge calls such a tactic the 'shame game'. It played on the insecurities of journalists, shaming the journalist whose interpretation of events was considered out on a limb into taking the perspective that had been adopted by his colleagues. If this was unsuccessful or if the complaint was of a more serious nature, then 'an approach might be made direct to the relevant programme editor'¹⁴. If this in turn was unsuccessful, then the spin doctor could appeal even higher to a senior member of broadcast management. Appealing over the heads of the journalists required the necessary seniority and authority. Complaints directed at journalists could also be intimidatory and personal, as Jones's citation of Mandelson's attack on Michael Brunson of ITN at the Labour conference in 1994 bears out.

Tough on Crime: the Home Secretary's speech

I want to examine through an example the simultaneous use of two proactive media strategies by Conservative spin doctors at their 1995 conference and the response of the news broadcasters. This not untypical example focuses on the trailing and targeting of News at Ten with personalised information from Home Secretary Michael Howard's speech. News at Ten's political editor was provided with an exclusive trail of the content of the Home Secretary's speech. News at Ten was targeted because the source suggested it was 'by far the most important news programme'¹⁵. The Tories' aim was to maximise publicity for the Home Secretary's announcements, as the other bulletins would pick up on the information and carry it too, and the announcements would be further reported the following day after the speech.

The report lasted 4 minutes and 21 seconds on Wednesday October 11 1995. It was the lead story on News at Ten and dealt mainly, although not exclusively, with the trailed information. The information was framed in the following way.

Anchor : 'Good evening. The Home Secretary Michael Howard is planning much longer jail sentences for serious crime, including a "Two strikes and you are out" policy for some sex offenders. He'll tell the Conservative party conference in Blackpool tomorrow that anyone found guilty twice for the most serious sex attacks will be locked up for life, most other prisons sentences will be served in full...'.

Brunson : 'Tonight the Home Secretary was on the social circuit, but after hard argument with his cabinet colleagues, he'll not only suggest tomorrow that the courts should send far more burglars to prison but will seek to end two situations within the criminal justice system which he believes ordinary people find offensive: criminals apparently getting out of jail early and criminals who repeat very serious crime. Mr Howard will say here in this hall tomorrow that in the future the sentence the court hands down will usually be the time actually served; 15 years will mean 15 years. And judges must take that into account in future, suggesting that present arrangements for remission for good behaviour are about to be ended. And when those who have served time for very serious crimes like sex attacks and then commit the same offence again once they are out of jail, Mr Howard will announce that in many cases, they will face the certainty of life imprisonment...'.

The same Conservative source suggested that this 'didn't actually stop them devoting another five or six minutes the next day to what he'd just said even though they had reported it, but they were able to give themselves a nice pat on the back, Mike Brunson was saying "As News at Ten reported yesterday..." and all this sort of stuff'¹⁶. There was some truth in this. Wednesday's report was followed by a 3 minute 32 second report on Thursday where Brunson did state 'as we reported last night'. However, the second report also focused on the reactions to the announcements. News at Ten used its discretionary power to obtain a reaction from the Lord Chief Justice. In fact, the report's introduction

suggested that the speech 'Almost immediately ran into trouble with the Lord Chief Justice. Lord Taylor... issued a statement saying he didn't believe the threat of longer periods of imprisonment would deter habitual criminals, he suggested more police might'. The response of the Lord Chief Justice was also indexed in the report reinforcing the narrative. The report also further indexed Howard's reaction to Lord Taylor's comments.

Interviews conducted with ITN journalists gave some idea of the attitude of ITN's Political Editor to the use of trailed exclusive information and more generally of ITN journalists' attitudes. An ITN source explained their orientation through a story of a trailed exclusive but on a different issue:

'Once I was scooped by my opposite number at the BBC because he got a leak of the inflation figures and I was very pissed off. So I took this high moral tone and said that he was deliberately leaked them as part of the Department of Employment's news management operation. I remember discussing it with Mike Brunson and I said "Would you have chosen to rise above it and not get abused like that?" And he said, "To be quite honest, if you get the inflation figures it's a good story. It doesn't matter what the motive is. You've got the inflation figures the night before, you use them. It doesn't matter if some one is trying to manipulate you". Well he didn't quite say that, but he was right'¹⁷.

Discretionary power seems not to have been exercised in terms of the receipt of information but in terms of the treatment of reactive sources after the event. It seems that the newsworthiness of the trailed information was the priority for the Political Editor. The fact that News at Ten had been used for the advance release of information was secondary. The same journalist suggested:

'I don't think we have the right to withhold something from the public just because we think we are being used with bits and pieces of information. I think if you start taking that line you're in grave danger because you'll end up reporting nothing - you'll end up filtering material just on some abstract principle'¹⁸.

Through co-operating, both the Conservative managers and ITN benefited. ITN received their 'exclusive' before their rivals and the Conservative leadership gained maximum publicity for the announcements. This example further shows that proactive strategies worked through adapting to the competitive desires of the broadcasters to be first, ahead of their rivals, and have exclusive material (Tunstall, 1970). Successfully executed proactive strategies provided benefits for both the inner core and the journalists.

Reactive Strategies

The parties' spin doctors made frequent use of reactive strategies which were an essential part of political campaigning throughout the year. The conferences provided an internal dimension for the implementation of such strategies. The spin doctors, often over the course of the study, were forced to react to prevent adverse events 'snowballing' into something that seriously undermined the planned promotion of policy. However, for reactive strategies to be successful a certain amount of second-guessing was required. One source suggested that 'You have to have in the back of your mind constantly, what is the potential problem? How can we pull it round [and] get the right people in the right positions to control the story?'¹⁹. The spin doctors need to be able to 'calculate in advance what may be the worst-case scenario should the news media decide to put the least favourable interpretation on what happened'²⁰.

Rebuttal was the most common reactive strategy used. It entailed a systematic countering of perspectives initiated outside the party elite with the aim of 'killing them off' before they developed into a full news story. 'Spinning is not just about placing stories, it is about killing them too, either by straight denial or sly innuendo'²¹. This involved targeting journalists with the counter-points to prove that there was no truth in that particular interpretation of events. It was frequently combined with complaining to and bullying the particular journalists. Each of the parties established a rebuttal unit, with one or more spin doctors responsible for rebutting. The inter-party nature of rebuttal did not disappear: the three parties continued to respond to developments at each other's conferences through phoning the journalists directly or faxing them. Jones note that the spin doctors 'obtain the telephone numbers of the temporary news rooms established by the radio and television services during the party conferences. Labour's response to a development at a Conservative conference can then be communicated directly to the relevant political correspondent'²².

If rebuttal failed, the spin doctors needed to 'up the ante' through mobilising authoritative sources within the party leadership to make a comment. The effective mobilisation of comment was done in off-the-record briefings and through interviews. The off-the-record mobilisation generally tended to be pernicious in character, involving a repudiation for journalists of the source of the stories. The aim of such a technique was to undermine the credibility of a source outside the inner elite as unrepresentative of general feeling within the party. Such off-the-record comments may be made by members of the

inner core elite themselves, but was usually made by the principal spin doctors on their behalf. However, such strategies by themselves were sometimes not enough. A public mobilisation of comment was also on occasion necessary in support or denial of a news story. A potentially negative event involving a senior party member often called for the support of the rest of the inner core elite or a disagreeable activity might require their collective condemnation, but either way the comments were an important part of reducing the salience of a potentially negative interpretation of events.

Spinning Gold Bars: the Liberal Democrat health spokesperson's speech

This example serves to illustrate first the use of reactive strategies by the Liberal Democrats in order to kill off the view that a policy announcement was a gaffe, and second the response of the news broadcasters. The incident arose at the 1996 conference and concerned an announcement by the health spokesperson, Simon Hughes. In a speech he suggested that certain existing tax loopholes would be closed to provide extra revenue for the NHS. The extract from the speech was as follows.

‘Some of the cats - of all sizes - in the City and elsewhere currently receive huge sums from tax-dodging employers who should know better - millions of pounds have been paid in gold bars, life policies and other valuables to avoid paying tax to the Exchequer. Responsible firms shouldn’t spend their time thinking up tax wheezes and we wouldn’t let them - we’d close this illogical loophole for good’.

However, one journalist rang the Inland Revenue that afternoon to enquire about such exemptions. A source noted:

‘John Sergeant [BBC Chief Political Correspondent] rang the Inland Revenue and said “Is this the case?”. And they said “oh no we have been taxing them for a while”. So it looked as if Hughes had dropped a huge clanger by trying to tax something already taxed’²³.

News of the fact that these items were already taxed spread through the news community at the conference. The same source noted: ‘So this is where the bush telegraph works... some body said “oh down in the press room they have all been talking about this gold bars thing”...’²⁴. The Liberal Democrat spin doctors engaged in an immediate rebuttal operation led by their Head of Communications and the Treasury spokesperson’s spin doctor. From observation in the press room at the time, they held an impromptu press briefing for all the journalists, fully explaining the party’s policy and arguing that this was an example, not a proposal. This stance was backed up with press releases from a tax expert indicating that there were other loopholes that could be closed. The same source, who also attended the briefing, noted:

‘I went down to see what was going on and I found Jane Bonham-Carter [head of communications] with Malcolm Bruce’s spin doctor, who used to work in the City himself. And they had already produced an opinion from a tax expert saying you could raise three hundred million pounds. And they said: “No, what Simon meant was this is what used to happen, but there are lots of other examples”...’²⁵.

The rebuttal exercise was combined with a further mobilisation of comment. Simon Hughes did a series of interviews for the evening news bulletins where he reiterated the same line. All reports quoted the same extract from the speech juxtaposed with information challenging it. The BBC Six commented:

‘... But tax experts were puzzled. A leading local accountant explained that a good part of this loophole had already been closed: “Not fine wine and gold bullion bars because those have already been closed down, but there are still ways that national insurance isn’t being paid on bonus payments in kind. Those ways are being challenged by the authorities but without a more fundamental change in the rules the task is going to be much more difficult”...’.

The BBC Nine news before quoting the same source noted:

‘The party estimate that 350 million pounds would be saved, but tax experts were puzzled. A leading local tax consultant pointed out that employers couldn’t avoid tax by offering gold or vintage wine. The problem had already been tackled by the government’.

Channel Four News, News at Ten and Newsnight juxtaposed the passage with a reference to government sources claiming that the loopholes had already be closed. The BBC Six, Nine and News at Ten further indexed Hughes explaining the passage.

The rebuttal and mobilisation of comment prevented the incident from turning into a full-blown gaffe. None of the reports contextualised the passage as a gaffe. One journalist suggested a reason for this:

‘Because the speech was ambiguous you had to give them the benefit of the doubt. But they only just got away with it. I still don’t know whether it was just sloppily written or they really had just cocked it up and then had to retreat, but they handled it quite well actually. It was quite well spun by them, because they put the fire out quickly once they realised what was going on. They marshalled their forces, got some bits of paper, came down, and that was a partial success from their point of view’²⁶.

Further, the concluding remarks of the reports left the issue open and did not draw any strong conclusions; this is best summarised in News at Ten’s report: ‘But the Liberal Democrats have had to work hard today to defend their claim to have policies which are clear, costed and coherent’. This example shows that rebuttal prevented the full development of an alternative perspective on the issue through effectively muddying the interpretative waters and mobilising comment from a tax expert and Hughes himself. It also shows the discretionary power of journalists should they wish to check particular policy announcements.

5.2 Managing the Conferences

The spin doctors were continually trying to create a more ordered information environment to aid the implementation of communication strategies and prevent the deflection of journalistic attention away from the planned agenda. To attain this goal the communication professionals sought to regulate the news gathering process. This involved the routine provision of timetabled press conferences and press releases, additional visual material in the form of photo opportunities, and controlling the access of journalists to senior party actors. They also attempted to co-ordinate their own activities and those of other party actors. This increasingly disciplined approach towards the party was augmented by a fear and nervousness in inner core circles that coverage of differences of opinion and gaffes would reflect badly on the party.

The Press Office

Located within the press room, the press office acted as an information nerve centre. A Conservative source outlined the function of their press office as

‘...processing the press releases, issuing them, organising the briefings for the regional lobby, being there to answer any inquiries and in organising the sheer horrendous sort of logistics, like making sure every phone works. That stuff is certainly bigger than would have been the case ten years ago, but about the same level it has been for the last three or four years’²⁷.

While the flow of personalised information was managed by the principal spin doctors, the press office catered for the journalists' demands for background information on speeches and debates, but also sought to regulate its flow and encourage passive gathering.

The communications team working within the press office firstly kept journalists informed of any changes in the timetabling of routine events in the main hall. Secondly, they produced a series of pre and post-speech press releases²⁸. Pre-event releases were the first to be issued, and arrived at the news team's desk in time for their morning meetings. These took several forms: an outline of the main announcements contained in speeches to be made throughout the day, details of the leadership's responses to various motions under debate²⁹, and copies of all the speeches in full, as well as the location of the party leadership at specific times of the day. At the Liberal Democrats' conferences the press office issued a daily document, called ‘Daily Press Focus’, which was a timetable indicating where Paddy Ashdown and the leadership would be throughout the day. Post-

event releases provided the leadership's official reaction to an event that had occurred. All press releases had contact telephone numbers for journalists to follow up. The use of embargoes enabled them to control when such information was used. A spin doctor suggested:

'You can organise it by time. For example...(1995) I talked to all the broadcasters who would be putting out programmes in the morning and gave them the story [...]. And that was given on a strict embargo basis - they couldn't run it till six o'clock the following morning but they were told that no newspaper would have it, and that it was just being given to the breakfast broadcasters, and it wasn't to be used that evening'³⁰.

The journalists, having received their advance information, nearly always respected the embargoes, the same source noted: 'If they had chosen to break the embargo (which they very rarely do) they could have had it running on the six o'clock and the nine o'clock news bulletins. But they all understood the terms'³¹. Thirdly, the communications teams organised press conferences. All three parties made extensive use of press conferences in two forms: pre-event, to preview the forthcoming speeches that day or week, and post-event, usually held by those members of the inner core who had made a speech³². The communications teams carried out two further important tasks: co-ordinating photo opportunities and dealing with requests for interviews.

Photo Opportunities

Television news was driven by a 'pictorial imperative' (Schlesinger, 1987): it had 'a consuming need for pictures...' ³³. To a large extent the choice of pictures was governed by the event on which the report was focused and by the already committed technical resources, but this was not exclusively the case. Table 5.1 (next page) shows the origin of the visual material used in reports (excluding pegged items, which were mostly, although not exclusively, non-conference visually) as a proportion of the total amount of conference, coverage accompanied by the actual figure to the nearest minute.

Table 5.1: The percentage of visual material from different sources used in conference reports by bulletin (and in minutes of coverage) 1993-1996.

	Main Hall	Fringe	Photo Op	Other	Total
ITN 5.40	63% (95)	1% (2)	2% (3)	34% (50)	100% (150)
ITN 10	57% (105)	4% (8)	3% (5)	36% (66)	100% (184)
Ch 4	56% (200)	7% (24)	3% (11)	34% (120)	100% (355)
BBC 9	55% (125)	6% (14)	3% (7)	36% (84)	100% (230)
BBC 6	53% (114)	2% (5)	4% (9)	41% (86)	100% (214)
NN	41% (138)	8% (28)	2% (5)	49% (168)	100% (339)
Total	53% (777)	6% (81)	3% (40)	38% (574)	100% (1472)

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight. Photo Op = Photo opportunities. Other = a combination of journalists talking to camera, party actors walking between the venue and the conference hotel, computer generated graphics and library and illustrative pictures)

The table shows that over half of all visuals in conference reports were 'actuality clips' (Tutt, 1992) of routine events, derived from camera positions in the main hall. There were variations between the bulletins. Over half of all pictures used in the majority of bulletins' reports originated in the main hall, although with Newsnight that figure was as low as 41%³⁴. However, conference sessions were not a source of dramatic visuals. They provided what could be described as a series of 'talking heads' - in Schlesinger's words, as a 'second-best' source of visual material. There was therefore a demand from programme editors for additional interesting visual material to illustrate events and show the same personalities in different settings. These pictures came from a variety of sources, as the table shows. The fringe was the source of an average 6% of visuals used in all reports. The 'other' visuals, initiated by the broadcasters, were a combination of journalists talking to camera, party actors walking between the venue and the conference hotel, computer generated graphics and library and illustrative pictures, and accounted for 38% of the visual material on average, although in Newsnight's reports it was as high as 49%.

With the 'gaze' of the cameras focusing outside the main conference auditoriums, photo opportunities constituted a direct attempt to adapt to the visual demands of the broadcasters but in a controlled manner³⁵. As one Liberal Democrat source noted: 'There is a big demand for photo calls'³⁶. Although the photo opportunities organised by the parties only accounted for a small proportion of the total visual material used (on average 3%), in

providing additional visual material the parties' communication teams had three aims. First, to regulate the conference environment so that key individuals - be they ministers, shadows or the party leaders - were less likely to be caught off guard by haphazard 'door stepping'. Secondly to make it easier for the broadcasters to gather footage of key party actors to supplement their core coverage. The same source noted: 'For instance, you know they are all on tight deadlines: they need to know who will be where and when. So all of our MP's are given and have a detailed programme in front of them'³⁷. Thirdly, to provide a visually relevant 'peg' on which to hang reports of policy announcements. It was standard practice at all three conferences for ministers, shadow ministers and spokespersons to undertake a visit to a school or hospital in the conference locality, to emphasise policy proposals or the success of existing policies. Such occasions were just for the cameras, with the key protagonists refusing to answer questions that particular journalists lying in wait might ask. In addition there was also an attempt to inject newsworthiness into such opportunities by using party actors who were in demand, accompanied by other newsworthy actors such as show business and sporting celebrities. The Tables 5.2 to 5.4 show the photo opportunities used in reports between 1993 and 1996.

Table 5.2: The nature of Liberal Democrat photo opportunities used in reports 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of opportunities used).

	NN	BBC9	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	Ch 4	Total
Party leader	3	3	3	5	6	6	26
Education spokesperson	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
Other leadership actors	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Celebrities	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Home Aff spokesperson	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Treasury spokesperson	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	4	4	5	7	9	9	38

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight. Home Aff = Home Affairs)

Table 5.3: The nature of Labour photo opportunities used in reports 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of opportunities used).

	NN	ITN5.40	BBC9	BBC6	ITN10	Ch 4	Total
Party leader	1	3	4	6	4	4	22
Leader & Celebrities	0	1	1	1	2	1	6
Leader & Wife	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Shadow Education Sec	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
Other leadership actors	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Shadow Home Sec	1	1	1	1	1	2	8
Union	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Shadow Chancellor	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	5	5	8	9	9	10	46

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight. Sec = Secretary.)

Table 5.4: The nature of Conservative photo opportunities used in reports 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of opportunities used).

	ITN10	NN	ITN5.40	BBC6	BBC9	Ch 4	Total
Party leader	1	0	1	4	2	2	10
Leader & Lady Thatcher	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Party Chairman	1	1	1	2	5	4	14
Party Chairman & Event	0	1	1	0	0	2	4
Labour Party Stunt	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
Total	2	3	5	7	8	9	34

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight. Labour Party Stunt = the parading of a Conservative defector to Labour outside the 1996 Conservative party conference. Party Chairman and Event = a football practice with the Party Chairman and Bournemouth FC youth side.)

The tables show that the most widely used photo opportunities at Labour and Liberal Democrat conferences involved the party leaders. Photo opportunities featuring the Liberal Democrat leader accounted for 26 of all the 38 photo opportunities used. The Labour leader accounted for 31 of all 46 photo opportunities used. Interestingly, photo opportunities featuring the Conservative leader were less frequent than those featuring the Party Chairman. This was due in large part to the fact that most of these were on the Monday before the start of the conference, when the Chairman was virtually the only inner

core elite member present.

The tables also show the frequent use of photo opportunities featuring the party leader and other actors, particularly celebrities. Labour held two successful photo opportunities featuring Tony Blair with football managers Kevin Keegan in 1995 and Alex Ferguson in 1996. These featured in all bulletins except Newsnight. News at Ten devoted its 'And finally' slot to the 1995 Blair-Keegan photo opportunity. A journalist suggested:

'If you are a news editor and you are told Blair is doing this, Blair is doing that, you have got to cover it because if you miss it and something happens or he says something you look a complete idiot. But inevitably if you are told nice pictures of Blair in front of a tank, nice pictures of Blair playing football, we are television - good pictures is the name of the game. We are going to use them and they know that'³⁸.

These visuals were more popular with the broadcasters than those that were designed to provide a peg for particular ministerial or shadow ministerial announcements. Generally, those broadcasters interviewed did see themselves as partly compromised by overt attempts to manipulate the use of visuals, but they were also limited in their responses:

'I think any journalists in our profession would all strongly dispute going down the line they wanted but maybe paradoxically we do. We do what we think is a professional way of covering it and they achieve something they want to achieve because they get nice pictures of Tony Blair. We can't say: "We won't use these pictures of Tony Blair, we will use shots of the stage" just because we don't want anything to do with it. It doesn't work like that. So if you like it is a trade off'³⁹.

The press office also faced competition from other sources in the photo opportunity stakes. The parties had taken to organising stunts at each other's conferences, particularly the Labour party, whose 1996 parade of a Conservative defector outside the Conservative party conference received wide coverage, as Table 5.4 shows. At the Labour conference some unions provided photo opportunities, although generally the peripheral elites did not have the resources to provide large-scale planned photo opportunities. However, as individuals, they were aware of the 'pictorial imperatives' of television news and were able to provide impromptu publicity opportunities.

The leaderships also responded individually to the pictorial demands of the broadcasters. With the proliferation of lightweight electronic news gathering (ENG) cameras searching for additional visual material on a virtually twenty-four-hour basis at conference the leadership were aware of being caught off guard, 'door stepped' at any moment. The communications departments sought to control door stepping to some extent, especially around the parties' leaders. In particular their arrival and departure at the conference hotel and main hall and their tours of the conference exhibition stands were all controlled. Such situations also provided potential publicity, and the elite actively sought to

co-operate with camera crews in the production of important set-up shots for news reports. During observation in the press room at the 1996 Labour conference, frequent co-operation was observed in the setting up of short interviews for reports. On two separate occasions Gordon Brown's and Alistair Darling's spin doctors helped organise the broadcasters' shots, insisting that the party logo featured in the background - demands with which the journalists and camera crew complied.

Controlling Access

Amongst the broadcasters there was a high demand for interviews with the leaderships. The communication teams responded by offering only certain members of the elite for interviews, and by monitoring interviews and complaining where necessary. Two of the journalists interviewed suggested that the parties exercised a certain amount of control over the interview process. One said: 'Increasingly, I'd say through the Thatcher years, the parties have taken a much tougher grip on that whole process and they decide who they are fielding'⁴⁰. This point was reinforced by a senior BBC source who argued: 'there is a trend towards greater control of their leading players and where they appear and how they appear'⁴¹.

The first stage of control was the bidding process. News bulletins had to bid for interviews in advance. A political correspondent remarked: 'There are two types of bids. There is a bid for a pre-recorded interview for a package, which we might put in ourselves or might ask the producer to do. And there is a bid for a live interview on the programme'⁴². Competing bids made through the press office allowed the party elites to pick and choose in advance which news programmes they wanted to be interviewed by. Jones argues that at the 1994 Labour party conference this process was carried out on an 'hour-by-hour- basis, as dictated by events at the conference'⁴³.

All three parties frequently decided to use specific members of the leadership for interview purposes. They rejected bids for interviews with certain senior party members, offering instead their own preferred candidate. A political correspondent commented:

'You know when they are not fielding anybody because Jeffrey Archer comes up. At the conferences they'll decide who they want to put forward. They might have a particular message to put forward, but quite often they'll be trying to share out the goodies and let Michael Heseltine, Ken Clarke or whoever it is have a fair go at the whip'⁴⁴.

However, there was a certain amount of negotiation between the two sides, with both

aware of how far they could push their demands. A senior BBC source suggested:

'They will constantly have battles about who is available and on what day, people pulling out at the last minute and substitutes put up. You have to be prepared to indulge in some brinkmanship. If we are going to complain against the conditions they are putting up, we have to be prepared to sometimes say: "Well, if you are only offering over these conditions, fine, we won't bother". And we have to judge how important they think it is to go on the air. There is an awful lot of that'⁴⁵.

Interviews like, communication strategies, were monitored, with the aim of improving the way senior party spokespersons communicated particular party policies. A not untypical example occurred at the Liberal Democrats' 1996 conference. Here the Director of Communications used a team of volunteers to monitor all interviews and provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the spokesperson's performance.

Managing the Party

The disciplines of campaigning have been extended well beyond the period of the general election, forming what Scammell calls a 'quasi permanent campaign'. The main impact of this change was a 'tighter central control over internal party mechanisms with the potential for dissent'⁴⁶. The inner core's aim in all the parties was to provide as unified a response as possible to the broadcasters. This entailed co-ordinating the communications operation, making sure the inner core elite 'sang from the same hymn sheet', and controlling the proceedings in the hall.

A source suggested that, at the Conservatives' conferences, Conservative Central Office co-ordinated information dissemination. 'Everything they do and everything they say and where they say it and when they say it is choreographed for the period of that week by Conservative Central Office. That only ever otherwise happens during general election campaigns'⁴⁷. The aim, suggested the same source, was to try to get 'ministers to behave as politicians and not as civil servants'⁴⁸, the benefit for the party being that 'the week when we tended to take politicians out of Whitehall and put them in with the party at the party conference, although heaven knows it has had its ups and downs, we generally ended the week stronger than when we went in to it, fairly consistently'⁴⁹. Another Director of Communications, quoted in *The Times*, confirmed that the 1995 conference had

'been charted out in news management terms... the cabinet has been informed of this. There is a ruthless centralisation and co-ordination of announcements. Those that might not get a big play on the day because they conflict with other big initiatives will be moved forward. In previous years there was substance in the ministers' speeches but it dribbled out willy nilly'⁵⁰.

The Liberal Democrats' Director of Strategy and Planning emphasised the need for greater co-operation between the party's spokespersons. 'They meet every morning, we try to get them together so they can work as a team for the whole week. In the morning we can review what's coming up and advise members how we ought to argue it'⁵¹. The same source also talked in terms of an overall planned and co-ordinated response to the journalists:

'We're going to start with a management plan for the conference which I have to make sure is stuck to. We'll have a press team of about a dozen people doing various different things and I shall be co-ordinating them, making sure that they're all right and dealing with I guess the senior journalists about what's happening, what we are trying to get across, in addition to just ordinary spinning'⁵².

Richards argues that the Labour party elite 'puts a high premium on collective responsibility'⁵³. He adds that 'the shades of opinion within the shadow cabinet and beyond are rarely expressed for fear of causing trouble'⁵⁴.

Once the conferences started, there were also attempts to manage the proceedings in the hall. This was important in making sure that there was the minimum distraction to the promotion of particular policies. At the Labour conference this management role was performed by the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) and the general secretary. The CAC was involved in managing the delegations at the conferences. The aim was to absorb any dissent that existed amongst the delegations over the timetabling of events. As one source suggested: 'The name of the game for public reasons and good party reasons was to get the people who were concerned about the arrangement of the agenda off the floor of conference and in to see us, so you could have a rather more relaxed private discussion'⁵⁵. Another CAC source suggested: 'There is a strong purpose in doing that. It absorbs a lot of the anger [...], it takes a lot of the heat out of it and it is quite an important role in terms of calming things down'⁵⁶. While the CAC were charged with deflating any problems with conference delegations, the Labour party General Secretary also undertook a behind-the-scenes management role aimed at minimising conference disruptions. The General Secretary's role was that of a fixer, particularly as far as the unions were concerned. As one former Secretary suggested: 'My role is to do the political fixing at conference, both in terms of the composites that come through and dealing with the trade union delegations in particular, and the powerful movers and shakers among the constituencies'⁵⁷. The same source suggested that such a management role would be more difficult for the inner core elite to perform mainly because of the suspicions held about it in some sections of the party. 'It is really only the General Secretary, or somebody who is known to be acting on behalf of the General Secretary, that can do that. If the leader tries, or the leader's office, there is quite a negative reaction. It is better that such activity is seen

to come from the party'⁵⁸.

As part of managing the conference proceedings, the Liberal Democrats' FCC was actively involved, especially in the 1996 conference, in trying to maximise the exposure of their parliamentary candidates on television. While this had to be done within conference procedures, it was part of an active attempt to control those contributing to debates.

'We obviously want to give maximum media exposure to our parliamentary candidates. I had 8 cards in from parliamentary candidates in winnable seats but 6 of them were in the south west and although it was a long debate there was simply no way that you can call 6 parliamentary candidates from the south west to the debate, conference just won't stand for that. So you have to work that out with the agent. We won't guarantee to call parliamentary candidates in winnable seats, but what we tend to do is to ask them to nominate a couple for each debate, so we don't end up in a situation with them all competing to speak in the same debate'⁵⁹.

5.3 Shortcomings in Conference Manipulation

Despite the management of conferences and the use of the best prepared communication strategies, the spin doctors did not effectively eliminate risk. Access was impossible to control completely, press conferences and photo opportunities sometimes unexpectedly backfired, internal party disagreements arose that could not be managed, there was occasional poor co-ordination of spin doctors, gaffe-prone members of the inner core elite and newsworthy external events that impinged on the conference agenda. These risks by their nature could not be predicted by the communication teams during planning.

Open Access

The agreed ground rules on interviews could not prevent journalists gaining access to the inner core and other senior party members. It was difficult for party communication professionals to control access completely. Journalists at the BBC and ITN indicated in interviews that conferences provided unrivalled opportunities for reaching party actors compared to other times of the year, even though they admitted that things had been toughened-up. A senior Channel Four source noted: 'It is a period of great access... you have access to politicians then and there which you really never get at any other time'⁶⁰. Similarly a senior BBC source suggested that:

'You have much more access across a wider range of contacts within the party at conferences than you have any other time of the year. You... do inevitably have more access to the leadership and the leading lights in all the parties, you have more

access to MPs... and perhaps most important of all access to the party grass roots which is something you are deprived of unless you make an enormous and expensive effort from Westminster'⁶¹.

Further, both informants agreed that the open nature of access to sources which were usually unavailable via the lobby at Westminster limited the influence of the spin doctors during the conferences:

'The lobby system at Westminster although it is a system of access it is fairly restrictive access [...]. At conferences you have... social access... [and] it is much easier for stories to slip through the net of the spin doctor. It is much easier to talk to the party mavericks, it is easier to talk to politicians when their guards are down'⁶².

'The spin doctor to some extent is less effective at conference and more effective in isolation in Westminster where you can't get hold of the real McCoy and you can't pin them to the wall over coffee and say "come on, be candid". The problem at Westminster is that the spinner takes all, as he is the only one on the go very often... But when you go to the conferences the spin doctor is only part of the mix... not dominant in the way that they are at Westminster'⁶³.

Despite these comments, improved access could not be divorced from already-held journalistic preferences, as seen in Chapter Four. It was not necessarily access to the grass roots which was sought but access to certain actors within the inner and outer core elite. As one journalist suggested:

'One of the big parts of conferences is the invitations you get to receptions, the Saatchi party, for the very elite the Jeffrey Archer Krug Champers Shepherds Pie party. If you spend your evenings there talking to the ministers, and it is just the ministers and the correspondents that go, you're not really getting any sort of insights into the grass roots [...]. The theory is we go down there and get in touch with party grass roots, but I think we spend much more time talking to each other and to senior politicians who we know quite well'⁶⁴.

Greater access opportunities did at least reinforce journalists' discretionary power to choose by providing a series of elite party actors in one location. Unable to control the activity of party actors and with greater access and social contact, journalists could usually find a member of the party elite who was prepared to express an opinion that differed from the official perspective, if it was given off the record.

Problems with Press Conferences

Press conferences were seen by the spin doctors in all parties until recently as the most effective way to impart information. However, during the period of study they proved difficult to control⁶⁵ and highlighted the differences in the way their role was perceived between broadcasters and the spin doctors. Three senior Conservative sources expressed a certain level of anxiety with the pre-conference press conference traditionally held on the

Monday before their main conference started, aimed at filling a news vacuum. As one party source said: 'The media's attention has switched to the Conservative party with effect from about midday on Saturday. The Saturday papers try to do a preview of the Tory conference but we don't actually start until the Tuesday morning, and we don't have an exciting speech until noon on Tuesday so you have this terrible vacuum'⁶⁶. A former Party Chairman raised the 1994 press conference as an example of the broadcasters' and the press's attitude to such events:

'The big press conference is a game. It is when the press will try to destabilise the conference and blow the Chairman off course. They hunt in packs! And it was Mark Thatcher who was the theme for that Monday, which was a story that died a death within two days, but that was their attempt to try and destabilise it, this year [1995] it was Alan Howarth. You know that is part of the game'⁶⁷.

Another source reinforced the same point about the 1994 press conference:

'It was just the four of us. The Party Chairman, the Chairman of the National Union, the President and myself and they're throwing questions at us. Basically they are usually about the agenda and the way things are going to pan out over the next four days etc., perhaps questions about how many people are coming, whether we are down or up, and we are ready for that. Of course the day before on the Sunday something blew about Mark Thatcher and every single question at that press conference was about Mark Thatcher. The Party Chairman said: "Right we've had it, we've had six questions on Mark Thatcher, we are not taking any more, something different" ... "Adam Boulton Sky, Mark Thatcher etc., etc. Yeah but we want to know". A total waste of time as far as we were concerned and you cannot break them out of it'⁶⁸.

Another source suggested:

'Last year [1994] was the last year that we had the Monday afternoon press conference [...]. Basically what happens is that an awful lot of fairly obnoxious journalists come along and scream insults at the Party Chairman until he says something slightly awkward. Last year with Jeremy Hanley they came along and they screamed at him for three-quarters of an hour about Mark Thatcher and he said something slightly unfortunate and then bingo the Mark Thatcher story was running into Tuesday's papers'⁶⁹.

It was in the light of this experience that the third source argued that the party leadership had decided to abandon this press conference as the solution to the perceived problem:

'For a long time it had been thought the way to answer this media vacuum problem on the Monday is you put the Party Chairman and Basil Feldman to answer to a press conference, this was not a clever idea [...]. Press conferences these days are a singularly ineffective method of getting across your message, they are the 1990s equivalent of bear baiting [...]. So even if we had not known that we had Alan Howarth coming, we had decided to scrap that Monday afternoon press conference'⁷⁰.

When asked about the scrapping of the press conference, the former Party Chairman blamed the journalists:

'I didn't know that they got rid of it, I didn't know that this year. I just experienced twenty-four questions out of the twenty-five on the subject of Mark Thatcher. I think [they] brought that upon themselves. But I hadn't decided that press conference would go. Obviously Brian Mawhinney did, having decided with Hugh

Colver, that instead of being on the defensive on a matter of the press's choice, we wanted to promote the conference' ⁷¹.

The Labour inner elite followed a similar line. At their 1994, 1995 and 1996 conferences they held two press conferences daily. Each one involved their Head of Press and Broadcasting reading the agenda for the morning and afternoon and the NEC's responses to the various amendments and composites. As the week progressed the attendance by journalists declined rapidly until the Friday morning when there were only five journalists present⁷². From my observations, none of the journalists asked any direct questions. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between journalists and the spin doctors about the role of these press conferences. There were also rather few post-speech press conferences held by the party elite, despite the fact that Labour had built a rather grand stage-set in the press room for press conferences. There was a preference within the Labour inner core elite for informal briefings, which could be more easily controlled, a preference with which the broadcasters co-operated.

Choreography backfires

The effect of trying to exert tighter control over the visual aspect of conference was in some instances to create more conflict with broadcasters and to imbue those gaffes that did occur with greater newsworthiness than they might otherwise have had.

The broadcasters and the media in general at conferences were only willing to co-operate to a certain extent with restrictions on their movement. Attempts to tighten control of the activities of camera crews beyond this level, for the benefit of the parties, in one instance led to conflict. At the 1994 Conservative conference a push by the party Chairman to control the movement of camera crews in front of the main stage led to a partial walkout and a boycott of subsequent arranged photo opportunities.

'The photographers insisted their job was being made impossible, and downed cameras. A tense stand-off developed during the day, with prolonged negotiation between the press and Conservative Central Office yielding little result... The first photo call to suffer was that of Jeremy Hanley the Tory Chairman, who toured the new platform pursued by a gaggle of reporters and a couple of television crews. A football match kicked off by Dame Angela Rumbold, the party's Vice Chairman, was the next casualty - her out-door event falling victim to the negotiations. Last night it was unclear who would crack first - the Conservative politicians, who want coverage, or the media who need the pictures'⁷³.

While there was increased attention to the choreography of leading party actors, it did not always go according to plan. Paradoxically, it increased the visual attractiveness of gaffes when they did happen. In fact a ratchet effect seemed to be the consequence. The more potential gaffes were ironed out, the more newsworthy they became when they did occur. The Conservative Party Chairman's accidental walk off the main platform prior to his formal introduction to the conference in 1994 was one such occasion, a senior party source remarked:

'I don't know if you saw that little snip last year where the Chairman says I welcome to the platform the Party Chairman, "oh where has he gone". He's gone because the PM said to him "Jeremy I want to see you now". Jeremy Hanley had been told to stay put, but the tension was building and the adrenaline was pumping and the PM says "get up Jeremy". Bill, who's the Conference Chairman, can't see this [...]. The media have run that story of the missing Chairman time after time after time. They ran it the whole of the Tuesday morning of conference. That was the only thing they referred to: it was very upsetting for the agriculture debate [...]. It happened to Norman Fowler [former Party Chairman] the year before [1993] as well'⁷⁴.

Reflecting on the mistake, the same source said that he hoped to introduce measures to avoid such occurrences in the future:

'I have got to break the courtesy [and] get the Conference Chairman to welcome the Party Chairman as well. So then if the Prime Minister or anybody else comes on stage we can welcome them too. You only learn these things, it's not something you think of until it actually happens. But I believe that sort of detail is quite important [...]. So you have to try to cover yourself. It probably sounds worse than it is, but you always need to get it right'⁷⁵.

In addition, the planned use of members of the leadership cadre to aid the promotion of certain policies sometimes had unforeseen consequences, such as a personality clashes. A Conservative source gave an example from their 1994 party conference.

'You will have some personality clashes. One or two Ministers who don't particularly want to speak on the same day as some others because they think, for example, that if they speak on the same day as Michael Heseltine, however big the announcement, it is bound to be overshadowed simply by the reaction to him. That was particularly the case in 1994 because Michael Heseltine had not been able to speak in '93 and therefore his return speech in '94 was always going to be a big event. There were a number of senior ministers who said "I don't want to speak on the same day as Michael Heseltine because whatever I say will be drowned out by him". Michael Heseltine's speech was alongside Portillo's. In retrospect that was probably an unfortunate fact. On the other hand there were so many other people who were not prepared to speak on the same day, and frankly Michael Portillo didn't have any objections, point one. Point two, at the time, although he was spoken of as a future leadership contender, he was still a relatively junior member of the cabinet and therefore if you had much bigger beasts who were saying I'm not prepared to speak on the same day as Michael Heseltine they could not be pushed around and Michael Portillo to an extent could, although as I say he did not particularly raise any great objections'⁷⁶.

Uncoordinated Spin

Despite detailed planning and increased efforts to co-ordinate the communications operation, conflicts of interest between the spin doctors still arose and were also manifest between the inner core and members of the peripheral elite or external power brokers, as well as with the delegates. These differences could not be smoothed over by the use of strategies and were obvious to the broadcasters. They acted as a 'brake' on successful policy promotion. To a large extent the success of communication strategies was dependent on co-ordination and an ability to avoid internal disagreement. Ironically, success often became more difficult to achieve in the period studied because of the activities of party actors.

Internal channels of communication had been developed by the party leaderships and their advisors to 'ensure different elements of the public relations operation are working with each other effectively'⁷⁷ but these were not always effective. The level of co-ordination within the communication operation varied at each of the conferences. The literature tends to suggest a significant improvement in the co-ordination of in the parties' media operations in recent years (Franklin, 1994; Scammell, 1995; Shaw, 1994). However, from my observations and from other sources, co-ordination of spin doctor activity was not guaranteed. Labour's 1994 conference provided one example of a lapse in the orchestration of the media operation. One journalist present noted of that conference: 'I had found it difficult to work out which spin doctor was in charge'⁷⁸. The lack of co-ordination surrounded the trailing and follow-up of Blair's first speech to conference. Hill, Campbell and Mandelson were all providing differing insights into the content of Blair's forthcoming speech, giving journalists a confusing picture of whose version was most reliable. The lack of co-ordination was underlined by a certain level of tension between the three actors on their positions and responsibility within Labour's new inner core elite. Campbell, newly appointed to the position of Blair's press secretary, took to attacking Mandelson in his column in the *Today* newspaper which he was still writing at the time⁷⁹. 'Turf wars', in the form of personality conflicts and the jostle for position and power within the Labour party, and the inexperience of a new communication team undermined the co-ordination and therefore the effectiveness of conference communication strategies.

At the Conservative party conferences there were difficulties in centrally co-ordinating the dissemination of information within the inner and outer core, leading to various members of the leadership promoting their own particular policy areas. A senior

Conservative admitted at the 1995 conference:

‘There are all sorts of people who are not entirely under Central Office’s control, who are going around briefing sometimes with authorisation sometimes without. All the ministers’ special advisers for example are up there and they may be pursuing their own strategy in terms of who they want to leak their stories too’⁸⁰.

The same source gave one example from the 1995 conference:

‘Last weekend our intention had been that we were going to trail with some papers the ‘Enterprise Centre of Europe’ phrase from the Prime Minister’s speech as the big idea, now we subsequently learnt that the Foreign Secretary’s team had briefed I think the *Sunday Telegraph* that he was going to be announcing in his speech on Tuesday his idea of the North Atlantic Free Trade Area. And we were a bit irritated about that because he did that without clearance’⁸¹.

Conservative sources argued that being in government rather than opposition made control more difficult. One noted:

‘When you are in government it’s actually much more difficult to exercise a single ruthless centralised control over what everybody does than it is when you are in opposition. Blair is able to rule his shadow cabinet with a rod of iron and all the rest of it, not least because his shadow cabinet do not all have in addition to various political advisors a huge staff of departmental press officers working for them’⁸².

The Liberal Democrat communications team were not immune from similar conflicts of interest. Such conflicts undermined the inner core elite’s ability to provide a coherent perspective and steer journalistic attention on to policy areas which were favourable to them.

The management of the party also proved difficult, particularly on issues where there were open disagreements. The spin doctors could not hide or contain divisions within the parties on certain issues. Such differences of opinion, if overt, were newsworthy and not ignored by the broadcasters. The fringe acted as a platform for the expression of such disagreements. At times these divisions led to members of the inner core elite briefing journalists against each other or making direct attacks on aspects of the leadership’s official policies. At the 1996 Conservative conference concealed conflicts were highlighted in the Chancellor’s claimed remark to the Party Chairman ‘tell your kids to get their scooters off my lawn’, an impression reinforced in complaints by several ministers (Bottomley, Newton, Shephard and Hogg) that party spin doctors were briefing against them at conference⁸³. As one Channel Four source suggested: ‘You can’t underestimate the fair amount of incorrigible gossips around who sometimes can’t stop themselves from rubbishing their opponents in the same party’⁸⁴. Another journalists confirmed the point:

‘You would’ve thought the rational way to go about being a party... is that everybody sticks to the party line and doesn’t say anything to the contrary because then the media will have nothing to report. But it just amazes me that there are always people who will talk to the media and brief against their colleagues, I suppose because it is just too big and unwieldy and you can never have complete silence’⁸⁵.

Party managers’ attempts to make ministers behave less like civil servants and more like

politicians revealed that Central Office was often frustrated by ministers' behaviour, hence the effort to get ministers to sing from the same hymn sheet organised by the Party Chairman, Brian Mawhinney, at the 1995 and 1996 conferences. But the response of certain ministers to being told what to do was hostile - they perceived the initiatives as an incursion by the Chairman on their policy areas.

External Events

The spin doctors were aware that the broadcasters were oriented towards certain newsworthy external events over which they had no control. These situations highlighted a temporary divergence in views between the broadcasters and the spin doctors that undermined the inner core elite's advantages. It was impossible for the spin doctors to predict what external events would occur or their 'size' and impact upon the planned conference agenda. Consequently it was hard for them to achieve any influence over their journalistic interpretation, even using reactive strategies. There were several periods during the study when the broadcasters' agenda shifted away from planned events at conference to ones that had occurred externally. While this occurred once at the Labour conference between 1993 and 1996, when Baroness Turner of Camden openly supported Ian Greer Associates, the lobby firm at the centre of the 'cash for questions' scandal, at the Conservative conference it occurred every year. As one Conservative source suggested:

'You always have your meltdown on the Sunday and this has happened so often that I think it's a sort of fixture of the party conference as regular as the Mayor's address at the start on the Tuesday morning. What tends to happen is that one of the Sunday papers or more will have a story which completely comes out of left field as the Americans would say, which you have no warning of, which is absolutely devastating in its impact and which is in serious danger of knocking you for six'⁸⁶.

The news agenda on the opening of each of these conferences was dominated by a series of events: in 1993 the publishing of leaked extracts from Lady Thatcher's memoirs in the *Daily Mirror*; in 1994 Mark Thatcher's involvement in the Saudi Al Yamamah arms deal; in 1995 the defection of MP Alan Howarth to the Labour party; and in 1996 the defection of Lord MacAlpine, former Conservative party treasurer, to the Referendum party. Table 5.5 (next page) shows, the events dominated the broadcasters' news agenda.

Table 5.5: The number of news items on external events across all bulletins on the opening day of Conservative conferences 1993-1996.

	External events	Conference events	Total
1993	13	10	23
1994	9	5	14
1995	7	6	13
1996	7	3	10
Total	36	24	60

The table shows that external events accounted for the majority of news items on the opening days of the conferences. The Conservative communication team's response was largely to implement a reactive strategy. A Conservative spin doctor outlined the reactive strategy followed in 1995 after the defection of Alan Howarth:

'The first any of us heard about it was when one Sunday journalist rang me up on Sunday evening and said "Have you heard about Alan Howarth MP for Stratford upon Avon" and I have to say I went through in my mind, dead, in bed with a woman, in bed with a man, in bed with a camel and the last thing that occurred to me was that he had defected to the Labour party no warning at all. That was clearly a big story, that wasn't a case where you could sort of try a damage limitation exercise. We got the local association's chairman to say basically that this man is a git, we had an exercise of statements from various people, we did try what turned out to be quite a successful fire break operation in that our concern had been that the story could run for two days rather than just the one and that when the Prime Minister arrived at Blackpool on the Monday afternoon the only questions he would be asked would be about Alan Howarth and that would run the story on into the Tuesday. So a decision was taken by the Party Chairman that we would get the Prime Minister to respond on the Sunday evening, so he came back from Huntingdon deliberately instead of going straight into Downing street he lingered and answered some questions predictably enough about Alan Howarth so all the reaction was done on the Sunday. We knew the Monday papers were lost because they were going to follow up on that, but it did mean that by the Tuesday morning we were beginning to slightly regain the full control of the agenda but that sort of reactivity really at the beginning of the week is often all that you can do'⁸⁷.

Conclusion

Conferences were characterised by occasional divergences of interest between the parties and the broadcasters. While both complied with the unwritten rules of engagement, they also wanted different things out of the conferences. The conventionally journalistic broadcasters wanted newsworthy information, the inner core elites wanted coverage of the events they had planned regardless of their news value. If the inner core elites did not

provide such information, the broadcasters would go to other sources or focus on other newsworthy developments. The development and implementation of strategies could be seen as the inner core elite's rational attempt not only to adapt but also to innovate to overcome any divergence of interest. In effect, strategies of promotion and control were inseparable. Inner core elite policy announcements had to be imbued with news value and the environment into which the announcements had been delivered controlled. Party managers needed to make sure that the journalists' attention on policy announcements was not distracted by ministers or shadow ministers talking at cross purposes. Knowing that journalists had many access points to the core elite, internal communications within the elite were monitored and leadership personnel talking to the media were informed regularly about the party line on particular issues. The strategies had to ensure that these policy announcements were reported over the welter of other information, and that responses could be prepared to the reaction generated by the broadcasters or the press. The party elite's ideal was a conference where all newsworthy events were those planned by them.

However, control over the conference environment could not be guaranteed. Party leaderships were not homogeneous. Members of the inner core elite had their own goals in terms of the ideas they wanted to put across, and the peripheral elite certainly did. There were conflicts of interest between those in the inner core elite and between them and actors on the periphery. Such core-periphery tensions occasionally broke out into open conflict in front of the journalists, overshadowing any promotional endeavours previously organised. The broadcasters also exhibited their discretionary power in deciding which agenda to follow. The leadership and their advisors, while continually adapting, could not completely control the conference. To some degree the continual quest for greater control made those events outside party managers' control all the more newsworthy.

1. Throughout the period of the study there were two opinion polls commissioned, both by Newsnight - one on the Labour party in 1993 and one on the Liberal Democrats in 1994. The findings of both polls formed the content of two programmes.
2. McNair, 1995, p 107. (The emphasis is mine.)
3. Interview with Tim Collins.
4. Jones, 1994, p 12.
5. Jones, 1995, p 124.
6. Interview with Tim Collins.
7. Interview with Alan Leaman.
8. Interview with Gary Gibbon. Jones (1995) also notes the use of similar tactics by Mandelson . pp 127-128.
9. Interview with Jon Snow.
10. Jones, 1995, p 132.
11. Interview with Alan Leaman.
12. Interview with Tim Collins.
13. Ibid.
14. Jones, 1995, p 124.
15. Interview with Tim Collins.
16. Ibid.
17. Interview with Hugh Pym.
18. Ibid.
19. Interview with Alan Leaman.
20. Jones, 1995, p 123.
21. Routledge, 1995, p 3.
22. Jones, 1990, p 25.
23. Interview with Hugh Pym.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Interview with Tim Collins.
28. In all different forms, at the 1995 conferences, the Liberal Democrats' press office produced a total of 42 press releases, Labour's 41 and the Conservatives' 38. The actual total number of press releases produced by all party actors was impossible to calculate.
29. At Labour's conference the leadership produced a document entitled 'Proposed Action

on Composites and Resolutions on the Conference Timetable' listing the attitude of Labour's National Executive Committee to each composite and resolution. The Liberal Democrats' conference committee provided daily announcement sheets carrying information about amendments to resolutions.

30. Interview with Tim Collins.

31. Ibid.

32. At the 1995 conferences, the Liberal Democrats held a total of nine press conferences over four days - eight before the events of the day including a daily briefing at 9 PM and a regional media briefing, and one after the conference finished; the Labour party held a total of eleven press conferences - nine morning and afternoon briefings to highlight forthcoming events and two regional press conferences after speeches; the Conservatives held seven press conferences, all occurring after ministerial speeches.

33. Schlesinger, 1987, p 91 & p 128.

34. These figures are higher than those for televising Parliament. Tutt notes in his study of the broadcasting of Parliament that actuality clips averaged 25-6% of total item length for BBC 1, ITN and Channel Four news reports and only 10% for Newsnight's. 1992, p 131.

35. Bruce notes that photo opportunities were regulated by certain rules: 'First, the cameras must not obstruct the principal's path; secondly, they must be stationary some yards away; thirdly, some physical means e.g. crash barriers, need to be employed to restrain the camera crews; fourth, minders have to be present to brief the crews on the timing of the interviewee's appearance; fifth, the minders must scan the background "in frame" ... to remove or conceal extraneous distractions or embarrassments; and lastly the interviewee must rehearse...'. 1992, p 159. During my observation at the conferences, the first five of these were regularly applied to the arrival of the party leaders at the conference hotel and the main conference hall and at other occasions such as the tour by the party leaders of the conference exhibition stalls.

36. Interview with Alan Leaman.

37. Ibid.

38. Interview with Hugh Pym.

39. Ibid.

40. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

41. Interview with Ric Bailey.

42. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

43. Jones, 1995, p 168.

44. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

45. Interview with Ric Bailey.

46. Scammell, 1995, p 277.

47. Interview with Tim Collins.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. Brooke, 1996, p 23.

51. Interview with Alan Leaman.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Richards, 1995, p 15.

54. *Ibid.*, p 15.

55. Interview with Derek Gladwin.

56. Interview with Sally Morgan.

57. Interview with Larry Whitty.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Interview with Alan Sherwell.

60. Interview with Jon Snow.

61. Interview with Ric Bailey.

62. *Ibid.*

63. Interview with Jon Snow.

64. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

65. Bruce (1992) notes: 'News conferences have a dreadful tendency to go wrong...'. p 169.

66. Interview with Tim Collins.

67. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

68. Interview with Chris Poole.

69. Interview with Tim Collins.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Interview with Jeremy Hanley.

72. Observations from the 1995 Labour Party Conference.

73. Staff Reporters, 1994, p 11.

74. Interview with Chris Poole.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Interview with Tim Collins.

77. McNair, 1995, p 128.

78. Jones, 1995, p 168.

79. See also *ibid*, p 168.

80. Interview with Tim Collins.

81. *Ibid*.

82. *Ibid*.

83. Smithers (1996) notes: 'Ministerial aides admitted that the problem had reached a head around the time of the party conference in October; one official said: "Of course there are always disputes behind the scenes, but this was getting out of control. Mrs Gillian Shephard, for example, was extremely unhappy. She confronted Dr Mawhinney over this... when she thought he was trying to suggest she should be sacked" [...]'. What really got ministers' backs up, it seems, is the Chairman's meddling in policy'. p 3.

84. Interview with Gary Gibbon.

85. Interview with Hugh Pym.

86. Interview with Tim Collins.

87. *Ibid*.

Chapter 6

Manufacturing Debate

News broadcasters found overt differences of opinion on significant issues particularly newsworthy. Debates which exhibited such divergences were subsequently given prominent coverage, both in terms of the number of news items and the position within the overall bulletin running order. If such differences were already present in a timetabled debate, the broadcasters captured this. However, not all the overtly conflictual debates had been formally timetabled. Many had been prevented from being aired in the main hall by the tighter control exercised over the planning process by the parties' leaderships. The broadcasters sought to circumvent this and construct the debate by juxtaposing differing opinions and reactions from protagonists in assorted conference locations. Whatever the scenario, and this chapter examines both, the broadcasters' reports further contextualised the conflict in the commentary - for instance, indicating that the debate was a sign of wider division within the party on ideological or policy grounds. The broadcasters often supplemented the boiled-down version of events in reports with additional news items. They typically 'spun' the debate further, through a series of pegged items, two-ways and interviews. These expanded upon the issue being debated, examined any 'informal agendas' that arose, such as the personal history of those involved, loyalty to the party leader, betrayal and other dramatic elements that were part of the debate. They also sometimes speculated about the outcome of such debates and what impact they would have on a party's electoral fortunes. Conflictual debates were framed as a drama of diametrically opposed actors - those for, those against - pulled together and packaged by the broadcast journalists, irrespective of the distinct nature of the conferences.

This led to a temporary divergence of interest between broadcasters and the parties' leaderships. For the inner core elites in each party, the attention such debates received was less than desirable. However, willingly or unwillingly the inner elites were involved, either formally through proposing a motion or rule-change or opposing one, or informally because their policies were the subject of intra-party debate. Whatever the case, they could not afford to ignore the news broadcasters' role in framing the debate. The party elites responded, some in a more coherent manner than others, by using the communication strategies and management techniques detailed in chapter five. The party elites and their

spin doctors sought to engage the news gathering journalists proactively and reactively to make sure that their perspective was put across and to try and define the dominant line of interpretation within the debate. They also simultaneously had to attack their opponents (whether peripheral elite actors or, in the Labour party, the trade unions), rebut their perspectives on events and even publicly repudiate them. But unlike speeches, debates were more difficult to spin as events. The journalists had access to a vast array of relevant sources who were beyond the control of the party leadership or even hostile to it. Their opponents too used communication strategies - ones that fed on the broadcasters' need for divergent perspectives but simultaneously allowed them to express their views to a wider audience.

This chapter presents an examination of several overtly conflictual debates in the main conference hall and on the fringe. The following debates were analysed. At the Labour conference, the Clause Four debate in 1994. At the Liberal Democrats', the debates on 'Cannabis', 'the Minimum Wage', and 'the Monarchy' in 1994. At the Conservatives' conference, VAT on domestic fuel in 1993 and on Europe in 1994. The analysis focused on the use of communication strategies - namely, the proactive and reactive strategies followed by the party elites and others during the period of these debates. It also examined their framing by six evening news bulletins: in particular, the prominence given to debates by the news bulletins in terms of number of bulletins and their position in the running order; the 'value added', the construction and representation of debates by journalists, through the juxtaposing of perspectives surrounding those agendas¹; and the use of what Semetko et al (1991) have termed 'contextualising remarks' which seek to evaluate debate for a television audience. The research also examined the extent to which the bulletins 'go beyond' (Semetko et al, 1991) the given agenda, extending coverage through a series of pegged items, two-ways and interviews; and the explanatory framework used in these items to examine the day's occurrences and speculate about the likely outcome of a vote taken after a debate.

6.1 The Clause Four Debate

The debate to reaffirm the Labour party's commitment to Clause Four of the party's constitution occurred on the Thursday of the 1994 conference. The debate's significance lay in the fact that it occurred two days after Blair's speech in which he signalled that the old Clause Four was to be re-written. The reason for a debate so soon after Blair's speech

was more to do with the secrecy surrounding the announcement than with poor planning². The vote narrowly went against the leadership, with the delegates voting to reaffirm the party's commitment to the old Clause Four.

Framing the Clause Four debate

The debate was highly prominent. Fifteen of the 16 news items that evening focused on the debate, and on all the bulletins it was the lead story. In addition the ITN 5.40, Channel Four News and the Nine O'clock News (BBC Nine) provided two-ways, and Channel Four News and Newsnight included one pegged report and two interviews each.

In the light of the leader's speech on Tuesday, the news agenda was more than simply a debate on Clause Four. It became a barometer indicating whether the party would accept the proposed reform. Reporting of the debate itself was conveyed through juxtaposing the two differing perspectives, the official line in favour of change and the oppositional one in favour of retaining the existing Clause Four. Across all bulletins 16 sources were indexed a total of 45 times. Of these, 7 sources endorsed change and 9 were against it. In terms of the number of times both were indexed it was fairly even, 23 to 22 respectively. Further, the broadcasters initiated the majority (9) of the 16 sources, only taking five from the debate itself and two from fringe meetings. The bulletins actively contributed towards the debate, indexing these sources 18 times in addition to those taking part in the main debate in the hall. All the correspondents sought out Blair. The BBC Six O'clock News (BBC Six) initiated quotes from both an endorser and a detractor, Channel Four News from three endorsers, the BBC Nine two endorsers, News at Ten an endorser and a detractor and Newsnight from 3 detractors and two endorsers. These additional sources were added to the juxtaposition of perspectives from the debate itself. The debate was presented in a time-linear fashion with the same five actors being juxtaposed in all the evening reports.

There was also some anticipation of events in the previous night's reports. Channel Four News in a two-way with its political editor discussed strategies that were being put in place by the NEC to avoid the possibility of defeat. The BBC Nine suggested that the composite motion 'awkwardly for the leadership calls for re-affirmation of Clause Four...'. News at Ten in its report's concluding remarks noted the up-coming debate, as did Newsnight, which suggested that 'there could be some embarrassing headlines after tomorrow if Composite... 57 is voted through in the morning'.

Spinning Clause Four

The party elite engaged in both a proactive and a reactive media strategy. The main team of spin doctors were Blair's press officer Alastair Campbell, David Hill, Director of Communications, Peter Mandelson, Blair's confidant, and a team of junior press and broadcasting officers, amongst whom the most notable were Tim Allan and Gordon Brown's press spokesman Charlie Whelan. The proactive strategy was aimed at managing expectations in three ways prior to the vote taking place. First, the leadership indicated that they expected to lose. Secondly, although they would lose, they expected the result to be close. A BBC correspondent suggested that 'reporters were briefed by the party's publicity staff. Their judgement was that it would be close'³. Calling spinning 'sophisticated playing', an ITN correspondent confirmed the same point: 'they knew the vote was going to be close'⁴. Thirdly, the spin suggested that the composite supported the *aims* of Clause Four, not the existing wording. The same ITN correspondent suggested:

'The spin was based on the wording of the resolution, that it reaffirmed support for the aims of Clause Four, not the wording. In other words changing Clause Four was compatible with that resolution... So there was some pre-emptive spinning that the two were not inconsistent, which is a little bit thin, but they got away with it'⁵.

The proactive strategy was followed up with a two-pronged reactive strategy. Rebuttal was used to 'kill off' any other developing interpretations and, secondly, comment was mobilised. The same BBC correspondent noted: 'there was a pretty heavy attempt by Labour's spin doctors to play down the significance of the defeat... the party's spin doctors' spin was that the result was not important. It was what was known as a "snow job"- blotting out any other theories'⁶. This playing down of the significance was combined with a further interpretation that (a) the narrowness of the vote indicated how far the party had travelled towards Blair's position in a short period of time, and (b) that many of the delegates had been mandated to vote the way they were and the big unions would soon be backing him. An ITN correspondent noted that the spin took the following format: '... even two days after Tony announced it [Clause Four], we still get 49% and that is a huge vindication and anyway the motion isn't inconsistent with what Tony tried to do'⁷. This was combined with a mobilisation of comment. Blair in particular did several interviews reinforcing his line. This was backed up with further interviews by John Prescott (deputy leader), Kinnock (former leader) and Cook (shadow Foreign Secretary). There was no reference to a confusion noted by Jones (1995) about whether the re-write should be approved in the autumn or at a special conference⁸.

The attempt to influence the interpretation of the vote in favour of the leadership line met with some success, although the contextualising remarks still referred to Blair's embarrassment. The ITN 5.40 in the anchor's introduction suggested that Blair was 'shrugging off an embarrassing defeat...' and continued that by the 'narrowest of votes the party conference had defied the Labour leader...'. In the contextualising commentary, the correspondent made reference to two elements of the party elite spin. First, 'He says it is not a setback for his plans' and, second, that the unions' position would change: '... they'll almost certainly be backing Tony Blair by the time he produces his blueprint'.

The BBC Six made no such reference to Blair's embarrassment, just to the fact that he had been defeated. The leadership perspective also appeared in the introduction, with the anchor stating: '...But he [Blair] said the narrowness of today's vote indicates how far the party has travelled in the last 48 hours'. Further, in the correspondent's commentary, Sergeant insisted the 'leadership were adamant the review would continue. They are convinced next year's conference will support them...'.

Channel Four News' introduction suggested 'Blair's attempt to remodel the Labour party suffered a major setback today. Elinor Goodman reports now on the abrupt end to Mr Blair's honeymoon period...'. The programme was careful to balance the party elite's line with reference to the loss of the vote. While mentioning that the TGWU and other unions had been mandated, the contextualising remarks were slightly disdainful, making reference to the fact that Blair's supporters 'had planned carefully how to discount [the vote]'. In the report's concluding remarks a similar balance was present. Goodman suggested: 'Tonight he claims to be confident that next year's conference will have approved the new statement of the party's aims, but today has been a reminder he can never take his conference for granted'.

On the BBC Nine the anchor suggested: 'two days after Tony Blair talked of a new Labour party without its Clause Four the old party said no'. But it also made reference to the leadership line, stating: '... but Blair immediately said the vote made absolutely no difference to the review of Labour's constitution'. Oakley in the report made reference to the fact that conference had '... embarrassed their new leader by defying the platform...' but also included two elements of the inner elite's spin stating that the '... leadership are insistent, the constitutional review goes on'; and second, suggesting that 'Mr Blair with union delegations differently mandated will get his new constitution through next year'.

Similarly, News at Ten in its introduction referred to the loss of the vote: 'Tony Blair was defeated... on the party constitution and his plans to rewrite it...' and then to the leadership perspective: 'Afterwards he said the defeat was of no significance'. Brunson reiterated in the report that 'Nothing could alter the fact that Tony Blair has suffered an embarrassing defeat...' although he did suggest it was '...not as horrible as he'd feared'. Newsnight's introduction again made reference to the embarrassment: '... what's happened here is an embarrassment but hardly a major disaster for Mr Blair' and then to the party elite line: 'Blair says it won't make any difference to his drive for change...'. The party elite's spin clearly made an impact. All the reports accepted the line that change goes on and in the long run the unions would come on side. All carried variations of the party leadership's line and all made reference to the closeness of the vote.

Three bulletins provided two-ways in addition to reports. Two-ways were a forum in which the anchor invited the correspondent or political editor to speculate upon and explain⁹ the issues of the day. The speculative questions and answers about Clause Four were in a minority compared to non-Clause Four issues such as Prescott's speech the next day but greater, all the same, than those that provided an explanation. However, on Clause Four the party elite's perspective came through clearly in the journalists' answers.

Table 6.1: The number of speculative and explanatory questions and answers in two-ways on 6 October 1994.

	Speculation	Explanation	Non Clause 4	Total
ITN 5.40	0	1	1	2
BBC 9	1	0	2	3
Ch 4	2	0	2	4
Total	3	1	5	9

(ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; Ch 4 = Channel Four News. None of the other bulletins carried two-ways.)

The ITN 5.40 report was followed by a two-way with political editor Michael Brunson. The question on Clause Four sought more detail on the vote:

Anchor: '... I understand you have some information on how that vote was made up'?

Brunson: 'Yes, I'm told that Tony Blair was expecting a far worse defeat than this... they are taking quite a lot of comfort from that final figure in the leadership because they think quite a lot of delegates did decide to switch on the basis of what they heard from Tony Blair'.

The section of Channel Four's two-way on Clause Four involved two speculative questions. The first was about whether the reforms proposed would be successful and the second about whether the debate had caused any damage to the party. The first answer by Goodman raised the point that a future debate may divide the party. Her second answer suggested that the vote had 'clearly been a setback... but at the end of the day we know that he, Mr Blair, will get his way next year'. And she reinforced the point that the debate could damage the party: 'the problem for him is that voters don't trust divided parties'. The BBC Nine's question asked if this was a setback of any significance for Blair. While Oakley referred to the vote by conference as 'bumps and scratches rather than a deep wound', he did speculate that success depends on 'how long and bitter the wrangle [gets] ... because the public doesn't like divided parties'.

Both Channel Four News and Newsnight provided additional reports. The Channel Four report took the vote as a peg from which to hang an analysis of the images of division within the party past and present. The anchor's introduction noted that the 'virtual fifty-fifty split over Clause Four threatens once again to present an image of a divided Labour party'. The report's commentary then dealt with the state of internal party relations under Kinnock and how both he and Smith had attempted to unite the party behind their reforms. Newsnight's additional pegged report was a retrospective of Tony Blair's first conference as leader. Using the metaphor of a Blackpool roller-coaster, it referred to his speech as a high, and to the reaction of the party to the proposed re-write of Clause Four as a low.

6.2 Cannabis, a Minimum Wage and the Monarchy

This section examines news coverage of three debates on the first two days of the 1994 Liberal Democrat conference. The coverage on the first day in most of the bulletins focused on the debate and vote on an amendment to a policy motion on 'the use of drugs'. This amendment called for 'The decriminalisation of the use and possession of cannabis in order that the police and Customs and Excise are able to target their resources on the vital battle against the use of hard drugs'¹⁰. The Liberal Democrat party leadership opposed the amendment, but it was carried. On the second day, coverage focused on debates around two policy motions. The first was on the employment policy paper and an amendment to that on a minimum wage, which again the party leadership opposed but lost. The second was a policy motion on the head of state, and contained an amendment which called for the

'abolition of the monarchy after the current Queen's reign'¹¹. This policy amendment was defeated, in line with the leadership's wishes.

Prominence

These debates were fairly prominent in terms of the amount of coverage they received. On the opening day of conference 7 out of 10 news items focused on the drugs debate. On the second day all 9 news items focused on the debates and votes surrounding the two policy motions. In terms of prominence in overall bulletin running order Table 6.2 shows that it was fairly low.

Table 6.2: The prominence of reports on debates at the Liberal Democrat conference on the 19 and 20 September 1994.

	Story Position Monday	Story Position Tuesday
ITN 5.40	0	4
BBC 6	11	4
Ch 4	7	6
BBC 9	5	8
ITN 10	5	5
Newsnight	2	1

(BBC 6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch4 = Channel Four News.)

Table 6.2 also shows that, once the debate was finished, reports on the result of the debate on cannabis moved up the running order of the bulletins over the evening, with the late evening bulletins (especially Newsnight) giving it greater prominence. The overt divisions between the party leadership and the delegates was clearly seen as newsworthy.

Framing the Cannabis Debate

The cannabis debate was represented in the reports, first through juxtaposition and, second, through the contextualising commentary. The news reports were not just confined to representing the cannabis debate. They also dealt with the informal agenda of the leadership's embarrassment at being defeated. This informal agenda was mainly (though

not exclusively) represented within the contextual narrative of the report. The reports on the first day of the conference were mixed, with the cannabis vote being one of several issues covered. Indeed, the reports from the conference on the ITN 5.40 and the BBC Six made no mention of the debate - in large part owing to the fact that the debate was still in progress when these bulletins went on air. The outcome of the debate was treated as a breaking news item by the BBC Six, who went live to their correspondent to get the result and reactions to it. The debate was treated very differently across the four mid-to late-evening bulletins. On Channel Four News and Newsnight the debate received a small amount of attention in comparison to the reports on the BBC Nine and News at Ten. On the latter two, the result of the vote was the main focus of each report.

The reports that dealt with the debate acted as an additional forum for the debate in the hall, indexing quotations from the various actors involved. All sources that spoke either in favour or against the amendment were identified. Two members of the party's elite and two delegates were indexed a total of nine times across the bulletins. Those in favour were indexed four times and those against the amendment five times. Channel Four News included quotes from Beith (Home Affairs spokesperson) and Hughes (Environment Spokesperson 1993-1994, Health spokesperson 1994-97), both opposed to the amendment. On the BBC Nine Beith was juxtaposed with two delegates in favour and News at Ten also featured two delegates in favour of the amendment. In addition both the BBC Nine and News at Ten also included a quote by Beith about the loss of the vote. Newsnight only incorporated one quote from a delegate in favour of the amendment. In this sense there seems to have been an intermittent attempt by all the bulletins to juxtapose both sides of the debate. The debate was represented through the juxtaposition of party elite actors for, and delegates against.

The contextualising commentary in four reports referred to the result in general terms as a 'snub' and an embarrassment for the party leadership. Ashdown's reactions were also the subject of contextualising remarks on the BBC Nine, with the other reports emphasising the delegates' defiance of the party elite. Channel Four's report opened with the anchor suggesting that 'the party's leaders were embarrassed...'. The report further suggested that '... his [Ashdown's] hopes of presenting the Liberal Democrats as the voice of moderation in a Labour coalition received a setback in the debate on drugs...'. The BBC Nine's anchor remarked that the '...vote went against strong opposition from the party's leadership...'. The report went on to suggest that '...against the wishes of the party leadership... there was a clear majority in favour of decriminalising cannabis...'. The

correspondent went further: 'Mr Ashdown, obviously unhappy, didn't stay to hear the formal result' and concluded that 'tonight the party leadership are licking their wounds over the cannabis debate... it's just the kind of defeat Paddy Ashdown could do without'. News at Ten's contextualising remarks were in a similar vein. The anchor suggested that 'Liberal Democrats defied and embarrassed their leaders today by voting for the decriminalisation of cannabis. Simon Hughes begged them to be reasonable, Alan Beith said they shouldn't do it, but they did'. The correspondent continued in a similar manner: 'MPs urged members to vote No, but the majority said Yes, a snub to the leadership...'. The correspondent concluded with a mention of the possibility of further defeat: 'the leadership faces further possible embarrassment here tomorrow with calls for the abolition of the monarchy'. In Newsnight's report the correspondent emphasised the narrowness of the vote: 'In a piece of radicalism that will send the tabloid press into a frenzy and also embarrass the leadership, the conference narrowly voted in favour of a decriminalisation of cannabis'. There were also three additional news items: a two-way on the BBC Six and two interviews - one on Channel Four News with the Home Secretary solicited his reaction to the vote; and the other was with Party President Charles Kennedy on Newsnight.

Cannabis: the spin

The Liberal Democrat leadership seem not to have been prepared for the outcome of the cannabis debate and there was little evidence of an organised public relations strategy, although the party elite did mount a limited reactive operation. The problem lay in part with the lack of planning for the debate and poor timetabling. A senior party source suggested they had little chance of dealing with the results of the balloted motions because of their position in the timetable. 'Last year [1994]... awkward votes were happening right in the middle of a news bulletin, who were going live to the correspondent who was saying this has happened. We had no chance to deal with that and that set the terms for all the coverage'¹². In fact in the cannabis debate the official perspective was very slow in being mobilised. The BBC Nine was the first target of the party elite, with Alan Beith establishing the leadership line that 'the overall motion was the one that mattered'. This was reiterated on News at Ten, and Newsnight made reference to the amendment being immediately disowned. But the party elite line had little impact and, as an interpretation, was not adopted in the contextualising commentary. The reports treated the party elite's perspective as a reaction to events in the hall and not as the main interpretation of those events, which is what the party elite would have wanted to achieve.

Framing the Minimum Wage and Monarchy debates

The news items on Tuesday September 20 were dominated by two further debates in the hall and by the emerging informal agenda of conference management and the state of the relations between the leadership and the delegates. In addition there was also a reference in all reports to the previous day's cannabis vote. The first debate was on a minimum wage and the second on the abolition of the monarchy. The ITN 5.40 only covered the minimum wage debate owing to the late conclusion of the second debate. The party elite perspective was one of opposition to both policy motions.

On all bulletins 23 sources were indexed 38 times. Four of those 23 were quoted endorsing the party elite line 8 times, but a majority (12 sources) were indexed 16 times arguing in favour of one or the other policy motion. Four sources provided a reaction and three could not be placed either way. Of the 38 quotes, the broadcasters took 20 from the conference proceedings and initiated a further 18 themselves from elsewhere. All the responses by Ashdown were initiated by the correspondents' door-stepping him. The initiation of delegates' opinions by the correspondents was confined to reports on Channel Four News and Newsnight.

The debate was represented through the juxtaposing of different perspectives on the two issues being debated. The ITN 5.40 juxtaposed both sides of the minimum wage debate, quoting Baroness Williams and Alex Carlile MP. The BBC Six only indexed Williams for the first debate and two delegates from opposing sides for the monarchy debate. Channel Four again indexed Williams and a delegate in favour of a minimum wage and Alex Carlile against. In the second debate two delegates were indexed in favour and Archie Kirkwood (Chief whip) and one delegate against. The BBC Nine only indexed Baroness Williams in the first debate and a delegate in favour in the second. News at Ten indexed quotes from the second debate, a delegate in favour and Kirkwood against. Newsnight focused on both debates, on the first debate covering Williams in favour and Carlile against, and in the monarchy debate including two delegates in favour and Kirkwood against.

The correspondents exhibited further discretion in their contextualising remarks. These remarks were in general critical of the party elite and performed a threefold function. They reminded the viewers about the previous day's events, explained the current day's events and in the early evening bulletins speculated about the likely outcome of the

monarchy debate. The commentary also assessed the reaction of the party elite. In addition a clear emerging informal agenda was conveyed on party management. What was particularly telling in all reports was the use of such descriptive words as 'embarrassment' (six times), 'defeat' (five) and 'snub', 'loss of authority' 'damaging reverse' (once each) in reference to Ashdown. The loss of the vote was presented as a defeat for him personally and the defeat of the second motion on the monarchy as a relief for him.

The defeat on the minimum wage was strongly linked by the early evening bulletins to the previous day's defeat on cannabis. The ITN 5.40 in its introduction suggested that '...Ashdown has suffered a second embarrassing defeat...'. The BBC Six said that Ashdown had again been 'defeated... it's a further embarrassment for him...'. Channel Four News noted that the 'defeat followed last night's embarrassment...'. While not mentioning the cannabis vote, the BBC Nine and News at Ten also referred to the previous loss of the vote as a defeat for the leadership. The BBC Nine's introduction suggested that the '... Liberal Democrat leadership had suffered its second conference defeat in two days...' and the News at Ten introduction stated that '... Liberal Democrats went against their leader... again'.

The defeat of the motion calling for the abolition of the monarchy was also personalised. The ITN 5.40 and the BBC Six, on air before the vote, speculated about the likely outcome in their introductions. The ITN 5.40 said that '... a third potential defeat loomed...' and the BBC Six that they were '... debating another topic that could end in embarrassment for Mr Ashdown'. The anchors on Channel Four News and the BBC Nine described the outcome in terms of relief for Ashdown, and Newsnight saw it as an annoyance.

The contextualising remarks in the reports raised an informal agenda of competent conference management - that is Ashdown's and the spin doctors' ability to manage conference proceedings, and the mood of the party delegates. The ITN 5.40 noted that the setback of the minimum wage and cannabis vote '...creates an image of a leader who has been thrown off course...'. The BBC Six noted that 'Liberal Democrats are asking questions. Why did party managers fail to warn the leadership of the strength of delegates' opinions?'. Channel Four's report dwelt on the same theme, suggesting that '... MPs are worried that delegates are ignoring how their actions appear to the outside world...'. It continued: '... Just as the media focus is turning on the Liberal Democrats as future possible power brokers, the party's grass roots might be embarking on a new unruly

phase'. Further in the same report it suggested that the 'patience of peers and MPs was wearing thin, some worried about the divide that appears to be developing between MPs and the delegates, and the leader is reported to be feeling frustrated...'. The BBC Nine suggested that 'old hands were still muttering that he [Ashdown] really must get a grip on the party machine', and continued: '...the leadership fear their loss of authority doesn't help the party....'. News at Ten noted that the loss of both votes suggested a 'leadership out of touch with the party...'. Newsnight noted that '... the leadership struggled to impose its will.. there is almost a feeling that the parliamentary party were an irrelevant rump who certainly don't know best'. And it continued: 'some wonder whether that's a sign of Paddy Ashdown's liberalism or just a case of hellishly unprofessional party management'.

Only Newsnight and the ITN 5.40 provided any additional news items - Newsnight in the form of two interviews, the first with a group of delegates and the second with Paddy Ashdown. ITN 5.40 had a two-way with its correspondent, seeking an explanation of how the debate was going, and reviewing the conference proceedings of the week so far.

The spin

There is surprisingly little evidence in any of the bulletins of the party elite engaging in any communication strategy. One might have expected, with potential defeats looming and on the strength of the previous day's coverage, that the party leadership would engage in the expectations game as part of a proactive strategy of anticipating defeat. There was also no organised attempt to mobilise comment for any of the news broadcasts. The party elite line materialised via the correspondents' door-stepping Ashdown. In fact all six bulletins initiated reactions to the votes in the hall. All except Channel Four acquired a reaction from Ashdown. The ITN 5.40 and the BBC Six carried his response to the vote in favour of a minimum wage; the BBC Nine and News at Ten his reaction to both the minimum wage and the monarchy vote; and Newsnight his reaction to the monarchy vote only. David Steel was indexed by ITN and Channel Four once each for the leadership line, and Kennedy once for the BBC Six.

In covering these three debates the broadcasters clearly demonstrated their discretion. They were able to represent the results of two of the debates as a personal defeat for the party leader and the third as only a minor relief. In the commentary they raised the issue of the failure of party management. The journalists were left almost unfettered to

construct their interpretation of events. In this situation the journalists expressed a preference for the most newsworthy angle on the debates, that of the defeat for Paddy Ashdown, and his embarrassment. By the second day this interpretation had built up a head of steam with the vote on a minimum wage against the leadership's advice. While there were few additional news items, the journalists exhibited their discretion in the fact that they initiated many of the party elite's responses themselves and were not noticeably approached by the party spin doctors. The party leadership made no real attempt to engage an effective proactive or reactive media strategy. The outcome of these two days was that Paddy Ashdown installed in Cowley Street a Director of Strategy and Planning from his own office, charged with the overseeing of conference media management for the next two conferences.

6.3 The Conference Fringe

The fringe is a series of meetings organised by an array of different groups on numerous issues. These meetings took place throughout the week while the main conference was not in session. The fringe has grown (Harris and Lock, 1995; Norton, 1996) and '...is now a prominent feature of every conference'¹³. Recent research has shown that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of fringe meetings. There were 290 meetings held at Labour's conference in 1995 compared to 166 held in 1986. Similarly the Conservatives' conference had 173 fringe meetings in 1995 compared to 100 in 1986¹⁴. The fringe acted as a platform for the party elite, the peripheral elite (in Labour ranks also union actors) and delegates to express their views on particular issues. It was also a resource on which the TV bulletins could draw.

The fringe provided the news broadcasters with a wide selection of potential issues and numerous perspectives. However, none of the fringe meetings were covered in their entirety and mostly formed part of a wider news package. The abundance of fringe meetings meant that the broadcasters actively had to make decisions about which meetings they were going to cover and, further, which could practicably be included in a report. Two main decision-making criteria arose from interviews. The first was the activities of the news community and other broadcasters in particular. Referring to John Redwood (Conservative MP and leadership challenger in 1995), a Channel Four journalist suggested: 'Redwood is doing three speeches at this year's conference [1995]... the question is, which one is the one we are going to cover? Is the one we are all going to pile in on? And

actually we will be there for every one of them'¹⁵. The second was news values. A BBC editor argued that decisions 'tend invariably to be news judgements on the day... it is usually fairly self-evident which are the interesting fringes'¹⁶. News judgements (including those of the bulletin's competitors) formed the 'bottom line' for deciding which meetings found their way into reports.

These news judgements were based on further criteria. First was the recognisability of the actor. A BBC source suggested: 'Who the speaker is is crucial. You know, if Norman Lamont, say last year [1994] or the year before [1993], is appearing on the fringe, then you have to be there because it is clearly important'¹⁷. This point was echoed by a senior Channel Four source: 'Television in some measure in political terms is about recognition... if you have a room of unrecognisable faces... that sounded bad and the rest of it, it doesn't make terribly persuasive television. It is hard to persuade the audience that some great moment is unfolding'¹⁸. The same BBC source raised a second criterion, namely the event: 'There are particular events where you would have to be, the Tribune rally, the Tory Reform Group or whatever'¹⁹. However, these news judgement criteria had to be considered alongside other factors: 'The environment, what was happening elsewhere, what the demands of the live programmes are, what the demands of the news are and how the fringe fits in the main story of the day'²⁰. The last point was further emphasised: 'If the main story of the day from the conference is x then a fringe meeting which may at another time look quite interesting, but because it is about y we might not cover it, or it might not get in [and] we are less likely to put resources into it'²¹. This point was confirmed by another Channel Four source. 'If your line of attack is the economy or it's Europe you make sure you speak on the day the Tory party is debating the economy or Europe, because otherwise the news editor is not going to construct a whole news package just around your speech unless it is extraordinary'²².

The fringe was treated pragmatically by the broadcasters, with decisions largely resting on news value and ease of capture in terms of the overall package. The evidence from content analysis shows that the fringe featured in a substantial number of reports (30%) - that is 118 of 396 reports over the four-year period.

Table 6.3: The number of reports featuring fringe meetings by conference and bulletin 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	BBC6	Ch 4	BBC9	ITN10	NN	Total
Liberal Democrat	3	4	8	5	4	5	29
Labour	2	2	7	7	4	14	36
Conservative	2	5	13	10	8	15	53
Total	7	11	28	22	16	34	118

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 6.3 shows that of the 118 reports 29 were from the Liberal Democrat conferences, 36 from Labour's and 53 from the Conservatives'. It further shows that fringe coverage was concentrated in the mid-to late-evening reports in the longer news bulletins and at the Conservative conferences.

The Conservative fringe

Table 6.4 shows the prominence of reports featuring the fringe in running orders over the four years. It confirms the interview evidence and shows that those meetings that were covered were considered to be newsworthy.

Table 6.4: The prominence of all reports featuring fringe meetings by conference 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
Liberal Democrat	1	2	3	5	18	29
Labour	12	5	7	6	4	36
Conservative	20	9	11	6	7	53
Total	33	16	21	17	29	118

The table further reveals that the majority of reports featuring the fringe were lead news items. The fringe at the Conservative conference was particularly prominent over the four years compared to the other parties' conferences. The Conservatives' fringe was seen by broadcasters as the most newsworthy (revealed in the prominence and amount of coverage it received). They did not perceive the main hall as the venue for genuine policy-forming

debates or ideological divisions as understood in Labour and Liberal Democrat terms. The Tory motions selected for debate over the period were contextualised by correspondents as anodyne and supportive of government policy and a platform for ministerial speeches.

Table 6.5: The prominence of reports featuring Conservative conference fringe meetings by bulletin 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
Newsnight	5	3	2	2	3	15
Ch 4	5	1	2	2	3	13
BBC 9	3	2	3	2	0	10
ITN 10	4	2	2	0	0	8
BBC 6	2	1	1	0	1	5
ITN 5.40	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total	20	9	11	6	7	53

(BBC 6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

Table 6.5 shows that the bulletins from Channel Four News onwards not only provided the most coverage of the fringe but also gave the meetings the highest prominence over the four conferences. This may be partially explained by the fact that the majority of fringe meetings took place in the evening. The prominence given particularly by Channel Four News and Newsnight shows that they saw the fringe as an important element of Conservative conferences, based especially on who was making the speech and what they were saying. Indeed, for these bulletins the fact that it was a fringe meeting was of secondary importance and was not always referred to in the commentary, although usually indicated to the trained eye from the visuals²³.

Taking the point of recognisability, raised by editorial staff and journalists, the majority of fringe clips featured recognisable party actors. In 53 reports Norman Lamont (former Chancellor and prominent Eurosceptic) featured 18 times, Michael Portillo (Treasury minister 1993-94 and Defence Secretary 1994-97) 9, Michael Howard (Home Secretary 1993-1997) 8, Norman Tebbit (former Party Chairman and prominent Eurosceptic) 7, Douglas Hurd (Foreign Secretary 1993-94) 5, Thatcher 4, Quintan Davies (Europophile Member of Parliament) 4, John Redwood (former Welsh Secretary and

prominent Euro sceptic) 3, Kenneth Clarke (Chancellor 1993-1997), Peter Lilley (Social Security Secretary 1993-97), Iain Duncan MP (Eurosceptic Member of Parliament), John Gummer (Environment Secretary 1993-97) and Lord Howe twice each. Recognisability was sometimes reduced to group identity; the speakers who were not identified personally were referred to as members of particular groups, say the Eurosceptics. The Conservative fringe therefore featured more recognisable actors than those of the other parties.

Newsnight and Channel Four News and the later evening bulletins clearly saw the Tory fringe as an important source of party debate that was not present in the main hall, and to a large extent the fringe was contextualised in this way. Out of 53 reports over the four conferences, only in a small minority of the reports - 6 - was the fringe a news item in its own right and not included as part of a wider conference package. Of the 6, three reports were an anchor-only short report of a minute or less, used to highlight the fringe speeches that occurred as the bulletin went on air or was about to do so. During the 1993 conference the BBC Six made a brief mention of Michael Howard's speech, the same year that Channel Four News briefly highlighted *The Sunday Telegraph* debate between Clarke and Tebbit, and in 1995 BBC Six covered John Redwood's speech to a fringe meeting. It was only Howard's speech in 1993 that was the subject of reports in its own right on BBC Nine, News at Ten and Newsnight.

In the remaining 47 reports the fringe formed part of a wider package including events in the main hall. It was a resource from which quotes from recognisable party actors or those under group identity could be indexed and juxtaposed with sources speaking in the main hall or at other fringe meetings. In other words, various recognisable actors with divergent views speaking at different fringe meetings were brought together within a report. The fringe was treated therefore as a key 'building block' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) in the construction of intra-party debate on a series of issues. Those reports which used the fringe in this manner did so in a number of ways: 12 juxtaposed the perspectives expressed on the fringe with those expressed in the main hall; 33 reports used the fringe as a sampling exercise in which the different views expressed in meetings served to illustrate divergent views on matters of policy, such as left versus right or pro-European versus Eurosceptic. And in 2 reports the fringe provided a 'professional' counter-view to that being expressed in the main hall by partisan actors. The bulletins displayed discretion both in the selection and in the presentation of those meetings. They contextualised the debates they had constructed as evidence of overt divisions within the party on particular issues.

The fringe also provided an opportunity for certain members of the peripheral elite and the inner party elite to express views that they would not ordinarily express in a speech in the main hall²⁴. The fringe in this sense became an integral part of these actors' public relations strategies, allowing them access to a wider audience than those immediately in the meeting. Only certain peripheral elite players and 'old stars' such as Norman Lamont, John Redwood and Norman Tebbit tended to follow such strategies, but not all, as an ITN correspondent suggested: 'They are not necessarily very sophisticated... it is just that Redwood in particular is very keen to be on the media [...]. He is very media friendly, he is always available for a quote. He knows how it works, he sends faxes round of his speeches'²⁵. He continued: 'the others are much more disparate, I mean the whipless ones [nine Tory back-benchers who had the Conservative whip withdrawn for rebelling in European votes], they were not very well organised. They were all saying different things at different times but they got a lot of coverage because of who they were'²⁶. An actor using a public relations strategy was not necessarily the determining factor in whether the fringe meeting received coverage, but adopting the logic of news values and timing as a strategy enhanced the chances of an actor's views being carried in a report, providing he or she had the prerequisite 'capital' as a party actor.

Fringe Elements: creating and contextualising debate

This section focuses particularly on the framing of two speeches made by former Chancellor Norman Lamont at the 1993 and 1994 party conferences and other debates on the fringe between the 'left' and 'right' of the party. It examines first how such actors used the fringe as part of a personal public relations strategy in order to gain coverage for their views and second the reaction of the party elite.

Lamont at the 1993 conference deliberately timed his speech on the fringe, in which he criticised the Chancellor's decision to put VAT on domestic fuel, for the same day as Clarke's speech justifying his decision in the main hall. Both speeches were covered on all the bulletins. Further, all the reports constructed a debate around VAT on domestic fuel through juxtaposing Clarke's speech with Lamont's. Lamont was indexed once on all bulletins except Newsnight, which provided a 'blow by blow' comparison on four points of difference. The significance of Lamont's speech for journalists was that it signified a wider internal difference of ideological perspectives within the party on the issue which

was not manifest in the debate in the hall prior to Clarke's speech. All the reports contextualised the fringe speech in this manner and as undermining party unity.

The ITN 5.40 introduction made no quote from Lamont's speech. The correspondent in the report contextualised it as a straight contradiction of Clarke's. He suggested: 'Nearby the former chancellor said he would have done it differently'. The BBC Six in its introduction suggested: 'Mr Clarke said he'd set the toughest public spending limits he remembered, but it might not be enough to avoid further tax increases... Norman Lamont said tax increases would damage the economic recovery'. The report contextualised Lamont's speech in terms of opposition to VAT on fuel, suggesting that 'opposition to VAT on domestic fuel has highlighted the political dangers for Mr Clarke as he attempts to balance the books'. It reaffirmed the difference of opinion: 'But as the Chancellor kept his options open his predecessor was telling him to be tougher on spending rather than increase taxation'. In addition it suggested that Lamont's speech reflected a wider feeling of many of the conference representatives 'who would have preferred to see a tougher spending round'.

In Channel Four's introduction the anchor suggested: 'Kenneth Clarke refused to back down on the government's plans to put VAT on domestic fuel and left open further tax increases. But... the former chancellor Norman Lamont tells him to cut spending instead'. The difference in perspective was reinforced further in the report when, after indexing Mr Clarke's speech, the correspondent suggested: 'but on the fringe Mr Clarke's predecessor Norman Lamont has been less helpful. He warned further tax rises would retard recovery and rejected Mr Clarke's claim that spending targets already agreed for next year were so tight that they couldn't be reduced further'. The report contextualised Lamont as disturbing the 'carefully choreographed truce' in the main hall.

The BBC Nine introduction suggested that 'Kenneth Clarke defended the planned imposition of VAT on domestic fuel... and hinted at more tax rises. But Mr Lamont said that any more tax increases would damage the recovery'. Similarly to the BBC Six the report contextualised Lamont's speech in terms of opposition to VAT on fuel and re-emphasised the differences of opinion: 'while the current Chancellor was keeping his options pragmatically open, Mr Lamont was mapping out a more ideological path. Arguing in favour of tougher public spending rather than further tax increases'.

While the introduction on News at Ten did not mention Lamont's speech, it was raised in the report. The speech was contextualised in terms of internal opposition to the policy. The correspondent suggested there had been 'hardly a squeak from the grass roots about VAT on domestic fuel despite a host of hostile motions before the conference'. Then having quoted Clarke the correspondent suggested there had been '...conflicting advice nearby from a former chancellor who counselled against tax rises', with Lamont as apparently the only voice of dissent.

Newsnight produced a more in-depth look at both speeches, indexing Lamont's speech four times. The introduction set out the differences of opinion between the two: 'He's [the Chancellor] in a funny position, having to deliver the first autumn budget in a few weeks and therefore unable to boast about his achievements. His predecessor Norman Lamont meanwhile was telling anyone who listened that the Chancellor couldn't risk raising taxes'. More than the other reports Newsnight contrasted the views of the two actors and was also interested in other areas of their disagreement. The report contextualised the two speeches as signifying a personal rivalry. 'Blackpool today offered two competing attractions, Kenneth Clarke at the Winter Gardens and Norman Lamont thirty minutes later and fifty yards away at a local cinema. Under the guise of politeness both men were playing hard ball'. While the report suggested that both agreed on VAT on domestic fuel, it commented: '... but otherwise their analyses could scarcely have differed more'. The correspondent then went on to contrast the points of view on the state of the economy, on the need to raise taxes and (as the report called it) the 'core dispute': government spending. The divergence of views was further dealt with in interviews on Channel Four and Newsnight with Clarke and Lamont and in a two-way on Channel Four News.

Lamont's speech to a fringe meeting on the opening day of the conference, October 11 1994, was treated in a similar manner by all the bulletins. The speech was contextualised as an attack on government policy on the European Union, arguing that withdrawal may need to be considered. It was timed to coincide with a speech made by the then Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd. Lamont's speech formed part of the lead news report on every bulletin and all reports juxtaposed his views with those of the Foreign Secretary and made reference to Major's views. The speech was contextualised in all reports as having a touch of personal animosity, re-igniting existing divisions over Europe and as representative of a wider call within the party for ideological 'clear blue water' between the Conservatives and New Labour.

The ITN 5.40's introduction contextualised the speech in terms of Lamont's personal animosity and party divisions over Europe. It stated:

'Norman Lamont, sacked from the Government and still smarting, re-opened Conservative party wounds over Europe on Day One of a party conference aimed at unity. He accused John Major of deceit... He declared that we should tell the European Union "Here we stand and no further" and floated the idea that Britain could withdraw totally and still be viable on its own'.

This context was reiterated by the correspondent, who suggested that 'thanks to Norman Lamont the Tories' scalding row over Europe has been stoked up again'. After indexing Lamont the correspondent suggested: '...all of that is at odds with the Foreign Secretary's conference speech which talked of Britain's positive achievements in Europe'. The report ended by the correspondent raising the possibility of a leadership challenge: 'bookies say money's already going on him [Lamont] for a leadership challenge'.

The BBC Six's introduction similarly contextualised Lamont's speech in terms of party division over Europe. It highlighted the difference of opinion with Hurd but also positioned the speech within the wider context of positioning within the political spectrum.

'Norman Lamont has reopened divisions over Europe. He accused the government of deceiving the British people and suggested that Britain should consider pulling out of the European Union. But this view is firmly rejected by the Foreign Secretary... who warned against listening to siren voices speaking out against Europe'.

The report juxtaposed Lamont with Hurd and again contextualised the debate in terms of party divisions on Europe and also on the political repositioning of the party. The BBC correspondent suggested the party's strategy of 'resisting a sweep to the right suffered a serious blow this evening over Europe'. It then suggested that Lamont's speech had opened up '...the old divisions over membership of the European Union'. The report concluded:

'This evening the debate is over Europe but the argument goes much wider than that. It is about how the Conservatives position themselves after the advent of Mr Blair... Should the Tories stay largely in the centre ground or should they shift to the right? And that argument will go on throughout this week'.

Channel Four's report contextualised Lamont's speech as re-opening party divisions and ruining the image of party unity. The introduction noted that Lamont had 're-opened Conservative wounds over Europe... with a speech in which he warned that Britain one day may have to contemplate withdrawal from the European union...'. This contrasted with the Foreign Secretary's speech '...telling representatives not to be defeatist or to give in to the temptation to turn their backs on the awfulness of Europe....'. The report indexed the speech three times, calling it a 'complete demolition job on everything John Major has claimed to have achieved in Europe...'. It was contrasted with Hurd's speech, aimed, the

correspondent suggested, at 'Eurosceptics both in the media and his own party'. The political editor further noted 'without mentioning Mr Lamont he [Hurd] insisted that Britain would win the argument in Europe over its future'. The report concluded that Mr Lamont's speech had 'spoiled the carefully choreographed image of unity which party strategists were hoping to present today'.

The BBC Nine's introduction suggested that Lamont had 'opened up the Tories' divisions on Europe'. It continued:

'He told a fringe meeting the benefits of membership had proved remarkably elusive. Britain was losing the argument over Europe, he said, and if we were not already members there wouldn't be a case for joining now. Earlier the Foreign Secretary... warned the conference of the dangers of getting high on xenophobia'.

The report contrasted the two speeches. It raised Lamont's personal animosity and added that he had 'pitched in to the debate about... the party's future direction by backing right wing calls for more clear blue water to be put between the Conservatives and Labour'. The report concluded that while dissent might have been muted from the floor, 'Mr Lamont's intervention tonight has put the focus back where the Tories didn't want it, on the eternally divisive subject of Europe'.

News at Ten's introduction highlighted Lamont's speech but made no initial mention of Hurd's. The introduction suggested that divisions on Europe had been 'dramatically forced back into the open' and as with the other reports it went on to highlight the main elements of his speech. The anchor then went live to ITN's political editor²⁷. Brunson suggested that Lamont had 'directly attacked the Prime Minister, his own party leader, for his heart of Europe ideas'. The report put Lamont's speech in the wider context of the European debate within the party: 'Once again, just as the Prime Minister seemed to have turned the political corner, the nightmare issue which has so badly split the Tories over the years, Europe, has returned'. It then indexed Hurd's speech in the main hall. He concluded: 'in fact, though, it still remains a dispirited conference, given all the Tories present troubles, but now it risks being somewhat of a divided conference as well over the issue of Europe'.

Newsnight contextualised Lamont's speech in terms of opening up divisions over Europe but also in terms of Lamont's personal animosity towards the Prime Minister. Newsnight's introduction used a particularly graphic metaphor: 'Europe is the scab the Conservatives cannot stop picking. At the point the party thought it had grown something of a callus over the issue, the former Chancellor Norman Lamont has opened it up again'.

Referring to his speech Paxman suggested: 'This was heresy, of course, but the reason the party leadership is dismayed and angry isn't just that such an eminent figure advocates such a policy. It's because they know that Mr Lamont is speaking for a significant section not just of the party but the nation too'. The contextualising remarks built up Lamont's speech as a 'big news event', suggesting that 'over the summer there have been persistent rumours in political circles that John Major's former friend, campaign manager and Chancellor was about to deliver a body blow: this was it'. The commentary further contextualised the speech as an attack on the Prime Minister, linked to what the report called Lamont's 'downfall', and referred to his feelings about Mr Major: 'Mr Major's friends say Mr Lamont now regards his old friend as worse than Beelzebub'. It then contrasted Lamont's speech with Hurd's, referring to him as the '*bête noire* of the anti-European right'. But Hurd's speech wasn't given the prominence of Lamont's in terms of the number of times it was indexed.

Some of the bulletins initiated additional news items immediately after the reports. Newsnight and Channel Four News each interviewed Lamont and Hurd, and the ITN 5.40 and the BBC Nine had a two-way. Both two-ways continued the process of contextualising Lamont's speech. The anchors of both bulletins asked the political editors to speculate about the impact of the speech on the party. For the ITN 5.40 Brunson suggested: 'Well of course it's damaging when a former Chancellor gets up and says these sort of things'. Oakley for the BBC Nine insinuated the same: 'Oh I think inevitably it is damaging. It's a direct challenge to the arguments used by Mr Major and Douglas Hurd'. He continued: 'Mr Lamont is really going much further than the Maastricht rebels have done in the past, and of course parties that look divided within their own ranks never really appeal to the public'.

Debate was not only constructed using opposite views expressed between peripheral elite actors on the fringe and party elite in the hall. Nine reports also used divergent views expressed by party elite members on the fringe. The most noticeable examples were reports on the BBC Nine, News at Ten and two on Newsnight on October 7 1993. All four reports constructed the debate on the fringe through juxtaposing differing views of ministers and placing them in the context of an ideological debate between the 'left' and 'right' of the party and set this against the overall party elite aim of presenting a unified party image.

In its introduction the BBC Nine's anchor suggested: 'Conservative party managers today appeared to succeed in fostering a show of unity between the prime Minister and

'Lady Thatcher' but added: '...tonight the struggle to give the Conservative party that distinctive ideology continued with two very different speeches from cabinet ministers'. News at Ten's introduction was similar in its contextualisation: 'The Prime Minister got a hand shake from his predecessor...' and continued: 'Mr Major has been pushed to the right this week....'. Newsnight's introduction to the first of two reports was more acerbic: 'Almost every single speech we've heard... has contained some protestation that the party is united in undying loyalty to John Major as if the mere statement is enough rather than perhaps drawing attention to the fact that divisions are as deep as ever, if less visible'. The introduction to the second report followed a similar line: 'Well if the Conservatives leave this conference having succeeded in convincing themselves that the party is now united by John Major it will be quite an achievement, because despite the fact that almost everyone is now using the same language the philosophical divisions still run deep'.

In all four reports the fringe meetings were framed in the context of party unity behind the leadership of John Major. The BBC Nine, News at Ten and the first Newsnight report described the day's events in the hall, Thatcher's reception by the representatives and John Major, Clarke's pledge of support for Major, and Heseltine's first conference appearance since his heart attack. All contextualised this as an attempt to reinforce party unity in the light of the events that week. But then came the caveat. The BBC Nine's report suggested: '...But her departure did little to ease the tensions outside the conference hall'. News at Ten's report said disdainfully: '...But behind the theatre of reconciliation in the conference hall a battle has been developing over the future of government policy'. Newsnight's commentary ran: '...But in the last few hours two of the more thoughtful members of the supposedly united leadership have made plain the ideological chasm which separates the left from the right'. The speeches of different actors, in particular Portillo and Hurd, were juxtaposed in order to underline the point. Newsnight's second report reinforced this angle, placing the fringe meeting as the arena for a struggle between 'left' and 'right'. The correspondent started the report: 'This was supposed to be the conference that was all about unity. In fact in the vacuum at the heart of the party, ministers are engaged in a struggle for domination'. The report then went on to juxtapose the speeches from four different fringe meetings addressed by Hurd, Portillo, Clarke and Tebbit and Gummer.

The 'left' /'right' debate was further highlighted in a series of two-ways on the ITN 5.40, Channel Four News, and News at Ten. The two-way on BBC Nine focused exclusively on the Chancellor's speech.

Table 6.6: The number of speculative and explanatory questions and answers in two-ways 7 October 1993.

	Speculation	Explanation	Non debate	Total
ITN 5.40	0	1	1	2
Ch 4	0	2	2	4
BBC 9	0	0	2	2
ITN 10	0	1	1	2
Total	0	4	6	10

(BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

Table 6.6 shows that just under half the questions and answers in the two-ways were on this debate on the fringe, and none of the two-ways speculated about the outcome of the debate: instead they sought to explain further the nature of the debate and who the main protagonists were. On the ITN 5.40 the anchor enquired whether there had been a 'distinct shift to the right wing of the party'. The political editor Brunson suggested '...that certainly is the sense of it, isn't it?' and after reading out trailed extracts from the forthcoming speeches by Portillo and Hurd he suggested 'the battle is on really for the soul of the party'.

The Channel Four News anchor similarly asked whether there was an '...ideological struggle going on on the fringe tonight'. Goodman, the political editor, agreed, and outlined the debate as taking place between '...those who say the Thatcherite revolution must continue and those who argue it shouldn't'. She then summarised the positions of four actors speaking on the fringe, Portillo and Tebbit representing the former, and Clarke and Hurd the latter. Asked further whether the 'bastards' (in John Major's own reported terminology) had had a good week, Goodman suggested: 'They feel in command, that they have taken the high ground'.

The theme of a shift to the right was also pursued by News at Ten. The anchor stated:

'The party really shifted to the right... and that was emphasised again today wasn't it?'

Brunson: 'Well I asked one cabinet minister about this in this very hotel tonight. I said, "Are you shifting to the right?" He said: "Look, we've always been a right of centre party. What I think the Conservatives have realised is that there is huge concern in the country especially about something like law and order". And as another minister said to me today: "The agenda which we have tried to tackle these things on in the past has not worked and so we have now got to try (if you like) a more right-of-centre approach". That's where all this is coming from'.

Peripheral Spin and Rebuttal

In both 1993 and 1994 Lamont was able to mount a highly successful media operation, getting his views and criticisms across using the news bulletins. His success was due in part to the 'capital' he possessed as a peripheral elite actor, in particular his public recognisability as former Chancellor and the fact that his views were seen as representative of a party-wide divergence of opinion. But he built upon this advantage by internalising the news values by which the news broadcasters operated. His proactive strategy had two main identifiable parts. The first concerned the content of the speech. Both speeches were critical of the party elite and its policies, Clarke on the economy, and Major and government policy on Europe. One Channel Four correspondent remarked that he was 'thrilled to have a politician saying something and not couching it in ministerial terms... [and added] we are just glad for the story'²⁸. In addition to being critical, Lamont delivered the speeches on the same day as the issues were being discussed in the hall in speeches by party elite members, further increasing the likelihood of his speech being included in a news report. This strategy was augmented when Lamont trailed the content of his evening fringe speech on 11 October 1994 for the ITN 5.40 and the BBC Six.

At both conferences the party elite engaged in a reactive strategy but with limited success. They mobilised comment by senior party figures, including the Chancellor and Foreign Secretary, in an attempt to downplay the significance of Lamont's speeches. The strategy involved, first, a repudiation of Lamont himself and, second, stressing the fact that there was no alternative to government policy. In 1993 this line was that Lamont would have done exactly the same if he was still the Chancellor. However, the rebuttal operation only had partial success and the comments were not carried by all reports. In 1993 the BBC Six and Nine and News at Ten included the reactions in their reports. The BBC Six and Nine ran the line from Clarke and his spin doctor suggesting that Lamont would have done the same. The BBC Six noted: 'Some Treasury insiders suspect Mr Lamont would have been singing a slightly different tune had he still been Chancellor'. The BBC Nine noted that some were calling him a 'disaffected former Chancellor' and further referenced a reply from the Chancellor during a Newsnight interview: 'On Newsnight tonight Mr Clarke gave a robust response. "He ought to know that you make a budget judgement when the time comes"....'. News at Ten repeated the main line, with the political editor suggesting: 'His critics say it is unlikely he would have said that if he'd been Chancellor, and tonight Michael Portillo joined a ministerial chorus warning that unpopular decisions would have to be taken'.

In 1994 comment was again mobilised by the party elite but only featured in news items on the ITN 5.40 and the BBC Nine. The ITN 5.40 raised the reactions both in the report and the two-way. The report carried Hurd's reaction: 'He [Hurd] dismissed Mr Lamont's attack: "He's perfectly entitled to put his point of view. I think he's wrong, I think partly because he's out of date" ...'. This view was underlined by reference to further ministerial comment in a two-way:

'... "beyond the pale" was one senior back bencher's comment. "A bitter man who always vowed to get his revenge on the Prime Minister, and he has", that was another minister's point of view. Another... simply said to me "Norman Lamont's barking mad" ...'.

The BBC Nine similarly in its report mentioned party elite views. The correspondent suggested that 'many former colleagues were swift to reject his call' and then covered Lord Howe's reaction.

While the party elite were involved in a rebuttal operation at the 1993 conference they were also engaged in conveying divergent perspectives on the fringe. The news broadcasters elected to cover these meetings because they illustrated intra-party debate and undermined the picture of unity that was being presented in the main hall. The activity of the party elite was also media-oriented and proactive. Speeches were trailed on the ITN 5.40 and Channel Four News, but it was not the activity of a unified entity but of a group of key individuals, using the fringe to convey their perspectives on a particular issue, that the broadcasters found newsworthy.

Fringe Management

There was some effort amongst the Conservative Party elite to try and manage the fringe during this period, despite its normally unmanageable nature. As one source remarked: 'There isn't a way of preventing it, because as the name suggests, it is not organised by us. It is actually organised by outside groups'²⁹. For the 1995 party conference the Tory party elite used three strategies to counter the media attention the fringe received. First, one source noted that they had generated 'the political circumstances in which people speaking at that sort of fringe meeting do not want to rock the boat. It partly comes back to... the run up to the general election and the instinct for unity... [which] always gets much stronger when an election starts to appear on the horizon'³⁰. Second, with the leadership's political position stronger, words could be had with certain peripheral elite actors. 'Mawhinney [Party Chairman], for example, had conversation with all the people who were likely to

cause trouble... but it wouldn't have done him any good at all twelve months ago, because there was still the festering issue of the leadership³¹. Third, they generated newsworthy events in the hall. 'If you want to over shadow the fringe you have to have exciting events and exciting speeches inside the hall'³². Expanding upon this tactic, the source suggested:

'As it happened [in 1995] Rifkind had quite an interesting policy proposal... Portillo made a, what ever else was said about that speech, it was very well-crafted crowd-pleasing and therefore the most interesting and newsworthy things were happening inside the hall. And that was one of our strategic objectives to make people think the news and the excitement and value was going to come from things inside the hall rather than outside it'³³.

Table 6.7 shows that there was some success in such management techniques.

Table 6.7: The prominence of all reports featuring Conservative conference fringe meetings by year 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
1993	8	4	5	2	3	21
1994	8	1	3	0	0	12
1995	4	1	1	0	1	7
1996	0	3	2	4	3	12
Total	20	9	11	6	7	53

It shows that 1995 saw the fewest number of reports on the fringe, 7 compared to 21 in 1993 and twelve in 1994 and 1996. It also shows a marked decline in the prominence given to those reports that featured the fringe. Interestingly Oakley noted in a two-way on the BBC Nine on 12 October 1995 that 'they [party leadership] managed to keep the stories on the conference floor rather than on the fringe'.

Conclusion

The coverage of debates both in the main hall and on the fringe revealed divergent although overlapping interests between the news broadcasters and party actors. For the unions (in the Labour party), peripheral elite actors and some delegates the news bulletins provided a platform to get their perspectives across to a wider audience. For the news broadcasters their overt expressions of opinion increased the newsworthiness of a particular issue and in the case of the fringe allowed them to explore what they saw as core issues not appearing on the formal conference agenda. However, while such coverage was at odds with the

party elites' desire to present an image of party unity to the viewers, it was still in their interest to co-operate with the news broadcasters. The party elite were reliant on the news items produced to ensure that their perspective was conveyed and to rebut the alternative perspectives, and used public relations strategies to this end. Intra-party debates more than other events involved competition between party elites and other party actors to set the news agenda on a particular issue. In this way both the party elite and other actors actively contributed to the construction of conference news.

The news broadcasters, however, also had a certain amount of discretionary power. Taking the first element, the prominence given to debates in the running order: the party elite and other actors had little direct leverage on editorial decisions about the running order. The prominence given by the bulletins to debates was derived from the perceived significance of a debate in pragmatic terms. Newsworthiness was heightened by overt conflict and further enhanced by the defeat or the potential defeat of the party elite in a vote, by the strength of the criticism of party elite policies, and by criticism emanating from a recognisable party actor thought to be representative of a wider ideological division. Of course, such factors were tempered by the availability of material. The Clause Four debate at the Labour conference possessed these qualities and was given prominent coverage by all bulletins. The 'Cannabis' and 'Monarchy' debates, because of their position within the Liberal Democrats' timetable, were given prominent coverage by the later evening bulletins. Coverage of the fringe was also affected by the time when the meetings occurred. Some of the meetings, particularly at the Conservative conference, possessed the above qualities and these were given prominent coverage, particularly by Newsnight and Channel Four News.

The broadcasters played an active role in the construction and representation of debates. This effect was seen in terms of the number of quotes they initiated as opposed to those taken from the proceedings. In the 'Cannabis', 'the Minimum Wage' and 'the Monarchy' debates 20 of 47 quotes were media-initiated, and in Clause Four 18 of 45. All the reports on the debates acted as a common carrier for the different views. These views were split into binary opposing positions which were juxtaposed in reports. The weight given to opposing sides in a report was an indicator of the discretion held by the correspondents. A mixed picture emerged in terms of leadership line versus those opposed to it. In the Liberal Democrats' conference coverage, 6 actors supporting the leadership line were indexed 13 times, while 16 against were indexed 22 times. In the coverage of the Clause Four debate 7 actors supporting the leadership line were indexed 23 times, compared to 9 detractors indexed 22 times. In terms of fringe coverage at the Conservative

conferences the news broadcasters also played an active role in the manufacture of debate. The reports acted as a forum for the divergent perspectives expressed on particular issues. The debate between actors on the fringe and the main hall was only tangible within the news reports.

The contextualising remarks within the reports on all three debates also gave an indication of the bulletins' discretion. Such remarks performed a twofold task. First, they highlighted an issue and the perspectives surrounding it. Within reports on debates there was a multi-layered formal and informal agenda. The commentary revealed the journalists' autonomy in being able to choose which issues they would 'spotlight' and which would receive less coverage, and also showed their ability to 'set the tone' on the day's events. Secondly, the contextualising commentary also relayed the party elite's interpretation of events as presented via the spin doctors. Interpretations of events favourable to or directly referenced by the party elite found their way into many of the reports. In some reports such an interpretation was taken at face value, while in others it was acknowledged as spin. But debates by their very nature provide a variety of interpretations. Journalists were able, though, to assert their autonomy through juxtaposing these different views. In the coverage of the debates the correspondents referenced not only the party elite line but also those adopted by the unions and other peripheral elite actors. However, similarities between the way reports contextualised debates point to the fact that there was some consensus amongst journalists about whose views were seen as important on a particular issue. The party elites' interpretation of events was always referenced, as were the views of party actors who opposed it. Such a consensus on angles and interpretations was partly formed within the wider news community. The collective of competitor colleagues clearly influenced each other in arriving at an interpretation of events.

A third element concerned the extent to which the bulletins 'go beyond' the given agenda, extending coverage through a series of pegged items, two-ways and interviews. Again, the party elite had very little influence on the editorial decisions about whether or not to produce additional items on a given issue. Over the two debates, the broadcasters carried 16 additional news items consisting of 4 two-ways, 8 interviews and 2 pegged news reports. While there were no pegged items on issues initiated on the fringe there were 6 two-ways and 8 interviews. All the bulletins had two-ways and pegged items, whereas interviews almost exclusively occurred on Channel Four and Newsnight. A fourth element concerns the explanatory framework used in these items to examine the day's occurrences and speculate about the likely outcome of a vote taken after a debate. Analysis of the two-

ways showed a high level of speculation about the impact of the Clause Four, debate less during the 'Cannabis', 'the Minimum Wage' and 'the Monarchy' debates, but virtually nothing surrounding the fringe, where coverage was dominated by explanation.

1. Paletz and Elson (1976) note of journalists, in their study of news coverage of the US presidential conventions: 'Their aim seemed to be to find people who would present opposing views on the major themes with which coverage was concerned. This process tended to emphasise divisiveness [...]. It was most apparent in the way NBC interviewed people who opposed McGovern, alternating them with McGovern supporters. The juxtaposition of their comments and classifications created the impression of hostility and disunity among participants' pp 121-122.
2. Wintour and Harper note: 'It had been agreed weeks ago by the conference arrangements committee... [they] could have been persuaded to say there was no need for a debate on the issue at this year's conference. But the provisional agenda was agreed many weeks ago, before Mr Blair had decided to propose the re-writing of Clause Four, similarly it had been agreed weeks ago that [the] debate would be staged on Thursday... Mr Blair's team... felt they could not go to the CAC... and ask for re-timetabling to Monday without raising suspicions'. 1994, p 7.
3. Letter from Nick Jones.
4. Interview with Hugh Pym.
5. Ibid.
6. Letter from Nick Jones.
7. Interview with Hugh Pym.
8. Jones notes: 'Mandelson gave a pre-recorded interview for the "World at One" in which he suggested that if a consensus developed behind a move to re-write Labour's constitution then the issue would be resolved quickly so that the debate over Clause Four did not dominate the 1995 autumn conference... Prescott immediately rejected this suggestion on "Conference Live" "a special conference" he said "would not be necessary"....'. 1995, p 169.
9. Speculative questions and answers were those in which the anchor asked about and the journalist actually commented upon the likely future outcome of a vote or the possible impacts of such a debate on the parties' electoral fortunes. Explanatory questions and answers sought to further illuminate events or provide background to the issues.
10. Liberal Democrat conference agenda Autumn, 1994, p 17.
11. Ibid, p 28.
12. Interview with Alan Leaman.
13. Norton, 1996, p 12.
14. Stanyer and Scammell, 1996.

- 15. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
- 16. Interview with Ric Bailey.
- 17. Ibid.
- 18. Interview with Jon Snow.
- 19. Interview with Ric Bailey.
- 20. Ibid.
- 21. Ibid.
- 22. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
- 23. All extracts from fringe meetings were coded for and noted on the content sheets.
- 24. Kelly (1994) notes: 'After 1979 the fringe acquired a new dimension as it came to provide a platform from which sacked ministers such as Gilmour (in 1981) and Pym (in 1985) ventured criticism of government policy [...]. ' p 253.
- 25. Interview with Hugh Pym.
- 26. Ibid.
- 27. While the two-ways were live, reports very rarely were. This was a unique occurrence and something that had not occurred before or since on News at Ten. It partly indicates the significance of Lamont's speech in pragmatic terms for ITN.
- 28. Interview with Gary Gibbon.
- 29. Interview with Tim Collins.
- 30. Ibid.
- 31. Ibid.
- 32. Ibid.
- 33. Ibid.

Chapter 7

Spinning and Framing Leaders' Speeches

The leaders' speeches were the 'highlight' of the conferences for both the parties and the news broadcasters¹, a key moment for underlining what the party now stood for to the maximum group of viewers. They were also critical episodes in the shared interests and co-operation between party leaderships and their staffs and the broadcasters. The leader's speeches provided the party inner elites with an unrivalled platform to promote policy changes and internal party messages while simultaneously promoting the leader in a favourable setting without internal criticism. As part of this promotional drive, the parties' adhocracies routinely sought to add gravitas to the event through the use of promotional videos, lighting and changing the shape of the main stage (to include a promontory designed to bring the leader closer to the audience). Party insiders were dependent on the news broadcasters to provide wider publicity for the speeches' content outside the immediate conference environment to a television audience of millions. The news broadcasters depended on the speeches for newsworthy developments or pronouncements that would hopefully attract audiences.

Shared interests of the parties and broadcasters were particularly visible around the advance release of information. For the party elites, the trailing of selected extracts from the leader's speech enabled them to maximise its publicity potential. For the broadcasters, trailed information was useful for 'freshening up' the evening conference reports and vital in planning daily conference coverage, particularly the production of pegged reports. These needed time to be produced and were therefore reliant on the receipt of advance information. Over the four years, at all three conferences, Table 7.1 shows that the news broadcasters used trailed information 31 times.

Table 7.1: The number of news items containing trailed information on the leaders' speeches by conference 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	BBC6	Ch 4	NN	BBC9	ITN10	Total
Liberal Democrat	2	1	3	3	2	3	14
Conservative	0	0	0	2	3	5	10
Labour	0	1	1	0	1	4	7
Total	2	2	4	5	6	12	31

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Interestingly table 7.1 shows that Ashdown's speeches were the most heavily trailed, followed by Major's and then Smith and Blair's. Table 7.1 also shows that the late evening bulletins (the BBC Nine O'clock News and News at Ten in particular) carried the greatest number of trails and the early evening bulletins, the BBC Six O'clock News (BBC Six) and the ITN 5.40, the least. Since early evening bulletins had covered the day's events prior to the speech, the later programmes were looking for (and were provided with) newsworthy information about the content of the leaders' speeches next day, which allowed them to up-date their reports from the conference.

On the day of the speech itself advance information on the content of the leaders' speeches was particularly important for the early evening bulletins, because it provided them with enough time to produce a pegged item. Here co-operation between broadcasters seeking to expand the agenda linked with party leaderships' concerns to maximise publicity.

Table 7.2: The number of pegged items on leaders' speeches by conference 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	Ch4	BBC9	NN	Total
Liberal Democrat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Labour	0	1	0	1	2	3	7
Conservative	0	1	2	3	3	5	14
Total	0	2	2	4	5	8	21

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.2 shows that there were a total of 21 pegged items on information from the Conservative and Labour leaders' speeches (but none from the Liberal Democrat leader's speeches). The BBC produced the greatest number of pegged items, while the Table also shows that the Conservatives did most to co-operate with the BBC in this area. The broadcasters' appetite for pegged items was in some respects also greater when a party enjoyed the advantages of being in government, so that any announcements made within the speech were likely to become law and therefore to affect the broadcasters' audience in a significant way. The table also seems to reveal certain differences in editorial approach, with ITN producing the fewest pegged reports.

There was also a level of co-operation with the use of follow-up strategies after the leaders' speeches. The most common strategy observed in the field was the informal briefing of journalists in the press room by various spin doctors, particularly principals. After the speech was finished the spin doctors would head for the press room to talk to

various journalists, particularly the senior correspondents and political editors. There were occasional press conferences after the speeches, although this was not a consistent pattern throughout the conferences². Post-speech co-operation was demonstrated most clearly in the broadcasting of interviews after the leaders' speeches.

Table 7.3: The number of interviews broadcast after the leaders' speeches by conference 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	Ch4	NN	Total
Liberal Democrat	0	0	0	0	1	3	4
Labour	0	0	0	0	4	5	9
Conservative	0	0	0	0	6	3	9
Total	0	0	0	0	11	11	22

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.3 shows that all post-speech interviews were conducted on Channel Four News and Newsnight, the two longest bulletins. The party elites' communications teams regulated interview access to certain of their members. In return for access, both Newsnight and Channel Four News provided the parties with an additional forum in which to develop further the issues initiated in the leaders' speeches.

Despite being proactively spun, there was also an element of discretion manifest in the reporting of the leaders' speeches which was both beneficial and non-beneficial for the party elites. On the one hand the broadcasters' view that the leaders' speeches were the most significant event of the conferences chimed with the party imperative to portray the leaders' speeches as a great success and to maximise coverage devoted to the speeches. Chapter 4 showed that the broadcasters were more pragmatically oriented towards speeches by other actors, deciding coverage according to the news value of their content. Coverage of the leaders' speeches, though, was more sacerdotal than pragmatic. A journalistic source suggested:

‘We are now much more news driven except the leader’s speech. We have got to get the leaders. We can’t cut Paddy Ashdown back if it is a busy news day, and if it is a quiet news day when Blair’s on, give him a lot of time - that is just unfair. The easiest thing to do is say give them a big chunk each. Don’t ask any questions³.

The same source noted that it was ‘convention’ for broadcasters to pay extra attention to the leader's speeches.

‘You start from the premise that the leader's speech is important because it is one of the high points of the political year - a bit like the Chancellor’s speech at the Mansion House. Then you report what’s in it... If what you are saying is: “Why do you feel that you have to cover [the] speech in great length?” the answer is: “I agree. It is arguable but that is convention..”. We had made a conscious decision to play the leaders big. We felt that was our role⁴.

These attitudes meant that the leader's speech received a significant proportion of overall conference coverage (as Table 7.4 shows), and they were always covered by each broadcaster's political editors and senior correspondents, to emphasise the importance of the event to the viewer⁵.

Table 7.4: The number of news items on the leaders' speeches 1993-1996, and as a proportion (%) of all news items on their conference.

	ITN5.40	BBC6	BBC9	ITN10	Ch4	NN	Total
Lib Dem leader	5	4	4	5	5	6	29
Total Lib Dem Items	17	18	15	17	23	27	117
(As % of Lib Dem Items)	29%	22%	26%	29%	21%	22%	25%
Labour leader	7	6	7	5	9	14	48
Total Labour Items	34	36	36	38	69	80	293
(As % of Lab Items)	21%	17%	19%	13%	13%	17%	16%
Conservative leader	8	10	8	6	14	11	57
Total Cons Items	34	48	45	37	77	82	323
(As % of Cons Items)	24%	21%	18%	16%	18%	13%	18%
All leaders	20	20	19	16	28	31	134
All News Items	85	102	96	92	169	189	733
(As % of All Items)	24%	20%	20%	17%	16%	16%	18%

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Taken as a whole, 18% of all conference news items were on the leaders' speeches, with the ratio much higher in the less newsworthy Liberal Democrat conference, and slightly lower for the Labour conference. Channel Four News and Newsnight devoted the smallest proportion of news items to the leaders' speeches, and the ITN 5.40 bulletin gave it the greatest share. If these proportions seem unexpectedly small, it is important to note that the whole of these news items were devoted to the leaders' speeches, unlike coverage of other senior party actors.

The leaders' speeches were also given prominent coverage, although the prominence varied between the conferences and significantly between bulletins in the case of the Liberal Democrats' conference (as Table 7.5 shows, next page).

Table 7.5: The prominence of reports on the leaders' speeches by conference 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position						Mean position
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total	
Conservative	24	0	0	0	0	24	1.0
Labour	18	3	3	0	0	24	1.4
Liberal Democrat	5	3	3	4	9	24	3.4
Total	47	6	6	4	9	72	1.9

The Conservative leader's speech over the four-year period was consistently the first news item on every bulletin. The prominence of the Labour leader's speech was only slightly less, but the positioning accorded to Paddy Ashdown's speeches was much worse, with the majority of reports across the bulletins being half way down the running order or more. While the leaders were treated more sacerdotally by the broadcasters compared to other actors within their parties, compared to the other party leaders Ashdown's speeches were treated more pragmatically. The other leaders' speeches were treated more sacerdotally, and were guaranteed prominent coverage unless exceptionally newsworthy events occurred elsewhere.

In terms of news gathering, the leaders' speeches required the minimum of effort. The visuals were largely garnered from the cameras in planned positions in the hall and the journalists sat through the speeches making a series of notes which would later be used for the report's narrative. These notes would be amended through a process of talking informally to various spin doctors (where any queries would be raised) and talking to other competitor colleagues in the news community. Once gathering was complete, the journalists acted as 'packagers' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), compiling various extracts from the speeches to form a report. Despite the sacerdotal orientation towards the leaders' speeches, the reports were not simply a relay of the information verbatim to the viewing audience. The packaging process involved both selection and a 'value added' element (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995).

The journalists and political editors selected certain parts of the speech, reflecting the limited size of the time slot within which they had to fit the report. Selection was accompanied by what was, in effect, a process of distilling out what the journalists perceived to be the core elements of any speech. The extracts were reduced to soundbites, although passages from the leaders' speeches were never juxtaposed with any other actor's comments. The most newsworthy elements of a speech tended to dominate any single report.

A clear element of value added was present in the reports on the speeches as well, with selected passages sometimes placed in context in the report's narrative in a variety of ways⁶. There was an attempt to 'unmask' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) for the television audience the logic behind a particular announcement in terms of explanatory variables, including: party competition pressures; contemporary conference events; contemporary issues such as the positioning of the parties in the political spectrum; and attempts to appeal to the conference delegates, as gauged by their reception of a particular passage. In addition to contextualising individual passages, there were attempts to evaluate the speech as a whole, through references to the leader's performance and to the immediate reception of the whole speech by the party. Occasional comparisons were also drawn between the current speech and those of previous leaders. These elements were mainly visible in the reports' introductory and concluding remarks. The correspondents also exhibited discretion through being able to solicit reactions from those in the conference hall or other media professionals. Reports often carried the favourable and unfavourable reactions of these actors to the speeches.

The bulletins also produced a number of two-ways after the leaders' speeches. As with the coverage of intra-party debates, they were an additional outlet for the senior correspondents and the political editors to comment further and speculate about the speeches.

Table 7.6: The number of two-ways broadcast after the leaders' speeches by conference 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	BBC6	BBC9	NN	ITN10	Ch4	Total
Liberal Democrat	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Labour	3	1	2	3	1	1	11
Conservative	3	4	1	0	1	1	10
Total	7	5	3	3	2	2	22

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.6 shows that most two-ways were on the early evening bulletins, because there was not always enough time to complete the production of a pegged news item before the deadline and the two-way was seen as a quick replacement which could capture the immediacy of an event. In addition, co-operation with the parties was not a necessary prerequisite in the use of two-ways. They were used less frequently in the late evening bulletins.

The rest of this chapter examines the framing and spinning of the three party leaders' speeches by six evening news bulletins in 1995. The analysis focuses on key elements of the framing process (prominence, selection and contextualisation), and looks at the shared interests between the party elites and the news broadcasters in the coverage of the leaders' speeches.

7.1 The Liberal Democrat Leader's Speech

Ashdown's speeches were treated as the main event of the Liberal Democrat conferences by the news bulletins although Table 7.7 shows the prominence given to reports on his speeches was low.

Table 7.7: The prominence of reports on the Liberal Democrat leader's speech 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
ITN 5.40	2	0	0	1	1	4
BBC 6	1	1	0	0	2	4
Ch 4	0	0	1	1	2	4
BBC 9	2	0	0	1	1	4
ITN 10	0	2	0	1	1	4
Newsnight	0	0	2	0	2	4
Total	5	3	3	4	9	24

(BBC 6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

It was only a lead story five times, and in most cases the speeches were reported as the fourth item of news or lower. Ashdown's speeches were given particularly low prominence by Newsnight and Channel Four News, with the highest position both bulletins awarded him being third.

Selection

Owing to the length of the speeches, the journalists edited them into a number of small sections to fit into the report. Table 7.8 (next page) shows the average number of these passages contained within reports.

Table 7.8: The mean number of passages used from the Liberal Democrat leader's speeches 1993-1996.

	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	NN	Ch 4
Mean 1993-96	4	4	5	5	5	7
Stdv	0.9	1.5	1.0	1.2	0.8	1.3

(Stdv = Standard deviation. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.8 shows that a comparatively small number of extracts were used by the journalists when compiling a report on the Liberal Democrat leader's speech. ITN used the lowest number, on average 4, with the BBC Six, Nine and Newsnight slightly higher with 5 and Channel Four News the highest with 7. The length of these segments was also determined by the journalists. Table 7.9 gives an indication of the mean length of the passages selected by the journalists in reports.

Table 7.9: The mean length of soundbites (in seconds) in reports on the Liberal Democrat leader's speeches 1993-1996.

	BBC6	BBC9	ITN5.40	ITN10	Ch 4	NN	Av
Mean 1993-96	15	15	19	22	22	26	20
Stdv	7.1	7.3	7.0	6.8	8.7	9.3	8.9

(Stdv = Standard deviation. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.9 shows that the length of soundbites varied between bulletins with the BBC providing the shortest, some four seconds less than ITN and Channel Four News, and Newsnight the longest. Taking Tables 7.8 and 7.9 together: ITN selected fewer extracts but of a greater length and the BBC more extracts but shorter. Newsnight and Channel Four News quoted most comprehensively, using the most number of extracts at the greatest length.

Having seen the average number of passages selected and their length, Table 7.10 (next page) shows a more detailed examination of which passages from the 1995 Liberal Democrat leader's speech were selected.

Table 7.10: Which passages from the 1995 Liberal Democrat leader's were used in reports by bulletin.

	Identification number of the passage						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	(Dear Tony)	(Rail track)	(Tax Cuts)	(Change Gov't)	(Cnf'nt Issues)	(PR Ref'm)	(Lib Gov't)
ITN 5.40	x	x	x	x	x		
BBC 6	x	x	x			x	
Ch 4	x	x	x	x			x
BBC 9	x	x	x	x	x	x	
ITN 10	x	x	x	x	x		x
Newsnight	x	x	x				x

(1, Dear Tony = an extract from a joke postcard. 2, Railtrack = renationalise Railtrack. 3, Tax Cuts = opposition to tax cuts. 4, Change Gov't = a call to get rid of the existing government. 5, Cnf'nt Issues = a challenge to the other parties to confront the issues. 6, PR Ref'm = a call to reform the existing voting system and implement proportional representation. 7, Lib Gov't = the Liberal Democrats' role in a new government. BBC 6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

Table 7.10 shows that seven of a total of 11 passages from Ashdown's 1995 speech were used by more than one report. There was considerable overlap between all the bulletins in the passages they selected as the most important from the speech. These passages concerned two main themes: the outlining of the Liberal Democrat leadership's position on possible co-operation with Labour after the 1997 election and a reaffirmation of party policy and a critique of the other parties on a series of issues.

Context

All bulletins in their reports saw the most important passages of Ashdown's speech as being about the Liberal Democrats' attitude towards co-operation with Labour after the next election, precipitated by Blair's offer of closer co-operation the previous day (see Table 7.10). The speech's aim was contextualised as providing the outline of issues where co-operation between Labour could be considered. While all the reports mentioned his attacks on the Conservatives, they focused to a greater extent on the challenges Blair would have to meet for co-operation. The BBC Six called these a 'checklist of challenges'; the BBC Nine 'challenges for Labour'. Channel Four's report called them the 'terms on readiness to work with Labour' and Newsnight the 'decisions Labour should not duck'.

All reports sought to contextualise each passage used⁷. The first passage concerned

Ashdown reading out a joke postcard, responding to Blair's overtures on co-operation .

Passage 1.

'Dear Tony, Having a wonderful time in Glasgow. We've always believed in working with others where we agree. But first you must be clear where you stand. We are. Lets us know when you are. Yours, Paddy'.

All reports sought to explain the significance of this element as Ashdown's response to Blair's offer of co-operation. ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised the response in terms of its confidence, suggesting that Ashdown was '...confident enough to send Tony Blair, after his approaches, what amounted to a saucy postcard'. The BBC Six suggested that the passage's significance lay in the fact that his party wanted to hear 'his reply to Tony Blair's petition to talks and possible co-operation'. Channel Four's report focused on the passage's aim, 'designed to open up a dialogue without giving the impression he was rolling over at the first approach'. The BBC Nine referred to Blair's offer of co-operation as 'destabilising' but suggested that Ashdown had turned it into 'an advantage by lambasting his potential allies for retreating on key policies'. Newsnight contextualised it as a reply, but one which 'struck just the right mocking tone'.

The second passage was contextualised as a challenge to Labour to co-operate in opposing rail privatisation and in terms of the popularity of reception for the passage.

Passage 2.

'We must retain public control of Railtrack. And once again my message to Labour is very, very simple. Join us, join us in that pledge and if you do, no one would buy the shares and together we could stop this crazy rail privatisation dead in its tracks'.

The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten emphasised both the popularity of its reception and the challenge to Labour: 'The biggest applause came when Mr Ashdown spoke about rail privatisation and said Labour should join them in keeping Railtrack under public control'. The BBC Six made no reference to the reception but used it as an example of co-operation: 'Labour should join them too in pledging continuing public control of Railtrack'. Channel Four News suggested: 'so to the loudest applause for his speech, he challenged Labour to block rail privatisation'. The BBC Nine focused on the reception and noted 'his insistence that they could between them stop the privatisation of Railtrack won him his loudest applause'. Newsnight suggested: 'the biggest applause came when Mr Ashdown spoke about rail privatisation and said that Labour should join them in keeping Railtrack under public control'. The popularity of the reception of this passage made it more salient in the eyes of the journalists than other elements in Ashdown's 'list'.

The third and fourth most frequently used passages concerned reaffirmation of existing party policy on tax and education and a critique of the other two parties. The third passage used by all reports reaffirmed the party policy on increasing tax to fund education but was contextualised as a challenge to the other parties to be honest on taxation.

Passage 3.

‘If you promise never to put up taxes, then the rest of your pledges are no more than pipe dreams. What’s so depressing is that Labour now seem as keen to play this party trick on the electorate as the Conservatives. Well, let me make it clear now, deceiving the electorate on taxes is not a game this party intends to play’.

The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten highlighted the passage as a spending pledge: ‘Mr Ashdown once again promised more spending on education and the environment which might indeed mean higher taxes’, and as an attack on the other parties: ‘about which other parties never spoke the truth’. The BBC Six did not mention the spending pledge but contextualised it as a criticism of Labour: ‘It was also depressing that Labour now seemed as ready as the Tories to hide the truth about taxes’. Channel Four contextualised it differently, in terms of tough choices: ‘Throughout he positioned the Liberal Democrats as the party that was prepared to take tough choices in contrast to Labour’s timidity’. The BBC Nine made no mention of the criticism of Labour but suggested there was an element of risk in his strategy: ‘Riskily, Mr Ashdown promised that his party would tell the truth on tax’. For Newsnight the significance lay in terms of the tax-cutting agenda of the other parties. The report suggested the passage was a taunt: ‘On tax he taunted Labour’s timidity’.

The fourth most-used extract (ignored only by Newsnight and the BBC Six) was contextualised as a call for the government ‘to go’.

Passage 4.

‘I want to use this moment as the start of a great campaign, up to and through the next election, in which we say simply and plainly how Britain must change and how the Liberal Democrats’ will guarantee that change. And the first change that Britain needs is a change of government. This government must go, and every vote and every seat that we win at the next election will see that they go’.

The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised this as Ashdown’s ‘clear alternative message for Britain once the Tories were slung out’. Channel Four said that it showed Ashdown ‘was unambiguous in his determination to get rid of the government’. The BBC Nine described it rather oddly, saying ‘he didn’t spend too long discussing the Tories’.

The fifth passage used by both ITN reports and the BBC Nine was contextualised as a critique of the other two parties for failing to confront the ‘issues’.

Passage 5.

‘Labour won’t confront the issues because they are frightened of the electorate. The Tories won’t confront the issues because they’re frightened they’ll divide their party’.

The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised it as an attack on ‘the constant fudging of the issues by the two old parties’. The BBC Nine noted that Ashdown ‘assailed’ the other two parties ‘for timidity and a failure to tell it like it is’.

The sixth used by both BBC reports and Channel Four News was contextualised as

a critique of Labour's policy on proportional representation (PR).

Passage 6.

'Well let me make it absolutely clear, electoral reform is not an optional extra. It is not leadership to ask others to decide when you won't decide yourself. Holding a referendum is not an alternative to holding an opinion'.

The BBC Six summarised it as Ashdown's critique of Blair's stance on proportional representation: 'In areas such as electoral reform he should stop being half-hearted and timid. He must say whether he supports proportional representation'. Channel Four's report similarly focused on the critical nature of the passage: 'Tony Blair's promise of a referendum yesterday was welcome, but not enough'. The passage was similarly contextualised by the BBC Nine: 'he wants the Labour leader to come out in favour of PR, not just to stage a referendum on it'.

The seventh passage of the speech (from its close) was used only by News at Ten and Newsnight. It was contextualised as a restatement of the 'Liberal Democrat Guarantee' document⁸ to be the guarantors of change in the next parliament.

Passage 7.

'Within the next eighteen months, perhaps before we meet again, we will be called upon to show that we have the courage and the firm answers and the strong vision to be the lever of change, the guarantee of change, in our country once again. Let them then say of us, that was their challenge and they rose to it'.

News at Ten report suggested: 'Come the general election the party would need to show it has firm answers and a strong vision to be a lever of change'. Newsnight attempted to draw some historical comparisons. It suggested 'tellingly Mr Ashdown ended on a conciliatory note, something of the spirit of Labour's landslide victory in 1945, noting the vital contributions the Liberals Beveridge and Keynes made to post-war Britain, he said it was time to play that role again'.

In addition there were four passages from the speech used by only one of the reports. The BBC Six used another quote to illustrate Ashdown's call for co-operation with Labour. Channel Four's report used another extract to illustrate Ashdown's attack on the Conservatives' education policy, contextualising it as another example of a policy area over which Labour and the Liberal Democrats should co-operate. Newsnight used a further two extracts to highlight the role of the Liberal Democrats in a future parliament after the next election. This was contextualised as the party's mission 'to ensure that after the Conservatives had gone, the next government did not fail Britain'.

Performance

Table 7.11 (next page) shows the frequency of comments on Ashdown's performance when making a speech.

Table 7.11: The number of references in all reports to the performance of the Liberal Democrat leader in making his speech by bulletin and year 1993-1996.

	BBC9	ITN5.40	BBC6	ITN10	Ch 4	NN	Total
1993	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1994	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
1995	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1996	2	2	1	0	0	0	5
Total	3	2	2	1	1	0	9

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Overall there were nine comments, mainly concentrated in reports on the 1996 conference speech and on the ITN and BBC main news bulletins, with one on Channel Four and none at all on Newsnight. In 1995 there were no remarks on Ashdown's performance when making the speech.

Reception

The reports were keen to convey to the television audience the reception the speech received from the delegates in the conference hall. These comments usually came at the end of a report but were also linked to a specific announcements.

Table 7.12: The number of references in all reports to the reception of the Liberal Democrat leader's Speeches by bulletin and year 1993-1996.

	ITN10	ITN5.40	Ch 4	NN	BBC6	BBC9	Total
1993	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
1994	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
1995	2	2	2	1	1	1	9
1996	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
Total	5	4	4	2	1	1	17

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.12 shows that there were 17 references to the speeches' reception over the period. Both ITN bulletins consistently referred in their reports to the speeches' reception by delegates, whereas the BBC bulletins made only one mention of the speeches' reception. In 1995, in addition to the reception already noted for the passage on rail privatisation, five reports also specifically referred to the speech's final reception. The report on the ITN 5.40

suggested that the speech ‘...earned Paddy Ashdown a noticeably warm ovation’ and News at Ten that the conference ‘...rose to give Paddy Ashdown a noticeably warm ovation’. The BBC Six report said that it ‘...won him more than a standing ovation’. The Channel Four report said that after the speech ‘Delegates insisted on Mr Ashdown taking a second bow today’, and Newsnight noted that ‘Mr Ashdown’s speech went down so well he was even called back for a sort of encore’.

Reactions

In addition to referencing the reception for the speech the journalists also indexed the reactions of other actors, referenced by journalists in the commentary and incorporated into the report through indexing different actors. There were differences between the six bulletins in terms of the value-added, in particular between Newsnight, Channel Four News and the rest. These two bulletins provided considerably more reaction to Ashdown’s speech than the other bulletin’s. The following table shows the reactions to the leaders speech initiated by the journalists⁹.

Table 7.13: The number of indexed reactions in all reports to the Liberal Democrat leader’s speeches by year 1993-1996.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
1993	0	0	3
1994	2	0	6
1995	0	0	9
1996	1	0	2
Total	3	0	20

The overwhelming number of reactions initiated by journalists after Ashdown’s speech were neutral over the four years, with no negative reactions. On the 1995 speech only three reports carried reactions, all neutral. The BBC Six indexed the reaction of MPs Liz Lynne and Simon Hughes; Channel Four’s report included Liz Lynne, Charles Kennedy and a delegate; and Newsnight covered Lord Holme and three delegates.

Concluding Remarks

The concluding remarks of the reports emphasised the positive and upbeat finale to the speech but alluded to potential problems from within the party for his overtures to Labour. The ITN 5.40 report suggested: ‘Thumbs up, another sign of his confidence that being up-

front on tax and other issues will mean more votes and seats and influence in the next parliament'. News at Ten similarly suggested: 'Thumbs up, an indication that Mr Ashdown believes he is carrying his supporters with him over his "Yes, we'll put taxes up if we have to" strategy'. The report also noted there could be problems from '...a sort of hair shirt tendency inherited perhaps from the old Liberals... and evident today as it voted to ban National Lottery instant scratch cards... but most of the representatives here seem to be backing Paddy Ashdown's view'. The BBC Six report said that he had succeeded in keeping 'the door open to increased co-operation but his language was sufficiently uncompromising to make it sound more like a challenge'. Channel Four similarly noted the possible response of the party: 'He deliberately didn't respond too warmly to Mr Blair's talks, knowing that might produce a backlash, as a result he kept the party with him... Despite the applause Liberal Democrats won't be rushed into talks with a party that its vocal minority still regards as the enemy'. The BBC Nine raised the same dilemma as the other reports: 'The Lib Dems have been pleased to be wooed by Tony Blair but they are by no means convinced they want to start walking out. But he's kept the doors open whilst boosting his party's confidence'. Newsnight were more forthright in focusing on a deal with Labour. Tension between delegates and MPs was raised as one potential outcome: 'This week has revealed a tension between MPs and officials, who would dearly love to pull that lever for change inside a government, and activists who'd split the party rather than contemplate coalition'.

Spinning

Ashdown's speeches were widely trailed in bulletins the night prior to the speech. Table 7.14 shows that the use of trails was more or less evenly spread across all the bulletins over the four-year period. The majority of trails were used by Newsnight, Channel Four News and News at Ten with the early evening bulletins (particularly the BBC Six) using trailed information least.

Table 7.14: The number of news items containing trailed information on the Liberal Democrat leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	Ch 4	NN	ITN10	BBC9	ITN5.40	BBC6	Total
1993	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
1994	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
1995	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
1996	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
Total	3	3	3	2	2	1	14

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

1995 represented a low point in the number of trails used by the bulletins. There were only two in reports prior to the 1995 speech on News at Ten and Newsnight. News at Ten contextualised the information by reference to Blair's offer of co-operation earlier that day: 'Tomorrow Mr Ashdown will call for a great campaign through until the next election, with the Liberal Democrats stating clearly how they plan to change the country. As for Labour it's now up to them to say where they stand'. Newsnight similarly contextualised the information in terms of Blair's offer of co-operation: 'Paddy Ashdown tomorrow will attack Labour for a lack of courage on taxation...'. Trailing of the 1995 speech was limited and far from systematic compared to the previous year. There were no pegged news items on the content of Ashdown's speech in any of the bulletins. Between 1993 and 1996 the bulletins also only produced a few additional news items on the Liberal Democrat leader's speech. These almost exclusively took the form of interviews with senior party actors - Charles Kennedy (Party President) was used twice and David Steel (former leader) once on Newsnight, and Menzies Campbell (Foreign Affairs spokesperson) appeared once on Channel Four. There was only one two-way over the period, after a report by the ITN 5.40 in 1994.

7.2 The Labour Leader's Speech

The Labour leader's speeches were treated sacerdotally by the different news bulletins. Table 7.15 shows that the significant majority of reports were lead items in all bulletins over the period. The leader's speeches were always the lead story on the BBC and the only time they were not the lead story on ITN and Channel Four News was in 1995.

Table 7.15: Prominence of reports on the Labour leader's speech 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
BBC 6	4	0	0	0	0	4
BBC 9	4	0	0	0	0	4
ITN 5.40	3	1	0	0	0	4
ITN 10	3	0	1	0	0	4
Ch 4	3	0	1	0	0	4
Newsnight	2	1	1	0	0	4
Total	18	3	3	0	0	24

(BBC 6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

The 1995 conference speech provided an interesting example of temporarily diverging

interests between party elites (especially the leader's principal spin doctor Alastair Campbell) and the news broadcasters' editorial staff over the O.J Simpson trial verdict, announced on the same day and seen by most journalists as a momentous news event. This coincidence fractured momentarily Labour's and the broadcasters' shared interest in leading with the leader's speech. Fearing that pragmatic values would take precedence over the sacerdotal, Campbell launched a pre-emptive strike to try and persuade the broadcasters to lead with the Blair speech rather than the verdict of the O.J Simpson trial. Campbell sought assurances from both the heads of BBC and ITN that Blair's speech would not be displaced from its lead position on their bulletins. One political editor noted that Campbell was '... imploring the broadcasters not to lead their news programmes with the O.J Simpson verdict'¹⁰. Another journalist suggested that Campbell had 'urged television news organisations not to swamp the Labour leader's speech... with coverage of the trial verdict'¹¹. As part of his attempt to persuade the broadcasters Campbell appealed to the Director General of the BBC, John Birt, and the head of ITN Channel three news, Nigel Dacre. He sent the following fax around midday on the day of the leader's speech.

'I write concerning your coverage of Tony Blair's speech on your evening bulletin today. Some of the journalists have suggested to us that we are unlikely to get as much coverage for the leader's speech as in previous years because of the O.J Simpson trial verdict at 6pm. It has even been suggested that there is little chance of Mr Blair's speech leading your bulletins. Whilst of course news judgements must be made in the light of other stories on any particular day, and whilst I fully understand there is much interest in the verdict, I would implore you not to lose sight of the news value and of the importance to the country of Mr Blair's speech. I hope you will communicate our concerns'¹².

While ITN ignored the fax, Tony Hall, Managing Director of BBC News and Current Affairs, replied immediately, saying that 'the corporation was capable of making its own decisions'¹³. The response of the BBC and ITN was different. Although claiming to be 'capable of making its own decisions', both the BBC's bulletins led with Blair's speech, whereas both of ITN's bulletins led with the O.J. verdict.

Peter Bell, head of the BBC TV news programmes, was quoted as saying in the BBC's defence: 'The order of the Nine o'clock News was determined by the editor Malcolm Balen. His decision was supported by editorial management, including me. At the time the decision was made the programme editor did not even know Mr Blair's press officer had contacted the BBC'¹⁴. As to charges that the BBC had 'bowed to Labour pressure' or 'caved in to Labour party complaints' a further BBC spokesman was quoted as saying 'The Nine O'clock News would always have led on Blair. We are quite happy we got it right...' ¹⁵. This clearly does show that there were some differences between a more sacerdotal approach to the leader's speech as an event by the BBC and a more pragmatic approach by ITN, albeit in extremely unusual circumstances. The previous leader's speeches and the 1996 leader's speech were lead items on both ITN bulletins (see

Table 7.15). This case also highlights the broadcasters' discretionary power to decide the running order of their bulletins. If the BBC is to be believed, the decision was made on sacerdotal grounds, not because of pressure. Although in terms of the conferences such attempts at editorial interference were far from frequent, the example shows the response of the party elites where news values threatened the taken-for-granted assumptions on the prominence of the leader's speech.

Selection

At the Labour conference the journalists were active in selecting which extracts would be incorporated into a report. The news reports again edited the leader's speech into a number of small sections. Table 7.16 (next page) shows the average number of these passages contained within the reports.

Table 7.16: The mean number of passages used from the Labour leader's speeches 1993-1996.

	NN	BBC9	BBC6	Ch 4	ITN5.40	ITN10
Mean 1993-96	9	8	7	7	6	6
Stdv	1.3	1.0	1.8	2.5	0.6	1.5

(Stdv = standard deviation. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.16 shows that Newsnight used the greatest number of speech extracts. The BBC Six and Nine on average used more extracts from the Labour leader's speech than ITN 5.40 and News at Ten. Interestingly the BBC Six and Nine used the same number of extracts as Channel Four News, a longer news bulletin. Table 7.17 shows the average length of these extracts.

Table 7.17: The mean length of soundbites (in seconds) in reports on the Labour leader's speeches 1993-1996.

	NN	Ch 4	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC9	BBC6	Av
Mean 1993-96	27	21	21	20	18	15	20
Stdv	12.8	8.2	9.8	7.5	8.0	6.9	8.9

(Stdv = standard deviation. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

In terms of soundbites Table 7.17 shows a variation between the bulletins. Reports on Newsnight provided the longest soundbites. The BBC Six and Nine used the shortest on average, particularly the BBC Six's soundbites, which were some four seconds shorter

than both ITN bulletins. Interestingly there was little difference in the length of the soundbites on the shortest bulletin, the ITN 5.40, and on Channel Four News, one of the longest. Tables 7.16 and 7.17 again show that Newsnight and Channel Four News provided on average, the greatest number of, and the longest extracts. They also show that both ITN bulletins selected fewer extracts from the Labour leader's speech but of a greater length, whereas the BBC Six and Nine selected more, making them shorter.

Table 7.18 shows a more detailed examination of which passages from the Labour leader's speech were selected in reports on the 1995 conference.

Table 7.18: Which passages from the 1995 Labour leader's speech were used in reports by bulletin.

	Identification number of the passage								
	1 (BT Deal)	2 (Rail Nation)	3 (Patri- otic)	4 (Bambi)	5 (Love party)	6 (New Brit)	7 (Edu- 'tion)	8 (Wind- fall)	9 (Crit Cons)
ITN 5.40	x	x	x	x				x	x
BBC 6	x	x	x		x				
Ch 4	x	x	x	x		x	x		
BBC 9	x	x	x	x	x		x		
ITN 10	x	x	x	x			x	x	
Newsnight		x	x	x	x	x	x		

(1, BT Deal = A deal with British Telecom to connect schools to the internet. 2, Rail Nation = A pledge to renationalise the railways. 3, Patriotic = Labour as the patriotic party. 4, Bambi = A joke reference to Blair's nickname. 5, Love party = The leader's love for his party and country. 6, New Brit = The leader's vision of a new Britain. 7, Edu'tion = The importance of education and technology. 8, Windfall = The uses to which revenue from a new windfall tax would be put. 9, Crit Cons = A critique of the Conservatives. BBC 6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

A total of 17 passages were used from Blair's 1995 speech. Table 7.18 shows that nine passages were used by more than one of the reports. The most used passages concerned two themes: the outlining of the Labour leadership's policy pledges and the political repositioning of the party. The first two most widely used passages specifically concerned policy pledges.

Context

All the anchors' introductions summarised the series of policy proposals in Blair's speech and emphasised the visionary aspect of the speech. The BBC Six suggested that he set out

'his vision for a new young Britain'; Channel Four said it was 'his vision for Britain under Labour'; the BBC Nine a prescription... to change Britain'; News at Ten 'a vision of a new young united Britain...'; and Newsnight that the aim was to 'reposition Labour as the party of the future'.

All reports except the BBC Nine contextualised the aim of the speech as revealing policy substance. The BBC Six said the speech was designed to 'answer those critics who complain that he's full of fine words but his promises lack substance'. Channel Four observed that 'Mr Blair's advisers wanted this speech to be seen as full of policy'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten noted that 'perhaps sensing in advance that the Tories might try and attack the speech today for being without substance it came with a 24 page briefing paper'. And Newsnight said that 'this is a party that has been increasingly restive, wondering "Where is the beef?" Mr Blair offered up some red meat'.

All reports in addition sought to contextualise the main passages in the following way. The first quote, used by all and summarised by Newsnight, concerned the connection of every school to the internet by British Telecom (BT).

Passage 1.

'I can tell you that we have been these past weeks in discussion with British Telecom. In return for access to the market I can announce that they have agreed as they build their network to connect every school, every college, every hospital, every Library in Britain for free'.

The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised the passage in terms of advantages for both schoolchildren and BT: 'The cable television market currently closed to British Telecom would be opened up, but at a price'. This passage was contextualised by the BBC Six in terms of advantages for both schoolchildren and BT: 'each child to have access to a computer and British Telecom to have greater freedom to compete'. Channel Four's report suggested the passage was symbolic. It symbolised 'both Labour's commitment to education and technology and to a partnership between the private and public sectors'. The BBC Nine contextualised the passage as both visionary and practical. Its vision was 'of a country with every schoolchild having access to a lap top computer, medical centres of excellence linked to the electronic super highway. To underline its practical purpose Labour has done a deal with the privatised BT'. Newsnight summarised the announcement in a straight manner: 'Labour would allow British Telecom to use cable technology to the full in return for promising to connect up every school... in Britain for free. And he [Blair] also said that there would be discussion about how to ensure that every child has access to a lap top computer'.

The second passage was a pledge of tight public spending controls but with a caveat that there would be a publicly owned railway under Labour. The popularity of this

announcement was emphasised by reference to the applause it received on the BBC Nine, News at Ten and Newsnight.

Passage 2.

'I don't give blank cheques in any area of policy, including this, no matter what the pressures. But to anyone thinking of grabbing our railways, built up over the years so they can make a quick profit, as our network is broken up and sold off, I say this: There will be a publicly owned, publicly accountable railway system under a Labour government'.

The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten emphasised the careful wording of the passage: 'After welfare into work for single parents, transport. But there'd be no blank cheques in any policy area' and noted the reaction: 'The applause for that, led by Jimmy Knapp the rail union leader'. The BBC Six contextualised this passage in a descriptive manner as a 'pledge' on 'taking a privatised British rail back into the public sector'. Channel Four emphasised its reception and made reference to its careful wording: 'Most popular of all, public ownership of the railways. But the commitments were very carefully phrased'. The BBC Nine reinforced the passage's reception: 'But if New Labour are warming to the markets Mr Blair still got his loudest applause of the day for a pledge to reverse a controversial privatisation'. Newsnight referred to the passage as a 'a promise of a more traditional kind', its aim 'to delight the audience in the hall'.

All the reports referenced the passage of the speech which sought to label Labour as the patriotic party and attacked Conservative patriotism.

Passage 3.

'So let us say with pride, we are patriots, this is the patriotic party, because it is the party of the people. And as the Tories wave their Union Jacks next week, I know what so many people will be thinking, I know what people want to say to those Tories. It is no good waving the fabric of our flag when you have spent sixteen years tearing apart the fabric of the nation'.

The BBC Six suggested simply: 'today he also took hold of the Union Jack'. Channel Four contextualised the passage as an attempt to occupy the moral high ground: 'Mr Blair returned to his theme of trying to occupy the moral high ground with an appeal for patriotism'. The BBC Nine located the significance of the passage in terms of Conservative attacks on Labour's European policy: 'Mr Blair knows the Tories will attack him at the next election as soft on Europe and so he has sought to stress that his party is a party of patriots'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten saw the passage as a critique of the Conservatives' patriotism: 'The Labour leader knew what ordinary people would be saying to the flag-waving Tories at their conference next week'. Newsnight contextualised the extract sceptically: 'Labour the party of patriotism! an audacious move in itself', although it suggested as an aside: '... the hall cleared, there was not a single Union Jack among the debris'.

In addition to repositioning and policy pledges there was also an interest in

humorous passages from the speech. All reports except the BBC Six contextualised the fourth passage, as a joke in which Tony Blair sought to respond to critics of his style of leadership.

Passage 4.

'Last year I was Bambi, this year I'm Stalin. From Disneyland to dictatorship in twelve short months. I'm not sure which one I prefer. OK, I prefer Bambi honestly'.

This was contextualised by Channel Four as 'dealing with criticism of his leadership with a joke against himself'. In the BBC Nine the context was somewhat different: 'The struggles for party reform were dismissed with a joke'. On the ITN 5.40 and News at Ten there was no mention of a joke. The passage was seen as showing that 'Labour could change Britain for the better since the party itself had changed'. Newsnight suggested that the passage showed that Blair 'laughed off the criticism that he's centralised power in his hands'.

The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth most frequently used passages concerned a mixture of the reiteration of existing beliefs, a vision of the future and an attack on the Conservatives. The fifth passage, used by both BBC1 reports and Newsnight, was seen as a straight attack on the Conservatives.

Passage 5.

'I love my party, I just hate being in opposition. And I love my country and hate what the Tories have done to it'.

This was contextualised by the BBC Six as 'one of his overall themes' and the report suggested it was 'underlined by the appearance of the widow of one of his most successful predecessors'. The BBC Nine in a descriptive manner suggested 'time for a change was the theme'. Newsnight contextualised the passage as a gesture to old Labour: 'It was time to display a little tenderness to old Labour members who often feel unloved by Mr Blair'.

The sixth passage, used by Channel Four News and Newsnight, was contextualised as a vision of a new Britain.

Passage 6.

'Where people succeed on the basis of what they did for their country rather than what they take from their country. Not saying "This was a great country", but Britain can and will be a great country again. A country that will build the new economy of the future. No more bosses versus workers, partnerships at the work place. No more public versus private, co-operation to rebuild our nation's roads and rail and inner city and regions. No more boom and bust economics...'.

Channel Four contextualised the passage in terms of President Kennedy: 'His language as he described his vision of Britain as a young country could have been borrowed straight from President Kennedy'. Newsnight contextualised the passage sceptically in terms of promises: 'In a curious phrase he promised a young country. Indeed this man who has steered clear of firm promises made some rather extravagant ones about new Britain'.

The seventh passage, used by Channel Four and the BBC Nine, was contextualised

as Blair reaffirming the importance of education and technology.

Passage 7.

‘Education is the best economic policy there is for a modern country. It is in the marriage of education and technology that the future lies. The arms race may be over, the knowledge race has begun’.

Channel Four interpreted this passage in a descriptive way: ‘The key to the future he claimed was education and technology’. Similarly the BBC Nine suggested ‘he made education and technology the key’.

The eighth passage, used by both ITN reports, concerned uses of the windfall tax for a welfare to work programme.

Passage 8.

‘And we will use that money too and end up saving money by giving single parents the chance not to live on benefits but to plan their future, organise child care and training so that they can support themselves and their children’.

This was contextualised as the ‘biggest programme of work and education ever put forward in Britain’.

The ninth passage, used by both ITN reports, was the closing passage of the speech.

Passage 9.

‘I will do all that I can to get these Tories out and I will devote every breath that I breathe, every sinew of my body, to ensuring that your grandchildren do get to live in that new Britain, in a new and better world. New Labour new Britain. The Party renewed, the country reborn. New Labour, new Britain’.

This was contextualised by both as a promise ‘to those ordinary people among the flag-waving crowd on VJ day’.

Table 7.19: Which further passages from the 1995 Labour leader’s speech were used in reports by bulletin.

	Indentification number of the passage							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	(Wil- son)	(Soc- lism)	(Edu- tion)	(Fam V'lue)	(Party Fut're)	(Trad V'lue)	(NHS- S)	(Eur- ope)
Newsnight	x	x	x	x				
Ch 4				x	x			
BBC 6						x		
BBC 9							x	

(1, Wilson = The introduction of Lord Wilson's widow. 2, Soc'lism = The leader's definition of Socialism. 3, Edu'tion = The importance of education. 4, Fam V'lue = Family values. 5, Party Fut're = Labour as the party of the future. 6, Trad V'lue = Traditional values. 7, NHS = National Health Service. 8, Europe = The party's position on Europe. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

In addition there were a further eight passages used by the different reports - four by Newsnight, two by Channel Four News and one each by the BBC bulletins. Newsnight contextualised Blair's introduction of Lord Wilson's widow (Mary) in terms of reaching out to his own party, 'which perhaps he has deliberately failed to do over the past year', and as a tribute to Lord Wilson, 'the last man who won power for Labour'. It used a passage on Blair's definition of socialism, contextualising it in a descriptive way. The report used another passage from the speech to illustrate the theme of education and technology, suggesting 'Mr Blair dreamed of surfing the net'. And a passage on the family was seen as Blair stating that 'family values were Labour values'. Channel Four's report used two further quotes to illustrate Blair's inspiring the next generation and retaining traditional values as the party of the family. These were contextualised in terms of 'trying to position Labour as the party of the future' and trying to 'reclaim some traditional values from the Tories'. The BBC Six referenced the passage on his support for the NHS suggesting 'the NHS would become a service again', and the BBC Nine the passage on the party's position on Europe, which was contextualised as Blair 'nailing his colours firmly to the European mast'.

Comparisons

In 1994 there were a few comparisons made on Channel Four News and Newsnight to Gaitskell and his attempt to rewrite Clause 4, but they were not as widespread as the comparison to Wilson and Kennedy made in 1995. The contextualising remarks drew comparisons between Blair's speech and that made by former Labour leader Harold Wilson in 1963, known generically as the 'White heat of technology' speech, and between Blair's language and that of President Kennedy. The BBC Six's report compared one section of the speech dealing with new technology to Wilson's: 'Like Harold Wilson he put great emphasis on education and technological change'. The Channel Four report made a similar link: 'There were echoes of Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology" in his speech'. The report also made comparisons with Kennedy: 'Together with an almost Kennedyesque appeal to the next generation and patriotism'. The link with Kennedy was further emphasised: 'His language as he described his vision of Britain as a young country could have been borrowed straight from President Kennedy'.

The BBC Nine report, like the previous two reports, drew a comparison with Wilson. After highlighting the introduction of Wilson's widow (Mary) to the conference, it suggested that the last Labour leader to end a long period of Conservative rule 'did so preaching the white heat of technological change. Mr Blair too suggested the Tories had let Britain become a tired old country'. The report further reinforced the comparison: 'like

Lord Wilson he made education and technology the key'. Newsnight's introduction like Channel Four's, drew the comparison between both Wilson and Kennedy: 'His speech tried to cast himself and his party in the mould of Wilson against Douglas Home, Kennedy against Nixon....'. The historical comparison was further developed in the report - 'just as Wilson won power from the white heat of technology to drag Britain into the 1960s Mr Blair dreamed of Britain surfing the internet'; and then, 'there was also more than a hint of the vision thing, a touch of Kennedy's Camelot'.

Performance

Table 7.20 shows that the leader's performance was commented on some eleven times in reports over the period.

Table 7.20: The number of references in all reports to the performance of the Labour leader in making his speech by bulletin and year 1993-1996.

	Ch 4	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	NN	Total
1993	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
1994	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1995	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1996	2	1	1	1	1	1	7
Total	3	2	2	2	1	1	11

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Most of these remarks were focused on the Labour leader's 1996 speech. Overall there were marginally more references to the leader's performance on ITN than on the main BBC bulletins. However, there were no references to Blair's performance in reports in 1995.

Reception

The reports on the Labour leader's speech were also keen to convey the reception the speech received from the audience in the conference hall. Table 7.21 (next page) shows that there was frequent reference to audience reception.

Table 7.21: The number of references in all reports to the reception of the Labour leader's speeches by bulletin and year 1993-1996.

	BBC9	Ch 4	ITN10	ITN5.40	BBC6	NN	Total
1993	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
1994	2	3	1	0	0	0	6
1995	2	0	2	1	1	1	7
1996	1	1	1	1	1	0	5
Total	6	5	5	3	3	2	24

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

The late evening bulletins made more references than the early evening bulletins, with the exception of Newsnight which made the fewest. In addition to the noted references to the reception of individual passages of the 1995 speech, four of six reports referenced the speech's overall reception. The BBC Six's report suggested: '...there was of course a long standing ovation'. The BBC Nine's said that 'the hour-long marathon won Labour's leader rave reviews from most of his audience'. News at Ten noted that 'its reception inside the hall confirmed the extent to which Mr Blair is carrying his party with him'. And Newsnight somewhat disdainfully pointed to an '...inevitable standing ovation' and argued that 'rhetoric that would have offended and shocked this conference a few years ago now genuinely pleased most here'.

Reactions

As well as referencing reception, the reports also indexed reactions to the speech by other actors.

Table 7.22: The number of indexed reactions in all reports to the Labour leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
1993	1	2	2
1994	14	13	1
1995	8	2	0
1996	5	1	0
Total	28	18	3

Table 7.22 shows that the majority of reactions initiated after the Labour leader's speeches were positive. There was a high proportion of negative reaction indexed by journalists, particularly after the 1994 conference, which contained Blair's announcement that he had

decided to rewrite Clause 4 of the party's constitution. In 1995 Channel Four's report indexed the reactions of two delegates and Diane Abbott MP, all positive; BBC Nine used three delegates, two positive, one negative. Newsnight's report suggested that 'critical voices were hard to find' and carried positive reactions to the speech from Harriet Harman (Shadow Social Security Secretary), Claire Short MP and a delegate, and a negative reaction from another delegate. In addition the BBC Six and Nine's report referred to the critical reactions of both Brian Mawhinney, the Conservative Party Chairman, and Alan Beith for the Liberal Democrats. Channel Four referred to the 'Tories dismissing it as little more than retitled version of Labour in '45 and '64'. News at Ten noted that the 'Tories dismissed it as nothing new, the same old plan for dismantling Tory success'.

Concluding Remarks

Overall there was no single theme to the reports' concluding remarks, which focused on a mix of policy substance, party positioning and evaluating the success of the speech. The BBC Six's concluding remarks suggested that the speech had reaffirmed Mr Blair's position within the party and returned to the theme of policy substance. 'Mr Blair has managed to consolidate his position as a strong party leader'. The consolidation of his position was further underlined by referring to the defeat of the left: 'Earlier the left of the party were easily defeated over the dropping of the left-winger Liz Davies...'. In terms of policy substance the report was slightly sceptical, suggesting that 'In some areas, in particular over the overall balance between tax and spending, Mr Blair has not been specific. But at least for the party faithful here, he's provided plenty of fresh ammunition to use against the Tories'.

Channel Four's concluding remarks contextualised the speech in terms of policy substance pleasing the party: 'The party has been looking for reassurance and they got it in the form of a policy commitment'. In addition it suggested that Blair had 'succeeded in going some way to answer what Labour will do with power, without making costly commitments...'. But the speech was also seen in terms of positioning the party and electoral competition: 'What is important in the long term is how he positions Labour as the party of the future. For now, there is no question of the Tories changing leader, so that could be a difficult strategy for the government to counter'.

The BBC Nine's concluding remarks ignored the question of policy substance, summing up the speech as a personal triumph: 'Tonight Mr Blair and his colleagues can afford to grin [...]. A compliant party occasionally swallowing hard has its sights on the next election'. It further characterised the speech as 'stamped through with Christian

Socialism, even prayer book language', suggesting that it had 'pressed nearly all the right buttons, while reassuring middle England with firm words on crime and the family'.

The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten's report contextualised the speech in terms of party competition: 'Every word was meant to reflect Tony Blair's belief that Labour can replace the Tories because Labour's moral purpose is higher, their vision for Britain clearer'. In addition the concluding remarks focused on an imagined Blair response to Conservative attacks: 'First he would say that in his view it's a patriotic thing to do, to try and change the country, not a destructive one. And secondly, he was playing for all it's worth the feeling that he has that up and down the country people are saying "It's time for a change"'. Newsnight's concluding remarks suggested that 'he had soothed a party that was beginning to get a little restless, and set out a strong vision'. Yet it also suggested that there were potential problems ahead: 'But trying to prove that Mr Blair can afford to build what he calls a young country may still prove to be more awkward'.

Additional News Items

Over a period of four leader's speeches there was a total of eleven two-ways, which Table 7.23 shows distributed across different bulletins.

Table 7.23: The number of two-ways on the Labour leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	NN	ITN5.40	BBC9	BBC6	Ch 4	ITN10	Total
1993	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
1994	0	1	1	1	0	1	4
1995	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1996	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	3	3	2	1	1	1	11

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

There were no strong differences in the use of two-ways between the broadcasters. As with the coverage of debates, the function of two-ways after the leader's speech was to elaborate further upon different elements of the speech's content, prompted by the anchor's questions, and focus either on an explanation of a particular part of the speech or on speculation. In 1995 the only two-way was on Newsnight between the anchor Jeremy Paxman and the political pundit Peter Kellner. There were three questions in total, two of which on the leader's speech both required some form of speculation by Kellner. The first

question concerned the accuracy of widely made comparisons between Blair's speech and Harold Wilson's 'White heat of technology' speech in 1963. Kellner suggested that the parallel 'was striking'. He elaborated on the comparison, suggesting that Wilson too had set out 'the marriage of technology and education', but that orthodox economic policies (such as the defence of the pound) then undermined the policies' impact in government. He speculated that there were similar worries about whether Blair could 'fight off similar economic orthodoxies'. It was a question, he suggested, 'hanging in the air'. In the second question Paxman asked whether Blair in his speech had put enough 'flesh on the bones'. Kellner suggested he had, but speculated whether or not it was a full policy package. 'If these are all the policies, then it may be enough. If there are more to come, where are they'?

Spinning

Table 7.24 shows that News at Ten carried a trailed extract from the leader's speech in every conference report. The other bulletins seemed to consider trailed information less deserving of coverage, unless the extracts were particularly newsworthy.

Table 7.24: The number of news items containing trailed information on the Labour leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	ITN10	BBC6	Ch 4	BBC9	ITN5.40	NN	Total
1993	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1994	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1995	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
1996	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	4	1	1	1	0	0	7

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

There were three trails from the 1995 speech reported on Channel Four, the BBC Nine and News at Ten. Channel Four suggested: 'He'll be asking voters to make the same choice as he asked Labour to make last year, i.e. decline or modernise. And he'll try to link Labour with the majority and say the Tories represent the minority'. The BBC Nine suggested that 'tomorrow Mr Blair... will spell out more detail on class sizes and help for single parents. He will argue that the Tories have allowed Britain to become old and tired, and challenge its people to a supreme national effort under a Labour government'. News at Ten noted with mixed metaphors that Blair would 'play one particular string of the political violin for all its worth tomorrow and it's the string called "time for a change" So Mr Blair is not only going to say that under the Tories Britain is old and tired, but he'll also go on to say that

it's up now to a new generation, as he puts it, and a newly revitalised Labour party, to lead Britain on the long climb into the premier league'.

In addition the news broadcasters produced seven pegged items on the contents of the Labour leader's four speeches. None of the pegged items were produced by bulletins in the early evening, but all the other programmes used them, with *Newsnight* producing the most pegged reports. This pattern shows there was little co-operation between Labour's strategists and the broadcasters.

Table 7.25: The number of pegged items on the Labour leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	NN	BBC9	ITN10	Ch 4	ITN5.40	BBC6	Total
1993	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1994	2	1	1	1	0	0	5
1995	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
1996	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	3	2	1	1	0	0	7

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = *Newsnight*.)

In fact the majority of the pegged reports were produced in 1994 after Blair's announcement of the intention to rewrite Clause 4 of the party's constitution, which was given no prior publicity at all. There was only one pegged item for each of the other speeches. In 1995 the only pegged item was produced by the BBC Nine: it examined the background to Blair's pledge to connect schools and hospitals to the internet courtesy of British Telecom.

A wide range of individuals were interviewed by the two bulletins, not just members of the Labour leadership who had been offered for interviews. There was a total of nine interviews between 1993 and 1996 after the leader's speech, all on Channel Four News and *Newsnight*. On Channel Four in 1993 there was one joint interview with Bill Morris and Robin Cook, and in 1994 there was another with Peter Mandelson, Dennis Skinner and John Edmonds. Further interviews in 1995 were with John Prescott and another with Robin Cook in 1996. John Prescott was interviewed every year by *Newsnight*, who also produced one interview with three members of the general public in 1994 to solicit their comments on Tony Blair's speech and whether they would be tempted to vote for him.

7.3 The Conservative Leader's Speech

The Conservative leader's speech was treated particularly seriously and was the lead story on every bulletin throughout the period of study.

Selection

At the 1995 Conservative conference journalists selected a small number of extracts which would be incorporated into a report. Table 7.26 shows the average number of these extracts contained within the reports.

Table 7.26: The mean number of passages used from the Conservative leader's speeches 1993-1996.

	Ch 4	BBC6	BBC9	NN	ITN5.40	ITN10
Mean 1993-96	11	9	9	8	7	7
Stdv	1.3	1.8	2.2	1.3	1.5	1.5

(Stdv = Standard deviation. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 7.26 shows that Channel Four News provided the greatest number of extracts from Major's speeches and that the BBC Six and Nine used more extracts than both ITN bulletins and Newsnight. The mean lengths of these extracts are shown by programme in Table 7.27.

Table 7.27: The mean length of soundbites (in seconds) in reports on the Conservative leader's speeches 1993-1996.

	NN	ITN10	ITN5.40	Ch 4	BBC9	BBC6	Av
Mean 1993-96	25	23	21	19	16	14	20
Stdv	8.5	9.6	9.7	8.6	6.9	6.1	8.5

(Stdv = Standard deviation. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Newsnight provided the longest soundbites, while the BBC Six and Nine contained the briefest ones, some five seconds shorter than their rivals ITN. Interestingly, the soundbites on Channel Four News's reports were shorter than those on the briefer ITN reports. Tables 7.26 and 7.27 together reveal that again the BBC Six and Nine used more extracts from Major's speeches but shorter ones than both ITN bulletins, with Newsnight using fewer

extracts but of greater length than Channel Four News.

Table 7.28 shows which passages from the Conservative leader's speech were selected in reports on the 1995 conference.

Table 7.28: Which passages from the 1995 Conservative leader's speech were used in reports by bulletin.

	Identification number of the passage								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	(More police)	(Europe)	(My dad)	(Education)	(Win Elec)	(Care Cons)	(Serving)	(Tax cuts)	(Devolution)
ITN 5.40	x	x	x	x			x		
BBC 6	x	x	x	x	x				x
Ch 4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
BBC 9	x	x	x	x	x	x			
ITN 10	x	x	x	x			x	x	
Newsnight			x	x		x	x	x	x

(1, More Police = 5000 extra police on the beat. 2, Europe = Party policy on Europe. 3, My dad = The leader's father. 4, Edu'tion = More state assisted places for private schools. 5, Win Elec = A pledge to keep on winning general elections. 6, Care Cons = Caring Conservatism. 7, Serving = Serving the nation. 8, Tax cuts = A pledge to reduce taxes. 9, Devolut'n = An attack on Labour's plans for devolution. BBC 6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC 9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN 5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN 10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

A total of 17 passages were used, nine of which were used by more than one news report. The most important passages were deemed to be those that involved the announcement of new policy, the position of the party on Europe and Major's personal history.

Context

All the reports' introductions summarised the main announcements in the speech and sought to contextualise the speech as the plan or formula on which Major would fight the next election. The BBC Six's introduction suggested that the speech contained Major's 'plan for winning the next election' and also 'highlighted clear policy differences with Tony Blair's party...'. Channel Four's introduction suggested it represented 'John Major's manifesto'. The BBC Nine's introduction contextualised the speech as one in which he had 'spelled out the issues on which he'll fight Tony Blair at the next election'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten introduction contextualised the speech as one in which Major had

'stamped his personality and priorities on the... party today...'. Newsnight's introduction was slightly sceptical in tone. It suggested that Mr Major had promised 'tough choices' on public spending and taxation 'but the week has ended without any clear hint of how he's going to do that'. The introduction suggested the announcements were aimed at persuading voters that the party could still come up with 'election-winning ideas' but posed a question: 'But was there really a big new idea to captivate the electorate?'.

The first passage extracted by all reports except Newsnight concerned the announcement of extra police on the beat; this was contextualised in terms of its popularity with the Tory representatives.

Passage 1.

'We have found the resources over the next three years to put not 500 but an extra 5000 police officers on the beat'.

The BBC Six suggested this was 'another popular announcement'. Channel Four contextualised the passage as part of a wider series of measures: 'He announced new measures to allow the security services to join the fight against drug trafficking, a new national police squad and more policemen'. The BBC Nine contextualised the announcement in terms of a 'rightward drift' and its reception: 'Policy reflected the rightward drift this week of Tory rhetoric. A promise to get the security services involved in fighting crime brought cheers. So did this announcement'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised the passage as a major announcement, more substantial than a promise made by Blair and popular with the audience: 'For those who have been asking all week "Where's the big one?" they now had the answer... Well, that announcement topping Tony Blair's promise of three thousand more constables over five years was for many representatives not just the best thing in the speech but the best announcement of the week'. Newsnight merely described the passage's content: 'then a series of announcements on law and order, five thousand more bobbies on the beat, MI5 to fight organised crime, possibly a national police force'.

The second passage, used by all except Newsnight, was on the Conservative party's position on Europe.

Passage 2.

'If we want to persuade our partners that their policies for Europe are wrong, and I passionately believe that many of their policies for Europe *are* wrong, then we must use our imagination to understand their feelings and their motives. But underneath the rational argument we should not be misunderstood. If others go federalist, Conservative Britain will not'.

The BBC Six contextualised the passage in terms of the representatives' response: 'On Europe some would have preferred a more strident tone, even though he gave a firm "No" to federalism'. Channel Four contextualised the passage as dealing with the 'potentially most difficult issue', and in terms of Michael Portillo the Defence Secretary's speech earlier

in the week: 'In a polite rebuke to Mr Portillo he said Britain must advocate its arguments courteously'. The BBC Nine comments were descriptive, suggesting that the passage was a 'firm warning on Europe that a Tory Britain would have no truck with ending border controls or signing the Social Chapter, we must understand the motivations of our European partners and argue courteously'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised the passage in terms of the positive response of the representatives: 'The message on Europe pleased this audience too'.

The third passage, about Major's father, was used by all the reports, because journalists saw it as an insight into Major 'the man' and his background.

Passage 3.

'He made garden ornaments forty years ago. Some people have always found that rather humorous. I don't. I see the proud, stubborn, independent old man I love, who ran that firm and taught me to love my country, fight for my beliefs and spit in the eye of malign fate. And I know the knockers and the sneerers who may never have taken a risk in their comfortable lives aren't fit to wipe the boots of the risk takers of Britain'.

The BBC Six contextualised the passage in terms of a comparison between Blair and Major: 'Mr Major as a candidate was contrasted with Mr Blair. He the public school educated socialist, Mr Major the son of a small business man'. Channel Four suggested the passage showed Major making 'much of his own inheritance or lack of it... and recalling his own father's struggles as a small businessman making garden gnomes'. The BBC Nine saw the passage as an attempt to revive the 'core Tory vote', using 'his personal experience to demonstrate sympathy with key sectors like small business...'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten emphasised the emotion of the passage, suggesting that there were 'tears almost as he spoke of the struggle his father had in running a small business... Well, both Mrs Major and the Prime Minister, first biting his lip, and then as the applause continued clearly seen dabbing at his eyes, they seemed to have quite a struggle with their emotions at this stage'. Newsnight saw the passage in marketing terms, drawing comparisons with Blair: 'The next step selling Major the man. Unspoken the comparison of John Major, the ordinary bloke, with Tony Blair, the public school socialist. Mr Major reminded his audience his father made garden gnomes'.

The fourth passage used was about education policy and the pledge to extend the assisted places scheme.

Passage 4.

'It helps children from lower income homes to go to our best private schools and it has been a magnificent success. But Labour hate it, hate it. And that's true to form. They always claim to want to help people, but in return they demand that people know their place if they happen to have been helped. In Labour's view there is no place for children of low income families in private schools, no place. So they want to abolish the scheme outright. Labour's message to them is "no choice for the poor"..."'

The BBC Six contextualised this passage in terms of Labour's policy on assisted places: 'On education Mr Major promised to double the number of assisted places at private schools - Labour want to abolish the scheme altogether'. Channel Four similarly drew a comparison with Labour's policy, suggesting it was an attempt to 'undermine Labour's claims to be the party of standards and choice. While Labour last week said that it would scrap the assisted places scheme, he said he would double it'. The BBC Nine personalised the comparison: 'Mr Major announced the doubling of the assisted places scheme for sending children from poor homes to private schools, the scheme Mr Blair last week vowed to scrap...'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised the passage in terms of the popularity of the announcement and the reaction of ministers, suggesting that the popularity of the announcement of more bobbies on the beat was almost matched by 'news about the assisted places scheme.. a delighted Education Secretary signalled to William Waldegrave, the holder of the Treasury purse strings, that he'd have to find the money now'. Newsnight suggested the passage was designed 'to catch Labour out' and contrasted it with Labour policy: 'Singling out Mr Blair's old public school, Mr Major said he would double the number of pupils that the state sends to private schools - Labour would abolish the scheme'.

The fifth passage, used by both BBC reports and Channel Four, involved elements of humour, with Major's pledge to keep on winning elections in the future.

Passage 5.

'We've won four and we're going for five, then six, and then seven. And then we'll think again'.

The BBC Six contextualised the passage as an 'unashamedly traditional' appeal: 'they would wave the flag as they always had, and they would win elections as they always had'. For Channel Four it was part of Major's strategy to 'convince them that he had a strategy for winning the next election'. The BBC Nine contextualised the passage as evidence of his new-found confidence, 'boosted by the leadership election gamble in the summer that has given him a new authority'.

The sixth passage, used by Channel Four, the BBC Nine and Newsnight, was contextualised in terms of the theme of caring Conservatism.

Passage 6.

'If there's one thing in our Tory tradition that inspires me, that helped bring me into this party, I'll tell you what it was. It was our historic recognition that not everyone is thrusting and confident and fit. Many are not and they deserve our protection. With a Conservative government they can always be certain of getting that protection now and in the future'.

Channel Four contextualised the passage in terms of a criticism made by a defecting MP the same week: 'He didn't mention the defection this week of a Tory MP to Labour, but the sub-text of his speech was a rejection of Alan Howarth's claim that he had abandoned

traditional caring Conservatism'. The BBC Nine contextualised the passage in terms of ideological positioning: 'But Mr Major insists that his position is still on the One Nation centre ground of politics'. Newsnight saw the passage somewhat sceptically in terms of a curious vision: 'If Mr Major did express a vision it was a curious amalgam, of Britain as the low tax Hong Kong of Europe, combined with caring, comforting One Nation Conservatism'.

The seventh passage, used by all except the BBC 1 reports, was the final section of the speech.

Passage 7.

'We carry the scars of battle, that is true. But they are honourable scars. We know that no other party can win the battles for Britain that lie ahead. Our nation's future is at stake and we Conservatives have served our country in office for longer and better than any other democratic political party in the world. We Conservatives are here, and in the future we Conservatives stand ready to serve on behalf of the nation we love'.

Channel Four contextualised it as an attack on Labour: 'Mr Major predicted that Labour would make a lightweight alternative'. The ITN 5.40 and News at Ten contextualised it through a comparison with the emotion of Major's personal memories: 'at the end of the speech it was all quite different as Mr Major talked of the Tory record'. For Newsnight it was part of the marketing for the next election: 'all part of a package the Tories hope will woo voters'.

The eighth passage, used by Channel Four, News at Ten and Newsnight, concerned the pledge to reduce taxes at an unspecified future date.

Passage 8.

'In recession we had to put up taxes to protect the vulnerable. Now the recession is over and, as Ken Clarke said, as soon as is prudent, but not before, we must get those taxes down again. But be in no doubt, I don't only mean income tax. I mean taxes that damage investment and stultify wealth creation. I mean inheritance tax and I mean capital gains tax as well'.

This was contextualised by Channel Four in terms of the 'enterprise centre of Europe', based on lower public spending 'and, to the pleasure of representatives, lower taxation'. News at Ten contextualised it in these terms: 'with the Chancellor listening, Mr Major said taxes must come down'. Newsnight noted only: 'he said taxes would be cut and not just income tax'.

The ninth passage, used by BBC Six and Newsnight, was an attack on Labour's plans for devolution.

Passage 9.

'These are not distant problems to be tossed aside while we worry about day-to-day matters of politics. These are Labour's plans for the first year of the Labour government if they won the election. So take the message of danger to every doorstep in every part of our once united Kingdom'.

The BBC Six contextualised the passage in terms of Major's strong feelings for the Union: 'It was over the constitution that Mr Major reserved his strongest fire power... Labour were threatening the United Kingdom itself'. Newsnight contextualised it as an attack: 'On the constitution he admitted there was a clamour for change in Scotland but denounced Labour's plans'.

Table 7.29: Which further passages from the 1995 Conservative leader's speech were used in reports by bulletin.

	Indentification number of the passage							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	(Vic Cross)	(Crit Lab)	(Pas- sion)	(Drug use)	(Nat Squad)	(Rec- ord)	(Spnd cuts)	(Wel- fare)
BBC 6	x							
Ch 4		x						
BBC 9			x					
ITN 10				x	x			
Newsnight					x	x	x	

(1, Vic Cross = Increased annual payments to Victoria Cross holders. 2, Crit Lab = A critique of Labour policy. 3, Passion = Passion for politics. 4, Drug use = An attack on drug dealers. 5, Nat Squad = Formation of the National Crime Squad. 6, Record = The party's economic record. 7, Spnd cuts = Government spending cuts. 9, Welfare = The importance of welfare. BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN10 = News at Ten; Ch 4 = Channel Four News.)

There were eight further passages used by the different reports, mostly Newsnight. The BBC Six indexed the policy announcement of an increase in the annual payment to holders of the Victoria and George Cross, contextualising it in terms of patriotism and the audience reception: 'Patriotism of various forms was highlighted, with the warmest applause going to the increase in annual payment for holders of the Victoria Cross'. Channel Four highlighted Major's attack on Labour policy for 'double think', contextualised in terms of Labour hypocrisy. The BBC Nine used another passage to illustrate Major's passion. News at Ten indexed Major's attack on drug dealers and his announcement of the formation of a national crime squad, contextualising the passage as heartfelt, giving a greater insight into Major 'the man'. Newsnight used passages on the Conservatives' economic record, Major's vision of lower government spending and his belief in the importance of welfare. These were contextualised in terms of the forthcoming election campaign.

Performance

In all the reports on the Conservative leader's speech over four years, there were 14 comments on the performance of the leader (see Table 7.30).

Table 7.30: The number of references in all reports to the performance of the Conservative leader in making his speech by bulletin and year 1993-1996.

	BBC9	BBC6	NN	Ch 4	ITN10	ITN5.40	Total
1993	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
1994	1	0	1	1	0	1	4
1995	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
1996	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Total	4	3	3	2	1	1	14

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

These remarks were mainly concentrated on the BBC, with the Nine o'clock news commenting on Major's performance after each of the four speeches. In 1995 four out of six programmes commented on Major's performance. The BBC Six report said: 'Mr Major was becoming an old hand at making conference speeches, and this was his best so far'. It also suggested that his performance had been strengthened by his leadership victory in the summer. News at Ten focused on certain performance-enhancing factors in Major's speech, noting that 'the Prime Minister had been practising quite hard at varying the tone and pace and the content of this year's speech'. It further emphasised the 'emotional staging' of the speech: 'Mr Major decided to step out into the centre of the hall to deliver his speech. He wanted to take the audience with him, and those outside the hall too, as he made what came across as a more heart-felt speech, giving us a greater insight into the way his mind works...'. Newsnight indirectly questioned the inner elite's line that this was his best speech ever: 'The spin doctors' big line that this was Mr Major's best ever speech was swallowed by many. There was something here for every vaguely Conservative taste'.

Reception

Reports frequently referred to the reception the speech was given by the conference audience. Table 7.31 (next page) shows that there were some 37 references to the representatives' reception of the leader's speech. While the 'clapometer' was used during the week by the broadcasters, it was never used to register the reception given to the

leader's speech.

Table 7.31: The number of references in all reports to the reception of the Conservative leader's speeches by bulletin and year 1993-1996.

	Ch 4	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	NN	Total
1993	2	1	0	1	2	1	7
1994	2	1	2	1	0	1	7
1995	4	3	3	3	1	0	14
1996	1	3	3	1	0	1	9
Total	9	8	8	6	3	3	37

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

ITN mentioned the reception of the leader's speech more often than the BBC reports, and there was a divergence between the two longer programmes, Channel Four News mentioning reception most and Newsnight least. In addition to comments on audience reception for certain passages of the speech already noted, three broadcasters referenced the overall reception of the 1995 speech. Channel Four's report focused on the audience response at the beginning: 'Mr Major's arrival on stage was delayed until he'd heard whether he'd won the Nobel peace prize. He hadn't, but that didn't take the enthusiasm out of his reception from the representatives, who wanted to demonstrate to the watching world that the divisions of the leadership struggle were over'. It also noted the conference's final response: 'The representatives waved their flags in defiance of Tony Blair's claim last week that their treatment of the nation denies them the right to do so'. The BBC Nine suggested 'the audience loved his sharper new style'. Similarly, News at Ten said that the audience 'loved the speech', but added: 'they always, do of course'.

Reactions

Many reports also indexed favourable reactions of various actors to the speeches (see Table 7.32).

Table 7.32: The number of indexed reactions in all reports to the Conservative leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
1993	11	0	3
1994	10	0	0
1995	5	0	2
1996	2	0	0
Total	28	0	5

There were no negative reactions indexed. This pattern was especially marked in 1993 and 1994, but in 1995 only Channel Four and Newsnight included any reactions to the speech. Channel Four carried three positive reactions from representatives. Newsnight's report sought positive reactions from two representatives, and neutral reactions from Andrew Lansley, former head of the Conservative Central Office research department, and Trevor Kavanagh, political editor of the *Sun*. In addition the BBC Six referred to the critical reactions of John Prescott, Paddy Ashdown and Alex Salmond, and the BBC Nine, to the reactions of Prescott and Ashdown. News at Ten referenced John Prescott's attack and Channel Four a general Labour critique.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, the concluding remarks focused on several themes. The speech was seen largely in terms of repositioning the Conservatives in policy terms and raising the morale of the representatives in the face of the looming general election. The BBC Six's concluding remarks focused on the speech's target audience: 'Mr Major's whole speech was directed at the election campaign to come. And unlike many of the speeches this week, it was aimed at the electorate outside the hall as well as the party faithful'. Its aim was contextualised as an attempt to reposition the Conservatives: 'The Prime Minister with his brand of 'one nation' Toryism wants to reclaim the centre ground from Mr Blair'. It was also seen as an attempt to move the political 'goal posts', 'so that if Mr Blair is tempted onto the Tories' new territory he would have to move further to the right'. Channel Four's report similarly contextualised the speech as a formula for 'reclaiming the centre ground from Mr Blair', but also alluded to the attempt to open up a difference with Labour on certain policy areas: 'Education is obviously one area in which the Tories believe they can open up "clear blue water" with Labour', and 'the Conservatives intend opening up divisions with Labour over law and order'. Finally the report hinted at the enormity of the task: 'The Tory party want to rally behind John Major. The road to victory will be very long indeed'. The BBC Nine's concluding remarks suggested that 'Mr Major is now fully in charge' and that Major had 'focused forward to the millennium, not back to the past'. It saw the speech as giving the representatives 'back some self belief, and the hope that (with two budgets to come) they can yet get back into election-winning form'. As with the previous year, the BBC's political editor Oakley generally summed up all three conferences as 'successes'.

The ITN main channel programmes' concluding remarks emphasised the upbeat ending of the conference week: 'This year the representatives here, and the party at large, had wanted something to bite on. And with the law and order package, a week which had started slowly, tensely, ended with satisfaction and a bit of fun'. News at Ten went further,

suggesting that the representatives 'agreed with the Prime Minister, that the party had been united, renewed and healed'. Newsnight's concluding remarks contextualised the speech in terms of the forthcoming election. They insinuated that Major had only just started to respond effectively to Labour: 'The conference season at an end, the Tories seem to be getting rid of the debris of three years of infighting. They are only just starting to respond more effectively to Labour'. But it further derisively suggested that 'they've lost the trust of the nation, and it may be difficult persuading the voters to return to the fold'.

Over a period of four leader's speeches there was a total of ten two-ways (see Table 7.33).

Table 7.33: The number of two-ways on the Conservative leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	BBC6	ITN5.40	Ch 4	BBC9	ITN10	NN	Total
1993	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
1994	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
1995	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1996	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	4	3	1	1	1	0	10

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Two-ways were the main way of extending coverage of the Tory leader's speech on the early evening bulletins; later bulletins featured only one two-way each, and Newsnight none at all. A two-way after the 1995 speech on the BBC Six involved the political editor Robin Oakley in both explaining and speculating. The first question from the anchor asked whether or not the 'choice facing the electorate [had] become any clearer as a result of the speeches?' Oakley said he thought it had, and outlined briefly the main themes of Major's and Blair's speeches. He suggested that differences between them were 'sharpening up', before listing a series of issues on which policy differed. He concluded that there was a 'real raft of differences' between the two parties. The second question was in two parts, first inquiring whether 'we are in for an eighteen-month campaign?' and second whether there was 'any politician who expected the opinion poll gap to stay thirty points?'. Oakley speculated that 'we are in for an eighteen-month campaign' and that it would be rough. To the second part of the question he speculated that 'all parties expect the gap between Labour and the Tories to close'. Blair was not being complacent and the Conservatives could use the two budgets before the election to make themselves more popular.

Spinning

There was a deliberate attempt to trail extracts from the leader's speech in 1995. A Conservative source recalled:

'Thursday night I went round and I talked to all the broadcasters who would be putting out programmes in the morning and gave them the story of assisted places being doubled'¹⁶.

Table 7.34: The number of news items containing trailed information on the Conservative leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	ITN10	BBC9	NN	ITN5.40	BBC6	Ch 4	Total
1993	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
1994	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
1995	1	1	2	0	0	0	4
1996	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	5	3	2	0	0	0	10

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Looking at the evening and night-time bulletins, Table 7.34 shows that the trailing of information from Major's speeches was fairly consistent, but focused on the late bulletins on ITN and BBC. In 1995 extracts from Major's speech were trailed on the BBC Nine, News at Ten and Newsnight. The BBC Nine noted that 'the Prime minister is expected to make law and order one of the main themes of his leader's speech to the party conference tomorrow'. News at Ten said 'Tomorrow Mr Major will... draw together the theme for the week. He'll say once again that taxes must come down. And he'll set out what he sees as the choice for Britain as it enters the twenty-first century - in hock with Europe with the other parties; leading Europe (he will claim) with the Conservatives'. Trailed information was also used on Newsnight in a report which noted that 'politicians have recognised the fear of crime as an important area to deal with. Mr Major will promise to hit harder and harder in his speech tomorrow'. In a two-way the correspondent said: 'What we are told is that he'll concentrate on crime. They very much say the same sort of things as Michael Howard. And on the economy he'll say that Britain has to be ready to fight those Asian tiger nations, and he will talk about a low-tax, low-spend economy'. In the event these were indeed key parts of Major's speech.

There were 14 pegged items on the policy announcements raised in the leader's speeches over the four years.

Table 7.35: The number of pegged items on the Conservative leader's speeches by year 1993-1996.

	NN	Ch 4	BBC9	BBC6	ITN10	ITN5.40	Total
1993	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
1994	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
1995	1	2	1	1	0	0	5
1996	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
Total	5	3	3	2	1	0	14

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

The largest number of pegged reports were produced by Newsnight, and the BBC produced a greater number of pegged reports than ITN. There were five pegged reports on the contents of the 1995 speech. All sought to expand further upon two announcements made in the speech. Both BBC bulletins, Channel Four and Newsnight produced an additional report on the speech's main policy announcement, the formation of a national crime squad; and Channel Four News produced a further report on the planned expansion of the assisted places scheme.

There were nine interviews around Major's speeches, all on Channel Four News and Newsnight. Channel Four News in 1993 interviewed Douglas Hurd (Foreign Secretary) and Peter Lilley (Social Security Secretary). They interviewed Lilley again in 1994 and Steven Dorrell (Heritage Secretary). In 1995 they produced a joint interview with Charles Moore (editor of the *Daily Telegraph*) and Geoff Mulgan of the think tank Demos, and in 1996 interviewed Major himself. Newsnight in 1993 interviewed David Hunt (Employment Secretary), and Michael Heseltine (Deputy Prime Minister) in 1995 and 1996.

Conclusion

The news bulletins did far more than merely reflect the content of the leaders' speeches. Journalists were involved in a process of prioritising, selecting and contextualising the information they received, and there were some clear editorial differences between the bulletins, despite the overall sacerdotal approach. There was a particularly obvious divergence between the longer, more 'serious' Channel Four News and Newsnight, and the other bulletins. These 'serious' bulletins devoted the least attention to the leaders' speeches as a proportion of overall conference coverage. Over the three conferences they also consistently sought to expand upon the issues raised in the leaders' speeches through pegged items and interviews.

There was less divergence in attitude between the ITN bulletins and the BBC's. ITN focused more on the leaders' speeches as a proportion of overall conference coverage than the BBC did. All the bulletins gave Ashdown's 1995 speech substantially less prominence than those of the other two leaders, but there was a momentary divergence between the main BBC bulletins and ITN's in the prominence given to the Labour leader's 1995 speech. Overall, ITN carried the greatest number of trails, particularly News at Ten. In the main, the use of trailed information was concentrated in the late evening bulletins whose staff were keen to update and differentiate the information contained within their reports. The BBC sought to expand upon issues raised in the leaders' speeches more than ITN, who produced substantially fewer pegged items.

The BBC Six and Nine consistently provided more extracts from each of the leaders' speeches than both ITN bulletins but crucially of a shorter length. There seemed to be a trade-off in reporting the leaders' speeches within the limited time slot available on these bulletins - namely, more breadth at the expense of length. Such a trade-off did not affect Channel Four News or Newsnight, whose longer bulletins could contain a greater number of longer extracts from the leaders' speeches. The parties therefore had more opportunity to get their message across using the longer (but less watched) bulletins.

In terms of the passages of the leaders' speeches selected by the bulletins, there was a high degree of overlap between all the bulletins. In 1995 the same seven passages were used from Ashdown's speech, the same nine from Blair's, and the same ten from Major's. The main passages selected, while appearing at different lengths, were on policy announcements for the Labour and Conservative leaders' speeches, and about party positioning for the Liberal Democrat leader, followed in the case of the Conservatives and Labour by party positioning on certain policy areas indicated by an attack on the other parties.

The value-added in the construction of news on the leaders' speeches came in the contextualising remarks. This was mainly descriptive, although there were some stark differences. Newsnight provided a more sceptical contextualisation of the passages than the other reports. There was an attempt to contextualise the speech in terms of the audience response, revealing its popularity or not amongst the audience in the hall, a technique slightly more prevalent on ITN's reports than the BBC's. Over the four-year period ITN reports made 33 references to audience reception compared to twenty by both BBC reports. The performance of the leader in delivering his speech was also noted. In contrast, over the four-year period BBC 1 referenced leaders' performance factors 16 times, compared to ITN's nine times. There was a tendency for both Newsnight and Channel Four News to ignore both factors when compiling reports. In certain situations there was

an attempt to contextualise the leader's speech historically. This was done in the case of the Labour leader's speech, although not the others, through drawing a comparison with speeches made by a previous party leader.

Despite the occasional divergence of interest, the leaders' speeches underlined the shared interests of the parties' inner elites and the news broadcasters. For the broadcasters, the leaders' speeches represented easily reportable, newsworthy information about an event whose significance was already manifest and did not have to be explained to the audience. The party elites derived a series of benefits from the news coverage of speeches. Speeches, particularly those made by easily recognisable party leaders, gained more attention and benefited from the news broadcasters' sacerdotal orientation; they were more or less guaranteed prominent coverage. Although the prominence varied between parties, for the Labour and Conservative elites it was significant. The leaders' speeches also represented a controllable information channel, one which other actors (such as peripheral elites and external power brokers within the party) could not affect. There were fewer oppositional sources of information for the broadcasters to access, who could effectively contest the official perspective.

In the light of the fact that the leaders' speeches and other speeches were of mutual benefit to both the inner core elite and the broadcasters, it is not surprising that there was a greater emphasis in reports on speeches rather than debates and particularly speeches made by members of the leadership. These speeches may have been part of a debate but to a large extent were abstracted by the reports into stand-alone events. The following picture emerges (see Table 7.36, next page).

Table 7.36: The number of news items covering speeches and debates at party conferences by year 1993-1996.

Liberal Democrats

	Speech	Debate	Mix	Other
1993	12	10	4	0
1994	10	6	8	11
1995	9	5	6	3
1996	24	0	1	7
Total	55	21	19	21

Labour

	Speech	Debate	Mix	Other
1993	9	13	13	63
1994	17	9	6	52
1995	14	9	3	25
1996	18	6	6	31
Total	58	37	47	171

Conservatives

	Speech	Debate	Mix	Other
1993	34	2	0	62
1994	26	0	0	59
1995	33	0	0	49
1996	27	0	0	33
Total	120	2	0	203

Table 7.36¹⁷ shows that at the Liberal Democrat and Labour conferences there was a marked decline in the number of reports on debates, and a corresponding increase (although not year-on-year) in the number of reports on speeches alone. At the Liberal Democrat and Labour conferences there has also been a decline in the number of mixed reports. The Liberal Democrats and Labour over the four years seem to have put more emphasis on announcements in speeches to deliver policy, not through debates. For both parties these significant speeches then become stand-alone items and the focus of the reports. The Conservative conference has never really been a reciprocal device for policy-making debates and has always been geared around speeches (Kelly, 1989). To a large extent this growing similarity in the orientation of reports towards key speeches has been spurred on by the parties, with the news broadcasters' acquiescence. By planning and design, conferences themselves have become more speech-oriented, and the coverage reflected this change.

1. This has not always been the case. Kelly (1994) notes of the Conservative conference: 'Prior to 1965 the leader's speech was scheduled to take place after the conference's formal cessation, as if to demonstrate that the leadership was not directly affected by its events'. p 228.
2. From observational research, only the Liberal Democrats had a press conference after the leader's speech. For further discussion of the use of press conferences see Chapter 5.
3. Interview with Hugh Pym.
4. *Ibid.*
5. In 1995 the reports of both ITN bulletins on the leaders' speeches were produced by their political editor Michael Brunson. In many respects the reports he produced for both bulletins were identical. In 1993, 1994 and 1996 Brunson produced the main reports on the Labour and Conservative leaders' speeches. The BBC Six's reports were produced throughout the period by chief political correspondent John Sergeant, the BBC Nine's by political editor Robin Oakley, Channel Four's by political editor Elinor Goodman and Newsnight's by a mixture of political correspondent Mark Mardell and the anchors Paxman, Wark and Snow.
6. Scammell and Semetko (1998) suggest that contextualising comments 'refer to the way reporters' remarks surround or set the scene for party activities and statements'. Such comments could be 'non-directional (straight/ descriptive), reinforcing or deflating of the activities and statements of politicians'. p 14. For the purposes of the leaders' speeches it was important to see the wider application of the notion of contextualising commentary. Non-directional comments were value-laden with references to the audience and the symbolic or visionary nature of the speech, amongst other things. Their content and not simply their direction was of importance, particularly in gaining an understanding of the journalists' contribution to framing.
7. The length of each passage varied between reports. For the sake of analysis the fullest possible version of the passage is quoted.
8. The 'Liberal Democrat Guarantee' document, which was launched at this conference, was in addition only mentioned in reports on the BBC Six and Newsnight.
9. Only those remarks directly referring to the leader's speech were coded as reactive comments on the content analysis sheet. A positive reaction was defined as one which praised the leader and endorsed his reforms or policy announcements. A negative reaction was defined as one which was hostile toward and critical of the leader's speech. A neutral reaction was neither endorsing or critical of the speech but mainly descriptive.
10. Webster, October 4 1995, p 1.
11. Johnston, October 5 1995, p 2.
12. *Ibid.* p 2.

13. Webster, October 4 1995, p 1.

14. Culf, October 5 1995, p 1.

15. Ibid, p 1.

16. Interview with Tim Collins.

17. The focus of all news items were sorted into exclusive categories (see appendix 2, V12). This table used the categories in the following way: 1) Reports focusing exclusively on a speech, 2) ones focusing on a debate, 3) ones focusing on a mix of debates and speeches, and on a mix of fringe, debates and speeches and 4) News items focusing on the fringe, outside events, media initiated items and others.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

Conference news was the product of a 'composite source... [which was] inextricably intertwined'¹. The framework developed in this thesis adopted a combined source-media-centric position, or what McNair (1994) calls a 'culturalist perspective'. It placed at its heart the activity, relationships and interaction that occurred at conferences, as the key to understanding the production of conference news. My approach placed these factors within a time-linear news production cycle (Gans, 1979; Golding and Elliott, 1979) and took account of the heterogeneous nature of both organisations. Conference news production was characterised by different activities and relationships at each stage of this production cycle. Both the parties and the broadcasters planned, the parties disseminated information and the broadcasters gathered, selected and presented this information. Planning by the broadcasters and parties was a fundamental prerequisite for dissemination and gathering; the essential logistical and aesthetic elements of conference coverage had all to be in place prior to conference starting; indeed, these elements made the next stages possible.

Each stage involved interaction between different groups of actors within organisations, although activity was co-ordinated from the centre. Interaction was structured by the news production cycle. Those actors who interacted during planning were largely not the same as those who interacted during the conference week. During conferences there was a large amount of personal interaction between the party actors and broadcast journalists. These actors were dependent on each other throughout the cycle, from pre-conference planning, through strategy-setting for the week, and then hour-by-hour interactions once the conference started. In the planning stages both the broadcasters and the parties adapted to new structural demands on television camera positions or changes in the timetables. And during the conference week, parties (especially the leaderships) adapted to the presence of the broadcasters in a strategic fashion, developing and implementing strategies of promotion and control. The broadcasters in turn learnt to fit into the controlled environment this created at conference.

From the planning stages onwards the parties and the broadcasters had particular interests or goals. Some of these goals were shared by the different parts of both organisations at each stage of the production cycle. On a general level both the news broadcasters and the parties had a shared interest in attracting high audience viewing

figures. The parties wanted their conferences to be seen as a success, while the broadcasters wanted them to be seen as newsworthy. Where their goals converged they co-operated - as in the logistical planning stages, both organisational bureaucracies wanted the event to run smoothly and look professionally produced to the viewing audience. But interests also diverged. The parties' leaderships planned their conferences to be a platform to showcase the party, its policies and certain key actors, particularly the leader. Short of conflicts or disasters (such as afflicted Labour conferences in the early 1980s), the broadcasters went along with such aims. However, as shown, their interests also diverged and on some issues quite significantly. The broadcasters possessed a certain amount of autonomy (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Gans, 1979; Semetko et al, 1991), manifest in the focus on and framing of events within the conference timetable. The news values with which the broadcasters operated still led to them focusing and giving prominence to overt conflictual events in the form of debates or fringe meetings. There was also a desire, particularly amongst Newsnight and Channel Four news journalists, to analyse events, to 'go beyond' (Semetko et al, 1991) the agenda initiated by the parties. The publicity this brought for the parties was on occasion seen as less than desirable by party elites. However, because they were mutually dependent, these divergences did not lead to sustained conflict, which might in itself have generated adverse publicity. In this sense both sides realised that they could not have everything they wanted. A compromise was usually made by both in order to allow the attainment of their goals.

While based on dependency, adaptation and co-operation (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), relationships between the parties and the broadcasters were also structured by the production cycle. Planners had relationships with each other. During conference week interaction occurred between party actors and political journalists who had existing relationships. At the kernel of these relations were those between senior journalists and the parties' leaderships. The dyadic nature of conferences, the fact that each conference involved one-on-one interaction as distinct from any other time in the political calendar, amplified existing dependence and the need to co-operate and adapt. However, any disagreement that arose was temporary and quickly dissipated.

This chapter opens out the discussion from this broad pattern to examine, first, some implications from these findings for broader theories of media/political system relations; second, the 'game'-like qualities of party-broadcaster interactions; and third, the overall trends in conference coverage charted here, and their implications for the possible development of party conferences in future.

8.1: Some Theoretical Implications

Underlying this examination of the production of political news has been a wider, well-documented difference of emphasis between major theoretical perspectives on the construction of news, itself rooted in an older macro-debate within the field of communication, between pluralist and neo-Marxist perspectives (Curran et al, 1982; McQuail, 1987). A key aspect of this founding debate was the two-part question: Is what the audience sees on TV simply a reproduction of the information and definitions provided by powerful news sources? Or is it an independently reconstructed meaning, based on media professionals' values and attitudes? This question raised in a specific form a central debate, namely the extent of the news media's subordination to or autonomy from the state and other powerful societal institutions.

Pluralist and neo-Marxist or radical analysis answered the question in very different ways (Curran et al, 1982). Pluralists (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1977) emphasised the autonomy of the news broadcasters, arguing that they had a 'semi independent power base'² such as their ability to deliver and inform audiences. The neo-Marxists (Hall et al, 1978; Schlesinger et al, 1983) emphasised the dominance of 'accredited' sources and the subordination of the news media. The news media 'reproduce the view points of the dominant institutions not as one among a number of alternative perspectives, but as the central and obvious perspective'³. Exponents of both views criticised the other side's position, of course, although the evidence they drew on was largely similar in nature (McQuail, 1987; Schlesinger, 1990). These two extreme poles on a subordination /autonomy continuum both have obvious shortcomings in analysing the construction of news. What the audience sees in a news bulletin is not merely a reflection of what news sources desire, but nor is it a product controlled independently by journalists.

A more effective understanding of news production requires a restitution of emphasis along this continuum. McQuail (1987) argued that both positions are 'ideal typical in the sense of accentuating and exaggerating certain features of media and it would obviously be possible to offer intermediate models in which the features of both could be found together, as they almost certainly are in reality'⁴. Such a restitution is now complete. Curran (1990) notes that there has been a shift by neo-Marxist researchers towards recognising the validity of the pluralist arguments, leading to the emergence of an intermediate position adopting what Curran describes as a 'new revisionist perspective' between pluralism and neo-Marxism, one which has considerably influenced research into news production. Curran (1990) also notes, although he does not detail, a re-emphasis amongst pluralist researchers tending to confront more empirically questions of dominance.

This new position clearly occupies what could be termed neo-pluralist terrain (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987), with pluralists responding to a neo-Marxist critical onslaught and revisionist neo-Marxists (Schlesinger, 1990) critically reacting to the findings of their own and pluralist empirical research. There is now a loose consensus on this middle ground on five main propositions.

First, the semi-autonomous nature of the news media is widely recognised (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Curran, 1990b; Franklin, 1994; Schlesinger, 1990; Semetko et al, 1991). Revisionist neo-Marxists acknowledge that the news media have greater autonomy than they were at first given credit for. And neo-pluralists concede that the news media's autonomy is constrained by news sources, by the political and regulatory environments in which they operate, and by financial and organisational factors. There is even a recognition that news media are sometimes subordinate in a detailed or specific events way, reproducing the definitions of key events propagated by powerful news sources.

Second, the study of news production is now solidly based on an understanding that relationships between news sources (in this case the political parties) and the news media are inherently and permanently complex. Both revised positions see definitional power not as the exclusive resource of either the news media or news sources. Once access has been achieved, the construction of news is a joint enterprise, both sources and journalists are co-producers, and, as with all relationships, who interacts and what meaning it has are grounds for contestation.

Third, revisionists seek to answer the question: Which sources regularly gain access and enjoy established relationships with the news media? Traditional pluralists emphasised that access to the news media is open to different groups within society, while the older neo-Marxist views argued that access is restricted primarily to powerful interests. Revisionists recognise that competition for access is imperfect (Schlesinger, 1990). Certain sources have guaranteed news media access and enjoy a privileged position, while others do not. The revisionist theory of dominance argues that access is determined by a news source's 'capital' or resources, and they are more concerned with questions of inclusion and exclusion of non-official news sources. However, while neo-pluralists also recognise that competition for access is unequal, they are less concerned with access inequalities than with the mechanisms by which agendas are formed. Their characteristic questions are posed in terms of agenda-setting best articulated by Semetko et al (1991): If the media set the audience agenda, who sets the media's agenda? Neo-pluralists' research tends to be focused on explaining how existing 'accredited' sources and the media compete to set news agendas, particularly at elections (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Nossiter et al 1995; Semetko et al 1991; Semetko and Scammell, 1998). For the revisionists, the site of

struggle is not exclusively between the news media and news sources, but rather it is a struggle between news sources themselves and sets of relationships located in a wider framework than elections.

Fourth, research undertaken by both perspectives increasingly focuses on the strategies used by news sources and their importance for gaining access to and setting the news media agenda. Neo-pluralists have emphasised the rise of a modern publicity process (Blumler, 1990) and the professionalisation of campaigning by political parties (Franklin, 1994; Scammell, 1995). Scammell in particular focuses on the rise of 'disciplined' communications by the state and political parties, and Franklin on the use of media strategies. Although less party political in orientation, revisionist research has focused on the use of public relations strategies in source competition. Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) talk of a 'promotional dynamic' influencing all news sources. Both focus on the crucial importance of news management strategies in gaining and maintaining access to the news media in a competitive news environment.

Fifth, while recognising a growing professionalisation amongst news sources, neo-pluralist authors continue to emphasise the importance of journalistic attitudes in the news production process (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Semetko et al, 1991). Journalists are not passive relayers of information but active packagers. Tension may arise between the news media attitudes and the promotional aspirations of particular sources, seen in the rise of disdaining commentary in the news reports (Semetko et al, 1991). While early neo-Marxist studies of news production focused on the passivity of journalists in news gathering (Golding and Elliott, 1979), there is a growing recognition by some revisionists (Deacon, 1996)⁵ of the importance of news media and journalistic attitudes in the construction of news.

This research confirms both the limits of the older approaches, and the value of the revisionist call to 'update [the] intellectual tool kit'⁶ of the 'extra-organisational' (Curran et al, 1982) approach in political communications. It has shown that conference news production is inherently complex. No extra-organisational approach that is 'based on a single dominant causal factor will be able to get an adequate explanatory grip on... [the news production process]'⁷. The findings here show the value of re-applying the concept of a news production cycle to take account not only of the activity of the news broadcasters (Gans, 1979; Golding and Elliott, 1979) but also of the 'production cycle' of the political parties. The sequence of logistical planning, message dissemination, news gathering and news-presentation provides a structured way of analysing the activities of both source organisations and media organisations.

Most media research from revisionist perspectives has focused on inter-source competition. However, these 'accredited' sources, particularly those with routine news media access, are not homogeneous entities. Political parties are heterogeneous organisations dominated by party elites with strong resource advantages (McKenzie, 1964; Panebianco, 1988). The revisionist concept of imperfect competition (Schlesinger, 1990) can be productively applied within an intra-party environment. Imperfect intra-party competition pits resource-rich party elites against other sections of the parties (such as dissident elites, factions or party stake-holder groups), giving party inner elites a competitive advantage in terms of setting the conference news agenda. Primary definition becomes the goal of the political elite, although this is not something they always automatically achieve. Sometimes it may be sufficient for them to create news. At other times they have to engage actively in a struggle to set the news agenda. The unequal access of non-elites to the news broadcasters clearly needs further consideration, together with questions about how elites come to dominate conference news and party agendas - an important question left unanswered in the literature.

Also in need of more examination are the strategies of promotion and control and their implementation, well documented by various researchers (Deacon, 1996; Franklin, 1994; McNair, 1995; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). Parties' inner elites routinely use these strategies not only to set the news broadcasters' agenda throughout conferences but as part of the competitive process to ensure that their perspective becomes the dominant interpretation of events at the conferences. The development of such strategies can be seen as part of the wider dominance of a media-centred logic which has reduced the distinctiveness of all the parties, while yet evoking a set of systematic countervailing responses developed by political parties to minimise the risk of bad publicity (Scammell, 1995) and reduce the unpredictability of conference proceedings. Information subsidies, photo opportunities, proactive and reactive strategies are all aimed at regulating the flow of information to the news broadcasters and controlling the activity of the party. However, risk can never be eradicated (Thompson, 1995), so the importance of promotion and control strategies has to be understood within the context of a risk environment. Although Molotch and Lester (1974) argue that routine events are more predictable than scandals, this research has shown that there remains a significant element of unpredictability in the party conferences, which cannot be removed despite the strongest efforts of party spin doctors and media professionals, and despite agendas and timetables being manipulated. Party leaderships could not completely account for unplanned events and in many ways their continual quest for greater control inadvertently made those events outside its control all the more newsworthy. As one journalist put it: 'Politicians are risking less and less on the floor of conference in both camps If you risk less then you lay yourself open to the media hunting for more. And if they can't get it on the floor of the conference, they will get it in

Cherie Blair's wardrobe⁸.

As a further indication of the complexities here, consider the possible objection to these propositions. Some of the parties' leaderships were in some circumstances able to turn an apparently risky debate to their advantage. Within any party there have to be those sections that disagreed with the current policy line⁹, and the leadership needed to confine negative reactions to such sections. While unexpected negative reactions to the leaderships may have had dysfunctional consequences, long-expected negative reactions that are calculable in advance may be functional for the leaderships' aims. Strong opposing reactions in these specific circumstances could provide an opposition party leader (otherwise denied any opportunity to demonstrate 'firm leadership' and strength of character) with the opportunity to demonstrate his or her leadership abilities. Blair's attack on Clause Four was an important opportunity for the Labour leader to demonstrate not only to his party but also to the news broadcasters a capacity for 'strong leadership' - a high-risk but none the less controllable and valuable strategy. So we cannot necessarily dismiss 'source dominance' in these cases simply because of the existence of some observable conflicts on the conference floor or the ritualised presence of opponents in TV reports.

The theme of complexity affects neo-pluralist insights into news media attitudes, such as Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995) typology of sacerdotal and pragmatic orientations, which proved useful in explaining the variability of broadcasters' attitudes to different elements of the conference experience, depending on the actors involved and its location - summarised in Figure 8.1. Certain events like the leaders' speeches received particularly prominent coverage

Figure 8.1: Broadcasters' orientation towards events at conference and levels of coverage.

	Sacerdotal orientation			Pragmatic orientation	
Event	Leaders' speeches	Other speeches	No conflict debate	Low conflict debate	Overt conflict debate, and fringe meetings
Coverage	High	Low	No	Low	High

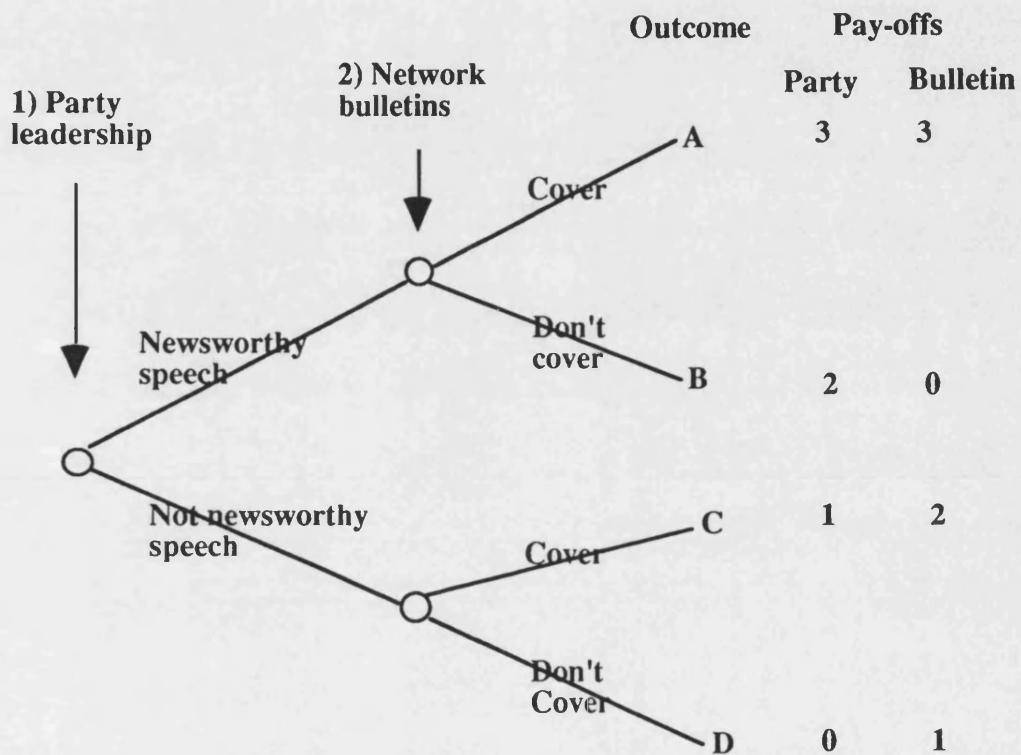
despite their newsworthiness, whereas the coverage of other events such as debates was determined *by* their newsworthiness. Such attitudes also guided journalists' use of exchanged information and the exhibition of their relative autonomy or discretionary power to make 'value-added' to reports.

8.2: News Games

One way to take further the discussion of ‘the interaction between media professionals and their sources...’¹⁰ is to think of it in terms of a news game. Basic game theory seems to be a potentially useful analytic tool for examining the simpler dyadic interactions of journalists with a single party at conferences¹¹. As Blumler and Gurevitch insightfully note, ‘the communicators can be viewed as playing a game...’¹², although they themselves do not further elaborate upon this suggestion. The news games studied here involved the dissemination of information by party actors verbally and in written form and the gathering of this information from various sources either actively or passively. In a simple model party elites have to decide on strategies for handling an event or an issue, and the broadcasters in each individual network news programme must then decide whether or not to award coverage to the event or issue.

The majority of news games at conference revolved around two different types of routine event in the timetable: speeches by the leadership and debates. The journalists' interests were driven by news, they wanted something to report; the parties' leaderships were driven by promotion, they wanted to get their message across, maximising its news value first but then despite its news value, if that was not easy to provide. Taking the speech game first, Figure 8.2 (next page) shows the extended game form. Members of the party leadership giving a speech moved first, by deciding to have newsworthy elements in their speech, or not; the broadcasters moved second, to cover the debate or not. Of course, not all speeches by members of the leaderships could be salient or contain important reportable policy or positioning announcements, so sometimes leadership members were constrained to be un-newsworthy - especially ministers in government (where being newsworthy involved the high transaction costs of changing policy) and front-benchers in the Liberal Democrats, who could not realistically present themselves as an alternative government.

Figure 8.2: The speech game played during the party conferences (in extensive form).

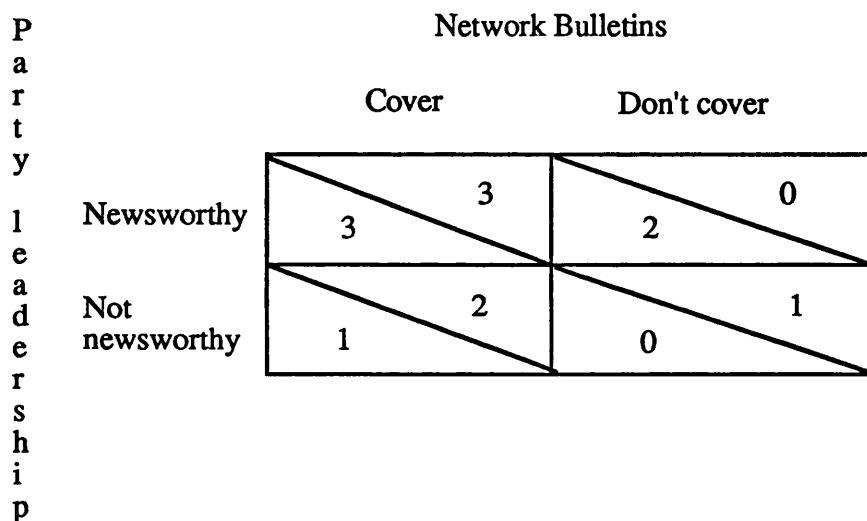


The party elites' top preference was obviously to be newsworthy and be covered by that programme (hence the top pay-off of 3 in Figure 8.2). Their second preference was to be newsworthy but not covered, because there would still be the likelihood of being covered elsewhere by broadcast or press journalists (pay-off of 2). Their third preference would be to be covered despite not being newsworthy, for although some voters could be bored, exposure is always seen as preferable by politicians (pay-off of 1). The party elite's last preference would be to make a dull speech and not be covered at all.

The broadcasters necessarily move second in this game, deciding to award coverage to the speech or withhold it. This decision always involved the exercise of a complex professional judgement (for instance, about whether the speech was or was not newsworthy) where there was a risk of making a mistake. For each individual network bulletin the best outcome was for the speech to be newsworthy, and for them to cover it - not least because this result maximised total conference coverage, which was what mattered to the team on the ground (pay-off of 3). The worst outcome for each bulletin would be if the speech was newsworthy but they made a mistake and did not cover it, where everyone

else did: here they would clearly lose out in competition with other bulletins. The next worst outcome would be for the speech to be un-newsworthy and the bulletin not to cover it - here the team's professional judgement would be proven fine, since other bulletins also might well not cover the speech, but the role of journalists at the conference on the bulletin would be reduced vis-a-vis those back at the London news office, covering other stories. This implies that the broadcasters' second preference was to cover a non-newsworthy speech, both because it avoided the risk of getting their worst outcome, and because it at least supported their roles at conference¹³.

Figure 8.3: The speech game at the party conferences (in strategic form).



Putting these preference orderings together in the strategic form of the game in Figure 8.3 we can see that party elites and broadcasters shared the same top preference for a newsworthy speech that was covered, and that this cell of the game is a Nash equilibrium in this sense - that so long as party elites were in a position to produce a newsworthy speech, the top left cell here gives both players their optimum pay-off. If for any reason the party leadership could not deliver a newsworthy speech, but could disguise this fact from broadcasters to any extent, then the distribution of broadcasters' preferences (especially their risk aversion) would mean that they could best maximise their welfare by covering the speech none the less - thus the lower left cell would be where the game ends up in this situation. This analysis sheds an interesting light on the trend towards using speeches as the main vehicles for announcing policy change and conveying party messages to viewers.

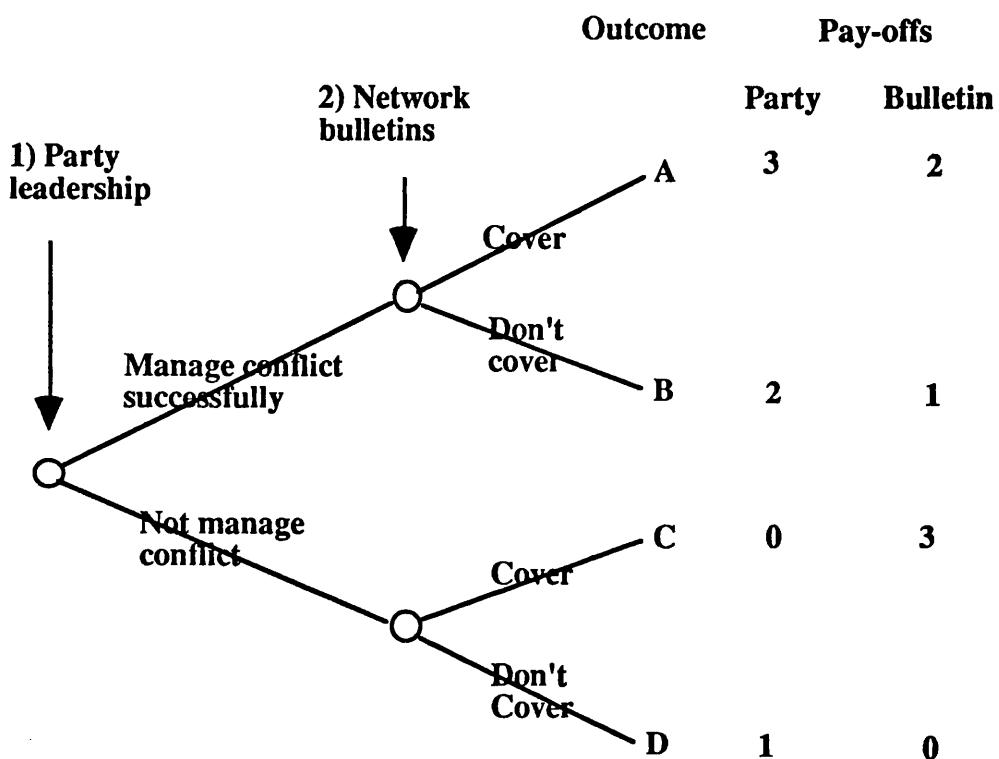
This approach sheds some light on why parties' leaderships wanted all speeches to be reported rather than not, but did not show any strong preference for being newsworthy

over un-newsworthy. A routinised compromise solution was reached at each conference. In order to ensure that a speech received maximum attention, party elites had to make sure that any speech contained a necessary number of announcements to make it newsworthy. An injection of news value also helped maintain an element of control over proceedings. It kept the broadcasters' attention focused on the event the party leadership initiated. Providing a series of un-newsworthy speeches did not necessarily mean that there would not be any coverage; it often meant that the news broadcasters gave the speeches less coverage or searched for another agenda on the fringe of conference or focused more intently on any gaffes that had been made.

While making concessions the leaderships also expected in return a certain attitude toward speeches made by senior party members. Even if the party leader said nothing of note, because of his position in the party and the country, they expected it to have full and prominent coverage and received it. The more senior the party actor, the greater the expected level of coverage, and vice versa for less senior colleagues, who were only expected to be newsworthy in exceptional circumstances. While not wanting to report an un-newsworthy speech or give it greater attention than it deserved, the news broadcasters had to compromise and routinely bowed to the party elites' expectations. Not to comply could lead to conflict or incurring penalties like the refusal of a request for an interview or the offering of an exclusive to a rival bulletin.

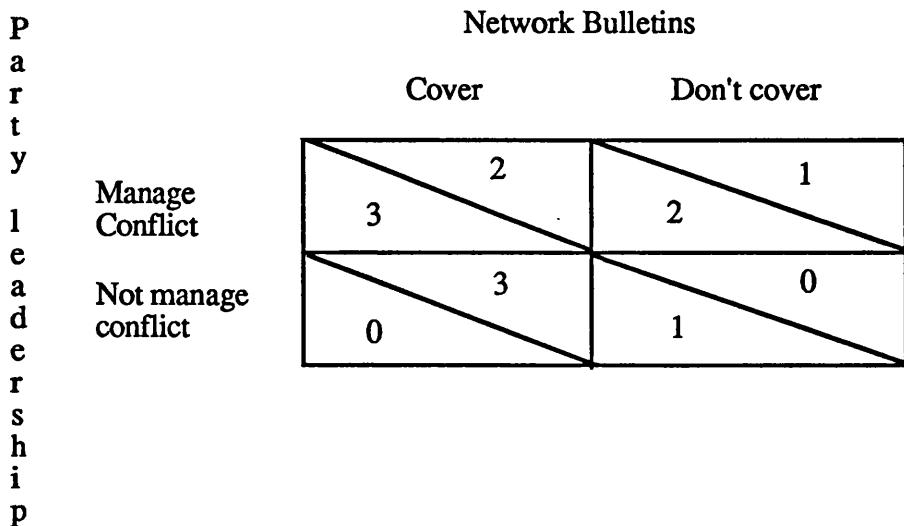
A second key form of game played between party managers and the media concerned conference debates. Here the party elites again move first, seeking to 'manage' the debate successfully, so that the leadership would be seen to have been victorious in the formal floor debate or to have 'won' the alternation with dissident elites in a fringe-initiated debate. Figure 8.4 (next page) shows the extended game form. Again the broadcasters move second, deciding whether or not to give coverage to the debate. Here the elite's top preference would be for them to manage the debate successfully and to get coverage of their success (pay-off of 3). Their second preference would be to manage the debate successfully without publicity (pay-off of 2). Their third preference would be to fail in managing the debate but to prevent that bulletin from covering their failure (pay-off of 1). Their worst case scenario would be to lose out on managing the debate and have the bulletin give coverage of this outcome.

Figure 8.4: The debate game played during the party conferences (in extensive form).



Here the individual bulletin had a much stronger lack of congruence in their preferences with the party elites than over speeches. The journalists' top preference would be for the party elites to fail in managing the debate, and for them then to cover it. Their second preference would be that party elites succeed but they still cover the issue and the debate. Their worst case result would be that the party elite fails to manage the debate but their bulletin does not cover the outcome, for then they would lose in competition with other journalists and bulletins and be seen to have made a mistake. So their second worst preference would be for the party elites to succeed and the bulletin not to cover the result¹⁴.

Figure 8.5: The debate game at the party conferences (in strategic form).



Putting these preference orders together in the strategic form of the game (Figure 8.5), we see that if the party elites can successfully manage the issue, then the top left cell becomes a Nash equilibrium. Once there, neither player can unilaterally improve their utility. But if the party elite fails to or cannot manage the issue, journalists will cover it - this bottom left cell is top of their preferences and hence they cannot be moved off it. If the party elites even try to convince them that the debate has been managed when it has not, the journalist will be strongly resistant - for acknowledging such a shift would lower their utility.

Again, this approach is helpful in looking at why conference debates were routinised occurrences at both the Liberal Democrat and Labour conferences. The debates that received substantial coverage in reports always involved the parties' leaderships in some way or form. The more overt the intra-party conflict and the more important the issue being debated, the more attention the debates received. In some senses debates were more 'heavily laden with conventional news values, particularly those of conflict, drama, movement and anomaly'¹⁵ than speeches. Broadcasters preferred to report debates exhibiting intra-party conflict to those that did not, while the parties' leaderships preferred debates to be covered than not covered but only if they did not feature overt conflict. The game had no compromise solution. The parties' leaderships, particularly in the Labour and Liberal Democrats, were unable to avoid such debates despite the increasing control over the conference agenda, and were resigned to the fact that they would attract a large amount of coverage. In addition the parties' leaderships competed with other factions involved in

the debate. As was not the case with speeches, they were not in a position to 'ration the goodies'; they were not the only source of news and the journalists were not, as a result, solely dependent on them.

Although the parties' leaderships were forced on to the defensive, they could not bury their collective heads in the sand. They had to try to control the situation as best they could using and further developing the repertoire of strategies at their disposal, to try and persuade broadcasters to accept their perspective on the debate and outcome, divert journalists' attention, and rubbish the perspectives of those opposed to them. The strategic response focused on shaping the broadcasters' interpretations of events, and arranging interviews with journalists who were known to hold views favourable to the leadership. (At its limit this strategy could move journalists' standing up or down inside the news organisations.)

While interests temporarily diverged in the debate game, there were still elements of predictability. The parties' leaderships knew in advance what the likely awkward motions for debate were and could allow for them in the planning stages. But the parties' leaderships did not have control over the debates that fractured this routine, which were of high news value and could not be predicted, such as external interventions, 'new sleaze allegations' or a 'gaffe'. For instance, there was the case of the leaking of specific extracts from Lady Thatcher's memoirs, commenting on Major's performance as party leader, to the *Daily Mirror* at the 1993 Conservative party conference, which became the main news story on all news bulletins on that particular day of the conference. It is in these situations that the spin doctors sought to coerce the broadcasters back into the routine. Recent literature on political communications has strongly argued a trend towards 'disciplined' communications as part of a quasi-permanent campaign and that this shift has led to tighter central control over internal party mechanisms with potential for dissent or public embarrassment reduced (Franklin, 1994; Scammell 1995). However, party conferences show that communications were far from disciplined and that the leaderships could not, even when planned, exert tighter central control over certain unforeseeable elements.

8.3 Coverage Trends and the Future of Party Conferences

The news broadcasters and the parties were the co-producers, the co-constructors of the conference news agenda. But the long-term results of their repeated plays and counter-plays at successive conferences were not necessarily fully in either of their interests - nor necessarily productive of beneficial results from the point of view of citizen information or democratic accountability. In this section I consider some longer-term aspects of the

developing co-operation or complicity of parties and broadcasters, beginning with the point that the party elites had relatively little direct leverage on editorial decisions about the amount of coverage or the bulletin running order¹⁶. The amount of coverage was determined to a certain extent by the size of the bulletin and also by its orientation toward the conferences. Table 8.1 shows that Channel Four News and Newsnight devoted substantially more coverage to the conferences than any of the other bulletins.

Table 8.1: The total amount of conference news coverage by party and bulletin 1993-1996 (in minutes).

	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	Ch 4	NN	Total
Liberal Democrat	30	42	40	37	115	152	416
Labour	70	115	99	123	334	465	1206
Conservative	79	110	140	145	346	456	1276
Total	179	267	279	305	795	1073	2898

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

The Liberal Democrat conference received the least coverage - only one third of the amount of coverage given to the other two conferences. At the 1992 general election, news coverage was 'rationed according to the allocation of party election broadcasts, which was 5:5:4 (Conservatives: Labour: Liberal Democrats)'¹⁷. However, such criteria seem not to have been used in party conference coverage. In fact Semetko (1989) notes 'outside election periods, when conventional standards of newsworthiness apply, broadcast coverage of parliament and political affairs has contained very little in the way of contributions from third [parties]'¹⁸. Norton (1996) suggests one reason for the low Liberal Democrat conference coverage: 'The media does not see the conference in the same light as the other conferences. It is not the gathering of the party of government or of the alternative government'¹⁹. Table 8.2 also shows that, even when covered, the Liberal Democrat conference was seen as less newsworthy.

Table 8.2: The prominence of conference news reports by party 1993-1996 (cell contents show the number of reports in each position).

	Story Position					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th+	Total
Liberal Democrat	7	6	7	13	62	95
Labour	57	38	32	24	46	197
Conservative	78	47	30	23	45	233
Total	142	91	69	60	153	525

Table 8.3 shows that the overall amount of conference news coverage by the major network bulletins strongly declined over the period of study.

Table 8.3: The total amount of conference news coverage by year and bulletin 1993-1996 (in minutes).

	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	Ch 4	NN	Total
1993	45	88	85	101	234	294	847
1994	43	70	74	77	210	263	737
1995	47	55	71	69	183	302	727
1996	44	54	49	58	168	214	587
Total	179	267	279	305	795	1073	2898

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

There was a particularly noticeable decline in the coverage provided by Channel Four news and Newsnight, and also substantial declines in News at Ten's coverage, the BBC Six's and BBC Nine's. The ITN 5.40's coverage fluctuated. Commenting on the decline of news coverage one ITN source suggested:

'We have cut back. In the old days we had Sandy Gall (Anchor) in the studio and Alistair Burnett (Anchor) down in Brighton and the whole of the first half of News at Ten would be reporting the conferences. We used to have a cast of thousands literally'²⁰.

However, while the amount of coverage declined this could not be attributed to a shortening of report lengths. Table 8.4 shows that there was no corresponding yearly decline in the average length of news items across all bulletins - instead, it remained almost constant, but with an upward blip in 1995.

Table 8.4: The average length of conference news items by year and bulletin 1993-1996 (in minutes and seconds).

	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	Ch 4	NN	Av.
1993	1.47	3.01	2.45	3.05	4.52	5.20	3.28
1994	1.52	2.47	2.32	2.51	4.34	4.52	3.15
1995	2.47	2.55	2.58	2.54	4.28	8.38	4.06
1996	2.13	2.54	3.05	3.27	4.41	4.45	3.30
Av.	2.10	2.54	2.50	3.04	4.39	5.54	3.35

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Further, Table 8.5 (next page) shows that coverage of one of the key events of each conference, the leader's speech, fluctuated over the period and did not decline.

Table 8.5: The total amount of news coverage of the leaders' speeches by year and bulletin 1993-1996 (in minutes).

	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	Ch 4	NN	Total
1993	12	13	18	21	30	43	126
1994	15	18	19	21	43	44	160
1995	15	15	19	22	40	64	175
1996	14	15	14	14	34	47	138
Total	56	61	70	78	147	198	599
Total Cov	179	267	279	305	795	1073	2898

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

Table 8.6 shows that the decline in coverage can be accounted for by a fall in the number of news items produced by the news bulletins.

Table 8.6: The total number of conference news items by year and bulletin 1993-1996.

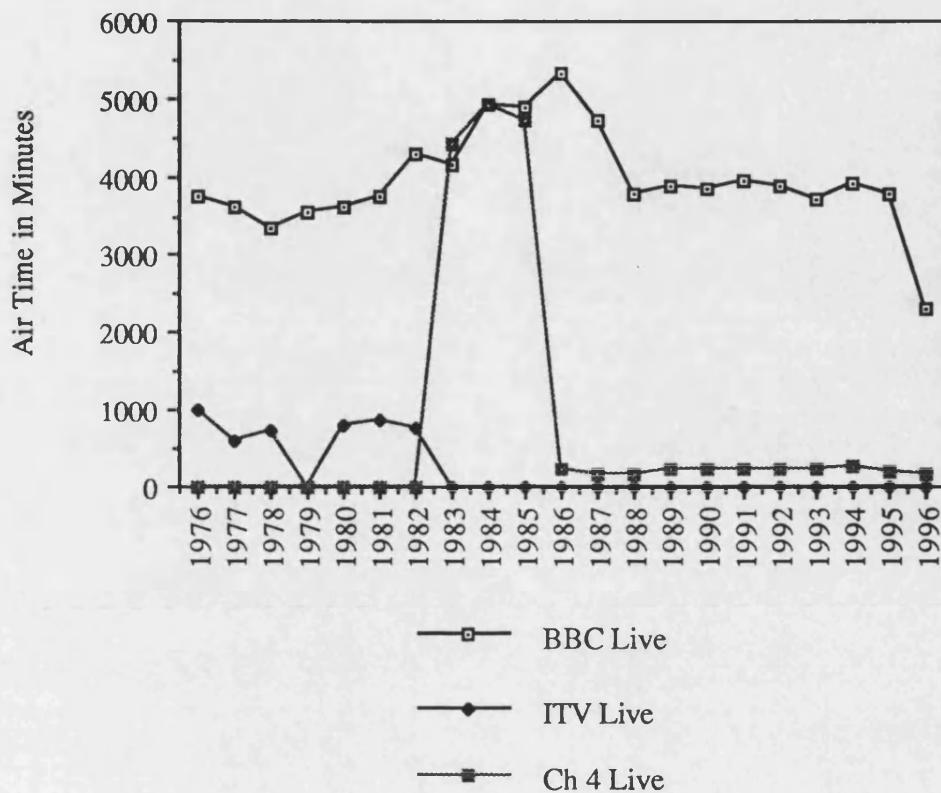
	ITN5.40	ITN10	BBC6	BBC9	Ch 4	NN	Total
1993	25	29	31	33	48	55	221
1994	23	25	29	27	46	54	204
1995	17	19	24	20	41	35	156
1996	20	19	16	17	36	45	153
Total	85	92	100	97	171	189	734

(BBC6 = BBC Six O'clock News; BBC9 = BBC Nine O'clock News; ITN5.40 = ITN News at 5.40 PM; ITN10 = ITN News at Ten O'clock; Ch 4 = Channel Four News; NN = Newsnight.)

The number of news items produced by Channel Four news, News at Ten, the BBC Six and BBC Nine declined steadily, although those produced by ITN 5.40 and Newsnight fluctuated slightly but also fell back.

It is difficult to say with certainty from the available data whether the decline of news coverage was part of a longer-term trend across all bulletins. However, data was available for twenty years of live gavel-to-gavel conference coverage. Figure 8.5 (next page) shows an overall decline in live coverage. Although ITV's live output was lower than the BBC's, the commercial network stopped covering the conferences live in 1982. Channel Four matched the BBC's live output from 1983 to 1985 before cutting back and only covering the leaders' speeches live. The BBC's coverage rose from just under 4000 minutes in 1976 to a peak of over 5000 minutes in 1986, before declining steadily to 2500 minutes in 1996. From the high point of the mid eighties live coverage has been in decline.

Figure 8.6: Live coverage of the annual party conferences 1976-1996.



Source: *Radio Times*, *TV Times*, *The Times* and *The Financial Times*.

One obvious reason for the decline in news and live coverage could be falling television audiences and an increasingly competitive environment in which the broadcasters now find themselves. Evidence from existing research shows that in such an environment both ITN and BBC attached a growing importance to ratings (Nossiter et al, 1995). The 1990 Broadcasting Act subsequently intensified the commercial pressures on the ITV companies to obtain the maximum value for money from programme suppliers. This change in turn intensified the commercial pressure on ITN (the sole provider of news) to deliver an affordable, high quality and popular news service to the ITV network. High audience ratings also took on an even greater commercial significance with competition amongst existing news organisations. With the introduction of Sky 24-hour news in 1989 and Channel 5 in 1997 this trend has intensified. Although the BBC's competition is quasi-commercial, attention to audience size (now shown in quarter-hourly ratings) is crucial in setting the level of the licence fee. Existing literature (Blumler, 1991; Kumar, 1977; Prosser, 1993; McNair, 1994) suggests that in the past public service television news aimed to steer a course between responsibility for the welfare of the political system and an

awareness of the limited political appetite of the ordinary viewer. This responsibility was threatened by the need for news and political programming to be popular and maintain high ratings levels in a competitive news environment (Blumler, 1991). The news broadcasters' conference commitment could be seen as a victim of this environment²¹. One source highlighted an annual debate over Channel Four's commitment to covering the conferences.

'Every year we do have a serious debate about whether we should go [and] would the money be better spent some other way. I suspect if there were a different presenter, who didn't particularly want to go, they (Channel Four) might be happy to settle for not going and just have a correspondent up there. And that would reduce the emphasis we give to it. If we retreated, would Newsnight?'²².

Another related reason for declining coverage could be the newsworthiness of the events themselves. The news broadcasters approached the conferences in a more pragmatic way, although still tempered by a diluted sense of public service duty. One BBC source noted in relation to conference coverage: 'There are tensions between strict commercial news judgements and the public service aspect'²³. An ITN source concurred:

'When the public service ethic was more prominent, you had a public service obligation to go down to Brighton and broadcast half of News at Ten. We are a long way from that situation..., now we just do packages from the scene and there is much more news judgement... But I suppose we still take it for granted that we will be there'²⁴.

Pragmatic considerations were also raised in other interviews with news broadcasters. There was a common perception of conferences being stage-managed and increasingly lacking in newsworthiness.

However, this research has provided evidence that could be construed as contradictory. If overall coverage is declining, then one would expect the presence of the broadcasters at the conference, including the numbers of journalists and technicians who attend, to be declining also. But the picture that emerges from Chapter 2 is of an increased demand for new camera angles and for space in the conference venue, driven by a greater number of broadcasters, including breakfast and satellite TV plus radio, who now attend the conferences. Indeed Franklin (1996) and Gaber (1998) argue that there has been a 'rapid increase in the market for political news...[with] the advent of round-the-clock radio and television news outlets plus the growth in political programmes on both the BBC and commercial channels...'²⁵. At conferences what seems to be happening is that total coverage across all media has increased because there are more media outlets present, although the coverage that each outlet provides remains small and has declined. Conference coverage is becoming more fragmented across an increasing number of channels²⁶. One could argue that the process of fragmentation will continue with the digitalisation of broadcasting.

The debate over the impact of digital multi-channel broadcasting cannot be dealt with in any detail here. The advent of digitalisation may have both negative and positive

implications. More channels covering the conferences may not mean more in-depth coverage, only greater coverage of conference highlights, such as speeches by party 'luminaries' or overt intra-party conflicts. However, the potential remains for conferences to be covered in the same way that Parliament is, with a channel devoted to gavel-to-gavel live coverage, which the existing broadcasters cannot provide because of time and commercial restrictions. Indeed, the Parliamentary Channel provides such coverage at the moment and there is potential for coverage to be produced by the parties themselves.

None of the parties have as yet talked of producing their own coverage. However, there have been hints that the format of the conferences themselves may change. The desire for change seems to be driven by a need to minimise risk and future negative publicity and is part of a longer-term drive to reduce the policy-making power of the conference. At the 1996 Labour conference two intra-party interest groups, Labour 2000 and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, produced pamphlets arguing for a fundamental change in the nature of the conference. Labour 2000 called for the conference to be turned into 'a good old fashioned, American style convention'²⁷. The Labour Co-ordinating Committee similarly suggested that the party should copy the format of the presidential conventions and 'get rid of boring and damaging debates'²⁸. Margaret Hodge, who was closely connected to the Labour leadership, suggested:

'What I think we need to do is move away from the formalised posturing debate that we have at conference and allow members an opportunity to express honestly what they feel, within smaller regional policy forums across the country or in smaller discussion-based groups in conference'²⁹.

While the Conservative conference has always been seen as a rally (Ingle, 1987; Kavanagh, 1996) there has been some speculation that its format may change also. Pierce and Sherman note that 'Mr Hague (party leader) is being urged to scrap the traditional four day format and replace it with a two-and-a-half day gathering which would end on Saturday'³⁰. These pressures to change the existing format of conferences have not been acted upon but may grow, leading to a radical change in the nature of the conferences, which will feed into the content of conference news.

These trends raise fundamental challenges for students of political communication to ponder. The possibility remains that the cumulative effect of the long-term hegemony of broadcast media priorities, combined with the development of systematic counter-responses by the political parties themselves, will be the production of a set of supposedly media-oriented conferences which attract progressively less and less media coverage - because all the uncontrolled features which made them newsworthy in the past have been either stamped out or neutralised by the development of party elites' management techniques. This study shows that such an outcome is still some way off, and that the complex permutations of parties' and broadcasters' complicities in co-producing conference news

still contain elements of creative tension and space for genuinely autonomous media responses and dissident voices. But the space concerned is not large, nor growing - and the future health of party conferences themselves is called in question by long-term trends towards fragmented and more a-political media.

1. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 26.

2. Curran et al, 1982, p 21.

3. Ibid, p 21.

4. McQuail, 1987, p 85.

5. Deacon notes: 'Although the growing interest in the role of external agencies in the structuring of the news debate is a welcome development, there is a need to be careful that this widening of the research scope does not lead to a neglect of the mediating role of news professionals. For news is far more than the sum of information and opinions received by news organisations. Journalists necessarily exercise value judgements in selecting the information they receive and in directing their news seeking [...]. We must be careful not to replace media-centrism with source-centrism'. 1996, pp 192-193.

6. Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987, p 273.

7. Ibid, p 287.

8. Interview with Jon Snow.

Indeed there were several short news stories on the dress sense and role of Norma Major and Cherie Blair on ITN. Also see Junor (1993) for news media reporting of Norma Major's purchase of a dress at the 1992 Conservative party conference.

9. See E. Jones (1994) p 121 for an account of (former TGWU chief) Ron Todd's attack on Labour leader Neil Kinnock at the 1988 conference.

10. Curran et al, 1982, p 20.

11. Osbourne and Rubinstein suggest that 'Game theory is a bag of analytical tools designed to help us understand the phenomena we observe when decision makers interact. The basic assumptions that underlie the theory are that decision makers pursue well-defined exogenous objectives (they are rational) and take into account their knowledge or expectations of other decision makers' behaviour (they reason strategically)'. p 1. The aim of viewing interaction in terms of a news game is not for the sake of making its representation highly abstract by using mathematical formulae but to simplify what is a complex pattern of interaction to a readily understandable entity.

12. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 36.

Preference Rankings

Party leadership	Network Bulletins
First preference	Outcome A
Second preference	Outcome B
Third preference	Outcome C
Fourth preference	Outcome D

14.

Preference Rankings

	Party leadership	Network Bulletins
First preference	Outcome A	Outcome C
Second preference	Outcome B	Outcome A
Third preference	Outcome D	Outcome B
Fourth preference	Outcome C	Outcome D

15. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 148.

16. There were numerous cases where the parties sought to influence news coverage or to complain. The case of the OJ Simpson trial verdict and Tony Blair's speech has already been detailed in Chapter 7. Others include Chris Patten's call for Conservative representatives to complain to the BBC about their coverage of the 1991 conference (see Dovkants, 1991; Franklin, 1994) and Labour's attack on the BBC for delaying the One O'clock News in order to cover the Conservative Party Chairman's speech at the 1995 Conservative conference (see Thynne, 1995).

17. Nossiter et al, 1995, p 86.

18. Semetko, 1989, p 456.

19. Norton, 1996, p 12.

20. Interview with Hugh Pym.

21. If we look to the US TV coverage of the presidential conventions as a possible future scenario, it is one where coverage has radically declined. Hames notes: 'Less than twenty years ago they lasted for four whole days and were devoted to the internal means of the party organisation. The entire platform, often 100,000 words long, would be read to delegates for their approval. The evening sessions were devoted to speeches of thirty minutes or more by senior figures who spoke by right of their position no matter how dreadful their oratory. The whole occasion, every minute, was covered by all three major networks. Starting in the 1980s, responding to ratings, the stations cut back their coverage. This year (1996) little more than an hour a day is live, and that punctuated by commercials and commentary'. 1996, p 11.

22. Interview with Jon Snow.

23. Interview with Ric Bailey.

24. Interview with Hugh Pym.

25. Gaber, 1998, p 1.

26. Franklin (1996) notes that there has been a proliferation of broadcast media outlets reporting on Parliament and these have impacted on 'what was a previously very stable system of broadcast and print media' leading to a 'highly competitive environment, prompting market driven efficiencies... and market imperative to generate low cost popular programming' pp 312-313.

27. Grice, 1996, p 7.
28. Newsnight 1 October, 1996.
29. Ibid, 1996.
30. Pierce and Sherman, 1997, p 2.

Appendix 1

Research Methods

The thesis used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in its examination of the subject matter. Schlesinger (1990) argues that methodologically there are two approaches to examining the activity of news sources, internalist and externalist. Whilst not mutually exclusive, the former analyzes on the activities of the news media through interviews and / or content analysis. The latter examines the activities of news sources in relation to the media through reconstructing events through interviews, content analysis and observations. The examination of events at conference has largely taken this externalist approach, relying on a mixture of sources for primary data. The combination of interviews, content analysis and observations allowed an analysis of the activities of both the news broadcasters and the political parties at each stage of the conference news production process.

Content Analysis

There have been numerous definitions of content analysis, which have evolved and shifted over time (Berelson, 1971; Holsti, 1969; Krippendorf, 1980; Weber, 1990). Content analysis cannot be regarded as an objective quantified exercise. The researcher's values and predispositions inevitably influence the selection of categories, and the categories in turn influence the findings of the research. However, it is still a useful method for the analysis of news coverage.

Originally I set out to content analyse news over a longer period of time (20 years) but I encountered the following problems. The British Film Institute library would only make video tapes of one specific programme at a time, which had to be viewed on the premises. The BBC wanted to charge £150 per video from the archive, going back as far as 1980. ITN were not keen to provide access, suggesting that one-off access was the best they could do. In this situation a historical comparison of news, say, between the early eighties and 1990s, was not feasible or affordable. I therefore had to tape news coverage of the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative conferences over the four-year period from 1993 to 1996.

Initially I videoed all news coverage on terrestrial and satellite television. However, bearing in mind the sheer amount of content analysis involved, I targeted the analysis on six evening terrestrial news bulletins ITN News at 5.40 pm, the BBC Six O'clock News, Channel Four News, the BBC Nine O'clock News, ITN News at Ten and Newsnight. This was also in part because these bulletins attracted the largest audiences (the BBC Nine O'clock News and News at Ten had over 4 million viewers each) and provided the fullest account of the day's events. The aim of the content analysis was to examine four years of news output year by year on these six bulletins. A coding sheet was developed designed to gather information on certain elements of news coverage (see Appendix 2). The coding sheet focused on two main areas. First, the framing of the conferences by the different news bulletins and, second, evidence of the use of media strategies by the political parties.

In terms of framing, the sheet focused on the editorial attitudes towards the conferences. There were two different attitudes towards the conferences as a source of news. The first was 'sacerdotal': it considered that the conferences deserved 'a regular and prominent airing as an inherent right and regardless of news value calculations'¹. The second was 'pragmatic': in this approach, 'the treatment of politicians' activities is based on... assessments of their intrinsic newsworthiness... [so] that consequently the prominence given to the stories reporting these activities, the amount of time or space allocated to them will be determined by a strict consideration of news values'². The broadcasters were both pragmatically and sacerdotally oriented towards the conferences. Blumler and Gurevitch argue that attitudes 'towards a given institution will reflect the interaction between two sets of influences - its more or less abiding sacerdotal standing... and its momentary weight on news value scales'³. These attitudes were revealed in the prominence and amount of attention given to the various conferences and in the selection of events for coverage. The sheet also analysed the selection made by journalists in terms of the indexing of sources, the use of different perspectives on a particular issue, the length of sound bites in reports and the use and initiation of visuals. In addition the content analysis allowed the bulletins to be compared on those points.

The content analysis also sought to reveal the use of proactive and reactive communication strategies by the political parties. Proactive strategies were aimed at enhancing the dissemination of planned party policy. There were two forms of proactive strategy, trailing and follow-up. The use of trailing was identified through the presence in news items of advanced information released before an event. The use of follow-up was identified in news items by the indexing of certain party actors after policy announcements were made, and in references made by the journalist. Reactive communication strategies were planned to limit potentially damaging negative publicity. There were two forms of

reactive strategy, rebuttal and mobilising comment. The use of rebuttal was identified through references made by journalists in news items, and the mobilising of comment through the indexing of certain senior party actors trying to play-down the significance of an event.

The content analysis included a textual analysis of the news transcripts. As both the BBC and ITN wanted to charge for transcripts of the news, I directly transcribed all main news reports, some pegged items and all two-ways and all headlines and some interviews. Transcribing from video, it has been argued, provides greater accuracy. Indeed, Philo notes interestingly when comparing Glasgow University Media Group's content analysis with that of Harrison's (1985): 'When we compared these transcripts with the video tapes of the news programmes in our research archive we found that there were serious material differences between them and what ITN had actually broadcast'⁴.

The textual analysis was used to examine the packaging of particular debates and speeches in Chapters 6 and 7. The aim was to provide a more detailed analysis of certain news items on debates and speeches. The transcripts of reports and pegged items were used to examine the journalists' contextualising remarks and the evaluations made in the reports' conclusions. Two-ways were also examined particularly to highlight the use of speculative and explanatory questions and answers. I alone was responsible for carrying out the content analysis. As most of the variables were fairly clear-cut in their application the absence of reliability coding should not qualify the conclusions drawn. Intercoder reliability, though, was an important consideration in establishing the trustworthiness of subjective variables. However, it was difficult within the time, and with available resources, to find anyone else to carry out the content analysis as well. Certain variables were therefore defined as specifically and exclusively as possible, particularly speculative and explanatory questions and answers in two-ways and positive, negative and neutral reactions to the leaders' speeches. These were then tested on a small sample of news items with my supervisor. The conclusions drawn from these variables should be treated more cautiously.

Interviews

I conducted twenty-five interviews, some face to face and others on the phone, although all were taped and on the record. The interviews lasted on average one hour ten minutes and occurred within office hours. They were then fully transcribed. The interviews were all semi-structured and investigative in nature, and based around particular themes. The use of such interviews allowed these different themes, some of which arose in the interview, to be

investigated more thoroughly than with a structured interview. Such techniques also allowed the establishment of confidence and rapport with the interviewee; this is essential in order to obtain more in-depth answers to particular questions. The questions on particular themes were open-ended, designed to get the interviewee to talk on an issue. Of course there were tangential comments, but in some cases they provided additional information which had not been previously considered. There was a particular effort when interviewing journalists and spin doctors to get them to discuss particular examples from conference news coverage. The interviews were analysed thematically, with the issues raised by interviewees being cross referenced to provide as complete a picture as possible.

While interviews with those involved in the pre-conference planning occurred at different times throughout a three-year period, some of the interviews, particularly those with journalists and political actors, were conducted in the months immediately after the conferences, when events were still fairly fresh in their minds. Although I tried to interview as wide a cross section of people as possible, the main problem I faced was getting access for interviews. Many requests were never replied to, even though I sent each subject two reminders. Surprisingly, the Labour party were the most recalcitrant. It was impossible to talk to any of the current Labour spin doctors on the record or to anyone working at party headquarters, John Smith House, despite repeated requests. I managed to interview former personnel who had recently left, who provided an insight into the planning of conferences. In comparison, Liberal Democrat and Conservative sources and those at the broadcast organisations were more forthcoming.

Observation

It has become standard practice in media research to conduct observational studies, and there have been many of news broadcasters (Gans, 1979; Schlesinger, 1987; Tuchman, 1978). I attended the Liberal Democrat and Labour Conferences in 1994 and all three in 1995 and 96. I received a media pass for these conferences, which was essential for allowing me access to the press room. I carried out a daily observation of journalistic and party activities in the press room and made a series of field notes. The press room was chosen because it was a key space in which journalists, press teams and spin doctors interacted. It was a particularly important venue to observe spinning in action. The observation was carried out for set periods of time, chosen to coincide with key moments of the day, such as when journalists returned to the press room after major speeches and debates or for press conferences. The periods of observation also involved eavesdropping on the spin doctors at work and journalists talking amongst themselves. This was made

possible by the group nature of both occurrences. On occasions, it also involved talking to journalists, gauging their reactions to the spinning, if possible. I was also allowed unofficially to observe one journalist editing his conference report. In addition I attended all press conferences given during the day.

Other Resources

I also referred to *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Independent on Sunday* over the period of the study for their conference coverage and to keep abreast of developments within the political parties. I also used the newspaper archive at the BLPES (LSE) to examine TV programme guides in order reliably to construct data on the amount of live conference coverage from 1976 to 1996.

1. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p 50.

2. *Ibid*, p 50.

3. *Ibid*, p 56.

4. Philo, 1987, p 398.

Appendix 2

TV News Content Analysis Sheet

V1 Story ID number _____

V2 Date of Story _____ / _____ / _____
Day Month Year

V3 Programme: _____

V4 The length of the story (in Seconds) _____

V5 Is the story a headline Item. _____

V6 If yes, state headline position. _____

(opening, 2,3 or 4 etc)

V7 Does the story form a teaser headline. _____

V8 Is the story a closing/ reminder headline item. _____

(Yes 1 or No 2)

Quote all headlines:

V9 Position: Where is the story in the programme. _____

V10 Story format: _____

Report 1

Pegged report 2

Interview with politician 3

Interview with reporter (two-way) 4

News Item.

V11 Who is the reporter? _____

V12 News item focus. _____

1 Speech

2 Debate

3 Mix speech/ debate

4 Fringe

5 Mix fringe/ speech or debate

6 Outside event

7 Media initiated

8 Other

V13 Who appears in the story and sound-bites.

Who	Length (seconds)	
	Speaking	
Source app 1	_____	_____
Source app 2	_____	_____
etc..		

V14 If a reaction, is it positive or negative? _____

V15 Who is cited (no sound bite) as a source in the story.

Source cited 1 _____
Source cited 2 _____
etc...

Interviews/ Two-ways.

V16 Who is interviewed. _____

V17 Number of interview/ two-way questions and answers. _____

Speculation	_____
Explanation	_____
other	_____

Spinning and Publicity

(1 Yes 2 No)

V18 Any evidence of trailing in report? _____

V19 Was this Trail an Exclusive? _____

V20 Who trailed? _____

V21 Reference to party / leadership line _____

Contributions of Fringe

V22 Number of times fringe shown and mentioned _____

V23 Length of fringe clip (in seconds) _____

V24 Who if anyone speaks on fringe _____

Visuals

V25 Party initiated TV Visuals

	Number	Length
Photo Opportunity	_____	_____
Hall Shots	_____	_____
Clips of the Fringe	_____	_____

Description:

V26 Media initiated TV Visuals

	Number	Length
Graphics	_____	_____
Library Pictures	_____	_____
Door step	_____	_____

Appendix 3

List of Interviewees

- 1) Ric Bailey (Editor for BBC Political News) on the 19/2/96 2.30 pm.
- 2) David Boddy (Former Director of Press and Broadcasting at Conservative Central Office in the early eighties) on the 31/10/95 9 am.
- 3) Bill Bush (Head of BBC Political Research Unit) on the 17/7/95 3 pm.
- 4) Tim Collins (Special Media Advisor and Former Director of Communications for the Conservative Party from 1992-95) on the 17/10/95 11.30 am.
- 5) Neal Eccles (Editor of BBC OBU) on the 29/8/96 2pm
- 6) Graham Frost (Editor of ITN News) on the 27/7/95 11 am.
- 7) Judith Fryer (Liberal Democrats' Head of Press and Broadcasting) reponse to questions in letter, 23/11/95.
- 8) Gary Gibbon (Political Correspondent for Channel Four News) on the 9/8/95 2 pm.
- 9) Lord Gladwin of Clee (Former Chairman of Labour's Conference Arrangements Committee under Neil Kinnock and John Smith) and Sally Morgan (Former Secretary to the CAC under Neil Kinnock and John Smith) on the 23/1/96 11 am.
- 10) Baroness Joyce Gould (Former Director of Development and Organization at the Labour Party under Neil Kinnock and John Smith) on the 12/6/96 7.30 pm.
- 11) Jeremy Hanley (Former Conservative Party Chairman 1994-1995) on the 1/11/95 11 am.
- 12) Roy Graham (Architect designing the internal plans for the party conferences) on the 18/1/96 2 pm.
- 13) Nicholas Jones (Political Correspondent for BBC News) reponse to questions in letter 28/1/95 and interview 20/8/96 5.10 pm.
- 14) Alan Leaman (Director of Strategy and Planning for the Liberal Democrats) on the 19/7/95 10 am.
- 15) Mark Mardell (Political Correspondent for Newsnight) on the 27/7/95 3.30 pm.
- 16) Penny McCormack (Liberal Democrat Conference Organiser) on the 21/2/96 3 pm.
- 17) Bob Oliver (Organizational Manager Sky News) on the 13/5/96 1 pm.
- 18) Chris Poole (Secretary of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations) on the 16/8/95 11 am.
- 19) Linda Parker (BBC Conference Unit Manager) on the 10/8/95 11 am.
- 20) Hugh Pym (Political Correspondent for ITN News) on the 1/11/96 1pm.
- 21) Alan Sherwell (Chair of the Liberal Democrats Federal Conference Committee) on the

27/6/96 6 pm.

- 22) Malcolm Smith (Resource Manager at ITN) on the 13/8/96 10 am.
- 23) Jon Snow (Presenter of Channel Four News) on the 16/8/95 11 am.
- 24) Philip Webster (Political Editor of the Times) on the 9/7/95 12 pm.
- 25) Steve White (News Engineer, in charge of outside broadcast planning at ITN) 16/4/ 96.
- 26) Larry Whitty (Former General Secretary of the Labour Party under Neil Kinnock and John Smith) 12/9/96 11am.

Glossary

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBC Nine	BBC Nine O'clock News (broadcast on BBC 1)
BBC Six	BBC Six O'clock News (broadcast on BBC 1)
BSkyB	British Sky Broadcasting
CAC	Conference Arrangements Committee
CAS	Conference Agenda Subcommittee
CCO	Conservative Central Office
CEO	Conference and Exhibitions Office
Channel Four News	Channel Four's Seven O'clock News (produced by ITN)
CU	Conference Unit
DDO	Department of Development and Organisation
ENG	Electronic News Gathering
FCC	Federal Conference Committee
FE	Federal Executive
FPC	Federal Policy Committee
GMB	General and Municipal Boilermakers Union
ITN	Independent Television News
ITN 5.40	ITN's News at 5.40 PM (broadcast on ITV)
MP	Member of Parliament
NEC	National Executive Committee
News at Ten	ITN's Ten O'clock News (broadcast on ITV)
Newsnight	BBC News at 10.30 PM (broadcast on BBC 2)
NU	National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations
NUEC	National Union Executive Committee
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
OBU	Outside Broadcast Unit
Pegged item	An additional report expanding upon issues raised in a speech or a debate and presenting the reactions and opinions of actors both in and outside the parties.
PPC	Prospective Parliamentary Candidate
PRU	Political Research Unit (BBC)
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
Two-way	Live questions and answers between the anchor and political journalist.

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