

# Labour orators from Bevan to Miliband

*Edited by*

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## The oratory of Michael Foot

*David Stewart*

Michael Foot is renowned as one of the outstanding British political orators of the twentieth century. An aptitude for public speaking was an invaluable asset for Foot's generation of politicians, who were expected to adapt to a diverse range of political settings ranging from Parliament, party conferences and broadcast studios to open-air demonstrations and workplace meetings. Foot was one of the few Labour Party politicians who could lay claim to mastering all of these settings. His political career has been the subject of detailed biographical work by Kenneth Morgan, Mervyn Jones and Simon Hoggart and David Leigh. Morgan describes Foot's oratory as 'a fusion of the Cornish chapels, the Oxford Union and the soapboxes of the Socialist League', while Hoggart and Leigh highlight the 'often savage power of his oratory' and his 'evangelical' delivery style (Hoggart and Leigh, 1981: 3; Morgan, 2007b: 484). Jones concludes that Foot was 'one of the few politicians who [has] been equally effective on the platform and in the House of Commons' (Jones, 1995: 40). However, the existing historiography tends to confine its coverage of Foot's oratory to his parliamentary speeches and offers limited analysis of his wider oratorical style.

In order to redress the balance, this chapter examines Foot's oratory in several settings and contexts: Parliament; Labour Party conference; Constituency Labour Party (CLP) meetings; public demonstrations; and the media. The chapter charts Foot's oratory through three chronological phases: 1945–70; 1970–80; 1980–83, and is underpinned by the oratorical constructs of ethos, logos and pathos. It examines the role of Foot's oratory in constructing and popularising the concepts of the 'Guilty Men' and the 'politics of persuasion'. The chapter also considers the ways in which Foot's speeches drew on parliamentary sovereignty and collective memories of the 1930s and 1940s to heighten their salience. This in turn raises the question of Foot's patriotism, which is scrutinised through his speeches on British membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) and devolution for Wales and Scotland. His espousal of unilateral nuclear disarmament and liberal internationalism is interwoven throughout the chapter. The chapter begins by focusing on the evolution of Foot's oratory during the early stages of his political career as MP for Plymouth Devonport.

### The flame of liberty, 1945–70

Foot's style of oratory was shaped by his close friend and leading Labour left MP, Aneurin Bevan's mantra 'to always address yourself to the strength of your opponent's case, not the weakness' (Foot, 1962: 261). Foot's speeches tended to be delivered 'across a range of intonations in a series of barks' and punctuated by dramatic pauses caused by his asthma (*Independent*, 2010). He rarely spoke from notes when addressing public meetings, 'leaving much to chance and spontaneous combustion' (Morgan, 2007b: 484). Due to his involvement with Keep Left and the Bevanites, Foot was excluded from the rostrum at Labour Party conference until 1959 by the moderate party leadership and trade unions. However, from 1949 Foot became a regular contributor to the current affairs television programme, *In the News* (Jones, 1995). Hoggart and Leigh attribute his effectiveness in this arena to the formal debating structure of the programme, while Jones highlights BBC viewers' perceptions of Foot as 'intolerant, humourless and fanatical' (Hoggart and Leigh, 1981: 104; Jones, 1995: 178).

Yet Foot was most anxious to prove himself as a parliamentary orator. Foot was steeped in the history of Parliament and believed that the oratory of individual MPs could make a difference through upholding democracy and pursuing progressive reform. His maiden speech asserted his irreverent, anti-establishment ethos by promising to 'sink from that high level of pure affability which we are supposed to attain in our maiden speeches' (*House of Commons Debates*, 20 August 1945). The speech, which concentrated on the pursuit of liberty and democracy in foreign affairs, balanced logos and pathos. Foot's appeals to logos drew on a class-based analysis of 1930s international relations, reminding MPs that 'when the war came, when Hitler made his attack, there were very few friends of Hitler to be found in the workers' homes in Europe, and there were very few friends of democracy to be found in the precincts of the palaces and the offices of big business' (Foot, 1945). Thereafter, the diplomatic and moral failings of appeasement were dissected, as Foot urged the Labour Party not to 'submit to instruction on the principles of democracy' from the Conservative Party, which had taken the 'mass journey to Damascus a little late'. The speech concluded with a patriotic appeal to pathos, which sought to infuse Britain's post-war international role with the spirit of national independence and democracy generated during 1940:

At the end of this great war and after this great Election, the British people can play as conspicuous a part before the gaze of all mankind as they played in 1940 ... Surely it is the duty of our great country not to be content with some secondary role ... As we look out across this stricken Continent and as we see a new hope in the struggle to be born across this wilderness of shattered faiths, may it not be our destiny as the freest and most democratic and a Socialist Power to stand between the living and the dead and stay the flames?

Future speeches built upon these themes by evolving a narrative in which the Conservative Party represented an unpatriotic, privileged 'vested interest' associated

with private monopoly and international capitalists who were intent on sparking an economic crisis in the UK to prevent further socialist reform (*House of Commons Debates*, 28 October 1947). This also reflected Foot's concern that anti-socialist vested interests were using their influence within the Establishment and civil society to undermine the Labour government. He delivered several speeches attacking the Kemsley press empire, which he alleged undermined freedom of speech and democracy by enforcing proprietorial control over the editors of Lord Kemsley's nationwide network of newspapers. During these debates Foot's ethos as a leading opponent of wartime press censorship came to the fore. Foot asserted that 'Lord Kemsley's newspapers do distort the news, they do suppress the evidence, they are used as vehicles for the expression of the political opinions of Lord Kemsley. And the word "gutter" is a good old English word which makes its meaning tolerably plain' (*House of Commons Debates*, 29 October 1946).

Foreign affairs continued to form a central focus of Foot's oratory throughout his time as MP for Plymouth Devonport. Although Foot's speeches supported collective security, he defied the Labour Party leadership by opposing membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and promoting British neutrality in the developing Cold War. Foot envisaged Britain and its Commonwealth working alongside the United Nations (UN) instead to promote peace and humanitarianism. When not speaking on these issues Foot concentrated on constituency interests in Plymouth. Foot became one of the leading back-bench spokespeople for the Blitzed areas and naval dockyards, demanding that investment in new housing and jobs should be given special priority in these areas as a reward for the people's sacrifices during the war (*House of Commons Debates*, 18 March 1947; *House of Commons Debates*, 8 March 1948; *House of Commons Debates*, 21 March 1949; *House of Commons Debates*, 5 December 1951; *House of Commons Debates*, 25 February 1952).

Foot's defeat at Devonport in 1955 was followed by the revisionist Hugh Gaitskell's election as Labour Party leader in 1955. With Foot's democratic socialism marginalised within the party, he further developed his media profile through participation in ITV's *Free Speech* current affairs programme, cultivating a reputation for incisive debate and a lack of deference, which were at odds with consensual contemporary broadcast media practices. Simultaneously, Foot broadened his interests through involvement with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) (Jones, 1995: 225–31). When he was allowed to address the Labour Party conference for the first time in 1959 Foot spoke on this matter. Foot also used the platform to aggressively challenge Gaitskell's efforts to revise Clause IV of the party constitution: 'we are never going to convert or win an election if we ourselves do not believe in our own principles of public ownership ... it is a fallacy to try to separate the ends and the means because socialism, in my view, is a doctrine which reveals how only by mobilising the resources of the community can you achieve the ends' (LHASC, 1959: 122). This rhetoric and activism further alienated Foot from the

Labour Party leadership, and enabled him to popularise his ethos as a democratic socialist tribune.

Meanwhile, the death of Bevan and Foot's election as his successor in Ebbw Vale in 1960 signalled the beginning of a new phase in Foot's oratory. Ebbw Vale intensified Foot's socialist passion through its association with Bevan, added to his national profile, broadened his industrial interests to include the key staple industries of coal and steel, and brought him into contact with the influential National Union of Mineworkers and Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. Foot used his first major parliamentary speech as MP for Ebbw Vale to pursue the cause of unilateral nuclear disarmament. The speech utilised ethos, logos and pathos in equal measure. Foot's ethos as heir to Bevan was interwoven throughout his oratory, 'No one could be more conscious than I am of my unfitness to represent the constituency which he made famous' (*House of Commons Debates*, 13 December 1960). Attacking the lack of parliamentary control over Britain's nuclear arsenal and its deployment with American-led NATO forces, his appeal to logic was once again built around notions of liberty, democracy and national independence:

[O]ne of the most sinister features of our society induced by the invention of these weapons is that political control, and, even more, anything which can properly be described as Parliamentary or democratic control, is corroded almost to the point of extinction. It is the essence of the nuclear strategy that the decisions which govern all our lives shall be taken by a very few people, possibly even by one man. That is the very opposite of liberal or democratic debate. Therefore, on the supreme question of all supreme questions, we have accepted the notion of dictatorship, and even dictatorship by a foreign power. (*House of Commons Debates*, 13 December 1960)

Thereafter, Foot's oratory reached a passionate crescendo as he aligned CND with the national interest, 'fortunately for the honour of this country there is a great and growing number of people throughout the land who are protesting against the policies pursued by the Government ... who are protesting against the suffocation of democratic responsibilities which goes on in this matter, and they have every right to do so' (*House of Commons Debates*, 13 December 1960). Through this oratory Foot became the figurehead of a large vocal unilateralist minority within the labour movement.

Foot's concern for parliamentary sovereignty also led him to oppose membership of the EEC. His oratory forcefully contrasted the EEC's 'bastard form of Cobdenism' with the 'primary concern of this House and of the country ... to develop the economic relations between the developed and under-developed areas of the world' (*House of Commons Debates*, 28 June 1961). Labour and Liberal Party advocates of entry, who contended that Britain should pursue progressive policies from within the EEC, were mocked with humorous invective which presented the EEC as an elitist rich man's club: 'it is like a man saying that he wants to become a member of the Carlton Club, but in order to avoid difficulties and the opprobrium which this might arouse among his friends, he intends later to turn it into a Left-wing coffee house.'

Although less fractious, Foot's relationship with Gaitskell's successor as Labour Party leader, Harold Wilson, was complicated. The Labour left, now organised through the newly established Tribune Group, placed high expectations on Wilson who was a former Bevanite. At the Labour Party conference Foot urged Wilson to implement in full Labour's 1964 general election winning manifesto, while simultaneously using his influence in the Tribune Group to discourage back-bench rebellions (LHASC, 1965; Morgan, 2007b). The economic crisis of 1966–67 proved a turning point. Despite the delivery of steel nationalisation, Foot became increasingly alienated over the implementation of a statutory incomes policy, public spending reductions and proposed industrial relations legislation. Addressing the 1966 and 1968 party conferences Foot launched scathing critiques of the government which were shaped by pathos and Foot's democratic socialist ethos. Foot skilfully presented himself as the socialist conscience of the Labour Party, using phrases such as 'I say, as a socialist' and 'I say we can break out of it if we have faith in our own principles'. Both speeches passionately linked the loss of national economic independence with the pursuit of conservative economic policies, 'We shall not beat this economic crisis with the rusty weapons of our opponents. We will not solve this problem by dressing ourselves in the deflationary clothes of the Tories'.

Given the limited time allotted to Foot at the rostrum he deployed emotive language to spark a reaction from conference, 'We are not our own masters. So great is the crushing burden of our overseas expenditure, so perilous is the position which our attempt to maintain ourselves as a world banker imposes upon us ... I say: any Government worth its salt, particularly a Labour Government, would do anything in its power to escape from that position of humiliating dependence.' Foot's rhetoric also sought to empower conference delegates by highlighting their ability to change policy, 'What we have to do is to use this Conference as one of the great instruments for persuading our movement to readopt the socialist policies on which we were elected, the socialist policies which can most quickly make this country independent, the socialist policies which can reinvigorate our movement' (LHASC, 1966: 237; LHASC, 1968: 146). These speeches were of profound significance as they enabled Foot to elevate his standing in the labour movement by aligning with the trade unions, which were becoming more militant in response to rising inflation and deindustrialisation.

In the period 1945–70 Foot's oratory on the core issues of public ownership, unilateral nuclear disarmament, industrial relations and the party manifesto broadened his personal appeal within the labour movement and established a middle-class support-base in CND. His appearances at party conference proved particularly influential in shifting his oratory from the left-wing margins of the Labour Party towards the centre of debate. Foot established a reputation as the most eagerly anticipated speaker at party conference and a powerful parliamentary orator sought after by media broadcasters. Although much of his oratory appealed to pathos and

logos it was underpinned by Foot's democratic socialist ethos, as he urged the party leadership to have greater faith in the labour movement and its democratic socialist convictions.

### The 'politics of persuasion', 1970-80

Foot's election to the Shadow Cabinet in 1970 was recognition of his extended appeal within the labour movement and would transform his political career in the period 1970-80. Foot's front-bench position allowed him greater time at the rostrum at party conference and enabled him to lead parliamentary debates with much greater regularity. Although there were continuities in Foot's oratory, his speeches reflected the transition from back-bench rebel to government minister by incorporating greater pragmatism. Addressing public meetings and CLPs during the 1973-74 mining crisis, Foot's oratory drew on a combination of pathos and logos. Pathos was to the fore in Foot's speech to Nelson and Colne CLP, which was intended to convey Labour's narrative regarding the mining dispute and reassure activists that the party would deliver its radical *1973 Programme*. Foot deployed a series of combative rhetorical questions intended to ignite his audience's indignation, 'Doesn't he [Heath] know that the pits have been short of miners for years? Doesn't he realise that a defeat for the miners could have disastrous consequences throughout the coalfield? Doesn't he realise that you can only recruit miners in mining communities?' (Foot, 1973b). This was accompanied by apocalyptic language regarding the future of the mining industry: 'This indeed may be our last chance to keep a coal industry in this country at all ... We cannot allow the most essential industry in the country to be crucified on the cross of an unfair and unworkable incomes policy' (Foot, 1973b).

Although Foot's January 1974 speech to a public meeting in Taunton utilised logos to a greater extent, his language was more aggressive and contained strong class overtones, 'We must have miners. They will only come from mining communities. People in Bexley or Broadstairs who may imagine that the coal drops like manna from heaven may not be able to understand that, but somebody should have drilled it into Heath's thick skull by now' (Foot, 1974b). With a national miners' strike imminent, much of the speech sought to justify the miners' position and condemn Edward Heath for pursuing an intentionally destructive and confrontational strategy akin to 1926, 'It cannot be repeated too often that the trade union movement went to extreme lengths to offer Heath a way out ... but instead of seizing this obvious chance of a settlement, Heath and his colleagues are apparently to spend the next few weeks and months pouring still more millions of the national wealth down the drain in the attempt to mobilise the electorate against the miners' (Foot 1973b). Both of these speeches contained in microcosm the appeals to logos and pathos that Labour would deploy during the 1974 general elections.

As Employment Secretary between 1974 and 1976 Foot negotiated the 'Social Contract' with the trade unions, a voluntary wages agreement which formed the centrepiece of the government's economic strategy. Foot's address to the 1975 party conference utilised a combination of ethos, logos and pathos in an attempt to generate solidarity and win delegates' approval of the policy. Foot astutely drew on his reputation for rebellion to appeal for the trust of conference:

I have heard it many times before; I dare say I may have said it myself at some time; who knows? People sometimes say: we will agree to some arrangement between the Government and the trade unions about wages, but only when you have the full panoply of socialist measures actually put into full operation. I understand the argument but I say it is unworkable. (LHASC, 1975: 163-6)

Logos also came to the fore as Foot highlighted the Social Contract's compatibility with democratic socialist values:

you can do it by not so many methods. You can do it by the brutal capitalist methods of the nineteenth century, or you can do it by the equally brutal, or maybe even more outrageous methods of twentieth century Stalinism, or you can do it by the politics of persuasion, by the Social Contract. You can do it that way. You can do it the democratic way, which is the heart and soul of our Labour Movement. (LHASC, 1975: 163-6)

Thereafter, the speech fused pathos with Foot's literary ethos, exhorting the movement to display the 'red flame of socialist courage' and avoid the divisive errors of 1931:

We face an economic typhoon of unparalleled ferocity, the worst the world has seen since the 1930s. Joseph Conrad wrote a book called 'Typhoon', and at the end he told people how to deal with it. He said, 'Always facing it Captain McWhirr: that's the way to get through'. Always facing it that is the way we have got to solve this problem. We do not want a Labour Movement that tries to dodge it; we do not want people in a Labour Cabinet to try to dodge it. We want people who are prepared to show how they are going to face it, and we need the unified support of the Labour Movement to achieve it. (LHASC, 1975: 163-6)

Foot's newfound emphasis on party unity reflected his concern over the emergence of aggressive neo-liberal Conservatism under Heath and Margaret Thatcher, which Foot described as the 'politics of force' due to its advocacy of anti-union legislation and hostility towards the public sector (Foot, 1974c). According to Foot the overwhelmingly pro-Conservative media was complicit in the promotion of the 'politics of force'. Speaking in Thatcher's Finchley constituency in 1978 he accused the Conservative supporting media of being 'neo-fascist' in its manipulation of opinion poll evidence and coverage of industrial relations (Foot, 1978). He also extended this critique to Thatcher, and her neo-liberal ally, Keith Joseph, whom he accused of using the Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency to disseminate 'Tory propaganda'

intended to mislead the British people into accepting 'the pernicious doctrine that inhuman market forces must be allowed to dictate to human beings how they should behave and how they should live in communities together' (Foot, 1978).

Foot's oratory was shaped by memories of the 1930s and 1940s. Speaking to Barrow-in-Furness CLP in 1976 he presented the Social Contract as the only democratic means to prevent a return to the economic depression of the 1930s and stem the drift towards 'near-fascist conditions' (Foot, 1976). Parallels were drawn between the economic crisis facing the Labour government and the wartime crisis of 1940, directly implying that British democracy was under threat. This concern underpinned Foot's public speeches and media interviews attacking the idea of peacetime coalition government (Foot, 1979). Addressing the Society of Labour Lawyers during a period of minority Labour government in 1974 Foot used logos to dismiss coalition government as an 'evil and impractical' notion associated with the 'Guilty Men' of the 1930s:

Let us recall the year 1931 when the call for a Government of National Unity became overpowering. The clamour from Fleet Street and Threadneedle Street and Westminster and Whitehall succeeded, and on a note of triumph and self-congratulation, the worst British government of the century took office, and led us inexorably to 1940 and the most perilous moment in our history. (Foot, 1974b)

However, after the loss of the government's majority in 1977 Foot further embellished the ethos underpinning the 'politics of persuasion' by negotiating an agreement with the Liberal Party in order to sustain Labour in office. Foot was at pains to emphasise that 'there is no question of any coalition ... Nor is there any question of any Lib-Lab pact as has been discussed in previous years. It is an agreement between us, made in good faith on both sides, to try to make this Session of Parliament workable in the interests of the nation and the people' (*House of Commons Debates*, 23 March 1977).

Meanwhile, rising support for the Scottish Nationalists and Plaid Cymru at the 1974 general elections added to the sense of crisis by bringing the future of the UK into question. The Labour government responded by proposing the establishment of devolved Scottish and Welsh assemblies, for which Foot assumed responsibility following his appointment as Leader of the House in 1976. Logos dominated Foot's oratory on this issue. During the parliamentary debates Foot drew parallels between devolution and the nineteenth-century reform acts, arguing that it would strengthen democracy while maintaining parliamentary sovereignty (*House of Commons Debates*, 3 August 1976; *House of Commons Debates*, 30 November 1976; *House of Commons Debates*, 16 December 1976; *House of Commons Debates*, 15 February 1978). With the Labour Party divided on devolution the debate at the 1976 party conference became fractious, leading Foot to expand upon the 'politics of persuasion' by describing Labour as 'persuaded devolutionists' while highlighting long-held Labour support for the policy: 'Keir Hardie was a strong supporter

of something similar for Scotland and when he stood for Merthyr Tydfil and when elected he was in favour of such a proposition for Wales as well ... if Keir Hardie was here ... he would have asked why we had not got on with it before' (LHASC, 1976: 201–2). Furthermore, Foot urged conference to support devolution on the pragmatic grounds that it was sustaining the minority Labour government in office through conditional support from the Nationalist parties and the Liberal Party while helping to deliver manifesto commitments, such as nationalisation of the shipyards.

Foot's advocacy of devolution was interlinked with his concern for the interests of Britain's industrial communities. Anxiety over accelerating deindustrialisation led Foot to broaden his critique of British membership of the EEC to include its detrimental effect on the steel industry. He explained that:

if there is a proposal for building a great new steel works in this country, there will be arguments about whether it should be built in Wales, Scotland or elsewhere. But one of the by-products or associated facts of entry into the Community may be that the building of such a big new plant, a major new investment of the Steel Corporation, will take place in Europe instead. (*House of Commons Debates*, 3 November 1971)

Foot's rhetoric reflected the interests of his own constituents in Ebbw Vale, but by seeking to defend industrial Britain he also added to his standing in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), which contained a disproportionately large number of Labour MPs who represented industrial communities grappling with the twin problems of deindustrialisation and unemployment. Therefore, Foot performed strongly in the 1976 Labour Party leadership contest and was elected deputy leader later that year (Crines, 2011). When the Labour government fell in March 1979 Foot was widely recognised as the leading Labour left MP.

Indeed, Foot delivered one of his finest parliamentary performances during the Confidence Debate which brought the government down. The speech was underpinned by logos as Foot restrained his passion to provide a contrast with the 'almost hysterical tension' of the preceding debate. Foot's newfound ethos as a 'parliamentary fixer' was evident as he humorously warned the Speaker of the House that 'they are trying to stop me from getting your vote as well' (*House of Commons Debates*, 28 March 1979). Portraying the Scottish Nationalists and Liberals as pawns of Thatcher, the speech primarily sought to discredit the minority parties intent on voting against the government by highlighting their connivance with the Conservative Party, 'what the right hon. Lady has done today is to lead her troops into battle snugly concealed behind a Scottish nationalist shield, with the boy David holding her hand'. Foot's reference to 'the boy, David' skilfully presented the young Liberal Party leader, David Steel, as immature in siding with the Conservatives, and was reinforced by the damning assessment that '[Steel] has passed from rising hope to elder statesman without any intervening period'.

This intelligent use of logos, which presciently predicted that Steel's error of judgment would result in the deterioration of the Liberals' electoral prospects, was also directed against the Scottish Nationalists. Foot's oratory highlighted the contradictions underlying their parliamentary leader Donald Stewart's alignment with 'those who are most bitterly opposed to the establishment of a Scottish Assembly' and commented on the 'remarkable allegiance that the right hon. Gentleman commands from his followers' in an attempt to encourage left-leaning Nationalists to defy Stewart (Wilson, 2009: 192–7). The speech concluded with a powerful patriotic attack on the Conservatives, which once again drew on memories of 1940 and 1945:

What will once again be the choice at the next election? It will not be so dissimilar from the choice that the country had to make in 1945, or even in 1940 when the Labour Party had to come to the rescue of the country. It was on a motion of the Labour Party that the House of Commons threw out the Chamberlain Government in 1940. It was thanks to the Labour Party that Churchill had the chance to serve the country in the war years. Two-thirds of the Conservative Party at that time voted for the same reactionary policies as they will vote for tonight. It is sometimes in the most difficult and painful moments of our history that the country has turned to the Labour Party for salvation, and it has never turned in vain. (Wilson, 2009)

Although the balance of Foot's oratory shifted towards logos during the period 1970–80 through his articulation of the 'politics of persuasion', Foot's democratic socialist ethos was integral to the credibility of this rhetoric. Foot was at the height of his oratorical powers and his speeches at party conference and in Parliament were central to sustaining the Labour government in office. Despite the collapse of the Social Contract during the 'winter of discontent' and the triumph of Thatcher's 'politics of force' at the 1979 general election, he left office with enhanced esteem within the labour movement. This was primarily due to Foot's efforts to sustain Labour Party unity and preserve relations with the trade unions while delivering manifesto commitments. These factors would result in his surprise election as leader of an increasingly divided Labour Party in November 1980 at the age of sixty-seven, ushering in a new phase in his oratory.

### **The politics of emasculation, 1980–83**

The internal divisions that Foot inherited profoundly influenced his oratory as Labour Party leader. Under his leadership Labour was confronted with the tripartite problems of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) split, Militant Tendency entryism and the Bennite left (Shaw, 1996). Foot's speeches on these issues displayed pathos and ethos and were underpinned by his commitment to parliamentary sovereignty, Labour Party democracy and liberal party management. Tony Benn, who led a hard left grouping on the National Executive Committee (NEC) intent on transforming

Labour's constitution through conference and NEC control of the election manifestos and mandatory reselection of MPs, was the main target of Foot's oratory (Panitch and Leys, 2001). Foot's speech to the 1981 party conference, which took place in the immediate aftermath of Benn's narrow defeat by Denis Healey in a deputy leadership contest, sought to achieve the difficult balancing act of restoring party unity while discrediting the key demands of the Bennite left. His oratory blended ethos and pathos, quoting Benn before drawing on his own personal reputation for rebellion to challenge Benn's position:

Tony said – and I quote his words, and I listened, as they were addressed especially, I think in a sense to me – He said about the Parliamentary Party that he wanted to have: 'a better internal democracy so that he is never again told he is there being "a dog licence issued by a prime minister"' ... I give Tony and everybody else concerned this absolute undertaking here and now that no such dog licenses will be issued by me. Indeed, I can recall the first occasion when that was said, because I was in the party meeting when it happened ... I protested against that statement then. I have protested against the idea behind it ever since. (LHASC, 1981: 121)

Foot's democratic socialism was at the heart of the speech, as he sought to contrast Benn's criticisms of party democracy with the undemocratic implications of his constitutional demands: 'I accept partners – that is what it has got to be. The partnership has got to be one in which the Parliamentary Party does not presume the right to dictate to the Party Conference, and the Party Conference does not presume the right to dictate to the Parliamentary Party'. Foot also used deprecating humour to highlight the hypocrisy of Benn in questioning previous Labour governments' integrity by reminding conference that he had 'not been in quite as many Labour Cabinets as Tony has'. Thereafter, pathos came to the fore as Foot returned to the theme of 'the politics of force' in an attempt to focus the party's attention on the genuine threat posed to democracy by Thatcherism, 'almost week by week, the collapse of the Government's economic policies causes them to attack our free institutions. They must find scapegoats. So with every economic failure they turn more viciously on the local authorities or the trade unions or the nationalised industries or on the obligation of Parliament itself to provide full employment'. Although the speech helped to stem the rise of the Bennite left, the scale of Labour's internal divisions resulted in Foot's oratory remaining inward-looking.

Due to these divisions Foot's leadership became increasingly reliant on the support of moderates intent on marginalising the Bennite left (Crewe and King, 1997; Golding, 2003). This reliance was accentuated by the formation of the SDP in March 1981 by 'liberal revisionist' defectors from the Labour Party (Meredith, 2008: 14–19). Foot presented the SDP/Liberal Party Alliance as a 'disparate group of disillusioned people thirsting for power and willing to coalesce with anyone who will help them on their way', and accused the Labour defectors of 'bringing

aid and comfort to the most reactionary government we have had in this country in this century' (Foot, 1981a; 1982). Meanwhile, Foot relented to moderate pressure and compromised his liberal party management through the establishment of a register of proscribed organisations intended to facilitate the expulsion of the Trotskyite entryist group, the Militant Tendency (Thomas Symonds, 2005). This decision exposed Foot to accusations of hypocrisy given his previous involvement with the Socialist League, Bevanites and Tribune Group, accusations which he responded to with a highly emotional speech at the 1982 party conference: 'I will be opposed to witch hunts in the party until the day I die ... when people say to me that Militant Tendency are just like Stafford Cripps or Aneurin Bevan ... it is not like that at all ... There was no secret conspiracy with Stafford Cripps or Aneurin Bevan ... They were accused of trying to form a party within a party, but it was not true ... but in this case it is true, and that is the big difference' (LHASC, 1982: 51-2). However, this appeal to pathos and ethos failed to conceal Foot's diminishing authority amongst the Labour left and the growing emasculation of his leadership.

These trends were accentuated by the media's near singular focus on Labour's problems. Foot's televised interviews with the former Labour MP, Brian Walden, on *Weekend World* proved particularly difficult as Walden's combative questioning style unsettled Foot, who in turn resisted the 'sound bite' interview technique (Foot, 1981b; 1981c; 1983). This interview technique partly stemmed from the tabloid media and the growing involvement of advertising agencies in British politics. However, Foot argued that this approach represented a threat to democracy by crudely simplifying complex ideological and policy debates within Parliament, party conference and the PLP. As a result of his refusal to adapt to modern media methods, Foot suffered from a poor media image and struggled to generate popular appeal (Shaw, 1996). Foot's advisors sought to overcome these difficulties by encouraging him to make his televised speeches and interviews more factual and policy centred but this only succeeded in neutralising Foot's one remaining asset; his passion.

To compound matters Foot's style of oratory, which prioritised principle over policy detail, was ill-suited to conveying the programmatic politics of Labour's Bennite-influenced Alternative Economic Strategy. His addresses to the 1980 Liverpool and 1981 Glasgow unemployment demonstrations are illuminating in this regard. Both speeches were dominated by pathos as Foot sought to empower his audiences and enflame their political passions through the use of emotive and aggressive language. Speaking in Liverpool he urged the demonstration to 'kill the lie that there is no alternative to mass unemployment ... Banish the despair which mass unemployment brings in its train. Of course we can stop the whole wretched process of industrial ruin if we have the will. Prepare to destroy at the ballot box, which is the only place they can be finally defeated, the Party of Unemployment' (Foot, 1980). His appeal to pathos reached a crescendo in Glasgow. The speech skilfully sought to

align Scottish patriotism with anti-Conservatism while presenting a united labour movement as the vehicle to rescue Britain from Thatcherism: 'Comrades, have you brought your diaries with you? Mark down this date ... This is one of the great historic days in the history of Scotland when we tell the Tory Government what we think of them ... we have had some great crises in the history of our country, 1940, 1945 and in all of them it is this Labour movement of ours that has had to come in and saved the country as a whole' (Foot, 1981d). Foot's memories of the 1930s were omnipresent in both speeches, 'No the 1930s are not to be allowed to return to plague us. The fresh martyrdom of new generations is not to be tolerated'. However, in tapping into collective memories of the 1930s and 1940s and binding Labour to the democratic socialism of 1945 Foot ran the risk of appearing backward-looking and highlighting his advancing age, which was increasingly perceived as an electoral liability.

Foreign policy speeches proved equally problematic. Foot developed a fierce critique of American foreign policy which he contended was recklessly aggressive in the nuclear arms race and responsible for an 'evil' imperialism in Latin America (Foot, 1981e). He pledged to remove American cruise missiles from UK soil and questioned the British-American special relationship. In response the Conservative Party and its media supporters portrayed him as an unpatriotic Communist 'fellow traveller'. The only occasion in which Foot caught the patriotic pulse of the nation was in the emergency parliamentary debate over the Falklands crisis in April 1982. Indeed, Morgan describes the speech as 'perhaps Foot's last great parliamentary performance' (Morgan, 2007b: 411). Although the speech made appeals to logos and pathos, it was underpinned by Foot's long-standing reputation as an opponent of appeasement. Foot deployed logos by posing a series of probing questions intended to hold Thatcher personally accountable and reveal the diplomatic failings of her government:

What has happened to British diplomacy? The explanations given by the right hon. Lady, when she managed to rise above some of her own party arguments ... were not very full and not very clear. They will need to be a good deal more ample in the days to come ... Above all, more important than the question of what happened to British diplomacy or to British intelligence is what happened to our power to act? The right hon. Lady seemed to dismiss that question. It cannot be dismissed. (*House of Commons Debates*, 3 April 1982)

This incisive analysis was accompanied by a powerful patriotic challenge to Thatcher to take action on behalf of the Falkland Islanders:

[T]here is no question in the Falkland Islands of any colonial dependence or anything of the sort. It is a question of people who wish to be associated with this country and who have built their whole lives on the basis of association with this country. We have a moral duty, a political duty and every other kind of duty to ensure that that is sustained ... So far they have been betrayed. The responsibility for the betrayal rests with

the Government. The Government must now prove by deeds – they will never be able to do it by words – that they are not responsible for the betrayal and cannot be faced with that charge. (*House of Commons Debates*, 3 April 1982)

Yet differing pacifist, anti-imperialist and anti-fascist interpretations of the crisis within the Labour Party subsequently led Foot to pursue a dual-track approach of supporting the despatch of the British taskforce while proposing a UN negotiated settlement, which negated Foot's patriotic rhetoric and created a sense of confusion (Frank *et al.*, 2010).

Foot's prevarication was in stark contrast to Thatcher, who cultivated the image of a conviction politician intolerant of dissent and opposed to compromise. In effect, Foot's leadership style had little appeal in the polarised political climate of the time. Between 1980 and 1983 Foot's oratory was driven by determination to preserve Labour Party unity and a sense of personal affront at the divisive effect of the SDP split and the Bennite left's constitutional manoeuvring. Ethos and pathos became his most prominent oratorical weapons in this internal labour movement conflict. Yet Foot's over-reliance on character and passion frequently inhibited his appeal to logos and conveyed an impression of confusion and indecision to the wider electorate. Foot was less assured at party conference where he faced an increasingly critical audience and during Prime Minister's Question Time Foot was frequently exposed by Thatcher's aggression, speed of response and command of her brief. Consequently, Foot's oratory was at its weakest in the period 1980–83, debilitated by a combination of internal party divisions, greater media focus on image over substance, and his inability to combat an aggressively populist Thatcher.

#### Conclusion: the red flame of socialist courage

To conclude an analysis of Michael Foot's oratory on the prism of his leadership would leave a distorted picture of its wider significance to the Labour Party. Foot continued to deliver notable parliamentary speeches until his retirement in 1992. In particular, his speeches on the Westland affair and Yugoslavia stand out. Logos was to the fore in both speeches as Foot assumed the ethos of elder parliamentarian. During the Westland debates in January 1986 Foot focused on Thatcher's duplicitous and undemocratic behaviour to expose her as divisive and untrustworthy:

[Michael Heseltine] said the other day that there was a constitutional crisis – a breach in the constitution ... I never thought it was a breach of the constitution. To me, it is a matter of common decency and plain speaking. It is a matter of coming to the House of Commons and telling the House the truth ... The reason why the Prime Minister is quite prepared to apply one rule of confidentiality to one lot and another rule of confidentiality to another lot is because she works on the principle, 'Is he one of us?' She operates with those who are 'one of us' and that is the way that this Government

has been run and this country has been debased. (*House of Commons Debates*, 27 January 1986)

Foot's final parliamentary speech in March 1992, which focused on conflict in the Balkans, also drew on the theme of democracy. It was underpinned by Foot's anti-appeasement ethos as he urged the government to commit UK troops to a UN peacekeeping force in the region in order to curb Serbian aggression. Once again he passionately drew comparisons with the 1930s:

What the [Serbian] federal army tried to do [in Dubrovnik] was one of the worst acts of that nature that has occurred since the bombing of Guernica ... Conflicts similar to these led people to say that we must have an international authority with the power and the capacity to send in troops speedily and the authority to settle disputes. To some of us, that was almost the first lesson to be learned from the failures between 1918 and 1945. We wanted a real United Nations with the power to act strongly. (*House of Commons Debates*, 5 March 1992)

Foot contributed to nearly all of the major political debates that shaped post-war Britain. He developed a delivery style that blended his knowledge of literature with rapier wit and disregard for deference. Foot's oratory was characterised by a sense of history, interweaving the English civil war, parliamentary reform and nineteenth-century radicalism with the evolution of the labour movement. The extent to which logos, pathos and ethos featured in Foot's oratory differed over time, as did the impact of his oratory on external and internal opponents and the wider electorate. As MP for Plymouth Devonport Foot's oratory was characterised by logos and pathos, and his oratorical pursuit of the 'Guilty Men' during these years, which emphasised the Conservatives' lack of patriotism and association with appeasement and unemployment, proved crucial to his victories in 1945, 1950 and 1951. After succeeding Bevan as MP for Ebbw Vale the force with which Foot's oratory conveyed his democratic socialist ethos proved integral to elevating his standing within the labour movement, and establishing Foot as the 'most consistently articulate and powerful speaker in the House' and at party conference (Morgan, 2007b: 484). Prior to 1970 Foot's chosen role as the democratic socialist conscience of the Labour Party brought him into regular conflict with the Labour Party leadership. In particular, his oratory helped to thwart Gaitskell's attempts to revise Clause IV and curtail Wilson's *In Place of Strife* proposals.

As Foot assumed Shadow Cabinet and ministerial responsibility during the 1970s his pursuit of the 'politics of persuasion' led to logos being combined with ethos in his oratory. The positive electoral impact of his oratory at national level was confined to this period as his exposure of Heath's inept handling of the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes and portrayal of the Conservative Party as an incompetent and elitist vested interest was integral to the Labour Party's victory in the 1974 general elections. Ironically, Foot's success in securing more liberal party management during this period was subsequently exploited by the Bennite left and

Militant Tendency under his leadership. During his time as leader Foot's appeals to logos were overshadowed by his reliance on ethos and pathos when addressing labour movement audiences. Although his oratory proved pivotal to preserving the foundations upon which party unity could be rebuilt after 1983 by preventing mass defections to the SDP and avoiding 'hard left' dominance of the party it also revealed some deep contradictions and ironies. Foot had been elected party leader as the unity candidate, and it was anticipated that his powers of oratory would expose the less intellectual and articulate Thatcher. Yet the main strengths of his oratory – conviction and incisive analysis – failed to shine through due to a combination of internal divisions and age. The pursuer of the 'Guilty Men' and tribune of democratic socialism came to be perceived as appeasing the 'undemocratic' hard left and trade unions while prevaricating over causes that he had pursued for a generation, such as unilateral nuclear disarmament. These difficulties were accentuated by Foot's poor media image. During the 1950s his lack of deference and incisive analysis marked Foot out from contemporary politicians but by the 1980s his refusal to deliver 'sound bites' or alter his appearance undermined his ability to effectively communicate with the wider electorate. Although Foot continued to perform strongly at public rallies and demonstrations, his style of oratory based upon an extended vocabulary, and a command of history and literature, had become outdated.

Nonetheless, Foot's oratory impacted on Labour policy and the party's political thought. Foot's vision of democratic socialism as the means to achieve the greatest individual freedom, advance democracy and secure national independence was translated into a progressive patriotic current of the Labour Party's wider political thought. This progressive patriotism associated the labour movement with the 'spirit of 1940', embraced the multinational diversity of the UK through advocacy of devolution, and promoted regional policy as a means of reducing inequality. For much of Foot's career the impact of his oratory on policy was limited due to his reputation for left-wing rebellion and passionate pursuit of causes. The policy areas over which Foot exerted most influence were the EEC, industrial relations and devolution. From the 1960s Foot was the most consistent and articulate Labour Party opponent of British membership of the EEC, combining the socialist case against membership of the European 'rich man's club' with parliamentary sovereignty. During the 1970s his passionate advocacy of the 'politics of persuasion' underpinning the Social Contract proved pivotal to its endorsement by trade union leaders and the Labour Party conference. Indeed, Foot's presentation of the Social Contract as both fair to workers and in the national interest shaped Labour's relationship with the unions for the following decade. Foot's speeches were equally important in delivering devolution legislation whilst in government and in ensuring that the Labour Party retained the commitment to legislative devolution for Wales and Scotland under his leadership, despite deep internal divisions on the issue.

Throughout his life Foot's oratory was defined by its passion, humanity and conviction. During an era when the Labour Party leadership was dominated by political economists attracted by rationalist methods of electoral communication, such as Gaitskell and Wilson, Foot's oratory humanised Labour's socialism by emphasising the need to appeal to the emotion as well as the intellect of the electorate. Foot's speeches acted as a moral compass for the Labour Party, reminding the party of its responsibility to the working class and its historic relationship with the wider labour movement. Despite variations in their appeal to pathos and ethos, Foot's speeches always exhorted his audience to kindle 'the red flame of socialist courage'. Foot made the greatest contribution of all post-war Labour orators to preserving the ideal of the Labour Party as a democratic socialist cause.