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## The Conservative project

A return to "the natural party of government"?

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Stephen Williams • Peter Scott • Eric J. Evans • Kevin Hickson • Ben Williams

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## Editorial

### Clever manoeuvring or conservatism for our time?

This edition of the *British Politics Review* examines two aspects of the contemporary Conservative Party: their internal development under David Cameron (party leader since 2005), and their electoral successes in 2010 and 2015.

Cameron's modernising intentions have moved the goal posts of British politics to the centre-right from the centre-left, and despite the difficulties in glossing over his personal background and class (which rear their head on occasion), he has been reasonably successful in de-toxifying the "nasty party" image without significant change to the party itself. The "modernised" Conservative Party has been sold as a departure from party orthodoxy but is, as argued by Richard Hayton, more of a continuation of a policy paradigm that took a minor hiatus under New Labour – Thatcherism in all but name. Meanwhile, it has also taken on broadly popular and more "social" policies, such as raising the bottom rate of tax and the introduction of a National Living Wage. These policies potentially help to inoculate the more "toxic" reforms to the welfare state and the introduction of Trade Union reforms, as Steve Williams and Richard Scott point out. Hayton directly challenges the view that Cameron radically altered the contemporary Conservative Party. He argues that the repositioning, and rebranding, of the Party as more "one nation Tory", socially aware and compassionate, was more symbolic than substantive. Thatcherism's main tenets remain firmly embedded in the contemporary Conservative Party's political outlook, much to people's delight and dismay. It should come as no great surprise that the Conservative Party has in fact remained distinctly conservative!

In the second major theme, David Denver and Mark Garnett look at the run up to, and outcome of, the 2015 General Election where the result was seen as a surprise by many, including the now wounded polling industry. The two principle reasons for Conservative success were the relative trust in their economic competence compared to Labour, and the electoral appeal, or lack thereof, of the two main candidates – where Cameron had actually been prime minister, while Miliband looked far from prime ministerial. The Liberal Democrats, for their part, suffered a meltdown in precisely the parts of England that the Conservatives could win. Consequently, the Conservative's narrow victory in 2015 was largely due to the failures of the other parties, and their relative decline (or rise in the case of the SNP *vis-à-vis* Labour).

Cameron's Conservative Party brings together a plethora of political positions and the in-party politics have in many ways been more complex and bitterly fought than the battles fought across the House or within the Coalition. Modern, cosmopolitan and urban Tories battle with the more traditional and rural-based Tory heartlands across England, while major tensions continue over the EU. Indeed, Eric Evans likens the internal wrangling over "Brexit" to the damaging splits during the Corn Law debates in the first half of the 19th century.

The articles of this *British Politics Review* all suggest both continuation and change – a continuation of some fundamental principles with a change in the way they are packaged, presented and sold. This all speaks volumes about contemporary British politics. As Evans also suggests regarding the historical success of the Party, the British public tend to see the Conservatives as the safer bet, testifying to a "naturally" conservative position with scant regard for the sales pitch.

Øivind Bratberg and Henry Allen

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# David Cameron and the renewal of British conservatism

By Richard Hayton

Whatever David Cameron achieves, or fails to achieve, in his remaining 3-4 years as Prime Minister, his place in British political history is secured. Elected as Conservative Party leader in December 2005, he inherited a party that had recently suffered its third crushing defeat at the hands of Tony Blair's Labour Party. Although the Conservatives had seen a modest advance of 33 seats, they still had fewer than 200 MPs in the House of Commons, and failed to capture even a third of the popular vote. The renewal of Conservative Party electoral hegemony continued to remain a distant prospect.

In returning the Conservatives to power in 2010; forming a Coalition government that, against the expectations of many, survived for its full five year term; and winning an outright Conservative majority in 2015, Cameron has re-established his party as the dominant force in British politics. Central to orthodox accounts of how he accomplished this is the claim that Cameron radically altered the nature of contemporary British conservatism, through a far-reaching process of modernisation. In this article I challenge that view.

Cameron was elected to the Conservative Party leadership on an explicitly modernising platform. He told his party that it must 'change to win'. This agenda for change entailed three main strands: revitalising the party image through a concerted effort to rebrand the party, an extensive review of policy, and ideological repositioning towards the centre-ground. In relation to the first of these Cameron enjoyed notable success, helping to dispel (at least amongst certain key groups of swing voters) the notion that the Conservatives were, in Theresa May's words, 'the nasty party'. In the early years of his leadership, Cameron downplayed traditionalist Conservative concerns such as immigration, taxation and European integration, focusing



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instead on issues such as climate change and social exclusion. In policy terms, a series of review groups were established to undertake a comprehensive reassessment of the party's positions. The themes chosen for these groups – quality of life, social justice, economic competitiveness, and public services improvement – symbolically indicated that Cameron wanted to set new priorities for his party. He expended particular energy articulating his commitment to the NHS, in an effort to neutralise one of Labour's key electoral advantages over the Conservatives. Although the pledge was dropped following the financial crash in 2008, Cameron also initially pledged if elected to match Labour's public spending plans more broadly.

In opposition Cameron was also keen to imply that a noteworthy ideological shift was occurring in his party. Rhetorically he sought to distance himself from the legacy of Thatcherism, noting for example in his speech on winning the leadership that "there is such a thing as society", in a seemingly direct repudiation of Margaret Thatcher's oft-quoted assertion that there is no such thing. Digging a little deeper, however, reveals that this shift was more symbolic than substantial. It is worth recalling the remainder of the passage from Mrs Thatcher 1987 interview with *Woman's Own* magazine: "... there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first." Such a claim does not sound strikingly different to that made by Cameron in his 2005 victory speech, again to quote at greater length:

"In opposition Cameron was also keen to imply that a noteworthy ideological shift was occurring in his party. Rhetorically he sought to distance himself from the legacy of Thatcherism... Digging a little deeper, however, reveals that this shift was more symbolic than substantial.."

*"There is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state... At the heart of what I believe are two simple principles, trusting people, and sharing responsibility. I believe that if you trust people and give them more power and control*

*over their lives, they become stronger, and society becomes stronger too, and I believe profoundly that we are all in this together. We all have a responsibility, as individuals, as parents, as families, as businesses, as government, as Members of Parliament, we all have a role to play."*



Thatcherism's emphasis on individual responsibility, and scepticism about the capacity for state action, were clearly influential on Cameron's conservatism. The idea of the Big Society pushed by the Conservatives at the 2010 election encapsulated these principles, suggesting that in the context of austerity and a shrinking state, local activity by individuals and other social groups could act as a substitute for "big government". Clear continuities with Thatcherism could also be identified in a number of other areas. On European integration, which remained a touchstone question for many Conservative MPs, Cameron pledged during his leadership election campaign that he would pull his party's MEPs out of the European People's Party (EPP). On immigration, although the party's rhetoric had softened considerably in comparison to the hard-edged campaign at the 2005 election, policy remained to reduce net migration substantially to "tens of thousands" per year. Cameron also moved to offer reassurance to his party's traditionalist wing in relation to social morality, through an emphasis on the importance of marriage. He deliberately presented himself as a 'family man' and stressed the value he placed on marriage as a societal institution, and as the most desirable environment for raising children. In one of the few other specific commitments he made during the leadership election campaign,

Cameron announced that a future Conservative government under his leadership would introduce a new allowance to recognise marriage in the tax system (a pledged fulfilled in 2015).

If Cameron's project to renew conservatism had only been partially completed in opposition, some of his fellow modernisers hoped that his audacious embrace of the Liberal Democrats following the 2010 election would finally free him from the demands of his party's right wing and allow a genuinely fresh liberal conservatism to emerge from Thatcherism's shadow. In practice though the pervasive hold of Thatcherite philosophy over contemporary Conservative politics came into sharp relief

under the 2010-15 Coalition government, most notably in terms of economic policy. The austerity agenda advanced by the government as the only plausible response to the financial crisis revealed the narrow neo-liberal orthodoxy that informed the Conservatives' approach to economic management. The government pledged not only to eliminate the deficit in the public finances, but also to do so largely through public spending cuts. In fact even as the government attempted unsuccessfully to balance the books, council tax and fuel duties were frozen, taxes on business such as corporation tax were reduced, as was the top rate of income tax (from 50 per cent to 45 per cent), while the personal tax allowance was also significantly increased (from £6,475 in 2010 to £10,600 in 2015). In short the Conservatives remained firmly committed to the Thatcherite ideals of a smaller state, intervening less in the economy, lower taxes, and a cautious fiscal policy.

The austerity agenda was driven as much by politics as by economic considerations, creating a clear dividing line with Labour and provided an overarching framework within which many other policy debates could be framed. This in turn enabled the Conservatives to side-line the influence of their Coalition partners in many key areas of policy making. With deficit reduction through fiscal retrenchment established as the number one priority for the Coalition, perhaps inevitably the language adopted by Conservative politicians became rather more hard-edged than during the earlier years of the Cameron leadership, emphasising the "tough choices" the government had to make. On welfare policy for instance, which had been identified by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as an area that could be targeted for significant spending cuts (ostensibly to help protect spending in other areas), Osborne and other Coalition ministers deployed rhetoric redolent of the Thatcher era, for example framing the issue in terms of "workers versus shirkers".



**Turning point.** The entry into coalition government in May 2010 proved to consolidate Cameron's image as statesman, whereas Nick Clegg were to suffer the burden of leading the smaller party.

Crown copyright / The Prime Minister's Office.

The core facets of Thatcherism can be identified as a neo-liberal approach to economic issues; a moralistic social authoritarianism; and a commitment to a rather narrow conception of national sovereignty, manifested particularly as Euro-scepticism. Each of these elements remains clearly visible in the Conservative Party after a decade of Cameronite leadership and more than five years in office.

The reassertion of a neo-liberal political economy has been discussed above in relation to the politics of austerity. The hold Euro-scepticism retains over the PCP has been illustrated both by Cameron's veto of a putative EU treaty at the European Council of December 2011, the attempted renegotiation of British membership of the EU, and the forthcoming referendum on that issue. And while in some ways the authoritarianism of Thatcherism appears to have been abandoned in the face of new social norms (for example in relation to equal rights for gay people) a moralistic tone is still very much a feature of Conservative rhetoric on issues such as welfare and marriage. On the issue of equal marriage rights for gay couples, an issue championed by Cameron against the wishes of much of his party, it is worth remembering that he argued that he favoured the move not only on the grounds of equality, but as a means for strengthening the institution of marriage. In short, after almost a decade of Cameronite leadership the construction of a coherent and qualitatively new conservatism remains largely unfulfilled.

As such, the principal claim of this article is that the liberal conservatism advanced by David Cameron remains essentially neo-Thatcherite, and that the modernisation agenda pursued since 2005 has not pushed contemporary conservatism beyond these parameters. The novel element in neo-Thatcherism is its recognition of the need for the Conservative Party to stress the fact that it has concerns beyond the economic sphere and the deployment of a

Year	Party leader	Number of votes	Share of votes	Number of MPs
2001	William Hague	8,357,615	31,7	166
2005	Michael Howard	8,784,915	32,4	198
2010	David Cameron	10,703,654	36,1	306
2015	David Cameron	11,334,576	36,9	330

**Comeback.** Comparing General Election results prior to and after David Cameron's rise to the party leadership in late 2005 testifies to a steady increase in electoral support.

However, it seems unlikely that David Cameron ever truly envisaged radically transforming the core ideological principles on which his party is currently based. After all, his diagnosis of the party's electoral problems, outlined in a speech entitled "Modern Conservatism" in January 2006, was not with the essence of Conservative philosophy, but with how to apply it in a modern setting. As he noted:

*"We knew how to rescue Britain from Old Labour. We knew how to win the battle of ideas with Old Labour. We did not know how to deal with our own victory in that battle of ideas. That victory left us with an identity crisis. Having defined ourselves for many years as the anti-socialist Party, how were we to define ourselves once full-blooded socialism had disappeared from the political landscape?"*

Ten years on, Cameron can justifiably claim to have resolved his party's identity crisis, and dealt with their "victory" in the battle of ideas. Unsurprisingly perhaps, this sense of ideological triumph did not lead the Conservative Party to abandon the key ingredients underpinning it. Cameron's feat has been

to revive an effective statecraft within these ideological parameters. Whether this can be embedded to a sufficient degree to herald a new era of Conservative electoral hegemony remains to be seen, but the party must at least be hopeful that is in prospect.

# The Conservatives and the 2015 General Election

By David Denver and Mark Garnett

Right up until the polls closed on 7 May 2015, there was almost universal agreement among commentators that, as in 2010, the general election would produce a parliament in which no party would have an overall majority. The consistent message of the opinion polls conducted during the campaign was that the Conservatives and Labour were running neck-and-neck and neither was likely to win enough seats to form a government alone. With



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that overall verdict apparently settled, speculation focused on the likely distribution of seats among the other parties. Would the Scottish National Party (SNP) replace Labour as the dominant force north of the border? How many seats would the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) win outright, and would its popularity hurt Labour as much as the Conservatives? A bad result for the Liberal Democrats had been expected from soon after they agreed to join the Conservatives in a coalition government in 2010. It only remained to be seen whether Nick Clegg and his colleagues would be mauled, or murdered.

At 10 pm, the announcement of the exit poll conducted by Ipsos Mori and NOP provoked amazement and consternation among pundits and politicians alike. It projected that the Conservatives would win 316 seats, raising the possibility that the party might be able to form a majority government after all. Those who heard the results of the exit poll being reported will almost certainly regard this as the most memorable moment of the 2015 election. While not exactly matching the dramatic impact of a last-minute reprieve for a prisoner on death row, it transformed the near-certainty of another frustrating night for the Conservatives into a much sunnier prospect.

As the real results were registered, however, it became clear that even the exit poll had slightly

understated the level of Conservative support. In the final reckoning, the Conservatives won 36.8 per cent of the UK vote to 30.4 per cent for Labour, resulting in a net gain of 24 seats compared to 2010 and a working majority of 12 in the House of Commons.

Although the exit poll constituted a partial redemption, the election result was, of course, something of an embarrassment for the polling industry and this has provoked a number of inquiries and inquests. There is now broad agreement that the main reason for the discrepancy between the campaign polls and the outcome was that the pollsters' samples tended to contain too many politically engaged younger people and not enough hard-to-reach voters in their seventies.

**Why did the Tories win?** With hindsight it is fairly easy to explain why the Tories won the 2015 contest. There are two basic reasons. First, they easily outscored their opponents on the key campaign issues. The most important of these was the economy and, throughout the 2010-15 parliament, the Conservatives (echoed by their Liberal Democrat junior partners) had lost no opportunity to proclaim that the previous Labour government had virtually bankrupted Britain. The Conservatives, by contrast, had taken tough but unavoidable decisions in accordance with a 'long-term plan' for economic salvation. While this may not have been entirely swallowed by the electorate, YouGov reported towards the end of the campaign that 40 per cent of voters thought that the Conservatives were the best party to handle the economy competently compared with 22 per cent thinking the same of Labour.

"Those who heard the results of the exit poll being reported will almost certainly regard this as the most memorable moment of the 2015 election."

The second main reason for the Conservative victory was the relative electoral appeal of the party leaders – David Cameron and Ed Miliband. The former had consistently been preferred as Prime Minister over the latter throughout the inter-election period. On the eve of poll, IpsosMori reported that Cameron was thought more capable by 42 per cent of respondents and Miliband by 27 per cent. The last time that a general election was not won by the party of the leader preferred as Prime Minister was in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives defeated Labour under James Callaghan.



In the 2016 New Year's Honours List, David Cameron bestowed a (highly controversial) knighthood on his imported election supremo, Lynton Crosby, who was given credit for capitalising on the Conservatives' advantages in respect of issues and leaders. Had Cameron been equally bountiful towards his partisan opponents, he might have offered a life peerage to the SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon, and a hereditary Dukedom to his erstwhile coalition partner, Nick Clegg. Above all, he should have found scope within the honours system to reward every individual who helped to elevate Ed Miliband to the Labour leadership in 2010. All of these people certainly contributed to the 2015 victory.

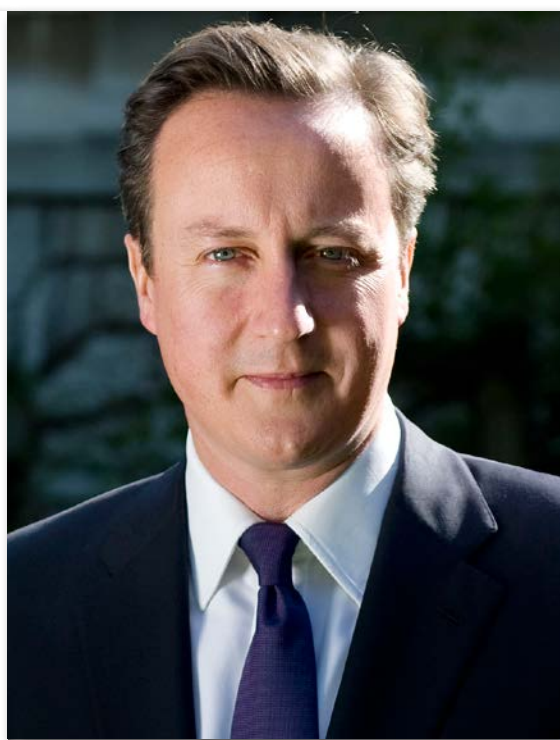
Before the election, Ms Sturgeon was alleged to have told a diplomat that she wanted the Conservatives, rather than Labour, to win. Although this report was hotly denied, Sturgeon's SNP played a considerable part in the Conservative victory. In Scotland, 40 of the 50 seats it gained came at Labour's expense. Sturgeon also embarrassed Miliband by launching a frontal attack on the coalition's policy of economic 'austerity', thus attracting Labour supporters in Scotland and diluting much of Miliband's potential appeal to left-inclined voters in England. More pertinent in respect of the overall outcome was the fact that Sturgeon's surge allowed the London-based media to run scare stories about the likelihood of a Labour-SNP coalition government. While Miliband ruled out any possibility of such a deal, this merely further alienated left-leaning voters while failing to assuage the fears of any wavering reader of a Tory-backing newspaper.

The Liberal Democrat role in the Conservative victory is less ambivalent. By vetoing a change in electoral boundaries which would have favoured Cameron's party (by making constituency electorates more equal), Nick Clegg and his colleagues made another 'hung' parliament more likely. However, the popularity of Clegg and his party had sunk like a stone after the 2010 election and neither showed any likelihood of improvement as the next one approached. For obvious reasons,

then, the Conservative strategy was to target vulnerable Liberal Democrat seats and, in the event, half of the 50 seats lost by Clegg's party were acquired by its carnivorous coalition partner; in other words, without these gains from the Liberal Democrat the Conservatives would have ended the 2015 election with a net loss of one seat. If this targeting strategy earned Lynton Crosby his knighthood, then few honours have been so easily gained.

As noted above, the electorate's preference for David Cameron over Ed Miliband was a key factor in the success of the Conservatives. When the latter beat his brother David to take the Labour leadership in 2010, it was easy for critics to jeer that he was not even the most attractive candidate within the Miliband family, let alone his party as a whole. David won majorities among Labour MPs and party members so that Ed owed his victory to trade union support. Even if he had proved uniquely gifted, the younger Miliband would always be tainted by that as well as by the feeling that he had stabbed his brother in the back in the fratricidal contest.

As it was, while his shortcomings were no doubt exaggerated by his media critics – including by means of unflattering photographs – even at the best of times for Labour, Miliband would have been no more than an adequate leader. These were not the best of times, however, especially since the Labour standard bearer was closely associated with economic failure, thanks to his prominent role in Gordon Brown's entourage.



Key players in the Conservative re-election in 2015: the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne and Prime Minister David Cameron.

**Why did the Tories not win more easily?** Given the impressive list of winning cards held by the Conservatives – on issues, leaders, worries about the SNP and so on – it seems pertinent to ask why they did not win more handsomely. The euphoric reaction of many senior Conservatives on election night and of the Conservative press on the day after should not obscure the fact that the election was anything but a triumphal procession for the Conservatives. Indeed, it could be said that the party barely crawled over the winning line.

In fact, however, this argument does not apply to the votes won by the parties but to the distribution of seats. As previously indicated, the Conservatives easily led Labour in terms of vote share. Indeed, the gap of 6.4 points is a very comfortable lead in historical perspective. In short, in terms of votes the Conservatives did win handsomely. It was the conversion of these votes into seats that caused the problem and made the outcome look like a narrow squeak.

"The Conservative strategy was to target vulnerable Liberal Democrat seats and, in the event, half of the 50 seats lost by Clegg's party were acquired by its carnivorous coalition partner."

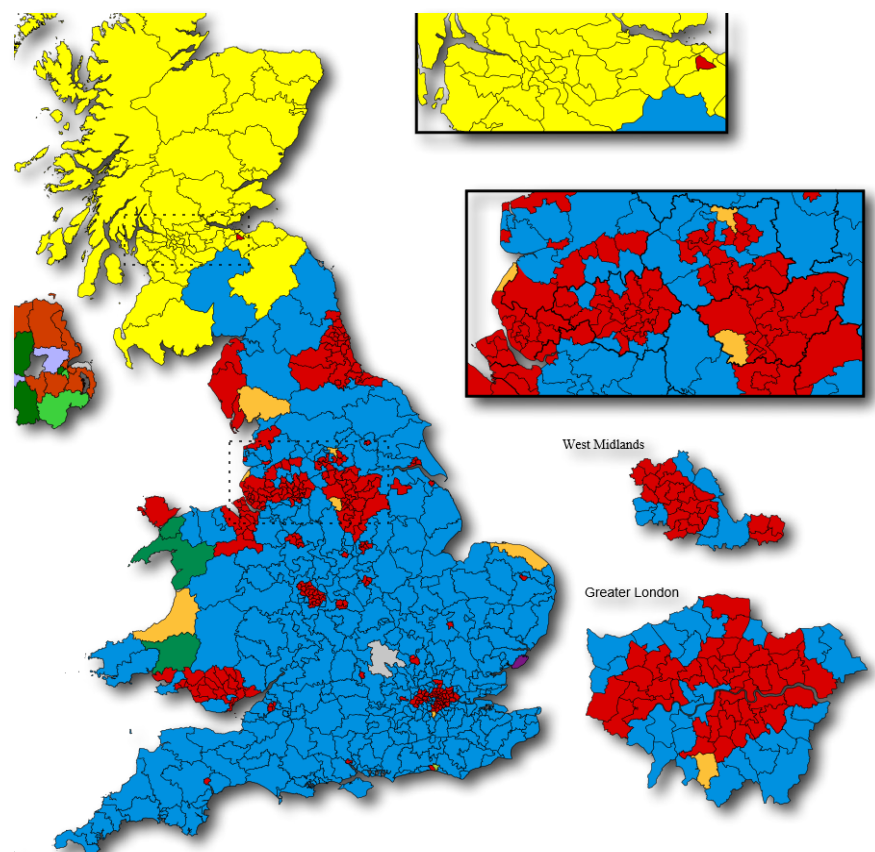
In previous elections the electoral system has worked to the disadvantage of the Conservatives vis-à-vis Labour. Two reasons for this remained in place in 2015 – the constituencies that they won had larger electorates than those taken by Labour (by about 4,000 electors) and also higher turnouts (69 per cent to 62 per cent). A third reason – large numbers of "wasted" Conservative votes in Liberal Democrat seats – virtually disappeared, however. In consequence, the Tories won a clear majority of seats in England and Wales (57%). In Scotland, on the other hand, they continued to be seriously under-represented with just 1 seat out of 59 and, of course, had none at all in Northern Ireland. The UK-wide outcome, therefore, was a significantly narrower Commons majority.

**Prospects.** Before the next election the Conservatives will implement the recommendations of another review of constituency boundaries which has already been initiated. This will certainly reduce the disadvantage that they suffer under the current arrangements. The Conservatives are

also receiving a major boost currently from the fact that the Labour party is in a mess having elected a left-wing leader, in the person of Jeremy Corbyn, who is not even supported by the majority of his own MPs. On the other hand, a large question mark hangs over the future of David Cameron.

As in 2010, Cameron had proved to be an invaluable electoral asset for a party which harboured some of his harshest critics. Before the election, he had signalled his intention to stand down before the next contest. Interestingly, none of his senior colleagues felt compelled to lodge an impassioned public protest against his decision to vacate the leadership and the scramble to succeed him is already under way. More immediately, Cameron somehow has to negotiate his way through a trap that he had set for himself – the promise of a referendum on Britain's EU membership before the end of 2017. As the realisation of a narrow Conservative victory began to sink in on the morning of 8 May 2015, Cameron must have been acutely aware that he had surmounted a significant electoral obstacle only to be confronted by new and potentially more hazardous

problems, before he could retire with the feeling that he had ensured a positive legacy for his country, his party, and himself.



**A bluer country.** The electoral map of Britain following the General Election of 7 May 2015.



# Cameron seen from Norway

Interview with **Torbjørn Røe Isaksen**

*Torbjørn Røe Isaksen (Conservative Party) is a Norwegian politician, MP for the Conservative Party and Minister of Education and Research since 16 October 2013. He was the leader of the Young Conservatives (Unge Høyre), the youth wing of the Conservative Party, from 2004 to 2008 and has contributed widely to ideological debates in the party in recent years.*



*As Minister of Education and Research, he is responsible for implementing the government's policies on the primary, secondary, tertiary vocational and higher education sectors, as well as on kindergartens, cultural schools, vocational education and training and adult learning. He is also responsible for government policy on research.*

***–You are and have been an eager reader of conservative ideology. What British thinkers, if any, have had a guiding influence on your own political career – and why?***

–I have to correct you. I have been an eager reader in general, not just of conservative ideology. Politically I have very much enjoyed liberal thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin and John Stuart Mill. Gladstone continues to be one of the most fascinating politicians in history, not to mention a Ramsay MacDonald or a Tony Blair.

But I have been more influenced by conservative thinkers, of course. Edmund Burke is foremost amongst them. I think his Irish background, and his Catholic mother, made him a more interesting figure than many of his contemporaries from the obvious elites. And of course his analysis of the French Revolution was spot on. Michael Oakeshott is less well known in Norway, but a very interesting thinker. He almost matches Burke when it comes to eloquence. I think British conservative thinkers have an appeal to me because British history lends itself so easily to a conservative interpretation.

So British conservatism has (at least most of the

time) not been purely abstract and theoretical. Benjamin Disraeli is perhaps the politician who best articulated this point.

Roger Scruton is a present day philosopher whom I enjoy reading.

***–David Cameron managed – to the surprise of many observers – to be re-elected with a parliamentary majority last May. What, in your opinion, has been the decisive factor in the success he has obtained among British voters?***

–It is tempting to say Miliband, but I think Cameron's success is due to something more. First of all he has managed to keep the conservatives together with for example the promised referendum on Europe. Second I think they conveyed their message of austerity quite well. It sounded as though the Tories had to keep spending down not out of ideological reasons, but because it was necessary for Britain (which I also believe is true). Cameron's modernisation of his party has not been that successful, but he has been able to soften some of the harsher sides of the Tories image. And I see to my great pleasure that he is now raising the One Nation banner once again.

***–Following on from that: to the extent that there are specific lessons to learn for a Norwegian Conservative from the Conservative resurgence since 2010, what would they be?***

"The Conservatives conveyed their message of austerity quite well. It sounded as though the Tories had to keep spending down not out of ideological reasons, but because it was necessary for Britain (which I also believe is true)."

There is one big lesson to be learned and that is: Act like you are a national party. Although the Tories are very weak in for example Scotland, they still act as the default party for the running of Britain.

The second thing is to broaden your appeal, not just rely on a few core issues. You might not get votes for being the best at

running the NHS, but you can certainly lose votes if people think you're running against it.

Third, be tireless in demanding that your opponents put forth clear policy solutions. Never let them get away with lofty suggestions and slogans.

***-What is your assessment of Cameron's reign in light of the classic division between conservative and liberal thought? Does his premiership encompass both – and, if so, is there no longer a need for a major Liberal party in Britain?***

Has there been a need for a Liberal party in Britain since Lloyd George died? No, on a more serious note. A conservative party can never be dogmatic in the the sense that it does not realise that people and society changes. In needs to hold on to certain institutions and ideals, but also fill these institutions with purpose and meaning that resonates in our time.

Homosexuality is a good example. It is hopeless today to argue that gay people undermine the nuclear family or family life in general. The modern conservative should argue that marriage is a very important institution, and thus it should be open also to same sex couples.

Though Britain is different from both the Nordic countries and continental Europe, I think Cameron has placed the Conservatives on a more solid centre-right ground that resembles the conservative parties in the Nordic countries. And I do think that there is still intellectual room for a liberal party in the UK, but the question is whether there is room for it in the first-past-the-post electoral system.

***-In Norway as in Britain, debates on local governance often take efficiency as a key criterion. However, Edmund Burke is only one of several conservative thinkers who have championed local communities as a harbour of civil society and buffer against a centralised state. How should these values be applied today?***

I think Cameron's thoughts on this are very much in line with the best in conservative tradition, that of devolving power to local governments. One of the problems though, has been that this has been done in years of austerity. That makes it easier for the public – and the opposition – to say that the motivating force is cutting spending, not building stronger local communities.

That said there is no conservative recipe for this. Of course conservatives will mostly favour decentralisation of power, but at the same time



Essence of a conservative disposition. Edmund Burke, (1729-97), politician and philosopher.

there are national differences. In countries where strong regions threaten to break away, such as in Spain, the national conservative parties tend to be the great defenders of the state. But, at the same time, one of the major Catalan parties wanting to break free from Madrid can also be labelled conservative...

***-To the extent that conservative values are of guidance to your own brief as minister of education and research, are these fundamentally different from what prevails in Britain? (on this, Conservatives have in recent years often referred to Sweden in their policy for "free schools", but have also***

***promoted basic skills and more competition in higher education).***

One tenet of conservatism is that we are not "citizens of nowhere" as I think Roger Scruton put it. So my job is not to shape Norway based on some theoretical model, or some foreign ideal, but to develop my country based on our traditions and our social model. That said there are some themes that unite conservatives across national borders. We, of course, view competition and private involvement as broadly positive. We tend to stress quality over quantity especially in education. We tend to focus more on school's core mission – education – and to want to guard that from intrusion by too many well intentioned activists.

I think one of the issues that have made a comeback is thinking of schools as arenas for nation building, for making communities stronger. This is an old conservative theme that seemed nearly forgotten for a few decades when economic growth took centre stage.

***-Do you see a scope for a closer community of interest between Britain and Norway in European policy with reference to the renegotiation process and coming referendum?***

I really hope the UK decides to stay in the EU, not least for the sake of the EU. But I do think the debate the UK raises, and the demands they have, are healthy for the EU. But if Britain should decide to leave the EU it is obvious that it will lead to closer ties with the countries outside the union, amongst them Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein. A mighty trio....

# Conservative ideology and the modernisation of the welfare-state

Since the accession of David Cameron to the party leadership in late 2005, the so-called Conservative 'modernisers' of British politics have sought to re-define and re-ignite the party's approach to managing the country's extensive and politically-sensitive welfare state. This has involved some often tortuous and prolonged policy



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re-positioning, with the modernisers seeking to adopt positions that transcend the past without entirely abandoning elements of it. This revived policy approach has also featured a specific focus on some key political themes and vocabulary such as "efficiency", "value for money", "streamlining services", "compassion" and an enhanced degree of "shared public-private welfare provision". All such terms have subsequently been blended into a broader "Big Society" agenda, and while not always clear in practical meaning, this nebulous concept has indicated that the era of the 'big state' and its centralised bureaucracy, for so long a fundamental feature of the British welfare state, has come to an end once and for all.

While emphasising individual responsibility, Cameron and his allies have nevertheless been keen to emphasise that the historic principles of Disraelian "compassionate conservatism" remain intact, and that the vulnerable and sick will be supported by wider society wherever this is required. However, what degree of support and who qualifies for such support has developed into major areas of political controversy, and the imposition of increased levels of 'conditionality' has appeared to challenge the principle of universal coverage which has been considered sacred to the basic pillars of the post-war welfare state. Ultimately, this has raised some broader concerns as to what the future holds for welfare provision within the UK, particularly under the stewardship of a majority Conservative government from 2015 onwards.

It is within the context of a growing and ageing population that significant long-term financial pressures have emerged to demand what is a more

*By Kevin Hickson and Ben Williams*

'modernised' approach to managing the welfare state, and such 'modernisers' exist within all mainstream British political parties. This type of politician fundamentally argues that the post-war consensus involving high public expenditure to fund an inexorably growing welfare state is an approach consigned to the history books, and that a reformed welfare state for the 21st century will have to be developed in its place. This argument claims that if significant reform does not occur, then the traditional (and generous) British welfare state is unsustainable and may implode in the near future. In general terms this perspective seeks a retreat from centralised, bureaucratic state control and points to the potential in a more diverse range of welfare service providers.

Such an outlook has been further encouraged by the 2008 economic slump and the specific austerity agenda pursued by the incoming Conservative-Liberal Democrat administration from 2010. In sustained opposition from 1997- 2010, and in office since both in coalition (from 2010) and then alone (from 2015), the new generation of Conservative politicians have faced major challenges in terms of reducing welfare expenditure and reformulating the British welfare model without destroying its key 'welfare' ethos in a practical sense. To successfully strike such a balance will arguably determine the party's long-term political prospects, with the public mood still broadly supporting a welfare state, albeit a less generous one for specific "less deserving" groups. However, critics and political opponents have determinedly argued that since the party's return of to national office in 2010, a series of welfare "safety nets" have been steadily eroded under the auspices of "austerity" and "welfare modernisation", and such trends have the potential to escalate further under single-party Conservative rule from 2015.

British Conservatism's relationship with the welfare state has gone through a series of distinct phases, with the party wedded to the post-war consensus of high taxation and generous provision for much of the 'years of consensus' between 1945 and the mid-1970s. This post-war welfare settlement had been imposed on social democratic terms by Attlee's Labour government of 1945-51, but the Conservatives maintained it while in power primarily for reasons fuelled by electoral pragmatism; namely that it chimed with the public mood and seemed to be broadly popular. The post-war population of Britain certainly desired a more comprehensive range of welfare support from the state, which was a mood heightened by the hardships of war and the poverty of the "devil's decade" of the 1930s, when many people faced long-term unemployment with limited state support.



Yet as the British population continued to grow, and core services such as the NHS, old age pensions and unemployment benefit expanded in cost and scope, there developed a growing political awareness that the status quo was not an option and that the size of the welfare state would have to be reduced. This was a view held by Margaret Thatcher on becoming leader of the Conservative Party in 1975, and it would frame much of her approach to the welfare state over the next fifteen years while both in opposition and in government.



**Reference with caution.** "The spectre of Thatcherism bears heavily on the 21st century Conservative modernisers, who are now embarked on a new phase of the party's relationship with the British welfare model."

The spectre of Thatcherism bears heavily on the 21st century Conservative modernisers, who are now embarked on a new phase of the party's relationship with the British welfare model. While always keen to praise her radical re-alignment of British politics and society during the 1980s, they are equally conscious of the broader public perception that her political approach lacked social empathy and awareness to the plight of those at the lower end of the social spectrum. Thatcher's often misquoted statement in 1987 that there 'was no such thing as society, just families and individuals' seems to epitomise the Thatcherite approach to welfare; which utilised rhetoric that emphasised the 'survival of the fittest' and a limited social framework for those that required additional support from the state. This was a perception that was significantly exploited by Tony Blair and New Labour from the mid-1990s onwards, which fuelled many of its key political campaigns on the premise that the Conservative Party lacked interest in and underfinanced core public services, and which polling evidence suggests was a factor in Labour's three successive general election victories between 1997 and 2005. Cameron's rebuke to this narrative was a prominent feature of his very first speech as Leader of the Opposition, when he sought to revive the collective Conservative social conscience by declaring that "There is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state". This signalled the beginning of his concerted 'de-toxification' strategy that sought to improve the party's social policy agenda and rid the Conservatives of the "nasty party" image.

In office for the first time in thirteen years from 2010, and initially hampered by the political practicalities

of coalition government, the Conservatives set about adopting their vision for the welfare state, while consistently expressing a concern and a desire to maintain core public services such as welfare provision. While caution has been evident in the sense that levels of public spending have remained relatively high and that national debt has not been significantly reduced (as was promised) in the short-term at least, there has even been evidence of some significant attempts to re-define the welfare state in a Conservative image for the new century. Policies such as the so-called 'bedroom tax' aimed at curbing housing benefit and introduced via the 2012 eponymous Welfare Reform Act, the re-organisation of the NHS under the 2012

Health and Social Care Act, and the introduction of 'free schools' within a radically re-structured educational model, have all reflected this new welfare approach involving a streamlined state that influences and interferes in fewer aspects of people's everyday lives. In philosophical and theoretical terms this view appears to represent a socio-political approach that envisages the alignment of citizens 'horizontally' alongside each other in social terms, communally bonded by key institutions that are less invasive, interventionist and prescriptive, as part of a more voluntarist model of civil society.

Of significance is the fact that all three flagship social welfare policies were vehemently opposed by the Labour opposition under then leader Ed Miliband and which continue to be opposed by current leader Jeremy Corbyn. This indicates a further polarisation within British politics, of the like that has not been seen since the 1980s. Freed from the shackles of coalition from 2015, further and more radical social and welfare reform beckons, with a looser degree of state control all potentially possible across the key welfare spheres of healthcare (enhanced private involvement), education (a more independent network of schools with even more autonomy), housing (with enhanced 'right to buy' extended to housing associations) and welfare payments (streamlined and reduced for those considered most deserving). If such a route continues, it will add fuel to the fire of those who argue that the new generation of Conservatives have the potential to re-structure and re-define the welfare state in a way that even Margaret Thatcher could not achieve.

# UK employment relations under the Conservatives: a "Little English" hegemony?

By Steve Williams and Peter Scott

In May 2015 the Conservatives under David Cameron were returned with a small, but largely unexpected parliamentary majority. Between 2010 and 2015 they had governed in coalition with the more centrist Liberal Democrats. While the leaderships of both parties shared the same fundamental belief in the virtues of a deregulated, flexible labour



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market, over time differences of emphasis began to emerge when it came to their respective approaches to employment relations matters. The commentator Ken Spours has argued that, liberated from the constraints imposed by having to govern in coalition, the Conservatives are using this opportunity to forge a long-term hegemonic strategy designed to marginalise political and industrial opposition. Its ultimate goal is to dominate the English – and hence the UK – political landscape for the foreseeable future.

A hegemonic strategy involves incorporation as well as coercion. The former, incorporating stances from the opposition, is an effective part of the political armoury. In the field of employment relations, it is evident in the attempts of the Conservatives to portray themselves as best placed to represent the interests of working people. Perhaps the most eye-catching element of the July 2015 budget, for example, was the Chancellor's announcement of a new minimum wage rate for over 25-year olds: a so-called 'National Living Wage' (NLW). This comes into effect in April 2016, at a rate of £7.20 per hour; and is anticipated to increase to at least £9.00 by 2020. Whether such a projected increase survives business lobbying remains to be seen. The government's claim that the NLW would offset the proposed reduction in the value of tax credits, part of £12 billion worth of planned cuts to in-work welfare benefits by 2019-20, has been shown to be false. However, as a measure which was effectively purloined from the

Labour opposition, the NLW policy is an important illustration of the Conservatives' efforts to construct hegemony by engaging with the emergent political consensus around tackling low pay. The campaign to introduce a "living wage" had, after all, been championed by the Labour Party in the run-up to the 2015 general election.

The hegemonic political strategy also has a strongly coercive dimension, aimed at weakening the prospects for political and industrial challenges to the Conservatives. This is demonstrated by the majority Conservative government's rapid return to legal attacks on organised labour. Its immediate employment relations priority was to progress with a new Trade Union Bill which, once it becomes law, will impose substantial additional restrictions on trade unions and their ability to undertake industrial action. The Bill's headline measure was the proposed introduction of new 'turnout thresholds' for industrial action; to be lawful any ballot will need at least half of the workforce to have voted. In so-called 'important public services' an additional hurdle will apply, with industrial action needing the support of at least 40 per cent of those entitled to vote. The Bill also contained provisions to hamper further the effectiveness of industrial action, some of which may not survive the legislative process.

Nevertheless, once it becomes law the Bill will have profound implications for employment relations in general, and trade unions in particular. It is already difficult enough for unions to organise a lawful strike; the measures contained in the Bill will make it significantly harder. The balance of industrial power will shift even further towards employers. Specific attention is given to the public sector, for the purpose of undermining union organisation in one of the few areas of the UK where it is still relatively healthy. Here, the Bill would prohibit the arrangements that enable union membership subscriptions to be deducted directly from salaries. The activities of workplace union representatives would also be restricted. The measure with perhaps the most profound long-term implications is that which would alter the basis on which unions can engage in legitimate political activity, by requiring union members to 'opt in' to paying political fund contributions, as opposed to choosing to 'opt out' as at present. Moreover, the proposed changes to political fund arrangements will, if enacted, substantially reduce the funds available to the main opposition Labour Party.

Now that they are governing without the pro-EU Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives have also been able to pursue their objective of re-negotiating the UK's membership of the EU, although to what ultimate purpose remains unclear. Under pressure to satisfy the demands of the increasingly animated Eurosceptic wing of his Party, in 2013 David Cameron announced that a future Conservative government would attempt to re-negotiate the terms of the UK's membership of the EU before putting the outcome to a referendum. One of the main areas where change was sought concerned EU social and employment policy, a longstanding Conservative grievance both because of the supposed regulatory burden it imposes on employers and the degree to which it symbolises the erosion of parliamentary sovereignty in the UK.

The process of negotiation formally commenced in November 2015, with the UK government hoping to reach an agreement with other EU member states in early 2016 in advance of a referendum expected to come later in the year. The UK published four key negotiating objectives, of which only the most specific one, the requirement that EU migrants must work in the UK for at least four years before they are entitled to claim in-work benefits, created any real difficulties. However, a demand to repatriate EU social and employment rights back to the UK was not one of the UK's explicit reform objectives (unless somehow subsumable under a wider generic objective of increasing European competitiveness). The omission seems odd given the concerns expressed by the Conservatives over the years about

how EU-derived employment protections impede business flexibility and competitiveness. The aim of securing an opt-out from EU employment legislation was originally on the government's agenda for renegotiating the terms of the UK's membership of the EU; however, given the increasingly Eurosceptic beliefs evinced by Conservative voters the government realised that in order to secure its preferred outcome in the referendum – 'yes' to remaining in a 'reformed' EU – it would be heavily reliant on Labour and trade union support. That meant abandoning – or at least deferring – the objective of opting out of EU social and employment laws, to the dismay of Eurosceptic Conservatives increasingly concerned about what they saw as the government's lack of ambition. At the time of writing, the outcome of the negotiations and the promised referendum are uncertain. However, the implications of a decision to withdraw from the EU would be potentially

momentous for employment relations and the entire body of UK employment law, depending on the terms of any UK exit.

Europe is not the only area where the UK Conservative government will struggle to realise its aspirations in employment relations. Devolved government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively has generated greater intra-UK diversity, something which became more pronounced during the coalition period between 2010 and 2015. Under a majority Conservative government such divergence is likely to become more marked, given the opposition to neo-liberal policies exhibited by the Scottish National Party administration in Scotland and Labour in Wales. This has already become evident with regard to efforts to block elements of the Trade Union Bill in Wales and Scotland. The Scottish government also opposes UK government proposals to deregulate Sunday trading hours. The Scottish and Welsh governments' preference for partnership, rather than antagonising professional staff, is evident in the health service. Whereas in England the UK government has become embroiled in a messy and fractious dispute over new contracts for junior doctors, the Scottish and Welsh administrations, which have devolved responsibility for health matters, have chosen not to pursue contractual changes.

Taken together, these issues demonstrate that, notwithstanding its efforts to pursue a hegemonic strategy, the 2015 Conservative government is nonetheless vulnerable on some fronts. Politically,

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the House of Lords defeat on the proposed cuts to tax credits, for example, shows that it cannot take Parliament for granted. Its parliamentary majority is rather smaller than that enjoyed by the coalition administration which preceded it. Industrially, moreover, action by junior doctors in England (which would have still been lawful even if the measures included in the Trade Union Bill had been in place) demonstrate the potential opposition that exists to unpopular measures taken by a government that, despite its plurality, was elected on just 36.9 percent of UK voters

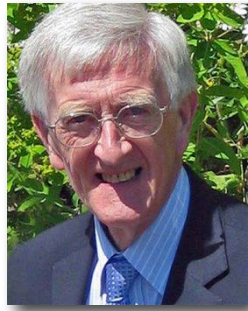
(24.3 percent of the registered electorate). However, with employment relations a matter largely reserved for the UK central government, the Conservatives' gamble may well be that sufficient English voters will buy into the Tory high employment, low regulation, low tax, low public spending message to ensure that a "Little English" Conservative hegemony can be maintained UK-wide for some time to come.



# Why do the Conservatives win so often?

By Eric J. Evans

The roots of Conservative success in Britain run deep. Adequate analysis requires reference as far back as the first half of the nineteenth century and begins with Tory disaster rather than triumph. In 1846, the Conservative party under Sir Robert Peel tore itself apart over proposals for free-trade in corn. Only a third of the notional Tory majority in the House of Commons voted with Peel to repeal to Corn Laws. With no Tory majority, Peel resigned. His resignation split the party. Between the end of Peel's ministry and Benjamin Disraeli's electoral victory in 1874, six general elections were held and the Conservatives lost the lot. Although they formed three minority governments, none lasted.



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From 1874 to 2015, however, the party was in power, either alone or as the dominant force in coalitions, for 60 per cent of the time. What best explains such a long period of electoral success? The propensity for internal feuding was as great in the Conservative party as in the Liberal or Labour parties. In addition to their deep divisions over the Corn Laws, the Conservatives split apart again over free trade in 1903. This led directly to a Liberal victory at the general election of 1906 and to the party's last overall majority. As war approached in the later 1930s, the Conservatives were again divided over the policy of appeasing Hitler's Germany. Divisions continue. Indeed, the current ill-natured internal wrangling over "Brexit" has the greatest potential for irreversible fission in the Conservative party since corn-law repeal.

Despite these problems, the Conservative party has survived and prospered because its internal conflicts have generated less long-term damage than have those of its opponents. In 1886, the Liberal Party fell apart over an existential, rather than an economic, issue: home rule for Ireland. Gladstone's fierce, if ultimately frustrated, determination to resolve the issue succeeded only in exacerbating pre-existing tensions within the party. Many in the wealthy, aristocratic Whig elite, which had provided the party with both funding and leadership for two centuries, now considered that the preservation of the Union was more important than the unity of the

Liberal party. A separate 'Liberal Unionist' party was formed in response, while over the next decade or so, many defectors joined the Conservatives. In 1909, the Tories renamed themselves as the "Conservative and Unionist Party" and a formal merger with Liberal Unionists took place three years later.

Historians have generally been severe on Gladstone's handling of the Irish issue. One concluded that he had "turned the Liberal party from a great party of government into a gaggle of outsiders". If that judgement seems extreme, it is difficult to disagree that, despite a short-lived revival in the early twentieth century, the course of the party's long-term decline was set in 1885-6. The Liberals also missed its opportunity to consolidate support among recently enfranchised working men, many of whom were loyal Liberals. The party showed little interest, however, in adopting prominent trade union leaders as parliamentary candidates. Rapidly growing unions turned their attention to establishing a separate working man's party. By the later 1920s, the Labour Party had established itself as the second party in the state.

The vagaries of Britain's electoral system also harmed the Liberals. Under the so-called 'first-past-the-post system', a candidate wins by polling more votes than any other candidate, irrespective of the numbers voting for a different candidate. By the late 1920s, the Liberal Party was reunited under David Lloyd George and prepared for the general election of 1929 with confidence. However, it was the third party in what was, in essence, a two-party system. The Conservative and Labour parties won a little over 8m votes each. The Conservatives obtained 38.1% of the popular vote and won 260 seats; Labour, with 37.1% won 287 and, as the largest party in the Commons, formed a brief, if divisive, government. The Liberals gained 5m votes – almost two thirds of the popular vote cast for either the Conservatives or Labour – but only 59 seats. On average, Labour won a seat for every 28,000 or so votes cast and the Conservatives for every 32,000. By contrast, the Liberals gained one seat per 87,000 votes. The Liberals came a close second in a large number of seats but this gained them nothing. Indeed, worse than nothing. The 1929 election confirmed them as Britain's third party. Although the party has enjoyed sporadic revivals since 1929, they have flattered to deceive: The Liberals have often been a convenient repository for protest votes but not a serious contender for majority government.

The impact of first past the post also came close to destroying Labour in 1983, at the first of the two general elections Margaret Thatcher won as prime minister. The Conservatives were anyway favourites because of Britain's recent victory in the Falklands War against Argentina in 1982. Meanwhile, Labour was experiencing one of its periodic ideological wrangles between left and right. Some prominent right-wing Labour politicians had recently left the party and fought the election in alliance with the Liberals as the "Social Democratic Party". First past the post did not determine who won the election. The Tories won 42.4 per cent of the popular vote which gave them a huge overall majority of more than 140 seats. It did, however, shore up the two-party system. The Labour party suffered heavy losses and won only 27.6 per cent of the popular vote. The Alliance won 25.4 per cent, suggesting a closely fought contest to be the official Opposition. The number of seats won told a spectacularly different story. Labour won 209 seats and the Alliance 23. Labour won a seat for every 40,000 or so votes cast and the Conservatives with about 33,000. In stark contrast, the Alliance polled 338,000 votes per seat won. No wonder that electoral reform has been a key objective for Liberal politicians since the late 1920s. No wonder, also, that the Conservative party staunchly defends the electoral *status quo*.

The mechanics of party organisation have also helped to explain Conservatives domination. In particular, the party usually reacted more effectively than its opponents to electoral defeat. Soon after Gladstone's Liberal victory in 1868, the Conservatives established a new Central Office in 1870. Central Office increasingly focused attention on articulating policies designed to reduce the number of separate, and often unhelpful, messages coming from different constituencies. It also concentrated its efforts on Britain's growing and increasingly prosperous middle class, especially in London but also in industrial Lancashire. The Conservative strategy was straightforward. The parliamentary reform Acts of 1867 and 1884 substantially reduced the number of small parliamentary boroughs and transferred their seats to suburbs of the rapidly growing towns. Thus, while the Liberals fought over Home Rule for Ireland, with Gladstone believing, as in 1868, that the party's core support lay with "Scotch Presbyterians, English and Welsh nonconformity and Irish Roman Catholics", the Conservatives recognised both that these were minority groups in the UK as a whole and that most propertied Englishmen opposed Irish home rule.

Although, as recent research has confirmed, Conservative organisation in suburbia was hit and miss, the party increasingly focused on opposition to Home Rule and the defence of property rights. The first it characterised as a fatal step towards the disintegration of the British Empire; the second recognized that parliamentary reform had substantially increased

the influence of modest property-holders. In 1868, the Conservatives had won only two of London's twenty-two seats. The 1884 Reform Act increased London's representation to fifty-nine seats of which the Conservatives won forty-nine in the 1886 general election. In 1900 (an election dominated by imperial issues, especially the Boer War), they won fifty-one London seats and fifty-one also of the sixty-two seats in increasingly industrial and commercial Lancashire.

More often than not - and the period 1997-2010 was a notable exception - the Conservatives continued to respond effectively to electoral defeat. To general surprise, the 1945 general election produced a huge overall Labour majority of almost a hundred and fifty, yet five years later the Conservatives had whittled this down to single figures before winning a narrow majority in the election in 1951. They were able to turn the tables so quickly because they recognised the reasons for defeat. In voting Labour in 1945, the electorate was supporting a party which promised to use of the power of the state to improve life chances blighted by two devastating world wars. Right-wing Tories - ideologically opposed to almost any state intervention - were marginalised after 1945. A new generation of Tory politicians, including R.A. Butler and Harold Macmillan, came to the fore. They accepted many of Labour's key reforms. In particular, they promised to sustain the new National Health Service, free at the point of use. They also promised to build more houses than Labour had done. Their promise to the electorate was to make state intervention more efficient, less costly and above all less ideologically driven. Conservatives would never go down the Socialist road which, they argued, led to an 'over-encroaching power of the state over the lives of individuals'.

Priority was again given to party organisation. The Party Chairman from 1946 to 1955, Lord Woolton, revived what in many cases had become ramshackle and demoralized constituency organisations. He demanded a more professional approach to party politics at local level, concentrating on prosperous constituencies in the south of England, many of which had been lost to Labour in 1945 but which should have been safe Tory seats. Woolton himself epitomized the new emphasis in Conservative politics. He came from a working-class family on Merseyside which could not afford a University education for their bright son. Woolton made his own way in the world of business, and was appointed Chairman of Lewises, the Liverpool-based department store in 1936. Woolton's initiatives made a key difference in the two closely fought general elections of 1950 and 1951. The Tories fought a campaign committed to the welfare state, but with a substantially greater emphasis than Labour on individual opportunity. They looked to business to provide opportunities to improve living standards of both the working and the lower middle classes.

Woolton's example also helped to consolidate the Conservatives' growing reputation for competence, safe economic management and support for business. These proved the important issues for so-called 'swing voters' who have determined the outcome of most general elections since 1950. The party also pledged to help more working people own their houses. One of the most popular pieces of legislation passed by Margaret Thatcher's highly contentious governments in the 1980s was that which gave council-house tenants the right to purchase the properties in which they lived. Conservative propaganda celebrated the emergence of a property-owning democracy. Conservatives presented themselves as "the party of aspiration", a phrase which Tory politicians in the early twenty-first century worked almost to the point of expiration.

The 1950s and 1960s saw substantial economic development and rising living standards. Unsurprisingly, and despite being out of office from 1964 to 1970, the Conservative party claimed credit for ending the years of post-war Labour austerity and for launching a prolonged period of regeneration. In this period, the party outpaced Labour in two important areas. Firstly, most of both popular and broadsheet national newspapers were right-wing. The paper of choice for between two-thirds and three-quarters of British voters was pro-Tory. Of course, many voters were perfectly capable of ignoring the political advice newspapers offered; most denied that a newspaper's political had any influence on how they voted. However, in the late twentieth century, British newspapers both left and right increasingly – and often contemptuously – ignored the dictum of the newspaper editor C.P. Scott in 1921 that "Comment is free, but facts are sacred". Particularly as general elections approached, newspaper editors acted as unofficial party agents and propagandists. In such a battle, the 'right' heavily outgunned the 'left'.

The Conservatives' second in-built advantage was the support it received from business, private industry and finance. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the propertied classes feared the malign spread of communism into Western Europe and thence to the United Kingdom. With the Liberals marginalized after the First World War and the Labour Party committed by its 1918 constitution to secure for workers "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange", business support for the Conservatives was more or less a foregone conclusion. In consequence, the Party found it easier to raise the substantial funds needed to fight elections than did their opponents and easier too to find articulate and sympathetic voices at election time. A report from Britain's electoral commission noted that in 2014 the Conservatives received £28.6m in donations to the Labour Party's £11m. Combined with the effects of the present government's proposals requiring trade unionists positively "opt in" to a political levy rather than "opt out", the Labour party unsurprisingly feared that

the Conservatives "will establish an overwhelmingly financial dominance over the Labour party, making British elections uncompetitive".

Of course, this advantage was partially countered by trade-union funds. Political levies formed part of most unions' membership fees. Members could opt out of paying the levy, the overwhelming majority of which went to swell Labour party funds, but few bothered. From the end of the Second World War to the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, union membership increased from about 8m to almost 14m, which helped Labour considerably. The trend from 1979, however, was generally downwards. By 2014, trade union membership had declined by 54 per cent to 6.4m, most members working in the public sector of the economy. Furthermore, with a larger proportion of over-fifties registered as union members than younger groups, this downward trend is likely to continue if not accelerate.

This paper has argued that no one "killer cause" explains why the Conservatives have been the dominant political party in Britain so often and for so long. Perhaps the most important was sheer good fortune? Though its own splits over the Corn Laws, free trade and tariff reform were damaging enough and led to substantial periods out of office, they taught the party to prioritize unity above ideology. By contrast, splits in the Liberal party precipitated its virtual collapse. The knock-on effect brought further benefits. From 1918 onwards, it was the fledgling Labour party which provided the Tories with their main opposition. Labour was far from united itself and it took the party almost half a century to win an overall majority in the House of Commons.

The bizarre but highly significant effects of first-past-the-post protected the majority parties from assault by opponents on both left and right. The Conservatives also understood that most voters are relatively uninterested in politics. They disproportionately vote Conservative because they usually see the party as the safest choice. The balance may shift, of course. Ongoing divisions over Britain's role in Europe may widen to produce the first full-blown Conservative split for over a century. More likely, however, such a split will not happen and the favourable factors rehearsed here suggest that the Conservatives will continue to dominate. Indeed, their prospects could become even rosier. The Conservatives rarely win majorities in Scotland or Wales, while Labour needs consistently strong showings in both nations to have any hope of winning a majority. England is substantially the largest nation in the United Kingdom and, especially in the south of the country, predominantly Conservative. If the gusty winds currently inflating the sails of the United Kingdom's nationalist parties lead to the re-establishment of an independent Scotland, then it becomes difficult to see how Conservative domination can be challenged in the foreseeable future.



# Speech to the World Economic Forum

*On 21 January 2016, David Cameron spoke to the World Economic Forum in Davos on the future of Britain in a reformed European Union. His speech reflects a Prime Minister whose approach to Europe is pragmatic rather than dogmatic, just as Cameron's premiership owes more to traditional Tory statecraft than to a stern ideological profile.*

*Following the agreement made in Brussels at the European Council meeting on 18-19 February, the date for the referendum has been set to 23 June. Interesting times are ahead, for Britain's future membership in the EU as well as for the Conservative Party which is subject to bitter internal strife over the issue.*

(...) My aim is absolutely clear. I want to secure the future of Britain in a reformed European Union. I believe that is the best outcome for Britain and the best outcome for Europe. Now, some people ask me, 'Well, why are you holding a referendum?' Let me explain why I believe this referendum is so crucial. For years Britain has been drifting away from the European Union. The European Union has become increasingly unpopular in Britain. And added to that, the succession of politicians, after treaty after treaty after treaty has passed, have promised referendums, but never actually delivered them. And I think it's absolutely essential to have full and proper democratic support for what Britain's place should be in Europe and that's why we're holding the referendum.

And we also need the referendum in order to address the concerns that people have in Britain about Europe. The idea that there is too much rule making and bureaucracy. The idea that this could become too much of a single-currency-only club. The idea that Europe is really about a political union, a political union that Britain has never been comfortable with. So I believe holding the referendum, answering these questions, but with the end goal of securing Britain's place in a reformed European Union, can give Britain and can give Europe the best of both worlds.

"Sometimes people think Britain is a very reluctant European. And I would say, no. If you look at things like completing the single market, you will find no more dedicated a country than Britain to get the job done."

Now let me explain what it is that I think needs to change. And I've set out the 4 things, the 4 areas that I think are so crucial. And just want to run through them. First of all, it is about competitiveness. When I look at the single market of 500 million people, I think it is an absolute thrilling prospect. This is a quarter of the global economy. But we have to be frank when we look at Europe's single market. We're still lagging behind America in technology; we're lagging behind in productivity. We could be doing so much more to add to the competitiveness of our businesses and our

economies rather than taking away from it. And that's why what I want to see, what I believe we will see, is clear measures to cut the bureaucracy that there is in Europe and to cut the rule making. I want to see clear measures to complete the single market in digital, in services, in energy which will be of huge benefit to countries like Britain, but right across Europe in terms of jobs and prosperity.

And crucially, I want to see Europe sign trade deals with the fastest-growing parts of the world. For instance, our trade deal with Korea has been fantastically successful for Korea, but even more successful actually for the countries of the European Union. And people will want to know in Britain that the European Union is signing trade deals as fast as and more significant than we could ever sign on our own. So I want to hardwire competitiveness into the European Union so it benefits countries; not just Britain, but I think it will benefit all of Europe and that's why I think it's important that we put this on the table.

Now the second area I want to see change is I want to make sure that this organisation is good for those countries that are members of the eurozone, but also good for those countries, like Britain, that don't want to join the euro. Because the truth is this: for many, many years, and in Britain's case, I suspect forever, the European Union is going to have more than one currency. And we should be frank about that. And let me be clear: I want the eurozone to succeed. The eurozone is our biggest trading partner. I don't want to stand in

the way of things that need to be done to make the eurozone a success. Indeed, I would encourage eurozone members to take those necessary steps. But in a sentence, what we need is an organisation that is flexible enough so that you can be a success if you're not in the euro, or a success if you are in the euro, and fair rules between the two.

(...)

Now the third area I think we need to see change, change for Britain, but again I would argue, good change for Europe, and that is in the area of sovereignty. Britain has never been happy with the idea that we are part of an ever-closer political union. We're a proud and independent country, with proud, independent, democratic institutions that have served us well. We're also bound up in the European continent, of which we are an important part, and we need to get that relationship right.

And sometimes people think Britain is a very reluctant European. And I would say, no. If you look at things like completing the single market, you will find no more dedicated a country than Britain to get the job done. If you look at issues like coming together on foreign policy challenges to make sure we take robust action, it was Britain that led the charge on sanctions against Russia because of its actions in Ukraine. It was Britain that led the charge on making sure we had those crucial sanctions against Iran that helped to bring Iran to the table that brought about that non-nuclear deal. So we're not reluctant in that sense, but if Europe is about ever-deepening political union, with ever-deepening political institutions, then it's not the organisation for us. So I want to be absolutely clear that we want to carve Britain out of the idea of a closer union. We will be enthusiasts for the economic cooperation, for foreign policy cooperation, for working together on challenges like climate change, but we're never going to be comfortable in something that insists that Britain should be part of an ever closer union. We're not comfortable with that, and we need to sort that out.

The fourth and final area is perhaps the most difficult of all, and that is this issue of migration and welfare. Now Britain is, I would argue, one of the most successful multi-racial, multi-faith, multi-ethnic democracies anywhere on Earth. We are a very diverse nation, a very diverse and successful nation, but the pressures that we face from migration in recent years have been too great. Our population is growing anyway, even before this migration is taken into account, but the figures are simple. Today, net migration into Britain is running at 330,000 a year. That means adding as many as 3.5 million people to our population across a decade. And that's what the concern is about. It's not a concern about race, or colour, or creed. It's a concern about numbers and pressure. And it's the British people's number one concern. And I don't think for one minute they're being unreasonable having this concern, indeed I share this concern because the pressure on public services, the pressure on communities has been too great. Now, of course, we need to do more to control migration from outside the European Union, and we're doing that. But we do need to look at the situation within the European Union. Now I want to be clear: I support the idea of free movement. Many British people take advantage of free movement to go and live and work in other European countries. But I think where this has gone wrong is that the interaction of our welfare system with free movement has actually set up very large pressures on our country, and that is what needs to change.

And that is why I put on the table the idea, the proposal that you should have to live or work in Britain for 4 years before you get full access to our in work benefits system. Because the way it works today – because Britain has a non-contributory system, one you can

access straight away – you can train as a nurse in Bulgaria, and actually it would pay you to come and work in manual labour in Britain because of our top up welfare system. And in the end, that isn't really right for Bulgaria and that isn't really right for Britain.

And I think, when enthusiasts for the European Union look at this issue, they should stand back and look at the facts and the figures. When the founding fathers of Europe came together, did they ever really believe that a million people were going to move from Poland to Britain, or that 1 in 20 Lithuanians would make their home in Britain? Now, those people make an incredible contribution to our economy, and I welcome that, but the scale of the movement, the scale of the pressure, is something that we need to address. And I think, when in Europe we look at the issues we face today – whether it's the migration crisis, whether it is the issues that Britain's putting on the table – it would be far better to address these issues, to try and solve these problems, rather than try and look our electorates in the eye and say we're simply not going to listen to what you're doing.

So what I've tried to set out is 4 things; not outrageous asks that can't be achieved, but 4 practical sets of steps that, if achieved, would actually answer the concerns that Britain has about Europe.  
(...)

Now, where do I hope this all ends? Well, let me just say this: even if I'm successful in getting this reform package and holding this referendum, and Britain decides to stay in a reformed Europe, at no stage will you hear me say, 'Well that is perfection; this organisation is now fixed.' There are many things that are imperfect about the European Union today, and there will be many things that will be imperfect about the European Union even after this negotiation. We do need reform in Europe: to make sure Europe works for the countries of Europe, for the peoples of Europe, for the businesses of Europe; for all the people who want to work and have security, and get on and make something of their lives. The reform will not be finished.  
(...)

We would be absolutely clear that, for us, Europe is about independent nation states coming together to cooperate, to work together for their mutual benefit, but it is not an ever-deepening political union which the British people do not want and would not sign up to. I think that is a huge prize. I think that is a prize worth fighting for; it's a prize worth negotiating for; if necessary, it's a prize that we will have to be patient in order to achieve, but it's a prize I'm determined to deliver in this, my second term as Prime Minister. Thank you.

*A full transcript of the speech is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/davos-2016-prime-ministers-speech-to-the-world-economic-forum>*

# Report from a BPS seminar on the Corbyn leadership

"Where to, Labour?" This was the overarching, rhetorical question asked at British Politics Society's evening event at Litteraturhuset in Oslo on 15 December last year.

At the seminar, an engaged audience got to hear presentations from Glen O'Hara (Professor at Oxford Brookes University), Annette Groth (Former London correspondent for the NRK) and Paul Beamont (PhD fellow at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences).

The three presenters reflected on the the Labour party's historical development and present-day challenges, in light of its change in leadership and profile last year. The seminar was organized by British Politics Society with financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through "Europamidler". It was chaired by Øivind Bratberg, Senior Lecturer at the University of Oslo, while BPS leader Atle L. Wold opened the seminar on behalf of the organisers.



## Membership 2016

*Membership in BPS is open to all individuals and institutions with an interest in British politics, society, language, and culture. As a member, you receive subscription to four editions of British Politics Review, invitation to all events organised by the society and the right to vote at our annual general meeting.*

*Your membership comes into force as soon as the membership fee, 200 NOK for 2016, has been registered at our account <6094.05.67788> (please make sure to mark your payment with your full name). If you have questions about membership, please do not hesitate to contact us by e-mail at [mail@britishpoliticsociety.no](mailto:mail@britishpoliticsociety.no)*

## Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review

Where does Northern Ireland stand 10 years after the St. Andrews agreement of 2006? In the spring edition of *British Politics Review* we will mark the anniversary of St. Andrews with a series of articles addressing the state of Northern Ireland now, and the development which has taken place over the past ten years.

The agreement which was reached at St. Andrews in Scotland in October

2006 resulted in the re-establishing of the devolved government of Northern Ireland after the suspension of 2002 and, since then, the power-sharing government of Northern Ireland has been up and running. Does this mean that a lasting solution for the government of Northern Ireland has finally been found?

2016, however, also marks the centenary of the Easter Rising of 1916, and in our issue

on Northern Ireland we will seek to include a longer historical perspective too, looking back to this crucial event.

*The spring edition of British Politics Review is due to arrive in May 2016.*