

Change is still our ally

John Bercow MP
and **Nicholas Hillman**



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Clutha House
10 Storey's Gate
London SW1P 3AY
Tel: 020 7340 2660
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About the authors

John Bercow has been Member of Parliament for Buckingham since 1997. He has held front-bench jobs on Education and Employment, Home Affairs and Work and Pensions and was Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury during 2001/02. He is currently the Shadow Secretary of State for International Development. His most recent publication is *How much common ground?*, which was produced by the Bow Group in March 2004.

Nicholas Hillman is a Research Fellow of Policy Exchange and was previously Senior Research Officer to David Willetts MP. He has written about social policy for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Centre for Policy Studies and Politeia and has had historical articles published in the *Journal of Contemporary British History*, the *Conservative History Journal* and *Searchlight* magazine.

This pamphlet is based on a speech delivered by John Bercow MP at the University of Buckingham on 29 January 2004.

Introduction

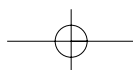
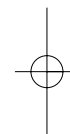
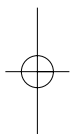
Ambivalent is the adjective which best describes the Conservative attitude to change. On the one hand, Conservatives tend to be suspicious of grand schemes and utopian ideals, instinctively preferring to recognise the strengths of existing institutions. On the other hand, Conservative Governments have introduced some radical reforms and the Party has remained at the forefront of politics only by coming to terms with – and helping to shape – social change.

The Conservative attitude to change is particularly relevant today, as the Party has now been out of office for over seven years – the longest continuous period during which no Conservatives have been in Government for nearly a century. Britain is already a very different country to how it was in 1992, when the Conservative Party last won a general election.

It is tempting to assume that because the Conservative Party has recovered from landslide defeats before, the political pendulum is bound to swing back again in time. In truth, Conservatives have recovered from landslide defeats only by responding to change and adopting a positive programme of change themselves.

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This pamphlet begins with a debunking of the two principal myths about Conservatives and change and an explanation of why change is so important to the Party today. The following chapters focus on some important historical precedents which highlight three specific lessons that Conservatives must remember in order to win office.



1 Conservatives and change

Labour or Liberal opponents of the Conservative Party can easily construct a case, however superficial, to support the idea that Conservatives oppose all change. They often argue that the Party's name is nothing more than a description of its deeply ingrained aversion to the new and the different.

In 1829, the novelist Thomas Love Peacock satirised the views of those Tories who refused to consider any measure of parliamentary reform. In his book *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, a Welsh prince refuses to improve an embankment on his property on the grounds that "It was half rotten when I was born, and that is a conclusive reason why it should be three parts rotten when I die."¹

Tony Blair's 'Forces of Conservatism' speech, delivered at the Labour Party Conference in 2000, also encapsulated this approach. Blair claimed that past Tory Governments "held people back. They kept people down. They stunted people's potential. Year after year. Decade after decade." He also claimed that the forces of conservatism opposed women's suffrage and the establishment of the NHS. He completed the catalogue of abuse by appearing to suggest

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Conservatives were responsible for the assassination of Martin Luther King and the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela as well.²

These views are a grotesque travesty of the truth. Conservatives have a long history both of embracing change and of implementing it in far reaching forms themselves. For example, far from opposing women's suffrage, it was under a Conservative Government in 1928 that women were given the vote on the same terms as men; and the 1945 Conservative manifesto included a promise to introduce "a comprehensive health service covering the whole range of medical treatment" in the following parliament. Without such a flexible approach, the party would never have become the most successful political organisation in the western world, nor would it have been in office, on its own or as part of a coalition, for most of the twentieth century. Instead, it would be remembered as the short-lived defender of some long-lost cause, such as the pre-1832 franchise or the Corn Laws, and as an upper-class version of the Luddites.

A second, diametrically opposite, view of Conservatives and change is equally unconvincing. This claims that there is no principle, however deeply-felt, which the Conservative Party has not been prepared to jettison in order to secure and retain power. According to this thesis, the Party has been playing a 200 year-old game of catch-up, and it has limply followed, rather than consciously moulded, the wider changes in society. Evelyn Waugh once lamented that the trouble with the Conservative Party was that it "has never turned the clock back a single second."³

But Conservative Governments have not introduced reforms merely for their own political survival. They have instead allowed a respect for the past and for tried-and-tested institutions to guide them towards reforms that are designed to improve society. It is easy to forget that Edmund Burke's hostility to the French

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Revolution was not based on opposition to all change, but on opposition to rootless change. That is why he claimed “People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.”⁴ Burke also warned against deciding issues “in all the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction”,⁵ without regard to circumstances of time and place. For Burke, the father of modern Conservatism, there was a world of difference between evolutionary change and revolutionary change. That some change was necessary, and even desirable, he did not dispute and the events of his time confirmed his belief that the state which lacks the means of change lacks the means of its own conservation.

It is of course possible – as AJP Taylor remarked about Emperor Napoleon III – to learn to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and thus to make only entirely new ones in the future. But we would be mad to pretend that we have nothing to learn from the past.

The Conservative tradition of proposing reforms which fit into what has come before contrasts starkly with the attitude of the Left. Labour’s attitude towards reform was traditionally based on utopian ideals that misunderstood the nature of human society. That socialism has now been rejected, but it has been replaced by a love of the new and the ‘cool’. Today’s Labour Party is more likely to ignore the past, than to learn from it.

The difference between Conservative and left-wing attitudes to change is illustrated over the House of Lords. Labour thirst to expel hereditary peers on the abstract grounds that their membership of the second chamber is inegalitarian and unjust. Conservatives prefer to identify ways of building upon the Chamber’s existing merits in order to strengthen its parliamentary scrutiny and democratic accountability.

Conservatism is a disposition, not an ideology. Michael Oakeshott said that to be Conservative was “to prefer the familiar

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to the unknown, the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss.”⁶

Conservatives have some clear principles, but we do not pretend that they represent either an all-embracing theory or a blueprint for government in every country at all times. Modern Conservatism involves a belief in free enterprise; a respect for private property; an ambition to enable each individual to fulfil his or her potential; a conviction that the family is a crucial building block of society; a sense that the capacity of government to improve the human condition is limited and its capacity to do the opposite almost unlimited; and a readiness to defend our territory and the liberty of its inhabitants. These principles are but a guide to action.

2 Why Conservatives should contemplate change

One reading of the 1997 General Election is that the political pendulum finally swung back after a long period of Conservative dominance – just as it had in 1906, 1945 and 1964 – and that it would soon start to swing back in the other direction again. After the 1997 Election, Conservatives who wanted to look on the bright side could point out that Labour's share of the vote was lower than in all seven General Elections between 1945 and 1966 and that, despite their enormous House of Commons majority, they won fewer votes than the Conservatives had in 1992.⁷ As the 2001 General Election approached, it was even possible for Conservatives to identify the green shoots of electoral revival, such as a lead in local elections and victory in the 1999 European Elections (albeit on a pitifully poor turnout).

However, the 2001 Election should have quashed any such complacency. Labour won significantly more support than the Conservative Party among almost every group of voters. When the

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electorate is broken down by age, for example, it is only among those aged between 55 and 64, and over 65, that the Conservatives had a majority and even that was wafer thin.⁸

In 1983, there were twenty-one Conservative MPs in Scotland and fourteen in Wales. Today, there is just one in Scotland and not a single one in Wales. Between 1983 and 1997, around 40 per cent of metropolitan seats were held by Conservatives. Today, less than 10 per cent are.⁹

Among the many cities where there are currently no Conservative MPs whatsoever are:

- 1 Birmingham, which Joseph Chamberlain brought over to the Conservatives and which remained a Tory stronghold for decades afterwards;
- 2 both Manchester and Sheffield, where the Conservatives held every single seat in the early 1930s; and
- 3 Leeds, part of which Sir Keith Joseph, who so helped Mrs Thatcher transform the party, represented between 1956 and 1987.

The number of people who voted Conservative in 2001 was more than one million down on 1997 and the lowest for any election since the Second World War.¹⁰ Even the low turnout could not be seen as evidence of a slow move back towards us because only 19 per cent of non-voters said that they would have supported the Conservative Party, whereas 53 per cent said they would have voted Labour.¹¹ This explains why the Nuffield Study of the 2001 Election begins with the words, “The general election of 1997 had opened a new era in British politics. The election of 2001 ensured its continuance.”¹² These depressing electoral facts should deter people from assuming that the significant Conservative lead in the 2004 local elections must inevitably lead on to victory at the next General Election.

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Those Conservatives who advocate little or no change in order to win back power – and there has been more than a smattering of them in recent years – should consider the disappearance of the Liberals as one of the two main parties. John Ramdsen, the pre-eminent historian of the Conservative Party, has written that “It is quite conceivable that the Conservatives rather than the Liberals might have fragmented and lost faith in their party’s future in the difficult decade of the 1910s; the Liberals would then have become the chief anti-socialist party while the Tories were remorselessly squeezed”.¹³

They should also recognize that it takes time to change perceptions. After a lengthy period in which Iain Duncan Smith and his Shadow Cabinet scarcely talked about Europe or asylum, rightly concentrating instead on health, education, transport and crime, one poll found that the two characteristics voters most associated with the Conservative Party were opposition to European integration and opposition to asylum seekers.

To recover credibility after the two seismic defeats of 1997 and 2001, Conservatives must respond to change and offer a constructive programme of change ourselves. In fulfilling this mission, three periods of Conservative revival are especially pertinent:

- 1 the years prior to Disraeli’s election victory of 1874;
- 2 the six years between the landslide defeat of 1945 and Churchill’s return as Prime Minister in 1951; and
- 3 the period between the election defeats of 1974 and the victory in 1979.

The relevance of these periods is clear from contemporary remarks. In the 1850s, for example, Disraeli wrote, “It seems that the whole ability of the country is arrayed against us, and the rising genera-

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tion is half ashamed of a cause which would seem to have neither wit nor reason to sustain and adorn it.”¹⁴

Nearly a century later, Quintin Hogg described the 1945 election defeat as “a long pent-up and deep-seated revulsion against the principles, practices, and membership of the Conservative Party.”¹⁵

And, after the two election defeats of 1974, John Biffen said, “Today the Conservative Party no longer receives the support of MPs from Northern Ireland, its representation in Scotland is lower than at any time in this century and in England it has barely a Westminster toe-hold in the large industrial cities. There is a very real danger that the Tories will become the middle class party of the English shires.”¹⁶

Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose. Each of these remarks remains as relevant today as it was at the time. And in each of these periods, the Conservative Party's situation was transformed only once it had reconciled itself to the challenge of opposition and started to develop an agenda that would resonate sufficiently to win an election. These historical examples have three specific lessons for Conservatives today, which are outlined in the following chapters.

3 Coming to terms with and reflecting the world around us

The first lesson is that if the Conservative Party is to secure the same sort of reversal in fortunes that was achieved in 1874, 1951 and 1979, we must again aspire to govern Britain as she is, rather than as she was. At the moment, Conservative supporters are atypical – for example, they are significantly more likely to be retired, more likely to have no mortgage, less likely to be single, less likely to have children and less likely to have a degree than the electorate as a whole.¹⁷

Just as Robert Peel's *Tamworth Manifesto* made it clear that the Conservative Party would not seek to unpick the Great Reform Act of 1832, so Disraeli's primary achievement was to reconcile the party to the repeal of the Corn Laws and to rebuild Conservative support after the Peelites had departed.

But it was not simply a matter of catching up with the Liberals. By introducing the Second Reform Act and committing the Party to social reform, Disraeli ensured that the Conservatives enjoyed

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their own distinctive appeal across the electorate. As a result, the Party was well placed to benefit from the extension of the franchise and the redistribution of seats that occurred in 1884 and 1885 and was predominant from 1886 onwards.

The landslide defeat in the General Election of 1945 came as a great shock to many Conservatives and to Churchill more than most. The mood of the people, scarred by privation yet brought together by adversity, had changed decisively against the Conservatives. Yet the Party was not slow to learn the lessons of defeat, as exemplified by its shift of attitude towards women.

In March 1944, a Conservative MP, Thelma Cazalet-Keir, put down an amendment to Butler's Education Bill which sought to equalise pay for male and female teachers. In her memoirs, she explained the reasoning behind her move by saying that "a political party must model itself on biology, that is to say, if it is to remain alive and kicking it must adapt itself to the changes in a changing world."¹⁸ Her amendment was seconded by Peter Thorneycroft and won significant backbench support from the Young Turks of the Tory Reform Committee, as well as from Labour MPs, and it passed with a majority of one.¹⁹ This was the only vote on policy which the Government lost during the war.

But Churchill immediately made the issue one of confidence in the Government and the vote was overturned by a massive majority two days later. One of the rebels, Quintin Hogg, later wrote "The episode was bad for Churchill, bad for Rab [Butler], bad for the Conservative Party and bad for Britain."²⁰ In April 1944, the *Economist* said: "The leadership of the war is not in question but for every elector who, two months ago, suspected that the Government was ruthlessly obstructing reform, or who doubted whether Mr Churchill was the man to head the country in peace as well as in war, there must now be three or four."²¹ Only 20 per cent of

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Conservative candidates identified themselves as advocates of equal pay in a 1945 survey²² and this helps to explain why the parliamentary fracas over teachers' pay is widely regarded as one of the many factors that contributed to the 1945 Election result.²³

In contrast, once the Party had been ejected from office, it did much to appeal to women voters. In particular, women disliked the additional austerity measures introduced by the Labour Government, such as bread rationing (1946-48), the potato control scheme (1947-48), the promotion of the unpalatable-sounding snoek and the decision to stop importing dried eggs. Aneurin Bevan told the Cabinet "the decision to ration bread has raised the moral stature of the UK throughout the world",²⁴ but women themselves said "We are under-fed, under-washed, and over-controlled."²⁵

Winston Churchill described bread rationing as "using a steam hammer to crack a nut when there is nothing in the nut".²⁶ The Conservative Party responded by promising greater freedom and by publishing a charter for women in March 1949 which called for people to be paid 'the Rate for the Job' – in other words for less disparity in male and female wages, something which the Labour Government explicitly rejected on grounds of cost.²⁷ Back in office after 1951, the Conservatives soon announced the introduction of equal pay in the (non-industrial) civil service, for teachers and for local government workers.²⁸

This chasing of women's votes was overwhelmingly successful. If women had not been able to vote, Labour would have won every single General Election between 1945 and 1970. Conversely, if men had not been able to vote, the Conservatives would have won every General Election except 1945 and 1966.²⁹ This explains the patronising Labour Party internal memorandum from 1950 which said, "it is easy to picture the happy results that would follow if working

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men could only persuade their womenfolk to share their opinions.”³⁰ This appeal to female voters is perhaps the pre-eminent example of how social change can help, rather than hinder, the Conservative Party. And it helps to explain why the Fawcett Society, which campaigns for women’s rights, said in December 2003 that “In many respects, the Conservative Party is the natural party of women.”³¹

In recent years, the Conservative Party has not enjoyed significantly more support among women than among men.³² One recent MORI poll, which broke down voting intention by gender, shows this vividly; if the results of the poll were replicated at a general election in which only women could vote, Labour would end up with a majority of over 100 seats. If the poll were replicated at an election in which only men could vote, there would be a hung Parliament.³³

In learning the lessons from the successful appeal to women that occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s, social justice and political self-interest demand that we tackle the issues that are important to women today. These include equal pay, affordable childcare and pensioner poverty.

- 1 The overall gap between men and women’s pay remains strikingly high at nearly 20 per cent,³⁴ yet only 19 out of 93 Government departments and agencies conducted equal pay reviews by the ministerial deadline of 30th April 2003. Stark pay discrimination – unequal pay for work of equal value – is bad enough, but it is compounded by gender differences in bonus rates and historical anachronisms in the grading of posts.
- 2 The Treasury has spent some money on improving childcare provision, but this support has gone mainly to the 20 per cent most disadvantaged wards. Because there are disadvantaged

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pockets all over the country, only one-third of poor families live in these wards.³⁵ We need to tackle both the rigidities of the planning process in this area and an OFSTED inspection regime which is as inflexible as it is burdensome; both of these factors restrict the supply of much needed childcare. Moreover, little has been done to ease the position of mothers who want the choice of staying at home to look after a young child.

- 3 Women are more likely to be living in poverty in retirement because, on average, they have smaller pension entitlements and live longer. Yet the Government's Pension Credit does nothing for the hundreds of thousands of poor female pensioners who refuse to claim means-tested benefits because they find them demeaning and it treats people without full work histories, who are mainly women, less generously than others. Similarly, the State Second Pension rules are less generous for parents who stay at home to look after their children than either the basic state pension or SERPS. The Conservative Party's commitment to reducing means-testing, to reintroducing the earnings link for the basic state pension and to establishing a Lifetime Savings Account would go a considerable way to lessening these problems.

Ensuring that the Conservative Party reflects the society in which we all live is not just about developing a coherent message for the 51 per cent of the electorate who are women, but for all potential Conservative voters. Same sex partners suffer discrimination. They are not recognised as next of kin for hospital visiting rights, or for decisions relating to hospital care. They also have little say in the treatment of a partner experiencing mental health problems. Gay people (and unmarried heterosexual partners) do not even enjoy equal rights in the registration of deaths in comparison with

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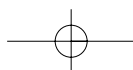
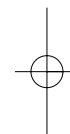
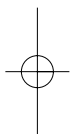
married couples or blood relatives. This is indefensible. Inequalities remain in employment, benefits and taxation. Social justice and political self-interest demand that Conservatives address them. The Government's legislation to create a civil partnership register is one way in which to do this and Michael Howard's commitment to support the Civil Partnership Bill on a free vote marks how far the Conservative Party has already changed.

The 2001 Census showed that there are nearly five million people in non-white ethnic groups living in Britain.³⁶ In the General Election of that year, the Labour lead among non-white voters was 61 per cent.³⁷ The Conservative Party is unlikely to return to power while that gap remains so large. For far too long, few black and Asian Britons have been attracted to the Conservative Party. Why? Many are conservative in outlook and share our values and aspirations: they run businesses, value education, prize the family and believe in the community as something distinct from the state. Yet they have generally not voted Conservative. At best, they have not seen us as natural allies. At worst, they have regarded us as actively hostile. Social justice and political self-interest demand that we work to change this state of affairs as well and Michael Howard is absolutely and rightly committed to doing so.

It is evidence of how the Party is now changing from the grass roots upwards that we have some excellent Prospective Parliamentary Candidates who would not have been chosen in the past, such as Adam Afriyie in Windsor, Shailesh Vara in North West Cambridgeshire and Sandip Verma in Enoch Powell's old seat of Wolverhampton South West, as well as openly gay candidates in both North Norfolk (Iain Dale) and Hove (Nicholas Boles). Esther McVey (Wirral West), Justine Greening (Putney) and Anne Milton (Guildford) should also join the Commons after the next Election.

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But, of course, we still need to do a lot more to attract first-class candidates from across the whole of society if we are to reflect fully the make-up of the country that we aspire to lead.



4 Offer a clear direction in which we want to travel which strikes a chord

The second lesson for Conservatives to learn from past periods of opposition is the need to offer a clear direction of travel that resonates with voters. In both the late 1940s and the late 1970s, Conservatives stressed above all their commitment to extending individual freedom in the face of Labour's over-intrusive state.

The *Industrial Charter* of 1949 was the pre-eminent Conservative policy statement of the period. Although it did not promise any denationalisations and envisaged a more central role for the trade unions, its main importance was to show that the Party had a distinctive approach of its own, which allied personal liberty to the free market. Robert Eccleshall has noted how "the language advocating an enlarged state was deliberately bland, yet there were sparkling passages defending individual initiative and entrepreneurial rewards".³⁸ In the year before the *Industrial Charter* appeared, Churchill had complained that "Seven hundred

thousand more officials ... have settled down upon us to administer 25,000 regulations never enforced before in time of peace” and with “a rate of wartime taxation ... [which] has hampered recovery in every walk of life”.³⁹

In 1975, Margaret Thatcher followed a similar strategy, outlining her vision in her first conference speech as Party Leader as “a man’s right to work as he will, to spend what he earns, to own property, to have the State as servant and not as master”.⁴⁰ Subsequently, the publication of *The Right Approach* and *The Right Approach to the Economy* showed that the Conservative alternative once again rested on a promise to set people free. According to John Ramsden, “in 1979 Conservatives could, as in 1951, talk of rolling back the state and of a holiday from legislative interventionism.”⁴¹

Promises of greater individual freedom remain a powerful electoral magnet today, not least because:

- 1 businesses are bound by red tape;
- 2 the tax and benefits systems are more complicated than ever before; and
- 3 the European Union is intent on imposing excessive regulations.

Yet we should be under no illusions. The economy is not in a dire state. Most people in work are not poor and do not feel that they are. We Conservatives therefore face another, and much bigger, challenge: how to improve our public services. In 1964, 92 per cent of well-off people and 87 per cent of those on lower incomes were satisfied with the NHS.⁴² Today, 81 per cent of people believe that the way the NHS works “must be radically changed”.⁴³ There are some excellent hospitals and schools in the public sector and there are fantastic staff in all areas of the public services, as John Bercow saw at first hand when his first child was recently born in an NHS

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hospital. The challenge now is to ensure that more publicly-funded services become as good as the best.

There has long been a distinctive Conservative approach to public services. In the 1950s, the One Nation group of Conservative MPs produced a number of pamphlets, one of which was entitled *Change is our Ally*, which summarised one of the key differences between the Conservative and Labour approaches to public services. We defend local and autonomous institutions. Labour ordinarily prefers a centralised and prescriptive model. For example, the Conservatives' decision to lift obstacles to private building enabled a quarter of the population to be re-housed in new properties between 1951 and 1964 after the statist approach of the Attlee Government had failed to deliver.⁴⁴

Today, there is still a debate between centralism and localism. Centrally-imposed targets and centrally-controlled funding have damaged the delivery of services. Local institutions have been hemmed in by rigid and inappropriate regulations imposed from Whitehall, while professionals have lost the autonomy to devise their own solutions.

In particular, education, health and police services would benefit from less central control.

- 1 Individual comprehensive schools currently have to deal with up to 66 different revenue streams⁴⁵ and head teachers have little control over the terms and conditions of their staff. Reducing centrally-produced paperwork and trusting schools to manage their own budgets would help to set the right conditions for a big improvement in educational standards.
- 2 In many European countries, notably Holland and France, lots of hospital beds are run by organisations that are free of direct state control.⁴⁶ Here the British Government micro-manages the

NHS, and deluges it with politically-driven targets which distort clinical priorities. We should instead trust the judgements of medical staff and allow all hospitals to become foundation trusts.

- 3 The recent Operation Safer Streets initiative, which was imposed from Whitehall, had such a small impact that each mugging which was prevented cost £15,000.⁴⁷ The scheme led to a rise in burglary and other crimes as it diverted resources away from other important policing tasks and undermined local accountability. The Government remains keen on centralised policing initiatives, but we need to give local communities a greater, rather than a lesser, say in policing matters.

Localism, choice and diversity are necessary, but we should not kid ourselves that they are sufficient. They are not panaceas for the ills which bedevil our public services. Neither is privatisation. We need an agenda not for simply opting out of the State sector, but for improving what remains within it. Conservatives must be prepared to offer voters specific policies to tackle identifiable weaknesses.

For example, the Government's thinking on higher education is misguided and Conservatives can offer a genuine alternative to the arbitrary 50 per cent target for participation and to the creation of the Access Regulator. Labour was either unwise to promise in its manifesto not to introduce top-up fees, or to break the promise now, or both. At the next election, the Conservative Party has to offer a credible policy to meet the funding gap which undeniably exists. Attracting the best staff, developing our research base and offering courses to compete with the best institutions in the world are educationally and economically essential. Starving our universities of funds and allowing their decline would be a chronic betrayal of the national interest.

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Similarly, there is something wrong with this country's policy priorities and public sector management when hospitals do not provide towels and hospital-acquired infections are on the rise because some wards are plain filthy. These real problems are literally matters of life and death and people look to us for decent solutions.

As we think about policy, we need to be aware of one further lesson from history. Showing the direction in which we want to travel is not the same as offering an enormous number of massively-detailed policies which sound popular, but which may prove to be impossible to implement in office. It is about offering an indication of where we want to go. Rab Butler, who was in charge of the policy re-think after the 1945 defeat, recalled in his memoirs how he disagreed with Churchill on this: "When an Opposition spells out its policy in detail, he [Churchill] lectured me, 'the Government becomes the Opposition and attacks the Opposition which becomes the Government. So, having failed to win the sweets of office, it fails equally to enjoy the benefits of being out of office.'" Rab concluded by admitting, "There is rather more truth and tactic in this than I was always happy to allow at the time."⁴⁸

Churchill's lesson was forgotten after the 1964 election defeat, when the party sought to have as many specific commitments as possible. Iain Macleod later recalled that: "the Conservative Party Manifesto had contained 131 distinct specific promises. This was far too much to put across to the electorate, and the net result was that everybody thought we had no policy."⁴⁹ In contrast, Labour's 1997 manifesto contained only 56 pledges and the shorthand version, the size of a credit card, shrewdly stopped at five main commitments.

5 Have a positive message on the international situation

The third lesson that we can learn from spells in opposition is the need to have a convincing message on international affairs. For both Churchill and Margaret Thatcher, this meant warning about the menace of Communism.

In his speech in Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946, Winston Churchill described the Iron Curtain of Soviet control in large swathes of Central and Eastern Europe, “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic”.⁵⁰ He was accused of scaremongering and a hundred Labour MPs tabled a motion of censure but, before long, he was hailed as a prophet and saviour.

Margaret Thatcher shared Winston Churchill’s instincts about Soviet Communists. She demanded peace through strength and they grudgingly dubbed her the Iron Lady. She was right, her unilateral nuclear disarmament opponents were wrong and the rest is history.

For better or worse, containment and deterrence are no longer enough. The world is a much more complicated place than it was,

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as the devastating events of 9/11 showed. The symmetrical, visible and quantifiable threat that existed during the Cold War has been replaced by an asymmetrical, invisible and unquantifiable threat. It is also an irrational threat and it can be combated only by pre-emptive policies of either a military or non-military nature. But even in this new geopolitical landscape, the over-arching principles which motivated both Churchill and Thatcher should remain the basis of Conservative foreign policy. They both believed:

- 1 that Britain's national interests are best served by playing an active role in world affairs;
- 2 that our security rests on strong international alliances that stick together in the face of serious threats; and
- 3 that the promotion of free and fair societies is likely to produce a calmer, safer world.

These should remain our watchwords today.

In particular, Conservatives should not be shy of championing the trans-Atlantic relationship. Europe needs the United States. Equally, the United States needs Europe as a whole and the statesmanship of a candid friend in Britain in particular.

Conservatives should champion the cause of a Europe of nation states. We believe the proposed European Constitution fatally undermines that cause. Labour does not. We should argue our case determinedly, but not to the exclusion of other issues.

Conservatives should champion the promotion of a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. It is a noble goal in its own right and an outstanding example of effective pre-emption. Terrorists do not want peace, but democrats should strive ceaselessly for it.

Above all, Conservatives should champion the cause of trade as aid. You do not have to be left-wing to want to tackle the harrowing

Have a positive message on the international situation // 29

plight of the developing world, where over one billion people live on less than \$1 a day.⁵¹ There is no one reason for Third World poverty. The problems are multi-faceted. No simple cure can be administered. Yet, as Conservatives, we should be clear what is not responsible for the crisis and what is.

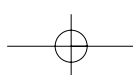
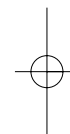
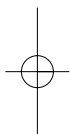
The Left is wrong to claim that untrammelled free markets have resulted in the poorest people being trampled underfoot. In truth, the so-called capitalist countries have failed to practise what they preach. They preach free enterprise, but they practise protectionism. For example, distorting subsidies and trade barriers, both tariff and non-tariff, prop up big agricultural producers in the developed world and perpetuate poverty in developing nations. After all, agriculture is crucial to those countries and they are often heavily dependent upon a very small number of commodities.

OECD countries spend vastly more money on subsidising their agriculture than on overseas aid to poorer countries. In 2003, aid from OECD countries was \$69 billion.⁵² At the same time, they also spent £350 billion on support for domestic agriculture: the EU spent around \$140 billion; the US spent around \$95 billion; and Japan spent around \$60 billion.⁵³ There is a plain mismatch, even incoherence, between aid policy and trade policy. The latter is often bad for consumers and it is inflicting terrible damage on the living standards of the most vulnerable people on the planet. It is morally wrong, economically counterproductive and politically dangerous.

Yet the last World Trade Round is estimated to have added at least \$350 billion annually to world income. The Tinbergen Institute has estimated that another 50 per cent cut in World Trade barriers could be worth \$150 billion to developing countries, significantly more than their aid receipts.⁵⁴ The World Bank reckons that changing trade rules to improve opportunities for developing countries could lift an additional 300 million people

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out of poverty.⁵⁵ The developed world should now seek to restart the World Trade talks as an urgent priority and offer a decent deal that will deliver growth and improve lives. Conservatives will be at the forefront of those arguing the free trade case.



Conclusion

The three lessons for Conservatives outlined in this pamphlet are far from an exhaustive list. Naturally, there are other challenges. For example, we need to communicate our messages effectively and we need to organise in constituencies better than in the past. Michael Howard has an acute grasp of these issues and he has already made substantial changes, in Parliament, at Conservative Central Office and in campaigning.

As this process continues, the Party must also learn from its own history. Each time the Conservative Party has been in Opposition, there have been diehards who have regarded any changes as a sign of weakness and as a betrayal of Conservative traditions. As we have attempted to show, they are nothing of the kind.

More than two decades ago, the authors of *Conservatives and Conservatism* wrote:

Change, if carried out circumspectly and without doing violence to the fabric of society, may prove to be (and has been) a Conservative ally. The Conservative Party neither

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adheres to some immutable body of norms nor produces change through a series of conscious and begrudged concessions. To see it in such terms is not only to do the party an injustice but also to misunderstand it. The Conservative Party views society as an organic entity, not one that is embalmed or mummified.⁵⁶

A continuing process of change is inescapable if we want the Conservative Party to survive. A reactionary resistance to all change is an enterprise doomed to failure. The future success of the Conservative Party – and, even more importantly, of our nation – depends upon us embracing and managing change as enthusiastically and competently as we have done throughout our long and successful history.

Notes

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- 9 Andrew Cooper, *The Conservative Party: the case for change* (2004)
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