

The Alliance continues to return impressively in opinion polls and by-elections. By this evidence, its vote in 1983 was no aberration. It is beginning to acquire a long-term core of support.

Moderate Muscle:

The Alliance Takes Shape

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Roy Jenkins, elder statesman of the SDP.

THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION saw Labour dangerously close to the edge of the precipice. It recorded its lowest share of the vote since 1918 and held off the Alliance's challenge for second place in the competition for votes by just two percentage points. Now, as Labour tries to lay the foundations for victory in 1987 or 1988, the opinion polls suggest that it has great difficulty in pushing its popularity beyond the 40% mark, while the Alliance stubbornly refuses to disappear from the race. Does the Alliance stand between Labour and its chances of victory in future?

Certainly, Labour lost votes to the Alliance in 1983. Indeed, movement to the Alliance was the single most important source of Labour defections between 1979 and 1983. This can be seen from table 1 which charts the 'flow of the vote' between the two elections.

Table 1 is based on interviews with a nationally representative survey of the electorate in the weeks immediately after the 1983 general election¹. Nearly 4000 respondents told us about the way they had voted, about their political beliefs and preferences, and about their social origins and class positions. Their answers enable us to chart, with reasonable accuracy, who voted for the Alliance and why they did so.

From table 1 we see that in 1983 Labour held on to only 58% of the people who had voted for the party in 1979. 21% defected to the Alliance, 13% abstained and only 7% moved over to the Conservatives. The immediate connection between Alliance success and Labour failure seems clear.

However, we need to be cautious in our interpretation of the long-run significance of these defections. Even in the heyday of two-party politics in the 1950s and 1960s movement between Labour and Liberal (and between Liberal and Conservative) was nearly always more common than movements between the Labour and Conservative parties themselves. The Liberal party was a kind of halfway house that provided a refuge for those who were in temporary disagreement with their 'own' party, to which they might be expected to return in due course. It was a convenient home for protest rather than a permanent change of abode.

A crucial question for the Labour party is whether the defections to the Alliance in 1983 were once again temporary protests against the Labour party - protests perhaps at its disunity and disarray in the period leading up to the 1983 election. Or do they mark perhaps a more fundamental restructuring of political allegiance with longer-term implications for Labour's support?

To help answer these questions we shall investigate three aspects of the Alliance vote:

(1) Its sociological base. It can be argued that a political party needs a solid core of support among a distinctive section of the electorate in order to provide it with an enduring source of activists and organisation. The Labour party's base has of course been the industrial working class while the Conservatives' base has consisted of employers and managers in the private sectors of industry, finance and agricul-

ture. In the past the Liberals appeared to be a rather classless party in comparison with Labour and Conservative. Has this now changed?

(2) Its ideological base. A social base is likely to be associated with a distinctive set of political beliefs and principles. These beliefs are a crucial link between the voter's 'objective' social position and his or her commitment to a particular political party. It was largely because the Liberal voters in the past lacked any positive attraction to distinctive Liberal principles and ideology that their vote was so volatile. If they now constitute a more permanent threat to the Labour party we would expect to find that they exhibit a more coherent and distinctive set of beliefs than previously.

(3) Its psychological base. Political scientists commonly refer to an individual's 'party identification'. This is an enduring commitment to a party often developed in childhood or in early adulthood when the voter first entered the electorate. It is rather similar to the kind of affection that a football supporter has for his/her own club, and the keen supporter will remain loyal to their side through bad times as well as good. The Alliance needs to acquire committed supporters of this kind if it is to be a permanent threat to the major parties.

The Alliance's social base

Consider, first the social base of Alliance voting. Our data strongly contradict the conventional view that its voters are drawn

Table 1: MOVEMENT BETWEEN 1979 AND 1983

Recalled 1979 vote	1983 vote					
	Conservative	Labour	Alliance	Other	Abstain	
Conservative	75	3	10	0	12	100%
Labour	7	58	21	1	13	100%
Liberal	13	3	72	0	12	100%
Other	8	10	22	38	23	100%
Abstain	27	14	16	1	42	100%

randomly from across the social classes. Its strongest support is to be found among people with secure and relatively advantaged jobs in what can be termed the salariat - salaried professional, administrative and managerial employees. In 1983 the Alliance secured 31 % of the votes here, easily beating Labour into third place (with 14%). It fared rather less well in the manual working class, winning only 20% of their votes. On the surface, then, the Alliance would appear to be a pale reflection of the Conservative party, but this is only a half-truth. Whereas the Conserva-

al experts such as systems analyst and computer programmer. In 1983 the Alliance won 35% of the vote from this section of the salariat, still some way behind the Conservatives but again clearly beating Labour (with 19%) into third place. (The remaining members of the salariat - the managers in large enterprises and nationalised industries, the public sector administrators and the full professionals - were intermediate between the 'small managers' and the semi-professionals in their voting preferences.)

There is, then, a distinct sociological

almost equally sharply, but Alliance support peaks halfway down the table. It is highest among the semi-professionals but is also greater than might be expected among the routine non-manual workers and among the foremen and technicians. Its appeal is clearly greatest to these social groups.

Various theories have been advanced about the class position and interests of these intermediate categories, particularly of the semi-professionals. Serge Mallet, the French marxist, described them as a 'new working class' and believed that they

Table 2: CLASS AND VOTE IN 1983

Class position	Conservative	Labour	Alliance	Other	
Petty bourgeoisie	71	12	17	0	100%
Managers in small enterprises	68	12	20	1	101%
Semi-professionals	44	19	35	2	100%
Routine non-manual workers	46	25	27	2	100%
Foremen and technicians	48	26	25	1	100%
Manual working class	30	49	20	1	100%

tives did best among the petty bourgeoisie (the employers, farmers and own account workers), obtaining 71% of their votes, the Alliance did worst here with a meagre 17%.

We can in fact be more specific still about the Alliance social base, for they are not equally attractive to all members of the salariat. They are relatively weaker among the managers in private industry, particularly those in small enterprises whose political attitudes and behaviour come very close to those of the petty bourgeoisie. 68% of these 'small managers' gave their votes to the Conservatives in 1983 and only 20% to the Alliance. Conversely the Conservative vote was relatively smaller, and both Labour and Alliance votes rather larger, among the salaried technical and semi-professional employees in the salariat - the teachers, social workers, and technic-

pattern to the Alliance vote, and one which differentiates it clearly from both Conservative and Labour. If the Conservative core is the petty bourgeoisie and the private sector manager, and the Labour core is the industrial working class, that of the Alliance is the salaried semi-professional and technical employee.

Table 2 compares the voting behaviour of the two wings of the salariat with those of the other social classes, namely the petty bourgeoisie and the manual working class together with two remaining social groups, the routine clerical and junior white-collar workers on the one hand and the foremen and technicians on the other.

The picture given by table 2 is fairly clear. Conservative support falls away sharply as we move down the table from the petty bourgeoisie and the 'small managers' to the working class. Labour support rises

were a potent source of radical protest. Lacking as they do direct managerial authority, he expected them to focus on issues of control and industrial democracy. Other writers have noted that they are largely employed in the public sector and thus have an interest in government regulation and intervention in the economy. But on both these lines of argument we might have expected them to turn to the Labour party rather than to the Alliance. The failure of Labour to capture the votes of this expanding section of the electorate is striking.

¹ Full details of our analysis of the 1983 election can be found in A Heath, R Jowell and J Curtice *How Britain Votes* (Pergamon, £15.50/£7.50). Our research was generously supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, Pergamon Press and Jesus College, Oxford.

Table 3: CLASS AND ATTITUDES

Class position	percentage favouring					
	further nationalisation	income redistribution	defence cuts	industrial democracy	no death penalty	government spending to create jobs
Petty bourgeoisie	8	27	27	58	31	55
Managers in small enterprises	7	28	26	62	36	59
Semi-professionals	15	44	43	76	49	67
Routine non-manual workers	16	50	37	70	29	74
Foremen and technicians	18	42	33	71	26	73
Manual working class	27	60	42	79	27	84

Its ideological base

Why the Alliance did so much better than Labour among these salaried semi-professionals becomes clearer when we examine their social and political attitudes. These are shown in table 3.

There are several important findings in table 3. First, we can see that the managers in small enterprises come very close to the

social issues they tend towards the left.

There is some support here for the theories of the new working class and of distinctive public sector interests. On the issue of workplace control, the semi-professionals are well to the left. Similarly, they favour government intervention rather than market forces as the remedy for unemployment. But in some ways it is the

greater appeal to voters in all class positions who share these attitudes. In general, Alliance voters in 1983 came midway between Conservative and Labour on the class issues of nationalisation and redistribution but come much closer to Labour (and relatively further away from the Conservatives) on the social issues. This is shown clearly in table 4.

Table 4: PARTY AND ATTITUDES

Vote in 1983	percentage favouring					
	nationalisation	income redistribution	defence cuts	industrial democracy	no death penalty	government spending to create jobs
Conservative	66	26	16	61	27	53
Alliance	36	53	49	77	40	83
Labour	12	75	61	83	39	95

petty bourgeoisie in their attitudes just as they did in their votes. On almost all the issues which we have distinguished in table 3 the petty bourgeoisie and the managers are the most likely to favour right-wing positions. They are markedly hostile to the classic working-class demands of nationalisation and income redistribution, and although a majority of them favour industrial democracy and government spending to secure full employment, they are still further to the right than the other social classes on these issues as well.

Secondly, we see that the semi-professionals tend towards the centre on the major class issues. Their attitudes towards nationalisation and income redistribution are very like those of the routine clerical workers and foremen, and they come roughly midway between the petty bourgeoisie on the right and the working class on the left. The picture is clearest in the case of income redistribution. 60% of the working class favour redistribution compared with only 27% of the petty bourgeoisie (and 28% of the managers in small establishments). The semi-professionals come almost exactly halfway between with 44% giving their support to redistribution.

However, this centrist position is not consistently followed across the other issues of table 3. On defence spending and industrial democracy, for example, the semi-professionals are much closer to the manual working class than they are to the petty bourgeoisie. Indeed on defence spending they are if anything to the left of the manual working class, and on the death penalty they are well to the left of any of the other classes. In other words there are marked differences in the relative position of the semi-professionals on different types of issues. On class issues they lie in the centre. On what might be loosely termed

finding on the death penalty which is most instructive. This is the issue on which the semi-professionals are most clearly differentiated from all the other classes, working class and petty bourgeoisie alike. It provides, we think, the clue to their support for the Alliance.

Our data suggest that it is educational level, rather than class or sectoral interests, which explains the semi-professionals' opposition to the death penalty. Higher education is often thought of simply as a channel of advancement into the secure and privileged positions of the salariat. But it is also an important source of socialisation into 'liberal' values - support for free speech and civil liberties, opposition to police power and a repressive criminal code. The highly educated tend to be markedly liberal on this group of issues, and many of them are to be found in the semi-professions.

We would not wish to draw too sharp a distinction between education, class and sector. While the 'liberal arts' institutions of higher education may foster, or at least facilitate, support for liberal values, we should not neglect the processes of occupational choice and the way that different occupational milieux may reinforce, or undermine, such values. Thus it may be their liberalism which initially attracts many people into the caring professions of the welfare state, but their liberalism may survive because it is compatible with their occupational interests and demands.

Liberalism and socialism

Be this as it may, this distinctive combination of liberal attitudes on the social issues and centrist ones on the class issues is what gives the Alliance its potential ideological base. While this combination is most commonly found among the semi-professional employees, the Alliance seems to have

Table 4 mirrors table 3 quite closely. It shows the ideological, as opposed to the social distinctiveness of Alliance voting and clearly refutes the claim that the Alliance vote is solely a protest vote, without ideological coherence and drawn randomly from across the political spectrum. It is no longer the amorphous collection of voters in transient disagreement with their 'natural' parties that used to be true of the Liberals. Rather there appears to be a distinct policy package which neither of the other major parties has on offer and which appeals to a significant proportion of the electorate.

Consistently with this we find that Labour losses to the Alliance in 1983 were particularly large among voters who disagreed with Labour on the class rather than on the social issues. For example, 44% of those who remained loyal to Labour favoured further nationalisation while only 15% of the defectors did so. But on non-class issues such as the death penalty and the like, Labour loyalists and defectors differed hardly at all in their attitudes. (This difference is also reflected in the class composition of the two groups: Labour defectors were more than twice as likely as Labour loyalists to be members of the salariat.) In short, Labour's loss of support to the Alliance in 1983 was particularly heavy among those whose previous support for Labour had been based more upon their liberalism than their socialism.

This is important for Labour not only because these voters can make the difference between a hung parliament and an overall majority of seats for Labour, but also because there can be no guarantee that such voters will return automatically if there is unity within the party. It would be unwise to assume that these defections were temporary. We do not wish to play down the role of disunity in Labour's

