

‘I’m Telling You, and You’ll Listen’: Ethos in the Rhetoric of Neil Kinnock

Simon Griffiths

Neil Kinnock was elected leader of the Labour Party in October 1983 and stepped down almost 9 years later, after his party lost its fourth consecutive general election—the second under his leadership. In electoral terms, Kinnock’s tenure was a failure. Yet, by the time he resigned, the party was almost unrecognizable from the one Kinnock had inherited: less divided, with a set of policies more attractive to the wider electorate and better presented. It was on the cusp of its biggest electoral victory since 1945 and its longest period in office.

Kinnock’s rhetoric was also the subject of seemingly paradoxical interpretations. On the one hand, Kinnock was seen as ‘arguably the finest orator in modern British politics’. On the other, Kinnock was attacked as a ‘Welsh Windbag’ (Kellner 1992) and often seen as ineffective in Parliament—particularly against Margaret Thatcher (see e.g. the discussion in Westlake 2001: 390). As Peter Kellner writes: ‘even his closest friends wince at his tendency to stretch a succinct statement into an elasticated tangle’ (Kellner 1992: 1). It is this paradox that makes Kinnock’s rhetoric a fascinating subject of study.

This chapter focuses on the importance of ‘ethos’ as a mode of rhetoric. I begin by discussing ethos as a mode of persuasion, arguing for a broad understanding of the term. I then set out the way in which

S. Griffiths (✉)

Goldsmiths, University of London, London, England

Kinnock's ethos was a product of his background—a background with which his audiences would have been largely familiar. I argue that Kinnock's ethos gave him the authority to take on the left in the Labour Party during his early years as leader. However, that same ethos meant that Kinnock's rhetoric was less effective in reaching out *beyond* the labour movement and led some voters to question his suitability to be Prime Minister. As a result, Kinnock's later rhetoric as Labour leader drew less obviously on his own ethos and more on other rhetorical modes: a transformation that created a degree of mistrust. I conclude with some brief comments on the importance of a broad understanding of ethos in the analysis of rhetoric.

ETHOS AND RHETORIC

This exploration of Kinnock's rhetoric draws on the classical modes of persuasion discussed throughout this collection: pathos, logos, and—particularly—ethos. Roughly speaking, these modes correspond to an appeal to an audience's emotions, to logic, and to character respectively (Toye 2013: 42). So, when Kinnock cautioned his listeners in 1983 that 'If Margaret Thatcher wins on Thursday [...] I warn you not to fall ill. And I warn you not to grow old', he was using pathos, seeking to fill his audience with fear concerning the human consequences of a Conservative victory (Harris 1984: 208). In 1987, when he argued that 'there is no collision between affluence and socialism', he was using logos: there was no logical contradiction between a wealthy society and a just one (Kinnock in Kellner 1992: 129–133). When Kinnock told Parliament in his maiden speech that he was 'the first male member of my family for about three generations who can have reasonable confidence in expecting that I will leave this earth with more or less the same number of fingers, hands, legs, toes, and eyes as I had when I was born' (Kinnock in Harris 1984: 23), he was using ethos. Kinnock was letting his audience know that he was born into the working class and the labour movement, and that he would seek to represent them (Kinnock in Kellner 1992: 129–133). Orators will use a balance of modes to persuade their audience.

There is a debate about how widely the idea of 'ethos' should be conceived. In Aristotle's narrow definition, the ethos of a speaker is established in the speech itself: 'This kind of persuasion [...] should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of this character before he begins to speak' (Aristotle 2014: 2155). Prior reputation

is not a factor in rhetoric. The audience should make a judgement based solely on the speech. In contrast, I argue that a broader interpretation of ethos provides a more compelling account of how rhetoric functions. As Isocrates argued, a speaker's ethos was related to their character and reputation: 'the argument which is made by a man's life is more weight than that which is furnished by words' (Isocrates 1982: 278). Speakers, particularly politicians working in a media age, rarely come to us as strangers. As an audience, we listen with preconceived ideas about who they are and what they have done in the past, and this shapes our reception of their speech. The approach taken in this chapter takes this wider view of ethos. *Who* a speaker is becomes as important to their rhetoric as *what* they say. With regard to Kinnock, his ethos included those aspects of his character and history known to the audience before a speech had begun. As such, his background mattered because it shaped his ethos. There is a further, related sense in which the concept of 'ethos' is used. It can be used to describe the guiding beliefs or ideals that characterize an entity, such as a community, an ideology, or a political party. People talk about the 'ethos' of the Labour Party, for example, when describing its guiding beliefs. This latter use is the root of our word 'ethics'.

KINNOCK'S ETHOS

According to David Marquand, 'in a sense true of surprisingly few of his predecessors, Labour's ethos is also [Kinnock's] ethos. He is unmistakably and unaffectedly a product of the working class culture of the South Wales valleys, with all the strengths and weaknesses that that implies' (Marquand 1991: 205–206). Kinnock was born in 1942, into a working class, South Walian family. His father, Gordon, was a coal miner—a member of the 'labour aristocracy'—and his mother, Mary, a district nurse (Westlake 2001: Chap. 2). Asked about his political awakenings, Kinnock noted the high level of 'civic consciousness' in the family. He recalls his mother impressing upon him the importance of being a 'good citizen'—a favourite term of hers (Kinnock 2011). In this vein, the historian Kenneth Morgan writes: 'Unusually among Labour leaders, he is an authentic proletarian in the people's party, with his mother's insistence on short haircuts and polished shoes as a further tribute to South Wales' working class canons of respectability'. Contrasting Kinnock with his intellectual, middle class predecessor as party leader, Michael Foot, Morgan notes, 'No donkey jacket at the Cenotaph for him' (Morgan 1992: 335). The family was not particularly active in Labour Party

politics but, Kinnock notes, they did have ‘huge regard for Jim Griffiths and other heroes of the pantheon’ and ‘worshipped’ the Welsh socialist, Aneurin Bevan (Kinnock 2011). They were part of the labour movement in the broadest sense.

Place and tradition shaped Kinnock’s rhetoric. He noted that he was ‘immensely fortunate in where I happened to be born’ (Kinnock 2011). For David Moon, the Welsh word ‘hwyl’ is useful in understanding Kinnock’s oratory. There is no clear translation of the term in English, and Moon argues that ‘hwyl’ is four things: a mood of enthusiasm or fervour; a medium involving musical cadences and lilting notes; a style of speech familiar to the Welsh nonconformist preacher; and a drive, like a sail filled with wind, that carries the oratory forward (Moon 2015: 129). When the ‘new religion’ of socialism came to displace the chapel in the Welsh valleys, the style of evangelizing remained the same (Deacon cited in Moon 2015: 129); the rhetoric of socialism was also recognizably the rhetoric of the pulpit. The passion, musicality and drive of Kinnock’s oratory were in part the product of his Welsh roots.

Kinnock’s apprenticeship in public speaking came through the labour movement and student politics. He joined the Labour Party at 14, partly under the influence of Bill Harry, a local councillor. In 1961, Kinnock was admitted to University College, Cardiff—as he later commented ‘the first Kinnock in a thousand generations to be able to go to university’ (Kellner 1992: 8; Thomas-Symonds 2006)—obtaining a degree in industrial relations and history in 1965. More importantly, he became active in student politics, joining the university’s Socialist Society and later becoming President of the Students’ Union. During these years he met his future wife, Glenys. Reflecting on that time, he commented:

Fate can be dominated by the most miniscule of things. I wanted to impress her. She *en passant* really said how much she thought debating and public speaking was important. So I took on a role in the debating society in Cardiff University which was immensely active and had huge attendances, overcame my terror, made a speech [...] won the debate and as a consequence was thrust into a much higher profile political role. (Kinnock 2011)

University was followed by a postgraduate diploma in education and, between August 1966 and May 1970, almost 4 years as a tutor for the Workers’ Educational Association (Harris 1984: Chap. 3; Kinnock 2011).

Kinnock's political rise in the Labour Party was impressive. After university he remained active in local party politics. Aged just 27, he squeezed victory over more established candidates as the Labour nominee for his local constituency, Bedwellty (later Islwyn), in June 1969. He was elected to Parliament on 18 June 1970. It was through his rhetorical abilities that Kinnock first made a name for himself in the national party, through a series of well-received conference speeches during the 1970s (Morgan 1992: 337). Following the general election defeat of 1979, James Callaghan appointed him Shadow Education spokesman (Westlake 2001: Chaps. 6, 8) and, 4 years later, Kinnock was overwhelmingly elected to the party leadership. Seen as a candidate from the left—although no longer the hard left—Kinnock was elected with over 71% of the vote, winning in every section of a college of unions, MPs, and party members. As Kinnock spoke to thank 'the movement' for choosing him as the next party leader, his words were filtered by the perceptions his audience already had of his character and roots.

EARLY LEADERSHIP: ETHOS AND AUTHORITY

Kinnock inherited a Labour Party in existential crisis (Whiteley 1983; Seyd 1987; Jefferys 1993). The party had gained just 29% of the popular vote in the 1983 general election. It had campaigned on a manifesto committing it to further nationalization, withdrawal from the Common Market, and unilateral nuclear disarmament. In Kinnock's view, these policies made the party unelectable. Looking back, he argued that, by the beginning of the 1980s, there had to be 'huge policy changes': Labour 'was travelling in orbit around the realities with which people lived [...]. And that meant that the messages that they did have [...] simply lacked credibility. And therefore, those policies had to change, and be changed'. He went on to say that 'The problem in politics, of course, is that policies become 'religified' [...] and in a relatively short time go as deep as conformist religious doxologies. And so changing those policies is like changing faith. It's absurd' (Kinnock 2011).

Policy tensions went hand in hand with organizational tensions. The party had split after 1981, as 28 MPs from the right followed the 'gang of four' into the new centrist Social Democratic Party (SDP). After 1979, the left had sought to 'change Labour's Constitution in order to make the leadership more accountable to the party outside Parliament' (Garner and Kelly 1998: 114). The result was a shift in power away

from the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and towards party activists. Mandatory reselection of MPs by Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) was introduced (Koelble 1991: 101ff). Many of the Labour MPs who had defected to the SDP were threatened in their local parties with deselection in favour of candidates from the Militant left. Militant, a Trotskyist entryist group, gained significant control of Labour councils in the mid-1980s, notably in Liverpool. As Peter Kellner puts it, ‘When Kinnock became its leader, the party’s long-term survival was in doubt’ (Kellner 1992: 10).

These tensions came to a head at the 1985 party conference in Bournemouth, when Kinnock attacked Militant. It was arguably the finest example of his rhetoric and is worthy of further analysis. The context for the speech was the decision by Liverpool City Council to deliberately budget for an illegal deficit, in order to provoke a crisis that would force central government to offer extra aid to the city. This strategy was designed to demonstrate to working people that revolutionary politics could succeed where parliamentary politics had failed. In August 1985, officials warned Derek Hatton, the leading Militant figure on the Council, that Liverpool would run out of money to pay its staff by the end of the year. This meant that it would have to issue 90-day redundancy notices to all 31,000 of its employees. This was the crisis that Militant was looking for. Hatton assured workers that Council jobs were safe, and that the government was posturing, but the main unions representing Council staff were unconvinced and refused to distribute the redundancy notices to members. As a result, Hatton commissioned a fleet of 30 taxis to deliver the redundancy notices to workers (Kellner 1992: 73–77). Kinnock’s conference speech confronted the situation head-on.

On the platform, Kinnock’s rhetorical skills were used to remarkable effect. He improvised with the written text he had in front of him, treating it—as was often the way—more like a draft. Indeed, the text underlined in the passage below was not in the copy of the speech given to journalists, but was improvised by Kinnock on the podium (see Kellner 1992: 1). With leading figures from Militant barracking him from the conference floor, Kinnock told his audience:

I’ll tell you what happens with impossible promises. You start with far-fetched resolutions. They are then pickled into a rigid dogma, a code, and you go through the years sticking to that, out-dated, mis-placed,

irrelevant to the real needs, and you end up in the grotesque chaos of a Labour council – a LABOUR council – hiring taxis to scuttle round a city handing out redundancy notices to its own workers. (Quoted in Kellner 1992: 3, 91)

Commentators have noted how the use of the word ‘scuttle’, in the passage above, adds to the image of the already-insectile black cabs. Aristotle explores the power of metaphor to communicate an idea by bringing something vividly ‘before our eyes’. Reflecting on his rhetoric, Kinnock would agree, noting that ‘I wasn’t embarrassed about painting pictures with words’ (Kinnock 2011). In this metaphor, Militant’s entryism becomes an unwelcome infestation that the party must deal with (British Political Speech, n.d.). Kinnock’s extemporization in his speech also draws, probably unconsciously, on powerful rhetorical techniques, such as repetition (‘a LABOUR council’), and tricolon (‘out-dated, mis-placed, irrelevant to the real needs’)—a favourite technique of his. Kinnock continued:

I am telling you, no matter how entertaining, how fulfilling to short-term egos – I’m telling you, and you’ll listen – you can’t play politics with people’s jobs and with people’s services or with their homes. (Quoted in Kellner 1992: 3, 91)

It is the interpolation in this section—‘I’m telling you, and you’ll listen’—added verbally to the text during the speech, which demonstrates the force of Kinnock’s rhetoric. The phrase calls attention to Kinnock’s power in the party, not just in a formal sense as leader, but as someone with a particular authority. I argue that the authority to confront the left came from Kinnock’s background: the Welsh, working class ethos. This narrative was made explicit in the closing sections of the speech, when Kinnock drew on his own character to argue:

I say to you in complete honesty, because this is the movement that I belong to, that I owe this party everything I have got – not the job, not being leader of the Labour Party, but every life chance that I have had since the time I was a child: the life chance of a comfortable home, with working parents, people who had jobs; the life chance of moving out of a pest and damp-infested set of rooms into a decent home, built by a Labour council under a Labour government; the life chance of an education that went on for as long as I wanted to take it. (Quoted in Kellner 1992: 93)

Kinnock's ethos gave him authority to reject rival conceptions of socialism. As Moon explains, Kinnock's delivery 'emphasized his character and as such provided reassurance to Labour members and supporters as it clothed him with an aura of trustworthiness—he was [...] *one of them* and as such a figure who could be trusted with the movement, to do it right, even as his actions might hurt. An individual such as [Deputy Labour Leader] Roy Hattersley—avuncular and literate as he was and is—could not have performed this task, not without engendering the real prospect of the party irreconcilably splitting' (Moon 2015: 135). Kinnock's rhetoric demonstrated pathos ('I owe this party everything I have got') and logos in its arguments for credible policy solutions, but it was his ethos that provided him with authority in the internecine party wars during his first term. However, it had a number of limitations when reaching out *beyond* the labour movement, as I explore next.

THE LIMITS OF KINNOCK'S ETHOS

While Kinnock's ethos gave him authority in the labour movement, the rhetoric he used could alienate those outside it. As David Marquand has written, 'The language of "our people", which can so easily sound false or patronising, comes naturally to him because they really are his people. The myths and symbols of labourism, which he manipulates with such artistry, are his myths and symbols: that is why the artistry is so successful' (Marquand 1991: 205–206). For those who appreciate the 'myths and symbols of labourism' the speeches were moving and convincing; for voters outside the labour movement the ethos was becoming increasingly alien, and indeed outdated.

By the mid-1980s, the section of the electorate who felt part of this movement was shrinking. This was due to a combination of factors, including industrial decline, unemployment, and political attacks diminishing the power of the trade union movement; the falling numbers of people who joined political parties and an increase in partisan dealignment; as well as the partial replacement of class with other forms of identity—such as gender or ethnicity—in shaping political debate. All of these factors meant that the labour movement, understood as the representation of the working class as a relatively homogeneous group, was weakened and that appeals to it as an electoral bloc reached smaller numbers of the population than in the past. In short, socio-economic change meant that Kinnock's labourite ethos was decreasingly that of the wider electorate.

Furthermore, ‘the argument which is made by a man’s life’ (in Isocrates’ account of ethos) is not objective, but reaches the audience through intermediaries—notably, in modern society, through the media. Kinnock was ruthlessly attacked by much of the popular press. In his review of Labour, the tabloids, and the 1992 general election, James Thomas argues that between 1979 and 1992, the popular press was more hostile to Labour than at any time in the post-war period (Thomas 1998). Unflattering media accounts of Kinnock’s ethos give a rather different interpretation of the persona that had served him so well when taking on the left. Kinnock was caricatured as brawling and boisterous, most at home in a working men’s club. There is a strong element of class snobbery in this account. For those inside the labour movement, Kinnock’s ethos gave him the authority as ‘one of us’ to take on the left; for those outside, that same working class ethos meant he lacked the gravitas to be Prime Minister.

Nationality was an important part of Kinnock’s ethos, and there was also an anti-Welsh element to the media’s reporting of Kinnock. A week after the 1992 election, the former Labour Minister, Barbara Castle, wrote that: ‘I was interested to detect some racist undertones emerging during the campaign. Neil’s “unfitness to govern”, it appeared, had something to do with his being Welsh. Tories don’t respect the Welsh whom they regard as a nation of plebs and poets’ (quoted in Jones 1994: 14). John Humphrys similarly claimed that ‘There is a kind of latent anti-Welshness among the English and that is his bad luck, that and his [ginger] hair colour’ (quoted in Jones 1994: 17). As James Thomas argues, Kinnock suffered from this anti-Welsh rhetoric far more than other Welsh politicians because his personality traits lent themselves to anti-Welsh caricature. While he used his ‘brawling boyo’ image and rough working class Welsh background to his advantage, the image also made him an easy figure for the press to portray as ‘an unstatesmanlike, intellectually lightweight, over-emotional figure’ (Thomas 1997). Reflecting on these caricatures, Kinnock notes that, ‘there are other people who say as long as you walk round with the accent that you’ve got, and the hair colour you’ve got, and the reputation, falsely built in some way for being a bruiser, there’s an element that was never going to listen in any case. And if I was true to the caricature I wouldn’t bother with me’ (Kinnock 2011).

One explanation of the negative depiction of Kinnock’s class and nationality in the media was that it was ideologically motivated. Kinnock

was certainly no friend of Rupert Murdoch. Martin Westlake recounts that Murdoch had described Kinnock as a ‘menace to freedom’ because of his pro-union views. In response, Kinnock told Murdoch that *he* was ‘a menace to democracy; not press barons in general—they come and go—but you personally’ (Westlake 2001: 712). Although Kinnock did not believe that Murdoch would have remembered the incident, he conceded that part of the attack upon him could have been attributable to his views on press ownership (Kinnock 2011). After all, the 1992 manifesto committed a future Labour government to ‘establish an urgent inquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into the concentration of media ownership’ (Westlake 2001: 712). Thomas concludes that while there were more fundamental reasons for Labour’s defeat in 1992, the tabloid press campaign almost certainly made the difference between a Conservative victory and a hung parliament (Thomas 1998). The ethos of the rhetor—that argument ‘made by their life not their words’—is open to interpretation and re-interpretation according to the ends, ideological or otherwise, of those who present it.

LATER LEADERSHIP: A MORE INCLUSIVE ETHOS

Kinnock was aware of the way in which his character was presented in much of the popular press, and he tried to counter that narrative with a more positive one. The efforts to change the media story on Labour—and Kinnock in particular—were in part carried out through the professionalization of Labour’s media machinery. Peter Mandelson was appointed the party’s first Director of Campaigns and Communications in 1985. He brought in Philip Gould, a public relations consultant, and they began to assemble a Shadow Communications Agency, the role of which was ratified by the party’s National Executive Committee in 1986. Mandelson enjoyed close relations with Kinnock’s office. The Shadow Communications Agency pioneered the use of qualitative surveys—‘focus groups’. Mandelson in particular cultivated close contacts with chosen journalists, ‘spinning’ stories in ways favourable to the leadership, sometimes at the expense of the left (Heffernan and Marqusee 1992: 212–213). Fruits of the investment in public relations were seen in the party’s presentation: the Labour rose replaced the red flag; there was better staging of conferences and political broadcasts were better produced—particularly 1987’s ‘Kinnock: The Movie’, which was directed by Hugh Hudson, who had recently gained fame for his work on *Chariots*

of Fire. This broadcast painted a picture of Kinnock's early life and family, portraying him in a far more flattering light than did the right wing tabloids. The investment in public relations was one part of the effort to put forward a more positive interpretation of Kinnock's ethos.

During his later years as leader, Kinnock revised his style to reach a wider audience. Many commentators, particularly after Labour's failure to make any significant breakthrough at the 1987 general election, observed that Kinnock seemed to be subjugating the more ebullient aspects of his personality to appear more statesmanlike. Eileen Jones, for instance, notes that 'Kinnock heard what the critics said, and it may well be that during 1987 and 1988 he made such attempts to become the serious statesman that the appealing lighter side of his personality was hidden. Certainly after the election defeat of 1987 he was accused of becoming withdrawn and remote' (Jones 1994: 124). To Leapman, writing at the time, Kinnock 'deliberately strips his speeches of vivid imagery and pyrotechnics, giving them the arid texture of academic lectures' (Leapman 1987: 184). Evidently Kinnock's rhetorical strategy changed considerably after 1987.

The notable slip was Kinnock's performance at the Sheffield Rally, just days before the 1992 general election. As Heffernan and Marqusee note, 'Carried away, he cast aside 8 years of self-imposed gravitas to disport himself before the adoring throng in the manner of a pop star or a boxing champion [...] Sheffield proved a public relations disaster' (Heffernan and Marqusee 1992: 319). Kinnock himself said that he had unthinkingly responded to cheering supporters with a yell of 'We're alright!' in the same way that he had seen The Everly Brothers and Johnny Cash doing. As he told the BBC, 'This roar hit me and for a couple of seconds I responded to it; and all of the years in which I'd attempted to build a fairly reserved, starchy persona—in a few seconds they slipped away' (BBC 2009).

In his later years as party leader, Kinnock could still be a powerful speaker, but the modes of persuasion were different. The best known sequence during his speech in Blackpool at the 1988 party conference, for example, was constructed almost as blank verse and combined rhythm, repetition, and mockery to attack Margaret Thatcher's claim that 'there is no such thing as society' (quoted in Kellner 1992: 7, 155):

'No such thing as society,' she says.
No obligation to the community.
No sense of solidarity.

No principles of sharing or caring.
 'No such thing as society.'
 No sisterhood, no brotherhood.
 No neighbourhood.
 No honouring other people's mothers and fathers.
 No succouring other people's little children.
 'No such thing as society.'
 No number other than one.
 No person other than me.
 No time other than now.
 No such thing as society, just 'me' and 'now.'
 That is Margaret Thatcher's society.
 I tell you, you cannot run a country on the basis of 'me' and 'now'.

Kinnock's later rhetoric, as this example shows, relied more on *logos* and *pathos* to persuade his audience. Gone were the claims to a particular authority based on his *ethos* seen in earlier speeches. This de-prioritization of *ethos* as a mode of persuasion in Kinnock's rhetoric is implicitly backed up in quantitative research. Robin Pettitt studied the extent of self-referencing in speeches by several Labour leaders and found that, in contrast to Foot, Blair, and Brown, Kinnock's speeches became progressively less self-referential the further up the party he moved (2012: 125). Pettitt asked: 'What explains Kinnock's low, and declining, use of the first person singular?' He suggests two answers: first, faced with a divided party, Kinnock emphasized unity in his rhetoric by shunning the first person singular; and, second, that Kinnock's reluctance to use the first person singular was part of his political personality, rather than in specific circumstances (2012: 126). I believe a more persuasive answer would be that Kinnock's declining use of the first person singular in his conference speeches reflected his declining use of *ethos* as a mode of persuasion. His own life, while helpful as a source of authority to unite a divided party, was not the best form of rhetoric to reach the wider electorate. After all, following the triumph over Militant, Labour's priority was to broaden its public support.

The rhetorical shift led to accusations of untrustworthiness. To James Thomas, Kinnock was vulnerable to this attack because he had moved to the right on a number of issues, such as disarmament and nationalization, during his leadership. Ken Livingstone, later Mayor of London, argued that voters never entirely believed this front. Discussing Kinnock's

appearance on the satirical show *Have I Got News for You?* after the 1992 election loss, Livingstone commented: ‘He went back to being the Welsh boyo as if there hadn’t been an intervening nine years. Of all the non-professional comedian guests they’ve had on, I thought he was the best, with all these snappy one-liners he’d forced himself to drop. And one of the reasons people didn’t want Kinnock was because they recognized the person they were seeing was false, he had shed half his personality’ (quoted in Jones 1994: 17). Kinnock had toned down his rhetoric (losing the ‘hwyl’ as Moon terms it) to appeal to an audience that was not necessarily Welsh or working class. However, these efforts made him sound less authentic, and consequently his rhetoric was received with a degree of mistrust.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the importance of ethos as a mode of persuasion in rhetoric, and argued for the use of a broad understanding of the term in rhetorical analysis. In particular, it demonstrates that the perceived character of the speaker can, at times, drown out the words they utter. This understanding of ethos recognizes that our response to a speech is filtered by what we know of a speaker in advance—‘the argument of their life, not just their words’. For Kinnock, as I have argued, this personal history gave him the authority to take on the left in the Labour Party during his early period as leader.

However, in modern society, what we know of a speaker’s life comes to us filtered through various media, particularly the press. These filters are partly ideological—any life story is open to a variety of interpretations. In the UK, the popular press during Kinnock’s time as leader was overwhelmingly anti-Labour. The ethos that aided Kinnock within the movement now hindered him: his Welshness made him a ‘boyo’, his working class roots meant that he ‘lacked the gravitas’ to become Prime Minister. To counter that narrative, Kinnock’s rhetoric in the later part of his leadership became subdued, more dependent on logos and pathos and less a product of his ethos. Yet in shifting his rhetorical approach, Kinnock lost some of his power and authenticity.

Every Labour leader has brought their own ethos to their rhetoric, which allows them to persuade some listeners but not others. It was not until Tony Blair became leader that the party was able to successfully reach out beyond the labour movement to the wider electorate, but this came at a cost: the ties that bound the Labour leadership to the working

class communities that originally created the party had become increasingly frayed.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Simon Griffiths is Senior Lecturer in Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London. His research explores the recent history of British political thought, and contemporary debates in public services. In 2010–2011 he was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Political Ideologies at Oxford University. He has taught at Queen Mary, University of London, and the London School of Economics, and has held a variety of roles in public policy organizations. He regularly writes for the print media and has appeared on television and radio to discuss British politics. His latest book is *Engaging Enemies: Hayek and the Left* (Rowman and Littlefield International 2014).

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