

TIME FOR A CHANGE

**BRITISH CONSERVATISM AND
THE POLITICS OF BREXIT**

Professor Alan Sked



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British Conservatism and the politics of Brexit

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*This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror...
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them.*

From William Shakespeare's King John.

*What! Shall a name, a word, a sound control
The aspiring thought, and cramp th' expansive soul?
Shall one half-peopled island's rocky round
A love that glows for all Creation bound?
And social charities contract the plan
Framed for thy freedom, UNIVERSAL MAN?
-NO- through th' extended globe his feelings run
As broad and general as the sun!
No narrow bigot HE;-his reasoned view
Thy interests, England, rank with thine, Peru!
France at our door, he sees no danger nigh,
But heaves for Turkey's woes the impartial sigh.
A steady patriot of the world alone,
The friend of every country-but his own.*

George Canning, Tory Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister.

Introduction

'...we shall shock them,' wrote Shakespeare. And we certainly did. Self-styled internationalists of all stripes were appalled by Britain's vote to leave the European Union. It was the shock of the patriotic. The descendants of Canning's Universal Man, 'the citizens of nowhere', in the words of Theresa May, those 'steady patriots of the world alone, the friends of every country but their own', were all convinced that the benefits of EU membership were so self-evident that the British electorate would endorse David Cameron's advice to remain in the EU. They had, unfortunately, ignored the concrete Euroscepticism of the British street based on the commonplace experience over several decades of the many failures of the European Union. Cameron, however, did the honourable thing and resigned immediately. His Chancellor, George Osborne, on the other hand – responsible for the Great Scare that Britain would suffer immediate economic ruin after a Brexit vote – had to be sacked by Cameron's successor. In the run-up to the referendum Osborne had also forbidden the Treasury to prepare any contingency plans for Brexit. The result was that whatever Vote Leave had said during the referendum campaign, May's government – consisting of a majority of Remainers, who presumably had also expected a YES vote and had endorsed Osborne's refusal to plan for the opposite outcome – was faced with negotiating Brexit without any blueprint or contingency plan in place at all. The hypocritical Osborne, none the less, like all recidivist Remainers, held this against the government. Surprisingly quickly, however, Theresa May, produced an excellent strategy for Brexit in her Lancaster House speech around which her cabinet seemed to unite. Since her disastrous 2017 general election campaign, on the other hand, doubts have emerged whether it will still be adhered to; indeed whether Brexit will take place at all. Yet the latter outlook is far too gloomy. Most voters have accepted Brexit – indeed a 'hard' Brexit – and now just want the government to get on with it. In any case, the EU's negotiators, who for the moment still display a determination to punish our desire for democratic self-government, have stated that, were we to rejoin the EU, we would have to relinquish our rebate, agree to adopt the euro and consent to sign up to the Schengen Agreement. Not even a senile Liberal Democrat would accept such an arrangement. So Brexit will happen.

It is also clear that it will be negotiated by a Tory government. There is no alternative. The Liberal Democrats have been reduced to political impotence, since like all the pro-European parties at the last election,

their share of the vote went down. Their policy of forcing a second referendum had little appeal. True, their new, elderly leader is sticking to it – despite previous statements calling it undemocratic and disrespectful to the electorate – but on the whole the party is reliant on anonymous geriatrics in the House of Lords to cause any real trouble. Neither liberal nor democratic, the party no longer attracts any Gladstones, Asquiths or Lloyd Georges and while it still seeks to rely on its traditional vapid do-goodery to present a decent front to the electorate, unfortunately its broken promises over student fees and its toxic association with David Cameron completely undermine this. Poor Nick Clegg has turned out to be just a pretty face. Cleggomania lasted a mere instant and even he lost seats as party leader. No longer an MP, he now has to compete with Nigel Farage for the odd television appearance.

The true Remainers, of course, as much as the bureaucrats of Brussels, had put their faith in Scotland to destroy the ambitions of the Brexiteers. To risk Brexit, they argued, would be to destroy the United Kingdom. The SNP would force a second Scottish independence referendum on the issue of EU membership. Brexit would mean not the restoration of self-government for the UK but the break-up of Britain. After the votes were cast in the general election, however, the plans of Brussels and the SNP, were no better rewarded than those of Mrs. May. The SNP lost 21 seats – almost one third of its total – while its vote share dropped to 37%. Irony of ironies, Ruth Davidson's resurgent Scottish Tories actually enabled Mrs. May to survive as Prime Minister. So the SNP will hardly be involved in Brexit negotiations, no matter how many trips to EU capitals the Scottish First Minister makes. Its Brexit election proved a disaster, with even Alex Salmond, the architect of the first Scottish referendum, losing his seat, along with Angus Robertson, leader of the SNP cohort at Westminster. Salmond, never a true political heavyweight, began a new career as a comedian. Nicola Sturgeon, on the other hand, who has never been noted for a sense of humour, has become a rather tragic figure, unable to run Scotland with any convincing degree of success and perhaps not really interested in doing so. She simply waits for the tide to turn to allow her to re-launch her independence referendum, even lamenting, unconvincingly and hypocritically, that her pro-European party's name should include the word 'National'. Fortunately, her tide seems to be going further and further out.

Without the sudden downfall of the Tory government, Labour cannot hope to negotiate Brexit. The party in 2017 lost its third election in a row finishing 56 seats behind the Tories. The great surprise,

however, was that it could take 40% of the vote, despite being led by an inveterate Marxist, whose career like that of his closest colleagues had been spent giving support and succour to practically every terrorist and revolutionary group on the face of the earth. He was supported by a street army of teenage Stalinists and anti-Semites, not to mention shadow frontbenchers, whose intellectual capacities appeared very limited, thus explaining perhaps his manifesto, which if ever implemented, would have bankrupted Britain. Most of these people displayed what Nietzsche once complained of in Carlyle, 'a painful craving for noise', a noise that would have reminded Hazlitt of 'importunate guinea fowls, one note day and night', in this case that of revolution. Their interest in the British political system seemed to be limited to violent assaults on it. The shadow Chancellor after the election was soon calling for days of rage when mobs would take over the streets. He would call the local councillors in Kensington murderers after the Grenfell Tower tragedy, even though Labour ones in Camden had presided over the cladding of tower blocks there with exactly the same flammable materials.

In days of yore, radical politics, if not dominated by, at least included, educated men of high ability, the teeming harvest of whose powerful minds, could sustain a respectable reform movement. But not today. Corbyn's entourage is full of what Carlyle would have referred to as 'berserkers' similar to those in the mob scene in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*. There, Jack Cade, the rebel leader, plays to his illiterate followers by arresting Chatham's clerk on the grounds that he can read and write and accuses Lord Say of being a traitor since he knows French. Cade himself, then denounces all traditional means of government: 'burn all the records of the realm: my mouth shall be the parliament of England.' Any one of Corbyn's cronies could express that sentiment today. George Orwell once wrote that in this country people do not kill each other over politics. Regretfully, that is no longer true after the murder of Jo Cox MP, yet it was the Left which during the election gave rise to a despicable social media campaign against Tory MPs (SNP trolls merit a mention too) which included death threats. The latest version of the Labour Party, therefore, threatens to turn into something hitherto unknown in this country albeit not elsewhere. 'The pity of it, Iago, O the pity of it!' Have these people never read *Animal Farm* or *1984* or *The Great Terror*?

Labour's new adherents (some in fact the rather ancient relics of the Loony Left of the 1980s) are trapped in a *mentalité* of violent revolution and as Braudel, the father of *mentalités* put it, such *mentalités* are, intellectually, 'long-term prisons'. This particular one leads Labour's

leaders to lend open, unembarrassed support of the most unsavoury, dictatorial, anti-Semitic and undemocratic movements around the world. Their immature followers accept this since they have been indoctrinated by third-rate academics, teachers, journalists and writers to see in revolutions, not a disparate collection of unfortunate, discrete events – the violent overthrow of established governments, the destruction of private property, mass murder and imprisonment, secret arrests and trials of opponents – but the generic cause of the regeneration of mankind, the road to utopia.

For both old and young in Labour's leadership, this ideological zeal is based on Marxism, a doctrine which the British working class has never been the least interested in. Marxism arrived in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century in the shape of translations of Marx's tedious volumes of *Das Kapital*. Contemporary economists wrote him off as a failure. His labour theory of value, which ignored supply and demand, market economics and the large variety of factors – investment, tax, overheads – that, apart from the cost of labour, also contributed to value, was seen as ridiculous and widely lampooned. The Fabians, for example, preferred Henry George's theory of land valuation as a basis for economic theory. It was the later success of Lenin's coup in Russia that saved Marx from eternal obscurity. Others pointed out that Marx's history was also bunk – history is mostly the story of class collaboration rather than class struggle – while his sociology – which saw classes as only important once they had a self-conscious grasp of their role in history (thus, crucially, allowing bourgeois Marxist intellectuals to lead the workers) made sense only to those who understood and swallowed Hegel. Crucially, of course, Marx was no democrat. As he wrote in 1852, he alone had 'proved' that 'the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Lenin said the same in his *The State and Revolution*: a true Marxist was one who extended his acceptance of the class struggle to acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The British working class never accepted any of this. It believed in the British system of parliamentary government and constitutional monarchy. Parliament was fair – just like one of the football matches they watched alongside their bosses, in which two teams were equally matched and regulated by a referee. The monarch was also fair – he or she never interfered in politics but represented the dignity of the nation and continuity with its past. In any case, any attempt by a Marxist third party to break into mass politics was impossible. The two great established parties – Tories and Liberals – were kept in power by a first-past-the

post-electoral system which meant that a vote for any other party was a wasted one. Today, it is true that the Labour Party is one of the two major parties but any attempt to impose a Marxist agenda on the British people would have even less chance of success: the organised, industrial working class has disappeared; Labour has no policies for implementing socialism apart from spending huge sums of money it cannot account for, while, without a party purge of Stalinist proportions, it could not command a majority even of its own MPs to push a Marxist programme through Parliament. If such a purge were carried out before the next election, Labour would soon lose its present standing in the opinion polls. And if there were any possibility of it winning a parliamentary election under its Marxist leadership on a Marxist programme, money would flow out of this country like water and there would be an economic crisis even before the election were held. In an age of globalisation, capitalists would scarcely hang around to be mugged.

Mr. Corbyn's Santa Clause act at the last election – offering presents to everyone – was rewarded with 40% of the vote. Yet the Tory vote went up by 5% and the Tory share of the working class vote improved by 18%. Mrs May could yet emulate Baldwin and recover from an election in which she lost her party majority to go on to win a new one with the majority she had originally expected. Labour, on the other hand, could indeed postpone its purges, restrain its street fighters, seduce its so-called 'moderates' and go on to win an election. But it could also implode, split and disappear. So, too, could the Tory party. British politics is in flux at the moment and is quite unpredictable. Almost anything could happen.

All politicians, therefore, should weigh up the history of the Liberal Party. This dominated the politics of much of the nineteenth century and that of the twentieth century until the First World War. It was the equivalent of the Democratic Party in the USA. Yet, whereas the Democrats have continued to be one of the two parties of government in the USA right up until the present, the Liberals stopped being a party of government (apologies to Nick Clegg) after 1918. And they only had themselves to blame. Great historical forces did not blow them away. They committed suicide. First, they built up the Labour Party by a variety of means. For example, they gave legal privileges to the trade union movement that enabled it to impose a political levy on its members thus creating the funds to organise a national political party. They also ensured that trades unions would not be liable for losses occurred by employers as a result of strikes. If all this were not enough, they also negotiated an electoral pact to encourage the return to the House of Commons of Labour rather

than Liberal MPs. Indeed for much of the first decade of the twentieth century Liberals counted Labour MPs as more or less their own. Labour support was so taken for granted by Liberal leaders that both Asquith and Lloyd George during the First World War alienated the party without almost realising it. Lloyd George deluded himself that if hundreds of Labour MPs were elected after the war, they would all support him. They, of course, had other plans. Meanwhile, the split between the two Liberal leaders left the party divided between one rather tired and discredited leader with no funds and no organisation to revive the party's fortunes and a brilliant politician, commonly held to have won the war, who made a peace settlement with Germany afterwards, who solved the Irish problem and reduced industrial unrest, who was flush with money from the sale of honours, but who had no party base among Liberal MPs whom he had largely ignored during the war. In truth, he now wanted to form a new Centre Party but was deserted by Conservative MPs who took back control of their own party to save it from him, while Labour simply went its own way. It did not take long, therefore – just a couple of years – for Labour to replace the Liberals as the second party within the two-party system imposed by the electoral one. True, there were larger factors in the background – the decline of religion (dissent) in politics; the unimportance of land as a political issue; the decline of self-made, small businessmen – but it is difficult not to blame the decline of the Liberal Party largely on the errors made by its own leadership. The lessons to be learned from its history by today's politicians, therefore, are surely: do not divide your party; pay attention to your base; secure your party finances; do not give hostages to fortune by working with or attempting to absorb your natural opponents; have a clear but non-Marxist programme of your own.

These lessons should be pondered by Labour, for the dangers facing it are obvious. Its Marxist leadership and street fighters are all too likely to purge and divide the party and to offer the country a clear but extremist programme of the type that historically has been unacceptable to any British electorate. No doubt a new party would emerge on the Centre-Left, something that would confuse the BBC and *The Guardian*. But all this would simply be grist to the mill of the Conservatives – always supposing, of course, that it was not they who had split in the meantime and faced decline and disappearance.

Conservatism and the Conservative Party

'When we reflect on the tremendous assaults she has survived, we find it difficult to conceive in what way she is to perish.'

Macaulay on the Church of Rome.

The Conservative Party is something of a conundrum. It is supposed to be the oldest and most successful political party in the world yet both its origins and its philosophy are obscure. Today it is split over Brexit, is in a dangerous position in the House of Commons, and lacks firm leadership. In charge of the most important diplomatic negotiations regarding UK independence since those with Hitler in the late 1930s, it seems to lack a Churchill while all too obviously possessing a Halifax. Faced with bizarre intransigence from its former European 'partners', many of its cabinet and other ministers (to say nothing of its civil service advisers) seem unable to muster the requisite resistance. To adapt Zelda Fitzgerald's description of Ernest Hemingway, its male members act like 'pansies with hair on their chests'; its female ones, colourless and cold, resemble a plate of oysters. The danger is that the government will split and fall and that the party itself will then split and suffer the fate of the Liberals. History does not guarantee political survival.

The term 'Conservative Party' seems to have been invented in 1831 in an article on the British Empire in the *Quarterly Review* by John Miller (not J. W. Croker) who wrote that it would be more appropriate to refer to the Conservative Party than a Tory one. The Tory party at that time consisted of the friends and successors of William Pitt the Younger, who certainly never thought of himself as a member of any party. (Burke, by the way always thought of himself as a Whig.) But the opponents of Fox had to be called something and Tories came to be the term employed. During the late Stuart period it had been used as an insult for the supporters of the future James II during the Exclusion Crisis, but there was no point in anyone using it during almost all of the eighteenth century with latitudinarian bishops and Hanoverian monarchs. With growing resistance to the French Revolution, however, a resistance given intellectual force by Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and his *Four Letters on a Regicide Peace*, a new ideological zeal would motivate Britain's political leaders, if only eventually. At first there was no real zeal for anything save neutrality and a quiet life. (Tory leaders in the late 1930s and in the two decades before the 2016 EU Referendum felt much the same.) Pitt did agree to meet Burke and listen to his advice to exterminate the French revolutionaries;

indeed, according to a witness, he 'took it all very patiently and cordially'. But he wanted a neutrality pact with France not war *à l'outrance*. Only France's invasion of the Low Countries and the advent of the Terror meant that the opposite would happen. Burke still despaired. Three days before he died in 1797 he requested to be buried 'unknown, the spot unmarked, and separate from his son, wife and brother, on account of the French revolutionists.' He thought that England might yet fall to the Jacobins, who would then desecrate his grave! Instead, Britain won, defeated the French Revolution and Napoleon and remained in safe Tory hands until 1830.

The Tory party, however, having found a *raison d'être*, kept fighting the French Revolution and protecting the eighteenth century British constitution till 1914. Just like the returning Bourbons of 1814 in France, it learnt nothing and forgot nothing from its domestic and external struggle with revolution. The period of Tory rule from 1790 to 1830, therefore, included a profusion of Treason Acts, Gagging Acts, Newspaper Acts, Combination Acts and various others (the Two Acts, the Six Acts etc.) all designed to keep radicalism, trade unionism, criticism, journalism as well as treason at bay. There was actually patriotic support for this from a number of popular societies and newspapers and fortunately William Cobbett, the most popular journalist in the country, turned out to be a Tory. But it did mean that the Tories for almost a century opposed almost everything, although as Macauley pointed out they would retain Whig measures on the few occasion after 1832 that they were returned to power.

Disraeli, it is true, attempted 'to dish the Whigs' by passing the Second Reform Act in 1867. But before then he had destroyed (for purely personal and cynical reasons) the political career of Sir Robert Peel over the Corn Laws in 1846, leaving him to lead a Tory party of the most reactionary country squires in the Commons for decades before eventually becoming Prime Minister in 1874. As a young man, however, he had written a sonnet on Wellington full of robust Tory sentiment:

*'Not only that thy puissant army could bind
The Tyrant of a world, and, conquering Fate
Enfranchise Europe, do I deem thee great,
But that in all thine actions I do find
Exact propriety: no gusts of mind
Fitful and wild, but that continuous state
Of ordered impulse mariners await
In some benignant and enriching wind,
The breath ordained by Nature.'*

As Prime Minister his social reforms were meagre and really the work of cabinet colleagues. Ironically, they gave legal privileges to the trade unions. Fundamentally Disraeli wasn't interested in social reforms – 'power,' he said, had 'come too late.' There were indeed 'no gusts of mind, fitful and wild' He preferred the flashy occasions and flashy gestures: speech-making at banquets, attending the Congress of Berlin, making Queen Victoria Empress of India. There was no consistency to him. A year after the Corn Laws were repealed, he proposed that protection be dropped; after attacking Palmerston for supporting the Turks over the Crimea, he supported the Turks against Russia in 1875-8; finally, after condemning the colonies as a 'millstone around our necks' he bought shares in the Suez Canal. His enmity alone was consistent: he loathed both Gladstone and Peel because both placed principles above ambition. His real contribution to Tory history was to recognise that the party could win the votes of the new suburbs of Victorian England and that for this purpose it should be properly constituted as an electoral machine by acquiring funds and organisation. Yet he had no distinctive party philosophy, he was not in power for very long and did little to dispel the reputation of the Tories as fundamentally reactionary. (John Stuart Mill famously called them 'the stupidest party', later explaining that stupid people were more attracted to the Conservative Party than to others.)

This reputation derived, perhaps, from the years after 1815 when they presided over the repressive regime described earlier. They were really only interested in protecting the aristocracy and the gentry and although some conservatives (Southey, Coleridge, Eldon, Liverpool and others) had a genuine interest in the Church (extending the number of parishes, providing better religious education) even the Church had to know its place. For example, when the Duchess of Marlborough was told by Lady Huntingdon that she should fear the Day of Judgement, the Duchess replied: 'Depend on it Madam, God Almighty thinks twice before damning a person of my quality.' She was part of the aristocratic society that dominated the whole of Europe and called itself *le beau monde*. It had no time for *les misérables*. Class was all. As Wellington said of Napoleon: 'Wasn't a gentleman!' (The Duc de Berri, on the other hand called Wellington a *parvenue*.) Wellington also gave the following definition of the Conservative Party: 'Our Party consists of the Bishops and Clergy, the Great Aristocracy, the Landed Interest, the Magistracy of the Country, the great Merchants and Bankers, in short *le parti conservateur* of the country.' (He took it for granted that British monarchs were also Conservatives.) What counted was the magic of great aristocratic names and the blessedness of landed possession.

That the principal role of Conservative politicians was to conserve this landed Establishment was accepted by the party right up till the First World War. It was completely instinctual to Conservative politicians, even, ironically, to the two most intellectual of them who led the party from 1885 till 1911, first Lord Salisbury and then his nephew, Arthur Balfour.

Lord Derby had written to Disraeli on 18 February 1875 that Conservatives 'are weakest among the intellectual classes,' adding 'as is natural.' Yet no one disputes the fact that the party's two leaders after Disraeli, both Salisbury and Balfour, were both distinguished intellectuals. Not that it mattered: they simply articulated their hatred of change better along with their determination to defend the landed estates and privileges of the aristocracy. Salisbury, indeed, had resigned from Disraeli's cabinet rather than support the Second Reform Bill. He had no faith in political or social action to make life better. When asked what advice he would give to a young man who wished to do good in this world, he advised him to expect bitter disappointment. Attempts to improve anything were unpredictable and would just cause new problems. Making concessions to demands for change was always wrong. It was better to defend the apparently indefensible: 'New wine will burst old bottles; a healthy diet will kill a sick man outright. Sir Robert Walpole's bribery saved his country. Necker's purity ruined his.' Liberal conservatism was to be avoided. Tories had their duties to the constitution and aiding Radicals in their works of demolition was not among them. It was well said of him that he was 'like the leader of a lost cause, resolved to fight on, although well assured that nothing but defeat awaited him.' Not that he even believed that the existing order was any good. Life was miserable. He defended the existing order merely because it existed. Nor did he have any faith that the middle class might rescue the Tories: 'It is not a class militant; it has no internal cohesion – no consciousness of unity to enable it to maintain political predominance.' (Had he read Marx, perhaps?) Not even his Christian faith rescued him from existential despair. God was inscrutable. There could be no Christian ethics. He had no personal theodicy. He felt some Christian responsibility in taking decisions but none with regard to consequences: 'With results I have nothing to do.' He was really only interested in foreign policy but even there he observed: '...the common sense of Christendom has always prescribed for national policy principles diametrically opposed to those that are laid down in the Sermon on the Mount.' And again: 'the meek and poor-spirited among nations are not considered to be blessed.' Empedocles once wrote:

*'Fear not! Life still
Leaves human effort scope,
But since life teems with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope.
Because thou must not dream, thou needst not then despair.*

Salisbury disagreed. He always despaired.

What then did he think of the Tory party? What did it stand for? Opposing change, certainly. Otherwise he once defined Conservatism as the belief that 'nothing matters very much, and few things matter at all.' He was succeeded as Prime Minister and Tory leader by his nephew, Arthur J. Balfour, who shared his pessimistic philosophy. His godfather had been the Duke of Wellington, whose outlook, as has been seen, was much the same. As Irish Secretary, Balfour had oppressed the natives, whom he thought incapable of self-government: 'There has never been an historic Irish State. Irish unity has been created by British conquest and every Irish political idea, including the conception of an Irish Parliament, has been of British origin.' Salisbury referred to the Irish as 'Hottentots'. Between 1903 and 1906 Balfour had to endure Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign. He tried to dodge the issue and keep the Tories united. Churchill later remarked that 'the greatest achievement he had known in his long parliamentary life was the silence of Arthur Balfour in the years between 1903-05 during the battle between Free Trade and Tariff Reform.' Balfour, indeed, had little to say on the matter, save propose some unrealistic compromises which he himself probably did not believe in or even care about. But in the 1906 election, although the Tariff Reformers won the battle in the Tory party, the party itself went down to a crushing defeat. Tory MPs may have liked Protection but the country did not. Balfour only kept the party leadership because Chamberlain suffered an almost fatal stroke. After 1906 he resisted the reforms to pensions, unemployment, sickness and national insurance brought in by the Liberals; he even allowed the Tory 'Die Hards' to oppose the People's Budget of 1909 which led to the Parliament Act of 1911 which reduced the powers of the House of Lords. This opposition also led to a new general election which Balfour lost, having lost two already. The press was now howling for his blood. He seemed to be without a following, a policy or a purpose. In the words of a distinguished contemporary: 'He has nothing but a crown It is the crown of Richard the Second. His party only await the advent of Henry Bolingbroke.' Balfour resigned in 1911 but with the outbreak of war in 1914 he would still have a role in British

history. His successor was Andrew Bonar Law, who was not a great improvement. One Liberal minister quipped: 'We dig our grave afresh every week but Mr. Bonar Law fills it up again before we can get into it.' What then of the Tory party? Would it ever have a genuinely positive part to play in British history? In 1914, under Bonar Law, it backed an armed Ulster Rebellion against an elected government over Home Rule, a rebellion which brought the country to the brink of civil war, hardly a conservative policy. Fortunately, the outbreak of the First World War saved the party from the consequences of its actions and after the war Lloyd George negotiated Irish independence in the form of the Irish Free State which excluded Ulster. The Irish were then left to fight themselves while the Tories considered how they might run the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

They did not change very much. Their view of society remained:

*The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate
He made them high and lowly
And ordered their estate.*

'There are two ways of governing men,' says a character in one of Disraeli's novels. 'Either you must be superior to them, or despise them.' Disraeli was not the only Tory to figure this out. Take the first Earl of Halifax for example, who almost became Prime Minister in 1940 and who between the wars had a distinguished career in Tory politics – well, at least a prominent one. He shared the same view of humanity as Salisbury and Balfour. He too had a brilliant mind – an Oxford first in history and a Fellowship at All Souls – but, as was said of someone else, 'he loved everyone except his neighbour'. As a young man he was appointed marshal to a judge on circuit in North Wales, who gave a night poacher a sentence of three years. 'Good job!' wrote Halifax. He was first elected to Parliament in 1910 and was returned unopposed in 1918, 1922, 1923 and 1924. He was raised to the peerage in 1925. It was just as well that he had no opponents since 'he disliked electioneering and constituency work'. From 1922-1924 and from 1932-1935, he was in the cabinet as President of the Board of Education. However, 'his imagination was not stirred by the subject of public education... and he had little interest in the problems of education past or present.' He employed his head civil servant to phone his barber to arrange haircuts. When he asked the Board to sanction a new church school on his estate at Hickleton, it was

because 'We want a school to train them up for servants and butlers.' Between 1926 and 1931 he was Viceroy of India, where his attempts to cooperate with Ghandi led nowhere. Back in Britain, under Baldwin's third administration he became first Secretary of State for War, then Lord Privy Seal, then Lord President of the Council (now under Chamberlain) and in 1938, Foreign Secretary. He was not much interested in foreign affairs either and did not like his new job, taking considerable time to reach decisions but then sticking to them like glue. Not that he was well informed. He never bothered to read *Mein Kampf* and was 'hypnotised' by Chamberlain. He met Hitler, Goering and Mussolini and liked all of them finding them all 'sincere'. That, of course, was the problem. Goering, with whom he had gone fox-hunting in Germany before he became Foreign Secretary, he found particularly attractive and great fun. Halifax, in short, was an innocent abroad, although not at home. Shortly after the war started he advised Chamberlain not to appoint Hore-Belisha to the Ministry of Information, since Hore-Belisha was a Jew. Astonishingly, Labour was prepared to have him as Prime Minister in 1940 although fortunately Churchill got the job. Halifax remained foreign secretary and at the end of May 1940 twice pressed Churchill to make peace with Hitler using Mussolini as a mediator. In 1940 he was packed off to Washington as British ambassador. Had he remained in the Commons, however, returned unopposed as usual, he would almost certainly have become Tory Prime Minister in 1940 and would have made peace with the Nazis. For Britain and the Tory party it was a narrow escape.

Fortunately, Halifax was not the main face of the Conservatives in the 1920s. and 1930s. Stanley Baldwin was Prime Minister for much of the time and gave the people what they wanted – international and social peace. There had been a huge reaction in Britain against the First World War and the Versailles Peace Settlement and the country invested its hopes for the future in the League of Nations. Baldwin offered 'safety first' and a return to normal times. This led to a return to the gold standard in 1925 at the pre-war exchange rate, which was too high, and led to high interest rates and higher prices for coal and steel exports. This in turn was part of the background to the general strike of 1926, which left a bitter memory among the working classes but which was easily defeated by the government, which then changed trade union law.

It was clear that the country was rigidly divided along class and regional lines. Two thirds of aggregate national wealth was owned by less than 1% of the population. Large areas of the country – North East England, South Wales, Belfast, Central Scotland – were depressed with

the severe decline of staple industries – coal, steel, shipbuilding, textiles – after the war. In 1921 unemployment stood at two million or 17%. In shipbuilding and engineering it was 36-37%. In Jarrow it was 67%. The situation improved between 1924 and 1928 but between 1929 and 1933 the figure went up to three million or 22% before falling in 1934. Yet it never fell below 10% till 1940. The countryside was also sunk in depression, although towns in the South of England that engaged in light engineering had only 3% out of work.

Lloyd George's post-war coalition government had built over 200,000 houses between 1919 and 1922 and this housing boom continued with Neville Chamberlain providing subsidies to private building firms. Throughout the interwar period, although particularly in the mid-1930s, the middle classes of South East England and the Midlands did very well with the introduction of new industries (car building, vacuum cleaners) and the extension of public transport (the London tube). New consumer products – Hoovers, nylons, radios, picture houses with first silent films and then 'talkies', gramophones,, magazines – all made life easier. This was true, even for those on the 'dole'. Indeed, for those in work, real wages rose by 17% between 1924 and 1935.

In the 1920s, on the other hand, Baldwin was more associated with the return to gold, the general strike and unemployment. A rather lazy figure with a platitudinous style of speaking and a deliberately unexciting programme, he lost the election in 1929 to Labour, which came into office only to be faced with the Wall St. Crash and the Great Depression. The May Report then blamed the depression in Britain on government spending and demanded cuts including a cut in the dole. The Labour government split and almost immediately the Labour Party deserted MacDonald who formed a National Government with the Tories and Liberals. This won a massive 500 seat majority in the 1931 election and although led by MacDonald, was dominated by the Tories, who at last introduced protection with the 1932 Ottawa Agreements which also created imperial preference. The government even went off the gold standard. Still, unemployment rose to three million and there was no recovery till 1934 in Southern England and the Midlands and not till 1935 elsewhere with the introduction of rearmament. The housing boom continued – 345,000 houses were built annually between 1933 and 1937 – while inflation fell and cities like Leicester and Coventry expanded. So, too did London suburbs like Hendon and Harrow and tube lines like the Piccadilly. The man who had contributed most to the recovery before rearmament became the major factor, was Neville Chamberlain

who as Chancellor of the Exchequer until 1937 had reversed the attempt to balance the budget, reversed the £70 billion of expenditure cuts and tax increases adopted in 1931 and even reversed the cuts made to the dole. Finally, after 1936 the dreaded means test for welfare benefits was amended and extra expenditure was provided for re-armament. Chamberlain had already got rid of the last remnants of the old Poor Law. Unfortunately for the Tories, his record in foreign policy was to overshadow any good he might have done on the domestic front.

Neville Chamberlain had intelligence and energy and great administrative talent. He enjoyed the undivided loyalty of his party. Unfortunately he was unlucky. Napoleon would never have employed him. Frederick the Great would have shunned him. Before 1914 he went to the West Indies to plant sisal and lost £50,000. In the First World War he was tasked with organising national service and failed. After Bonar Law's death he lost the Tory leadership to the slothful Baldwin who survived regular party plots and revolts but who managed both to push through an India Act in 1935 and to outmanoeuvre Edward VIII in 1936. If Baldwin had luck, however, Chamberlain had none. His own achievements, reforming health and local government and boosting house-building, were completely overshadowed by the Great Depression and the rise of the dictators. As Prime Minister he intended a policy of domestic reform but had to deal instead with Hitler and Mussolini, whom, like Halifax, he thought he could trust. He truly believed that he had achieved 'peace with honour' at Munich in 1938. but when that fell through and war broke out, it was Churchill's bungling of the 1940 Narvik campaign that brought him down. His luck had run out and, ironically, Churchill replaced him as Prime Minister. He might still have run the home front but was struck by cancer and died. According to A.J.P. Taylor he was even unlucky after death. His biographers could not dispel the belief that he had been responsible for appeasement single-handed. His bad luck, of course, infected the Tory party. After 1945 it became the standard view that the Tories had been responsible for appeasement, unemployment and the Second World War. This was not quite true, of course. Yet on the other hand, as the career and opinions of Halifax clearly demonstrate, it was not wide of the mark. Moreover, Churchill's career and memoirs only served to support the legend. Indeed, even he himself suffered from it as his electoral defeat in 1945 clearly demonstrated.

By then there was very little to suggest that the Tory party had much to recommend it: it seemed to want to conserve the class system in domestic affairs while it caused national disaster in foreign policy.

What then of foreign affairs? Was appeasement simply an unfortunate episode in an otherwise glorious record? Not quite. In the early nineteenth century, Tories had talked of non-intervention in Europe but had intervened several times all the same. Despite an *entente cordiale* between Britain and France, Peel and Aberdeen had almost gone to war with their neighbour across the Channel. Later, Disraeli went to Berlin and came home with Cyprus. Our subsequent record there can be passed over in silence. He also bought shares in the Suez Canal, the dividends from which would be paid in 1956. Salisbury saved us from a German alliance but took us into the Boer War in 1899, an act which split the country at least as much as Brexit. He himself was quite clear it was a mistake, confessing: 'We have to act upon a moral field prepared for us by Milner and his Jingo supporters. And therefore I see before us the necessity of considerable military effort – and all for people whom we despise and for territory which will bring no profit and no power to England.' All very true, but if the war was bad enough, one of its chief architects, the politically destructive Joseph Chamberlain, immediately afterwards invented his Tariff Reform Crusade and saddled the Tory party with yet another domestic and foreign policy disaster. Its slogan had been: 'Tariff Reform means work for all' to which its opponents had added: 'Chopping up wood in the workhouse.' Balfour lost three general elections afterwards attempting to retrieve the party's position. To all this was added, as has just been seen, the Tory record on defence and foreign policy during the interwar period: the ten-years' rule; the abandonment of the League over Abyssinia and Manchuria; non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War; and finally appeasement. *Quel drôle de parti!* Perhaps the post-war world would provide redemption.

Thank God for Churchill. Most Tory MPs had not wanted to make him party leader in 1940 but without him neither Britain nor the Tories would have survived the Second World War. Even his own magnificent war leadership could not overcome his toxic connection with the party, leading to his defeat in 1945.

Churchill returned to power in 1951, determined not to undermine the consensus that had already established itself behind the new welfare state established by the Attlee governments, which had set up the NHS, expanded National Insurance and nationalised twenty per cent of British industry. He had also backed Labour's support of the Korean War and the creation of NATO, although accepting the independence of India, Pakistan and Burma must have been harder for him. He knew that Attlee was unlucky to have lost in 1951 – the terms of trade were about to turn

in Britain's favour after the ending of the Korean War, the devaluation of 1949 and the introduction of the GATT. Even so, there was already full employment and Labour had built 1.5 million new homes since 1945. Crucially, Labour had won more votes than ever before in 1951 and more votes than Churchill and the Tories. So the party still lacked the self-confidence that had taken such a knock in 1945.

The result was that in office Churchill made few changes to Labour's record. Only the steel industry was denationalised, while the NHS was fully accepted. Harold Macmillan was given the task of building 300,000 houses a year and managed to fulfil it. Full employment was maintained, large wage increases were accepted in the public sector, and although income tax was reduced, it was reduced only marginally, the top rate remaining at around 90% throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Abroad, the new foreign secretary, Sir Anthony Eden appeared highly successful, chairing the 1954 Geneva Conference which allowed France to withdraw peacefully from Vietnam and arranging in 1955 for the rearmament of West Germany within NATO. He even reached an agreement with Egypt over the British base at Suez.

Then everything went wrong. True, there were a few times when everything seemed to go right but the overall balance was very mixed. The first sign of trouble, of course, was Eden's blunder of agreeing to help the French and Israelis invade Egypt after Colonel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. As one French diplomat put it, it was necessary either to *'canaliser le colonel ou coloniser le canal.'* Eden fell into the trap and fell out of power. Retreat from Suez under US pressure seemed a national humiliation, although within a couple of years the US and Britain were happily landing troops in Lebanon and Jordan and by 1963 the USA was selling the UK Polaris nuclear missiles – the only ally ever to receive them. The real significance of Suez was the replacement of Eden as Prime Minister by Harold Macmillan ('first in and first out' over Suez) who, as will be seen, completely changed the course of post-war British foreign policy.

Meanwhile, in domestic affairs he stuck to the 'post-war consensus' of a mixed economy, Keynesian economics, support of the welfare state and cooperation with the trades unions and big business in managing British industry ('corporatism'). Income tax remained sky high but there were still giveaway budgets before elections after which the Treasury sought to reverse its generosity. Britain now entered the age of 'Stop-Go', 'Boom and Bust' with balance of payments crises every couple of years and desperate attempts to keep down inflation by corporate agreements

between government, the TUC and the CBI. The period from 1951 to 1964 under Tory governments was later called 'thirteen wasted years' but in fact it was the period from 1959 to 1979 that should really be seen as wasted. This was the period in which governments attempted to control rising wages and prices by means of a whole list of corporate bodies starting with the National Economic and Development Corporation (NEDC or Neddy) in 1961, through the DEA (Department of Economic Affairs) and the National Plan of 1964-5, the National Board for Prices and Incomes of 1964, and the Pay Board of 1972. There were also desperate schemes of Keynesian deficit spending under Tory Chancellors, Maudling in 1963-4 and Barber in 1971. The top rate of income tax remained very high – another part of the post-war consensus. In 1971 it was cut to 75% but a surcharge of 15% on investment income kept that at 90%. In 1974 the top rate of income tax went up again to 85%, meaning the top rate on investment income was 98%. This applied to annual incomes over £20,000 (about £190,000 today). In 1974 about 750,000 people paid the top rate of income tax. Little wonder Bond (Sean Connery) left Britain for the Bahamas.

All these measures were reactions to what came to be called 'Britain's relative decline', that is to say, the fact that by the 1960s and 1970s, British economic growth was on average less robust than growth in Western Europe. There were two separate analyses of why this was the case. The Left blamed the role of sterling as a reserve currency, which meant that the pound had to keep its value to keep foreign capitalists happy. Unfortunately, extraordinarily high overseas defence expenditure kept creating balance of payments difficulties with the result that the domestic economy was cut back every two years or so by tax increases and/or expenditure cuts, which meant that it could not produce sufficient output to sustain the overseas defence expenditure. This led to yet another balance of payments crisis and more tax rises and expenditure cuts and so on and so forth. (Later monetary targets would also be blamed for this vicious circle.)

On the Right, on the other hand, the main cause seemed all too obvious. Britain's powerful trade unions made it impossible for Britain to modernise her industry on account of over-manning, restrictive practices, secondary picketing, closed shops, and weak management. Investment or research and development was rendered futile so that export markets were lost – this was the real cause of Britain's balance of payments problems and relative economic decline and the cause which won more and more recognition. Major defence cuts in 1968

made little difference to the economy. Instead, the miners' union in 1972 and 1974 led political strikes aimed at bringing down the government. The trade unions also prevented Wilson in 1969 and Heath in 1970-74 from bringing the unions within the law. Meanwhile, the car industry, shipbuilding and other industries were routinely convulsed in strikes. Labour was forced to go cap-in-hand to the IMF for economic aid in 1976 and in 1978/9 Britain suffered its 'winter of discontent', with a wide variety of trade unions calling mass strikes while ignoring Callaghan's Labour government. The result was a massive election victory for Mrs. Thatcher in 1979.

Two things should be noted about Britain's 'relative economic decline', however. Both analyses blamed factors which could only be – and indeed were – corrected by British governments. The EEC had no powers, resources or policies which could help. And if Western Europe's growth rates were higher on average at this time, that was because it was experiencing factors – an historic shift from agriculture to industry, urban rebuilding after the war – which did not apply to Britain. Besides, various supply-side economic reformers – Ludwig Erhard in West Germany and Jacques Rueff in France for example – had freed up economic enterprise there in a way which had not yet happened in the UK but would do so under Thatcher.

Franz Schubert, the composer, once wrote that 'with my natural frankness, I am good friends with everyone.' Mrs. Thatcher was also naturally frank, but could not have said the same. In fact, she became the most polarising figure in British political history since Lloyd George and was eventually ousted as Tory leader in 1990 in the most ruthless act of political ingratitude of modern times. Before then, ironically, she had almost created a new political consensus by replacing Keynesianism with monetarism, privatising most of the nationalised industries (returning several of them to profit-making), taming the trade unions by defeating the miners during the miners' strike of 1984-5, passing trade union reform legislation, and abandoning corporatism, although she maintained support for the NHS and the welfare state, spending more money on it than ever before. Meanwhile, the top rate of income tax was cut to 40% by 1987 and the standard one to 25% by 1988. The investment income surcharge was abolished in 1985.

This was hardly the whole story, however. Sir Geoffrey Howe's 1981 budget, which increased taxes and reduced government borrowing during a recession saw the British economy suffer its worst slump since the 1930s. Unemployment hit 2.7 million and growth slumped by 3.2%.

Eventually one quarter of all British manufacturing disappeared. There was a huge balance of payments deficit and interest rates were kept high to save the pound. 3.2 million people were unemployed in 1985.

Some sort of recovery did take place in the mid-1980s due to deregulation of the City of London. Banks could now offer generous loans to customers. Personal debt boomed from £16 billion to £47 billion between 1980 and 1989. People could also now buy the 'council houses' they had previously rented. But since councils were forbidden to use the money to build new houses, there was a massive rise in homelessness – with 390,000 people officially registered as such by 1987. Lots of beggars appeared on the streets and crime rose by 79% between 1979 and 1990. There was no economic miracle. The average growth rate was only 1.75% between 1979 and 1990, well below the average of previous decades. The share of GDP taken by the state had risen, meanwhile from under 35% to 37-38% to pay for the rise in unemployment and social welfare needs. By the end of the 1980s, the 'Lawson boom' (named after the Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, had turned into the 'Lawson bust' as yet another recession was underway. By then inflation had hit almost 11% and interest rates 15%. Before resigning, however, Lawson had given up both following monetary targets and shadowing the Deutsche Mark. Instead, he had advised Mrs. Thatcher to join the ERM. In 1990 his replacement as Chancellor, John Major, took us into it at too high a rate, paying no attention to the implications of German reunification that year for international money markets. Disaster was inevitable and Black Wednesday, 16 September 1992, would sink his own premiership. Meanwhile from 1987, Thatcher had introduced a reform of local government finance with a new tax called the poll tax. This was based on the novel but hardly popular idea that rich and poor should pay the same for local government services. The result was street riots and areas throughout the country where the tax was scarcely collectable. Before the end of 1990 Tory MPs had voted to elect a new leader, the hapless John Major, who, never the less, thanks to the ineptness of his Labour opponent, Neil Kinnock, won a stunning victory in the 1992 general election. Once the pound was forced to crash out of the ERM in September that year, however, his authority as Prime Minister never recovered.

The poll tax apart, much of Thatcherism's agenda actually survived her political demise. Major's government, of course, reversed none of her privatisations and kept selling council houses under the same conditions. Her tax reductions remained and trade union reforms

were continued. Surprisingly, with the return of Labour, neither Blair nor Brown attempted to overturn any of this record either. The main lesson drawn by 'New Labour' from the Thatcher years was that left-wing socialism merely lost elections. In the event, therefore, its policy initiatives were more in constitutional and cultural affairs than in economic policy. Indeed, the standard rate of income tax was reduced to 20% in 2007 although in 2010 the top rate was increased to 50% for those earning over £150,000. The real difference in economic policy was the increase in government spending – particularly on health and education – after 2000. Yet by 2010, the new leaders of the Tory party, David Cameron and George Osborne, were promising to copy Labour's expenditure plans. So there was a sort of Thatcherite consensus after all. The Tory party now seemed to have been captured by old Etonians. Cameron, (Prime Minister), Osborne (Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Boris Johnson (who became Mayor of London) were all young, brash and immensely self-confident. The first two came from privileged backgrounds, were really political novices, had been (along with Johnson) members of the notoriously anti-social Bullingdon Club at Oxford and were soon condemned by one Tory MP as 'posh boys who don't know the price of a pint of milk.' Indeed, it was very difficult to know what they stood for save an overwhelming sense of entitlement. Cameron had a first-class degree from Oxford but never said anything original or memorable, although he once advised Tories to 'hug a hoodie.' Hazlitt in his essay on Canning once called him the cleverest boy at Eton and the cleverest member in the House of Commons. Whether Cameron was ever either, is doubtful, but, like Canning, he spoke in 'an emphatic but monotonous and sometimes affected tone of voice,' which none the less enabled him to acquire an easy mastery over the Labour front bench in the House of Commons. (No intellectual jet engines there!) He at first strove to be a 'moderniser' and occasionally a Eurosceptic but on the whole adhered to Falstaff's advice that principles should hang about one 'lightly, like an old lady's loose gown.' Indeed, he changed them more often than most men change their underwear. On the whole, it could be said of him, as was once said of Lewis Harcourt: 'He does not scan far horizons. He does not declare any vision of a promised land. He has no passionate fervour for humanity and is too honest to pretend to any... He is the man without a dream.' Ironically, he hired a 'blue skies thinker' to dream for him, but Steve Hilton, the person concerned, eventually resigned and backed Brexit. Osborne, Cameron's *alter ego*, seemed mainly concerned to follow Cameron into 10 Downing Street. Responsible for two shambolic

budgets and deficit targets that were never ever met, he still seemed to think of himself as an economic and political genius. He acted as if he lived in a house of mirrors where, at every turn, he met a dazzling image – of himself. From 2010 to 2016 this duo dominated British government albeit with the most mediocre results. The Tory party became associated with ‘austerity’ and such disasters as the ‘bedroom tax’. Meanwhile Nick Clegg’s Liberal Democrats committed political suicide by joining it in office between 2010 and 2015 and agreeing to triple university fees which they had promised never to do. This soon allowed UKIP to replace them as the default protest party in British politics, which in turn persuaded Cameron to promise an in-out referendum on British membership of the EU. He almost certainly believed that he could not win the 2015 general election and that Clegg, once more his deputy in a coalition government, would veto the idea. Alas, his worst nightmare came true and he won an outright majority. The referendum had to go ahead and he staked all on winning diplomatic concessions from his European ‘partners’. However, he never had been any good at diplomacy – Libya and Syria proved that clearly enough – and despite his sales pitch (‘I am a winner’) – he came away from Brussels empty-handed. He had almost lost a referendum on Scottish independence on 18 September 2014. On 23 June 2016 he now lost the one that he himself had invented on British membership of the EU. He immediately did the honourable thing and resigned as Prime Minister, whereas the oily Osborne waited to be sacked. Both were quietly despatched to the lumber-room of history.

Britain and Brexit

If we are judged, it will not be for the merely intellectual transgression of failing to appreciate other nations, but for the supreme spiritual transgression of failing to appreciate ourselves.’

G.K. Chesterton.

The concept of European unity is unnatural and unhistorical. Europe is a state system not a state. It rose to dominate the world before 1945 on account of its disunity not its unity. Its secret was the European balance of power. The more it unites, the less prosperous it becomes, as the story of the euro has demonstrated. The more unified it becomes, the more bureaucratic it emerges. EU democracy is a joke. British voters at a general election can turn out a British government. European voters in a European election can change nothing. The European Parliament has no

official opposition (even the Zimbabwean Parliament has one) and its members have few powers. Certainly they cannot promise to introduce policies promised in their election manifestos. So few people bother to vote. Everyone knows the Commission, an unelected bureaucracy, is the engine of the EU. Nations hardly count either. Negative referendum results are ignored or overturned while majority voting can always keep the smaller states in their place. Plans for future integration will not bring more democracy. That is now seen to favour populists or nationalists.

Until about 1100, Europe, China, India and the Middle East were all at roughly the same stage of development. Then Europe grew exponentially economically, militarily and intellectually until she could colonise or dominate the others. One major reason for this was that the empires in India, China and the Middle East became united, centralised, bureaucratised and often under the control of a single religion. Intellectual and political life was suppressed and economic competition also. In Europe, meanwhile, Christianity split between Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, while the Holy Roman Empire failed to establish an hegemony over other states, whose rivalries were kept in balance through diplomatic and military coalitions. Meanwhile, the existence of rival states meant that refugees from one could find freedom in another (the Jews or Huguenots at various times, for example), while merchants, scholars and political commentators could travel around picking up new commercial or technical ideas or new political ones. Peter the Great of Russia, for example, himself headed a 'great embassy' to Western Europe to do exactly this. Later Lloyd George sent an agent to Germany to examine how Bismarck's welfare state worked there since he wanted to know how to establish a system of national insurance in Britain. In the eighteenth century, 'academies' began sprouting up everywhere, precisely to study economic, commercial, political and philosophical developments in other countries. Progress, therefore, depended on competition, diversity and disunity. The end product has been called 'the European Miracle' by global historians and Britain's role in it was absolutely crucial. Not only were her technologies from the era of the industrial revolution copied on the Continent but her example of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy inspired the French *philosophes* and others, while her military leadership against continental tyrants like Phillip II of Spain, Louis XIV of France, Napoleon, the Kaiser, Hitler and Stalin, enabled democracy to survive in Europe. Indeed, Europe owes its democracy and freedom in large part to British independence.

Harold Macmillan, however, had another perspective. Like many western leaders after 1945 (over-represented in the US security services, for example) he believed that war in future could be best guaranteed against by some form of world government, organised perhaps through regional federations under the United Nations. Jean Monnet, a former deputy secretary of the League of Nations and FDR's representative to the Free French in North Africa, where he met Macmillan, who was then representative of the allies in the Mediterranean, shared this view. And the two cooperated to create a European Union in Western Europe. Monnet also had the backing of top US officials who set up an American Committee for European Union to channel US government funds into the project. These men included John Foster Dulles, David Bruce and George Ball, later the force behind J. F. Kennedy's 'Grand Design' for an European-American Trade Partnership.

Macmillan, of course, came up against the opposition of Churchill and Eden to British participation in any sort of European federalism. Still, his views were made known. He proposed a European Coal and Steel Community in the House of Commons before the real one was announced. He then arranged a British Treaty of Association with it. He also arranged for a British representative from the Board of Trade to attend the Messina talks on European economic union and later attempted to merge the negotiations over a Free Trade Area with those establishing the Common Market. Meanwhile he and Monnet kept in touch. They both feared that de Gaulle and Adenauer represented French and German nationalism and that together they would prevent the EEC from developing into a politically united Europe. This persuaded them that Britain should make her own bid to join in 1961. The federalist leaders of the other EEC member states and of course, the Americans, whose leading diplomats – known as the 'theologians' in the State Department – were all disciples of Monnet, gave their full backing. Macmillan, tried to convince de Gaulle that Britain was his friend—he would persuade the USA to sell France Polaris – but the French President was not fooled. Why, he asked, would Britain, which was a wealthy country, with access to cheap food from the Commonwealth, which possessed democratic institutions and had a nuclear deterrent and strong global connections, want to join the EEC? The question has always been ignored by historians and political pundits but de Gaulle was the realist, not them – and not Macmillan. So British entry was vetoed in 1963. De Gaulle quoted Edith Piaf to a very dejected British premier : *ne pleurez pas M'Lord!*

Monnet had been kept more closely informed of the British

negotiations than either the British Parliament or cabinet. Edward Heath met him in secret regularly while Douglas Hurd arranged, through the private account of Lord Edwin Plowden in the City, for the Tory party to become a secret corporate member of Monnet's Action Committee for a United States of Europe. The initial fee was £15,000. According to Monnet's chief aide and biographer, Francois Duchêne, the Labour and Liberal parties joined later.

Britain was eventually allowed to enter the EEC in 1973, when President Pompidou, afraid that West Germany under Willy Brandt would overshadow France through its *Ostpolitik*, brought Britain in to provide a balance. Heath, desperate to fulfil his European dream, was prepared to agree to any terms on offer, backed by a supine Foreign Office, whose chief negotiator, Sir Con O'Neill, described his negotiating principle as 'Swallow the lot! Swallow it now!' Heath even offered to surrender British fishing rights on behalf of a Common Fisheries Policy that had not yet been invented.

Over the years, as the British budget contribution grew and the Foreign Office agreed to ever more daft initiatives, Britain signed up to the Single European Act, ERM membership, the Maastricht Treaty, which wasn't even published when MPs debated it and which, despite our opt-outs, many ministers didn't bother to read or understand (Hurd could not tell the House what the obligations of European citizenship acquired under Maastricht actually entailed.) and finally the Lisbon Treaty which gave the EU a constitution. Indeed, right up to the present, our Foreign Office officials, indeed most civil servants, still favour EU membership. According to Lord Andrew Adonis, Tony Blair's representative on earth, writing in *The Times* on 15 August 2017: 'virtually no civil servants believe in Brexit, and the more senior and able, the less they believe in it. The poll tax has more support in Whitehall than leaving the European Union.' Gosh! Are these the same Treasury civil servants who for decades defended an overvalued pound, took us into the ERM, failed to see the recession of 2007-09 coming, and have failed to control our deficits ever since?. Are they the Foreign Office geniuses who took us into the Iraq and Libyan wars? Or the others, say those responsible for the 2010 Defence Review or in charge of procurement at the Defence Ministry? Or those responsible for the Overseas Aid budget? If these great minds are against Brexit, why should anyone worry?

Real resistance to EU membership first arose with Margaret Thatcher's determination to cut the British contribution to the EU budget. By then she had a global reputation for not bending to pressure. After

all, she had won the Falklands War in 1983 and the Russians respected her closeness to Ronald Reagan. So in 1984 came the Fontainebleau Agreement by which two-thirds of our annual contribution was repaid. When the issues of economic and monetary union then loomed under the influence of Delors, however, matters became much more serious. Delors told the British TUC that social rights could be protected against Thatcher from Brussels. She warned of socialism by the back Delors and at Bruges declared she had not rolled back the frontiers of the state at home to have them reimposed from Europe. She had already signed the Single European Act as a compromise in the hope that it would spread competition to the European economy and reinforce Thatcherite principles there. However, she was adamantly opposed to European economic and monetary union and especially to a single currency. This outspoken opposition led Europhiles in her party to organise a leadership contest, in which dissatisfaction with the poll tax was also a factor, and so she lost the premiership. Out of office, she publicly opposed the Maastricht Treaty and accepted the presidency of the Bruges Group, an academic think tank set up to propagate her ideas on Europe. Before her death it became clear that she opposed Britain remaining within the EU at all.

Her supporters in the Tory party, both inside and outside Parliament, subsequently made life extremely difficult for John Major and future Tory leaders. Meanwhile, Dr. Alan Sked, an LSE academic who had become the leading polemicist of the Bruges Group, had the bright idea in 1991 to found a new party whose aim would be to pressurise the Tories into coming out of Europe by challenging them in elections. Twenty-five years later, the combination of pressure from that party (now called UKIP and led for years by Nigel Farage), the massive growth of Thatcher's legacy within the Tory party itself (spearheaded by Bill Cash, Daniel Hannan, John Redwood, Peter Lilley and others), not to mention the manifest failure of Europe's single currency as seen in events in Greece, Spain, Ireland, Cyprus, Portugal and elsewhere, convinced the British electorate that it was time to leave the EU. In fact, the EU's other leading policies – the CAP and CFP – had also been failures.

There is no need to examine the referendum campaign itself. The Leave Campaign, unexpectedly won the day. The Remain camp depended heavily on the Prime Minister, whose failed negotiations with Brussels thoroughly undermined it, while the ludicrously over-the-top scares put out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer deprived it of credibility. The Labour Party leadership seemed to absent itself from the whole debate.

So much for the referendum. Today, the result is that Theresa May leads a Tory cabinet, mainly containing former Remain supporters like herself, whose main task is to negotiate Brexit with Brussels. May's own position has been weakened by the disastrous results of her election campaign last summer which deprived her of her majority making her dependent on the DUP. Her cabinet is also clearly split, while some backbench Tory MPs like Anna Soubry would clearly sell their souls to reverse the Brexit vote. Yet Soubry is not only ignorant of European history. She also ignores Tory principles.

Conservatism

'...conscious political action taken by socially privileged classes, states or groups to safeguard the institutions in which their social position is embedded, against attempts to alter the norms prevailing in the political domain'

Hans-Gerd Schumann, German historian.

Much of the history of the Conservative Party as recounted above would suggest that Schumann's definition of conservatism should be applied to it. And, indeed, it often proved a very weak vessel in protecting the interests of the British people either at home or abroad. One could almost adapt the words of the American show song: 'What a swell party it wasn't'. However, an examination of traditional British conservative principles suggests that if these were properly applied, the party could have an honourable future after Brexit.

Most conservatives, surprisingly, have very little interest in or knowledge of their past. They usually associate conservatism as starting with Burke (a Whig) or Locke (a liberal). In fact, as two Israelis pointed out recently in an American magazine, the British conservative tradition (or the Anglo-American one in their eyes) begins much earlier with the writings of Sir John Fortescue (c. 1394-1479) who during the Wars of the Roses was in exile in France with the court of the young prince, Edward of Lancaster. Fortescue had previously been an MP and chief justice of the King's Bench and in exile became the nominal Chancellor of England. While in exile he wrote several books but foremost among them was a small work entitled *Praise of the Laws of England*, a treatise on English political philosophy. Long before Montesquieu made the claim, it argued that England's constitution was the best model of political government known to man. This was on account of its 'political and royal government'

which meant that English kings did not rule on their own authority but together with the representatives of the nation in Parliament and the courts. Their power, in short, was limited by the traditional laws of the English nation. Fortescue contrasted this with the situation in the Holy Roman Empire, governed by the Roman maxim, 'what pleases the prince has the power of law' and with royal absolutism in France ('royal government'). In England it was for MPs to determine the law and to approve requests from the king. Fortescue also pointed out that England enjoyed a system of trial by jury as part of due process under its judicial system. There was also protection of private property. In another work, *The Difference between an Absolute and a Limited Monarchy* (also known as *The Governance of England*) he starkly contrasted the prosperous state of the English population with the state of the French who suffered under a government that constantly quartered troops on them and confiscated their properties: 'Verily, they live in the most extreme poverty and misery, and yet they dwell in one of the most fertile parts of the world.' Yet maybe the French needed strong government. Fortescue was quite clear that the laws of one nation could not be applied to another since they reflected the historical experiences and development of each particular nation. He was eventually allowed to return to England and his *Praise of the Laws of England* was published in 1545 to great acclaim. It subsequently became a key text for generations of law students and he was hailed as England's greatest political theorist.

With the Stuarts, however, Fortescue's legal system came under challenge. James I himself had penned a treatise on government, the *Basilikon Doron* (Greek for the King's Gift) which argued that laws were the gift of the king and that he could make or revoke them at his pleasure. His book was bought in its thousands by very suspicious Englishmen who feared that the Stuarts wanted 'royal government' as in France. Eventually dynasty and law clashed under Charles I with the chief justice Sir Edward Coke and Sir John Eliot and others opposing the king. Yet his greatest opponent, who became England's greatest conservative thinker, was John Seldon, the most important common lawyer of his generation, a formidable philosopher and polymath, who knew more than twenty languages. Under his leadership, Parliament denied the king's right to imprison Englishmen without showing cause, to impose taxes or forced loans without its approval, or to quarter soldiers in private homes to impose martial law and circumvent the law. In 1628 Seldon played a leading part in drafting and passing a law of Parliament known as the Petition of Right which sought to restore and protect the liberties and

rights of Englishmen, stating they should not be compelled to pay taxes without consent, that they could not be imprisoned or have their property taken without due process of law. Freedom of speech was not mentioned but Coke had upheld that as 'an ancient custom of Parliament' in the 1590s. He was later at the centre of the so-called Protestation of 1621 that took him to the Tower of London in 1621 for nine months at the age of seventy.

Seldon saw himself as the heir to Fortescue, whose *Praise for the Laws of England* he had had republished in 1616. But his own writings were much more extensive in scope, not merely defending the traditional rights and liberties of Englishmen but also taking issue with new doctrines of universal rationalism, according to which men could merely consult their own reason to determine the best constitution for mankind. This 'rationalist' view had won popularity in England thanks to the work of the great Dutch political theorist Hugo Grotius, whose *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625), implied that the traditional constitutions of all nations could be done away with by simply relying on the rationality of the individual. Yet, as Seldon pointed out, reason led different men to all sorts of different conclusions. Government based on pure reason alone could, therefore, only lead to confusion as conclusions differed and changed. Instead, what was needed was historical empiricism, whereby men looked at how laws had developed and changed in the past and at what alternatives had been discarded and why, in order to adopt the best ones possible. The experience of the past could not be jettisoned arbitrarily.

Eventually, civil war proved the only way of ending Stuart absolutism in England, yet during this period and that of Cromwell's Protectorate the great fear remained that England would experience a Continental style tyranny. But with the restoration of Charles II (which Seldon did not live to see), two of his eminent disciples, Edward Hyde (later the Earl of Clarendon) and Sir Matthew Hale, played a leading role in restoring the constitution. In 1689 Parliament ratified the Bill of Rights which affirmed the ancient liberties invoked in the earlier Petition of Right, including the right to have arms for self-defence, freedom of speech and debates in Parliament, and the outlawing of cruel and excessive punishments and excessive bails and fines. The English press licensing laws were abolished a few years later. The 'glorious revolution', therefore, was based on Seldonian principles which protected the ancient laws and liberties of England.

These principles were consolidated throughout the eighteenth

century in works such as William Atwood's *Fundamental Constitution of the English Government* (1690) through to Josiah Tucker's *A Treatise of Civil Government* (1781). Meanwhile lawyers in Britain and America were trained on Coke's *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (1628-44) and Hale's *History of the Common Law of England* (1713) in both of which the law was understood to be the traditional English constitution and common law, amended as needed for legal purposes. There was, however, another theory now in fashion, which was rejected by Adam Smith, David Hume and Edmund Burke, namely John Locke's theory of the constitution as found in his *Second Treatise of Government*. Locke argued that prior to the establishment of government men existed, perfectly free and equal, in a state of nature governed by universal reason. This led them freely to form 'a body politic'. All this was pure fantasy, of course, and English historical empiricists were not impressed. They were even less impressed when Rousseau took up Locke's ideas embodying universal reason in the *General Will*. This is what led to the Terror during the French Revolution which had been foreseen and condemned in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. That polemic was directed against one of Locke's disciples, Dr. Richard Price, and Burke explicitly declared his debt to Seldon.: 'Seldon, and the other profoundly learned men, who drew up the petition of right, were as well acquainted, at least with all the general theories concerning "rights of men"... but preferred historical rights to speculative ones. William Paley's book, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) was also influential in arguing that men obeyed the law out of their sense of prescription which, again, meant voluntary obedience to the ancient constitution. Thus true British or Anglo-American conservatism derives from the gradual evolution of the law and constitution over time within the parameters of national institutions. It eschews the so-called rationalism of liberalism which can be used to dispense with any traditions at all – particularly national ones – and since reason is universal, welcomes the internationalisation of law, government and rights.

Right up until the twentieth century, conservatism was basically based on this tradition. It fully incorporated the emergence of capitalism and free trade (until Joseph Chamberlain's unhelpful intervention) although some paternalist aristocrats (Lord Shaftesbury for example) and squires bemoaned the changing industrial landscape. Capitalism, or better, Adam Smith's free market was a solid historical fact, whereas socialism, especially Marxian socialism, like Locke's liberalism, was based on speculation and historical fantasy. On the other hand, after the Second

World War, the party accepted the nationalisation of 20% of industry, the introduction of the NHS (it left the BMA to challenge this legislation), and corporatism and Keynesianism in managing the economy. Rab Butler told Churchill that it was essential to have 'strong central guidance over the operation of the economy' and 'to reconcile individual effort with a proper measure of central planning and direction.' Macmillan, a planner since the 1930s, was all too happy to agree. The trouble was that all the official bodies set up to control prices and incomes from the 1960s onwards did not work, so that by the time of the Heath government, an ideological struggle had broken out in the party with Heath, Peter Walker, Peter Luff and others on one side and Enoch Powell, Sir Keith Joseph and Thatcher herself on the other. Thatcher and her backers wanted as free a market as possible with the smallest possible role for the state. Heath and his supporters said this would mean a return to Victorian conditions (Thatcher was called a nineteenth century Liberal by her enemies) if not to interwar ones. Walker advocated profit sharing for workers and 'genuine employee participation' in industry. Luff argued that government must differentiate between 'competitive capital' and 'monopoly capital'. The latter had to be tackled through large-scale government intervention – 'on a far larger scale' than many Tories seemed willing to accept. Another Heathite wrote in a little book on the party published in 1976: 'Mrs. Thatcher and Joseph deny they believe in laissez-faire, but they do pay homage to the doctrines of Adam Smith and Milton Friedman. Not for many, many years has the leadership of the Conservative Party drawn its inspiration and its ideology from sources like that.' However, he did agree with Roy Jenkins, former deputy leader of the Labour Party and now President of the European Commission, when he said: 'I do not think that you can push public expenditure *significantly past 60% of GDP* (author's italics) and maintain the values of a plural society with adequate freedom of choice.' Moderate Tories, unlike Thatcherites, according to Heath's supporter, were 'more cool-headed and less obsessive and paranoid' about such a prospect. Of course, in the debate with the Tory wets over the virtues of the free market and a small state, Mrs. Thatcher emerged the winner. Even New Labour would share her victory.

Conservative principles, therefore, stand for the conservation of our historic constitution and the preservation of our common law, the prosperity of the British people through free market economics, and the defence of our national sovereignty. They are opposed to liberal ideas of the internationalisation of the state, law and rights. Brexit incorporates conservative values. The EU negates them. The diminution, eventually

the abolition of British sovereignty, is not a conservative principle. A successful outcome to negotiations will represent the historical pinnacle of Conservative achievements, redeeming any faults or defects in the party's past.

Brexit and the Tory Party Today

*Was it all false, that world of knightly deeds,
The splendid quest, the good fight ringing clear?
Yonder the dragon ramps with fiery gorge,
Yonder the victim faints, gasps and bleeds,
But in his Merry England our St. George
Sleeps a base sleep besides his idle spear.'*

Since the referendum, Mrs May has formed a government composed mainly of Remainers like herself. (Amazingly during her disastrous election campaign, she three times refused to tell Jeremy Paxman whether she had changed her mind on the issue. Her persistent refusal since then to say that she would back Brexit in any second referendum simply undermines her political authenticity and credibility.) Since the loss of her Commons majority she has not been able to strengthen her cabinet (the recall of Michael Gove is to be much welcomed. Indeed, her recent attempt at a reshuffle merely highlighted her obvious political weakness.) A series of concessions has brought a humiliating preliminary agreement in negotiations with the EU but Brussels is still intent on punishing us. As Count Plehve told Tsar Nicholas II: 'severity, served up cold, is the only way to deal with empire-wreckers.' But why allow Brussels to sit back and watch a weak and divided cabinet debate its differences in public? Does the cabinet not realise the impression it creates? One is reminded of the young Winston Churchill's jibe about Balfour's cabinet: 'They would make great sacrifices for their opinions but have no opinions; they would die for the truth if they knew what it was. They are like George II at the battle of Dettingen – *sans peur et sans avis*.' The British public, according to all polls, has accepted Brexit and wants to move on. Yet the cabinet, despite having an excellent plan elaborated in May's Lancaster House speech, seems to move on only away from it. Our depressingly uncharismatic Chancellor moves away from it as often and as far as he can. The £3 billion apparently set aside as a contingency for 'no deal' in his recent embarrassingly unimaginative budget has predictably been counterbalanced by an extra £30 billion offered to Brussels to secure

what looks like being a bad deal. Until very recently our very charismatic foreign secretary was neither to be seen nor heard. And when he was heard he was accused of making embarrassingly unfunny remarks mainly to befuddled foreigners. Instead of acquiring *gravitas* in the job by delivering powerful, intellectually heavyweight speeches on Britain after Brexit, it was claimed that he had nothing of interest to say at all. In his essay, *The Ignorance of The Learned*, Hazlitt wrote that 'anyone who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very lucky escape.' Until Boris's *Telegraph* article and his conference speech, even the Foreign Secretary's friends must have wondered whether he had really escaped the trap Hazlitt described. However, his reputation as a true champion of Brexit has been restored. Hammond, however, deserves to be sacked from the cabinet as do most of his very lacklustre colleagues, including the Prime Minister herself. So what is to be done?

First, a new cabinet must show some energy. For a start David Davis, whose lack of contingency planning for a hard Brexit, whose failure to oversee the drafting of impact assessment reports on any sectors of the economy after any kind of Brexit, and whose willingness to make regular concessions to Brussels without receiving any in return, must be replaced. Likeable and cheerful, he just rolls over and has his tummy tickled by the hard men of Brussels. We need a leading negotiator who has iron in his spine.

This new cabinet must immediately draw up real contingency plans for 'no deal'. The existence of such plans must be made known to Brussels along with the will to implement them if necessary. They must also be made known to the British public by the hiring of all sorts of officials required to execute them.

This cabinet must be ready and able to conclude free trade treaties with non-EU states as soon as possible.

The EU must be told that if talks break down it cannot expect normal relations with the UK thereafter on issues like defence and foreign affairs. Nor can it be offered help with its migration problems. We should also inform it that we will have no more to do with European Arrest Warrants, Europol, or the ECJ, nor shall we contribute to its foreign aid budget.

In 1870, after hearing the princes of Germany debate whether the King of Prussia should acquire the title German Emperor or Emperor of Germany, Bismarck asked them what was the Latin for sausage. Some said *farciamentum*, others *farciimen*, to which Bismarck replied that it made no

difference: 'a sausage,' he said,' means a sausage.' Likewise, Brexit means Brexit and a hard Brexit means a hard Brexit. The cabinet must unite on this. If a hard Brexit proves unnecessary, then it must agree to the shortest transition period possible.

We need a new prime minister. Mrs. May's inability to articulate her vision of the country after Brexit either during her disastrous election campaign or since has given rise to the suspicion that she has none. Her refusal to tell interviewers that if there were a new referendum she would now vote to leave the EU has not helped. She looks very much therefore like the Remain leader of a Remain cabinet trying to hoodwink the electorate about her true intentions over Brexit. Nor has her recent deal to move negotiations on to trade talks really helped very much. She has promised to pay up £40 billion which according to Hammond will be given away whether we reach a deal or not. Similarly, the vexed question of the Irish border has been fudged with an agreement that if there is no deal the UK will adhere to the regulatory regime of the EU in any case, thus most likely eliminating at a stroke Dr. Fox's chances of striking trade deals with all sorts of friendly countries. Finally, in spite of previously declared red lines, she has promised to allow the European Court of Justice to dictate British law on EU immigrants for at least eight years. Nor have the rights of former UK citizens who live in the EU been fully guaranteed. For example, they do not retain the right of free movement. Altogether, therefore, the second round of negotiations will require much firmer handling and a compelling vision of a truly independent Britain as the desired destination.

If there has to be a new prime minister, who should it be? Any new Prime Minister would have to be a Brexiteer to carry conviction and to carry the country. He – and there is no obvious female candidate in sight – would have to have the energy to swoop down on opportunity like a hawk on its prey. Or to slightly change the metaphor, he would have to be a political big game hunter. He will also need a fine and subtle mind, attuned not only to party politics but to international diplomacy and economic reform. It was said of Lloyd George in 1906: 'here was the unknown factor of the future, here the potentiality of politics.' Today, the Tory party needs a new Lloyd George or better still a Churchill. Is Boris the man to fit the bill? Perhaps so. Michael Gove is another candidate. Or perhaps a new Tory champion will have to be found amidst the ranks of younger Tory MPs among whom, fortunately, there is sufficient talent. There is after all another very clever old Etonian in Parliament who is more articulate, more witty and probably even more committed to Brexit than Boris.

Any new leader will not merely have to guide the party through Brexit but undertake a political revolution, forcing through the building of millions of new homes, tackling the problems of the NHS, social care, the universities and the BBC, not to mention the older ones of the national deficit and our national defence. He will require guts, energy, intellect and imagination. Incremental change will not suffice. Timidity will be an unpardonable sin. His leadership skills will have to be exceptional. We are at a turning point in British history and a Marxist Labour Party, *capable de tout et pire*, is already organised to make that turning point a revolutionary one. The new Tory party leader will be chosen by party members. They will have the final say and they must look to the future. They cannot choose someone with a pedestrian character. This is 1940 all over again but this time they will have a vote. They cannot afford to get it wrong. The country's very independence will depend on them. Fortunately at times of national crisis in the past the British have always found decisive leaders – Chatham, Palmerston, Lloyd George, Churchill. They must now find one again.

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