

BEING CONSERVATIVE: A CORNERSTONE OF POLICIES TO REVIVE TORY BRITAIN

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This collection of essays is published by the Cornerstone Group of Conservative MPs. It is designed to make a case for a proud, authentic Conservatism that can revive Tory Britain.

Our first pamphlet, “The Strange Desertion of Tory England: the Conservative Alternative to the Liberal Orthodoxy”, set out the broad philosophical principles on which conservatism is based. Some copies are still available from Edward Leigh MP’s office in the House of Commons (order by email via haydona@parliament.uk), and a PDF of the text can be downloaded from <http://cornerstone.blogs.com/>. This second pamphlet attempts to translate some of our principles into policies. It is also available on the Cornerstone blog.

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BEING CONSERVATIVE

John Hayes MP

In 1999 Tony Blair declared that the battle in the 21st Century would be between the forces of progress (by which he meant liberalism) and the forces of conservatism. He was right. Conservatives must battle against the ascent of liberalism. With its roots in the Enlightenment, adapted by Englishmen through utilitarianism, liberalism has come to dominate political discourse in modern Britain, as it feeds the bogus assumptions of the new establishment.

The liberal orthodoxy is failing Britain. Most people believe that the quality of life in Britain is declining and they are right. The symptoms of malaise are all too-evident: democratic government (not just a particular government) is no longer trusted by the people it claims to represent. Family breakdown is commonplace and consequently our towns and cities are blighted by despair and bereft of community. Public services routinely fail the people who pay for them, work in them, and use them, yet taxes continue to go up. Our judicial system is ineffective at dealing adequately with criminals, whilst many people live in constant fear of crime as public order evaporates. Our towns and cities are increasingly bland and brutal – with soulless shopping malls, identikit housing estates and all the yobbish symbols of social decay. Rural Britain is suffering as the plight of agriculture erodes livelihoods and our countryside is destroyed by overdevelopment. Ultimately, people are facing increasing insecurity: in old age, in the job market, in education, in health provision, and housing. Their pleas for certainty, security and stability are ignored by politicians deafened by the shrill voices of the liberal elite.

Though seemingly diverse, all these problems relate to the ‘decline of civil society’. Poverty in Britain was once a matter of the absence of material wellbeing. Deprivation was closely linked to the risk of disease and the certainty of hardship. But strong families and communities helped people to cope with shortages of income. The higher standards of living of recent decades have been accompanied by declining public order and decaying family and community life. The new poverty is the poverty of manners and morals; the new disease is hopelessness.

All are touched by social and cultural decay, but the vulnerable – those who live on the front line – suffer most. Even for those who have been fortunate

from a material point of view, the sorts of problems associated with the effects of civil decline mean a diminished quality of life..

We are becoming a nation of individuals. People feel alienated from one another, and from those with authority over them. There is collective despair over the erosion of identity and security. Society is experiencing what Peter Hitchens has described as “the decay of obligation, duty and morality¹”. Alexis de Tocqueville’s chilling prediction is now a reality across much of our country:

“...I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn into himself, is almost unaware of the fate of the rest. Mankind, for him, consists in his children and his personal friends. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, they are near enough, but he does not notice them. He touches them but feels nothing. He exists in and for himself, and though he still may have a family, one can at least say that he has not got a fatherland²”

In modern Britain men are diminished beyond de Tocqueville’s nightmare. Children born in broken homes in broken communities, as they grow, become hooked on crime to pay for their first fix; later, without the glue of marriage, they father children they never see and cease to care for. They have no regard for the past because they learn nothing of their country’s history and have no hope for the future in a society which solely reveres the here and now. There is no love of God in a world which worships only money. Thousands of shattered dreams and broken hearts – this is broken Britain.

The collapse of civil society demands urgent action and we must look beyond liberalism to rebuild Britain.

Some Conservatives have not even begun to understand the problems of broken Britain, let alone devise solutions. Not least because they feel disorientated by the new political landscape.

¹ Hitchens, quoted in Streeter ed, *There is such a thing as society*, London 2002., p71

² quoted in Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York 1993, pp160-1

The old dragons of the left are dead: destroyed in part by the worldwide collapse of socialism and finished off in Britain by the triumph of Blairism. Mr Blair understands that the greatest difference between the parties is no longer about economic management. But one might go further; the great challenges which now face us are no longer (if they ever were) economic at all – they are social and cultural. So, the vital distinction is between people with contrasting views about the nature of man and society. It is the difference between liberals and conservatives. Our opponents have changed and we must turn our fire on new enemies, or perhaps old ones wearing new clothes.

The liberal left champions political correctness and social licence, as they seek the political disestablishment of morality. It is uncertain whether social justice plays any significant part in their thinking. On the contrary, many of the denizens of New Labour seem to find the glitz and glamour of money and power so intoxicating that they are either ignorant or careless about the social consequences of a society in which worth is largely measured by wealth and where the disadvantaged and vulnerable are often seen as an embarrassing inconvenience. The liberal establishment either actively embraces or passively accepts the soulless individualism and selfish materialism which infest our society.

Generally, Conservatives has been slow to respond to this change. Some have remained on a permanent tour of old battlefields, others – dazzled by the success of New Labour or demoralised by our party's failure – want to ape Blairism. Still more, having only ever defined themselves by their hostility to socialism, are now rudderless. They are not, for the most part, to be blamed. The case for authentic conservatism has too rarely been put. The arguments put so well by George Bush in America are hardly heard here. Of recent Conservative leaders the two who have best understood all of this – William Hague and Iain Duncan Smith – were either misrepresented or misunderstood.

So, let us be clear, the essence of Conservatism is as pertinent today as it has ever been. It is born of a timeless view of man. Liberals are committed to the idea that because man is essentially rational, unfettered and unrestrained, he will, for the most part, act rationally. Conservatives know that this is not so. We appreciate that man is fallen, frail and faulted. Unrestrained by the character of our organic society; its culture and values; man, for the most part, will not act rationally. So whereas for liberals politics can produce the conditions for the successful pursuit of perfect

happiness for the greatest number, for Conservatives the best Government can do is to preserve those institutions and traditions that mitigate the natural sorrows of human existence. Which is why law and authority – based on moral certainties – are so important to Conservatives – they are all that separate us from anarchy. This is the fundamental philosophical difference between liberals and conservatives.

To appreciate the nature of Conservatism, one must understand its emphasis on the desirability of pragmatic change, its regard for the inexact and the unwritten and the conservative understanding of wisdom transmitted across generations. From this springs the reverence for time-honoured institutions, not time-limited codified constitutions, and a belief that human fulfilment springs from those duties which voluntarily constrain us from the desire to do as we will. Freedom, as Edmund Burke (the philosophical father of modern Conservatism) knew, is just one ingredient in the recipe for individual contentment and social cohesion. Burke recognised that the most precious choice of all is the choice to sacrifice one's self-interest for the common good. It was his belief that theory should be made to fit reality. He concluded "a theory founded on experiment, and not assumed, is only good for so much as it explains. Or inability to push it indefinitely is no argument against it."

In other words, Burke's philosophy is not doctrinaire, not limited in the same way as, say, Marxism. There is something profoundly humble about his philosophical method described at length in 'The Sublime and the Beautiful', which concludes: "If any inquiry thus carefully conducted should fail at last of discovering the truth, it may answer an end perhaps as successful, in discovering to us the weakness of our understanding." Crucially, Burke also distinguished between form and essence, which explains why he came to such divergent conclusions on the two great republican revolutions (in America and France) that marked his times. He knew that the state was a natural community. This organic view of society is surely even more relevant in today's technological and rapidly changing world. We must, as Roger Scruton argues, restore an organic national community.³

Conservatives must consider the tyranny of the minority just as much as the dangers to minorities posed by an intolerant majority. Authentic Conservatives should understand that it is not through the exultation of

³ Roger Scruton, 'In Defence of Nation', in *Ideas and Politics in Modern Britain*, 1990

rights, still less their enshrinement in law, that men grow or civilisations prosper, but through freely accepted responsibilities, duties and obligations. We would do well to consider the necessary limits of those who use power and free will irresponsibly. No child feels its freedom should be compromised; it wants to do as it pleases. Yet no adult with the advantage of maturity borne of experience could fail to understand that it is only through compromise; only through thoughtful limits on freedom defined by law and custom that personal, civil and global relationships prosper. Fairness suffers when licence reigns. A fair social order is cohesive, because it inspires individual fulfilment and collective contentment. It is through the pursuit of fairness that Conservatives fulfil their greatest purpose.

Sadly, some in our party have come to believe that by aping Blair, rather than studying Burke; by adopting the assumptions of the liberal elite, rather than recalling our Conservative roots; we might become as popular as our opponents. This route is likely to prove as disastrous electorally as it is unauthentic. Why on earth would voters support imitation liberals when they can have the real thing?

That the liberal cuckoos in our nest are wrong is forgivable. Their intolerance is less so. As C.H. Smyth put it, “It is an inevitable mark of...the ‘tyranny of liberalism’ that the liberal is not only convinced that he is right; he is also convinced that other people secretly agree with him – how could they do otherwise? – and are only restrained from saying so by unworthy motives arising from worldly prudence, material interest, and so forth.”⁴ The liberal considers his viewpoint, of course, the very opposite of tyranny, but, according to Maurice Cowling, John Stuart Mill, one of the founding fathers of liberalism, is guilty of “something resembling moral totalitarianism.”⁵

Cowling’s explanation is worth quoting at length, as it reveals the liberal core of New Labour’s attitude to conservatives: “Because his opinions have become part of a prevailing orthodoxy, their aggressiveness is less obvious than when he wrote: because they express, even in victory, disarming intentions of universal benevolence, they are often taken to be more comprehensive than they were. Mill’s doctrine was liberal: but his liberalism was neither comprehensive nor libertarian: it attempted

⁴ C.H. Smyth, ‘The Importance of Church Attendance’ in *The Recall to Religion*, London 1937, p. 120, quoted in Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism*, frontispiece, p. xii, Cambridge 1963

⁵ Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism*, introduction, p. xii, Cambridge 1963

dogmatically to erode the assumptions on which competing doctrines were based. One competing doctrine was Christianity: in Mill's hands, liberalism was not compatible with it. Liberalism, no less than Marxism, is intolerant of competition: jealousy, and a carefully disguised intolerance, are important features of Mill's intellectual personality⁶."

Sounds familiar? Of such an attitude Tony Blair is the most perfect incarnation; one might even say that he is Mill's word made flesh.

Peter Hitchens, in *The Abolition of Britain*, a jeremiad against Blair and all his works, sees that the cultural changes effected in Britain since the 1960s by an unholy alliance between liberals, permissives and socialists of various shades in the churches, the BBC, the media in general, academia and other sections of the establishment, "have made it possible for a long-buried radical strain to climb out of its tomb and finish a revolution which first threatened this country during the Civil War, was defeated by the Restoration and headed off by the historic compromise of 1688. It rose again", he asserts, "in the aftermath of the French and American revolutions, but was defeated by Church, King, Law, patriotism and tradition – which is why today's radicals loathe the United Kingdom so much. To them," he argues, "it is the living disproof of all their theories – conservative and royalist but democratic, lawful but free, rooted in the past but capable of modernization. It ought not to exist," he concludes, "so they plan to make sure that it ceases to do so⁷." It is over these resurrected radicals that New Labour reigns.

Conservatives must be both brave and authentic; brave enough to undertake the task of challenging the dominant liberal elite in all the spheres and institutions it has so effectively colonised, and authentic enough to regain the respect and loyalty of our natural supporters. It is this courageous authenticity that will awaken the interest of all those weary of the current political stagnation. At present, too often we behave like those desperate liberal Anglicans who hold to the form but abandon the content, who in a sad cry for 'relevance' retain the vestments but dilute the doctrine. Like Whig aristocrats, such Tories hope that concessions to liberalism will preserve their privileges. But that is like paying the Dane-

⁶ Ibid, introduction, pp. xii-xiii

⁷ Hitchens, p. 344

geld; and in Kipling's words: "if once you have paid him the Dane-geld/You never get rid of the Dane⁸."

It is indicative of the loss of confidence in Conservative ranks that it was left to Labour's Trevor Phillips, rather than a frontbench Conservative, to first deconstruct multiculturalism – one of the liberal left's most sacred cows. Leading Conservatives have known for years that multiculturalism was a bankrupt idea, but dared not say so. Any instinctive Conservative knows that a diverse nation coheres when the things that unite us are more important than the things which divide us.

Evelyn Waugh said "There are still things which are worth fighting *against*⁹." Not the least of these is the social liberalism of New Labour. Tim Montgomerie of the Centre for Social Justice has argued convincingly that social liberalism is incompatible with social justice. It weakens the family and the other institutions that best protect children from drugs, delinquency and despair. It is certain that an electorate beset by uncertainties and insecurities will not be reassured by a dated liberal reaction that offers little but unbridled individualism. But if we Conservatives return to the wellspring of our beliefs, our founding principles, we will refresh both party and country by articulating a philosophy that is distinctively conservative. We will be recast, our electoral credibility restored.

In this battle, it is vital that we take up arms against the wrong sort of cultural change, the wrong scale of development, wrong notions of "community" and sustainability. It is vital because to address these issues rightly is to match the preoccupations of a people for whom material success is only part of quality of life. Once we move beyond the obsession with living standards alone, we are free to aim much higher: at the reinvigoration of society; of its institutions and values. We can regain our sense of what is to be cherished. We can rise above the ugliness of much of the modern world. We can achieve social justice by bringing hope to those of our citizens neglected by the pace and ruthlessness of liberal brutality. Thus will the sense of local and national allegiance, which springs from shared identity and pride - so long eroded by our opponents - be renewed. Shared allegiance, in Roger Scruton's words, "constitutes society as

⁸ Kipling, What Dane-geld means, 1911

⁹ Evelyn Waugh, The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh, ed. Donat Gallagher, 1983, quoted in The Sayings of Evelyn Waugh, ed. Donat Gallagher, London 1996

something greater than the aggregate of individuals that the liberal mind perceives.”¹⁰

We must help people break out of the prison of lonely individualism. After too long a silence, the time is ripe to make the case for a Conservatism that is idealistic, socially cohesive and romantic. British Conservatives are right to value freedom, but as Pope John Paul II reminded us “only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good¹¹.” It is not through small-minded liberal utilitarianism or by abstract freedoms, but in the pursuit of God-given truth that politics can inspire those who must rebuild broken Britain.

¹⁰ Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, 3rd Edition 2001

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, London 1993, para. 84, p. 128

Flat tax – too good to be true?

Edward Leigh MP

Introduction

What do those who aspire to lead the Conservative Party have to say? The leadership election has been very disappointing so far. No candidate has convincingly promoted the Cornerstone agenda. Vague noises have been made in the direction of reducing the size of the state, and supporting the family, but there has been no substantive discussion of how this might be done.

This campaign is an opportunity for the party to develop ideas now for government.

As we have found to our cost before, and as the German Christian Democrats found recently, radical ideas such as a flat tax need to be promoted and explained years, not months, before a General Election. So far, as I have said before, there has been a poverty of expectation in terms of new ideas, and we have only had vague aspirations. It is no surprise that the press has speculated endlessly and tediously on personalities, who is up and who is down. Personalities come and go, ideas live on.

Now is the time to articulate a clear set of principles based on fighting political correctness and over-regulation, explaining how a smaller state can be achieved, proclaiming the supremacy of the British parliament, introducing real choice in education through a universal education voucher, comprehensively reforming the NHS through tax relief for private health insurance and also a radical social agenda to rebuild traditional family life, as well as encouraging people to save for their retirement.

This paper sets out the case for a flat tax. Unless we make these sorts of arguments now, during and immediately after a leadership election, then it will be too late, and we shall lose the next General Election. There has to be an intellectual conservative case put forward, so that we can take the common ground and drag the middle ground towards us. This is the opposite of focus group politics, which has proved so disastrous, and simply ended up in the last election with talk about cleaner hospitals.

As I know only too well from my work as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, dramatic efficiency savings could be made in many government departments if only the will and the boldness to make them could be found. There are many layers of bureaucracy which could be stripped away. After all, the current combination of stealth taxes, the abolition of mortgage tax relief; the increase in national insurance; tax on pension funds; the abolition of the married couple's allowance and the increase in stamp duty – not to mention the hike in council taxes – together form a burden under which the nation is groaning for relief. In 2005 terms, it averages out at an annual increase of £5,000 per family¹².

So, above all we must SPEND LESS of the public's money. But we must have an exciting, credible and costed programme to do so. We need a headline figure – not just one or two pence off the basic rate of income tax, but a dramatic reduction.

In fact, by following the lead of those countries which have already introduced a flat tax, and combining it with a greatly increased threshold, what could be more attractive than the promise to raise the personal tax allowance from its present level to £10,000? At a stroke, this would put more money in people's pockets and lift the poorest tax-payers out of tax altogether. Social justice *and* prosperity.

The real “poor” – the poorest third of the population – who currently have to donate 9% of their hard-earned salary to Mr Brown, would be entirely freed from this unjust burden. For the first time, a real release from the poverty trap; a real spur to get a job and ditch the dole. And we could then bid farewell to the Chancellor's Byzantine nightmare of tax credits and means-tested benefits.

But what about that gaping hole, that £43bn, that would be blown in the Treasury's takings as a result? Aren't the poor going to suffer death by a thousand “cuts”? Put another way, £43bn is only 4% of GDP. The figure is not excessive. One way to close the gap is by making really efficient use of tax-payers' money.

As I have seen time and again in my PAC work, the waste of revenues due to poor management, clumsy bureaucracy and general inefficiency is a matter of grave concern. But the James Review saw almost £35bn

¹² Figure from Policy Research Unit, House of Commons

available through achievable savings; the Taxpayers' Alliance thinks there could be as much as £81bn. The average of these two figures is £58bn – leaving £15bn in change (once the £43bn gap is plugged). Of course, exact figures are impossible in such large calculations with their multiple and ever-changing variables, but the numbers indicate a massive amount of slack in the system.

To give just a few of numerous examples, one has only to consider that the Inland Revenue has £3bn of debt at least a year old¹³; that fraud across the main benefits amounts to £2bn a year¹⁴; that Customs lost £11bn of VAT in the year 2002-3¹⁵, and that the cost of phase 3 of Guy's Hospital to the tax-payer rose by £98.4m due to mismanagement¹⁶, to realise how many savings could be achieved in the public sector.

Flat tax – an end to the nightmare

The average person in Britain now has to work a full five months of the year solely in order to pay their taxes. But Gordon Brown has not only increased our taxes. He has made them incredibly complicated too.

Just think of all the problems caused by his tax credits system. It may have been done for perfectly good motives – trying to ensure that people on modest means are not left worse off when they get a job, or move to a better job. But it is so complicated that hardly anyone can understand it. So many families have been overpaid, only to face huge bills from the Inland Revenue months later when the money has already been spent. This is not just my view. There have been, to my knowledge, four independent major reports this year highlighting the problems in the tax credits system, the last one coming from the PAC.

It is this combination of high taxes and impenetrable complexity that has led more and more people to call for lower, simpler taxes. And that is why many policy experts are looking to what is called the 'flat tax'.

¹³ PAC 49th report 2003-04, The recovery of debt by the Inland Revenue

¹⁴ PAC 55th report 2001-02 Fraud and error in Income Support

¹⁵ PAC 36th Report 2003-04 Tackling VAT Fraud

¹⁶ PAC 28th Report 1998-99 Cost over-runs, funding problems and delays on Guy's Hospital Phase III Development

The flat tax idea applies specifically to income tax, though it can be extended to other taxes too. The fundamental principle is that everybody pays the same. There are no complicated rate bands under which some people pay a higher rate than others. And all or most of the complicated concessions and exemptions are swept away. So it becomes perfectly clear what everyone is expected to pay, and you don't need a degree in accounting to work it out.

Flat tax sweeps Europe

It's an idea that is spreading across the world, having been adopted by over a dozen countries, including four EU members. And in Britain it is catching on too. A couple of the smaller parties adopted it in their manifestos. And now a number of mainstream politicians, both among the Conservatives and the Lib Dems, are looking at it with great interest.

The prosperous Asian tigers of Hong Kong and Singapore have had something close to a flat tax for many years, but it was the Baltic state of Estonia which brought the idea to Europe in 1994, replacing three rates on personal income, and another on company profits, with one uniform 26% rate. With annual growth rates of 6%, Estonia has never looked back. And it was not long before its small neighbours EU Latvia and Lithuania copied it.

Then, in 2001, a much bigger neighbour – Russia – adopted the idea with a flat rate of 19% on personal income (prompting the Estonians to reduce their own rate to match). Further east, Serbia went for a 14% flat tax in 2003, Ukraine a 13% rate a year later, and in 2005, Georgia with 12% and Romania with 16%.

But the revolution has continued to roll through the EU too. Last year, Slovakia brought in a 19% rate on personal and company incomes as well as Value Added Tax; whereupon foreign investment flooded in, and the country now boasts a growth rate of 5.8%. Then this year, Poland – a politically and geographically important EU country – announced it would soon be switching to a single 18% rate on personal, company, and value added taxes too. It seems likely that the Czech Republic will join in with a 15% flat tax rate before too long.

The structure of a flat tax

As mentioned, the core concept of a flat tax is a uniform rate of tax. However, if we just calculated the average rate of tax and set the new rate at that level, low earners would end up paying more. So in practice, most flat tax systems go for a single rate that is the same or lower than the existing standard rate. And for the same reasons, most flat tax systems also involve a much bigger personal allowance – the amount of money that each person can earn before they start paying any tax at all – so that the poorest are taken out of the tax net entirely.

The other strand of the flat tax is to reduce complexity even further by getting rid of the customary array of tax concessions and reliefs. In Britain, these include things like the tax relief on ISAs and pension contributions, business credits for research and development, and tax exemptions on certain state benefits. When tax rates are very high – up to 40% in Britain – these reliefs are obviously very important to people, and are guarded jealously. But when tax rates are around half that or even less, they have far less value. In the interests of spreading simplicity and transparency, they can be removed.

In Britain, a working proposal for a flat tax of income tax might have a single uniform rate of 22% (equal to the current standard rate) and a personal allowance set at somewhere near £10,000 (meaning that nobody on the minimum wage pays any tax at all).

But before we go into the details – and the difficulties – what is it about the flat tax that makes it so attractive to such a diverse and growing list of countries?

Why a flat tax?

Lower compliance costs

Because there is only one tax rate, a flat tax is simpler, and all the more so if existing tax reliefs are pared back at the same time. This reduces the cost of administration, not just for the government, but for employers struggling with PAYE and the self-employed struggling with their own self-assessment forms. Less money wasted on bureaucracy means more can go into real job-creation.

Less avoidance and evasion

Because there are no complicated rates and different reliefs, there are fewer tax loopholes. The amount that people should pay is clearer, and it becomes more difficult for them to avoid the tax. And if the flat rate is low enough, there is much less advantage in doing that anyway. So a lot of unproductive effort, as people shuffle their affairs to avoid paying tax, is saved. Why send your money offshore, or go to live in a tax haven, or spend money on expensive lawyers and accountants, if tax is not a major burden? And indeed, why should others take the risk of illegally evading tax if the benefit to them is slight?

Less distortion

When taxes are high, tax concessions are often needed in the interest of restoring fairness or helping particular groups who are disadvantaged by the high tax rate. But that means the tax system can cause big economic distortions. Often, for example, people will invest because it saves them tax rather than because it generates profits and prosperity. Indeed, in a very complex and high-rate tax system, every pound the government adds to the tax burden probably costs the economy a lot more than a pound. That is not true with flat tax.

Better incentives

When taxes are high, there is less incentive for people to invest – because the investment has to prove profitable enough to cover the tax as well as the return that the investor is hoping for. That's especially bad for people contemplating business start-ups, which are always risky ventures – meaning that high taxes produce lower job-creation and choke off new competitive innovations.

More employment

Existing firms, too, are less willing to employ people when taxes are high. By the time tax and national insurance is taken out, the cost of employing someone is far greater than what the worker actually gets in take-home pay. It can make a number of jobs cost more to the employer than they are worth to him or her. That is particularly bad news for younger workers or those with few skills, who may be less attractive to employers anyway.

Is a flat tax feasible?

Of course, if we lower the tax rate and raise the personal allowance such as to take everyone on the minimum wage out of tax, the Inland Revenue

will collect less money. But the shortfall is not necessarily as much as people imagine. For a start, many of today's various tax concessions could be scrapped if the rate were reduced. And the economic boost of low taxes will help grow the economy, create jobs, and broaden the tax base, generating new revenues for the future. It seems counter-intuitive, but it is true, that a number of the flat-tax countries have found exactly this: they are generating much more revenue, despite major cuts in the rate of tax.

On the Treasury's figures, a £10,000 personal allowance – nobody on that minimum-wage level paying tax, in other words – would reduce tax revenues by just over £26bn. Removing the higher rate, so as to produce a flat rate of 22% for everyone, would cut revenues by nearly £17bn, a total of £43bn.

That may sound high, but it is only about 4% of GDP. And there are two good reasons to think that it is in fact manageable.

First, some of the gap can be closed through more prudent public expenditure. The James Review of government bureaucracy identified nearly £35bn of civil-service savings – which is a long way towards our target. The Taxpayers' Alliance has gone further, identifying £81bn of annual savings.

Second, the stimulus to the economy brought by lower and simpler taxes would mean that next year and the year after, there would be more people in jobs and earning more money, so revenues would rise again. There would, as we have seen, also be far less avoidance and evasion. And investment from abroad would become more attractive, so new capital would flow in.

Indeed, a fair estimate is that the higher economic growth and easier collection would see tax revenues recovering in just three years – in other words, within the lifetime of a Parliament.

The benefits of a flat tax

Intuitively, you might think that a flat tax would help only the rich, who would pay a lower rate. But this is not true. The reduced incentive for avoiding or evading tax, or for living abroad or keeping your money

abroad, means that the rich in fact end up paying more. And the evidence is clear.

During the 1980s, the Thatcher government cut the top rate of tax from 83% to 40% - and higher earners ended up paying more of the total revenue. The top tenth of earners went from paying a 35% share of total revenues collected in 1979, to 42% of total revenues in 1990.

The United States found the same during its three tax-cutting episodes: 1921-26 (top rate reduced from 63% to 25%); 1964 (top rate 91% to 70%); and 1981-84 (the Reagan tax cuts). Revenues rose, and the rich paid more of the total. And the evidence is coming in that exactly the same is happening thanks to the Bush tax cuts of more recent years.

Furthermore, under a flat tax system with a high personal allowance, the poorest third of the population – who at the moment lose 9% of their income to the tax collectors, despite being so poor – would instead pay no tax at all. This must be a real incentive for people to get off benefits and into work. And it produces far less need for Gordon Brown's over-complicated tax-credit system and all those means-tested benefits that can simply trap people in poverty and unemployment.

It is worth saying too that the UK is part of a global economy. Other EU members are attracting investment thanks to their low, flat-rate tax initiatives. And there are many other countries where costs are lower than they are in high-tax, high-spending Britain. A flat tax would help us compete in this tough world.

In other words, through radical reduction and simplification, we can speed up Britain's economic growth, get people out of the benefits trap, and make all taxpayers – rich and poor – better off.

The Case for Education Vouchers

Angela Watkinson MP

Introduction

There is widespread inconsistency in the quality of education across the country and universal enthusiasm for bringing about improvements. To the eternal shame of the Government, after receiving a state education, a fifth of all adults do not have the literacy or numeracy skills expected of an 11-year-old. This underachievement is not only damaging to business and the economy in artificially reducing the numbers of productive people in the population but also leads to higher levels of crime and disaffection through lack of self-esteem, hope and ambition.

Education reform should have the core values of raising standards and enhancing opportunity for all through diversity and innovation in the range of provision.

It is important to acknowledge that we have many highly successful, oversubscribed schools. These well-led, successful schools should have the autonomy to continue to excel and innovate, but a more diverse range of new schools is needed to cater for the differing preferences of parents and pupils.

Through these core values, the core problems of failing schools, low teacher morale, capital investment, secondary transfer, disaffected teenagers, over-regulation and the acceptance of mediocrity could be tackled and overcome. This article explores how that can be achieved.

International Comparisons

There are examples worldwide of different approaches to education that have addressed precisely the kind of problems we are experiencing and have demonstrated success. These include public funding of private schools, privatisation of under-performing state schools and voucher and tax credit schemes. They have each overcome the doctrinal divide between the private and state sectors by harnessing the former to improve the latter.

Education Vouchers

These can be universal, as in Sweden and Chile, or targeted at particular groups, as in the USA, Bangladesh, New Zealand and Colombia. The voucher, (which could also be called a cheque, coupon, account, personal education fund etc) is provided by government to parents for them to spend with an education provider of their choice.

The Swedish system was introduced in 1992 and has led to a rapid growth in independent schools, from religious schools to those run by for-profit corporations, provided that they fulfil certain basic requirements. Private school enrolment is expected to reach 50% within the next few years. Parents receive 75% of the per pupil cost of a state education and the money follows the pupils into public sector schools in other local authorities as well as the independent sector.

Denmark and the Netherlands have a similar arrangement which is restricted to parent-controlled, not-for-profit schools. Once schools have been approved by the National Agency for Education, local authorities are required by law to finance them.

Voucher schemes in America vary from state to state. Some target low-income families, as in Milwaukee and Cleveland, to allow them to attend registered private schools, while Florida targets failure in state schools rather than poverty. Parents may spend their vouchers in any independent, religious or government school. The effect of this is that state schools improve their performance rather than risk losing students and possible closure.

In Columbia, where there is a shortage of places at state schools, a targeted voucher scheme allowed poor children to benefit from private school provision and took them out of the overcrowded state sector.

Bangladesh piloted a gender-specific voucher scheme in 1982, aimed at girls from low income families who would not otherwise have been able to obtain a secondary school education. Female enrolment in secondary schools rose from 27% to 44% in five years.

Education Tax Credits

Educational tax credits can take three forms. First, non-refundable tax credits where the costs of the child's private education is paid for by the parents who are then able to deduct it from their annual tax liability. Second, refundable tax credits, where a sum in excess of the parent's tax liability can be claimed. In this case, those who pay little or no tax could receive additional funds. Third, tax credits may be used to allow businesses or philanthropically-minded individuals to fund the education of a disadvantaged child's private education and deduct the cost from their tax liability. Many American states use variations of the tax credit; most are means-tested and may be used for private tutoring, books, transport, computers and educational materials, as well as school fees. Canada introduced a graduated voucher scheme to subsidise private education in 2002, starting at 10% and rising annually to 50% in 2006.

Tax relief of various types to cover private educational expenses is common in over half the countries in the European Union.

Public Support for Private Education

Government support of private education is widespread across Europe. As the European Commission noted, Britain is one of only two countries, the other being Greece, that do not support private education financially. This has not deterred the government from exercising control over private education institutions through heavy regulation. The UK government's version of state-subsidised private schools, City Academies, are large capital-rich projects that use private funding for their construction, in contrast to the much smaller schools prevalent in Europe and America that are accessible to smaller grassroots organisations.

In the Netherlands, any group of parents or other interested parties can apply to establish a new school and successful applicants are guaranteed to receive state funding to set up and maintain their school. 70% of Dutch pupils attend private schools which range from all the great world religions to Montessori and Steiner. Although no top-up fees may be charged, schools may receive parental contributions towards the cost of extra-curricular activities or additional staff. A similar system operates in Denmark where the take-up is more modest, about 21%, and moderate fees are charged (£700-£900 per child, per annum) to demonstrate parental responsibility.

In the German Lander, subsidies comparable to the cost of state education are paid to private schools provided that they are non-profit bodies. Top-up fees are allowed and these schools enjoy complete freedom over timetables, curricula and textbooks. Moreover, private schools are free to promote religious or philosophical views, use teaching methods of their own choice, and hire and fire teaching staff.

An interesting variation on state subsidy has developed in Hong Kong. Fee-paying school places are provided for most 15-year-olds and a percentage of the funds collected is channelled into subsidised places for poor families.

Charter schools in America are free from direct administrative control, but they must meet the performance standards set by their charter. They can be converted state or private schools or brand new. They may not charge fees and are funded per pupil by the state, so their continued success depends upon satisfied parents and good results. There is no protection from bankruptcy. There were over 2000 Charter schools in 2001, run mainly by charities and for-profit companies

Education Management Companies are a growing trend in America. They take over failing schools and run them either as Charter schools or under contract with the school districts. They are all schools of choice – no parents are forced to send their children to them and all parents of pupils currently on roll may choose to opt out of a school that converts. They serve a largely disadvantaged intake, and the assessment of pupils' progress is a priority alongside quarterly learning contracts with parents. A higher percentage of funding is devolved to the classroom than in state schools and profits are taken from lower administration costs.

An innovative for-profit company in the UK, Explore Learning, provides supplementary learning for 6-16 year olds to help them improve in maths, science, English and ICT. The first base was in a supermarket, where children could receive an hour of one-to-one tuition tailored to their individual achievement level at a much lower cost than private tuition.

The evidence

Raising Standards

The market approach can be justified by demonstrating that it raises standards better than non-market approaches and often at a lower cost.

Students from poorer families on a targeted voucher scheme in Milwaukee reached achievement levels higher than would normally have been expected of them, compared with a control group of state school students.

Improved standards in previously failing state schools have been achieved across America through voucher systems that reward success, rather than reinforce failure. Pupil numbers are maintained through improvements in behaviour, attendance and achievement levels, as well as parental satisfaction with the quality of education provided, as the state sector can no longer take its customer-base for granted.

Enhancing Opportunity

Voucher schemes targeted at specific groups, such as students from low-income or single-female-headed households have increased inclusion in private education in America, whereas in the Netherlands, where 70% attend private schools, the social composition of pupils does not differ significantly between the two sectors.

In Sweden, the universal voucher system has shown that the share of students attending private schools is also larger, and many private schools are established to serve disadvantaged young people. The worst performing schools are the state schools; however, there is no evidence that low achievers are adversely affected by increased competition from independent schools.

In the UK, the highly successful Assisted Places Scheme, which enabled gifted students from poor families to receive private education, was abolished by this government. A voucher scheme would be one way of restoring that opportunity.

Proposals for Reform

The following proposals would bring the world's diverse education agenda to Britain by breaking down the social apartheid between the state and private sectors, encouraging the growth of new schools more rapidly than by state sector reform alone, and driving up standards in state schools by stimulating innovation and responsiveness to parents' wishes. Forward-thinking LEAs could volunteer, or seriously failing LEAs could be chosen, to run pilot schemes. However, the voucher system should not be seen

only as a means of improving choice and opportunity for disadvantaged families.

Targeted Vouchers

This proposal offers an escape route for pupils trapped in failing (or not improving) state schools, to either new or existing private schools, or successful state schools that can offer them hope and incentives to improve. It also gives huge incentives to failing state schools to improve and retain their pupils. Schools already registered with the Independent Schools Council would be eligible and vouchers could be used at any registered educational provider, including charities, trusts, cooperatives and for-profit providers, religious or philosophical groups.

Universal Choice

This is a more radical approach in which all pupils, not just those from disadvantaged families, would be eligible for vouchers that could be used in any private or state school. Once new schools have been established and spare capacity created, real choice would be available. Parents might favour their nearest local school, for social reasons or convenience of location, or simply because it is a good school. Others could opt to travel further afield to a school with a style or ethos that they prefer. Choice of school would rest with the parent not the state. At secondary transfer, parents would not be told by the state which school their child must attend, rather, schools would be competing for pupils on the strength of their reputation and record of achievement. Vouchers, therefore, also drive standards up through competition.

Cost

The cost to the Treasury is a key point in achieving political viability. Targeted voucher schemes in America have not resulted in a drain on the public purse and can even produce a net saving. Excluding higher tax payers from eligibility for universal vouchers might be one way of reducing the cost, however, this is discounted as it would be unfair to the many who are not high earners but now find themselves in the higher bracket. If universal vouchers were set at, say, 70% of the costs of state education, they would be unlikely to lead to a net increase to the Treasury but would still be attractive to parents. The face value of the voucher would, of course, influence the level of take up.

Education tax credits allowable against parents' income tax liability are another option, claimed through PAYE or self-assessment forms. The

costs would rely upon how many children were withdrawn from the state sector, with a resultant saving.

Conclusion

Innovative approaches to education work. Throughout Europe and the wider world a range of approaches provide higher standards of teaching and learning, opportunity for all pupils, irrespective of background or ability and real diversity and choice in educational provision. The introduction of new schools provides that essential ingredient to choice – spare capacity. The doctrinal state control over which school a child must attend could be overcome. How much healthier a system in which a range of good schools compete for pupils by demonstrating their success rather than parents competing for too few places at too few popular schools.

*With acknowledgement of the research work of James Tooley,
Pauline Dixon and James Stansfield.*

Europe: a Conservative rethink

Roger Helmer MEP

Recently a Conservative leadership candidate was reported as saying that we must stop running away from the debate on Europe. He is right.

In 2001 we talked about the EU, and the Pound, *ad nauseam*. And we lost the election. This does not mean that the public don't care about the issue, still less that they want a more positive approach to the European project. Far from it.

Tony Blair had offered a referendum on the euro. For most electors, the euro was a proxy for the whole European question. They had been promised a separate referendum on the issue, and therefore they were prepared to disregard it during the General Election. They wanted to hear about a comprehensive programme for government, about schools and hospitals and tax and pensions and immigration, and we failed to offer it to them, or if we did offer it, the message was drowned out by our strident slogans on the EU.

In 2005, like generals fighting the last war, we had learned the lesson of 2001 all too well. So we failed to talk about Europe at all. To be fair, Blair had tried to repeat the trick of 2001 by offering, very grudgingly and after a huge public campaign by Tories and other sceptics, a referendum on the Constitution.

Yet in focussing on five domestic issues and ignoring the EU, we were less than frank with the voters, because every one of our five issues raised potential conflicts with EU law. Most conspicuously, the EU Commission itself announced during the campaign that our Conservative commitments on immigration and asylum were in breach of EU law, and could not be delivered.

This illustrates the difficulty of assessing the importance of the EU issue in modern British politics. We are all well aware that on a prioritised list of voters' concerns, the EU comes close to bottom. Yet those of us engaged in politics know (or ought to know) that Brussels influences virtually every other policy area, usually in a malign direction. Our task, therefore, is not to ignore the EU, but to explain to voters why it matters.

Yet despite the salience of the issue, senior Conservatives keep mouthing the same old platitudes. “The benefits of EU membership are self-evident”. “Britain will remain a full and committed member of the EU”.

The benefits of membership are by no means self-evident. That is why many euro-sceptics, and especially Lord Pearson, have made a point of demanding a Treasury White Paper on the costs and benefits of EU membership.

The only conspicuous benefit of EU membership is free trade in the EU’s single market. Various figures are quoted, as a percentage of GDP, for this benefit, and these estimates generally fall between 1.8% and 2.5% of GDP. Naïve apologists for the EU compare 2.5% of GDP – around £25 billion – with the net direct costs of membership, at about £4 billion, and conclude that membership is a huge benefit.

They fail to take into account the massive cost of excessive regulation in the EU, estimates for which range upwards from 4%. The Commission once cited (without endorsing it) a double-digit estimate.

There is a more fundamental question – would the same trade benefits be available without EU membership, and without ceding powers to Brussels? The answer is clearly yes.

The EU has bilateral free-trade deals with dozens of countries, and is negotiating similar deals with many more. Such deals offer virtually all the trade benefits of membership without the political damage.

EU apologists love to refer to what they call “regulation by fax”, which they argue occurs in (for example) Norway, which is obliged to accept some parts of the *acquis communautaire*, without a say in making the rules. But Britain is a much larger economy, and a much larger net customer, of the EU than is Norway. We would negotiate better terms. Mexico (which has a free-trade deal with the EU) is not subject to EU rules, and nor would Britain be.

The German Bundesbank (not noted for its euro-scepticism) has said “it can identify no trade benefits to German industry from the single market”. It reached this conclusion when its analysis showed that extra-EU trade for German industry had grown faster than intra-EU trade. Switzerland exports twice as much to the EU, *per capita*, as the UK does.

European countries not in the EU (Switzerland, Iceland, and Norway) have a higher *per capita* GDP than EU countries.

So the trade benefits of EU membership would be available through a bilateral treaty. This is an example of a more general truth: *there is no benefit of EU membership which could not be achieved through bilateral or multilateral treaties, without out-sourcing our governance to Brussels.*

If the EU does little for trade and prosperity, it does less for democracy. The EU parliament presents a façade of democracy, yet it is the only one of the EU's major governing institutions that is directly elected. More fundamentally, there is no European *demos*, no underlying European public opinion, on which representative government can be based. Without such a *demos*, voting is mere arithmetic, not democracy.

Other factors militate against accountability. MEPs are intrinsically biased, because, for the most part, only those who feel enthusiastic about the European project offer themselves as candidates. Unrepresentative NGOs and lobby groups have undue influence in Brussels, where self-appointed zealots are invited into the heart of the legislative process. The EU is not, and cannot be, democratic.

Of course it is possible to have a democratic Europe, but only through democratic nation-states trading and cooperating together.

The EU also threatens our national security. In a host of ways it is undermining the transatlantic relationship which has been the cornerstone of our security for the last century. It proposes to end the China arms embargo. Its Galileo global positioning system, in partnership with Russia and China, threatens US dominance in battlefield location technology.

Worst of all, our MOD's commitment to the EU's new battlefield communications system means that within a few years it may well become impossible for British forces to fight alongside our American allies. We will not be able to talk to each other. Meantime the EU is pressing ahead with its Defence Procurement Agency, despite the fact that with the EU Constitution in limbo, it had no legal basis for the agency.

The EU's ECHR and the so-called Charter of Fundamental Rights go to the heart of the conservative social agenda which the Cornerstone group

espouses. And we can take no comfort from the recent rejection of the Constitution (of which the Charter forms part). The Charter is already being called in aid by the ECJ, and its provisions will come in as case law, regardless of the fate of the Constitution.

Three concrete examples. As remarked above, EU law would prevent a future Conservative government from implementing reasonable and fair immigration, asylum and anti-terror laws (as even Tony Blair, to his credit, has now recognised). Our government found that it could not imprison foreign terror suspects because this amounted to discrimination against foreign nationals. But what is the nation-state *for*, if not to deliver benefits, privileges and protection to its nationals which are not available to non-nationals?

Anti-discrimination law creates recruitment problems for faith schools. What could be more reasonable than that (say) a Roman Catholic school should favour Catholics for its staff? Yet we had to fight a rear-guard action to ensure that they can discriminate on grounds of religion even for teachers of religion!

And there is the vital issue of the recognition of marriage in the tax system. The equation of marriage with other types of partnership is entirely specious, and for a very simple reason: marriage is a contract between *three* parties: a man, a woman and society at large. While some favour it on moral grounds, it can be justified on the purely pragmatic basis that (as all the evidence shows) a conventional marriage is the best environment for child-rearing, and as such deserves public recognition, both socially and fiscally.

These are policy decisions which must be made by our elected politicians in Westminster, not by remote lawyers and bureaucrats in foreign institutions where we have no control and little influence.

So where does this leave Conservative EU policy? We want to maintain the independence, self-determination and democracy of our country. But we also want to have free access to European markets.

We have made an excellent start by demanding the return of fisheries and foreign aid, and deciding that we should scrap the damaging "social chapter". Gordon Brown has suggested that regional policy should be repatriated. He is right. We should also bring back agriculture. We must

take back full control of justice and home affairs; foreign and defence policy and defence procurement; social, employment and economic policy, and environmental policy.

In many of these areas, of course, we will be eager to cooperate with our European neighbours, but we will do so as a free and independent nation, on the basis of bilateral or multilateral treaties – not as a province in a country called Europe, at the *diktat* of Brussels institutions.

The detail will be complicated, but the principle is simple. We want a relationship with Europe based *solely* on free trade and voluntary, inter-governmental cooperation.

Rediscovering Conservatism for the British nation

Bill Cash MP

The Conservative Party has lost its way. This has happened at least six times since 1800. The present failure is therefore an historic opportunity for renewal and for changing the course of events. This will only come about - as on every other occasion - when the Conservative Party rediscovers its role as the Party of Principle in the National Interest. Country first, Constituency Second, Party third.

Many of the proposed changes to the Conservative Party Constitution will undermine the grassroots of the Party and the principles of free speech and local autonomy which it enshrines. I believe that no person should aspire to the Conservative Party leadership who does not subscribe to the principles set out in this essay, or indeed who has failed to do so in the past. Modernisation is bunk; in the hands of the Party's left wing, One Nation politics is No Nation politics; Conservatism needs action, not "action man" politics.

Britain has increasingly lost control of its own affairs. It has allowed itself to be crushed by an obsolete and failing European ideology affecting every walk of life; by over-regulation, bureaucracy, and political correctness. It is now under siege by terrorism from within and without. Britain is losing confidence in its history and achievements, in its democracy, laws, institutions and priorities - and, with this, its capacity to govern itself. Now is the opportunity, indeed the obligation, for the Conservative Party to return Britain to the British people, based on clear principles, consistency, foresight and judgement. None of this will come about without political will and the restoration of trust.

There are 44.1 million electors in this country - only 27.1 million of whom actually voted in the last election - just 8.8 million voted Conservative. There are millions of people who are 'conservative' who, given the right lead, would willingly vote for us. They must be given reason to trust the principles and promises of the Leader and the Party itself.

So what are these principles in practice and in priority?

1. Returning national self-government and the Supremacy of Parliament, on behalf of the voters. Restoring the confidence of the electorate and of MPs in themselves.
2. Upholding freedom and public safety, which are mutually interdependent.
3. Foreign policy and defence by alliance, not subservience.
4. Parliamentary and Constitutional Reform - direct democracy, decisions and laws for the people by debate and judgement, not diktat.
5. A Conservative Party and leadership dedicated to these principles.

Principles that matter in practice

1. Returning national self-government and the Supremacy of Parliament on behalf of the voters.

A weak Parliament is a weak nation. The first duty of government is to protect the people. This is undermined when lawmaking is taken away from their Parliament and made elsewhere, as in the European Union.

Assuming that other member states will not fundamentally renegotiate the existing European treaties, withdrawal will become necessary and new arrangements for co-operation established between those states who so decide.

Parliament makes the laws, the judiciary must apply that law and uphold it - not overturn it. They are constitutionally obliged to apply the latest clear and unambiguous Acts of Parliament, e.g. which state they are made "Notwithstanding the European Communities Act 1972", similarly with the Human Rights Act 1998.

2. Upholding freedom and public safety, which are mutually interdependent.

The Human Rights Act should be repealed; we should withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights, and we should pass laws at Westminster, as we have for generations, that make for a fair, tolerant and just nation. This, of course, embraces genuine immigrants and asylum-seekers as prescribed by our own laws, but impossible conflicts between upholding universal treaties on human rights (based merely on prerogative, not statute) and preventing a proper suppression of terrorists and promoters of terrorism, add nothing to social cohesion. Alleged terrorists are entitled to habeas corpus and a fair trial, but the power to guarantee national security must be restored to the Government, not left to judges. Legal aid in this sphere should be greatly curtailed. The appalling spectacle of public agitators who treat Britain with hatred and contempt being protected by "human rights" legislation and financed by the taxpayer must stop. Our veto on the removal of border controls was absurdly given away in the negotiations on the Amsterdam Treaty by Conservative Ministers in 1995. This must be restored.

3. Foreign policy and defence by alliance, not subservience.

Britain has entered alliances since the Middle Ages with other countries, including those in Europe, but until the last twenty years has not bound herself to these within a legal straitjacket. First the Maastricht Treaty, then Amsterdam and Nice, and the European Constitution, mean that Britain has lost its independence of action in Foreign Affairs and Defence. Alliances are one thing, subservience is another. This must be reversed. Our relationship with the USA is based on mutual vital national interests in defence of democracy and must be the pivot of our policy. As Churchill said, "The greatest fact of the twentieth century is that Britain and America marched together". So in peace and against terrorism, as in war, we must march in the twenty-first.

4. Parliamentary and Constitutional Reform - direct democracy, with decisions and laws made in Parliament and locally through the people by debate and judgement, not diktat. Restoring the confidence of the electorate and of MPs in Parliament and themselves.

Parliament has been undermined. The Executive has gained supremacy over Parliament through the present whipping system and the intimidation of MPs by the threat of deselection. Yet they are representatives of the voters, not delegates. MPs are neutered by the power given to

bureaucracy in Whitehall and Brussels - little of this is publicly known, and less is understood. Over-regulation is costing British business £100 billion a year.

MPs have lost confidence in their own judgement and their capacity to influence events and policies. Crucially, the Speaker must be given back control over the House of Commons and its Standing Orders and procedure, based on clearly defined immutable principles, such as the need for proper time for debate. Mindless filibustering is unacceptable, but the prevention of reasonable time for discussion of essential issues by guillotine/programme motions must be stopped. Select Committees must be guaranteed true independence and MPs guaranteed theirs. No MP should be deselected for exercising his or her political judgement or speaking his or her mind. Resignation from office should become the norm when necessary on principle and when promises to the electorate have been broken or when Parliament has been deceived. Fair accusations of these should be allowed in Parliament.

The Supremacy of Parliament, which is the voters' ring of steel, must be absolutely affirmed by Act of Parliament, requiring the judges to apply and give effect to the latest Act of Parliament passed on any issue. This must be made clear and unambiguous, irrespective of European laws of Treaties, International Treaties, and Conventions on Human Rights or their like. All Treaties must be passed in Parliament, not by the Government alone. The House of Lords must be in part elected (80%) with its own constituencies, cycles of election and constitutional functions. Finally, judges of senior rank should be subject to approval by a Joint Committee in Parliament.

5. A Conservative Party and leadership dedicated, from within, to these principles.

In closing, having set out above some proposals for reform of matters affecting the nation's Constitution, I would like to recommend some for reform of the Party Constitution. It needs radical review. The recent attempts through the Conduct Rules to suppress freedom of speech by candidates and MPs must be wholly rejected. Constituency Associations must be generally self-governing on Conservative principles, including the selection and deselection of MPs. The Board of the Party must have its functions confined to administration.

There must be enforceable criteria for proper standards of ethics and conduct by MPs and candidates, but they should not be prevented from speaking freely or exercising independent judgement. The Party leader must provide political direction based on Conservative principles, the Chief Whip being instructed accordingly.

Who Governs Britain?

Owen Paterson MP

People are fed up with politics and politicians because they know that their vote has little impact on how they are actually governed. A vote in a local government election will have little bearing on the level of council tax or the manner in which refuse is collected, because most of local government finance and the tasks imposed on local government are decided by central government.

Victims of crime cannot change their local policing policy or their Chief Constable because these are decided by central Government which dictates national policies. No vote in any election will elect politicians capable of changing the Working Time Directive, the most expensive piece of legislation ever imposed upon the British people. The European Commissioners are effectively a one-party state; no Commissioner can ever be removed by a popular vote.

The other great problem of contemporary government is that there is simply too much of it. Central government has taken on so many responsibilities that it is not possible for the politicians to discharge their responsibilities adequately, with a result that vital decisions are delegated either to civil servants or the growing number of agencies and quangos. Again those that run these quangos spending huge sums of public money run no risk of losing their jobs in an election.

Conservative policy should be driven by a simple ideal. No organisation which supplies a citizen with services should be exempt from the citizen's ability to change that supplier either by voting or by spending his money differently. Privatisation has given citizens unprecedented choice and the power to change suppliers of telecommunications and energy supply.

The State has a lousy track record as a supplier of health and education services and these can be returned to the market. Under a voucher system, patients and parents would have the power to choose between state, private and charitable provision - as in every other successful Western country. The whole costly paraphernalia of centrally-directed targets and bureaucracy, requiring providers to satisfy political objectives laid down by national politicians, rather than the demands of individual

patients and pupils, would disappear at a stroke. Huge sums would be released from unproductive bureaucracy to satisfy customers.

At local level, it is essential that we return local accountability to police forces by introducing elected chief constables to take charge of each force and dictate local policy in accordance with the wishes of the people they serve.

In order for local authorities to act independently and be responsive to their local voters, they should be given clear areas of policy which they would have to fund themselves. This would give responsibility to Council candidates to present a programme of activity that they would have to finance and justify to their electorate. The current revenues from VAT are approximately the same as the central government funding to local authorities. VAT should be abolished and replaced by a local sales tax, paid to local authorities. This would create a virtuous circle of tax competition between local authorities driving local taxes down.

This would free local authorities from central government interference to provide services in accordance with the wishes and the purses of their electors, instead of being subject to targets, or any other performance indicators set by central government. Councillors would be accountable to their electors. Services would conform to the wishes of local people expressed at a local election rather than being imposed by European directives or central government diktats, over which local government electors have no control whatsoever.

There is a strong case for returning local services to delivery by county authorities. Counties have a long track record of showing that they are small enough to be trusted by local people, that they can be represented by genuine locals but that they are large enough to have the momentum to deliver. Returning real power to these units would be true devolution and would render the current, totally imbalanced, devolution settlement void. The devolution referenda excluded 85% of the population - i.e. the English - but the disgracefully wasteful talking-shops in Edinburgh and Cardiff are supported by a preponderance of English taxpayers' money. This is wrong. There should be an all-UK referendum on the issue of abolishing the existing devolution settlement and replacing it with real genuine devolution to county units.

Other functions should be devolved to elected local authorities or other bodies. These would include sea fishing, with the establishment of regional marine management authorities, and agriculture, which could be managed at county level.

For those functions retained by central government, Parliamentary scrutiny should be improved and the system of Parliamentary Select Committees strengthened. Members should be elected by MPs and chairmen should be drawn from opposition parties or independent members. There is much to be learnt from American Congressional Committees. Inquiries should be properly funded and staffed, with trained researchers. The Committees should have power to summon witnesses and to demand evidence under oath, with criminal sanctions for perjury.

There is a common feeling of helplessness that officials, more than elected politicians, run the country. This must change, and Parliamentary Select Committees should have a role here. Employment terms of public servants must be revisited. The perception is that, in far too many cases, when large amounts of public money are wasted or there have been serious failures of duty, no one is found responsible, or those responsible are not punished and in some cases are actually promoted. Governments, whether central or local, must also have the power to terminate the employment of those who fall short of the standards set and should be prepared to exercise that power.

We must get back to the Conservative concept that the State exists to serve the people, and that the people are genuinely sovereign. It should therefore be a central tenet of a Conservative government that it cannot delegate its law-making powers to any other organisation or institution. This applies to external bodies such as the European Union and internally, where currently so much effective law is made by officials without political input or control. Law-making must remain in the hands of politicians directly elected by the British people to serve their exclusive interests, affording the people an opportunity to remove legislators if they do not approve of their actions.

It is ludicrous that over 60 per cent of the laws imposed upon the fourth-largest economy in the world are created by people who have not been elected and cannot be removed in elections. A Conservative government should regain the power currently vested in the European Union by a fundamental renegotiation of all the existing treaties. Central to this

would be the removal of the supremacy of the European Court of Justice and other international courts, including the Court of Human Rights. This would entail the withdrawal from the Convention on Human Rights and the repeal of the Human Rights Act, which give excessive powers over British citizens to those who have not been elected. All existing EU legislation should be reviewed, and unless an overpowering case can be made for its retention - in which case it should be re-enacted as British law - it should be repealed.

Parliament should not only be supreme but in respect of the actions of British citizens or legal entities in the UK, no institution other than a British court should have jurisdiction over them. In the application of law, British courts should be supreme, headed by the House of Lords, which should be the sole, final arbiter of law. Furthermore, no British institution should have the power to levy fines or other penalties on citizens, without their having recourse to a court of law. As to our relations with other countries, we should look to normal government-to-government treaties

An Agriculture and Fisheries Policy for the UK

One of the first ambitions of Commissioner Sicco Mansholt, the creator of the Common Agricultural Policy, was to reform the very policy he had delivered. In fact, so far was it from his free-market ideal that, at one point, he considered committing suicide. Since then, virtually every European politician of substance has called for its reform and despite multiple attempts to improve it, it remains wholly unsatisfactory.

The current reforms arising from the “mid-term review” have gone a long way, but they still fail to address the underlying and inherent failures in the policy. It is time to call it a day. Agricultural policy, in its entirety, should be returned to the UK.

The central tenet of our new “repatriated” policy is that keeping farming healthy is important to the nation. We also believe that the first and primary task of farming is to grow food. Freed from the central direction of the EU, however, we would expect farmers to reduce their dependency on commodities and look to producing more high-quality finished food for the market.

To assist in this process, we would make the market more “transparent” by ensuring that there was clear and unambiguous “point of origin” food

labelling. We would also reduce or simplify much of the burdensome regulation which stifles enterprise. By this means, we would encourage farmers to focus on “added value” such as meat- processing and cheese-making. This would lead to a restoration of the support infrastructure and processing industries, and a network of small slaughterhouses.

The abolition of food production subsidies will encourage the move towards finished food production by eliminating market distortions. We accept that there is no case for subsidising food production; nevertheless, there are valid reasons for continuing taxpayer support to farming and rural enterprises.

The essential reason for this is that it makes economic sense to do so, as farming in the UK produces much more than food. There are other “products” which farming produces or could produce: scenery and facilities for countryside activities; a sound environment; energy crops and electricity.

As to the scenery, although the farm-gate value of food produced is in the order of £12 billion annually, the value of rural tourism and countryside activities, which is reliant on the landscape that farmers produce and manage, is in the order of £13 billion. In other words, the amenity produced by farmers as a by-product of producing food is worth more than the food produced.

Yet, while farmers are paid by consumers for producing food, there is no mechanism for rewarding them specifically for maintaining or improving the landscape. Thus, we will have a simple system of “amenity payments”. These would be based on contributions made to the beauty of the countryside.

As for the environment – the second “product” - we recognise that much of the flora and fauna which we value has relied on the action of farmers. While we expect farmers to maintain their land in a responsible way, there are good precedents for additional “environmental payments” where they suffer losses or incur direct costs in providing “added value” to the environment.

The current reality of environmental schemes is that farmers face a nightmare of complex regulation, especially under the new regime of

“cross-compliance”; the essence of our policy would be to minimise the bureaucracy and maximise the value.

Energy crops provide the third exciting product. Technology improvements now enable farming to make significant contributions to the UK energy demand. Yet, while some environmentalists are critical of farming support, they are happy to see huge subsidies given to wind farms (one 2.2 MW turbine attracts nearly £500,000 in subsidy, annually). Re-balancing support to encourage farmers to grow energy-producing crops could yield higher net gains without the visual and other damage caused by wind farms, at less overall cost.

One key crop is biomass such as the environmentally friendly miscanthus. However, biomass need not be just another commodity crop. With the construction of small generators on-farm, this gives farmers the opportunity to produce electricity as a brand new finished product on their own land – the fourth of our “non-food” products.

Devoting land to energy production would have an important side-effect. Currently there is a world surplus of food but in the year before last the world consumed more grain than it produced.

As demand from China increases, there is a real danger of a period of global food deficit. Land planted for energy, while not necessarily strictly economic as an energy producer, could be quickly returned to food production should the need arise, effectively giving the nation a strategic food reserve. Given global uncertainties, energy crop subsidies are, we believe, a price worth paying to keep land in production when there is no demand for the food that could otherwise be produced.

If farmland is allowed to decay or be covered by concrete, we could be storing up serious trouble. We should never rely entirely on the rest of the world continuing to supply us with cheap, plentiful and healthy food.

We would take seriously the needs of the wider rural economy, the benefits of farm diversification and the reintegration of farming with local economies. In addition to emphasising local food production and marketing, we will permit sensitive relaxation of the planning regime for on-farm diversification, to encompass such activities as non-intrusive light manufacturing, warehousing, office parks, activity centres and transport businesses.

When drawing up our national policies, we will also take into account the issues of rural infrastructure and the problems of delivering public services in thinly populated areas.

Given the devastating impact of animal and food-borne diseases on the health and prosperity of agriculture, we will upgrade disease surveillance and port security. We will also improve the management and elimination of disease in animals, in close co-operation with industry bodies. We will consider proposals for delegating control functions, either to industry or delegated authorities, under the supervision of central government.

We will not be cowed by urban activists when determining priorities for disease control. We also recognise the economic, employment and environmental benefits of country sports. We will stop further encroachment on these pursuits and repeal the hunting ban.

Fisheries Policy

The Common Fisheries Policy is a biological, environmental, economic and social disaster; it is beyond reform. It is a system that forces fishermen to throw back more fish dead into the sea than they land; it has caused substantial degradation of the marine environment; it has destroyed much of the fishing industry, with compulsory scrapping of modern vessels, and has devastated fishing communities.

Fisheries cannot be managed successfully on a continental scale; they need local control. That is the reason why Michael Howard and previous Conservative leaders have stated that the Conservatives will return our fisheries to National and Local Control. This accords completely with our instinct for small government. Issues should be tackled on an international basis only when justified, at a national level when appropriate and otherwise locally.

Experience from the Falklands, visiting numerous British fishing ports and successful fisheries in Norway, the Faeroes, Iceland, Canada and the USA, backed by extensive discussions with scientists, experts, fishermen and environmentalists provides a policy framework tailored to suit the specific requirements of the UK. It is based on the following principles:

- Effort control based on “days at sea” instead of fixed quotas
- A ban on discarding commercial species

- Permanent closed areas for conservation
- Provision for temporary closures of fisheries
- Promotion of selective gear and technical controls
- Rigorous definition of minimum commercial sizes
- A ban on industrial fishing
- A prohibition of production subsidies
- Zoning of fisheries
- Registration of fishing vessels, skippers and senior crew members
- Measures to promote profitability rather than volume
- Effective and fair enforcement

However, simply exchanging a bureaucratic system run from Brussels for one run by the bureaucrats in London and national centres is no panacea. It must be accompanied by a local management system, which has the confidence and trust of the nation and the fishermen who work within it.

The essence of our policy, therefore, is National and Local Control. National government will set the strategic framework in which the priorities will be the restoration of the marine environment and rebuilding the fishing industry; new local bodies will take day-to-day responsibility for managing their fisheries.

A Defence Policy for Great Britain

Traditionally, defence policy is predicated on the preservation of the territorial integrity of the nation and its possessions against actual or potential invaders. However, with the end of the Cold War, there is no significant threat of invasion, against which major forces need to be earmarked, nor is there any likelihood of any such threat materialising in the short to medium-term.

Instead, we are faced with the more diffuse, so-called “asymmetric” threats, including failed and “rogue” states, and state-sponsored terrorism. Those threats, and long-term humanitarian crises, fuel global instability and create conditions where domestic security is threatened directly by terrorism.

However, the diffuse nature of the threats requires a global reach which is beyond the capacity of the United Kingdom, and requires a flexibility of response that we are not always able to provide. We are no longer a

world power and are neither willing, nor able economically, to take on the role of “world policeman”.

We have, therefore, found it more advantageous to work with allies in coalitions, either bi- or multilaterally, or through organisations such as the United Nations, Nato and the European Union, affording ourselves only a very limited capability to act entirely independently.

It makes sense to continue to work within the framework of coalitions and therefore to construct defence policy on the basis of equipping ourselves to work with our allies.

Naturally, these will tend to be those with whom we have a shared “world view” – or at least the greatest degree of commonality. To this extent, there are developing divergent views, stratifying largely between that of the Europeans and the United States and her many allies.

In the past, we have sought a “bridging role” between Europe and the United States, while maintaining good relations with Commonwealth nations such as Australia, New Zealand, India and others. However, it is undeniable that a polarisation of views is developing to such an extent that it is no longer possible to keep a foot in both camps, and a strategic choice will have to be made between one or the other.

At the moment, the choice is being made by default, through gradual doctrinal and technical harmonisation with our European Union partners, based on focusing our actions through the deployment of the European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF), outside the Nato framework. We believe that this is not in the national interest. The main force for global stability, through the promotion of democratic self-government, is the United States, acting either in coalition with willing partners or with Nato.

Therefore, we believe that, since a choice has to be made, that our defence efforts and the emphasis on structuring our armed forces should be on developing our ability to work effectively in concert with the United States and her allies. This should be the focus of our procurement policy and the doctrinal development of our forces.

However, as part of a community of nations with the shared interest of maintaining peace and prosperity, safeguarding the lives of those individuals who are less fortunate than ourselves, protecting the weak and

the innocent, we accept that the European nations have a valuable and necessary role in helping to maintain global stability.

We will use our influence to encourage European nations to abandon attempts to develop an autonomous European Union military capability, and channel efforts through Nato in accordance with the Washington Summit Agreement of 1999, supporting the Strategic Concept and the Defence Capabilities Initiative. In particular, we would see Nato as the primary mechanism for securing doctrinal and technical interoperability, without which coalition forces – whatever their composition – cannot be truly effective.

Inexorably linked to the execution of any defence policy is the nature of our Defence Industry Policy. It shapes our ability to share technology with our allies, and to benefit from technological developments, especially those of the United States – some of which are delivered by British-owned companies. In this context, we cannot expect free sharing as long as our home-based industries and our government are working with other governments and industry partners which are major suppliers to strategic rivals and potential enemies of the United States.

Therefore, we intend to refocus our industry and government partnerships, and our own arms sales policies, to mesh with our own strategic allies, to prevent the leakage of technology into potentially hostile hands.

We also intend to refocus our procurement policies and abandon the *de facto* “Europe first” policy, aiming to purchase equipment from sources which offer true value for money and which guarantee interoperability with our main allies. Further, we do not intend to pursue the line of favouring domestic programmes where it is not in our economic interests to do so, but will seek partnerships with like-minded nations, or offset deals where appropriate.

This notwithstanding, we accept a need to maintain security of supply, either by holding sufficient stocks of essential materials or, where more appropriate, maintaining a domestic manufacturing base, the combination sufficient to permit independent operations, should the national interest require.

In terms of the main component of our forces – the personnel – we are concerned to see that the recruitment of high quality men and women continues and that establishment numbers are maintained. Here, we do not see that this can be achieved if the military is treated as a body separate and distinct from the rest of society.

In order to do their jobs properly and to reflect the values of our society, soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen and women must be valued, respected members of our broader society and have close connections with it. We would rebuild the relationship between schools and the military, reintroducing combined cadet forces into schools, with good links also with universities and industry. To the same effect, we would rebuild the Territorial Army, and Reserve Units of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and The Royal Marines.

Overall, we recognise that the military is currently undergoing a major restructuring with the adoption of what is known as a “Network Enabled Capability” (NEC) which amounts to a revolution in military operations.

We support this transformation but do not believe it wise to expend considerable sums to achieve a unique British capability when it would be more economic and militarily advantageous to work closely with our US ally to produce a common system.

Nevertheless, we believe also that we must retain the skills for which British forces are so highly regarded, and support the traditional structures, such as the local Regiments, which give them their strength and continuity. The pursuit of technology is not incompatible with the maintenance of the finest traditions of our Armed Forces and should not be seen as a replacement.

Furthermore, while the adoption of NEC is necessary to enable “rapid reaction” expeditionary forces, and particularly the development of highly sophisticated, medium armoured forces, we do not believe this should be at the cost of sacrificing our heavy armour capability, which we believe still has, and will continue to have, a central role in the British Army and should be upgraded.

As regards the Royal Navy, we believe it should still be the Service that maintains our nuclear deterrent through its fleet of missile submarines. These, we believe, should be renewed to maintain a credible deterrent

against “rogue” states which might acquire or have acquired nuclear weapons and be tempted to use them.

For the rest of the fleet, we believe that it should progressively be reconfigured to support expeditionary warfare, with the focus on ships to support amphibious actions, including adequate carrier vessels. The Royal Marines should form a central part of this capability. Not least, this would give the United Kingdom the ability to mount rapid and effective humanitarian and relief operations. Our capability should be configured to provide also for these tasks. We should also work alongside the United States and our other maritime allies to maintain a strong capability which will enable us to protect our trade routes.

For the Royal Air Force, this should also be configured to support expeditionary warfare, reducing the air defence component to the minimum. It should be focused primarily on providing a strategic airlift and effective tactical ground support/strike, with a strong reconnaissance capability, including space assets and unmanned aerial vehicles

Beyond this, we need to consider to what extent the UK is prepared to join in coalition missions and what capabilities we are willing to afford. Clearly, the defence budget must be limited but in the post-Cold War world, limits are set by our willingness to pay more than they are by our capability.

Yet, in the public arena, those limits, in contrast to America, have never really been discussed. Therefore, for the longer term, we need to open a public debate on the shape and size of our armed forces so that government policy can better reflect the wishes of the people. In particular, we must also decide for the future whether we want or need to retain a full range of capabilities, or whether the national interest would be better served by limiting ourselves to certain specialist functions, deployed in concert with our allies.

A Better Environment

Pursuit of environmental protection or improvement has become a grand-scale exercise in socialism, where the State is the ultimate arbiter of the common good and exercises draconian powers in imposing its vision of what the environment should be. For Conservatives it is self-evidently true that “protecting” and “improving” the environment is a “good thing”

- but this can only be regarded as a generality. The term environment begs several questions, not least of which is, "what do you understand by the environment?"

The "environment" is what surrounds us. It is varied and encompasses everything from houses, gardens, roads, factory sites to farmland and virgin wilderness - together with air and water. By far the bulk of that environment is private property. It is maintained by its owners, often at considerable cost, and its impact - especially any adverse impact - on the wider environment is often determined by the ability of the owner to bear the economic costs of maintaining particular standards.

Regulating the environment, therefore, is effectively a matter of deciding what is to be protected and improved, to what standard and at what cost? What is the mix to be and what are the priorities? This destroys the argument for a "common vision". In each nation, state, region, district, town and village, we have different problems, different priorities, different needs, different standards, different expectations, and - crucially - different priorities for the expenditure of limited resources. Reconciling the problems, the spending priorities and the standards is a matter for individuals and communities and only then local and central governments.

Crucially, the standards maintained are invariably related to economic prosperity in that only where there is significant disposable income, above subsistence level, is wealth expended on environmental standards and then because people with higher incomes have higher expectations of the environment.

Thus, far from being an issue which demands excessive supra-national intervention, pressure for environmental improvement depends on the wealth of individuals and local communities. The role of the State, therefore, is best devoted to minimising barriers to prosperity - which arise most often from its own activities.

However, under the European Treaties, this has largely ceased to be an option in that environmental policy has become an exclusive Community competence to the extent that Nation States within the European Union no longer have independent environmental policies.

The question is whether a supra-national government should dictate those priorities. Should the EU be able to decide to elevate, say, a requirement for ultra-purity in drinking water over and above the need to repair leaky water pipes and the renewal of ageing sewers?

Against this, there is the mantra that “countries must work together”, as “pollution knows no frontiers”. This in some specific respects is true but the lie creeps in with the inference that the only way countries can work together is through the supranational construct of the EU. Yet, one of the most immediate trans-national pollution controversies affecting the EU was acid rain and the supposed effect of British power station emissions on Norwegian forests. Crucially, Norway was not a member of the EU yet mechanisms for dealing with the problem still existed.

Intergovernmental agreements were concluded under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), starting with the 1979 Geneva Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, which Britain ratified in 1982. This convention, which was legally binding, was further extended by no less than eight additional protocols.

In order for countries to work together, therefore, not only is the EU not essential but, inasmuch as “pollution knows no frontiers”, pollution has no more respect for the borders of the EU than any other artificial political construct. The borders of EU member states are too restrictive. Dealing with the wider problem needs larger and different groupings of countries than merely EU members. International progress on the environment can be maintained through trans-boundary agreements and we believe that this is the way forward.

As to more general issues, although the EU claims to be playing a “dynamic role” in protecting and improving the environment, long before the EU was in being, individual nation states had their own environmental programmes. In the case of the UK, we had strong legislation and programmes stemming from the Public Health Act of 1875, before some member states of the EU were even nations. In that respect, the EU is simply “hijacking” member state activities and taking the credit for them. We should revert to tried and tested legal mechanisms, such as the statutory nuisance legislation as the core of our regulatory system. This would return power to individuals, who would no longer have to rely on unaccountable quangos, whose numbers could then be reduced.

On the issue of recycling, we believe the regulatory route chosen by the EU has failed. For instance, one of the earlier examples of environmental action is the “batteries directive” 91/157/EEC, aimed at promoting the recovery and recycling of lead-acid batteries used in motor cars. Prior to that directive, in the UK we had an excellent system which accounted for 95 percent of all batteries disposed of, comprising a profitable business for a number of scrap merchants. The EU scheme, however, imposed a costly, rigid bureaucracy which destroyed the profitability of the collection system, as a result of which costs to end users increased and the percentage of batteries recovered fell to less than 60 percent.

Then we have the famous fridge mountain created by EU regulation 2000/2037 which turned old fridges into “hazardous waste”, prohibiting their recycling and turning a perfectly adequate – self-funding - collection and disposal into absolute chaos, ending up with thousands of fridges in huge dumps, costing the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds to dispose of them. This is on the back of the infamous “landfill directive”, which is causing no end of problems, not least a rash of fly tipping, massively increased costs and a network of expensive incinerators which few want, at a cost to the UK estimated at £6.9 billion.

So incoherent is the EU waste policy that even the experts have trouble making sense of it, with great confusion between what is waste disposal and what is recycling. This has led to the absurd situation where it has become virtually impossible to recycle waste oil and where Scottish Power are no longer allowed to use processed sewage to make electricity.

Soon we will have to deal with the End of Life Vehicle Directive, the introductory phase of which is already causing our streets to be littered with car wrecks, while the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Directive will do for personal computers, vacuum cleaners and washing machines exactly what the EU did for fridges.

Currently, EU environmental legislation, at a very rough estimate, looks like costing the British economy something like £40-50 billion over the next ten years or so, all to create more problems than are solved.

We should abolish much of this regulation. Where necessary, we would consider tax exemptions to kick-start new recycling industries, so that the process is demand rather than producer-led, at the same time

reducing the overweening bureaucracy that erodes the profitability of such enterprises.

Then there is the “REACH” directive on chemical testing which will create so many obstacles to the production and use of a wide range of chemicals that it will drive businesses abroad, where there are fewer controls of pollution than there are now. The net effect may well be to increase rather than reduce global pollution. Therefore, we will rely on common law provisions of “duty of care” allowing manufacturers to make their own judgements as to what is required to market products safely but at the same time affording recompense to those who are adversely affected.

According to the environmentalist Bjorn Lomborg, the Kyoto Agreement, if fully implemented, could cost between \$150 to \$300 billion a year without having any long-term effect on global warming, massively retarding developed economies and limiting their ability to assist developing countries. Even if the emission targets are met – and there is no chance that they will be – the best case scenario is that predicted warming is delayed by six years.

Nevertheless, this has not stopped the EU spawning the ultimate bureaucratic dream, the Emissions Trading Scheme which adds a further £25 billion a year to the costs of the productive economy. This is the EU’s idea of a “greener future”. Any impartial observer would see it is a vision of chaos.

We believe that a rational approach to the reduction of emissions to atmosphere – which is a public good in its own right – should be by means of enhanced technology. The Toyota Prius was developed for the market with private funds and is selling well. Assessing the two major areas, transport and electricity production, in the former, low-emission engines, pollution limiters such as catalytic converters and hybrid motors have considerable potential to improve air quality standards.

For electricity generation, advances in nuclear technology have made nuclear power a safer and more reliable option. Such means as “pebble bed” generators have the potential to meet all known requirements and they can also be used to produce hydrogen via high temperature, high pressure hydrolysis, allowing the full exploitation of fuel cell technology. We believe that these technologies should be adopted, rather than

seeking to cover the land with expensive, wasteful, intrusive and unreliable wind farms.

On a smaller scale, we believe the potential for agricultural production of biofuels should be exploited by rebalancing support for renewables. Set-aside land and the area devoted to the inefficient production of sugar beet in Europe used for crops such as miscanthus could produce the energy equivalent of 100 million barrels of oil. Even at a modest \$60 a barrel, this would equate to a saving of \$6 billion on imported energy. Britain could make a substantial contribution to this.

In conclusion, one of the environmentalists' mantras is that we should "think globally and act locally". With this we agree. The UK should develop its own solutions which benefit the nation and as a good citizen of the world, benefit the community of nations as well.

Criminal Justice Gone Mad

Julian Brazier MP & Douglas Carswell MP

George Millers' 1979 movie classic *Mad Max* portrayed a future dystopia of decaying order, a society in which gangs rampaged freely, while the police lacked either the will or the means to uphold the rule of law. The premise of Millers' apocalyptic vision of the future is that one day the criminal justice system stops bringing criminals to justice. In one of the films' opening scenes, a smug and self-righteous human rights lawyer obliges the police to drop their prosecution and set the bad guys free.

Unlike the ever more elaborate post-apocalypse scenarios of the big budget 'Mad Max' sequels that followed, the power of the original film lay not in any special effects, but in the simplicity of its central 'what if' premise: what if one day the police stopped going after the bad guys? What if the law, the lawyers and the judges did more to set the bad guys free than to bring them to justice? In short, what if the law served the lawless and forced the law abiding to become outlaws? Britain is still a long way from that, but not so far as it was a generation ago.

Since the early 1960s, crime and disorder have risen vertiginously under both Conservative and Labour governments (a trend briefly reversed when Michael Howard was Home Secretary), as the criminal justice system has grown more and more ineffective at bringing criminals to justice. In the year 2003, there were more recorded crimes than in the whole of the 1920s and 1930s combined. Yet the chances of a perpetrator of any one of these crimes being brought to justice is lower today than almost at any time in modern British history. Contrary to myth, Britain does not have a high prison population. Measured in terms of the prevalence of crime itself, rather than population, Britain's prison population is lower than in most previous eras.

Clearly some of the reasons for this tidal wave of crime lie in wider social malaise - the decline in healthy families and communities, and in those informal social networks which sustain decent behaviour amongst individuals. Yet part of the underlying reason lies in the unwillingness of the criminal justice system to fight crime.

Our police force, once regarded as the finest in the world, has been increasingly rendered impotent by four factors:

(1) Several Parliamentary measures, some of them introduced in response to the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four miscarriages of justice, removing traditional police powers to deal with disorder and rowdy behaviour.

(2) The introduction of micromanagement by Whitehall, progressively replacing local accountability.

(3) The introduction of the Crown Prosecution Service.

(4) A series of rulings by judges, many of them long before the Human Rights Act, which tilted the Law heavily in favour of the accused

The worst example of the first category is the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). This was passed by a Conservative government in 1984 with the blessing of all sides of the House -- perhaps an ill omen in itself. To protect the rights of the accused, this sets out in extraordinary detail, step by step, how prisoners are to be handled in police stations. Failure to follow these procedures to the letter, usually results in the collapse of the prosecution case in court.

This Act was designed to deal with serious deficiencies among a small number of police officers. Its framers failed to recognise that the more we regulate and micromanage the more we suffocate initiative, professionalism and leadership. The way to cope with *bad* police officers is to develop *good* leadership among senior officers, backed by the criminal Law in cases of serious misconduct. PACE undermines respect for the police among disorderly people and criminals. How many parliamentarians have stood next to a custody sergeant at two o'clock in the morning and heard a drunken suspect abuse him while he wearily seeks to fill in every box?

The problem with PACE goes much deeper, however. Under the ancient principle of habeas corpus, the police could hold a suspect for 24 hours before charges had to be brought. Many minor public order offences could be dealt with without involving the courts at all. Unruly drunks, for example, could be thrown into a police cell overnight and ejected in the morning, without paperwork. Today, a policeman seeing minor – but anti-social -- disorderly conduct has a choice between an arrest leading to

many hours of paperwork back at the station or turning a blind eye. Most yobbos know that.

The zero tolerance programme, so successfully introduced in New York, could never have even been started in this country because of PACE. From that very first decision to seize all those in New York illegally washing car windows and hold them overnight for criminal checks, the whole operation would have been illegal in Britain.

The second factor has been a progressive shift away from discretion by chief constables and their police authorities, towards micromanagement by Whitehall through targets, national initiatives and other forms of upward accountability. This too has bred a police culture that is ineffective in going after the bad guys. In 2001 a Home Office survey revealed that police officers spent almost as much time in the police station as on the street. There is no more illustrative example of the modern culture of British policing than the new requirement that officers should fill in a form -- an exercise taking seven minutes of an officer's time -- every time they stop a member of the public in the street. The assumption behind this is that the police's relationship with the community needs to be micromanaged from above.

Our criminal justice system is failing not simply because the police are reluctant to go after the criminals in our neighbourhoods, but because the public prosecutors are unwilling to chase suspects through the courts. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) possesses enormous discretion to determine whether or not to prosecute. Yet it is largely unaccountable as to how it exercises that discretion.

The result is an increasingly incompetent bureaucracy. Approximately 7% of cases are abandoned each year by the CPS "in error"¹⁷. By 2000, the CPS was bringing 65% fewer prosecutions against offenders aged 14-18 than had been prosecuted in 1984¹⁸, the year before the CPS was established, despite a huge increase in juvenile crime in the intervening years.

¹⁷ HM CPS Inspectorate Report, May 2002

¹⁸ Based on CPS calculations and Home Office criminal statistics quoted in Daily Telegraph, 30 April 2002

How then should the criminal justice system be made accountable in a way that would ensure that it did what it was supposed to do and administered justice to criminals?

Police authorities and the apparatus of top-down accountability should be scrapped. Instead a simple, effective and transparent system of local accountability should be introduced: directly elected individual Sheriffs. Initially, there would be one for each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales. Chief Constables would retain their operational independence, but they would answer to the Sheriff for their performance - and the Sheriff would answer to the public. PACE should be repealed.

Where there was a directly elected Mayor whose jurisdiction was congruent with a police force area, the Mayor would exercise the functions of the Sheriff. Sheriffs would appoint and dismiss Chief Constables. They would set their own targets for the force, make their own police plans, and crucially, control their own budgets.

The CPS should be reconstituted as a set of local Sheriff prosecution offices, answerable to the Sheriff for their success in securing convictions. The Sheriff could not order a prosecution, but may order one to be dropped. Prising apart prosecution arrangements from the police was another sad legacy from the Guildford Four/Birmingham Six cases. We have now had twenty years to see the disaster it has spawned. All the evidence from America is that success in beating crime arises from these two agencies working together under local accountability.

The changes advocated thus far would radically transform the criminal justice system at the point where criminals ought to be caught and prosecuted. But what of the judges and independent courts which determine their guilt?

Accountable to government not the public, the police and the public prosecutors have grown ineffective and have opted for what is easy. Unaccountable to anyone at all, the judges have expanded their remit and today take what are in effect political decisions. The media have rightly highlighted their protection of foreign terror suspects from deportation even to France. Closer to home is Prosecution Disclosure. This has nothing to do with ancient liberties; it was a tool developed by defence lawyers in the 1980s for getting trials abandoned. It eventually resulted in the Association of Chief Police Officers submitting a dossier of cracked

trials to the government and the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice. In each of their cases professional criminal gangs were able to get trials abandoned on technicalities.

These usually take one of two forms: first demanding the names of informers, even where villains had been caught red-handed and no witness was needed. This of course required abandoning the case, as an informer would be at risk of murder. The second approach is to make such wide-ranging demands on the police for information that large numbers of police officers are tied up full-time on the trial, nowadays one of the key factors keeping police officers at desks. Failure to meet the court's requirements means another abandoned trial, more evil men who walk free.

For youngsters lured into drug addiction and their families, for victims of violence, for the growing number of foreign children imprisoned in London brothels, trials abandoned on technical rulings are not triumphs for due process; they are a shameful abandoning of the weak and the defenceless to organised crime. Yet this has arisen not through any act of Parliament but from a series of rulings by judges in the 1980s. The (subsequent) Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act 1996 sought to curb the worst abuses. Yet Police representatives testify that judges continue to allow defence lawyers to abuse the system.

Increasingly, our judges now adjudicate on the basis of what they think the law ought to be, rather than what the law actually says. Even before the European Convention on Human Rights was incorporated into UK law, judges sometimes delivered interpretations in clear opposition to the law that Parliament had actually made. Judicial activism has taken various forms: extending the scope for judicial review, adjudicating on the basis of a Convention even before it is incorporated into UK law, or by simply striking down the will of Parliament because the judge disliked what the law said. Yet in each of its different guises, it is now a fact of political life in Britain.

The question is how to tackle judicial activism without undermining the important principle of judicial independence.

Since the political nature of the judiciary is now a fact of life, there is an argument for electing judges directly as in all non-federal judicial appointments in the USA. On balance however, such a change would be a

disproportionate reaction to the problem, just as PACE and the nationalisation of prosecution were overreactions to a few (albeit most serious) miscarriages of justice. A process of transparent Parliamentary hearings would be far more in accordance with Britain's traditions, and would unquestionably be an improvement on having senior judges nominated by a government appointed panel.

Judicial activism could also be checked by derogation from certain sections of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the centuries since the Bill of Rights, Parliament has never had to use its ancient power to dismiss a judge. It is to be hoped that the judiciary will draw back from encroaching on Parliament's right to change the Law.

We must give law enforcement back to communities by making accountability for policing and prosecution local, thus encouraging leadership to replace bureaucratic control in police and prosecution. We must remind judges that the protection of victims is as important as justice for the accused. As Home Secretary, Michael Howard pointed out that a collapse in confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to protect against crime is an open door to vigilantes.

The Foundations of the Conservative Party: Thoughts on Party Reform

Andrew Rosindell MP

Politics in Britain today is a world apart from what it was just a couple of decades ago. No longer can any political party rely on a "dyed in the wool" vote. These days all candidates seeking election must earn every single cross on every single ballot paper.

The days of taking the Conservative vote for granted are long gone, but following the 2005 General Election, there are encouraging signs that at last the party and more importantly, our candidates are getting the message.

In 2001, Romford was gained from Labour, the first Tory "GAIN" since 1997 and with the largest Conservative swing in Britain. I was surprised to discover that in the months that followed, some were more interested in explaining away the result in my constituency, preferring to claim that "Romford isn't typical", rather than trying to discover exactly how it was done and what could be learnt to help others do the same next time around.

Fortunately, there were many bright prospective candidates who were not so quick to dismiss Romford. Instead, they looked closely at the ingredients of the Conservative success, in what was a fairly average town, and how this approach could be adapted to campaigning that would best suit their own patch.

In 2001 and 2005, candidates who chose to fight a grassroots campaign, properly engaging with and becoming part of the local community, whilst at the same time communicating directly and effectively to the people they were seeking to represent, were far more likely to win their seats than others who chose simply to follow a CCHQ model campaign.

Results in Enfield Southgate, Welwyn Hatfield, Fulham, Peterborough, Ilford North and Harwich, say it all.

Our party must surely now get the message that in the new politics of today, everything - or at least most things - are local, and our entire

campaign strategy during the coming three years in advance of the run-up to the next General Election should be devoted to re-building our campaigning and party organisation at grassroots.

However, the rebuilding of our grassroots support can only come about if we give the 'rank and file' membership a real part to play in the reconstruction of the Party.

Ordinary Conservative Party members cannot any more decide or vote on Party policy, nor do they have the ultimate say in candidate selection, as the Howard Flight incident demonstrated. Now, some in the Party advocate the retrograde step of taking away party members' ability to select the Leader of the Party. The question I am asked by many is "What is the point of being a Conservative Party member?"; if these changes go ahead, I think the frank answer must be, "There's not a lot of point!".

I have repeatedly joined with my colleagues in total rejection of these proposed leadership rule changes. As we said in our letter published in the Daily Telegraph on 27th August 2005.

"The Next Conservative Party leader should not be elected by the parliamentary party alone. The next leader should have to win the confidence of the rank-and-file members in target seats and in parts of Britain where, currently, there are all too few Conservative MPs".

It is my belief that those Conservatives in Scotland, or the North of England, or the West Country for example, know what the people of those areas want and need. To continue with a "London, SW1, centric view" is to fatally misjudge and undermine the relative successes of the 2005 General Election.

Some of my colleagues have suggested an electoral college system, others favour the "one member, one vote" system. These options can be debated at a later stage. What is important is that votes are not taken from the people who are our greatest asset - our members.

The youth wing of the Party, a once invaluable source of support, has been watered down, re-formed and restructured into a shadow of its former self.

If we actually want a Conservative future, we must focus on re-building a Young Conservative and Student movement throughout the United Kingdom, in every constituency as well as in universities. We must make it an organisation that young people with Conservative instincts can be proud to be a part of, and one where those involved are eager to help with the never-ending campaigns and elections that we must fight in order to win power. Many of these young people will be the Councillors and MPs of the future. We must inspire them to be committed Conservatives, active locally and nationally and thus sow the seeds for the future.

The Conservative Party must become the party of the local community once again. Our candidates must be the champions of their local towns, villages and communities. They must be independently-minded people with character - getting themselves noticed and respected, and being there for local people when it matters.

They must also be deeply committed to Conservative principles.

Not everyone will accept all our beliefs, but people will respect us less if we sacrifice our true values to become a pale blue version of new Labour. Electoral success is more likely if we stand for something clear and positive and show that we actually believe what we say. John Howard in Australia and George Bush in the United States have proved that.

The job of the Shadow Team at Westminster must be to sell the Conservative Party as the best government for Britain in 2009. Our candidates and party organisation must focus on winning the battle locally and giving people a choice as their next MP - someone who they can relate to and trust.

We must once again strive to be a truly grassroots party, in touch, organised and active. Always there when there is something going on and ready to make the running for local people when there's a battle to be won.

I firmly believe that the constituency association must continue to form the foundations of the Conservative Party at local level. Sharing offices, facilities, professional agents and print-runs with neighbouring associations is something that common sense tells us we should all be

doing, but this must not mean the end of local associations and local autonomy.

Current weaknesses in some areas means we must work to re-build, not downsize, our organisation even further, and undermine the loyalty members rightly have towards their own constituency.

If we want more results like Romford, Enfield Southgate and Welwyn Hatfield at the next election, the Conservative Party must be truly local and not London-centric; we must give our candidates the confidence to campaign freely on issues that are important to their future constituents. We should target everyone between now and 2008, not just people "Voter Vault" tells us might be sympathetic to us, and we must become the activist party again, campaigning all year round, with bright, interesting and well-put-together newsletters which go through every door regularly.

There can be no substitute for hard work in all these areas, and hard work it will be, but that is our only route to victory!

Faith and politics – do they mix?

Andrew Selous MP

“We don’t do God,” Alistair Campbell once famously remarked when journalists asked about the impact of Tony Blair’s Christianity on the policies of his government.

Over the last half century we have moved from a position where there was a broad assumption of Christian values in public life, through the view that a Christian worldview is a valid standpoint to argue in public discourse, but not a universally accepted one, to the position today where there is pressure for faith, especially Christianity, to be relegated entirely to a private matter with no application to public policy at all.

When the Gambling Bill was before Parliament, the Methodist Church sent a briefing to MPs outlining its concerns. Even this action was enough to concern *Times* journalist Tom Baldwin who complained that this “polluted”¹⁹ the debate. Free speech, it seems, is not something to which people of faith should have an automatic right, according to some supposedly “liberal” commentators.

In order to assess what place faith should rightly occupy in public life, we need to look back to see what impact Christianity, our nation’s established faith, has had in the past. It is no exaggeration to say that the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century radically changed Britain for the better. Before it occurred the historian Bready noted that “the British people were then perhaps as deeply degraded and debauched as any people in Christendom”²⁰.

The impact of Wesley and his fellow preachers on our public life was huge. Slavery was abolished, prisons humanised, factory conditions improved, education made more widely available and trades unions formed. A Christian social conscience was grafted onto our legal system and onto the outlook of society.

Wesley spoke to Wilberforce about the scourge of slavery, and Wilberforce, supported by the like-minded members of the Clapham Sect,

¹⁹ The Times Please God, save us all from religion in politics November 18 2004

²⁰ J. Wesley Bready: England: Before & After Wesley [Hodder & Stoughton 1939].

worked for 42 years to abolish slavery. Wilberforce and Shaftesbury, the great Conservative social reformer, sat as MPs together for seven years. Shaftesbury, like Wilberforce, was motivated by his faith in his work to improve public health; education; the lot of the mentally ill, as well as factory conditions.

In the nineteenth century, Shaftesbury was joined by a host of other philanthropists, charity workers and public officials, very many of whom were motivated by their Christian faith. Christianity was the most important influence in Victorian Britain. The social effects of this outpouring of Christian social concern were widespread and beneficial. Law-breaking in all its forms, had risen in the first half of the nineteenth century, but by 1900 it had been falling for fifty years. The historian Gertrude Himmelfarb has noted that by 1900 births out of marriage were half what they had been mid-century²¹ and that in east London, the poorest part of the city, they were below the national average. These facts are salutary reminders for our generation that social decay is not inevitable or irreversible.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts of our Christian heritage has been the transmission of the social virtues of politeness, considerateness and thoughtfulness across society and through the generations. Frank Field has written eloquently on this subject in his book 'Neighbours from Hell – the politics of behaviour'²².

It is the growing erosion of these social virtues that underpinned the common decencies that society took for granted that is at the root of the explosion in anti-social behaviour that makes so many of our fellow citizens' daily lives a misery. Politeness, considerateness and thoughtfulness are a straightforward extrapolation of the injunction to "love your neighbour as yourself"²³. As Christian belief has declined across society, these social virtues are no longer practiced by a growing minority of families, with devastating consequences for those affected.

²¹ Himmelfarb: *The Demoralization of Society: from Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* [IEA, Health & Welfare Unit 1995], epilogue, pp. 222-223; actual national figure: from 5% (1800) to 7% (1845) to 4% (1900); East End 4.5% to "slightly under 3% by the end of the century."

²² Frank Field MP: *Neighbours from Hell – The Politics of Behaviour* [Politicos publishing 2003].

²³ Mark 12, v31.

These examples from our past demonstrate the positive contribution that Christianity has made to the political life of our nation. Despite this, politicians often resent the attentions of religious leaders. In 1926 the Bishop of Durham offered to mediate in the General Strike. Stanley Baldwin's response was to ask how the church would feel if he referred the revision of the Athanasian creed to the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation! Church-state relations became strained under Mrs Thatcher's premiership and have also been frosty at times under Tony Blair. They would be on a sounder footing if the advice of Archbishop William Temple was taken to heart by religious leaders. Writing of the poverty, malnutrition and unemployment of his day he said "The Church is both entitled and obliged to condemn these evils, but it is not entitled, in its corporate capacity, to advocate specific remedies"²⁴. There will always be moral issues that the religious leaders should speak out on, but they should not commit themselves to an ephemeral programme of detailed action. Individuals motivated by their faith are rightly found in all political parties, involved in the detail of policy-making, as their own experience and outlook guides them.

Looking at the issues that churches and other faiths are engaged with in the United Kingdom today, there is quite a mixed picture of both the effectiveness of this engagement and the reaction of society and the media to it. One area in which churches and other faiths are making a significant impact, and are generally welcomed for doing so, is that of international development. The Jubilee 2000 campaign to reduce developing world debt, the Trade Justice and Fair Trade campaigns and the Make Poverty History Campaign are all recent examples of this.

The churches are beginning to become more engaged in environmental issues such as global warming and climate change. The Bishops of London and Liverpool, among others have spoken out on environmental issues and church engagement with this debate has not been controversial either.

That cannot be said however for life issues, whether at the beginning or end of life. Christian perspectives on abortion, bio-ethics or euthanasia are regularly treated with disdain by a growing number of politicians and commentators. It should not be so surprising that Christians, Jews,

²⁴ Archbishop William Temple: 'Christianity and Social Order' [Penguin Books 1942, New York].

Muslims and others concerned about keeping alive African children have a similar reverence for the unborn and our frail elderly, here in the West.

Engagement by Christians and people of other faiths on family, marriage, relationship and broader social issues often meets with strong opposition. It is in these areas that our post-modern culture, asserting the rejection of a shared value-system and proclaiming that everything is relative, can make serious debate strident and difficult. The tone and approach of people of faith is so important here. A gentle humility offering help, support and encouragement is called for from people of faith, who have so much to offer our deeply hurting society to this area. Family dysfunctionality and marriage and relationship breakdown regularly hit the poorest hardest, which is why a faith-based contribution to debate on these issues is an important contribution to social justice. Increasing the stability of families and the commitment of parents to each other and their children is also vital to reduce rapidly rising demand for benefits, housing and other social support. This is no doubt why many Christians are involved in the important preventative work of developing relationship skills undertaken by a growing number of Community Family Trusts in Britain²⁵.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others have a proud record of contribution to our nation's public life. A positive Christian contribution to British political life can be traced over two and a half centuries. Although more recent, the contribution of other faiths to the wider community is also well documented. No person of faith should expect an easy ride in the political arena, but there should be no question that they have a right to be there and that Britain is the better for it.

²⁵ See www.nacft.org.uk for further information on Community Family Trusts.

A socially just vision of family

Philippa Stroud

Why is it that as soon as a politician mentions the words marriage, family, or parenting, you can feel the atmosphere in the room bristle? The “M” word, as it has become known, is definitely dangerous territory for any party. Yet the challenges of 21st century Britain are so serious that without courage and honesty in tackling family breakdown we risk turning our backs on one of the major social issues of our time.

Over many years I have worked amongst the homeless, those who have been abused and those with mental health problems. It became clear to me that family breakdown damages society’s most vulnerable people. I ran a hostel for homeless men and women. One day I asked each of our residents the same question. Each one in turn responded by saying that their problems had begun when a father had walked out or a step-father had walked in. They were saying to me that the root cause of their problems was the disintegration of their family unit.

What right, though, has a politician to stray onto such deeply personal territory? What right have we to comment on the personal choices that people make?

Protecting the family is not about defending traditional morals for the sake of it. Far from it. Help for the family is an issue of social justice.

Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, certainly understood this. Just before the General Election he wrote a letter to the nation’s political leaders and said:

“Ask anyone who works with children and young people in any city. The climate of chronic family instability, sexual chaos and exploitation, drug abuse and educational disadvantage is a lethal cocktail. To call for more public support for stable families and marriage is not in this context a bit of middle-class, Middle England nostalgia; it’s life and death. To ask for public investment in skilled, properly resourced youth work is not begging for subsidised leisure; it’s asking for basic human necessities. So what is the programme for fuller and better family support, fuller and better care for our children throughout society?”

The call to strengthen the family is coming loud and clear from those who have to pick up the pieces of broken relationships. It is also coming from those who aspire to build their own families. I worked with many individuals who were desperate for help to keep their marriage together or support for parenting. That support wasn't forthcoming, however, until things reached crisis point and a social worker or other state employee had deemed that they were at risk to either themselves or their children. By this time the problems have become deep set and complex.

If we believe in aspiration we must also support the aspiration that many have from all backgrounds to build strong healthy families. The government supports and rewards many other socially constructive aspirations: the aspiration to learn, to go to university, to develop a career. But when it comes to the aspiration to marry, to remain married and to parent children over the long haul, we back off for fear of offending someone else. However much political correctness would try and push politicians away from family-based policies, we should listen to the experience of those who work with the many victims of family breakdown. The reality is that nearly everything that a politician does impacts in some way, shape or form on this most fragile of units.

What can be done?

When I stood up to speak on this issue a few months ago the response I was met with was, "Yes we agree that marriage and family are disintegrating, but a government cannot really do anything about it."

I would disagree. Tax policy expresses how the nation values the family, and it affects work-patterns within families. Education policy affects the authority of parents. Housing policy can affect whether members of the extended family can live close to one another or not.

Everything that a government does expresses a set of priorities and values. If you believe that the family is important and a key building block for the health of the nation, then you act on that belief and create a climate in which the family can thrive. This can take many forms.

1. Support for the family

Support for something as personal as the family should be given by those who are on the ground. Marriage preparation and training programmes for couples have had a dramatic effect on divorce rates. This was

demonstrated in 1986 when the first Community Marriage Policy (CMP) was established amongst community leaders in Modesto, California. The aim of the CMP was to provide proactive support to engaged and married couples through relationship education and mentoring. Twenty-five years later the divorce rate in Modesto had halved, while teenage pregnancy and truancy rates had also fallen by one quarter.²⁶

Earlier this year the Centre for Social Justice awarded one excellent family education service, Bristol Community Family Trust. They have seen that active support to engaged and married couples through relationship support and mentoring actually lowers divorce rates and improves marriage satisfaction even here in Britain. This is an excellent way of stemming disintegration.

However, we also have to face the fact that many of our families are suffering and that the children of this generation are showing signs of serious pain. The social services are often so overwhelmed that they dread the taking of another referral. The voluntary sector has a crucial role to play here and can often go places that the state sector cannot. Charities such as Kids Company that allow children to refer themselves for help are reparenting many back to health.

2. Tax fairness for married couples.

The tax penalty facing married couples in the tax and benefits system should be eliminated. The penalty is particularly harsh on the lowest income couples. The present system of welfare for poor parents penalises couples when they live together in one household. To put it another way, it rewards and incentivises living apart. We don't need to talk about "privileging marriage". We need to deliver a level playing field and achieve fairness before that discussion can begin. When we look at the evidence with regards to child well-being, it is astounding that we allow something as influential as our tax and benefit system to disincentivise the one thing that does children so much good. A recent study of 36,000 US families²⁷ was the first to compare outcomes amongst children from co-habiting and married biological parents as well as cohabiting and married step-parents. The conclusion of the study was not only that it mattered that

²⁶ What interventions strengthen family relationships? – A review of the evidence by Harry Benson of Bristol Community Family Trust.

²⁷ Brown 2004

children live with both parents, but it mattered that those parents were *married*, for the emotional and behavioural outcomes of the children.

3. Family-friendly housing policies

The proximity to extended family members should be considered in the allocation of social housing. If we want to encourage people to take responsibility for their own we should not be putting obstacles in their way.

4. Debt

Debt is a major source of family conflict and yet there appears to be resistance to ensuring responsible lending. This year the CSJ was involved with the Griffiths Commission on Personal Debt (2005).

“Debt affects roughly 3 million people in Britain but disproportionately affects low-income families, lone parents and people in their twenties and thirties.”

Debt tears families apart. More debt education, expansion of credit unions and more responsible lending will all help families to avoid debt and to get out of debt without putting undue pressure on the relationship.

5. Provide greater hope for children in care

Many children long for the day when they will leave care and be placed in a loving home. Over the years the criterion for adoption has become so politically correct that for many this will remain nothing more than a dream. When 1/7 of teenage girls leaving care are either pregnant or have had a child against 1/100 of the overall population of 16-year-old girls, the conclusion has to be that children are better raised in a loving, if imperfect, home than by the state.

6. Rethink child-care

We have a system in this country that has been developed as a result of the tax and benefit system whereby we push young mothers, particularly single mothers, out to work into low paid jobs (subsidised), with childcare (subsidised), whilst not recognising that this money could go towards them caring for their own child. This system seems perverse. It would appear that we are happy for anyone other than the mother to be paid to care for her own child. We need to rethink the messages that this sends and the values that we are expressing.

Labour is seeking to build a state edifice of Surestarts, schools, and childcare facilities to *replace* the family. If we invested the same money in strengthening the family we would be acting courageously, justly and with respect for all - including the poorest in our society - supporting the aspirations of many.

Labour policy supports, authenticates and gives momentum to the decay of the family by financing it at huge cost to the taxpayer. A socially just Conservative policy could show that one of the reasons that taxes are so high is that we are funding structures that provide an imitation of the role of family whilst we dismantle the genuine family that serves us much better and costs us nothing. The course that is currently set leads us nowhere as a nation other than to enormous human misery and enormous expenditure.

Ben was a friend of mine who came to the project that I ran. His parents had separated when he was 8, and then, when his step-father moved in, 10 years of abuse took place. The mental health problems, self-harm and addictions that followed to numb the pain fill medical notes on the shelves of doctors' surgeries.

Is it too hard to envisage a day when his parents could have been prepared by a Community Family Trust such as in Bristol for the stresses of marriage; when a mentoring programme could have supported them through difficulties; when the message that their marriage and family mattered was sent clearly through the tax and benefit system and when, if all else failed, there were voluntary organisations in his community into which he could have walked as a child in order to find sanctuary from pain? Is this so difficult for us to provide? I think not.

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Freeing the NHS to do its job effectively

Dr Mike Goldsmith

The National Health Service in the United Kingdom was once the envy of the world but for the last decade or so it has become a nightmare for patients and health professionals alike. There are a number of drivers for change which Governments have been wrestling over and which have made radical reform not just a good political idea but a necessity. These include demographics, rising expectations, new medical technologies, epidemiology, personnel factors, increased availability of information, sharply rising costs and, lastly, political factors.

Political cycles have traditionally run in 4-year terms with Governments rarely serving more than two consecutive terms. This means that any radical change is difficult for a Government to achieve, because reform takes at least two if not three consecutive terms and often reorganisation is not achieved in the first term because the new Government is bedding in. This means that change to the healthcare system in the UK has not really been either radical or necessarily successful, and incoming administrations often tamper with the previous Government's work for reasons of party or ideological dogma. For instance, New Labour reversed much of the Conservative Thatcherite reforms on their arrival in power in 1997. Many of these reforms were actually popular and successful, and considerable damage was done to Health Service morale in their undoing. Worse still, many of the market-orientated reforms have now been brought back in under new names, exasperating an increasingly exhausted workforce who find that they have to implement yet another set of changes. Prof. Alan Maynard of York Centre for Health Economics has described this as "redisorganisation".

Health is both an individual good and a social good. Poor health leads to poor quality of life and early death. It also leads to social deprivation and eventually to societal and economic breakdown. A whole series of studies has shown the social dimension of illness and morbidity patterns in relation to socio-economic status, age, ethnicity and gender. It also has a severe negative effect on the economy, not only from its direct cost through healthcare spending but also from the loss to the workforce

either temporarily or permanently. Britain loses £16 billion a year through sickness absence alone.

But it is not just a socio-economic problem. Health has become fundamentally a political issue and the allocation of resources, the access to services, the quality and effectiveness of treatment and care are all part of an inherently political agenda which has driven the policy experiments of the last two decades. It is an inescapable truth that the market-orientated supply of healthcare has tended to produce better quality, and in particular better husbanding, of resources. One of the major issues in the NHS is the huge burgeoning of the management over the last decade and the consequent lessening of the doctor powerbase, with a resulting frustration and lowering of both standards and quality.

The NHS hospitals of today face a constant battle between large fiscal deficits and resource shortages against inefficient and poor quality services with an ever rising demand from the public and the increasing costs of new medical technologies.

I believe that the time has come to make fundamental changes to the way in which secondary (hospital) care is delivered in Britain. The traditional NHS model of nationalised healthcare with doctors, nurses and other paramedical professionals employed by the Government in state-owned hospitals is now anachronistic. Whilst that was the correct policy for post-war austerity and failing healthcare supply in the late 1940s, sixty years later the drivers for change are forcing politicians to rethink how the National Health Service should be delivered as well as financed.

The general consensus is that the great mass of the British people still want healthcare largely free at the point of delivery and financed in the main by central general taxation. However this does not mean that doctors and nurses need to be employed by the State. By and large the State does not run efficient enterprises, a fact borne out by the number of post-war nationalisations that have now been returned to the safety of the private sector. Whilst the bulk of the financing of healthcare should remain a Government responsibility (and priority), provision should now be subject to market forces.

More and more care is being delivered in the private sector for the National Health Service. Many of the new Diagnosis and Treatment Centres (DTCs) which have been developed under the current New Labour

government have been owned and run by private sector hospital operators for the NHS. As the Middlesex Hospital policy statement says “*DTCs provide elective surgery for a range of routine conditions. They have been designed to give high-quality treatment, mainly for day surgery, or short-term hospital stay patients, making the most efficient use of resources, including beds, operating theatres, diagnostic equipment and staff. It is hoped that DTCs will play an important part in reducing waiting times for hospital treatment by providing an efficient service and additional capacity.*” If the current Labour government is turning to the private sector to run the seemingly most efficient and newest part of the NHS, then it must be right to look at the concept of self-governing hospitals employing all necessary medical, nursing and other staff and providing NHS care through a system of competing independent hospital providers.

Clearly “denationalising” NHS hospitals may be regarded as a major step, but this process began during the Thatcher years (1988-1991) of radical reforms to the NHS. An internal market was formed then, and NHS hospitals were given “trust” status. The intention then was to allow hospitals to be locally managed, with local citizens on the Boards of management and with an ability to raise local capital through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Many of the original reforms which were conceived by Margaret Thatcher and Kenneth Clarke (the then Secretary of State for Health) were unfortunately watered down by a combination of civil service inertia and obstruction. The reforms were also damaged by a medical profession resistant to change and to any diminution of Consultant power. Later, when New Labour came to power, both the hospital reforms and the GP fund-holding reforms were abolished or radically changed on dogmatic grounds. Doctor power was then savagely eroded by an increasingly powerful but ineffectual management elite.

I believe that the only way to improve the morale of the NHS workforce is to allow them to flourish in independently managed and financed modern hospitals and treatment facilities which compete for NHS funding and NHS patients. I am not suggesting that all Britain’s hospitals should be owned and run by the traditional private hospital sector. It is my strongly held view that a plethora of types of ownership should be encouraged just as they are in many other European countries like France, Spain, Germany and Sweden.

Ownership and management contracts could be through charitable bodies, local authorities, not-for-profit organisations, overseas hospital companies, universities and, obviously, existing and new private hospital companies. In a recent (June 2005) Adam Smith Institute report entitled Road Map to Reform: Health, one of the authors of this polemic suggests that one of the ways of using this type of “let a thousand flowers grow” approach is to organise the financing of NHS care through a nationwide system of County Commissioners who would buy care from these providers on behalf of the people. The government’s role would then be only twofold; first they would supply the bulk of the financing through central taxation and the Treasury, and second they would ensure that the Department of Health act as a quality control and standard-setting body to ensure that the services supplied are fit for purpose.

The advantages of this new system are that management of hospitals would immediately benefit from competent well-trained and non-bureaucratic managers and techniques. In addition, doctors and nurses could be recruited and paid on merit through local pay-bargaining and contracts. This would improve both the recruitment and morale of medical, nursing and other staff. It would also restore some power and leadership back to doctors, who have been successively undermined through poor and unsympathetic management and governmental interference.

Obviously serious hurdles remain. Professional staff training needs to be retained and controlled under the new NHS. Other countries have successfully organised training in hospitals which the State neither runs nor owns, and there is no reason why this should not be true in Britain. Indeed Universities could own and run hospitals and DTCs themselves. Including teaching hospitals and academic centres of excellence in this multi-provider system will help overcome these training and career-development problems.

I do not underestimate the potential for confusion if such a radical plan is not implemented with great care. Just as the fund-holding system for GPs under the Conservatives and the Foundation Hospitals of New Labour were brought in via volunteer pilot projects, so these new denationalised hospitals could start through multiple pilots in various places and of different types. Evaluation and outcome measurement will be all-important.

Finally, this will form only part of a wide-ranging package of reform, necessary if the provision of healthcare in general and the NHS in particular is to evolve into a quality service adequate for the 21st century. Specific attention to the financing of care will also be a vital aspect of such reforms. Simply throwing public money at the problems, as the Labour government has been doing for the last four years, is unsustainable and incredibly wasteful. Focussed financing of validated and successful care pathways is essential, and I believe that additional sources of finance are needed. Such sources will include increased membership of private and social insurance schemes, self-pay and long-term care investment schemes. Equally important will be the evaluation of cost effective new technologies and treatments, and the reduction of the “pill for every ill” mentality which is prevalent currently.

The demand for healthcare is infinite, and no government will be able to afford every treatment for every citizen. Rationing to some extent will always be with us, but a more efficient provider and hospital network and an increase in quality and morale of healthcare staff will be in the forefront of such reforms. It will be a difficult journey, but we need to start now. There is huge public support for a better health system.

Home Truths – A Conservative Approach to Housing

John Hayes MP and Scott Kelly

Homes matter. They matter to the young couple eager for their first home together but unable to afford it; they matter to the disabled person whose quality of life is inhibited by the lack of an accessible, manageable home; they matter to the homeless family trapped in temporary accommodation. And they matter to the Conservatives. Conservatives believe that everyone is entitled to a decent home. We know that homes stand at the centre of people's lives; we understand that people define themselves by the places they live; we respect the land and the landscape; we want new buildings to reach beyond utility – they should inspire, elevate and enchant; and we believe that a better government could harmonise the regeneration of urban and suburban Britain with the protection of our countryside.

Much of late twentieth century urban development was out of keeping with historic settlements and out of scale with the prevailing built environment – brutal and brutalising. To fail to acknowledge this – as the Labour government do – is to limit the chance to do better this century. Burke wrote that a civilisation is built on three relationships; with the present, with the future and with the past. What we build should add to what is there, supply what is needed now and provide a fine legacy for the generations to come.

Labour: The wrong homes in the wrong places

Under the Communities Plan, the Government is proposing an additional 200,000 houses in four growth areas in the South-East. To drive this new development through, John Prescott intends to take control of planning away from local communities and give it to unaccountable and distant regional bodies. Yet, incredibly, Labour has failed to properly assess the impact of its plans despite repeated warnings about the consequences for the environment. As the House of Commons Environment Audit Select Committee reported:

‘It is astounding that despite the clear need for an assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposals for the Growth Areas

as a whole, nothing has been done to date by the ODPM or DEFRA to address this issue.²⁸

The Government's insistence in concentrating development in this way will damage existing settlements and create unbalanced new ones. The volume of housing will not be sustained by local employment sufficient to prevent commuting on a large scale, with the consequent undesirable pressure on roads and the environment.

The costs of providing the transport links, health care, education and all the other facilities which these new communities will require has been estimated at around £20 billion.²⁹ In respect of the Thames Gateway development and its extension into Cambridgeshire, the Government's own consultants reported that it would cause a critical water shortage, threaten landscapes and destroy wildlife. Far from creating self-sustaining places to live, the aesthetic impact of the Communities Plan will be profoundly damaging, as existing towns become virtually unrecognisable and villages converge.

The Barker Review, commissioned by the Treasury and welcomed by John Prescott, recommended that an additional 120,000 new homes should be built every year in order to reduce the increase in house prices to a trend of 1.1% a year. This would mean the equivalent of two towns roughly the size of Middlesbrough eating into our green fields.

Yet demand side factors such as interest rates, the relative unattractiveness of alternative investment vehicles; the level of borrowing secured by housing equity; and uncontrolled immigration also drive up and hold up house prices. A supply side solution of the kind Barker envisages would be slow and inexact, with significant undesirable consequences for land use, communities and the built environment.

Even Labour's most favoured think-tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research, has condemned Labour's plans, in particular, questioning:

²⁸ Source: 'Housing: Building a Sustainable Future', Environmental Audit Committee, 2005

²⁹ Source: 'Planning for Sustainable Housing and Communities: Sustainable Communities in the South East', ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, 2003

‘whether it is really possible for policy makers to set targets for output in the housing market to achieve a particular path for house price inflation in order to meet targets for affordability at a national or regional level. Such an approach seems a blunt and probably ineffective tool in a complex market and one, moreover, subject to speculative pressures.’³⁰

The fundamental problem with Labour’s approach is its lack of balance. No attempt has been made to balance the need for new housing against environmental considerations and the wishes of local people. By focusing almost exclusively on tackling the problem of affordability through increased supply, the Government is prescribing a fundamentally unsustainable solution. We need a housing market that works better by focussing not just on supply, but the match between provision and need.

New housing can play an important role in regeneration and urban renewal. The great danger with Labour’s predict and provide approach is that it will result in the provision of housing where it is easiest to build rather than where it can make a positive impact. The result will be houses that are not properly integrated with the existing environment: large dormitory estates on the edge of existing settlements and social housing - built to inferior specifications - quickly decays and becomes hard to let.

In contrast, a Conservative government should address the underlying problems affecting the supply of new homes. Rather than centrally planning the provision of new housing we believe that it is the job of Government to create the circumstances by which the market can meet demand by expediting the process of regenerative development. A Conservative government should also strive to make the housing market work better and, by so doing, help more people into the home they deserve.

The right homes in the right places.

For Conservatives the challenge is to develop a vision for the revival of urban living. Towns and cities are a vital part of our human ecology. Green Belts were not established primarily to protect agricultural land from development, but to prevent urban sprawl and so protect the historic

³⁰ Anthony Vigor and Peter Robinson: Meeting Housing Need in the South East, IPPR, 2005

character of our cities. Conservative policy today should also demonstrate how urban renewal and the protection of our countryside go hand in hand.

The provision of new housing should be an important part of regenerative development. The role of a Conservative Government should be to enable the market to facilitate this process. More of the housing we need could be built on brownfield sites. Brownfield land is not a one-off supply; it is a stream not a reservoir. As land use changes additional sites become available. The continuing flow of disused and discarded sites shows little sign of abatement. Between 1999 and 2003 the National Land Use Database identified a further 20,000 hectares of brownfield land.³¹ The Government's brownfield target of 60% of new build on brownfield sites has been exceeded by good developers. Barratt Homes report that nationally 80% of their developments are on brownfield land, rising to 90% in the South East of England. If Government had expended more energy encouraging all developers to follow Barratt's fine example, rather than dogmatically deploying the blunt instrument of targets, they would have ensured the best utilisation of this continuing flow of brownfield land.

Conservative policy should make the redevelopment of brownfield sites easier by replacing the current uncertain and inflexible planning system with one that seeks to expedite the process of regenerative development wherever possible. The current planning regime frustrates developers and bemuses the public.

Between our town and city centres and their suburbs can often be found derelict sites that have not been redeveloped simply because local authorities have reserved them for employment use rather than for housing. Inner suburban decay is blighting many parts of Britain. A Conservative emphasis on regeneration will mean that the designation of land for employment purposes will not prevent its redevelopment as housing. Our emphasis within local development plans should be on flexible designations that facilitate the mixed work, housing and leisure uses essential to build genuinely sustainable communities.

The shift from green field to brownfield development should be accelerated by streamlining planning permission for brownfield sites.

³¹ Source: Professor Anne Power, 'Submission to the Barker Review', 2003.

However, dictating to local authorities how they should fast track development is likely to lead to more red tape and a lower quality development. Rather, Conservative policy should result in planning duties that fix an expectation that local authorities will streamline the planning process for brownfield sites.

However, even action to reduce and simplify the planning regulations will not alone ensure that the supply of brownfield sites is fully utilised. The costs associated with, for example, decontamination, means that in some cases re-development would still be economically unviable. Action is therefore needed to provide additional incentives for re-development. A Conservative Government should look at ways of making sure the tax system encourages the redevelopment of brownfield sites.

We should also give much greater regard to the aesthetics of housing. We must get away from the identikit housing estates that have done so much to damage the reputation of new housing. We must rediscover the architectural distinctiveness of each locality and develop accordingly. We must build on a human scale, incrementally and in keeping with local sensitivities.

Housing design also has implications beyond aesthetics. Bad design can encourage anti-social behaviour, crime and lack of neighbourliness. If buildings can enchant they can depress too. As Professor Alice Coleman has written:

‘Modernism claims to create communities by throwing households together in the same block but it actually does just the opposite, associating too many people for them all to get to know each other. They must therefore accept the presence of strangers, which makes criminals feel safe from being recognised. The residents may be victimised by intruders and alienated by inability to get to know others living there.’³²

The planning system has for almost 60 years encouraged or allowed out of scale buildings. In future, buildings should be in harmony with the landscape, vernacular in style, built from local materials and offer that local distinctiveness that is the foundation of people’s sense of place. Pride in a community is unlikely to flourish if people have no say about

³² Source: Professor Alice Coleman ‘DICE Principles for new-build and rehabilitation.’

how their house is built or how their neighbourhood develops. Planning should be a truly local function – community led and free from unnecessary government interference.

Prescriptive rules about the distances between dwellings currently dictate the layout of developments resulting in anonymous estates. Rigid highway requirements create environments dominated by roads. The Conservative approach should be to scrap prescriptive standards and instead reinforce the capacity of local planning authorities to ensure good design. Such an approach would mean that high levels of density could be achieved without condemning those who want houses to living in flats. It would mean that otherwise undeveloped urban brownfield sites could be brought forward as rigid highway standards are relaxed on a common sense basis.

Making the housing market work better

A fundamental problem with Labour's approach to housing affordability is that it is focused on buildings not people; subsidising the construction of property to rent rather than directly helping people to afford the home they want to own. This policy does not respond to the aspirations of the vast majority of people currently looking for a home and so contributes to the growing mismatch between provision and need.

Many people as they grow older have special needs but are living in unadapted large houses whilst large, growing families are living in crowded accommodation. We need to create a more fluid and flexible housing market that helps more people into the homes they need and deserve.

One important way that the housing market can be made more flexible and home ownership can be made more widely available is through the extension of shared equity. Professor Glen Bramley of Heriot Watt University estimated that if shared equity were widely available it could help an additional 12%-15% of households in the South of England to buy.³³

As well as helping people to buy their home, shared equity has a number of advantages that makes it the best way forward for social housing support. Shared equity schemes provide affordable housing at

³³ Glen Bramley, 'Affordability and the Intermediate Market', 2003.

substantially less public cost than social rented housing. This is because a substantial proportion of the market value is funded by the purchaser. For example, if the budget for the development of social housing for 2003/04 has been divided 50/50 between housing to rent and shared equity it would have financed 33,000 homes, almost 12,500 than under Labour. Shared equity also generates funds as the purchaser increases the size of their stake. These funds can be recycled to provide further support. Research suggests that current schemes are generating around 140 – 160 million pounds a year.³⁴ As shared equity is people rather than property centred it can potentially apply to any home. Even on new developments, affordable homes are usually distinguishable from other properties in terms of their size and design. Shared equity arrangements might as easily apply to a four bedroom family home as to a two-bedroom terrace. The range of properties offered with a variety of equity options broadens market accessibility.

Conclusion

Only the Conservatives are ready to take on the task of rebuilding Britain. We oppose Labour's Communities Plan, not because we oppose development, but because we understand that communities can only be built successfully if the balance between the need for new housing and the interests of the settled community is maintained. Our approach should replace the destructive tension between central government and local communities and their representatives – forced with thousands of houses they do not like in places they do not want them – with a partnership between central and local government to deliver the right homes in the right places.

By streamlining the planning process; lifting the burden of regulation on developers that suffocates enterprise; making more brownfield sites available for regenerative development; facilitating an equity revolution; bringing thousands of empty homes back into use; and by protecting our precious landscape – Conservatives must stop the blitz of the countryside and herald an urban and suburban renaissance.

Increasing home ownership, ending the crisis of homelessness and building neighbourhoods that make people feel good about where they live. These should be our ambitions. Britain deserves nothing less.

³⁴ Roof, July/August 2003.

Our Conservatism makes us well placed to build a better future – buildings that enchant, neighbourhoods that cohere, homes fit for an ambitious, hopeful nation.

The environment, selfishness and winning elections

Anthony Uskglass

What is the authentic Conservative position on the environment? The clue, of course, is in the question. We are, or should be, the party of conservation. Long before the birth of the modern environmental movement, Edmund Burke described each successive generation as “the temporary possessors and life renters” of this world. He believed that the living have a duty to provide for the future lest they “leave to those who come after them a ruin instead of a habitation.” Nowadays this is known as the principle of sustainability, but one should note that far from being an invention of the modern environmental movement, it is in fact in the very marrow of centuries-old Conservative ideas.

However, that is all the philosophising I intend to do in this essay. Genuine Conservatives will have an instinctive grasp of these matters and genuine environmentalists are heartily sick of political windbagging. The Conservative approach to politics is as much about practicalities as it is about principles. After all, everyone wants to save the planet, but what will convince the voters is evidence of serious intent. Above all, this means being honest with the electorate about the pain that effective environmental policy will cause. Moreover, as Owen Paterson MP persuasively argues elsewhere in this pamphlet, supranational institutions such as the EU have failed to adequately deal with these challenges. Nation states must take the lead.

Of course, it is true that such sacrifices in the present are made with the object of preventing much greater losses in the future. However, the relationship between the two halves of this equation is much less obvious than that between, say, a financial investment and its yield. The context here is the natural world, not a bank account. Environmental investments are therefore as uncertain as nature itself. For instance, there is no guarantee that the price we pay for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the years ahead will be to our benefit. Indeed, it may be those a hundred years hence that benefit from our foresight, should we choose to act upon it.

First of all, it is necessary to show that the environment is a significant electoral issue. The contrary position is that the environment does not matter because it does not rank among the five or six leading voter issues. This highly reductionist approach to politics was taken to extremes during, and in the run-up to, the 2005 general election campaign. The Conservative strategy was a relentless focus on the top five issues of health care, education, crime, taxation and asylum (with pensions as an occasional supplementary). All other issues were all but ignored. There was, for instance, next to no mention of the environment in the Conservative Party manifesto. Those few sentences that did make it in were meagre in comparison to the environmental content of the Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos. This is all the more unfortunate given that some very good policies were developed during our last period in opposition, a useful summary of which is provided in *Action for the Environment*, the Conservatives' environment manifesto, which was published on the Conservative Party website, but received no further promotion.

Voters interested in what the main parties had to say about the environment were likely to be least impressed by the Conservative effort. But how many voters are we talking about? The polling evidence would suggest that the numbers are significant. For instance, a MORI poll published on the 13 April 2005 asked the following question: "Looking ahead to the next General Election, which, if any, of these issues do you think will be very important to you in helping you decide which party to vote for?" 28% mentioned the environment. To put this number in context, 56% mentioned law and order. We might therefore conclude that the electoral significance of the environment was half that of law and order. This would admittedly be a crude analysis, but not so crude as drawing an arbitrary dividing line between the top five issues and the rest, then talking incessantly about the former and staying silent on the latter.

A tougher test of the priority voters attach to an issue is when they are only allowed to name a limited number of issues from a list. Unfortunately, there is no recent poll which asked voters to name the single most important election issue. The most recent was an ICM poll for the BBC in the run-up to the 2001 election in which 5% of respondents identified the environment as their most important issue. More recently, a YouGov poll for Sky published in April 2005 allowed respondents to choose up to three issues they considered most important to them in

deciding their vote. 15% of voters named the environment as one of their priority issues, compared to 33% for crime.

This further illustrates the great flaw in the 'top five issues' strategy: The top five issues for the population as a whole aren't necessarily everyone's top five issues. Thus a campaign that focuses on the top issues can actually fail to say anything at all on the top issues for large parts of the population. By staying silent on the environment we had nothing to say about what was one of the top three issues for approximately one in six voters. Some will call this focus, others will call it missing the mark.

As a general rule, one should always beware of the word 'focus', which is often used to flatter an approach that would be better described as 'blinkered'. For instance, the cult of the focus group has blinkered many politicians to the possibility that their role may sometimes be to lead public opinion, not follow it. If voters attach a lower priority to an important issue it does not necessarily follow that politicians cannot talk about it. Rather, if politicians fail to talk about an important issues, it may well follow that voters will attach a low priority to it. Indeed, there is evidence that voters want politicians to take the lead on such issues. Another YouGov poll for the 2005 election campaign found that 54% of voters thought that there'd been too little focus on global warming as an election issue, as opposed to 55% for council tax and 68% for pensions (the first and second placed issues). All other issues including crime, asylum, health and education came in below global warming.

Another aspect of the 'focus fallacy' is the notion that one should focus on those issues where your party scores well. It is for this reason that the 2005 Conservative campaign became increasingly focused on immigration, one of the very few issues, if not the only issue, on which the Conservatives enjoyed a consistent lead over the other parties. But this is to ignore two very real possibilities: firstly, that the reason why a party performs badly on an issue is because it never talks about it; and secondly, that electoral success isn't just about winning more votes on your best issues, but also about losing less votes on your weak issues.

As a thought experiment imagine a list of electoral issues. Now, for each issue, imagine the number of non-Conservative voters who nevertheless believe the Conservative Party to have the best policies on that issue. At the top of that list one would find issues such as crime and asylum, where significant numbers of non-Tories favour us. Why aren't these people

voting for us? The obvious answer is that the issues further down the list must be more important to them in deciding who to vote for. Of course, it may be that what is stopping them is a generalised dislike of who we are as a party rather than a weighing up of particular issues. Nevertheless, the issues right at the bottom of the list must say something about the nature of that dislike.

So which issue is right at the bottom of the list? It is, of course, the environment, where our typical rating barely flickers above zero. It is consistently below even health, education and other issues on which we are traditionally seen as being weak. But there is perhaps a yet more damning indictment of the way in which we are perceived on the environment, one delivered by our own voters. According to a series of pre-election YouGov polls, less than 40% of Conservative voters believed that we had the best policies on the environment – the only issue where we can't even get the endorsement of most of our own voters.

Needless to say, among all voters we are rated as the worst party on the environment. It was not always thus. Long-term polling data from MORI shows that at the end of the 1980s we were slightly ahead of Labour on this issue, and clearly ahead of whatever the Liberal Democrats were calling themselves at the time. During the 1990s Labour established a clear lead and we fell into third place behind the Lib Dems. In the current decade the Lib Dems have taken first place, but we remain last. Indeed, the environment is one of the few issues on which we can be guaranteed to come in third. Thus not only are we seen as the worst party on the environment, the environment is also seen as our worst issue.

Why should this be? Few of the usual explanations for the Conservative plight seem to apply. In Government we took some tough decisions on the economy, and thus our lingering unpopularity on issues such as unemployment is understandable. Meanwhile, on issues such as health and education, Labour lies, swallowed whole by a pliant media, have helped blacken our name. However, on the environment, our record in Government was one of solid, if not spectacular, achievement – with Conservative ministers earning the respect of the environmental movement. As a result we were never vilified by our enemies in the way that we were on the public services. No one has told the voters to mark us down on this issue, it is a conclusion they have come to by themselves.

Of course, that is not quite true. Our enemies have portrayed us as generally selfish. And if, as I have argued, the environment is the issue most purely concerned with selflessness, then one might expect this to be issue on which public perceptions of Tory selfishness are projected in their purest form.

It is for this reason that the environment provides the Conservative Party with a special opportunity: by transforming the way we're seen on this issue, we can transform the way we're seen on all the others. The environment is the anvil on which to shatter our reputation for selfishness.