

# Liberalism and the Right



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# Liberalism and the Right by Michael Meadowcroft

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**conservatism.** A body of political ideas  
and attitudes, the burden of which is a pre-  
ference for the old and established in the  
social and political order rather than the  
new and untried. As such its advocates  
emphasize the importance of law and  
order, continuity, prescription, caution in  
innovation, tradition, variety, the imper-  
fectibility of human nature, and the con-  
sequent ineradicability of human vices.  
Traditionally it embodies a degree of de-  
ference, an acceptance of a degree of  
inequality between men, a distrust of the  
purely intellectual approach to politics,  
and the acceptance of property. State  
intervention and state subvention both for  
individuals and economic institutions  
should, in the view of the conservatives,  
only be employed at the margin. See also  
Reactionary; Right, the. D.C.W.

*(from 'The Fontana Dictionary of Modern  
Thought'. ed. Alan Bullock and Oliver  
Stallybrass 1977)*

# INTRODUCTION

Many moons ago I used to collect football programmes. Every week on the front of the Preston North End programme was an advertisement "There'll always be an England - and Harrison's Bread". However sceptical one might be about the permanence of Harrison's bakery I was never in doubt that there would always be a Tory Party. Fickle the Tory vote may be, but never, even in 1962, 1973 or 1981, after the by-elections of Orpington, Ripon and Crosby, did I share the view of some Liberals that the Conservative Party could be replaced or even be reduced to a right wing rump.

The ideological and sociological enemy of liberalism has always been conservatism. Obviously, to a greater or lesser extent over its history, socialism has displayed authoritarian and illiberal positions which have required exposure and opposition. Because the Labour case has had the appearance, though not the reality, of a radical answer to our problems it has always required a more thorough analysis and the development of a more ideological alternative.<sup>1</sup>

Historically the rise of the Labour movement in Britain is linked with the fortunes of the Liberal Party. The natural desire of Liberals in the 1880s and 1890s to assist working men to secure representation in Parliament and in local government; the development of the 'Lib-Labs', and the Macdonald-Gladstone Pact of 1903<sup>2</sup>, all demonstrated the instinctive recognition of the Tories as the enemy of progress and change.

However, as the rise of Labour moved from being a helpful partnership to a threat of takeover two things happened. Firstly, a number of Liberal politicians, such as Wedgwood Benn, Trevelyan and Jowitt, and Liberal philosophers, such as Hobson, Hammond and Ernest Simon, switched their allegiance to the Labour Party.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, there was a parallel shift to an anti-Labour position, either as a definite breakaway such as John Simon's Liberal Nationals, or by local pacts which more or less preserved Liberal Party identity, if not its integrity. In my view these local pacts were less a principled belief in a changing ideology, or a spirited opposition to socialism, than a banding together of the old guard for survival (of Liberals) against the incomers. The Tories put up with such pacts because, at least until the 1950s, they were not convinced that in many of the towns with a Liberal tradition they were capable of defeating Labour on their own. Beside which, in many cases, including Leeds, the Tories were well able to dominate the partnership.<sup>4</sup>

The Conservative Party after the 1945 Labour landslide made a deliberate policy of appealing to Liberals to vote Conservative, arguing that with the threat of a dangerous Socialist anti-democratic party in office it was too risky to allow the indulgence of a 'wasted' vote for a third party. Beside which, the Tories argued, they were now the true heirs of the liberal tradition and the upholders of liberty and freedom. Parliamentary electoral pacts were arranged in Bolton and Huddersfield to give Liberals and Conservatives one seat each in both towns and the Liberal Leader, Clement Davies, was offered the Education Ministry in Churchill's 1951 Government.<sup>5</sup> It is arguable that the freak election result of 1951, in which the Conservatives gained a majority of seats with fewer votes than Labour, was a result of the collapse of the Liberal Party which only fought 109 seats - less than one-fifth of the number fought the previous year.

1956 was a key year in the evolution of the Conservative Party and the Liberal response to it. By precious coincidence the Tories dispelled any lingering thoughts that they might make any plausible case for Liberal support by embarking on the Suez

escapade at almost exactly the same time as Jo Grimond succeeded Clement Davies as Liberal Leader. Grimond's aim was 'to create a Left Party for the Left Programme' and his style was to catalyse new thinking and to persuade individuals to apply their intellectual skills and radical personalities to the current political agenda.

By 1964 virtually all the electoral pacts with the Conservatives had ceased and the Liberal Party was competing with Labour for the disaffected Tory voters who, even by then, were beginning to reject instinctively the materialism and centralism that characterised thirteen years of Conservative rule. Despite the strenuous efforts of Jo Grimond to exploit the delicate Labour majority between 1964 and 1966 the arithmetic and the public will were against him. Britain chose instead the pragmatic scientific 'Socialism' of Harold Wilson and consensus continued.

It took the slowing down of economic growth, and the inability of parties based primarily on economic values to demonstrate an ability to cope with this, to accelerate the end of 'Butskellism'.<sup>6</sup> Whilst it was plausible to argue that material wealth would continue to increase, and would improve the lot of the poor without causing great distress to the better-off, the case for very different values was unlikely to command an immediate response.

The Heath Administration in the winter of 1973-74 and the Callaghan Administration during 1978-79 both floundered ideologically and foundered electorally. The lesson was not lost on the fundamentalists in each party. Margaret Thatcher and Tony Benn began their similar tasks of dominating both the political direction and the leadership of their respective parties. Margaret Thatcher succeeded in both aims and is now embarking on a second term of office determined to enforce a dogmatic and unfeeling conservatism, whatever the cost in social instability and distress.<sup>7</sup>

Liberals need to develop the political arguments to counter monetarism, nationalism and elitism - the three key pillars of conservatism. Mere rhetoric or declamation will continue to be ineffective - as Labour's leaders may eventually learn. This booklet is the fourth in an annual series and aims to equip Liberals to persuade those many Conservatives who are increasingly unhappy with the rightward trend of their Party that there is a relevant, non state socialist alternative deserving of careful consideration.

## 1. THE DANGERS

The immense danger is the creation of a society without understanding or compassion for those who perform the burden of an increasingly unequal society. The effect of the Government's strategy is to favour the employed at the expense of the unemployed and the owner-occupier at the expense of the tenant. Inevitably, as this state of affairs shows no sign of improving - indeed, for all the parroting of "when the upturn comes" to all but the besotted it is clearly worsening - there is a parallel growth of a feeling of hopelessness, particularly with more thefts and burglaries, and an apathy towards 'society' with poor electoral turnout and a growth of vandalism.

This is the level it is currently at, but it will not stop there. Hopelessness will give way to desperation and the breakdown of law and order that could then ensue, particularly in the cities, could well extend the Toxteth and Brixton trailer into the main feature. I hope this does not happen - and Liberals particularly must work to preserve social stability, without which it is virtually impossible to promote Liberal values, as Northern Ireland, alas, demonstrates.

It does not require any wild man of the Left to stress the dangers. Sir Ian Gilmour, MP, former Foreign Office Minister in Mrs. Thatcher's Government said:

"Almost all the tenets of monetarism have been destroyed. The Government proved unable to control the money supply. ...In 1980 Professor Milton Friedman told the Treasury Committee that a successful policy of reducing inflation would have 'as an unavoidable side-effect a temporary retardation of economic growth'. The 'temporary retardation' would last less than three years. Nobody could possibly describe what has happened as merely a temporary retardation of economic growth! ....The theory of monetarism is in ruins and the experience of the last three years is there to prove it.

"...Dr. Pangloss is once more running our affairs, though the results make it seem that it is Dr. Strangelove who is in charge."

Peter Jenkins, who, for at least eight years has with Ralf Dahrendorf been warning British politicians and public of the immense challenge of coping with the maintenance and development of a humane and Liberal Society without growth, drew the appropriate conclusions:

"...if things go on as they are, the problem will arise of how to govern a society which banishes a substantial minority of its citizens into a sub-society of the useless and the poor, inhabiting the derelict areas of the old cities and the centres of industrial decline, poorly housed and inadequately looked after, without economic prospect, social future or political hope.

"What does the Government propose? The money supply reinforced by the police? Mrs. Thatcher may win the majority power (of a kind) but riots and revolutions are made by minorities. That she may win an election with three to four million unemployed is no reason to do nothing about it. Nor need we search the past for warnings of how somebody else's history might repeat itself here. We are quite capable of making our own."<sup>8</sup>

## Default

The political influence of the Thatcherist 'new right' comes from a coalition of support and, in one respect at least, by default. Not only has an increasing proportion of the electorate given up on representative democracy as practised in Britain and abstained from voting, but also those within the Tory Party who find the recent trends deeply disturbing to their sense of fairness and decency have, with but few honourable exceptions such as Sir Ian Gilmour, failed to confront the dominant faction with vigour or rigour.

Nor is the failure to develop an intellectual analysis of an alternative to Conservatism confined to the Tory 'wets'. The Labour Party has relied on a declamatory denunciation of Thatcherism as if the effects of the Tory Government's policies would themselves provoke a mass switch of support to Labour, despite its own internal contradictions. For its part the Alliance, and its constituent parties, has concentrated on showing a balanced niceness rather than a forthright alternative.

Also, if the Labour Party is really serious in its expressed fears of the outcome of another dose of Thatcherism, the effect of the electoral system's bizarre arithmetic this time ought to spur it to support reform. What justification can there be for a supposedly democratic process that rewards a loss of 685,000 votes with an extra 58 seats, and gives us a Conservative Government by default with only 42% of the votes cast?

## Fear

One of the oddest comments during the recent General Election campaign was Mrs. Thatcher's expressed belief that the Labour Party would in fact survive as a significant political force. The reason for making the statement is very clear: one powerful weapon in the Tories's favour is the fear of socialism. Never mind whether the fear is justified or not, as long as the Conservatives can construct the Labour bogeyman in sufficiently vivid language it will have its effect. The Labour Party has, of course, greatly assisted the caricatures of itself by its vain attempts to amputate Militant and its equally vain attempts to stitch together a united front, particularly on defence. Nevertheless a party's political values must be combatted politically, not by the clever tricks of the public relations profession.

Sir Geoffrey Howe expressed the Tory tactics accurately:

"... I welcome the tempestuous decline of the Labour Party. It is still too early to conclude that Labour's sickness is terminal. The brand label is still one of the most attractive in the world, still able to command the instinctive loyalty of many working people who equally instinctively recoil from the Socialism of Mr. Benn. It is important that the damaging, and truly unappetising, nature of today's Labour Party should be even more plainly perceived."<sup>9</sup>

The negative voting that characterises so much of our political health benefits the supposedly 'safe' Conservatives significantly. The danger for Liberals could be to believe that the 'anti-Benn' or whatever vote could fall into our lap without us earning or deserving it. We have to present 'commitment politics' as resolutely in our own style and values as Mrs. Thatcher and the Conservatives. Gladstone's dictum is particularly apposite today: "Liberalism is trust of the people tempered by prudence; Conservatism is distrust of the people tempered by fear."

## Self Interest

The materialistic emphasis of capitalism, whose political expression is through the Conservative Party, skilfully persuades people to support it even when it is arguably not in the individual's self interest to do so. It is hard for the individual who has grown up in a country in which for generations the prevailing social pressure has been to 'get on' materially to cast aside willingly the possibility of such self-advancement, which capitalism seductively offers, apparently to all. A moment's thought would demonstrate that, particularly in terms of what might be thought a status symbol such as a cottage at the sea-side, material advancement cannot be available to all and can only be available to the few at the expense of the many.

R. H. Tawney pictured it well:

"it is possible that intelligent tadpoles reconcile themselves to the inconveniences of their position by reflecting that, though most of them will live and die as tadpoles and nothing more, the more fortunate of the species will one day shed their tails, distend their mouths and stomachs, hop nimbly onto dry land and croak addresses to their former friends on the virtues by means of which tadpoles of character and capacity can rise to be frogs ... the consolation which it offers for social evils consists in the statement that exceptional individuals can succeed in evading them."<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless Conservatives have always been ready to play the materialistic card. Harold Macmillan's "You've never had it so good" may have been slightly misquoted

but its sentiments were accurate enough. Margaret Thatcher revealed more of herself than of the New Testament when she said 'No-one would remember the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions. He had money as well.'

Conservatives sometimes try to cloak such cynical views with philosophic legitimacy. For instance Sir Keith Joseph and Jonathan Sumption have written:

"No man can regard himself objectively. He cannot treat himself as the equal of every other man. He cannot put his own desires, which he experiences at first hand, after those of others which he observes at second or third hand. He cannot subordinate his own interests to those of others. If one allows for a handful of saints and ascetics, men have always put themselves first."<sup>12</sup>

Quite apart from begging the question as to whether women are thought to respond differently, it is a highly dangerous basis on which to build a political edifice. It is conceivable that, though manifestly unfair and harmful, such a selfish Conservatism does not strike a mortal blow to the democratic process whilst the prospects of a 'jam tomorrow' are believable. But if the present Government's policies are pursued there will shortly come a point when those directly or indirectly harmed by monetarism and its associated policies will outnumber those who retain any confidence that an upturn can ever come. Unless by then there is an awareness of values other than materialism it is unlikely that any amount of 'law and order' will be able to maintain social stability.

There will no doubt always be a class of people whom Conservatism benefits, in terms of money and privilege. In the way of things it is likely that they will continue to support the Tories. They would be wise to think carefully about the possible consequences of continuing the Tory hegemony in its present form. George Bernard Shaw once said that "a government that robs Peter to pay Paul can always rely on the support of Paul". The continued survival in office of the Tory Party suggests that Shaw has thus far been wrong but the growing feelings of disillusion and bitterness suggest that it would be highly dangerous to ignore the warning of traumatic change.

## Instinct

The particular success of Thatcherism - and potentially its most dangerous facet - has been its ability to articulate the most basic instinctive responses of the British public. It is relatively easy for the politician to gain short term popularity by agreeing with each and every superficial and prejudiced belief of the public. The public has every right to believe illiberally that the Argentines should be kept at bay, whatever the cost, or that draconian punishment deters criminals, or that gypsies should be banished, or that all would be well if 'immigrants' were 'sent back', or that there are vast numbers of Social Security 'scroungers'. The public, after all, can put its point of view and then walk away from the problem. The politician cannot, and consequently has to take facts into account, however uncomfortable.

Every elected representative, whether MP or Councillor, has to decide on the best course of action available. That decision may well be based on a very limited set of alternatives which does not include the ideal solution.

It is clearly wrong to pretend in such circumstances that the agenda can simply be ignored to placate the electorate. The views of the public are not to be lightly set aside but the public's representatives owe it to their constituents to put before them the constraints and the facts that legitimately influence their decisions.

What is so often alarming about Mrs. Thatcher and the Tories who support her is that, they actually appear to believe their own rhetoric. The dominant right wing faction in

the Tory Party gives every indication of being carried away by the tide of populism. Those Conservatives, such as Sir Ian Gilmour and Francis Pym, who have a deeper perception of reality must indeed be troubled in spirit.

## 2. ADAPTABILITY

The great Reform Act of 1832 was an identifiable spur to the development of political parties in Britain. There remained considerable ambiguities for another fifty years or so but the constituent components of modern conservatism can be identified, for instance, by the time of Sir Robert Peel and his Tamworth Manifesto of 1833.<sup>13</sup> In an invaluable recent book<sup>14</sup> Professor Greenleaf traces the "twin inheritances" of conservatism - collectivism and individualism - through to the present day.

The adaptability of conservatism relies as much on sociological factors, and its ability to shuffle sufficient prejudices to the top of the pack at any given time, as it does on ideology. Indeed in many respects Conservatives have used ideology in support of their 'constituency' rather than vice versa. Liberals and Socialists tend to aim to create a constituency of supporters and members by promoting and applying their ideology. But to utilise a stance of being the party of Church and Monarch, or of Empire, the Conservatives developed a philosophy of enforced 'morality', encouragement of speculation, and imperial preference.

Before the widening of the franchise and the burgeoning demands of the working class to have its own representatives, the background of those able to be active in politics was relatively narrow and inevitably fairly comfortable. Even so there were broad groups in society which identified with the different parties. The landowners were largely Tory and the manufacturers were generally Liberal so that, even if only in narrowly defined terms, there has always been class politics of a sort. The virulence of Lloyd George against the Tories was not just because they happened to oppose certain fiscal measures in the 'People's Budget'!

To survive the widening franchise the Conservatives had to widen the deference vote correspondingly. If acceptance of the aristocracy's privileges was to be eroded by gradually giving working men the vote then the gradual inculcation of a broader elite would suggest that the Conservatives were moving with the times and still deserved support.

The brilliant political skills of Disraeli ensured the survival and later electoral dominance of the Conservative party. Andrew Gamble says:

"It was Disraeli who ... saw deeper, and realised that an enlarged electorate, properly handled, could in fact aid and not destroy the Tory Party."<sup>15</sup>

Disraeli, recognising the inevitable, introduced the 1867 Reform Act which began the enfranchisement of the working class. He believed that by so doing he might earn their electoral gratitude. In fact they elected the Liberals and gave Gladstone his first Ministry but by 1874 Disraeli was back in office. It says much for the adaptability of the Tories and the emptiness of Mrs. Thatcher's attachment to Victorian values that "at the

1981 annual conference, the mere whisper of Disraeli's name - let alone the dread term 'one nation' - was thought tantamount to treason."<sup>16</sup>

The Tory Party's apologists sometimes display a rather disarming candour. Peregrine Worsthorne, for instance, said:

"(The Tory party's) whole purpose is to make it possible for a governing class to get on with the job of governing, within the context of universal franchise; to relate the practical requirements of good government to the contemporary circumstances for majority rule, to translate the idea of aristocratic rule into terms which make sense in a democracy, which means organising mass support for what is basically an elitist or paternalistic system of government."<sup>17</sup>

The Tories' adaptability has also been demonstrated in the party's ability to absorb more radical ideas, always providing that their proponents had the necessary respect for other key tenets of the Tory faith. It would have been hard to conceive that the Joseph Chamberlain of the 'Radical Programme' - dismissed as 'Socialist' by the right - would shortly end up within the Conservative (and Unionist) Party. The key to his rightward shift was, of course, his passionate imperialist and anti-Home Rule views, so that he fitted *emotionally* more comfortably into the Tory camp and could conceive of a sort of bizarre type of 'Liberalism within one country' approach.

It is important to realise how much the social and religious structure of a country influence its political parties' style and values. It is often difficult and even exasperating for British Liberals to cope with the very different attitudes of our European Liberal partners. Michael Steed lucidly identifies two crucial determinants of whether contemporary Liberal parties are more or less conservative.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, the power of the Catholic Church was and is highly significant, and, secondly, the capacity and scope to redefine the priority between social and economic equality and individual freedom.

Electoral systems in Europe often enable relatively small parties to play important roles but nevertheless there tend to be groupings of parties around the socialist, centre and/or liberalism, conservative split. Where the 'conservative party' is a 'christian democrat' party it is too facile to equate it with, say, a Thatcherite Tory party, not least as it will contain a much wider spread of opinion because of its religious allegiances and the associated fear of the secular left. Similarly if, as in France, the Socialist party contains, or has absorbed, a libertarian faction it is not surprising that many British-style Liberals find the space left for them in the political spectrum extremely confined.

The fluidity of the Conservative Party's political position - plus the strong influence of the trade unions within the Labour Party towards social and economic amelioration - ensured that Liberals faced the latter of Steed's two determinants. That Liberals did not face it very adequately is demonstrated by the liquorice allsorts variations around the National Liberal theme that defectors to the Tory camp assumed.<sup>14</sup> Attlee's 1945-51 Governments were saddled with the task of dragging Britain out of its post war austerity. It accomplished the difficult task with courage and honesty but succeeded in opening the door to thirteen years of Conservative Government in far more propitious economic circumstances.

The Tories were not slow to adapt their appeal to the new situation. Brilliant tacticians such as Harold Macmillan realised that economic growth and individual prosperity could plausibly be linked. Whether or not the differentials between different sections of society narrowed was not electorally significant. It was much more important to

encourage the electors to believe that in real terms they could be better off year by year. Macmillan realised that the crucial middle ground was largely occupied by those who held quite legitimate aspirations for them and their families to acquire more consumer goods that were the signs of progress and success.

Macmillan - dubbed 'Supermac' by the cartoonist Vicky - assumed a fatherly style and squeezed the patrician image for every vote it held. A consummate politician, with a sense of humour, he knew the vital importance of maintaining a broad base of electoral support. His biographer quotes him:

"A successful Party of the Right must continue to recruit from the Centre and even from the Left of Centre. Once it begins to shrink into itself like a snail it will be doomed."

and comments:

"He believed that a Conservative Government is best managed from a position just to the left of centre and that any party yields the middle ground in politics at its peril."<sup>20</sup>

The memory of Supermac is so evocative that it is difficult to realise that he won only one election and was Prime Minister at the time of the Orpington Tory debacle.

The slowing down and virtual end of economic growth ended the 'never had it so good' appeal that had stood the Tories in good stead for a decade and more. The Heath Government was hammered by the traumatic rises in oil prices and failed (just) to put together a new majority based to some extent on an antipathy to union power. The narrowness of defeat was not lost on Margaret Thatcher. If confrontation on one 'gut' issue could take the Tories to within a hair's breadth of victory, what would be the effect of a package of emotive appeals whose content struck chords with a substantial working class population that felt its integrity and conformity had been exploited by increasing permissiveness and social welfare? This, plus a last fling at the economic 'goodies to come' line, shopping basket and all, put Mrs. Thatcher into Downing Street in 1979.

Having failed conspicuously to deliver anything attractive, except the reduction of inflation (at a high price in terms of its effects on unemployment particularly) Mrs. Thatcher was forced back on to her instinctive empathy with 'middle England'. The virtues of suffering, self-sufficiency and sound money were promoted, with an emphasis on being resolute that appeared more like a lunatic foolhardiness to every politician of the left - and not a few of the 'wets' on the right. Those who felt betrayed by the Conservatives' performance since 1979 responded in the most colourful and forceful language, but there were sufficient electors who, particularly in the secrecy of the polling booth, were prepared to acknowledge with an 'X' a sneaking regard for honesty, even if it was honestly wrong.

There were, of course, other factors. The abysmal contortions of the Labour Party trying to bridge the unbridgeable, whilst pretending the chasm was only a crack that required papering over, destroyed any chance of Labour being able to attract any footloose votes. The advent of the SDP just when the Liberal Party had completed a three year plan and a Programme which represented the application of mainstream Liberal thinking to the key problems of the day, managed to hi-jack the Liberal leadership and obscure the Liberal Programme with an Alliance Programme that just might have been relevant to the 1960s.

Above all the Falklands conflict provided continuous opportunities for the jingoism that distressed the Left and enthused the Right. It effectively took over the centre of the political stage and moved all the immense problems of the social and economic crisis to the wings. Peter Jenkins summed it up well:

"Patriotism has worked its old magic with the working class and the trade unionists; skilled workers and young people have rallied to the national flag and the Conservative Party. The prospect of a 'new majority' - a patriotic majority, a moral majority - presents itself through the smoke of war."<sup>21</sup>

Once again the adaptability of the Conservative Party, this time by going back into the gunboat era, enabled it to stay on top against all the indications. Clearly conservatism will not be defeated by slogans or rhetoric. A better analysis is needed.

### 3. THE TORY CASE

Lord Salisbury once defined Conservatism as the belief that "nothing matters very much, and few things matter at all"<sup>22</sup>. Latter day Conservatives aware that those who have to promote a political movement, whether on television or on the doorstep, want to believe that there is some systematic belief behind it, have worked hard to produce rather more substantial apologia than has been expected from the Right over the years.

In the most recent contribution<sup>23</sup> Chris Patten acknowledged the dearth of literature until the mid 1970s. He also notes that much of the more recent material has argued a 'special' or 'sectional' case for or against particular brands of conservatism. He writes:

"In response to all this, and in particular to the dogmatic enthusiasm with which the 'new Conservatism' is advanced, the traditional Tory case has sometimes been argued in a way which suggests that it rests on nothing more than a majestic pragmatism. The attempt to demonstrate the Conservatism is not an ideology can come perilously close to suggesting that it is nothing much at all."

Quite so. Perhaps he also had in mind Quintin Hogg who, in an earlier version of the same literary challenge, wrote:

"Conservatives do not believe that political struggle is the most important thing in life... the simplest among them prefer fox-hunting - the wisest, religion."<sup>23</sup>

Easy though it may be to caricature conservatism by carefully chosen quota, more valuable for our purpose here to tackle the Tories on the main thrust of their case, particularly as demonstrated by the governments of Margaret Thatcher. Inevitably, this entails relegating the views of the Tory 'wets' to a supporting role, except insofar as they provide a pungent commentary on the 'dries'.

The essence of Thatcherism is contained in six aspects of the present Government's record and policy.

(i) a defective view of democracy which rejects pluralism and the distribution of power in favour of central domination of policy and resource allocation, thus tending towards the corporate state and even aspects of fascism. The intolerance towards the exercise of different political values, such as by Ken Livingstone at the Greater London

Council, and the removal of power from the hands of the people by the determination to abolish the GLC and the Metropolitan County Councils are highly significant and formidably dangerous for democracy in Britain. Such attitudes are the very antithesis of liberalism;

(ii) a defective view of liberty which, by removing many of the state's guarantees of equality of treatment and basic economic support, promotes opportunity only for the few. The belief that ending support and ownership will of itself enhance a wider participation in private enterprise without seriously detrimental effects on those already underprivileged is pursued with a myopic fervour that flies in the face of the evidence. The essential balance between public and private sectors is being artificially tilted in order to demonstrate how resolute the Government can be. The damage done to the structure of society will become apparent bit by bit, but it will certainly be substantial and deep-seated;

(iii) a defective view of sovereignty which led the country into a war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands, followed by the necessity to pretend to maintain the status quo there by making the islands into a fortress at whatever cost, despite the fact that so doing actually transforms the status quo. The obsessive promotion of nationalism, seen also in attitudes to (as opposed to legitimate debate with) the EEC, and the maintenance of the semblance of an independent nuclear deterrent, has other effects on attitudes. It makes extremism respectable - as shown by the increasing involvement in the Tory Party of individuals with connections with the National Front and other far right bodies<sup>24</sup> - and acts as a simplistic diversion from the crucial task of combatting the economic and social crisis, rather as Hitler's National Socialist Party did in a particularly extreme and vicious way;

(iv) a defective view of the diversity and interdependence of individuals and communities. The 'one nation' principle of Disraelian conservatism has been abandoned in favour of the re-emergence of class based politics. The adaptability of conservatism is once again demonstrated by the skill with which a new commercial elite and a council house owning Trojan horse have been grafted onto the traditional Tory constituency. The new conservatism of the Thatcher Government carefully plays off the competing claims of deference, flag waving, social injustice and nostalgia in order to retain a large enough 'coalition' of support, no matter what the eventual social cost of divided communities and dashed hopes;

(v) a defective view of the structural changes taking place in industrialised countries and of the need to respond in new and even experimental ways. Whatever else one is entitled to expect from conservatism it would take a wild optimist to believe that innovation could be on Mrs Thatcher's agenda. The essence of the conservative approach to the steadily increasing lawlessness, which is to some extent fed by feelings of impotence to change things, is to increase social control by means, such as the police, which are *external* to the community. There is no understanding of the essential requirement of the *internal* pressures towards stability and security that emerge naturally from a strong and healthy community.

Repression and force are dangerous substitutes for community support and involvement. It has never been possible to legislate for the enforcement of values; at best all that a Government can do is to prepare the fertile soil in which its preferred lifestyle can flourish. The Tories are not even doing that. Their ultra rose-coloured vision of Victorian values can neither be introduced nor sustained in a late twentieth century society in which both the requisite physical and psychological conditions are rightly absent. The frustration caused by the moral exhortations of Tory leaders is bound to erupt sooner or later. When it does erupt on the streets it will be exceptionally difficult to put the lid on it. The danger signs are all around us but the Conservatives read and write a different language;

(vi) a defective view of the role of philosophy within a political movement. The dominant force behind Mrs Thatcher and the present Conservative Government has been an economic theory rather than political philosophy or even social theory. The supremacy of monetarism has forced political decisions to be taken in too much of an ad hoc fashion. The whole plethora of Manpower Services Commission provisions demonstrates the inadequacy and weakness of pragmatism. Monetarism cannot even solve our economic ills and to allow it to obscure the need for a political analysis of our situation, and for the development of consistent political values to cope with the crisis is culpability of a very high order. Pragmatism as a necessity is barely defensible but as a virtue it is laughable.

Sir Ian Gilmour has emphasised the same points from within the Tory Party:

"Tories and others who pressed for . . . reforms did not do so because they thought that economic efficiency was not the only proper end of government and that certain conditions were an affront to a civilized society. There was, they believed, a higher aim of Government and political action; and the state had a duty to try to make life tolerable for the least well off and to give everybody the chance to develop his ability."<sup>25</sup>

Liberals would wish to state the case more positively:

"We believe with a passionate faith that the end of all political and economic action is not the perfecting or perpetuation of this or that piece of mechanism or organisation but that individual men and women may have life and that they may have it more abundantly."<sup>26</sup>

We need to look more closely at the Conservative case and the alternatives to it.

## 4. THE CORRUPTION OF POWER

Conservatives have never enjoyed dissent but hitherto they have tolerated it (except from within their own ranks when it is tantamount to committing the sin against the Holy Ghost). The present Conservative regime simply cannot abide to be crossed. A health authority, a local council or a quango has only to demonstrate a lively independence to put "the Queen . . . in a furious passion . . . stamping about and shouting 'Off with his head!' or 'Off with her head!' about once a minute".<sup>27</sup>

Even 'wet' Tories, like Chris Patten, have to try and bridge the awesome gap between his view of Conservatism and Mrs Thatcher's:

"Since Conservatives favour the diffusion of power, there is much to be said for defending local government autonomy, that is, the right of the local communities to run their own affairs. But we should be sensible not starry-eyed about this principle. We are not a very large country and there will always be consequently clear limits on how much it is administratively desirable to transfer to lower tiers of government, and how much such transfers are actually desired by the electors. The low turnout in local government elections does not suggest that most voters are yearning for greater local autonomy. What they want is

competent local administration, which they can understand and influence."<sup>28</sup>

Precisely the opposite can and should be argued. If successive Governments take more and more powers away from local authorities, and increasingly limit their financial capacity and, as a consequence, their policy freedom, why on earth should anyone bother to vote in local elections? In London we are now promised by the Conservatives the 'Ken Livingstone (Preservation) Bill'. Rather than rely on the judgement of the electorate — and for that matter on the effectiveness of the Greater London Conservative Party — to throw Labour out of control of the GLC at the 1985 election, the Government proposes to extend the life of the present GLC majority (and the Metropolitan County Councils, which are all Labour controlled) pending its proposals to abolish them altogether!

As it happens local government's financial performance has been generally praiseworthy,<sup>29</sup> and certainly better than central government, but the case for local democracy does not rest on economics. One hundred and twenty years separate the following statements and the consistency and weight of them is that to allow the concentration of political power at the centre is to turn a blind eye to the corruptibility of the fallible human state and to encourage the dangerous obsession of control by force.

J. Toulmin Smith could have been writing with the present government in mind:

"The basis, and only possible solid foundation, of free institutions in any country must always be Local Self-Government. The name of free institutions may exist; a national representative assembly may exist; nay, universal suffrage may exist, and even annual parliaments: but unless there be general and active and unshackled local self-government free institutions can have no reality; law and liberty and property can have no assured securities; and the government will be merely a despotism more or less oppressive, and more or less artfully disguised."<sup>30</sup>

Toulmin Smith, in a sense got his way. The municipal corporations, the county councils, and the parishes were all set up within forty five years of his great polemic.<sup>31</sup> The sad fact is that the past forty years have been years of retreat, with hospitals, gas and electricity, water and aspects of other services all taken away from the local authorities. The only gain by local government since the war, London Transport, is to be taken back by the Government.

George Bernard Shaw's credo is just not understood by Conservatives:

". . . the balance sheet of a City's welfare cannot be stated in figures. Counters of a much more spiritual kind are needed, and some imagination and conscience to add them up as well."<sup>32</sup>

Even the Bains Committee's Report's splendid introduction has had no impact despite being published by a Tory Government:

"Local government is not limited to the provision of services. It is concerned with the overall economic cultural and physical well-being of the community."<sup>33</sup>

The huge challenge for Liberals is to shift the debate on democracy away from the concentration on economics that obsesses Left and Right, and on which the Right loves to slog it out, knowing that it is on ground of its own choosing. The Conservatives can only be routed by winning the *political* argument on the nature and location of power. It is a far more complex and abstract case but is crucial to the whole Liberal philosophy and strategy. Without a pluralist democracy that, at worst, tolerates dissent



it is infinitely more difficult to achieve gains for community politics. Indeed, Liberals have been more culpable than most in recent years in permitting the Tories to get away with so much centralisation without a forthright and trenchant Liberal campaign which could have mobilised many of the single issue groups and campaigns. Perhaps we have been too diverted by Alliance mechanics and shadow Shadow Cabinets to realise that illiberal forces were rampant in the land. It is, after all, a Liberal rather than a Social Democratic case and one which can still be promoted with powerful allies if we choose to galvanise them.

Perhaps the best commentary of Mrs Thatcher came — unwittingly — from Senator William Fulbright:

“A nation which not only allows dissent but encourages it is adult and confident. A people which fearlessly exercises the right of criticism is civilised and intelligent . . . In a democracy dissent is an act of faith, and criticism an act of patriotism; a higher form of patriotism than the familiar rituals of adulation.”<sup>34</sup>

Amen!

## 5. ALTRUISM OR INCENTIVE?

To a certain extent the division between British political parties is based on their view of the nature of the individual. Given that it is economic values that dominate both Conservative and Labour parties these essentially derive from either a pessimistic or optimistic view of man. The Conservative takes a cynical view of man as being acquisitive, competitive, self-centred and even exploitative, whilst the Socialist believes that man is altruistic, generous and communal.

Sometimes the argument about human nature becomes bound up in the ‘nature and nurture’ debate, ie that if surrounded by a different value system—in this case usually a non-capitalist, interdependent, socialist utopia — the individual would in due course throw off the unnatural selfishness of capitalist society and cease to respond in exploitative ways. In a recent book<sup>35</sup> which should be required reading for socialists of every variety, Professor Nove points out that this debate is sterile in that the sustaining of change depends on the individual as she or he is, and can be persuaded to be, in which case the source of motivation matters less than its effectualness.

Liberalism is based on a more perceptive understanding of human nature and how individuals respond to different pressures. For instance a group can behave in opposite ways, depending on circumstances. A close knit local community can exercise a valuable inhibition on lawless behaviour and can catalyse informal neighbourly care, but it can also band together to oppose the sale of a house to an ‘immigrant’. Similarly though an individual might quietly take advantage of a tax free offer, the community will condemn the ‘black economy’. In other words ‘rightness’ or ‘acceptability’ is not measured by the sum total of individual prejudices but on what is considered to be reasonable. Thus although opinion polls suggest that a large majority of the public wants the return of capital punishment the fact that Parliament steadfastly refuses to legislate for its return does not destroy representative democracy. To be sure, there are some voluble grumbles but there is an underlying acceptance that Parliament’s view (on this at least) is the ‘right thinking’ one.

Lord Devlin in his book on some of the moral dilemmas of jurisprudence<sup>36</sup> compares this view to that of the ordinary citizen in the jury box. Because the juror has to reach agreement with fellow jurors; reaches a verdict only after argument, instruction and deliberation, and is in a role in which his or her views on the issue become directly effective, the decisions made are not as a rule based on the extremes of selfish cynicism or naive optimism.

Liberal values and their successful promotion depend on persuasion not prejudice, and therefore require a far greater commitment to the one-to-one relationship in canvassing, or to spending time with a small group round the table in the club or pub. I doubt very much that there are media or gimmicky short cuts for Liberals. We cannot baptise electors with a hosepipe. The Liberal working politician could well relate Devlin’s description of the jury paradox to the political process.

I want to labour the question of the individual’s duality of attitude towards political ideas and social change one step further. It is absolutely crucial to the effectiveness or otherwise of the process, and particularly so to Liberals trying to depend on the primacy of reason rather than on a class appeal. There is a ‘political ecology’<sup>37</sup> which determines the pace of possible change and the contemporary boundaries of trust, and therefore acceptability of ideas. It also insists that means are virtually as important as ends — as community politics has by instinct discovered and, in turn, taught.

Like many political concepts it is extremely difficult to be precise about ‘political ecology’ and the limitations it places on political action. It includes an awareness of the value of the trust built up by a long period of consistent public service and the influence of conscientious casework, both of which encourage the acceptance of ideas that are extensions of that local ‘style’. It also necessitates a skill in drawing on local example and experience to support abstract theory. In essence it is about a ‘resonance’ with the individual and the community which earns support for ideas that might in other circumstances appear alien. I do not believe it is possible in the short term to persuade the public of the dangers of Mrs Thatcher’s instinctive appeal to a national consensus other than by building up an alternative ‘resonance’ locally and regionally for Liberal values.

Conservative economics not only show a continuation of the obsession with monetarism but also, as a consequence, accept the inevitability of increasing inequality. Control of the money supply requires reductions in public spending, which requires restrictions on income support and on the personal services (health, education, housing, leisure, social services, etc), and the selling off of national assets formerly utilised for public benefit not private profit, which in return requires an increase in commercial speculation at the expense of an equal distribution of resources.

It is not necessary to be obsessive about the supposed primacy of egalitarianism to be angry at the Tories deliberate rejection of any need to redress gross inequalities. For many Tories the encouragement of the market, even where grossly exploitative, is not just an unpleasant necessity but an enthusiastic article of faith, whatever the consequences. Sir Keith Joseph and a colleague produced a book to parade “their firm belief that the search for equality is more than impractical and self-defeating: pursuit of it for its own sake is morally objectionable.”<sup>38</sup> Perhaps unfortunately for the authors they use Sir Freddy Laker as an example of a millionaire whose riches are accepted because the value of his activities is perceived!

The market is not capable of being utilised in isolation from the social constraints of community tension and the international constraints of the possession of essential raw materials in countries with considerable abject poverty. Consequently the state has to accept that there will be intervention and then to determine on what principles, if any, it will intervene. Edward Heath, for instance, did not take over Rolls Royce in 1970

because he suddenly believed in nationalisation but because its survival was essential to the wider economy.

Socialists have an understandable distaste for the market and its exploitative trappings and this blinds them to the equal but different exploitative faults of centrally planned socialised economies. Liberals have an equal awareness of the lack of freedom inherent in both the inequalities of capitalism and the rigidity of excessive state bureaucracy. Liberals therefore seek the mixture of private and public ownership that gives the highest level of personal freedom. The components of Liberal freedom and equality include devolution of decision making, encouragement towards levels of ownership of property or work-shares that assist personal security rather than exploit others, available work or individual income support that enables people to live with dignity, and the capacity for the local community to exercise choice in securing facilities on its own ground.<sup>39</sup>

## 6. NATIONALISM — THE DANGEROUS DIVERSION

On the car radio as I drove to the Liberal Party Council in Bedford last February I heard the news that the EEC had decided to involve itself in the problems of Ireland. I mused on the value of having a fresh and less cluttered initiative as from both Conservative and Labour spokespersons came the immediate ritual denunciation of the EEC for interfering in what is a sovereign British problem. I pondered on the need to have a motion at Party Council welcoming the EEC decision and arrived at Bedford to find a motion had been immediately tabled which later in the day attracted overwhelming Liberal support. This incident illustrates vividly the different instinctive responses of the three parties.

The Tories have never hesitated to play the 'national' card when it suits them, carefully implying that only their party can truly guard the patriotic interest. The 1886 election on Irish Home Rule, and the 1900 'Khaki' election on the Boer War are but two examples.<sup>40</sup> By contrast Gladstone and Campbell Bannerman took up wider international concerns and actively campaigned on the question of the Turks' Bulgarian atrocities and on the iniquities of the Boer War respectively. The whole episode of the Zinoviev Letter at the 1924 election was exploited by the Tories, whether or not the letter was a forgery. The 1956 Suez fiasco temporarily harmed the Conservative Government but the Tory Party backed the military action and in fact took an even stronger nationalistic line than the Government.

I have never been able to understand the case for independent nation states. Perhaps if I had emotional feelings of patriotism it would help but even then I suspect that objectively it would be difficult to sustain an argument based on the integrity of the present boundaries for virtually all states — quite apart from the illogicality of wishing to promote one's own country at the expense of another. In the United Kingdom we are somewhat protected from the problem of boundaries (though Ireland, Scotland and Wales would express varying degrees of scepticism on the legitimacy of the 'one nation') but what national unity has a country such as Belgium? Or what argument can there be for the perpetuation of the boundaries of African States that were carved up in Berlin a hundred years ago, and which have major tribes, such as the Ovambos in Angola and Namibia, on both sides of an artificial line?

The whole concept of the nation state has historically been dangerously divisive externally and perilously provocative. It is alarming that in the 1980s a country facing

immense economic and social problems, and which should be aiming to develop new partnerships with Europe and the developing world, should step backwards into a bygone imperialism and embark upon a military expedition in the South Atlantic which has been costly in human casualties and expensive financially. What makes it worse is that the sacrifice in the long term will be seen to have been in vain. By creating 'Fortress Falklands' the way of life to which so high a price was paid has effectively been destroyed and, what is worse, simply cannot be sustained indefinitely.

Toryism showing itself in its true colours ought not to be a surprise to Liberals. Mrs Thatcher even gave advance warning of her beliefs before she became Party Leader "[Conservatism] has been about serving the nation. We are above all a patriotic party... nothing that's bad for Britain can ever be good for Conservatism"<sup>41</sup>. Raphael Samuel drew the sharp conclusion as to the Tory attitude to the South Atlantic conflict:

"The Falklands war also corresponded (or was made to correspond) to the chivalric myths which the nation holds about the past. According to the myth — the imperialist version of the Arthurian legend — wars are engaged in as matters of honour and take the form of a gallant rescue.

For Conservatives, the war was not tragedy but triumph, a proof of the nation's manhood. Within days, it was being used as a Party fable. Mrs Thatcher, as is well known, invoked it in her Cheltenham speech to browbeat the railwaymen into accepting flexible rostering. Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, preferred to use it as a parable for privatisation."<sup>42</sup>

In retrospect we appear to have been exceptionally lucky to have survived the Falklands war at all. What might have been hardly bears thinking about, and what is even more worrying is that, having now been reminded of the Tory character, and having seen the electoral benefit of such formidable risks, the Thatcher Government might be tempted to try it on again elsewhere. The sophistication and availability of weapon systems ensures that any state can obtain Exocets or even more devastating weapons. Clearly in a country as volatile as Argentina cold calculations of risks or of deterrence are not foremost in a dictator's mind. We need to have regard to the potential risks and determine now how we can take diplomatic and political action rather than being caught without peaceful options. Liberalism provides another way. It discourages nationalism but acknowledges self-determination; it recognises the dangers of the nation state but encourages community; it is aware of the dangers of belief in superiority but knows the value of heritage; and it accepts the anachronism of sovereignty but does not believe that that necessitates vulnerability.

Liberals are not frightened by supra-nationalism. It is entirely consistent to develop community politics in the neighbourhood and at the same time to work towards a Federal Europe. The realities of multi-national capitalism, of the distribution of the world's resources, and of the nuclear threat are all urgent imperatives towards the acknowledgement of the interdependence of countries and continents. The development and progressive enlargement of the European Community has demonstrated that it is possible to give up aspects of sovereignty without loss of pride and character. The next key international task for those who are part of international federations and groupings is to explore ways of gradually linking very different economic and social systems.

By a strange irony, Mrs Thatcher's economic policies force the Conservative Government into a dependence on external factors:

"The pursuit of sound money as the main goal of stabilisation policy, the commitment to the freest possible movement of goods and capital, the scaling down of the internal protection and subsidy of industry, leaves the British economy in its debilitated state at the mercy of world

economic trends over which British governments cannot exercise any control. Any British economic recovery is now entirely dependent on a recovery in the world economy."<sup>43</sup>

It is further arguable that a recovery in the world economy is dependent on the development of the Third World's economy. The Tories have never seen that as high on their list of philosophic priorities.

Finally, the greatest danger of all in Tory nationalism lies in the necessity to sustain a belief in Britain's capacity to demonstrate her power and independence by maintaining a nuclear deterrent. If the deterrence theory works at all — and I do not believe that it can any longer be sustained in logic — it relies on mature, sophisticated political leadership which is aware of the risks and which weighs the consequences of action. But if Britain's argument is that possession of the Bomb makes the country strong and invulnerable then the awful problem is that other countries may actually believe it and decide to acquire the weapons in order to secure those same national benefits. How far can one then stretch the argument about international security if Colonel Quaddafi or the Ayatollah Khomeini possess nuclear weapons? Or if Argentina had had nuclear weapons?

The Conservatives are trying to prevent the last war not the next. The world has moved on and left the Tories behind.

## 7. THE SURVIVAL OF DEFERENCE

The recent election apparently left the Labour Party baffled. Their campaign meetings found an enthusiastic response and their canvassers did not identify the hordes of Tory voters that eventually appeared in the ballot boxes. For myself I was baffled by this phenomenon in the local elections five weeks before but we were not caught twice. At the General Election we were better prepared, and the canvassers better briefed, to look for the 'deference' vote. However polarised politics has become there are still those who, under every other heading, ought to vote Liberal or Labour, particularly given the ravages of the present Conservative Government, but who believe that the Conservatives are, as a class or a type, the people equipped to govern.

It is a surprising survival of privilege and of elitism that it can still call out such a response. I suppose it is only a lesser version of the adulation that royalty gets wherever it goes. I do not begrudge people their monarchy, even though I can find no logical rhyme or reason for it, and though its trappings, such as relaying flagstones and the paranoia about protocol and security, try my temper and patience more than anything else I know! But to look to those who have positions or power through the privilege of birth or cash as an emotional escape from the very real trials and tribulations of survival in the 1980s demonstrates how far we still have to go to build confident, secure and caring communities that recognise in the Tories the source of many of the attitudes and policies that undermine the services and values on which those same communities depend.

The Conservatives promote 'opportunity' as the plausible watchword for those who seek to better themselves. Educational opportunity, for instance, has not, in general and with honourable exceptions, tended to promote a recognition of the importance to the community of those arduous but non-complex jobs that do not require academic

qualifications. Even with non-selective schools, the emphasis is generally still towards qualifications that enable one to 'get on'. A legitimate desire to be sure but not to be seen as thereby conferring membership of a group that is intrinsically higher in status.

The huge increase in unemployment has done nothing to alter basic attitudes. Indeed, in a sense, those in employment have by and large not done badly in recent years and have tended to become more separate from less fortunate members of society. The physical separation from one's roots still goes on, which creates an ever wider division between the 'plush' and the 'plebs', and — most Liberal representatives excepted — between the governors and the governed. Whole areas of our cities are akin to reservations on which we settled the modern urban version of American Indians, without rights and without hope. To such areas commute the doctors, teachers, social workers, health visitors, employers, even community workers and politicians all of whom exhort the natives to live decent lives and then drive themselves smartly back to suburbia.

This cannot go on. Our community based message must be that everyone is entitled to parity of esteem as a member of the community and has potentially an equal contribution to make. Further, the community, however impoverished, has the potential of producing its own leaders who do not have to be seduced into a leadership elite or a leadership ghetto.

The change of political allegiance by change of job or of residence has always benefitted the Tories — just as now a new category of Conservatives has emerged: the owners of Council houses (understandably so in their terms).<sup>45</sup> But is a highly divisive and even dangerous trend and it is up to Liberals to challenge such 'evolution' and to build a philosophic basis to political values rather than let class perpetuate itself in this way.

## 8. THE ILLUSION OF TORY STABILITY

The desire for stability is as deep seated a human feeling as any. Politicians have often justified abandoning former principles in attempts to achieve it, as Ramsay Macdonald did in 1930; others have justified repression in the name of imposing stability but very few have sought to think through what makes a stable community. Liberal thinking from the late 1960s on the nature of community, and the political response required, has developed into a relatively thorough analysis of the neighbourhood aspects of the problem. The prescription still needs to give more attention to the problems of stability where 'community' has been destroyed, to the linkages between local action and national security, and to the work place 'community'.

The key reason why Conservative and Labour parties have failed, and will fail, to tackle the question of stability is that their philosophies give primacy to economic values and therefore tend to confuse the basically psychological condition of security with the need for material rewards and better physical conditions. Clearly economic security and decent living conditions are essential to a feeling of stability but they cannot create it, whereas a community that feels secure is likely to be able to win other improvements for its neighbourhood. Once again it is back to the key difference of Liberals being 'enablers' whereas Tories and Labour are 'providers'.

It is inevitable that the Conservatives' pessimistic view of human nature leads them, to resort to repression to suppress evil. Professor Greenleaf comments "There is . . . ample warrant for the suggestion that an authoritarian strand exists in Conservative doctrine"<sup>46</sup>. We have seen the breakdown of community, particularly in our cities and the consequent growth of anonymity and the loss of the natural inhibition of anti-social behaviour. In such circumstances repression is incapable of restoring the 'ligatures' of society.<sup>47</sup> The breakdown is too widespread and an attempt to impose authority is likely to be counter productive.

In many cases the priority given to economic development undermined stability. The carving of major highways through residential communities removed the informal contacts and sense of unity. The increasing scale of manufacturing units necessitated the development of industrial areas, often some distance away from workers' homes, which also damaged the unity of the community and its informal ties. Most damaging of all was the obsession with housing redevelopment and forcibly moving people onto new estates, often into tower blocks. Such traumatic change, usually done from good motives, was disastrous.

Human communities evolve. They do not just happen by being thrown together overnight. Now that the results of these errors of conservatism (and, for that matter, of Labour also in many cases) are seen — and felt — in many urban areas the Tory Government shows no sympathy. To recreate and encourage new community spirit and a sense of neighbourhood requires substantial and dedicated work. It needs a meeting place in each area, and community workers living within the community — not to take over local leadership, nor to fan the flames of dissent, but to work alongside local people, to tease out skills and talents, and to enable the community to determine its values and standards, and make them effective. Furthermore, such community work needs access to a city wide or county wide network of supporting voluntary services, such as educational advice and access, design and printing, employment development, basic administrative support, legal and financial advice etc.

This sounds like a vast bureaucracy. It is not. In comparison with governmental structures — particularly the Manpower Services Commission — it is laughably minute but it does require a certain amount of new capital and revenue funding. If attention is not given to helping communities rescue themselves from the ravages of the Tory 1950s and 1960s the cost, financially as well as socially, will be far higher than the amounts required for prevention. If the frustration and exasperation with government and authority gets worse (and every increase in unemployment exacerbates these feelings) it will shortly explode on to the streets. People will not continue indefinitely to practise self-subdual via the television set night after night. I doubt whether the Tories can understand the problem let alone deal with it apart from their knee jerk reflex of banging the law and order drum ever louder.

The Conservatives' problem is intensified by the inherent problem they have in coping with social evolution. Changes in the nature of the family, partly as a result of new attitudes to marriage, the recent emphasis on sexual politics, and the decline in adherence to formal religion, are all hurtful to the Tory mind. Mrs Thatcher's references to Victorian values, are exactly in that tradition, indeed it follows on comfortably from Disraeli's 1872 speech on Conservative principles, which, he said were primarily to defend our institutions — Church, Country and Empire.<sup>48</sup>

It is not necessary to believe that all recent social change has been beneficial but it is important to realise that it cannot simply be ignored or rejected. Social change, particularly in regard to personal relationships and social attitudes, tends to be much more gradual and, for that matter, less affected by legislation, than social policy. For instance a decision to reduce the prison population by ceasing to commit individuals for drunkenness offences has a swifter effect on policy than it does on attitudes to alcoholism. Equally it is incumbent on politicians to note changing social attitudes and to determine how best to amend legal provisions to take account of those changes. Thus changes in legislation on sexual offences have tended to be prompted by changes

in attitudes, even though it has thereafter been possible to lead opinion to some extent.

One crucial area where the Conservatives are hopelessly out of touch with recent changes is that of feminist politics. Most male politicians on the radical side of the divide have been taken aback by the intensity of the feminist attack on the 'maleness' of society and its presumptions. In addition the sharpness of feminist perceptions on the political agenda is the most optimistic aspect of an otherwise fairly depressing scene. It is not going to be easy to see the make up of political institutions altered drastically, or to have one's political priorities changed significantly, but at least to Liberals there is an openness to such new dimensions.

Not so, for Conservatives. Raphael Samuel begins an article on the Conservative Party's "profound sexism" with the stark statement "One of the unifying strands in contemporary Conservatism is anti-feminism" and proceeds to substantiate it in detail,<sup>49</sup> via Greenham Common, risqué jokes, dismissive reviews of women in the media, male effeminacy, male only clubs (and priesthoods), and its historical perspective.

The real answer to the problem of social instability is to promote a different value system to that which the Tories have relied on for generations and which is now played out, particularly as overall economic growth is at an end.<sup>50</sup> That requires an understanding of the nature of community and the integration of the different strands within it. It then requires an acceptance of the need to underpin its human and community values with a level of resources that enables it to encourage participation and mutual aid. Strong communities make up strong cities and possess an inherent 'law and order', in which community policing is, as its name implies, part of the community rather than a department at police headquarters.

John Stuart Mill's comment is highly topical:

"It is scarcely necessary to remark that a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement. There would be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture, and moral and social progress, as much room for improving the art of living and much more likelihood of it being improved, when minds ceased to be engrossed by the art of getting on."<sup>51</sup>

## 9. CONCLUSION — PRINCIPLES NOT PRAGMATISM

The Conservative Party cannot make its mind up on ideology. It has those who advocate pragmatism, or tradition, or emotion, as a virtue because they believe that ideology is somehow unhealthy or dangerous.<sup>52</sup> It also has those who see the trap that this attitude opens up in front of them and who therefore attempt to construct a philosophy.<sup>53</sup>

Its dominant drives are consistent enough in their own separate terms: to minimise the state's influence, and to maintain order; but they do not add up to an ideology,<sup>53</sup> indeed they are an ideal background for pragmatic action not least because they are to some extent contradictory. Much of the drive for the formulation of Tory policy is

managerial in its aim and there are sufficient recent examples to demonstrate the error of taking action on isolated problems without placing them within a philosophic framework. Failure to join the EEC when it appeared not to be in Britain's immediate self-interest; the promotion of the Beeching Report on the railways; the devising of a defective local government structure; and the recent treatment of the EEC, are all instances of pragmatic or managerial decisions that are clearly errors of political judgement.

In many respects the Conservatives have asked the right questions but have come up with the wrong answers. Being resolute is fine — as long as one is not resolutely wrong — but all the signs are that the Thatcherite policies are not succeeding, even in their own terms. The one success is the lowering of inflation but even that is at such a fearsome price that it makes other failures, particularly that of unemployment, so much more acute. Also there is now the irony that failure in other policy areas, such as the exchange rate, will start to push up inflation again.

Conservatism's four superficial attractions have all proved fallacious. Increasing ownership is now only happening by giving still higher discounts on Council houses, whilst at the same time more are having to be bought back as purchasers lose their jobs. In the totality of ownership, I suspect that, as more and more businesses go into liquidation, ownership of capital and of shares is being concentrated into fewer and fewer hands.

Increasing liberty is a joke for the forty per cent or so of British citizens who depend on the dole or on social security. Liberty only really exists for the handful of entrepreneurs who benefit from the economic liberalism<sup>55</sup> to which the present Government is committed. Once again in Tory Britain the prizes go to those with an eye for the sharp chance.

Less and less 'socialism' is hardly true in terms of either central Government control or spending. The powers taken by the Tory Government over health authorities, water authorities and local government are far more 'socialist' than have ever been contemplated by Labour Governments and are promised to get even more stringent. Control over pay awards is also far more centralised than Labour could get away with. The Government, having caused huge unemployment, now controls wage rates by it!

Competence in government is less and less convincing. No-one who has any dealings with the Special Programmes Division of the Manpower Services Commission will be impressed by claims of efficiency. Having been able to manage youth and adult programmes jointly, sponsors have now been forced to separate their management and to duplicate key administrative posts! The fiasco of the Unified Housing Benefit is appalling, with thousands of tenants forced into 'arrears' by the imposition of an unworkable scheme. As the evidence unfolds it even appears that the successful prosecution of the Falklands War owed more to individual military professionalism and good luck than to Government competence — quite apart from the errors that led the Argentines to invade in the first place.

The Empress of Downing Street may have new Conservative clothes but however much the courtiers admire and commend their finery, her nakedness is apparent to all those not in her thrall and it is not a pretty sight. Mrs Thatcher's conviction politics may increasingly depend for their survival on the impotence and weakness of the Official Opposition.

The opportunity for Liberals is immense if we have confidence in the style we have built up over the past decade and on the work we have put in on Liberal values and Programmes over the past four years. We have an open door before us and yet half the party hesitates on the threshold.

The political agenda for the rest of the 1980s can be determined by Liberals. It has four key items:

- a new attitude to work which does not create two 'classes' of person — one who can still exploit the diminishing labour market and another that has a vital job 'created' by the community; the quality of contribution to the well being of society, is more important than the source, or even the amount, of money involved;
- a new attitude to the power of the state, in which the fundamental issue of the distribution of power is debated rather than the secondary question of financial efficiency;
- a new attitude to the implications of an economy without growth; persuasion of the better paid that the widening of the gap between the rich and poor — relatively in Britain, and absolutely on a world basis — is harmful to community relationships;
- a new attitude to the maintenance of peace; development of the argument for defence in place of deterrence; consideration of the future of NATO in the search for ways of reducing tension in central Europe, together with acceptance of the need to seek partial policy successes, such as the argument against Cruise, and for a nuclear freeze.

Conservatism is shallow, anachronistic and far more divided than it pretends on the surface. It has a Leader who is determined to impose her own brand of conviction politics from the top. The Labour Party is determined to keep fighting itself rather than tackling the urgent issues. Increasingly the political vacuum is opening up away from Parliament. Someone or something will fill that vacuum. Is it to be Liberalism?

August, 1983

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45. this is far from being a new problem as the following incident from 1928 illustrates:  
 "The issue of houses to rent or to buy sharply divided Conservative and Labour parties, and Alderman Sir Charles Wilson (Conservative Leader) made no attempt to hide the reason: 'It is a good thing for people to buy their houses. They turn Tory directly (laughter). We shall go on making Tories and you (the Socialists) will be wiped out (renewed laughter).'" *Yorkshire Post*, 7th October 1928.
46. W H Greenleaf, *op cit*, p 198. He rightly qualifies the statement to stress that it is not the only character of Conservative ideology.

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53. see Chris Patten, *op cit*, pp vi and vii; and Angus Maude, quoted in Andrew Gamble, *op cit*, p 104.
54. W H Greenleaf, *op cit*, defines the 'Twin Inheritance' rather differently and has an excellent summary of the argument.
55. not to be confused with modern political Liberalism. Economic Liberals, following FA Hayek, depend on the market economy and prefer whatever intervention necessary to be accomplished through the price mechanism. Terminology is always confusing in politics; William Waldegrave in *The Binding of Leviathan*, Hamish Hamilton, 1978, devotes a considerable amount of space to erecting a target named 'Liberalism' in order to knock it down again. As he regards John Biffen and Nicholas Ridley as true Liberals rather than those in the Liberal Party it must have simplified his task!

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"Winning Leeds West on 9th June was a great mistake so far as this booklet is concerned! It prevented me taking my 'usual' week off in purdah to get it written and it has even more signs of a rushed job. That it has appeared at all is due to the invaluable help of Leighton Andrews, Rosalind Oakley, John Ricketts and Mary Walker. They did much of the devilling for it and passed appropriately caustic comments on the style and content — the responsibility for which remains mine."

MJM