

## 57. The struggle of the party leader: The im/possibility of change in David Hare's *The Absence of War*

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### Abstract

David Hare's *The Absence of War* (1993) deals with the period before an early general election in Britain and the defeat of the Labour Party, which is led by George Jones, to the Conservative Party. Hare presents George Jones as a weak leader who cannot actively take part in the policy making process because he is constantly controlled by the members of his advisory committee who prevent George from making his own statements before the public and while speaking to the media by using the established traditions in the party system. Through George, Hare makes references to Neil Kinnock who was the leader of the Labour Party between 1983-1992 and aimed to change the social and economic policies of the Party, but he resigned after the defeat in the 1992 general election. The major aim of this paper is to argue that Hare illustrates, and in a way comments on, Kinnock's leadership through that of George's in the play, so he presents a historical period in British politics through a fictional character. In this sense, Hare demonstrates that both leaders of the Labour Party aim to reform the party; however, both encounter resistance; while George is silenced by his advisory committee, Kinnock is accused of changing the ideological and economic basis of the party. Moreover, it will be displayed that although both leaders resign before winning a general election, they struggle to introduce revolutionary changes to the traditional system in the Party in order to appeal to voters.

**Keywords:** British Politics, the Labour Party, Neil Kinnock, the Conservative Party

## Parti liderinin m¼cadelesi: David Hare'in *Savařın Yokluđunda* adlı oyununda deđiřim olasılıđı

### z

David Hare'in *The Absence of War* (*Savařın Yokluđunda*) (1993) adlı oyunu Britanya'da erken d¼zenlenen bir genel seim ncesi dnemi ve George Jones tarafından ynetilen İři Partisi'nin Muhafazakr Parti'ye yenilmesini konu almaktadır. Hare, George Jones'u partinin politika geliřtirme s¼recinde yer alamayan zayıf bir lider olarak gsterir nk¼ George'un danıřma kurulu yeleri partinin sisteminde bulunan yerleřik gelenekleri kullanarak George'un toplumun n¼nde ve medyada kendi fikirlerini aıklamasına engel olur ve onu s¼rekli kontrol altında tutar. Hare, George zerinden 1983-1992 yılları arasında İři Partisi'nin liderliđini yapan, partinin sosyal ve ekonomik politikalarını deđiřtirmekle sulanan ve 1992 genel seimindeki yenilgi sonrası parti liderliđinden istifa eden Neil Kinnock'a gnderme yapar. Bu makalenin amacı, Hare'in oyunda George'un liderliđi zerinden aslında Kinnock'un liderlik yıllarını anlattıđını ve bir bakıma Kinnock hakkında yorum yaptığımı, yani İngiliz siyasetinin bir dnemini kurgusal bir karakter zerinden anlattıđını ortaya koymaktır. Bu bađlamda, Hare, İři Partisi'nin iki liderinin de partiyi dn¼řt¼rmeyi hedeflediđini

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ancak her ikisinin de direnişle karşılaştığını; George'un danışma kurulu üyeleri tarafından susturulurken Kinnock'un partinin ideolojik ve ekonomik temelini değiştirmekle suçlandığını gösterir. Buna ek olarak bu makalede iki liderin de bir seçim kazanmadan parti liderliğinden istifa etmek zorunda kalmasına rağmen seçmenlere hitap edebilmek için partinin geleneksel sisteminde devrim niteliğinde değişiklikler yapmak için savaştıkları üzerinde durulacaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İngiliz Siyaseti, İşçi Partisi, Neil Kinnock, Muhafazakâr Parti

## Introduction

I only ever thought of myself as a political playwright in the sense of trying to drag adult concerns into the theatre. I didn't see people psychologically and I didn't think people existed in their heads or in rooms; you had to put people into some sort of context. A lot of people's unhappiness would be explained by the time they lived in. (Hare, as cited in Page, 1990, p. 83)

David Hare's *The Absence of War* (1993), which is about the political parties, their relationships, ideologies, victory and defeat in politics, and the idea of leadership, mainly presents the situation of the British Labour Party and its leader, George Jones, before the early general election. In the world of politics with the busy schedules the party leader who works very hard reading documents, having television and public interviews, determining the strategies and policies of the party; the advisers, minders and secretaries who function as controllers of the party leader and do not have private lives due to heavy workload are the main characters of the play. In the play Hare not only presents the period when both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party make preparation for the early general election which is called by the latter but also uncovers the reasons why the Labour Party is defeated by the Conservative Party. Through the character, George Jones, Hare makes historical references to Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party between 1983-1992, and presents the leadership qualities of a political figure through a fictional character. Hare also presents the policies of the Labour Party in the period before the 1992 general election through the early general election and the election campaign of the Labour Party in the play. In this respect, the major aim of this paper is to argue that David Hare correlates Neil Kinnock, the historical personality, with George Jones, the fictional leader of the Labour Party, in the play, and presents that both party leaders aim to shape the party policy, but they encounter opposition from the Party, and they are defeated by the Conservative Party leaders in the general elections. Hare presents the period between 1983 and 1992 when Neil Kinnock aimed to modernise the Party and make it electable through innovations in social and economic policies by changing the rooted policies which had caused the Labour Party to lose the general elections to the Conservative Party until then. Accordingly, George Jones' attempts to express his own ideas about the current situation and the future of the Party, and his being repressed and silenced by his advisory committee, the intra-party opposition, and the media, which leads him to face a dilemma between following the traditions in the Party and implementing political reform, will be presented. It will be displayed that Hare presents the similarities between Neil Kinnock and George Jones as both party leaders work to change the destiny of the Labour Party and show the electors the potential of the Party for government. However, Kinnock encounters difficulties in leaving the Hard Left policy and bringing the centre-left Party closer to the centre-right Conservative Party as he is accused of changing the socialist structure of the Labour Party while George tries to convey his own ideas about the party policies several times, but each time he is forced by his advisory committee and the opponents to uphold the existing traditional policies of the Party. Hare himself expresses that he took Neil Kinnock's doings as the party leader between 1983 and 1992 as his reference in creating George Jones and his struggle with the established customs of the Party,

which are mainly represented by his own advisory committee, when he explains his motivation to write *The Absence of War* as follows: “Obviously Kinnock’s dilemma is what moved me and which provides the emotional spring of the play” (Hare, cited in Homden, 1995, p. 221). Hare presents that although, on the one hand, the guidance of the advisory committee on the policies is significant; on the other hand, the leader of a political party should not turn into a mere puppet at the hands of the advisers and should not be left voiceless, particularly, before the public. In addition, it will be also demonstrated that Hare questions the qualities of an ideal leadership and asks whether it is necessary to win a general election to be an efficient party leader, or the progress in shaping the party policy is enough to call a party leader an effective one. In that respect, David Hare’s biography along with his political views and the reason why he wrote *The Absence of War* will be followed by the political background of the Labour Party in the period between 1983 and 1992 along with Neik Kinnock’s leadership. Then, George’s leadership will be presented with references to Neil Kinnock to demonstrate the similarities between the two leaders.

### David Hare’s biography

David Hare was born in St. Leonard’s-on-Sea, Sussex in 1947. He studied English at Jesus College, University of Cambridge, which he defined as “wasting [his] time” in one of his interviews (Hare, as cited in Page, 1990, p. 7). In 1968 he founded Portable Theatre with Tony Bicat aiming to tour to the places where there were no theatres. *Inside Out* (1970), which was a one-act adaptation of Kafka’s *Diaries* (1910-1923), became the first play that Portable Theatre staged. Then, he took part in the foundation of the Joint Stock Company. In 1969-1970 he worked as a literary manager at Royal Court, which earned him money to use for Portable Theatre (Page, 1990, p. 7). John Deeney (2006) refers to Hare’s early years in the following words: “As the co-founder of Portable Theatre in 1968 and the then innovative Joint Stock Theatre Company in 1975, Hare quickly established himself as one of the leaders of the burgeoning and politically committed alternative theatre movement” (p. 429). Hare’s first play, *How Brophy Made Good* (1969) was staged by Portable Theatre while with *Slag* (1970), which criticised the materialistic and patriarchal social order, Hare won the Evening Standard Most Promising Playwright Award in 1970 (Zeifman, 1994, p. xix). With *Plenty* (1978), where Hare deals with the legacy of the Second World War, he gained critical and public recognition along with maturation as a playwright (Bar-Yosef, 2007, p. 2). In *A Map of the World* (1982) Hare focused on the relationship between the Third World and the West. There has been a great diversity in Hare’s works in terms of form and subject matter ranging from short sketches like *The Madman Theory of Deterrence* (1983) to one monologue *Via Dolorosa* which he himself performed in 1998; his National Theatre Trilogy including *Racing Demon* (1990), *Murmuring Judges* (1992) and *The Absence of War* (1993); small-scale pieces like *My Zinc Bed* (2000), *The Breath of Life* (2002) and *The Vertical Hour* (2007) (Boon, 2007, p. 4). David Hare wrote *Pravda* (1985), which is a satire of the Fleet Street press, in collaboration with Howard Brenton, and they started to criticise the British institutions, yet Hare continued to present the British institutions by his trilogy, *Racing Demon* (1990), *Murmuring Judges* (1992), and *The Absence of War* (1993). Lane A. Glenn (1994) comments on the common aspect of the plays taking place in Hare’s trilogy as follows: “His most ambitious work to date, however, involves not just one play but an entire trilogy examining British institutions” (p. 217). *Racing* deals with the Church of England while *Murmuring* presents and criticises the British legal system. The last play of the Trilogy, *The Absence of War* focuses on the English party politics dealing with both the Government and the Opposition, yet mostly presenting the ideals and the failure of the Opposition Party. Although each play in the Trilogy deals with a different British institution, they all present various aspects of the institutions they depict, and they not only comment on their current situations but also present various proposals for the development of these institutions. Therefore, the plays in the Trilogy are also called “State-of-the-nation plays” whose purpose in Hare’s

words is to show “the undulations of history [...] a sense of movement, of social change” (Hare, cited in Rebellato, 2008, p. 246).

### **Neil Kinnock's leadership**

*The Absence of War* deals with the reasons why the Labour Party, led by George Jones in the play, loses the early general election to the Conservative Party, which has a historical reference which is, “fourth in a row on April, 9 1992, when Neil Kinnock lost to John Major” (Donesky, 1996, p. 178). Therefore, the play is inspired by a historical event, that is, Neil Kinnock, who joined the Labour Party at the age of fifteen and worked as the member of the Parliament for Bedwellty from 1970 to 1983, then became an MP for Islwyn, and until he was elected as the party leader by the Labour Party Annual Conference in 1983, worked as the Labour Party National Executive in 1978 and an Opposition spokesman on education in 1979 (Gauhar & Kinnock, 1986, p. 1135), led an election campaign in 1992 which ended with the fourth successive defeat of the Labour Party and Neil Kinnock's leaving the leadership of the Labour Party.

As a supporter of the Labour Party in the 1980s and a friend of the then Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock, Hare was invited to the meetings of the campaign team. Also, he was able to do interviews with the major political figures in the Labour Party, and hence had access to the very privacy of the Party's policies and ideologies (Homden, 1995, p. 221). In respect to his political involvement, when Hare was asked whether he would continue the Trilogy after *Murmuring Judges* with a play about politicians, his response vividly demonstrates his interest in politics and politicians: “In Western democracies, politicians and those around them are currently held in such low regard that I was fascinated by the prospect of trying to look at the world from their point of view” (Hare, cited in Glenn, 1994, p. 227). However, with *The Absence of War* Hare did what nobody had expected as Carol Homden (1995) describes as follows: “When Neil Kinnock allowed Hare into the campaign meetings, he was expecting a friend of the Left to generate a play on the transition from opposition to government. In Labour eyes the fact that Hare has written a play at all might be seen as betrayal” (p. 226). In other words, what Kinnock and the members of the Labour Party expected from Hare was to write a play which presented the Labour Party in government defeating the Conservative Party in the forthcoming general election in 1992. But, Hare's Labour Party and its leader in the play fail both in the general election and before the public many times in different occasions. In this sense, Hare was severely criticised by the members of the Labour Party after *The Absence of War* was published as one insider says: “I knew he was searching a play but I didn't know he was going to repeat whole conversations in a book. He would not have been allowed that sort of access from the start if we had known about the book” (Insider, cited in Glenn, 1994, p. 228).

The idea of ‘New Labour’ which evolved after the four elections in 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1992 were lost was first held by Neil Kinnock after he became the party leader in 1983 (Cronin, 2009, p. 112). Kinnock defeated his three rivals from hard left, centre and right-wing of the party in 1983 and became the party leader by the votes of the trade unions, constituency Labour parties and the Parliamentary Labour Party whose votes exceeded 70 per cent. With Roy Hattersley who was elected as the deputy leader (Fielding, 1994, p. 593), Kinnock formed “dream ticket” which is “[t]he optimistic description of the combination of Neil Kinnock as party leader and Roy Hattersley as his deputy, elected in 1983 to unite Labour's left and right” (Harmer, 1999, p. 254). Although Kinnock had been a left-wing politician criticising the Wilson and Callaghan Governments between 1974 and 1979, when he was elected as the party leader in 1983, he received support from both the soft left and the centre of the party (Jones, 1996, p. 84). After

Margaret Thatcher became the prime minister in 1979, Britain fought in the Falklands War in 1982, became an ally with the USA and gained power in international affairs, gained power in the European Community, and in economy a new balance was settled between market and state as the country became more liberal (Cronin, 2009, p. 113). In 1988 the privatisation policies of the Conservative government, the discussion about the poll tax, the failure in economy such as the rise of inflation and the increased interest rates created unrest not only in the public but also among the members of the Conservative Party (Kochan & Kochan, 1990, p. 321). Moreover, Thatcher created a democracy depended on property owning, caused an increase in unemployment, and attempted to weaken socialism. These changes in Thatcher's government influenced every segment of society, and her policies in all areas were not easy to change and improve as they structurally determined the working of economy, the nature of the relationship between state and society, and government and market (Cronin, 2009, pp. 113-114). The social and economic damage that the Conservative government caused was to be repaired by the Labour Party which was a government in waiting; however, as Cronin (2009) puts forth, the following challenging questions were also posed for the Labour Party:

How could Labour exert control over the economy if the levers of control had been dismantled? How could Labour or any centre-left party deliver justice for working men and women if the trade unions, set up for this purpose, were shrunken, and their workplace rights curtailed? How could a party of the left secure its influence locally when the institutions of local government had been abolished? How could public services be funded if government revenues were permanently reduced? How could assets now in private hands be recaptured without provoking furious resistance and incurring impossible costs? (p. 114)

Accordingly, Kinnock believed that the problems in social and economic spheres could be solved by the Labour Party, yet the Party had to make changes in its established social and economic policies. He professes that even before he was elected as the party leader in 1983, he strongly believed that, in his own words, "there would have to be profound changes in the policies and in the organisation of the Labour Party – not simply as ends in themselves but also as contributions to the change in the mentality of the Labour Party" (Kinnock, 1994, p. 536). In other words, the system and the rooted structure underlying the policies of the Party had to be changed for a complete transformation in order to be electable and appeal to the voters from every walk of life. Hence, he further declares: "I therefore assess the need for change, the need for reform in the Labour Party" (Kinnock, 1994, p. 535). Martin J. Smith (1994) asserts that the Labour Party in 1983 had already suffered many electoral defeats, it was disunited and lost its influence on the voters. In addition, although all the party leaders had tried to change certain party policies and reform the party since the 1950s, none of them succeeded, and the party went through "an ideological crisis; an electoral crisis, and a membership crisis" (p. 555).

In respect to the ideological crisis, by the early 1980s the left-wing of the party had gained strength as it was supported by the trade unions and party committees, and the power of membership on the leadership was highlighted in the democratic structure of the party. Then in 1981 the right-wing members of the party were convinced that the party was turning into a radical socialist party through the policy and constitutional reforms and left the party to establish the Social Democratic Party. The Party's left-wing policies caused an unrest among the voters as they did not appeal to the voters, which is indicated by the decrease in votes from 44.5 to 31.8 per cent and reflects the electoral crisis because in the 1983 general election the Party had the worst defeat since the 1900s. The division within the Party between the left and right wings, the successive defeats and loss of electoral support also caused a decrease in the number of members. Therefore, Neil Kinnock took over the management of such a failed institution to reform and transform (Smith, 1994, p. 556). As it is stated in the 1987 election manifesto, opposing the nuclear weapons and the withdrawal from the European Community, and the social

ownership of the privatised institutions were among the new policies in the policy review (Thorpe, 1997, p. 221). However, Kinnock was heavily criticised for two specific policies which were the ideological shift from the leftist ideology to the Conservative ideology and moving away from socialism. As to the former, after the 1987 general election, according to the polls, the Labour Party lost the support of its “natural voters” who were the young people, the underclass people and the members of the ethnic minorities. The idea was that the Labour had to move to “the centre ground of the politics” (Thorpe, 1997, p. 222).

Between 1987 and 1992 there was the belief that the Labour had to create a more moderate image to appeal to a larger section of society, hence it had to move to the rightist ideology. Accordingly, the policy review groups were established in order to report to the 1989 party conference, and in economy nationalisation was not applied, instead market economy was emphasised, and a government close to business and aiming to prepare the necessary environment for businesses to grow were on the agenda of the Labour Party (Thorpe, 1997, p. 222). In the 1992 election manifesto it is stated that “[m]odern government has a strategic role not to replace the market but to ensure that the market works properly. Other competitors in Europe and elsewhere recognise that industrial policy must be at the heart of economic policy” (2000, p. 318). This policy review had reactions within the party as Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, representatives of the left-wing of the party, campaigned for the leadership and the deputy leadership of the party respectively, and after a six month campaign, at the 1988 party conference Kinnock could defeat the two candidates (Thorpe, 1997, p. 224).

In relation to socialism, at the 1987 party conference Kinnock presented a policy review which was in line with the traditions of the Party as the objectives of democratic socialism, which he believed that the Party had to build up according to the needs of the contemporary politics, were defined as dependence on community, democracy, justice, and individual freedom. However, with all these values of democratic socialism, Kinnock also highlighted the nature of the market economy, and stated that while the market economy was fundamental and necessary to set the price of many goods and services, for the services like health care and education which formed the basis of social life, market economy remained incapable to decide on the quality or supply of the services. Following this principle, at the 1988 party conference Kinnock was accused by the left-wing of the Party of shifting to the Conservative ideology by putting the market, so capitalism, in the centre of its economic policies. Thus, the Labour was abandoning the socialist policy of public ownership as a part of the policy review (Jones, 1996, p. 89; p. 91). Labour's policy review was compared with Thatcherite revisionism and encouraged the idea that the Labour was not socialist or social democratic anymore (Hill, 2001, p. 9), and it was even called “the Thatcherisation of the Labour Party” (Hill, 2001, p. 10).

In 1984 the miners' strike started, and Kinnock did not use the left-wing rhetoric in his approach to the incident; instead, he accused the leader of the strike, Arthur Scargill, of acting like a general fighting in the First World War (Harmer, 1999, pp. 125-126). In miners' strike Kinnock stated that he was “strongly sympathetic to the aims of the miners, but at the same time disagreeing with their strategy and aware of the need for Labour to appeal to the country as a whole” (Gaffney, 2017, p. 50), which caused him to be called by the left-wing of the party a traitor (Gaffney, 2017, p. 50). For the 1992 general election, although the exit polls showed that a hung parliament was possible, the Conservatives won an overall majority with 336 seats and 41.9 per cent of the poll while the Labour had 271 seats and 34.4 per cent of the poll (Thorpe, 1997, p. 226). However, despite the defeat in 1992, as Smith (1994) points out, Kinnock “managed to change the Labour Party significantly. He effectively turned a party which was divided, electorally defeated, disorganised and dominated by the left into a united social democratic party which could provide a significant electoral threat to the Conservative Party” (pp. 559-560). In Thorpe's words,

Kinnock “pulled the party back from the brink of disaster in 1983 to the brink of office in 1992”, and “made considerable progress in modernizing the party’s policy and organization, and so made it possible for future leaders to continue the process and make Labour a party fit to face the challenges of the 1990s and beyond” (1997, p. 227).

### George Jones’ leadership

In *The Absence of War* even at the very beginning of the play George Jones is presented as a man who has been tired of the hectic life style in politics and suffers from heavy workload due to his busy schedule. His burden as the leader of the Party is first presented through his absence as he, in a way, escapes from the office and goes to a park for a walk in Act One, scene two, which clearly displays his need of relief. When Andrew Buchan, George’s minder, asks about his trip to the park, George reveals that he envies the ordinary people with daily concerns for their ease and finding time for their private lives as follows: “I looked round. People were walking. And kissing. And talking. I thought, you lucky people . . . (*He pauses a second.*) You’re free and I’m not” (Hare, 1993, pp. 27-28). Hence, as a politician working under stress for long hours, George longs for a simple walk in a park, but he highlights his lack of social freedom in politics because he cannot find time for socialising in his private life, and while the people he works for and serves as a politician are independent of social restraints, he is obliged to act and speak sensibly. Furthermore, the workload which overwhelms George is presented through the documents brought by George’s secretaries and minders to look through in the stage direction as follows: “GWENDA *has come back in with a pile of documents which she puts down beside him, but he takes no notice*” (Hare, 1993, p. 34). Hence, it is asserted that George’s responsibilities as a party leader are not limited to attending meetings, having interviews, or discussing on party policies, yet he has to deal with all the documents presented to him whether he is concerned or not. Accordingly, George rejects to look through the documents on “[t]ransport and technology in Europe” (Hare, 1993, p. 35) which are brought by Oliver Dix, his chief political adviser, as he is not genuinely interested in the issue. Oliver’s insistence on George’s considering the documents saying, “We need you to read it” (Hare, 1993, p. 35), shows that there is high expectation of George’s potential and performance as a leader because he is fully expected to carry out each assignment concerning the party policies without exception. However, George regards such excessive workload as overcommitment and wants his assistants to ease it by saying, “Don’t bog me down in detail. Push the work away. Push it away” (Hare, 1993, p. 35). Oliver’s approach to George’s unwillingness to deal with the work is direct and pragmatic as he says that “[t]here’s a fine line, George, between getting bogged down in detail and being inadequately briefed. Which, if you were, would be my fault” (Hare, 1993, p. 35). Hence, it may be argued that there is an established system in the Party, and each staff member fulfils certain duties. In such rigid structure George, as the man who is at the top in the party hierarchy, is in charge of all the matters regardless of their importance and the physical and mental fatigue that George suffers from. The high expectations of his team from George as the party leader may be compared with the fresh hope that Kinnock’s being elected as the party leader in 1983 aroused. In this sense, Kinnock took over “a badly-divided and demoralised Party permeated with intense suspicion of leadership” (Jones, 1996, p. 84) with plans for reformation to broaden its electoral appeal.

George is a character coming from the working-class as his father is a worker and a unionist, who has educated George to develop his rhetorical skills which he cannot use as his statements are prepared in accordance with the established traditions of the Party. George’s family background resembles to “Kinnock’s proletarian credentials” (Cliff & Gluckstein, 1996, p. 367). Kinnock had working-class roots as he spent his childhood in a South Wales mining community where there was unemployment and

inter-war industrial defeat, then he went to Cardiff University and worked for the Workers' Education Association, which all shaped his view of socialism (Fielding, 1994, p. 596). George's advisory committee in the party which is led by Oliver and Andrew guides George on politics and, in a sense, Oliver and Andrew determine the party politics that George is expected to adopt. Therefore, George's advisory committee becomes the controlling and limiting force for George, which is criticised by Malcolm, an MP, in Act Two, scene six, as he asserts that George lives "in a world of [his] own. It's a world [his] little team has created" (Hare, 1993, p. 161). The members of George's team "whip the newspapers before [he] can read them. They turn off the telly so [George doesn't] see the news" (Hare, 1993, p. 161), which indicates that George is prevented from evaluating the social, political, economic, and cultural issues to determine the party policies and commenting on them before the public and the media. Malcolm's accusations that he levelled at the members of George's team are bitter as he says to George, "You've let yourself become the prisoner of a group", and "this group have rotted you" (Hare, 1993, p. 161). In that regard, considering his lower class background, George is presented as a figure who should be in public unless his advisory committee restricts him by using the established party policies and limits his actions and statements. George's deep commitment to the Party is presented through his comments on the working of the Conservative Party and his comparison of the priorities of both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party in relation to the public issues. In this sense, he blames the members of the Conservative Party for being materialistic and privileging financial issues and their own benefits rather than the welfare of the society as follows:

The point is, you see, life's much less tricky for the Tories. They have the advantage over us. They simply ask, what school did he go to? What bank did he work in? Is he a QC? They use all the people who sell each other houses. They give jobs to the people who sell them their shares. Hell, they have all troops of infantry. Who wear the same uniforms. And gather round flags. Rock-solid infantry, who all understand, they all understand, the point of it all is one thing. One objective. When everyone knows. And is loyal to. (*He smiles and sits back.*) Money's a simple master in that way. (Hare, 1993, p. 44)

Therefore, as indicated in the above lines, according to George, there is a huge difference between the Labour Party, which is in opposition, and the Conservative Party, which runs government, as their political ideals are based on distinct values. While the Conservative Party places emphasis on monetary issues which provide benefit to the ruling elite, the members of the Labour Party give vitality to justice and welfare of the public as George continues, "[b]ut our master is different. And causes more argument. Our master is justice" (Hare, 1993, p. 44). In this sense, Neil Kinnock's attitude towards the Conservative principles is similar to those of George Jones' as he expresses that the Labour Party "will tell them the truth about costs and contributions before an election, and a Tory Party that will obscure the truth before the Poll and then if victorious, increase taxes and charges hugely when elected" (Kinnock, 1994, p. 546). Hence, it may be argued that the social order George longs for depends on equality, justice and freedom, which is ironic for his own situation that he, as the leader of the Opposition Party, cannot act freely as he is controlled by the long-standing conventions of the Party. George also refers to the trade unions which, according to him, no longer have function in left-wing politics, and the political unity among the organisations and the left-wing parties has already been shattered, which strengthens the right-wing politics. In this sense, George says: "It has no schools. It did have once. They were called unions. But the communities that produced them have gone. The industries have gone. So now justice recruits from the great deracinated masses. [...] Who have nothing in common" (Hare, 1993, pp. 44-45). In Act One, scene two, Andrew also makes comparison between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, and states that while the latter has all physical resources and manpower, the former, that is George as its representative, has very limited and modest facilities to work as the Opposition. Andrew calls this situation a problem that the Party has to encounter as the government in waiting and says: "The



government has cars. And teams of civil servants. Resources. Buildings. Access to the facts. But George has much less. He has only his own private office. (*He smiles.*) George has to make do with us" (Hare, 1993, p. 17).

George clearly presents that his loyalty to the party is not a seeming devotion when he tells Lindsay Fontaine, George's newly employed image maker who is responsible for conducting the election campaign of the Labour Party, that he has taken an action and has greatly contributed to the reformation of the Party as when he has been elected as the leader, the Party "was torn, disfigured, unelectable. With a matchless capacity for meaningless squabbles and fights" (Hare, 1993, p. 101). George believes that "changing that culture, changing that disastrous habit of anarchy, controlling the Party, getting it to speak with one voice, this has been [his] historical legacy" (Hare, 1993, p. 101). Kinnock's statements about the condition of the Labour Party before he became the leader, which urged him to be a candidate for the leadership, are parallel to George's account of the changes he has done in the structure of the party:

In the years between our defeat in 1979 and our defeat in 1983 Labour was increasingly seen to be a party slipping towards impossibility, succumbing to fads, riven by vicious divisions, speaking the language of sloganised dogma – and voicing it in the accents of menace. It was almost as if sections of the party measured the purity of their socialism by the distance which they could put between it and the minds of the British people. [...] my reaction to these conditions was one of angry dismay. Indeed, my anguish was so great that it temporarily affected the balance of my mind and I consequently decided to stand for the leadership of the Labour Party. (1994, p. 535)

Hence, the Labour Party before the election of Kinnock was also divided, got stuck in conventional doctrines and could not make progress to be elected as government. However, in the play George's account and the current situation of the party along with his position as the party leader are not in coherence as the Party controls George rather than he controls the Party, and 'one voice' that George is proud of creating in the party is now held by the members of his advisory committee and the intra-party opposition. Hare presents that the Labour Party has established a strict system of management which denies any kind of change in party policies towards a much more liberal organisation where the party leader becomes the main policy maker. Lindsay struggles not only to change the stabilised system in the party but also to save George from his advisory committee, that is the restrictive political and public practices of the Party, and liberate him as the leader who has the right to speak about the party policies. Thus, Hare portrays Lindsay as "self-made, savvy professional who poses some of the play's trickiest questions and often seems to act as the audience's representative on the stage, seeking answers that have troubled us all" (Glenn, 1994, p. 231). Throughout the play, she asks questions to George, Oliver, and Andrew on the working of the Labour Party and the reasons why they have been so committed to the traditional systems. As Homden (1995) asserts, "[t]he new style is not working and the old has died" (p. 221), and the significant point is that the political parties should be able to meet the necessities of the time rather than being lost in traditions and settled rules which bind not only the leaders of the parties but also their electors. In other words, George, as a voiceless leader of the main Opposition Party, is in need of help from Lindsay to be able to regain his strength as a politician, and Lindsay, who is fully aware of George's being trapped in the existing policies of the Party from the very beginning, fights against the established order through her questioning of the working of the Party. As the members of George's advisory committee depend upon the existing system and want to manage the system without any external interference, they object to Lindsay's joining the Party to conduct the election campaign for fear of change and the success that such change may bring. In this respect, Andrew expresses that the party does not need a new campaign manager as George's current team has already completed the crucial stages of the election campaign in the following words: "But the fact is, we're well on in our planning.

The Strategy Unit is already in place. We have a campaign. We've even fixed slogans" (Hare, 1993, p. 37). Therefore, as Mary, the press secretary, states, they do not "need someone creative" (Hare, 1993, p. 38), which, in fact, refers to someone who is reformist, and Oliver openly puts forth that if a new staff member joins the party, then s/he has to act according to the instructions s/he receives from the advisory committee with the following question: "Or shall we have someone who'll do what we say?" (Hare, 1993, p. 38). In the first place, Lindsay is extremely puzzled as she gets to know George and recognises his potential to be an influential leader who is liked by the public and can create a new and positive public image, and she reveals her fascination for George to Andrew as follows: "You meet George, you think: 'this man is dynamite'" (Hare, 1993, p. 18). George's personal and political skills are also praised by the members of the Party as Oliver defines him as "[...] Extraordinary. Incorruptible. A great Party leader. As great in his way as any this Party has had. And what's more, still full of ideas" (Hare, 1993, p. 70). Furthermore, Bryden, an MP, displays his respect and love for George as he expresses, "He's decent. He has total integrity. Underneath his manner, he works like no man I've seen. His authority stems from his personal character. He's unspoilt" (Hare, 1993, p. 74). Hence, it may be argued that if the party politics do not restrain George, he will be a much more effective leader as his personal and leadership qualities are acclaimed by the members of the party, and if he is set free in his decisions and public statements, the Labour Party will have a chance against the Conservative Party in the general elections. In this regard, as Les Wade (2007) points out, "[Lindsay's] hiring serves as a tacit acknowledgement that the party needs an updating of image and message" (p. 73), which becomes possible only by George's liberation as a progressive and reformist party leader. Therefore, the transformation of the Party is directly linked to George's transformation as a more active leader having visibility in public through his actions and statements, which is constantly hindered by the rigid system in the Party. Accordingly, in Act One, scene six, as George is compelled to have a television interview on the economy and speak after Malcolm following his statements, Lindsay warns George to not support Malcolm's arguments, and declare what he really thinks on the matters raised in the interview, which is totally opposed by Andrew and Oliver. In the first place Lindsay is unable to understand why George also has to speak after Malcolm as Malcolm already expresses his ideas in the interview and asks Andrew: "Why exactly is George going to speak?" (Hare, 1993, p. 59). Andrew clearly states that George's presence is merely symbolic because he does not attend the interview as the party leader who is responsible for all the policies and practices in the Party, so to speak for the party, but only to confirm Malcolm's speech because the situation, which is the currency depreciation, "needs extra authority", and it "is going to be a very big fall" (Hare, 1993, p. 60) as Andrew asserts. George is regarded by the members of the Party not as a leader, yet as an image of power that is used when the Party goes through a crisis. Lindsay promotes, in this sense, the possibility of diversity within the Party as the leader should have the power and authority of dealing with a subject from a different point of view. However, Oliver's comment on Lindsay's warning, "But surely Malcolm's already doing that. Why put George up as well?" (Hare, 1993, p. 60), obviously demonstrates that such variety in the Labour Party is almost impossible within the existing established system: "This is the Labour Party. We all have to say the same thing" (Hare, 1993, p. 60). Also, in Act One, scene ten, Malcolm, worrying about George's failure to keep up with the predetermined statements of the Party, asks Bryden in fear: "Please. It is scripted?"; "He's not going into verbal freefall?", and Bryden's answer, "Malcolm. It's scripted. No worries" (Hare, 1993, p. 110), shows that what is expected from George is just to read word by word what has already been written down. Accordingly, all the members of the Party show ultimate attention to make parallel statements on the matters such as economy, social and cultural issues to not present incompatible arguments, and they use a digital machine which displays what each member states and makes all the members follow each other's statements:

*(ANDREW is smiling and has got out a small bleeper from his pocket.)*

Andrew: That's why we have a system. These things.

Lindsay: Can I have a look at that?

*(She takes it from him.)*

Andrew: Over these things we all read what each other has said. *(He runs his finger along the digital display.)* Look, you see there Malcolm says, 'defend a strong pound in all but exceptional circumstances . . .'

*(GEORGE's attention has turned from his shoes to the group round the bleeper.)*

Lindsay: So George now says . . .

George: 'Exceptional circumstances'. Word for word. Then it's watertight. (Hare, 1993, 26)

As indicated in the above lines, the Labour Party has established a system which completely avoids the leader ruling the Party according to his own decisions, ideas and statements. In other words, the leader ceases to be a decision making mechanism on the party policies, and he cannot shape the policies with his statements freely made, but becomes a neutral element who adapts himself to the established customs and rigid structure of the Party. Thus, the public speeches, interviews, or meetings turn out to be prepared shows rather than reflecting George's genuine ideas on politics, economic and social issues. As Peter Bull and Kate Mayer (1993) point out, "[...] the conversation that takes place in a political interview is a very special kind. To some extent it is a form of illusion; what appears to be a conversation is in fact a performance, arranged to take place for an overhearing audience potentially of millions" (p. 651). In this sense, it may be argued that the addressings of the members of the Labour Party are performances where all the members do, speak and even think the same things, and this system obliges the party leader to comply with the system and to be barely distinguishable from the rest of the party. In Act One, scene six, George clearly explains what happens when the members of the Labour Party utter different words as he announces, "If Bryden or I use any different words then it's a hostage to fortune. The *Daily Express* says we're split" (Hare, 1993, p. 61). Therefore, the fear of being regarded by the written and visual media as divided prevents George from acting freely. He firmly believes that such accounts on the inner processes of the Opposition Party may strengthen the government's hand, which will result in the defeat of the Labour Party in the general elections. However, under no circumstances, Lindsay believes that George must talk on issues that the party members think he cannot, or he should risk to make a mistake rather than following a certain plan, and asks the following quotation in order to motivate him to change: "Yes well maybe. But isn't that a risk you should take?" (Hare, 1993, p. 62). In other words, she maintains that George must not be controlled by his advisory committee, yet he must follow his own path as the party leader. In response, Oliver opposes Lindsay's advice and says: "Lindsay, the point is – we're a government in waiting. We must be responsible" (Hare, 1993, p. 62). Oliver fails to realise that unless the rigid traditional system in the Party is reformed, the Labour Party is destined to lose in the general elections, and the main responsibility of the party members is to the electors by making the Party a government even if it requires an overall change in the party policies and system. Furthermore, Oliver objects to Lindsay's advices as he warns George about Lindsay's influence on him by saying, "This is poison! George, she's feeding you poison" (Hare, 1993, p. 64). Hence, Lindsay's desire to change the party structure and give George freedom to act as he himself also wishes is regarded as dangerous and something to be avoided. In this sense, Oliver seems to threaten George to not listen to Lindsay and change the existing system:

George, you know full well we can't get into this. We discuss this properly or not at all. These are fundamental questions of policy. And a structure exists for discussing such things. *(He is serious, the shadow of old discussions there between them.)* No one here is frightened of re-opening these questions. Everyone here will change everything they've done. If that's what you want. But not change for change's sake. Not because you're bored, George. (Hare, 1993, p. 64)

As Oliver asserts in the above lines, the current policies according to which the Party is now ruled have been settled in consequence of fierce discussions which have taken place in the Party in the past. Therefore, the members of the Party want George to be a part of the existing system rather than challenging and reorganising it. In that sense, George's response to Lindsay, "And Bryden will tell you, politics isn't just about strategy. It's also down to personal relationships. (*He looks down a moment, quiet.*) And what Malcolm wants, I will do" (Hare, 1993, p. 65), indicates that George feels obliged to agree to the demands from the members of the Party for stability. In this respect, as Glenn (1994) states, "[George] is not a man of straw, designed to be propped up and knocked down for his ideological bent, nor is he a mythological hero, lionized like Churchill or Lord Nelson, but rather a multi-facted human being" (p. 230). Thus, it may be argued that Hare clearly puts forth the following argument: Considering his great potential to ensure victory for the Labour Party in the general election, if George, as the party leader, is allowed to rule the Party in accordance with his own vision for the future of the party, shape the party policies accordingly, change the systems for the better and express his ideas before the public and the media to reach both the Labour and the Conservative voters, then a victory in the general election and the Labour government will be possible. In Act Two, scene seven, Lindsay calls a meeting to discuss George's leadership and their position in the forthcoming election, which is very much opposed by Andrew, but supported by Bryden. She points to the fact that in private George is "articulate, funny, authoritative", yet he "tightens up the minute he goes public, the minute he talks policy" (Hare, 1993, p. 181). And she asserts that he has enormous potential which he is not allowed to fulfil: "Everything in him wants to let rip. [...] The public aren't stupid. They know he's been programmed. It's not hard to work out why this man's ratings are low" (Hare, 1993, p. 183). She also states that his public image has been badly influenced by his submission to the demands of the Party with the following words: "The public see only one thing when they look at him, and that's six rolls of sticky tape wrapped round his mouth ..." (Hare, 1993, p. 183). Similarly, Bryden agrees with Lindsay on George's inherent quality to be a leader and the fact that his commitment to the party policies ties his hands. In Act Two, scene seven, he urges George to fulfil his true potential as a politician and a party leader and use his rhetorical skills, which he has always used before he has become the leader of the Party, in his public speeches and media appearances as follows:

Bryden: What we want is to hear the George we once knew. (*Now BRYDEN opens his briefcase and takes a volume from it. He puts it down on the table in front of them. George frowns, puzzled.*) All your major speeches before you were Leader.

George: Yes?

Bryden: When you first started, I often heard you, you write nothing down . . .

George: Yes, that right. (*He smiles.*) My father . . . my own father taught me. He said to me: speak, just speak from the heart.

Bryden: And you did. (Hare, 1993, p. 186)

These lines clearly demonstrate that George needs to say what he believes in before the public and the media without using prepared notes which he calls "public sector borrowing requirement" (Hare, 1993, p. 187), predetermined strategies and confining rules of the Party. In this sense, Bryden, as Lindsay does throughout the play, aims to remind George of the past times when he has had the ability to take his own decisions and make his own statements. George remembers the times when he has spoken without using written notes and then he faces the present reality as he says, "And then people said to me, now you're the Leader, everything you say must be written down" (Hare, 1993, pp. 186-187). George's submission to such rigid control by the Party is presented in the stage direction as "[h]e shrugs and makes a despairing face to say all was then lost" (Hare, 1993, p. 187). His final statement to Bryden also ending

the scene, “You come, you arrive like temptation, with the impossible message. You come and tell me: just be yourself, George” (Hare, 1993, p. 188), which is followed by an emotional outburst in Scene Nine where he accuses of “all those hours in hotel rooms working at speeches, drafting, re-drafting, polishing, changing every word” (Hare, 1993, p. 196) for not being able to say what he has felt in his heart, and what has been really happening, demonstrates that he is fully aware of his former character and actions; however, now he is, in Lindsay’s words, “a sort of patient in hospital” (Hare, 1993, p. 181), and “it was like they’d forgotten, it was clear they’d lost sight of who he really is” (Hare, 1993, p. 181). In that respect, in Fielding’s (2009) words, the play “featured a principled Labour leader who had followed advisers to persuade him to deny his socialism until in a moment of crisis he decides to once again speak his own words – only to discover he could no longer articulate them” (p. 376).

George’s interview with Linus Frank in Act Two, scene three, clearly shows that although George is the party leader, he is not in charge of the party politics. On the issue of the abolition of mortgage tax relief Linus reveals that the issue has been in the draft of the election manifesto of the party, but later it has been removed upon George’s request. George is this time caught unprepared as he cannot figure how Linus has reached such specific information which is an internal affair of the Party and has been secretly dealt with. As Linus comes at George on the issue, George is forced to admit that the matter has been included in the manifesto by indirectly saying, “This proposal was never to appear in the final manifesto” (Hare, 1993, p. 143). However, Linus is not satisfied with George’s response and openly asks whether George himself has removed the matter aiming at driving him into a corner and putting him in a difficult position: “So who took it out? That is my question. Did you or did you not take it out?” (Hare, 1993, p. 144). George loses his control over Linus’ approach to him which he is not prepared for and loses his nerve and asks whether he is accused of being a liar, and Linus calmly leaves it to the public to decide, which humiliates George in the eyes of the public and damages his public image (Hare, 1993, p. 144). Although during their fight after the interview Oliver blames George for not sticking to the note cards which he has given him to follow, and calls George “too vain to do [his] bloody homework” (Hare, 1993, p. 148), George is personally attacked by Linus, and as an astute and experienced politician he tries to fight back at Linus, yet as he, for a long time, has not given statements without pre-prepared notes, he is easily and heavily defeated by the interviewer. Bull and Mayer assert that in interviews the interviewee would want to “protect confidential information” on a particular issue, and “[t]he choice here is between telling a truth that will reveal a secret or concealing, even denying, the information” (1993, p. 653). In this sense, there is a likeness between George’s interview with Linus Frank in the play and Kinnock’s interview with David Dimbleby in 1987. Bull and Mayer examine Neil Kinnock’s, the then Opposition Party leader, and Margaret Thatcher’s, the then prime minister, various interviews with different interviewers in 1987. Kinnock’s answer to David Dimbleby’s question about the future position of trade unions in Labour government, “yes I haven’t said by the way that we’re going to give massive return of power I’ve never used such a phrase in my life” (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 657), is parallel to George’s denial of first including the item of mortgage tax and then removing it from the party manifesto. In addition, the Mortgage Interest Tax Relief was a controversial topic for the Labour Party before the 1992 general election, and Kinnock was heavily accused of not having developed a clear policy on the issue. Kinnock (1994) himself admits that the Labour Party made a mistake as it did not transparently review its policy about allowances before the general election while the Conservative Party directly removed the tax from their manifesto:

By the time of the election, [the Conservative Party] probably will have eradicated Mortgage Interest Tax Relief and I do not know how many votes they are going to lose as a consequence of that – they will lose votes for other reasons but not necessarily as a consequence of that. (p. 547)

Kinnock (1994) also explains that he met with an adverse reaction on the issue so that he could not insist on it as follows: “There was no constituency in the decision-making parts of the Labour Party that agreed on that and other kinds of changes in allowances so there was no use me prodding that forward” (p. 547). Kinnock (1994) states that one of the reasons why the Labour Party lost the 1992 general election was that the party policy on taxation was not clear and convincing, “who it would hit, what the consequences would be, what it would be spent on and the ability of the Conservatives to take advantage of that with you ‘can’t trust Labour’ and Labour ‘tax bombshell’” (p. 553).

George’s inability to frame the party policies and express his ideas on the matters related to the party politics, and his recognition of his own weakness and desperation reflect Kinnock’s (1994) complaints about the obstacles he encountered in the Party since he started to reform the Party in 1983 with the policy review changing social and economic policies to make the Labour Party electable in the eyes of the public. He asserts that the “status quo” predominated the party policies, and the party leader was not entitled to implement ideological and structural change as the Shadow Cabinet and the National Executive Committee could not take part in the policy making process in order to support the leader (p. 536). Hence, in Kinnock’s (1994) words, “in the absence of any mechanism for instigating and promoting change, even the strongest and most dedicated Leadership will-power is not an adequate engine of reform” (p. 536). Therefore, Kinnock’s attempts, “seeking reform and revival of the party” (Kinnock, 1994, p. 538), for reformation were “blocked to some extent by those who thought of themselves as guardians of the soul of Labour” (Kinnock, 1994, p. 537), and these guardians were the people functioning in decision-making bodies and regarded such change as betrayal to the Party (Kinnock, 1994, p. 537).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, David Hare’s *The Absence of War* deals with the defeat of George Jones, the leader of the Labour Party, to the Conservative Party in the early general election, and demonstrates that his advisory committee imposes restrictions on George and justifies the control on the party leader on the grounds that there are long-established traditions and strict policies of the Party, which, in fact, causes to George’s defeat. George, who is already overwhelmed by his busy schedule and lack of private life, is not allowed to discuss politics freely, and he does not have authority to give voice to his ideas about the system and policy making of the Party, which becomes the main reason for the defeat of the Party in the early general election. Through George Jones, Hare refers to Neil Kinnock, who became the leader of the Labour Party in 1983 after a Labour defeat in the general election and went through the 1987 general election, which was a defeat, and the 1992 general election which ended with another Labour defeat and Kinnock’s resignation. Kinnock’s leadership generated excitement in the Party as it was supported by both the left-wing and the centre of the Party; however, his attempts to reform the party policies with a policy review and the changes he wanted to introduce to the social and economic spheres in order to broaden the electorate appeal were criticised by especially the left-wing members of the Party, and he was accused of leaving the traditional socialism which had been adopted by the Labour Party since its foundation and shifting the Party from the leftist ideology to the Conservative ideology. Although Kinnock struggled against the intra-party opposition, he failed to win the general elections in 1987 and 1992, and he could not make the Labour Party a governing party. In this respect, it may be argued that George Jones is the representation of Neil Kinnock, and Hare provides the audience/reader with an account of Kinnock’s leadership between 1983-1992 through George’s leadership before the early general election in the play. Hare presents that both leaders fight for change in the Labour Party as George struggles to regain his authority in the Party while Kinnock aims to make the necessary changes

in party policies. The major aim of both leaders is to create a new public image of the Party and give the voters reasons to vote for the Labour Party instead of the Conservative Party in the general elections. As Fielding (2009) states, "Hare defines a political writer as 'one who is likely to have an analysis as well as a view'; if they write stories these should 'convey a purpose' and aspire to 'achieve something'" (p. 371). Therefore, Hare aims to guide the Labour Party on how to win a general election, which can be achieved only through being open to change, and both George and Kinnock struggle in the Party in order to confront the Party with this reality. For Hare, as long as the Labour Party gets stuck in the traditional system, it cannot influence both the left-wing and right-wing voters and it will continue to exist as a government-in-waiting.

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