



# A New Conservative Century?

ANTHONY SELDON AND PETER SNOWDON

CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES  
57 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL  
2001

This pamphlet is dedicated to John Barnes and John Ramsden, two distinguished historians of the Conservative Party, to whom the Party has listened insufficiently – to its loss.

*The aim of the Centre for Policy Studies is to develop and promote policies that provide freedom and encouragement for individuals to pursue the aspirations they have for themselves and their families, within the security and obligations of a stable and law-abiding nation. The views expressed in our publications are, however, the sole responsibility of the authors.*

*Contributions are chosen for their value in informing public debate and should not be taken as representing a corporate view of the CPS or of its Directors. The CPS values its independence and does not carry on activities with the intention of affecting public support for any registered political party or for candidates at election, or to influence voters in a referendum.*

#### *Acknowledgements*

The authors would like to thank the Centre for Policy Studies for its support, especially Tessa Keswick and Tim Knox for his skill and patience as editor. They would like to thank Stuart Ball, John Barnes, Daniel Collings, John Ramsden and Paul Thomas for reading earlier drafts. Rodney Barker was a source of valuable information.

ISBN No. 1 903219 35 3

© Centre for Policy Studies, October 2001

Printed by The Chameleon Press, 5 - 25 Burr Road, London SW18

# CONTENTS

<b>1 The Predicament of 2001</b>	<b>1</b>
The 2001 General election: anatomy of defeat	
1997-2001: The causes of defeat	
<b>2 The British Conservative Tradition</b>	<b>14</b>
The death of a tradition?	
The nature of conservatism	
The seven core tenets of British Conservatism	
<b>3 The Long Conservative Century</b>	<b>27</b>
The First Era: 1886-1905	
The Second Era: 1924-1940	
The Third Era: 1951-1964	
The Fourth Era: 1979-1997	
<b>4 The Road Back to Power</b>	<b>39</b>
The Hague Leadership: 1997-2001	
Beyond the Conservative's Control	
The Way Ahead: 2001-2005	
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>51</b>



## THE AUTHORS

ANTHONY SELDON has been Headmaster of Brighton College since September 1997. He is also a writer on contemporary political history – author or editor of 20 books with five published in the last three years. Anthony Seldon's books include: *Churchill's Indian Summer*, which won a Best First Prize; *The Thatcher Effect; Major, A Political Life; The Heath Government of 1970-74: A Re-appraisal;* and *Conservative Century*. He co-edited the last two publications with Stuart Ball. His latest books are *The Powers Behind the Prime Minister*, co-written with Dennis Kavanagh, *Number 10: The Illustrated History;* and *The Foreign Office: A History of the Place and its People*. In 2001, he edited *The Blair Effect*, as well as writing the pamphlet, *Private and Public Sector in Education*. He also founded, with Peter Hennessy, the Institute of Contemporary British History, whose aim is to promote research into, and the study of, British history since 1945.

PETER SNOWDON was taught by Anthony Seldon at St Dunstan's College. He studied at Durham University (First Class Honours) and the LSE. He was a researcher on Anthony Seldon's *Major: A Political Life; The Powers Behind the Prime Minister; Number 10: The Illustrated History;* and *The Foreign Office*.



# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PREDICAMENT OF 2001

THE SEEDS OF THE 2001 general election debacle for the Conservative Party were sown years before. The scale of the 2001 defeat, which eclipsed in seriousness the landslide defeat of 1997, was by no means inevitable and could have been reduced, had the Party not indulged in one of the most barren periods in Opposition in its history.<sup>1</sup> The loss of six million voters in the nine years between the elections of 1992 and 1997, and the failure to reverse the decline from 1997-2001, is one of the most serious erosions of electoral support in modern political history. How, and why, did this support haemorrhage?

### **The 2001 General Election: anatomy of defeat**

The result of the June 2001 election was a milestone in modern British history. Many voters who had backed New Labour in 1997 felt let down, betrayed even, by a government that promised to transform numerous aspects of public life but had manifestly failed to deliver. The fact that the government could have been so resoundingly re-elected in 2001, in an election which saw the lowest turnout since 1918, highlights the poverty of the Conservatives'

---

<sup>1</sup> The Conservatives increased their share of the vote by only 1% from 30.7% to 31.7% and made a net gain of one seat increasing their 1997 tally to 166 seats. There were nine gains for the Party (including Galloway and Upper Nithsdale in Scotland), but they also lost eight (seven to the Liberal Democrats and one to Labour). See the British Parliamentary Constituency Database, 1999-2001.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

performance. Following the defeat of 1997, a number of commentators argued that the lessons of history suggested that the Party could well move cautiously but convincingly towards electoral recovery in 2001. Shortly after the 1997 election, the leading Conservative Party historian, John Ramsden argued that, despite suffering the worst defeat since 1832, the Party's electoral wounds could be healed and the Party could be returned to power within a few years.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, during every period when Labour had held office since 1924, the Conservatives had made a swift recovery in party organisation, membership, morale and, most importantly, a revitalised intellectual direction and policy platform (as discussed in chapter three).

Before 1922, however, we see a different pattern. After the landslide defeat of 1906, the Party experienced 16 long years in the wilderness before regaining office in its own right, rather than as part of a coalition. As David Willetts and Richard Forsdyke argued in their pamphlet, *After the Landslide*, the Party's response to the defeat of 1906 was essentially muddled, ensuring that the Edwardian period was largely marked by extraordinary weakness and division.<sup>3</sup> After 1922, however, the Conservatives successful pursuit of power throughout the twentieth century seemed to suggest that they had learnt the painful lessons of those early years in the wilderness. Ramsden aptly remarked in 1998 that:

...predictions of the Conservatives' inevitable withering into debility are no more justified by the facts after 1997 than they proved to be in 1832, 1880, 1906, 1945 or 1974.<sup>4</sup>

An average swing of 5% towards the Conservatives over the four years after 1997 would have restored a 'normal pattern' of regional

---

<sup>2</sup> See John Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830*, HarperCollins, 1998, pp 486-489.

<sup>3</sup> See David Willetts with Richard Forsdyke, *After the Landslide: Learning the lessons from 1906 and 1945*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, p 489.



## THE PREDICAMENT OF 2001

representation, as it did for example in 1950-51 after the collapse of 1945. This recovery would have not only consolidated their core vote, but regained a modest portion of support lost during the late 1990s. But there was to be no recovery. The 2001 defeat was thus far more serious than that of 1997. Such a severe rejection whilst in Opposition propels the Party into a position close to that of Labour throughout the 1980s, when three successive election defeats were required to jolt the Party back into contention.

One highly significant factor worked against the Conservatives in the 2001 election. Labour's 'winner's bonus' in 2001, which exaggerated its relatively modest 40.7% share of the popular vote, was the highest ever recorded for any general election since 1945.<sup>5</sup> Although the Conservatives trailed Labour by only 9%, they will require a 10.5% swing in their favour in 2005/6 to form the next government with a majority of one.<sup>6</sup> Any effort to restore the Party's electoral fortunes to those of 1992 (and that of the previous three elections when the Party won between 42% and 44% of the popular vote) will be confronted by some formidable obstacles. Three major trends and re-alignments have been confirmed in the wake of the 2001 election and may continue to develop still further to the detriment of the Party's fortunes. These are the continued advance of New Labour (and the Liberal Democrats) into formerly safe Conservative territory; the effect of tactical voting; and the impact of demographic, social and economic change on voting behaviour.

---

<sup>5</sup> If one divides the proportion of votes (40.7%) into the proportion of seats (62.6%) won by Labour in 2001 the 'votes:seats ratio' is 1.54. This provides a huge bias in the system to the detriment of the Conservatives, who now require a swing from Labour of 10.5% to form a government with a majority of one. Calculated from Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1999*, Ashgate, 1999 and The British Parliamentary Constituency Database, 1999-2001.

<sup>6</sup> This will require a Conservative lead of 13% over Labour in the popular vote to win the next election with an overall majority. For a good explanation for Labour's bias in the electoral system see Ivor Crewe, 'Elections and Public Opinion' in Anthony Seldon (Ed.), *The Blair Effect* Little, Brown, 2001, pp 90-91.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### *New Labour's (and Liberal Democrats') advance*

Even in the early 1990s, when the Tory Party struggled to recover from the nightmare of the poll tax and the embittered departure of Mrs Thatcher, it would have been inconceivable that the Conservatives would lose so much ground in traditionally safe areas. The early 1990s now seem to be another country. Yet if the losses in 1997 in Greater London, South East England and the Midlands had accentuated the scale of defeat (with falls in the share of the vote between 12% and 14%), then the result in June 2001 confirms an alarming regional trend.<sup>7</sup>

At the Conservatives' expense, Labour consolidated and extended its advance into the formerly safe Tory heartlands of suburban London, Kent, Sussex, Dorset and Wiltshire. In seats such as Enfield Southgate, Finchley, Harrow West, Wimbledon and Hove, a modest Conservative revival would have been expected. Yet overall the Party conceded further ground to Labour in these once true blue bastions of affluent South East England.<sup>8</sup> In the 2001 election the Conservatives managed to win only five seats from Labour, whilst Labour held 23 of its 30 most marginal seats without even a whiff of trouble from the opposition – increasing its majority in each case. The narrowing of the North-South divide for Labour was critical to the scale of Tony Blair's second successive landslide victory, whereas the Conservative defeat was compounded by the wasteful build up of votes in ultra-safe seats that had already been retained in 1997. In 2001, Labour polled almost six million votes in the South and almost five million in the North – a statistic that would have been unthinkable a decade before, given the absence of

---

<sup>7</sup> The Conservative share of the vote fell by 14.1% (30 seat losses) in Greater London and 13.2% (39 seat losses) in South East England in 1997. For an authoritative analysis of the 1997 election results see D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, Macmillan, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> The Conservative vote in Labour-held marginal seats fell on average by 0.1% and in Liberal Democrat-held marginals by 0.9%. See The British Parliamentary Constituency Database, 1992-2001 cited in Pippa Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001* Oxford University Press, 2001.

## THE PREDICAMENT OF 2001

almost any Labour seats below a line stretching from the Wash to the Bristol Channel.<sup>9</sup>

The continuing erosion of Tory support in Southern England, regardless of its near annihilation in many parts of urban and Northern England, Wales and Scotland, is one of the most pressing electoral problems now facing the Party. The 'M4 corridor', which became a notable beneficiary of the Lawson boom in the 1980s, deserted the Conservative Party in large swathes before and after the 1997 general election. Seats like Reading West, where the solid Tory majority had been overturned in 1997, swung even further into New Labour's grasp.<sup>10</sup> Even in the South West, where one might have expected Hague's Euroscepticism to find a particular echo, the results (Taunton apart) were exceptionally poor. The steady flow of votes to the Liberal Democrats, who achieved some spectacular results in seats such as Kingston and Surbiton, Guildford, Lewes and Romsey, has rubbed salt into Conservative wounds. The Liberal surge is now being seen as peculiarly threatening to the Conservatives' traditionally secure position in the two party system. If the Conservatives are to regain substantial swathes of 'Middle England' they must first reclaim these large blots of red and yellow from a landscape once bathed in unblemished blue. With a minimal swing and a single net gain of one seat in 2001, the Conservatives were confined once again to the remaining 165 strongholds in rural and suburban England.

---

<sup>9</sup> In 1987, Labour had a total of three seats (bar Greater London) south of a line between the Wash and the mouth of the River Severn. In 2001 the Conservatives polled almost six million votes in the South but only 2.4 million in the North. The South includes Greater London, the South East, South West, East Anglia and the Midlands. The North includes the remainder of Britain. See the research from The British Parliamentary Constituency Database, 1992-2001 cited in Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001*.

<sup>10</sup> Labour won the seat of Reading West in 1997 with a majority of nearly 3,000. In 2001, Labour made even further inroads into this formerly solid Conservative seat with a swing of 7% from the Conservatives. See the British Parliamentary Constituency Database, 1992-2001. See also John Major's article in the *Spectator*, 24 August 2001.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### *The effect of tactical voting*

If tactical voting had been used on an unprecedented scale to eject Conservatives in 1997, it had become a built-in electoral tool with which to damage them in 2001. In 1997 it was easy to explain away tactical voting by a collective desire to get rid of a hated government.<sup>11</sup> But, as canvassers found in 2001, when there was less hatred than an indifference to the Tories, anti-Tory tactical voting if anything increased. The majority of seats the Party lost through tactical voting did not change hands in 2001, illustrating the depth of anti-Conservative sentiment in some of the most critical electoral battlegrounds of the country.<sup>12</sup> This pattern of voting behaviour may (or may not) endure. But it confirms a strategic problem for the Party – that of fighting a general election on two fronts in many areas of the country, whilst acknowledging the informal collaboration between their opponents, as seen, for example, in Hastings and Lewes.

### *The changing electorate*

The altering nature of support for both main parties will undoubtedly provide disturbing evidence for Conservatives over the next few years. Most significantly, the steady migration of voters from cities to countryside and from inner-city to outer suburb will continue to benefit Labour by creating large disparities in the population size of constituencies held by each party.<sup>13</sup> Traditionally a problem for the third party in Britain's

---

<sup>11</sup> In 1997 the impact of tactical voting was estimated to have lost the Conservatives between 20 and 30 seats to Labour and 10 to 15 to the Liberal Democrats. See D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, Macmillan, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> See D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 2001*, Macmillan, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Labour will probably remain strong in inner-city and urban constituencies despite the decline in voter turn-out and depopulation trends over the last 25 years. In 1997, Labour seats contained an average of 6,500 fewer electors than Conservative seats. See Ivor Crewe, 'Elections and Public Opinion' in Anthony Seldon (ed.), *The Blair Effect*, Little, Brown, 2001, p 90.

## THE PREDICAMENT OF 2001

'first-past-the-post' system, the nature of this demographic change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is now in danger of seriously harming Conservative chances of winning the majority of seats necessary to form a government.<sup>14</sup> Boundary changes are due to be reviewed before the next election, but even a redrawn electoral map – to compensate for devolution – will not significantly remove Labour's advantage in the system. Although Labour remained strong in its traditional heartlands (despite some of the lowest turnouts in the country), recent polling research indicates that support has swelled for the Party in middle class constituencies containing many professional, managerial and skilled white-collar residents.<sup>15</sup>

The New Labour machine in 2001 marched on into the suburban dwellings of Kettering, Northampton and Brighton scooping up even more votes than in 1997. The AB classes split 44% to 37% in favour of the Conservatives to Labour, an unusually narrow margin, whilst Labour won over 50% of the vote in every other social class.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, Conservative support was lowest among the lower middle class (29%) and hardly much higher among the skilled and unskilled working classes (34% apiece). Given that decisive support in winning her three elections between 1979 and 1987 came from the so-called 'Thatcher's C2s' – the enlarging lower middle class – Tory strategists should be fully aware that this group have now become Tony Blair's most cherished friends in his electoral 'big tent'.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> In 1997 and 2001, the Conservative vote was much more evenly spread than Labour's and was penalised by the first-past-the-post system as a consequence. See Ivor Crewe, 'Elections and Public Opinion' in Anthony Seldon (ed.), *The Blair Effect*, Little, Brown, 2001, pp 90-91.

<sup>15</sup> The BBC/ICM Election Poll, 30 May to 4 June 2001 provides clear evidence of changing patterns in class voting and the decline of class voting altogether. Cited in Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001*.

<sup>16</sup> BBC/ICM Election Poll, 30 May to 4 June 2001 cited in Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001*.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice, *The Rise of New Labour*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

Not only has voting become less determined by class, but party allegiance has become much less defined and more unpredictable, confirming a trend that originated in the 1960s and earlier. Whereas Labour may have suffered more from this trend earlier, it now seems to be harming the Conservatives more than any other party. The Conservatives have over the same 40 years also lost considerable confidence among younger sections of the electorate – a characteristic feature of disrepair that has not been reversed since 1997 – presenting a massive challenge for the Party in the future (not least in terms of its own membership). The Party cannot be buoyed indefinitely by ageing Conservative supporters and activists: if they are not complemented by a significant infusion of fresh younger blood, the course of demographic and socio-economic change will continue to harm the Party's electoral prospects.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, memories of Labour's poor record in the 1970s and 1980s will continue to fade whilst younger generations of voters will have become firmly acquainted with the unpopularity of the Conservative Party both in government and opposition since the late 1980s.

### **1997-2001: The causes of defeat**

So why did the Party fail to make any kind of recovery between 1997 and 2001? Given the political difficulties New Labour endured towards the end of its first term, notably the fuel crisis, foot and mouth disease and widespread disenchantment with the state of public services, there was ample opportunity for the Tories to launch a progressively damaging offensive against the government.

The disarray of the Tory Party in May 1997 had been evident for all to see. The causes of defeat are not in dispute: bitter divisions, above all over Europe; a dwindling parliamentary majority; the widespread impression of sleaze; sheer governmental exhaustion

---

<sup>18</sup> This has been particularly apparent in closely contested marginal seats in the 1997 and 2001 general elections. A lack of younger party activists on the ground stifled efforts to provide an efficient electoral machine in some of the crucial seats, such as Ilford North in London.

## THE PREDICAMENT OF 2001

and the prevailing feeling that it was 'time for a change'. The Party's reputation for economic competence (and its lead in the polls) were destroyed after Britain's ejection from the ERM on 'Black Wednesday' in September 1992.<sup>19</sup> As Matthew d'Ancona has argued, the slaying of the dragons in the 1980s, with the defeat of communism and militant trade unionism, had deprived the Conservative Party of clear targets around which to group.<sup>20</sup> A huge vacuum had opened up in the Party's platform and indeed *raison d'être*. The Party had both the need, and the opportunity, to undergo a deep and lasting rethink about its weakened position on the new political terrain.

If ever the Party needed an inspiring, confident and appealing leader to lift it out of the jaws of defeat it was after 19 June 1997, when William Hague was elected. The task of rebuilding party organisation after years of decline and restoring morale and esteem in the country required strong and firm leadership. Although Hague was periodically convincing and resolute, and was a feisty debater, he was never able to lift himself into the stature of an impressive or agenda-changing leader. To his credit, some improvements were made to the party organisation and party democracy. The party constitution was overhauled and brought under the umbrella of a single-governing board, overseeing organisation and management, and uniting the professional and voluntary wings of the Party.<sup>21</sup> Central Office sought, with mixed results, to emulate New Labour's 'Millbank model' by establishing a campaign war-room and an open-plan office integrating press, policy and research. Although several initiatives to arrest the long-

---

<sup>19</sup> See M. Saatchi, *The Science of Politics*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001, pp 24-27.

<sup>20</sup> 'Herein lies a great strategic opportunity for the centre-Right. It must accept...that we live in an age dominated not by the slaying of dragons or the taming of perils, but by a relentless quest for a better quality of life'. Matthew d'Ancona, paper given to a Demos seminar, 12 July 2001.

<sup>21</sup> See Gillian Peele, 'Towards "New Conservatives"? Organisational Reform and the Conservative Party', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 69, 1998.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

term erosion of party membership came to no avail, the Party's finances were restored to healthier levels boosted by generous donations from wealthy businessmen and the injections of cash from the party treasurer, Michael Ashcroft.<sup>22</sup>

But however much one tinkers with the bodywork of the party machine, a sound policy engine and ample intellectual fuel remain essential – and these were lacking under Hague's leadership. Steadiness and consistency of strategic direction (except on Europe) were also lacking. He chose to distance his leadership from the record of the Major government: this was popular with the Major-hating Tory press, but it meant that the Tories appeared even more divided, and they could not gain the credit for the Major government's considerable economic success. A tactician of periodic brilliance, a strategist *par excellence* Hague was not.<sup>23</sup> As Dennis Kavanagh aptly put it, the leadership 'never agreed about the lessons of defeat and how to regain support'.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed the biggest problem for the Tories in opposition was the absence of a considered strategy capable of reclaiming the centre-ground of British politics, as John Major achieved in government between 1990 and 1992. In that short period, the Party managed to recover from almost certain defeat following the debacle of the 'Community Charge', the unceremonious disposal of a leader and the beginning of the worst recession since the 1930s, by shrewdly reading the political weather and crafting a focused campaign for

---

<sup>22</sup> Party membership was estimated to have been 756,000 in 1992, 400,000 in 1997 and just over 300,000 in 2001. See P. Whiteley, P. Seyd and P. Richardson, *True Blues: the politics of Conservative Party membership*, Oxford University Press, 1994, and W. F. Deedes, 'How the Tories lost their Precious Volunteer Army', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 June 2001. Stuart Ball argues that the figures by Whiteley et al are almost certainly too high. See Ball in Seldon and Ball (Eds.) *Conservative Century*, Oxford University Press, pp 292-3 and p 304.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Seldon, 'Thatcher's legacy distorts the Tory vision', *Financial Times*, 24 August 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Dennis Kavanagh, 'How William Hague lost the election', *Independent*, 3 September 2001.



## THE PREDICAMENT OF 2001

imminent re-election.<sup>25</sup> Luck certainly played a part, as did the advantages of incumbency in office, but so too did judgement, not least by Major himself and party chairman, Chris Patten.

Between 1997 and 2001, entirely the opposite was the case. Far from calmly taking stock of the gaping wounds that had afflicted the Party's electoral prospects in the mid to late 1990s, the Party threw itself into a haphazard fervour of activity that led it further away from the everyday policy concerns and the subtleties of public mood and opinion. Peter Lilley's policy review in 1998-9 showed promise of a deeper rethink on issues as salient as public sector reform, but was jettisoned amid worries in the Hague camp that this would not provide 'clear blue water' between the Tories and New Labour. Incredibly, no systematic and thorough long-term policy review was set in train, as had occurred in 1945-50, 1965-70 or 1975-79. The consequence was that the leadership let policy develop in too many directions, with little grasp of overall strategy and the changing political scene.

More attention was given to the populist appearances such as Hague's baseball cap, or 'policy on the hoof' such as on the Tony Martin case, 'bogus' asylum seekers and on-the-spot fines for cannabis use. Ill thought-out pronouncements were made on a range of policies, including tax, fishing and the European Rapid Reaction Force. Perceptions of the Party by voters who had deserted it in 1997 were damaged by the messages they received; now inclusive, now right-wing, now populist, peppered with the strains and divisions of a reinforced Euro-sceptic line. Such Euroscepticism played well for the 24% of the electorate who turned out to vote in the European Parliament elections in June 1999.<sup>26</sup> This was the best result for the Party since the 1997

---

<sup>25</sup> See Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon (Eds.), *The Major Effect*, Macmillan, 1994, and Anthony Seldon, *Major: A Political Life*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997, pp 129-289.

<sup>26</sup> The Conservatives won 36% of the share of the vote and 36 MEPs (seven ahead of Labour) in the European elections, June 1999. The turnout was 24%. See Rallings and Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1999*.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

debacle, but pales in comparison to the poor performances at by-elections and elections to the devolved assemblies.<sup>27</sup> Far from emerging as a credible alternative government, the Conservatives were prone to endless caricature for pandering to the pro-Thatcher press, for being too right-wing, out of touch and to all intents and purposes, desperate.

The content and style of the Conservative election campaign accurately mirrored these four chaotic years in opposition. Just as there had been no clear strategy during 1997-2001, so there was no clear strategy during the election. Despite seizing the agenda in the first week of the campaign with the early publication of the manifesto, as well as raising the importance of Tory campaign issues, such as tax cuts and crime, the Party failed to improve its standing with the public and the profile of its leader.<sup>28</sup> The Party provided some coherence and energy in the campaign around the major themes of tax, crime and asylum and Europe. Although the issue of taxation soon became embroiled by gaffes and policy confusion, strategists stuck to their guns in the hope that the key messages would start hitting home in time for polling day on 7 June. The 'save the pound' crusade, intended to be the Tories' nuclear weapon, lacked the necessary importance to be a vote-winner in an election dominated by concerns over public services. For four years, the right-wing press and commentators had been telling Hague Euroscepticism was the trump card. It was no such thing.

---

<sup>27</sup> In the newly devolved Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, the Conservatives polled 15% and 16% respectively, with representation only ensured by the 'list seats' in the hybrid proportional representation electoral systems. The Party fared better in the elections to the Greater London Assembly and Mayoral election in May 2000 as well the local government elections in 1999 and 2000. However, the Party only had 5,000 councillors in 1999 compared to the total of 12,000 in 1979. See Daniel Collings and Anthony Seldon, 'Conservatives in Opposition', in Pippa Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001*, pp 66-72.

<sup>28</sup> Collings and Seldon, 'Conservatives in Opposition', in Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001*, pp 66-72. Andrew Rawnsley, *Servants of the People*, Penguin, 2001.

## THE PREDICAMENT OF 2001

It became progressively clear throughout the campaign that the Party had failed to engage with the issues that had caused it most difficulty in 1997. As historian Ross McKibbin aptly commented one month after the election:

The Tories fought the campaign as though they were fighting an East End seat in 1900, or perhaps 1924.<sup>29</sup>

As the campaign drew to a close, Hague made a last-ditch appeal to ‘burst Tony Blair’s bubble’ by pleading with voters to reduce his majority – a battle cry that conceded defeat before the first polling stations opened on 7 June.

Thus ended one of the most unpropitious periods in the Conservative Party’s history, drawing the curtains on a century of unparalleled electoral success. The question which party strategists should now ask is: does the history of Conservative thought reveal clues on how the Party can regain the commanding heights of British politics?

---

<sup>29</sup> See Ross McKibbin, ‘The Tax-and-Spend Vote’, *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 23, No. 13, 5 July 2001.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT BRITISH CONSERVATISM that ensured its continuity and survival amid the rugged ideological and political terrain of the twentieth century? This question is the source of both fascination and debate among contemporary historians, commentators and politicians of all hues. Some argue the tradition is still vital, others that the *fin de siècle* witnessed the demise of a tradition made redundant by its successful fight against democratic socialism and transformed by the adoption of economic liberalism from the late 1970s. Now that capitalism and democracy have won the arguments, and 'history' has supposedly ended, there is no further need for a Conservative Party to defend institutions and the *status quo* which are no longer under attack. Is the 'Conservative tradition' still vital? If so, what light might it shed on the Party's rebuilding?

### **The death of a tradition?**

In the wake of the recent general election defeats, some leading commentators have taken it upon themselves to sign the death warrant of modern British Conservatism. John Gray concluded in his morbid assessment of the undoing of this once distinctive tradition that:

Tory Britain is gone for good. With it has gone the future of conservatism.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> John Gray, 'The Undoing of Conservatism' in John Gray and David Willetts, *Is Conservatism Dead?*, Profile Books, 1997, p 63.

## THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION

Globalisation and the information age were other forces allegedly making Conservatism redundant. Gray asserted that neither ‘One Nation Tories’ nor the ‘Thatcherite free marketers’ had begun to understand the changes that have transformed British society and the global economy since the mid-1980s.<sup>31</sup> Disagreements over Britain’s role in Europe were therefore ‘symptoms of a deeper and more damaging division’ within the centre-right over the place of the nation-state in a rapidly changing world. Could a tradition of thinking on the centre-right that has survived many of its more ideological rivals really have disappeared without trace?

This chapter argues that conservatism is a durable *tour de force* in the intellectual and political life of twenty-first century Britain. To regain confidence in themselves, and recover that of the electorate, Conservatives must dig deep into this wealthy resource of ideas and values – which continue to chime with the sound instincts and common sense of the British people.

### **The nature of conservatism**

Unlike Marxism, there is no single body of thought, nor one defining text or grand theorist that Conservatives may turn to for inspiration. Instead British Conservatism, as Ian Gilmour describes, resembles more of an ‘archaeological site’, in which successive layers of Conservative wisdom, insight and prescription have been allowed to accumulate.<sup>32</sup> Such a multi-layered tradition of political thought may be traced as far back as the sixteenth century and Richard Hooker, but its more succinct expression lies in the late eighteenth century writings of Edmund Burke – especially in the aftermath of the French Revolution.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, the essence and coherence of modern British conservatism took shape. At the heart of the Conservative mind is a common sense disdain for ideology and

---

<sup>31</sup> Gray, “The Undoing of Conservatism” in Gray and Willetts, *Is Conservatism Dead?*, p 145.

<sup>32</sup> Ian Gilmour, *Inside Right: A Study of Conservatism*, Hutchinson, 1977, p 144.

<sup>33</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Penguin, 1969.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

abstraction. As Burke argued, the pursuit of radical and doctrinaire politics is not only woefully inadequate, but also ultimately dangerous – threatening to undo the work of generations in all aspects of life.<sup>34</sup> For Michael Oakeshott, who echoes Burke and many other Conservatives, politics:

...is not the science of setting up a permanently impregnable society, it is the art of knowing where to go next in the already existing kind of society.<sup>35</sup>

To this extent, the Conservative's scepticism towards grand theories in politics represents an anti-ideological and even anti-intellectual approach to political life. As John Ramsden has observed in his grand survey of the Party's history:

There has almost been an inverse correlation between the Conservative Party leadership's intellectual clarity and its electoral record of success, not least because intellectual clarity invariably repels some potential supporters as much as it attracts others.<sup>36</sup>

This argument begs the question whether such an established tradition of political thought lacks a solid philosophical core that may illuminate questions of justice, liberty and other political values. The American political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington argues that Conservatism is a 'positional ideology', which mounts an impassioned defence of an established social order in response to the fundamental challenges of radicalism.<sup>37</sup> This view may help to explain why Conservatism has adopted remarkably different

---

<sup>34</sup> Burke warned that attempts to reorder society according to abstract theory rather than concrete practice, without any respect to one's inheritance of civilisation, would only lead to a state-of-nature and chaos. See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), pp 193-4.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Oakeshott, "The Political Economy of Freedom" (1949) in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Methuen, 1962, p 58.

<sup>36</sup> See John Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, p 493.

<sup>37</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, 1957.

## THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION

guises, regardless of their position on the political spectrum, in the last 200 years.<sup>38</sup>

But Huntingdon deprives Conservatism of the coherence that one would expect from such a long tradition of thought in British politics. For critics such as Robert Eccleshall and Ted Honderich, Conservatism would be more accurately described as a self-serving and self-preserving force that seeks to protect the interests of the ruling classes and dominant groups in society.<sup>39</sup> Indeed this critique might have some resonance if one considers Conservative thought to be little more than the preaching of a High Tory – that Conservatives share only a perennial fascination with the ‘endless adventure of governing men.’<sup>40</sup> It seems that such views reduce the Conservative genre to a form of traditionalism that opposes anything new, thereby providing a welcome home for the various anti-change movements throughout history, rather than a movement which has been peculiarly receptive to new ideas.

Roger Scruton argues that an illusion has arisen, perpetuated by liberals, socialists and other opponents of Conservatism, that there is no set of beliefs and principles which motivates Conservatives to act. Their caricature is readily painted:

Their action is mere reaction, their policy procrastination, their belief nostalgia.<sup>41</sup>

It is our view that British Conservatism is neither tantamount to a mere disposition nor simply preoccupied with preserving the interests of a privileged few, but consists of a substantial canon of closely related values and ideas. Conservative thinking does not operate in a philosophical vacuum.

---

<sup>38</sup> For example, Disraelian Conservatives defended the hierarchical and inegalitarian notion of communal responsibilities to contain the challenge from liberalism in the latter nineteenth century. Within 60 years, post-war conservatives had become reconciled to the redistributive and egalitarian welfare state.

<sup>39</sup> See Robert Eccleshall, “English Conservatism as Ideology”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 25, 1977, and Ted Honderich, *Conservatism*, Penguin, 1991.

<sup>40</sup> F. S. Oliver, *The Endless Adventure*, Vol. 1, Macmillan, 1930, p 3.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, Macmillan, 1980, p 1.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### **The seven core tenets of British Conservatism**

Seven core Conservative tenets can be identified that have consistently influenced Conservative thinkers and statesmen since the eighteenth century. Yet there is a further distinction to be made about British Conservatism. As Karl Mannheim and Michael Freeden suggest, the Conservative *core* is frequently embellished by the absorption of *periphery* values and concepts that emanate from rival ideologies and political traditions.<sup>42</sup> Though this feature may not be exclusive to Conservatism, it is certainly the case in the twentieth century that Conservatives were more apt and perhaps better equipped (in contrast to the doctrinaire politics of their opponents) to reshape their mould, moving away for example from landed interest, empire and the Church. The adoption of support for the welfare state, and of ideas with a distinctly liberal and libertarian flavour have undoubtedly enriched its appeal in changing times.<sup>43</sup>

Although not always immediately complementary, such flexibility has contributed to the expansion of Conservatism's ideological repertoire throughout the last 200 years, which at the same time illustrates its detachment from a homogenous ideological underpinning. In culinary terms, the recipe of the Conservative soup relies upon the periodic addition of a few unlikely ingredients to suit the ever-changing tastes of the time, and the rejection of tastes that have fallen out of vogue. It is this

---

<sup>42</sup> See Karl Mannheim, *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*, Routledge, 1986 and Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, Clarendon Press, 1996, pp 335-7.

<sup>43</sup> Indeed the incorporation of liberal and libertarian strands of thought within the conservative mould is by no means an innovation of the last 25 years. Perhaps an early illustration of this feature is found in the work of Edmund Burke. His political thought and practice (as a leading Whig) were strongly infused with liberal elements. The influence of the Enlightenment is central to a proper consideration of Burke's philosophy as found in C. P. Courtney's excellent commentary, "Edmund Burke and the Enlightenment" in A. Whiteman et al (eds.), *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants*, Clarendon Press, 1973.



## THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION

feature that John Barnes argues has contributed to the continuity and versatility of British Conservatism in the last two centuries.<sup>44</sup>

### *Individual reason and human nature*

One of the central tenets of Conservative thought is a belief in the imperfection of human nature and the limits to the power of reason. Indeed, flaws in human reason and its inability to master the mass of emotions and instincts in human nature informs the scepticism that is characteristic of conservative thinking. As Quintin Hogg wrote in his classic text, *The Case for Conservatism*:

The Conservative does not believe that the power of politics to put things right in the world is unlimited partly because man is an imperfect creature with a streak of evil as well as good in his inmost nature.<sup>45</sup>

The Conservative ‘philosophy of imperfection’ dismisses Utopian and reductionist theories that purport to explain the complexities of human life.<sup>46</sup> Most importantly, Conservatives believe that individuals require guidance – they need to look further than their own private stock of reason and ‘avail themselves in the general bank and capital of all nations’ to achieve a sense of continuity and belonging.<sup>47</sup> Not only should they cherish tradition, custom and convention, but they should also value practical experience (as opposed to abstract theory) as the best guide to life. Politics, Oakeshott believed, should therefore be a:

...conversation with the past... always so deeply veined with both the traditional, the circumstantial and the transitory.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> See John Barnes, “Ideology and Factions” in Seldon and Ball (Eds.) *Conservative Century*, Macmillan, 1994, p 316.

<sup>45</sup> Quintin Hogg, *The Case for Conservatism*, Penguin, 1947.

<sup>46</sup> See Anthony Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection*, Faber & Faber, 1978.

<sup>47</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p 183.

<sup>48</sup> Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p 3.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### *Organic society and orderly change*

Human beings are to be valued not simply as isolated individuals, but are organically rooted in a particular time, place and order. Imbued with a sense of historical continuity, which Burke expressed as an ‘eternal partnership’ between past, present and future, Conservatives conceive the fabric of society to be inherently complex and intricately arranged around certain institutions and customs. ‘Little platoons’ may instil a sense of civic pride, loyalty and a sense of locality in society.<sup>49</sup> Contemporary Conservative philosophers, such as Roger Scruton, continue to value the security and sense of belonging offered by the family, church, social organisations and groups that are vitally important to a society which is never static, but perpetually changing.<sup>50</sup> As Michael Freedon notes, Conservatives do not seek to forestall change; they simply want to ‘render it safe’.<sup>51</sup> The purpose of change must be to improve that which already exists, to correct the imperfections of human life and in so doing strengthen the existing social order. “A state without the means of some change is without the means of its own conservation” (or in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s words, ‘reform that you may preserve’) has proved instructive to Conservatives long after the time of Edmund Burke.<sup>52</sup> To permit measured and responsible reform of institutions within society is both to guard against sudden change or revolution and preserve the traditions that have served it well. Such an organic conception of society and change requires a strong defence of order in social and political life, which is ultimately bound together by the rule of law.

---

<sup>49</sup> See David Willetts, ‘Civic Conservatism’ in Gray and Willetts, *Is Conservatism Dead?*, Profile Books, 1997.

<sup>50</sup> See Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, Macmillan, 1980, p 31, 119.

<sup>51</sup> Freedon, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p 332.

<sup>52</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp 119-121.

# THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION

*Grounded liberty and the rule of law*

Edmund Burke remarked that:

One of the first motives to civil society, and which becomes one of its fundamental rules, is, that no man should be judge in his own cause.<sup>53</sup>

A stable social order and a framework of liberty are therefore wholly dependent on the proper maintenance of the rule of law. Conservatives uphold the impartial application of the law, which regulates the relations between governors and governed – including both the institutions of state and society. As Hogg eloquently proclaimed, the rule of law is:

The enemy alike of dictatorship and anarchy, the friend by whose offices authority and liberty can alone be reconciled.<sup>54</sup>

The common law tradition, the diffusion of power and the safeguards of the constitution are ‘the greatest single condition of our freedom’.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Oakeshott’s ideal of the ‘civil association’ (*civitas*), is one of a society bound by a common acknowledgement and allegiance to the authority of civil laws.<sup>56</sup> Under this framework, individuals may pursue a diverse range of activities and enjoy concrete liberties and rights – as opposed to the ‘enterprise state’ (*universitas*), which attempts to impose a common undertaking upon them. Acknowledging that the modern state represents a combination of the two ideal associations, Oakeshott and many Conservatives prefer a free society in which individuality can flourish, which contrasts sharply with the egalitarianism and solidarity associated with the politics of rationalism. Unfortunately Oakeshott regrets that:

---

<sup>53</sup> Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Vol. 5, 1889.

<sup>54</sup> Hogg, *Case for Conservatism*, p 63.

<sup>55</sup> Oakeshott, “The Political Economy of Freedom” in *Rationalism in Politics*, pp 40-43.

<sup>56</sup> See Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, Clarendon Press, 1975, p 129.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

What went abroad as the concrete rights of Englishmen have returned home as the abstract Rights of Man, and they have returned to confound our politics and our minds.<sup>57</sup>

### *The limited role of the state*

It was Margaret Thatcher who said:

What we need is a strong state determined to maintain in good repair the frame which surrounds society. But the frame should not be so heavy or so elaborate as to dominate the whole picture.<sup>58</sup>

Her concept of the state chimes with the thought of many other Conservatives over the last 200 years. Oakeshott argued that the enterprise of the 'ship of state' is to 'keep afloat on an even keel' by ensuring that conflicts of interest, periodic maladjustments and problems are resolved with due skill, prudence and foresight.<sup>59</sup> Politics should occupy only a limited share of an individual's attention. For Hogg, who best describes this strand of Tory thinking, the substance of life was to be found in 'religion, art, study, family, country, friends, music, fun and duty' rather than in the intricacies of the 'political struggle'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed the preservation of the distinction between state and society or public and private life is central to the Conservative emphasis on the limited style of politics. From the Edwardian Conservatism of Lord Hugh Cecil through to Hogg and Oakeshott, Conservatives have embraced a libertarian stand against the encroachment of the expansionist state.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> See Oakeshott, 'Contemporary British Politics' in *Rationalism in Politics*, pp 489-90.

<sup>58</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *In Defence of Freedom* - the first Airey Neave Memorial Lecture, 1986, p 84.

<sup>59</sup> Oakeshott, 'Political Education' in *Rationalism in Politics*, p 127.

<sup>60</sup> Hogg, *Case for Conservatism*, p 13.

<sup>61</sup> See Lord Hugh Cecil's celebrated account, *Conservatism*, Williams and Norgate, 1912.

## THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION

### *The prosperous economy*

Conservatives have long understood the importance of maintaining a prosperous economy. The benefits of free enterprise and the market economy were realised by Edmund Burke, who in the late eighteenth century, compared the ‘laws of commerce’ to the ‘terms of nature and consequently the laws of God.’<sup>62</sup> The economic thought of Adam Smith, which profoundly influenced the ‘Manchester School of Liberalism’ in the mid-nineteenth century, found notable expression in the writing of F. A. Hayek.<sup>63</sup> Though Hayek denied any political affiliations with the Conservative tradition, his belief in the freedom of the market and the demise of massive state intervention in the economy was to be influential in moulding Conservative thinking in the late twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> As David Willetts observes, it was as early as the late 1940s that the Party’s intellectual trajectory moved away from ‘Baldwinian corporatism towards more stress on freedom and free enterprise.’<sup>65</sup>

Conservatives believe that excessive regulation and interference within the economic machine stifles wealth creation.<sup>66</sup> This traditional attachment to the superiority of market forces over government intervention has not always been evident throughout the twentieth century. Conservatives have not shied away from recommending the use of intervention and central planning in times of war and crises, as shown in the inter-war period and during the wartime coalition. Support for nationalisation of industry and planning faded swiftly, as the flaws of such an approach became apparent in the 1960s and 1970s.

---

<sup>62</sup> See Edmund Burke, ‘Thought and Details on Scarcity’ (1795) in *The Works of the Right Honourable Burke*, 1889.

<sup>63</sup> See F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Chicago University Press, 1944.

<sup>64</sup> F. A. Hayek, ‘Why I am not a Conservative’ in *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago University Press, 1960.

<sup>65</sup> See David Willetts with Richard Forsdyke, *After the Landslide*, Centre for Policy Studies, p 5.

<sup>66</sup> See W. H. Mallock, *Social Equality: A Short Study in a Missing Science* (1882) cited in Barnes, “Ideology and Factions” in Seldon and Ball (Eds.) *Conservative Century*, p 333.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### *Respect for property*

Respect for property is a core anchor of a stable social order. For liberals and Conservatives alike, private property is essential to the vibrancy of the economy and the creation of wealth. Yet for Conservatives, the possession of private property is seen more profoundly as an extension of personality, which ensures a sense of belonging, security and independence. Ownership imparts duties as well as rights upon the individual. The best way to preserve property is therefore to extend ownership as much as possible, thereby providing an incentive for productive work, acquisition and progress. Mrs Thatcher extended the appeal of this concept of ownership with the sale of council houses to the ownership of shares. Not only does the core conservative justification of property provide a base with which to extend private ownership into the sphere of production, but also serves to create a diffusion of economic power within society. Privatisation therefore encouraged the realisation of both a 'property-owning democracy' and 'share-holding democracy'.<sup>67</sup>

### *The Nation*

Support for the nation is a constant in British Conservatism. The evolving nature of the British Constitution, parliamentary democracy, legal and political institutions chimes with a Conservative preference for continuity and stability. Unionism also runs through Conservative veins, following the alliance of Liberal Unionists with the Conservative Party in 1886. Strongly felt these ties may be, this has not stopped Conservatives from contemplating and implementing drastic changes to the make up of the United Kingdom. The creation of home rule for the Irish Republic was passed through a parliament with a Conservative majority in 1922. Disraeli sought to unite the nation behind the

---

<sup>67</sup> Conservative politicians first used the term 'property-owning democracy' in the 1920s and again after the Second World War. See Barnes, 'Ideology and Factions' in Seldon and Ball (Eds.) *Conservative Century*, p 326.

## THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION

three conservative canons of empire, constitution and welfare of the people in his proclamation of ‘one nation at home’ and ‘one nation abroad’ in the 1870s.<sup>68</sup>

A desire for national unity and harmony, rather than division and discord is most important. In the 1920s, Stanley Baldwin reminded his fellow countrymen that the ‘power of managing our own affairs in our own way is the greatest gift of Englishmen.’<sup>69</sup> Indeed his warm portrayal of the national character in the 1920s and 1930s (amid the chaos abroad) helped to forge a distinctive conservative image of nationhood for a generation.

The Disraelian ‘One Nation’ appeal continued to resonate well into the twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> Yet the appeal to national character and Englishness has often been a source of confusion for the Conservative tradition. Equating England with ‘Britain’, whether explicitly or implicitly, has led to an increasing sense of alienation among the other nations within the Union in the last 25 years. The Conservative definition of national character of course does not imply a monopoly of patriotism, which is upheld to varying degrees across the British political tradition from left to right. But the most passionate defence of national identity and sovereign nationhood by successive generations of thinkers and statesmen, from Burke to Scruton, undoubtedly provides vital cement in the Conservative tradition.

---

<sup>68</sup> See Benjamin Disraeli’s Crystal Palace Speech (1872) cited in Frank O’Gorman, *British Conservatism: Conservative Thought from Burke to Thatcher*, Longman, 1986, pp 148-152.

<sup>69</sup> See Stanley Baldwin, ‘Our Inheritance’ in *On England*, Philip Allan, 1926, p 39.

<sup>70</sup> To such an extent that Tony Blair has appropriated that exact phrase in numerous campaign and political speeches since becoming Leader of the Labour Party in 1994.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### Conclusion

These seven tenets of British Conservatism display both constancy and continuity in a tradition enriched by the contributions of thinkers and politicians over 200 years. There have been numerous attempts to delineate Conservative thinking into clearly marked strands, factions and traditions. Ideological divisions and fissures excite academics and political commentators alike. Among the most recent of these, 'Perri 6' has sought to use theoretical distinctions to provide a useful navigational tool with which to guide the centre-right back to a pre-eminent position.<sup>71</sup> Yet distinguishing between 'neo-conservatism', 'neo-Burkeanism', 'political libertarianism' and 'neo-liberalism' not only fails to recognise the continuity of ideas and values within the Conservative tradition, but over-intellectualises and misunderstands how the Tory Party has operated in practice.

The closest the Conservative Party has come to formulating a set of beliefs dates back to 1872. In that year Disraeli spoke at Crystal Palace about the three interlocking principles of Conservatism: the 'maintenance of the Empire of England', 'the preservation of its national institutions' and 'the elevation of the condition of the people' through measures of social policy. All party leaders since Disraeli have spoken in positive tones about these three principles (although the first has become the maintenance of Britain's role in the world). When the Party considered the introduction of a card for national membership in the 1950s, it was these three Disraelian principles that would have been placed on it.<sup>72</sup> What is most important for today about Disraeli is his emphasis on the Conservatives being a 'one nation' Party, appealing to voters across geographical, social and now ethnic divides. It is in following this direction that the Conservatives' salvation can best be found.

---

<sup>71</sup> See Perri 6, *On the Right Lines: The next centre-right in the British Isles*, Demos, 1998.

<sup>72</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, p 117.



# THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE TRADITION



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE LONG CONSERVATIVE CENTURY

TORY DOMINATION of the long Conservative century (1886-1997) is well known. In that period of 111 years, non-Conservative governments with parliamentary majorities were in office for less than 20 years. No political party has been so dominant for so long as the Tory Party. It has been Europe's most successful democratic political party.

The Party has been in office for four periods during the long century, the phases following a familiar pattern. The Party held office for a period of about 15 or 20 years, during which time the parliamentary opposition was initially weak or divided. The Tory Party then ran out of steam, it was faced by an adverse intellectual and media climate, the opposition recovered while the Conservative Party fell out amongst itself and then put in place a leader who was unwilling or incapable of rallying the troops.

The Party was then propelled into a period in opposition, during which it was always sustained by the electoral system and by its bedrock middle class and better-off working class social support, preventing it ever dropping below 140 MPs and into third party status. The Party then acquired a new leadership, its organisation, membership, morale and funding all recovered, and it renewed its popular appeal. The Party's reconciliation to political, economic and social change often helped its return to power.

The dominance of the Tory Party has not just been of the House of Commons. It dominated the House of Lords for the entire 111 year period and it was also the predominant party in local government for much of the period too.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

Will this pattern necessarily hold into the future? Or has a sea-change occurred which can no longer guarantee the Tories' eventual return to power?

### **The First Era: 1886-1905**

The first era of dominance owed much to the Liberal Unionists breaking away from Gladstone's Liberal Party in recoil against his policy of home rule for Ireland. It was the least creative of the four periods of Tory domination. A detestation of home rule was the cement that bound together the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. After Gladstone's retirement in 1894 and the end of the quest for home rule for the time being, there was little on which both wings agreed. Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, was himself no advocate of domestic reform beyond very cautious steps such as The Housing of the Working Classes Act (1890), which gave local councils limited powers for the compulsory purchase of land.<sup>73</sup> The establishment of the modern system of local government in 1888, with the creation of county councils, was the most significant early domestic achievement of the Tories in this first period. Once the activist Randolph Churchill fell from power in December 1886, however, there was no passionate advocate left in Cabinet championing radical domestic ideas.<sup>74</sup>

Organisational reform was the most enduring achievement of the Salisbury government from 1886-1892. The Primrose League, named after Disraeli's favourite flower, political clubs in London and in the provinces, party membership, constituency organisation and finance all enjoyed high points, much of the credit being due to two formidable party officials, Aretas Akers-Douglas and Captain R W Middleton.<sup>75</sup> The Liberals under Gladstone returned to office in the election of 1892, but achieved little. Gladstone's final attempt to

---

<sup>73</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, pp 162-178.

<sup>74</sup> See Roy Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, Clarendon Press, 1981.

<sup>75</sup> See Martin Pugh, *Toryism and the People, 1880-1935*, Blackwell, 1985 and in Anthony Seldon (ed.), *How Tory Governments Fall: The Tory Party in Power since 1783*, Fontana Press, 1996, pp 192-197.

## THE LONG CONSERVATIVE CENTURY

achieve home rule for Ireland was doomed to failure. His Bill, supported in the House of Commons by not just the Liberals but by the 81 Irish Nationalists, passed easily but fell in the House of Lords by 419 votes to 41.<sup>76</sup> Gladstone's successor, Lord Rosebery, was unable to overcome the deep divisions within the Liberal Party.

Most significant for the Tories in this opposition interlude was the formal agreement in 1894 of the Conservative and Liberal Unionists to serve together in office. Indeed, consolidating the anti-Gladstone forces in defence of property and the Church of England against radicals and nonconformists was Salisbury's most enduring achievement as Tory leader. The 1895 to 1900 Salisbury government again achieved little positive domestically, with the Working Men's Compensation Act of 1897 the principal legislative achievement.<sup>77</sup> Foreign and defence policy, as in 1886-92, achieved more. In 1897 came the national fillip of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, a time of imperial celebration, followed by the humiliation of France in the Fashoda Affair of 1898 and then the great recovery of 1899-1900 following the disastrous opening weeks of the Boer War.<sup>78</sup> But party organisation weakened during these last years of the nineteenth century, and without the patriotic lift of the Boer War in the 'Khaki' election in October 1900, and the emaciated state of the Liberals, victory would not have been won, or at least not on the scale that it was (402 MPs with 50.3% of the vote).<sup>79</sup>

The 1900-1905 Conservative government was even less successful domestically than the earlier two governments. It was a period of unusual legislative business, notably the 'Balfour' Education Act of 1902. But the more activist the government was, the more it alienated key constituencies. Again, it was in defence and foreign policy that the government displayed most foresight,

---

<sup>76</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, pp 176, 208.

<sup>77</sup> See Peter Marsh, *The Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft, 1881-1902*, Harvester, 1978.

<sup>78</sup> See *An Appetite for Power*, pp 183-184.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p 186 and Henry Pelling, *The Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910*, Macmillan, 1967.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

notably in its ending of Britain's traditional isolationist policy with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance policy of 1902 and the Anglo-French 'entente cordiale' of 1904.<sup>80</sup>

No sooner had the new century dawned than serious problems accumulated for the Party. The foundation of the Labour Party in 1900, and its formal electoral pact with the Liberals in 1903, were developments underestimated at the time, as was the impact of the refusal of the Party to reverse the punitive Taff Vale decision on trade unions of 1901.<sup>81</sup> Neither Salisbury nor Balfour helped prepare the Party adequately for the democratic age, towards which it was hurtling at an alarming pace. Instead, they clung on to the *status quo*, making minimal genuflections in the direction of social reform, an area in which Disraeli's premiership had paved the way.<sup>82</sup> Party organisation deteriorated rapidly after 1900.

Failure to subdue the Boers in South Africa after 1900 damaged the Party's reputation for military competence. Liberal opinion was outraged by the brutal treatment of the Boers in South Africa, and by the importation of indentured labour (the so-called 'Chinese slavery' issue) also in South Africa.<sup>83</sup> Salisbury's retirement in 1902 resulted in the seamless succession of his nephew, Arthur Balfour, a brilliant mind and a shrewd parliamentary tactician, but a poor leader of a national party.

The fatal blow for this first era of dominance was the split that arose between the 'free traders' and the tariff reformers, who favoured a system of 'imperial preference', i.e. free trade within the Empire only, but tariffs for imports from non-Empire countries.<sup>84</sup> Joseph Chamberlain officially launched the tariff reform crusade in 1903, from the Liberal Unionist wing and the biggest hitter in

---

<sup>80</sup> See Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire*, Yale University Press, 1991.

<sup>81</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, pp 195-196.

<sup>82</sup> See E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Edwardian Conservatism, 1880-1914*, Routledge, 1995.

<sup>83</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, pp 183-186.

<sup>84</sup> See Alan Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics, 1903-1914*, Clarendon Press, 1979.

## THE LONG CONSERVATIVE CENTURY

Balfour's Cabinet. It blended together Chamberlain's belief in social reform and empire, the tariffs on non-imperial goods providing the finance for the interventionist social policies. The division between free traders and tariff reformers, however, rent the Party from Cabinet level all the way down to local wards.<sup>85</sup> Heavy defeat in the 1906 election was an inevitability; the Party reduced to a mere 157 MPs. No MPs were returned in Wales and only 12 out of 72 MPs were returned in Scotland.<sup>86</sup> It was a fitting end to a largely sterile period of dominance.

### **The Second Era: 1924 –1940**

Given that the Party was so badly split and so demoralised by the 1906 defeat, it is remarkable that it recovered so well within the four years before the January 1910 election.<sup>87</sup> The Conservatives won 272 seats, drawing level with the Liberals, who were now dependent upon the votes of the Nationalist Irish MPs to remain in government. The January 1910 election by some measure saw the Tories' highest vote on the franchise introduced in 1884, with over three million votes cast for the Party. It was a peculiarly English recovery, accounting for an extraordinary 112 of the 116 seats regained.<sup>88</sup> The second election of 1910, in December, saw a virtual re-run of the January result, and the Liberals again remaining in power dependent upon Irish Nationalist as well as Labour MPs (which helped to perpetuate the Lib-Lab electoral pact).<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> See Richard Rempel, *Unionists Divided*, David and Charles, 1972.

<sup>86</sup> See A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906*, David and Charles, 1973 and David Willetts MP with Richard Forsdyke, *After the Landslide: Learning the Lessons from 1906 and 1945*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1999, p 8.

<sup>87</sup> See Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910*, Macmillan, 1972.

<sup>88</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, p 200.

<sup>89</sup> See Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910*, Macmillan, 1972.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

In contrast to the Liberal government's domestic activism, the Conservatives under Balfour had little new to offer. The rebuilding of the Tory Party began only in 1911, when Andrew Bonar Law succeeded Balfour as leader. He immediately proved himself a far more dynamic and combative leader.<sup>90</sup> That year also saw a new organisational structure adopted by the Party, with Arthur Steel-Maitland becoming the first party chairman. By-elections began to be won, party morale picked up under Bonar Law's rabble-rousing rhetoric, while the Liberal government's raising again of home rule propelled the Liberal Unionists into a formal merger with the Conservatives in 1912.<sup>91</sup>

The First World War finally brought the Conservatives back to the forefront of politics, chiefly because the Party was invited back into coalition government, initially in 1915. The war split the Liberal Party between the followers of Asquith and Lloyd George and it also militated against a further consolidation of the Lib-Lab pact. The 1918 election, on a radically extended franchise, saw the Conservatives become the largest party in the post-war Lloyd George coalition government.<sup>92</sup> When it broke apart in 1922 due to Conservative revulsion, it dramatically accelerated the time when Conservatives would win an election in their own right.<sup>93</sup>

If Bonar Law had held the Party together during the difficult pre-War and War period, it was Stanley Baldwin, who became leader in 1923, who gave the Party both the policies and an image which allowed it to dominate the inter-war years. Like Bonar Law, Baldwin was a man with an industrial rather than an aristocratic background (in marked contrast to the 'Hotel Cecil'

---

<sup>90</sup> See Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955.

<sup>91</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, p 215.

<sup>92</sup> See Kenneth Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-1922*, Clarendon Press, 1979 and Martin Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace, 1906-1918*, Routledge, 1978.

<sup>93</sup> See Michael Kinnear, *The Fall of Lloyd George*, Macmillan, 1973.



## THE LONG CONSERVATIVE CENTURY

worlds of Salisbury and Balfour).<sup>94</sup> After the 1923 defeat, Baldwin oversaw the healing of the 20 year split over tariff reform, eased by the balance of forces coming down decisively on the tariff side, he gave the Party a moderate reforming and national (albeit 'English') appeal which allowed it to attract the votes of well over one third of the working classes, he successfully established Labour in the national psyche as a 'sectional' party driven by an 'alien' creed (i.e. Marxism), and he piloted the Tories into the Conservative-dominated National Government formed during the financial crisis of 1931.<sup>95</sup> Baldwin saw off attacks from the right wing over India, although he failed to outwit the right over trade unions, succumbing to their pressure in the punitive Trade Disputes Act of 1927, passed in the wake of the General Strike of 1926.

In contrast to the governments of Salisbury and Balfour, which did little to define a future role for the Conservative Party, and which resisted for as long as possible the social forces which eventually swept it from office in 1906, the second era of dominance was far more creative. Baldwin, initially with the Party alone, and after 1931 with the support of National Labour and National Liberals, presided over a leftward and interventionist shift in the Party's stance. He modernised the Party's organisation and educated it in the new forms of media, which included radio, cinema and print propaganda. Baldwin reached out to all classes and all parts of the country: it was a high point of 'one nation' Toryism.<sup>96</sup>

Baldwin's only enduring star was Neville Chamberlain, who succeeded him as party leader and Prime Minister in 1937. But by then, the sands were beginning to run out for the Tories. Suspension of the general election in 1940 led to a five-year

---

<sup>94</sup> See Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.

<sup>95</sup> See Philip Williamson, 'The Doctrinal Politics of Stanley Baldwin' in M. Bentley (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

extension of nominal Conservative power under Chamberlain's successor, Churchill. But as he did nothing during those five years to advance Conservative thinking or Conservative organisation, the second era can be deemed to have ended with Churchill's succession in 1940.

### **The Third Era: 1951-1964**

Some rethinking of Tory policy took place during the War, principally in the Post-War Problems Central Committee set up in 1941, chaired by R. A. Butler. But it was only after the 1945 landslide defeat (213 Conservative MPs to Labour's 393 MPs) that the Party seriously addressed organisational and policy renewal.<sup>97</sup> Lord Woolton, Party Chairman from 1946 to 1955, ranks with Steel-Maitland and J. C. C. Davidson (1926-1930) as one of the most influential organisational figures of the century.<sup>98</sup> Woolton picked the Party out of the gutter in 1945, and by 1950 had rendered it an efficient and liquid fighting machine. Butler performed a similarly transformative role on policy. The 'Industrial Charter' of 1947 was the most significant new statement, which fed into the Party's 1950 election manifesto.<sup>99</sup> The thinking was radical because it accepted much of the Attlee government's economic and social interventionist agenda, inaugurated by Labour in government after 1945, while coupling it with a Conservative gloss stressing choice, home ownership and an end to austerity.

Aided by Labour's subsequent divisions and weariness, the Conservatives increased their vote by 2.5 million between the 1945 election and that of February 1950. Labour, with an initial majority in 1950 of six, clung onto power for a further 18 months, to be brushed from office by the Conservatives in October 1951 with a majority of 17.

---

<sup>97</sup> See Willetts with Forsdyke, *After the Landslide*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1999, pp 41-16.

<sup>98</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, pp 326-352.

<sup>99</sup> See Willetts with Forsdyke, *After the Landslide*, 1999, pp 63-69.

## THE LONG CONSERVATIVE CENTURY

It has become fashionable to denigrate Churchill's leadership of the Conservative Party. Although he devoted his primary effort to winning the war between 1940 and 1945, after the war he provided a protective and non-factional mantle under which the Party could re-group. Once back in office he helped ensure that the Party promoted moderate economic and social policies, in tune with the popular mood, which paved the way for its victory in the election in 1955.<sup>100</sup> Further electoral success, under Harold Macmillan, came in 1959, but by the early 1960s the Party was hit by a sea-change in the popular mood, which no amount of fresh policies nor a change of leadership in October 1963 (to Alec Douglas-Home) could avoid. Defeat in the 1964 election was almost inevitable: the narrowness of defeat was the only surprise.<sup>101</sup>

This third era, like the second, achieved much, both for the Party and domestically for the nation. Internationally, above all with its acceptance of the end of the Empire, and its adjustment to Britain's continued decline as a world power, it achieved more than any of the eras. Electoral success was helped by economic prosperity, albeit owing little to government policy, as well as to the virtual disappearance of the third party vote in the 1950s. When the Liberals began to recover in the early 1960s, they took votes from the Tories. The third party vote, coupled with the loss of support in 1974 from the Ulster Unionist MPs, contributed to the Party's poor election showing between 1964-79 (three defeats and one victory, in 1970, in an election almost everyone expected the Party to lose).<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> See Anthony Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government, 1951-55*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.

<sup>101</sup> Labour won with a majority of only five in the 1964 general election. See David Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1964*, Macmillan, 1965.

<sup>102</sup> See David Butler and Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970*, Macmillan, 1971.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### **The Fourth Era: 1979-1997**

This fourth era is the most misunderstood. Too often it is heralded as the time when the Conservative Party came into its own, finding its destiny in the leadership and policies of Mrs Thatcher. Only when she was ‘unfairly’ deposed in 1990 and her heritage squandered did the Party lose popularity. This misreading of the period matters because it has played a key part in shaping the Party’s actions since the early 1990s. No Conservative leader in history has continued to exert the same influence on the Party’s politics for so long after they left active politics as Mrs Thatcher.

She was a leader of extraordinary courage and stamina. She was also fortunate to come to office at a time not only when the Keynesian liberal democratic policies pursued by governments over the previous 30 years had been seen to fail, but also when there was a ready policy alternative that she could take off the peg.<sup>103</sup> The monetarist policies she pursued owed much more to liberal traditions of thought, most notably the economic liberalism of F. A. Hayek, than to Tory ideas.<sup>104</sup> She was fortunate not only to have dragons to slay, but also dragons which were rapidly running out of breath. She was above all fortunate in electoral politics, facing a weak and divided Labour Party and a resurgent third party, which took votes from Labour. As Ramsden has written: .

Her “success” in winning parliamentary seats was really no success at all in terms of historic shares of the vote, since she never came near to capturing half or more of the total vote cast nationally – as Disraeli, Salisbury, Baldwin, Eden and Macmillan had all done for their party in the past.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> See Robert Skidelsky, ‘The Fall of Keynesianism’ in David Marquand and Anthony Seldon, *The Ideas that Shaped Post-War Britain*, Fontana Press, 1996, pp 41-66.

<sup>104</sup> See F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago University Press, 1960.

<sup>105</sup> See Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power*, p 493.

## THE LONG CONSERVATIVE CENTURY

Mrs Thatcher was in many ways just the leader that the nation needed at the time. She helped ensure that the economy ran far more competitively, she reined in the power of trade unions, and she recovered some of Britain's standing on the world stage.

Her success as a national leader must, however, be set against the damage caused by the growing divide between north and south and rich and poor, and by the damage that she did to the quality and integrity of both central and local government. But it was as a party leader that she did most damage. Under her, the Party lost its national appeal and became increasingly a Party that represented the south-east of England and little else. Urban areas were allowed to decline. She antagonised the Church and professions, and oversaw the decline in the Party's representation in local government. The fine judgement she displayed in her first six years in office was less sure by the mid-1980s.<sup>106</sup> Her polarisation of the issue of Britain's relationship with the European Union entrenched an existing split and ensured that it would be perpetuated for years into the future. Above all, it was under her leadership in her latter years that the Party began to lose sight of the two keys that explain its dominance: its pragmatism and its hunger for power. Whereas most Conservative leaders have tried to include all sections of the Party under a broad umbrella, she made a virtue of emphasising the divide between those who were, or were not 'one of us', between the 'dries' and the 'wets', Eurosceptics and Europhiles. Instead of a broad church we had the one true faith.

Having been rightly scornful of the interventions of her predecessor, Edward Heath, she and her acolytes undermined the premiership of her successor, John Major, to an extent that is only now being recognised.<sup>107</sup> Timing is everything for a premier: the room for manoeuvre is far less if one is a leader like Balfour, Douglas-Home or Major arriving at Number 10 towards the end of

---

<sup>106</sup> See Anthony Seldon and Daniel Collings, *Britain Under Thatcher*, (Longman, 1999).

<sup>107</sup> This was one of the more revealing developments of the leadership election during July-August 2001.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

one of the eras of domination.<sup>108</sup> Major was a far more instinctive Tory than Mrs Thatcher and he possessed considerable powers of tenacity and judgement. But having won an election victory against the odds in April 1992, the only time in history when any political party has polled over 14 million votes, his premiership was doomed within months, even before Labour started to find itself again under John Smith (1992-94) and Tony Blair.<sup>109</sup> Britain's ejection from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in September 1992, and with it the loss of reputation for economic competence, put the leadership on the back foot from where they never regained the initiative or popularity in opinion polls or with the press. It was four and a half years of hard pounding, of an intensity that the Party had never before seen, in or out of power.

The four eras of dominance suggest that it will require significant change in the economic and social climate, as well as political change with Labour losing its way, for the Party to move into a fifth phase of hegemony. Talk of the Party disappearing is premature because it will in all likelihood be sustained, as it always has been in the past, by the electoral system which cradles the existing two parties to the detriment of third parties. But third parties have broken through in the past, most recently Labour's replacement of the Liberals from 1918-24. The SDP-Alliance and their successors, the Liberal Democrats, made a pitch to break the mould in the 1980s and to displace Labour in the two party system. Could such a displacement occur now, to the detriment of the Conservatives? Tinkering with the electoral system may seem a superficially attractive option. Under proportional representation, the Tories would have won more seats in 2001. But electoral reform would risk destroying the Tories' electoral cradle and in the end this could prove fatal. What then must the Party do to ensure that the time in opposition is minimised?

---

<sup>108</sup> See Anthony Seldon, *Major: A Political Life*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, pp 739-742.

<sup>109</sup> See David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1992*, Macmillan, 1993.

# THE LONG CONSERVATIVE CENTURY





## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ROAD BACK TO POWER

A DECADE AGO it would have been assumed that the Conservatives' cyclical pattern of power, defeat and recovery, would continue to operate almost automatically, and that the Party would regain power after a shorter or longer spell in opposition. However, this comfortable certainty of an electoral cycle can no longer be taken for granted.<sup>110</sup> Conservative historians now openly debate whether the Party will definitely return to power, or whether its position in the two party system might be taken by the Liberal Democrats.<sup>111</sup>

What the Party does now under Iain Duncan Smith is thus of critical importance. But whether the Party is able to return to power

---

<sup>110</sup> Anthony Seldon's argument in *Conservative Century*, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp 17-25 and *How Tory Governments Fall*, HarperCollins, 1996, pp 1-22 and pp 453-62 was based upon the assumption of the inevitability of cycles. Hames and Sparrow argued that there was nothing inevitable about the Conservatives' return to power after 1997. They argued that the Party had to win back not the 1.5 to 2 million Tory voters who stayed at home, but the 3 to 3.5 million voters who switched allegiance from Conservative to Labour from 1992-97. See Tim Hames and Nick Sparrow, *Left Home: The Myth of Tory Abstentions in the General Election of 1997*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1997.

<sup>111</sup> 'Conservative recoveries of power have not been inevitable – they were conditional upon different, unpredictable and contingent factors'. Stuart Ball, Centre for Policy Studies Seminar, 13 September 2001. John Ramsden also argues: 'It is at least arguable, since 1997-2001 defied all precedents, that there has been a sea-change, and the Tories are now going to drift into third party status. It will do the Tories no good to deny the risk as the Liberals did in the 1910s, with fatal consequences.' Robert Blake thinks differently. See 'We Will Survive', *Observer*, 9 September 2001.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

will depend far more on what happens to Labour than on what the Party does itself. A study of the last century shows that governments lose elections more than oppositions win them. This old truism is even more true today because Labour has moved more fully into the Tories' central policy position than has ever occurred before. It has stolen the Tories' two keys of pragmatism and hunger for office that allowed the Party to dominate the twentieth century. The Tories have allowed themselves to become doctrinaire and inflexible, and at the same time have let themselves become deeply divided, always death to a party wishing to achieve power. The Tories must recover their pragmatism and their hunger and Labour must relinquish these keys.

Accepting that the Tories can only make, at best, a marginal difference to the outcome of the next election, the Party under Iain Duncan Smith must nevertheless address themselves to what it *can* do. All four eras of Conservative dominance in the long Conservative century were ushered in by a loss in direction of their opponents in government. But they have all seen policy and organisational renewal, as well as a new leadership team, and it is to these that they must turn their attention now.<sup>112</sup>

The Conservative Party has already had one spell in opposition under William Hague from 1997 – 2001. What did it achieve?

### **The Hague Leadership: 1997-2001**

William Hague came to power at a low point in the Party's history. Winning just 165 seats in 1997, the Party had suffered its worst electoral defeat since 1906. The Party won no seats in either Wales or Scotland, its organisation, finances and morale were in extremely poor shape and, for the first time since the First World War, the Liberals had more local councillors than the Tories. The Party was deeply divided over Europe, which was correctly

---

<sup>112</sup> The relative significance of these elements can be debated. For example, Stuart Ball doubted the importance of policy reappraisal in past Conservative recoveries at the Centre for Policy Studies Seminar, 13 September 2001.

## THE ROAD BACK TO POWER

described as the most serious schism since tariff reform at the beginning of the twentieth century – or even since the Party actually split over the corn laws in 1846. Hague faced Tony Blair, a formidable opponent who had arrived at Number 10 on a landslide, with his Party and most of the press united behind him. New Labour had a mission and the Tories did not.

Hague promised to restore the Party's morale and fortunes. He provided an uncompromising Euro-sceptic line, which was contrasted with Major's alleged weakness and prevarication on Europe and much else besides. He reorganised the Party structure to some effect and he outclassed Blair in the House of Commons. Lady Thatcher conferred her blessing on him, as did her court. But Hague provided no clear strategic direction except on Europe, and presented no clear vision of what the Conservative Party stood for. He failed to win back disillusioned Tory voters or to win new ones. His youth and inexperience were all too evident. Mrs Thatcher had leant heavily on William Whitelaw, as well as on Bernard Ingham and Charles Powell within Number 10. Blair had assembled a formidable team around him after he became Labour leader in 1994 and shipped them into Number 10 *en masse* in 1997.<sup>113</sup> All party leaders, even the ablest, need individuals and teams of great quality around them if they are to make headway. Hague eschewed the opportunity of involving experienced and wise figures from across the Party, several of whom would have responded to the call, and leant progressively instead on the young, the politically inexperienced or the plain incompetent. It was the poorest period in opposition since 1906-10 when the Party had been aimlessly led by Balfour, who was similarly beset by deep divisions over food tax, which matched in their depth the present divisions over Europe.

---

<sup>113</sup> See Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon, *The Powers Behind the Prime Minister*, HarperCollins, 2000, pp 240-250.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

### **Beyond the Conservatives' Control**

The trumps are held by Labour. The result of the general election in 2005-6 will depend on what happens primarily in the following four areas.

#### *Individuals*

Will Tony Blair continue to provide strong leadership, or will energies be dissipated by personality conflicts, as they threatened to do periodically between 1997-2001? Will Blair's leadership remain vigorous and his authority strong, or will he run out of steam or judgement as did all Prime Ministers in the twentieth century after their first six years? Will Gordon Brown's ambitions and those of his followers remain containable? Will Blair's successor be able to hold all sections of the Party together as well as he has done?

#### *Ideas*

Will Labour remain convincing with its ideas, given that the 'Third Way' amounted to little? Will Downing Street successfully resolve the two core questions of Britain's place in the European Union (including the Euro) and its stance on public and private provision? Will intellectuals remain broadly supportive of New Labour? Will long-term thinking be overtaken by short-term imperatives?

#### *Interests*

Will old style unionism and old Labour remain as ineffective and as subdued as they were in 1997-2001? Will Blair be able to turn the ground to his advantage if they become restive? Will the Murdoch press turn against Blair in favour of Brown? Will we see a return to the hostile media climate that plagued the Major government between 1992-97? Will business and financial interests remain as benign? Will there be a revolt against the tax rises that inevitably must come? Will the pro and anti EU/Euro interest remain roughly balanced?

## THE ROAD BACK TO POWER

### *“Events”*

Will the overwhelming majority in the House of Commons act as an incentive for backbenchers to flex their muscles? Will there be an economic downturn or a severe economic setback in the next few years – no post-war government before 1997-2001 has lasted four years without an economic crisis; can Labour’s luck last? Will the repercussions of the New York and Washington attacks in September 2001 precipitate a recession such as those which derailed Prime Ministers in 1973-74, or 1978-79, or will it provide the platform for Blair to be seen as a successful war leader, akin to the boost Mrs Thatcher received in 1982 over the Falklands War? Will the Liberal Democrats remain close to Labour or might they move towards the Conservatives? Will violence again erupt in Ulster and on mainland Britain? Can the government avoid the fall-out from national disasters such as train crashes? Will local government remain quiescent? Will the electorate become bored by Labour?

Recognising that Tory fortunes in the years ahead owe far more to how Labour responds to the above questions than to anything it might do itself might be sobering. But it is also essential to acknowledge this fact if the Tory Party is to take the right decisions in the years ahead, and to think long-term.

### **The Way Ahead: 2001 – 2005**

Progress by the Conservatives needs to be made in three areas.

#### ***1. Policy renewal***

Every return to power has been accompanied by a rethinking and restructuring of policy.<sup>114</sup> The Conservative Research Department, set up under Neville Chamberlain in 1929, was the engine of much

---

<sup>114</sup> Though note Stuart Ball’s contention that policy renewals were not significant in the Salisbury recovery of the 1880s or Bonar Law’s victory in 1922, whilst the major exercise of 1964-70 did not give the Party self-confidence and contributed little to its unexpected victory in 1970. Centre for Policy Studies Seminar, 13 September 2001.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

rethinking. The years in opposition from 1945-50 saw perhaps the most successful period of policy formulation, a singular achievement given that so little groundwork was in place as Churchill's attention had been single-mindedly on winning the war. A series of documents, above all The Industrial Charter of 1947, paved the way for the 1950 manifesto which showed that the Conservatives were capable of matching Labour's ideas, while adding their own distinctive emphasis on deregulation and choice. The opposition period from 1964-70 saw the most thorough rethink, but it was hampered by the speed with which work had to take place in advance of the Spring 1966 election and by the reluctance of Heath thereafter to re-examine policy decisions. The result was that the Party was saddled with some ill-considered policies while the core issue of the day, how to contain inflation, was left unresolved. Rethinking in opposition from 1974-79 was aided by the corpus of work undertaken by think-tanks including The Institute of Economic Affairs and championed by the Centre for Policy Studies, set up by Keith Joseph and Mrs Thatcher in 1974.

Successful policy rethinks have needed time, support (or at least lack of interference) from the leader, intellectual consistency and the involvement of profound minds. They have not been hijacked by short-termism, as occurred under Hague. Successful rethinks have also shifted the Party either in the direction of the prevailing intellectual climate – leftwards from 1945-50 and rightwards from 1975-79 – or anticipated the shift in thinking, as the Party may have to do now. Success in the Conservative century was achieved by the Party articulating the concerns that were most important to the middle class and to a large share of the working class. Reconnecting with these groups will be the task of the rethink.

The Party should now engage in a prolonged dialogue with thinkers in universities, industry, the professions and elsewhere, in a process lasting three or four years, examining every aspect of Tory Party policy. The net should not be insular but be cast

## THE ROAD BACK TO POWER

internationally.<sup>115</sup> It should not listen only to right-wing thinkers but to those across the political spectrum. It should not be afraid of taking on the biggest issues and consider advocating positions hitherto regarded as politically unacceptable. What is imperative is that the thinking is inoculated from the noise of present politics and is not distracted by short-term ends and by the perceived need to counter Labour year on year. There exists a rare opportunity to recast the whole mould of Conservative thinking. Such opportunities occur every 25 years or so.

The reformulation of policy should also take place on two levels. The Conservative Research Department should be revived as a vibrant and powerful engine. As John Ramsden argues, recovery will not happen ‘unless the CRD or something like it is reinvented’.<sup>116</sup> But renewal also needs to take place amongst think-tanks, which can research and debate issues which would be potentially damaging if seen to be under active consideration by the Party. This ‘licence to think’ must be seized by the think-tanks if they are to open up new avenues of thought and policy for the Party. But the Party must also listen carefully to the think-tanks. It was another failing of the Hague leadership that think-tanks were often overlooked.<sup>117</sup>

Inspiration should be drawn from the seven principles of Conservatism listed in Chapter Two, as well as from Disraeli’s three themes. They will provide guidance and inspiration, but not a blueprint for action. The rethink must foresee the world not just as it will be in the next few years, but in a generation ahead. It will need to be far more aware of the information and technological revolutions, globalisation and environmental concerns than are the policies offered by any of the major parties currently.<sup>118</sup> It will need to address itself more fully to social change, including the

---

<sup>115</sup> David Willetts, ‘Tories must copy Europe’s best’, *Observer*, 26 August 2001.

<sup>116</sup> See John Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Party Policy*, Longman, 1980.

<sup>117</sup> Tessa Keswick, ‘A Party with No Idea’, *Financial Times*, 14 August 2001.

<sup>118</sup> See Lord Blackwell, *Towards Smaller Government*, Centre for Policy Studies, 2001.

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

break up of traditional family norms and multi-culturalism than the Party has ever done before. It will need to answer the core questions: what is the Tory Party *for* and who is it there to serve?<sup>119</sup> It will need to construct a narrative about why the Party is needed and why it is better than the alternatives. As Dennis Kavanagh has argued, one of Hague's greatest failings was his lack of such a narrative.<sup>120</sup> What is it trying to conserve? What must it now try to change? Our belief is that the Party has allowed its base to narrow too much geographically, socially, politically and economically and that the time has come for it to rediscover the national appeal it enjoyed under Disraeli and Baldwin. As well as being radical, the rethink needs to be cognisant of the need to appeal broadly.

The think-tank side of the rethink must not shy away from asking big questions, and putting forward bold policy proposals thought today to be politically unacceptable. The opportunity is there not to pander to but to lead public opinion and to set the agenda for the next generation and beyond. Some questions the rethink might address are listed below.

### *The Welfare State*

Is there a case for the state moving out of welfare provision? If so, in what areas? How can one reverse the deadening effect of state provision whilst still providing support for those who are unable to look after themselves? What more can be done to boost preventative medicine and individual self-help and respect? What more can be done to support family life and family values? How can the Party manage to be both more liberal and inclusive, while at the same time still supporting traditional values and norms far better than it has done in the past?

---

<sup>119</sup> Maurice Saatchi, 'How to choose the next Conservative leader', *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 September 2001.

<sup>120</sup> Dennis Kavanagh, 'How William Hague lost the Election', *Independent*, 3 September 2001.



## THE ROAD BACK TO POWER

### *Economic Policy*

What role, if any, should government have in the economic life of the nation? What more can be done to ensure that all are involved in purposeful economic activity? How can areas of low economic activity be revitalised without offering huge subsidies? What more can be done to enable British companies compete on the world stage? What alternatives can be found to tax for financing public services?

### *Foreign and Defence Policy*

Where does Britain's optimum relationship with the European Union lie? How can Britain remain a power in Europe while retaining its world interests and relationships? Is there any future role for Britain in the Commonwealth? Does Britain need to remain an *independent* nuclear power?

### *Northern Ireland*

What value and place does Ulster have to mainland Britain in the twenty-first century? How can harmony and peace best be promoted? Should Northern Ireland be established as a separate country within the EU? Should it be re-partitioned?

### *Law and Order*

Why is Britain apparently becoming a more lawless country? What can be done to generate more respect for law among citizens? How can one compensate for the decline in religion as a force for good? How can Britain become a more responsible country? Should some form of national service be reinstated?

### *The Constitution*

Should a new Conservative constitutional settlement be introduced? Is the current balance of devolution right? How might Parliament and local government be revitalised? If the Monarchy is to be retained, what role should it play? How can the increasing power of the central executive be checked and monitored?

# A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

## *Transport and Environment*

How is Britain's overcrowded and under-funded transport network to be improved? How are urban areas to be revitalised? How can civic pride and community best be enhanced? How can environmental issues, which will weigh very heavily over the next 25 years, best be addressed, and balanced alongside the demands for economic growth?

## *Education*

How can the low standards of public education be improved? Is there any role in the future for state education? How best can schools be given more autonomy? Should means testing be introduced for schools and universities?

## **2. Party Organisation**

Not since the Second World War has the party organisation been in such a desperate state. Morale and membership are in an even worse position than in 1997.<sup>121</sup> The organisation has recovered from low points in the past, as it did in the early twentieth century and after the Second World War. But will it do so again? The length of the decline in the organisation over the last 40 years, extrapolation of present trends in work, leisure and parenting patterns, social cohesion and attitudes, developments in IT and campaigning methods all make historians such as Stuart Ball believe organisational recovery may not recur.<sup>122</sup>

Organisational renewal needs to come on four levels. First Central Office needs no further bouts of tinkering, but strong and effective leadership from the key figure of the Party Chairman,

---

<sup>121</sup> See Nigel Fletcher, 'The Organisation of the Conservative Party in Opposition 1997-2001', Queen Mary, University of London, Politics Research Project 2001 (Inaugural Winner of the Professor the Lord Smith Prize for Research, July 2001).

<sup>122</sup> Note also Stuart Ball's argument that enhanced organisational strength follows from – or at least moves in tandem with – recovery, rather than creates it. See Ball in Seldon and Ball, *Conservative Century*, 1994, pp 169-220 and pp 261-311.

## THE ROAD BACK TO POWER

David Davis. Second, although the days of traditional mass membership are over, the Party must find new ways to appeal to the young, to its supporters in Scotland and Wales, and to ethnic minorities. People will only participate if they feel there is a purpose and a value to their contribution. The rethink has to ask why anyone in five, ten or fifteen years time would want actively to support a political party and devise a set of benefits and procedures to meet those needs. Third, the Party needs to devise a successful media strategy which recovers the support of the Tory-inclined press, without pandering to it as occurred under Hague. Finally, the Party needs to revive at a local level. The battle here is already succeeding, with most county councils back under Conservative control. As John Ramsden believes: “Fighting back, especially against the Liberals, needs a strong commitment to the theory that all politics is local. One of Hague’s greater failings was putting too much emphasis on the Commons, where he was always going to be swamped by Labour’s numbers, and where his triumphs were never adequately reported in a hostile press.”

### ***3. Leadership***

The Party’s history suggests that it matters far less who becomes the leader than what they do in office. Iain Duncan Smith will need to be a conciliator and lay to rest the lingering belief that one has to be divisive in a Thatcherite way to be effective. Baldwin was one of the most pragmatic of leaders, yet he was also arguably the greatest Party leader the Tories had last century.<sup>123</sup> So he must be emollient and patient, as well as lucky. He must make the Party again into a broad church, which can be achieved even with the divides over Europe, which will not continue indefinitely into the future, but which will be resolved almost definitely on the sensible Eurosceptic side of the argument. The leadership must recover the moral authority, the respect and sense of decency, which have

---

<sup>123</sup> Anthony King, ‘Dull, bald and unshaven - but he might be another Baldwin’, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 September 2001

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

been exemplified by almost all Tory leaders over the last two centuries. The loss of moral authority, of trust and respect within the Party, which began under Mrs Thatcher's leadership, has been a catastrophic problem for the Party over the last 20 years.

Tony Blair says he wants to make the twenty-first century into the 'Labour Century'. If the Conservatives continue to act as they have over the past ten years he might yet achieve it. But the Conservative Party can find its way back to office. If the next few years are to see the dawning of the fifth era, then it needs to be capable of long-term thinking, and of rediscovering the lost keys of pragmatism and hunger for power. And it must begin its work now. Four years have already been sacrificed. There is no further time to lose.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Stanley Baldwin, *On England*, Philip Allan, 1926

Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, *The Heath Government of 1970 – 74, a Reappraisal*, Longman, 1994

Rodney Barker, 'Political Ideas since 1945, Or How Long was the Twentieth Century?', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 10, 1996

M. Bentley (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine*, Cambridge University Press, 1993

Norman Blackwell, *Towards Smaller Government*, Centre for Policy Studies, 2001

Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955

Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910*, Macmillan, 1972

Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Burke*, 1889

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790)*, Penguin, 1969

David Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1964*, Macmillan, 1965

David Butler and Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970*, Macmillan, 1971

David Butler and David Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1992*, Macmillan, 1993

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

David Butler and David Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, Macmillan, 1997

David Butler and David Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 2001*, Macmillan, 2001

Lord Hugh Cecil, *Conservatism*, Williams and Norgate, 1912

Robert Eccleshall, "English Conservatism as Ideology", *Political Studies*, Vol. 25, 1977

Nigel Fletcher, 'The Organisation of the Conservative Party in Opposition 1997-2001', Queen Mary, University of London, Politics Research Project 2001.

Roy Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, Clarendon Press, 1981

Michael Freedon, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, Clarendon Press, 1996

Ian Gilmour, *Inside Right: A Study of Conservatism*, Hutchinson, 1977

E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Edwardian Conservatism, 1880-1914*, Routledge, 1995

John Gray and David Willetts, *Is Conservatism Dead?*, Social Market Foundation, 1997

Tim Hames and Nick Sparrow, *Left Home: The Myth of Tory Abstentions in the General Election of 1997*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1997

F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Chicago University Press, 1944

F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago University Press, 1960

A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice, *The Rise of New Labour*, Oxford University Press, 2001

Simon Henig and Lewis Baston, *The Politico's Guide to the General Election*, Politicos, 2001

Quintin Hogg, *The Case for Conservatism*, Penguin, 1947

Ted Honderich, *Conservatism*, Penguin, 1991

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Samuel P. Huntingdon, "Conservatism as an Ideology", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, 1957

Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon (Eds.), *The Major Effect*, Macmillan, 1994

Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon, *The Powers Behind the Prime Minister*, HarperCollins, 2000

Michael Kinnear, *The Fall of Lloyd George*, Macmillan, 1973

W. H. Mallock, *Social Equality: A Short Study in a Missing Science*, 1882

Karl Mannheim, *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*, Routledge, 1986

David Marquand and Anthony Seldon, *The Ideas that Shaped Post-war Britain*, Fontana Press, 1996

Peter Marsh, *The Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft, 1881-1902*, Harvester, 1978

Ross McKibbin, 'The Tax-and-Spend Vote', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 23, No. 13, 2001

Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969

Kenneth Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-1922*, Clarendon Press, 1979

Pippa Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001*, Oxford University Press, 2001

Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and other essays*, Methuen & Co., 1962

Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, Clarendon Press, 1975

Frank O'Gorman, *British Conservatism: Conservative Thought from Burke to Thatcher*, Longman, 1986

F. S. Oliver, *The Endless Adventure*, Vol. 1, Macmillan, 1930

Gillian Peele, 'Towards "New Conservatives"? Organisational Reform and the Conservative Party', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 69, 1998

## A NEW CONSERVATIVE CENTURY?

Henry Pelling, *The Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910*, Macmillan, 1967

Martin Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace, 1906-1918*, Routledge, 1978

Martin Pugh, *Toryism and the People, 1880-1935*, Blackwell, 1985

Richard Rempel, *Unionists Divided*, David and Charles, 1972

Anthony Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection*, Faber & Faber, 1978

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1999*, Ashgate, 1999

John Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830*, HarperCollins, 1998

Andrew Rawnsley, *Servants of the People*, Penguin, 2001

A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906*, David and Charles, 1973

Maurice Saatchi, *The Science of Politics*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001

Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, Palgrave, 2001

Anthony Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government, 1951-55*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1981

Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (Eds.), *The Conservative Century*, Macmillan, 1994

Anthony Seldon (Ed.), *How Tory Governments Fall: the Tory Party in power since 1783*, HarperCollins, 1996

Anthony Seldon and Daniel Collings, *Britain under Thatcher*, Longman, 1999

Anthony Seldon, *Major: A Political Life*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997

Anthony Seldon (Ed.), *The Blair Effect*, Little, Brown, 2001



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Perri 6, *On the Right Lines: The next centre-right in the British Isles*, Demos, 1998

Alan Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics, 1903-1914*, Clarendon Press, 1979

P. Whiteley, P. Seyd and P. Richardson, *True Blues: the politics of Conservative Party membership*, Oxford University Press, 1994

A. Whiteman et al (eds.), *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants*, Clarendon Press, 1973

David Willetts, *Modern Conservatism*, Penguin, 1992

David Willetts with Richard Forsdyke, *After the Landslide*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1999

Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire*, Yale University Press, 1991

## A SELECTION OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### WELCOME TO THE ASYLUM

£10.00

*Harriet Sergeant*

The Government has lost control of immigration. Britain is now seen as the softest touch in Europe. Government failure corrupts and criminalises. And immigrants, who are dependent on criminal gangs to claim asylum, are the first to suffer. The breakdown in the system is responsible for a man starving to death on the landing of small house in Streatham, a 10 year old working for a few pounds a week, sometimes just for food, in a factory in Wembley and a child imprisoned and forced into sex day after day in central London. Can the next generation of refugees survive all the indignities of immigration - the gangs, the slave labour, enforced prostitution, a sink estate in Glasgow – and go on, as their predecessors did, to dazzle us with their achievements?

*A brilliant exposition... Sergeant's work should be studied by all politicians –  
Stephen Glover, The Daily Mail*

*...an engrossing new report which shows in chilling detail the extent to  
which this Government has lost control of immigration –  
Christopher Hudson, The Evening Standard*

### THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

£12.50

*John Marks*

The quality of state education in Britain remains worryingly low. Dr John Marks, a lifelong campaigner for better standards in schools, presents an authoritative overview of standards in British education over the last 50 years. The key to better state education is the rigorous setting and monitoring of standards. In addition, a more diverse and selective system of secondary education can also be expected to lead to an improvement in standards. Only then can we rectify a system in which too many children are condemned to a life of failure.

*...a devastating critique of education's decline –  
Melanie Phillips, The Sunday Times*

*...a scorching paper –  
Bill Jamieson, The Scotsman*

## A SELECTION OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### **AFTER THE LANDSLIDE**

**£7.50**

*David Willetts MP, with Richard Forsdyke*

The Conservative Party's landslide defeat in the General Election of 1997 was not unprecedented. The Party suffered similar electoral disasters in both 1906 and 1945. The Party had to wait 16 years to form a Government after its first landslide defeat but only six years after the second. What did the Party get wrong after 1906 but get right after 1945? The authors' analysis suggests that electoral success will only be achieved if the Party accepts the need for change, not only in terms of party organisation, but also more importantly in terms of policy.

*...this elegant and beautifully researched work –  
Peter Osborne, *The Sunday Express**

### **POOR PEOPLE! STOP PAYING TAX!**

**£7.50**

*Maurice Saatchi and Peter Warburton*

Maurice Saatchi and Peter Warburton say that poor people should stop paying tax. The authors propose a radical simplification in which the tangled web of benefits and tax credits is simply exchanged for lower tax. In their proposal, the personal income tax allowance (the threshold at which people start paying tax) is dramatically raised from £4,385 to £10,000. Eight million people earning less than £10,000 a year would stop paying income tax altogether. The authors audited calculations show how the cancellation of the bizarre overlap between tax and benefits can be fiscally neutral for the Exchequer. The result is a dramatically more transparent and open system, understood by all. Not least by the eight million people who will stop paying tax.

*Poor People! Stop Paying Tax! is that rare thing these days, a seriously  
radical plan –  
Andrew Alexander, *The Daily Mail**

*It is particularly absurd, as Maurice Saatchi and Peter Warburton point out,  
that part of the burden of the very poor should be income tax. It is hypocritical  
for a Government that regularly boasts of caring so much about the low paid that  
it taxes those on the minimum wage –  
Leading article, *The Daily Telegraph**



**BECOME AN ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF  
THE CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES**

The Centre for Policy Studies runs an Associate Membership Scheme which is available from a minimum subscription of £55.00 per year (or £50.00 if paid by bankers' order). Associates receive all publications (of which there are at least 15 in any 12 month period) and (whenever possible) reduced fees for conferences held by the Centre.

We also welcome donors who are prepared to subscribe additional amounts to help to support our ongoing policy work.

*For more details, please write or telephone to:*

The Secretary

Centre for Policy Studies

57 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL

Tel: 020 7222 4488

Fax: 020 7222 4388

e-mail: [mail@cps.org.uk](mailto:mail@cps.org.uk)

Website: [www.cps.org.uk](http://www.cps.org.uk)