

Crossbow

The Bow Group Magazine | www.bowgroup.org

Keeping the Blue Flag Flying *Defining the future of conservatism*



The
BOW
GROUP

FEATURING:

Peter Smith
Ben Harris-Quinney
Ben Balliger
David Davis
Liam Fox

Harry Benson
Daniel Hannan
James Gray
Richard Honey
Ed West
John Redwood
Damian Green

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown
Paul Scully
Atula Abeysekera
Adam Afriyie
Alvino-Mario Fantini
Alex Burghart
Will Blair

Robert Rigby
Peter Williams
Gerald Howarth
Alex Deane
Laura Keynes
Marcus Booth
Alistair Thompson

About the Bow Group

Founded in 1951 the Bow Group is the oldest conservative think tank in the UK and a leader in the marketplace of ideas. It exists to publish the research of its members, stimulate policy debate through a programme of events, and provide an intellectual home to conservatives.

Although firmly housed in the conservative family, the Bow Group does not take a corporate view and it represents all strands of conservative opinion.

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Editor's introduction

Peter Smith

Welcome to the 2015 Conference edition of Crossbow magazine, the Bow Group's periodical with fresh ideas on the future of the Conservative Party and of conservatism. The background to this magazine is, of course, the Conservative victory in the May 2015 General Election. All the authors penned their pieces after the Election victory was known, and we present to you a long list of subjects covered. These range from traditional 'red meat' concerns voiced by James Gray and Sir Gerald Howarth over defence and Europe, through Damian Green's call for greater use of technology and transparency in the public sector, to Geoffrey Clifton-Brown's cry for the Conservatives to be "the party that will give you a hand up, not a hand out".

Several leading Tory MPs have given us their condensed wisdom on what the future holds. David Davis and Liam Fox warn against complacency in the face of an Opposition led by Jeremy Corbyn; Fox sees a deeper, more self-assured conservatism that champions trailblazers in "exceptionalism, innovation and excellence". Daniel Hannan, John Redwood and Alex Deane riff on the themes of Europe and of immigration, both huge matters of concern for Britons; a commonality in their articles is how much the two areas of policy overlap and interact.

A constant theme in many of the MPs' articles is social mobility and the opportunity for all. Davis and Fox stress the importance of "unlocking the potential of future generations", as the former puts it. Adam Afriyie focuses solely on the problem of an ossified society where the stratum of your

birth plays the dominant part in shaping your life. Afriyie's concerns with improving the lots of looked-after children in care, smarter schooling and making work pay, are evidence of the 'One Nation' conservatism espoused by Alex Burghart, from the Centre for Social Justice, and Will Blair. Both were Parliamentary Candidates in 2015 and know well how the 'hard' messages of the Right of the Party need to be complemented on the doorstep if we are to win again in 2020.

Paul Scully, a newcomer to the House of Commons, brings his expertise in local government to bear in a well-argued article on how to realise localism in public authorities (it isn't an easy task). Two Party activists write about troubles in the regions: Marcus Booth on Scotland and Robert Rigby on Northern Ireland, where the Tories have found it very hard to break into the closed politics of the province. Richard Honey, a barrister, welcomes Michael Gove to the Ministry of Justice, Atula Abeysekera suggests ways of improving the NHS, and Mario Fantini, from *The European Conservative* magazine, points to the Continent's embrace of Anglo-American conservatism.

The Bow Group has a strong affinity with social conservatism, and I'm delighted that Harry Benson, Ed West, Laura Keynes, Peter Williams and Alistair Thompson have contributed. A theme runs through their writing: the essential need for every child to be brought up in a family, where two parents commit to a life-long partnership of love. It is a sorry society that needs to be reminded of such basic truth, but it is being assailed, as these authors explain, by insidious forces at work in our culture.

A message from the Chairman

The
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Ben Harris-Quinney

The Blue Flag Flies Here

For the past 5 years the Bow Group has been campaigning against the third way movement, and for a return to principled, conviction politics. One should always be careful what one wishes for, and in Jeremy Corbyn a conviction politician *has* arrived to lead one of Britain's major parties.

Corbyn's election grants the Conservative Party a great opportunity, but also an existential threat. For those politicians and commentators more preoccupied with position, power and psephology the strong temptation will be to further mimic Blairite tactics of centrism, and move to the left to envelope Labour's moderate wing.

Doing so is probably the safest bet towards short-term electoral victory, moreover there is little doubt that unshackled from the pressure of polls, the Prime Minister is more comfortable on the liberal left of the political spectrum. Lord Tebbit spoke to the Bow Group last year and warned that constantly chasing the centre ground without a clear ideology is where political accidents happen, he was no doubt channelling his old boss, Margaret Thatcher, who left the advice to the Conservative Party "You don't move to the centre, you move the centre to you".

Jeremy Corbyn will focus on his base, despite the polls not affording him that luxury, but the Conservatives *do* have that luxury. If Conservatives want to place clear blue water between this Parliamentary term and the coalition years and truly reverse the errors of 13 years of Labour

government, they have to hold the Prime Minister to account and ensure that they drag the Conservative Party to the right, rather than allowing Corbyn to drag our politics further to the left.

If conservatives shy from this challenge the Conservative Party will depart from its history to the extent that it will become necessary to change its name (an idea now supported by the Deputy Chairman) to avoid absurdity in juxtaposition.

More jarring is that centrist politics have removed ideology and vision from the discourse, leaving little more than managed decline. The burst bubble of the economic system has been carefully restitched and re-inflated, but not repaired. Despite the achievements of the last 5 years, with the national debt doubled the next recession will likely be worse than the last, Britain continues to gently slip down the world order and our culture and traditions have never been more under threat.

Only radical conservatism can go beyond just marking time, and put Great Britain and its culture back together.

In the minds of the public, modern politics has become a billboard advert against humanity, and the first step towards rebuilding trust and a conservative Britain should be to truly pursue localism and direct democracy.

We will continue to argue for democratic reform of the electoral system, the party system, and to push most government powers out to local level, but the European

Union is the first and largest barrier to that process, and so this edition of Crossbow Magazine announces that the Bow Group will be joining many other conservatives from all parties and none in campaigning to leave the EU.

Come what may, the Bow Group will

remain the home of conservatism, and to borrow a lyric from comrade Corbyn; though cowards flinch and traitors sneer, we'll keep the blue flag flying here.

Ben Harris-Quinney is the chairman of the Bow Group.

Research update

Peter Smith

A good crop of papers have been published by the Group since the Conference 2014 edition of Crossbow.

Before Christmas, Graham Godwin-Pearson, the Online Editor, produced work on pledges for the Conservative manifesto relating to the environment and the protection of wildlife overseas.

We published a paper by Baroness Caroline Cox in March, in conjunction with OGP, the Austrian Society for Policy Analysis, entitled "A parallel world – confronting the abuse of many Muslim women in Britain today" and held a packed event in Parliament at which Baroness Cox and others spoke.

"Three ideas to cut immigration without harming growth" by Christopher Mahon was published in April, followed by Atula Abeysekera's "Five practical steps for innovation in the NHS" in June, which is reprinted in this magazine.

Nic Conner's "Stop the boats" addressed the huge problem of migrants crossing the Mediterranean, and Nic received coverage in the Daily Express.

Shortly after the release of the findings of the Davies Commission into the expansion

of Heathrow Airport, we published Adam Afriyie's response, reported in the Evening Standard, attacking the short-sighted proposal to build in West London and preferring a new airport or, if that is not possible, expansion at Gatwick. With the selection of Zac Goldsmith as candidate for Mayor, this is a subject that will run on and on.

Harry Malins produced a paper on the operation of the Strategic Defence and Security Review at the end of July, which was reported in the Daily Telegraph. Harry's concerns for a rush SDSR may prove well-founded as the Review is due in the Autumn at a time of strategic uncertainty over action in the Middle East.

Dr Jonathan Stanley's paper on care for the elderly and the limitations of the Dilnot Review was published in September, and was picked up by the specialist press.

Finally, we have had a good number of blog posts this year from a wide variety of contributors. We also receive cross-postings from the Breitbart London website. Well-researched writing of a high quality is always welcome; please email research@bowgroup.org

Secretary's report

Ben Balliger on Geoffrey, Lord Howe, the gentle revolutionary, and his final message to the Bow Group

It is often said that you do not know what you have until it is gone, and that, in many ways, sums up a Britain without Sir Geoffrey Howe.

A founder of the Bow Group in 1951, he was the quintessential British gentleman. He served king and country, was always impeccably dressed, amiable to all, and a pleasure to speak with. Beneath his unassuming demeanour lay a razor sharp intellect full of radical and controversial ideas - ideas that, once implemented, would transform Britain from the economically sick man of Europe into a truly global economic power once more.

A man of principle rather than ambition, he was to become a titan of the British political establishment, not by force of personality or pursuit of power but because of his strength of intellect and powers of persuasion. He was an almost Arthurian figure.

He brought an increasingly rare combination of qualities - solid principles, intellectual integrity, honesty and kindness - to the political forum of Westminster and when the time came proved himself an extraordinarily brilliant and courageous Chancellor of the Exchequer and a world respected Foreign Secretary. He was an extraordinary politician even in an extraordinary generation of politicians.

Here are his final words to us:

Those of us who began the Bow Group 60 years ago did so without any conception that it would form such an integral part of the conservative family. It served for us

initially simply as a sanctuary from the predominantly left leaning national student body - and which grew into something greater than ourselves. It was our quarry and our podium for thought and policy.

A form and function we handed on to successive generations, who continue to serve the Bow Group as we once did. Change must be a constant part of the Bow Group's evolution, as it continues to compete in the modern battle of ideas.

The Group's resilience and adaptability over the last 6 decades has been a considerable part of its strength. But it must always retain its core principles, of being open to all strands of conservative thought, of being a place where the ideas and abilities of young politicians are tested and galvanised. And an organisation never afraid to hold the Conservative Party to account or to ask, and try to answer, the great questions of the day.

As yet another generation of the Bow Group rises, I wish them and the organisation the greatest success for a long and fruitful future ahead.

It is now for the Bow Group, without its great founder, and those of conservative values and principles to maintain his great legacy alive and intact. We will miss him and so will the Britain he left behind.

The Rt Hon Lord Howe of Aberavon CH QC
was a founder of the Bow Group and a life-long member, 1951 - 2015.

Semper vigilans

Conservatives must remain vigilant, warns David Davis, even if the Opposition are a farce

The forces of Conservatism appear to be rampant. The problem with appearances is that they can be misleading.

An election victory that was unexpected to say the least and a Labour Party in chaos have resulted in exuberance in the Conservative Party. There is a sense that there is nothing to oppose the new Conservative Government's programme over the next five years.

But there are real dangers. The Conservative Party needs to be mindful of the paper-thin nature of its majority. And history suggests that spending too long in power can make any party hubristic; perspective and policy needs to be refreshed before we lose momentum.

We start from a strong base. Since 2010 the Conservatives have a record of which they can be proud. But there is still much to do, and there is a worrying trend of us not learning from our mistakes.

Social mobility has stalled since the 1970s. Opportunities for those from a disadvantaged background are fewer than they were. Inherited wealth and power are still more important determinants for success than ability. For a party that claims to, and needs to, represent everyone in society this is a serious problem.

Our economy, while faring better than those on the continent, still retains its long-term structural weaknesses. Our fiscal position, while improving, remains precarious, our competitiveness is poor and our productivity remains low. And should another financial crisis emerge, a real possibility given the turbulence in China,

our relatively high debt-to-GDP ratio could leave us terribly exposed.

Our Union has never been so fragmented. The SNP ran wild at the election, all but wiping out Labour across the border and snapping up 56 of the 59 Scottish seats. The failed devolution settlement is putting ever greater strain on the bonds between the home nations, and the next five years will tell whether or not Britain remains together.

At the same time, we are increasingly uncertain of our position in the world. Rightfully cautious after Libya and Syria, and still war-weary after Afghanistan and Iraq, Britain now lacks confidence in her global position. This is exacerbated by the constant trimming of our armed forces, leaving us unable to intervene abroad, even if we wanted to. There is a worrying sense throughout the country that we are becoming the Great Shrinking Britain.

In Europe, the failing Euro project and the falling popularity of the European ideal are causing conflict across the continent. German influence is increasing at a time when their continental rivals are weakening. We face a critical decision whether to continue down the path to 'ever closer union,' or whether to break out into the wider world.

Our relationship with America is becoming increasingly strained, as the global importance of Europe wanes, our ability to contribute to American overseas activities decreases, and our economic focus shifts to the East.

Britain is at a crossroads, with prosperity one way and slow decline the other, and just

as it did at the end of the '70s, Conservatism has to be ready with a vision for the country.

The mood music from the Party is encouraging. Tax cuts aimed at supporting those at the bottom of society, and a reduction in red tape to encourage businesses, especially the small and medium sized businesses up and down the country that sustain our economy. There is the recognition that we must help the de-industrialised North catch up with London, and become the economic powerhouse that it has the potential to be. All of this points to a Government that is benefitting the whole country.

“Britain is at a crossroads, with prosperity one way and slow decline the other, and just as it did at the end of the ‘70s, Conservatism has to be ready with a vision for the country.”

But while our economy is slowly being turned around following the disastrous credit-fuelled boom of the Labour years and the subsequent apocalyptic crash, there are still many areas that require significant reform.

Our competitiveness is poor, and productivity in particular is chronically low, even when adjusted for our excellent employment rate. Whole-economy output per hour remains significantly below its pre-

crisis levels. Had productivity increased at a similar rate to the periods following previous recessions, the UK could now be the richest major economy. If our productivity was similar to America's, our economy would be almost a third larger than at present.

Competition will be the key. Too many sectors of our economy are too closed to new entrants. High business costs and high levels of regulation help larger incumbents to squeeze out smaller rivals. As a result, inefficient systems and bad practices remain in place.

The Government's plans to expand the mandate for the Competition and Markets Authority to include a greater emphasis on productivity go some way to addressing this. But there needs to be a sea-change in our outlook. We have to be far more supportive of competition across our economy, be supportive of new business and entrepreneurs, and break down the cosy relationship, and revolving door, between big business and Government. We need less corporatism, and more capitalism.

If people are to receive the proceeds of growth that they deserve, then we need to address the problem of social mobility. If we are to improve social mobility, then we must address the roots of the problem - education. It is too late to try to level the field later, at university or in employment. Only by providing the same rigorous and competitive education as provided by the top private schools to all our children can we restart social mobility in this country.

Grammar schools once provided such an education for children from poor backgrounds, until they were all but eradicated by the Labour Party. Since then the Academy system and the Free School system have helped to improve education,

but they are still too few in number and too restricted in practice. There is also the other side of the education coin, providing high quality training and skills for those who are unsuited to traditional education.

If we can unlock the potential of future generations we will have gone a long way towards securing the future of this country. In addition we will go some way to showing that the Conservatives govern for everyone, and not just for the rich.

Looking abroad, our place in the world is becoming increasingly uncertain. Europe's influence is fading, and it remains the slowest growing economic area in the world. The days of American hegemony may be coming to an end, with the rise of China, an increasingly belligerent Russia, and a war-weariness borne out of failed military adventurism. The British public is far more cautious, unsure of our authority and security in the international arena.

With the EU referendum taking place within the next couple of years, the debate on our place in the world will take centre stage. If we can reform the EU, so that it is pro-growth, pro-trade, and most of all far less interventionist in the affairs of its member states, then there would be an argument in favour of staying in. But without these critical reforms, Europe will become too inward looking, too restrictive and will ultimately fail. Without reform, it is vital that Britain raise her eyes to rest of the world, and leave the EU.

We must remember all that we have achieved by engaging with the wider world. Now is not the time to become insular. The UK has a long and proud history, and the global results are clear: widespread democracy, the rule of law, and free trade. A foreign policy based on these fundamentals

will do much to address the Great Shrinking Britain myth.

It will not be possible to engage with the rest of the world if we are not capable of pulling our weight on the global stage. That means stepping up to our international obligations. We cannot do this without our military capabilities.

We cannot continue with the sort of procurement extravagance we have seen in recent years. There is little point in purchasing cutting-edge equipment if we don't have enough soldiers to deploy it. If we are to be able to conduct large overseas operations in the future then we need to properly fund our armed services, and increase the number of serving personnel.

This will be expensive, but the alternative is that we retreat from the larger world. Should we withdraw, the world will be less safe as a result.

The Left is not as weak as their current travails suggest. With Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party, the Far Left has been reinvigorated by his campaign. In the years ahead the country will once again be subjected to the siren calls of a failed ideology. Renationalisation of major swathes of industry, high taxes, expanded welfare, the pursuit of equality, unilateral disarmament. Conservatism must stand ready to face these threats once again. And we can only be ready if we have a full and positive vision of the future of this country.

Failure to do so could see the gains we have made in recent years quickly squandered. With so much still to do, Conservatism's job is only just beginning.

***Rt Hon David Davis** is Member of Parliament for Haltemprice and Howden.*

¡Viva la revolución!

*We should be Liberation Conservatives, says **Liam Fox**, and unleash the talents of all*

The recent General Election produced an outright Conservative majority Government. Now, with the opposition parties in complete disarray is a good time for a renewal of Liberation Conservative values.

It is probably true that the fire of strongly held beliefs that used to inflame discussions in the pub has been gradually swamped in an era obsessed with trivia and celebrity and where technology offers many other distractions. A long period of peace and prosperity may also have created the feeling that politics is not as vital as it once was.

Beliefs and values, never mind philosophy, have become unfashionable in recent decades when pragmatism has been king. It has left us in a political landscape with too few signposts for voters to discern any clearly differing political directions. But the recent successes of centre-right parties in Norway, Australia and Germany should give the Conservatives in Britain added confidence.

In my book *Rising Tides* I discuss the era of globalisation that we now live in, where the world is being shaped by new forces. There has never been a better time to harness the power of ideas in order to further the causes of freedom and liberty and there is no better Party to push this agenda than the British Conservative Party. At our strongest we have championed a broad range of ideas aimed at liberating our people from the excesses of state interference at home and defending our freedoms from threats abroad. We are at our strongest when we are a broad church

and have avoided external coalitions by maintaining a vibrant internal one.

The great prize of liberty is that it allows individuals to maximise their own distinctive potential, and in doing so maximise their contribution to their own society, their nation and the wider world. Political, economic and religious freedom engenders creativity and innovation, and the free competition of one talent with another is the route to progress and excellence. Any impediments to these freedoms not only diminish the expression of individual talents but ultimately will reduce the potential of societies and nations to prosper in a world which is increasingly subject to rigorous competition in almost every aspect of life.

The great commitment to liberty and freedom has been the dynamic which has propelled much of our social and political progress and, through our relationship with the rest of the world, shaped much of the direction of global thinking. Late seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke, Benjamin Franklin and David Hume shaped the political and philosophical discourse of the day, and are shaping it still. Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' still provides the foundation and assumptions on which our economic system is based and operates, especially since the fall of communism.

But politics is not about theory, it is about human experience. I joined the Conservative Party because I believed that in the late 1970s, under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, it represented a

genuine engine of social mobility. Here was a grocer's daughter telling people who would never have previously had dreams of joining the Conservative party that all they required to be 'one of us' was to share in the same beliefs and aspirations for our country. I was drawn to that vision for Britain, when millions of people who had never cast their ballot for the Conservative Party before took us to four consecutive majority Conservative governments.

“Liberation Conservatism therefore must be blind to colour, social background and religion. It should not matter what your parents did, where you went to school or what regional accent you have.”

I too did not come from a wealthy background – my father was a teacher, we lived in a council house, I went to the biggest comprehensive school in the country – but I went on to become a doctor, a Cabinet Minister and Chairman of the Conservative Party – something that would have seemed impossible to my grandfather who was a miner. But although I didn't come from a wealthy background I did come from a privileged one – one where the values of loyalty, hard work and family were paramount. And that's what counts.

Liberation Conservatism therefore must be blind to colour, social background and

religion. It should not matter what your parents did, where you went to school or what regional accent you have. All that should matter is that you share the same values, aspirations and goals for the sort of Britain that we want to see – strong, proud and free. We need to break away from the focus on the superficial. It is no more relevant to today's Conservative Party that David Cameron went to Eton or that I, or Sajid Javid for that matter, went to a local comprehensive school. Those who dwell on such stereotypes are missing the point. What we should concentrate on is why our beliefs are the right ones.

The Left can never offer the sort of liberation we seek for one simple reason – their objective is not equality of opportunity but equality of outcome. The difference between these two concepts is monumental. The Left will alter the circumstances of the individual and manipulate any aspect of society in order to achieve their preconceived end point. In the socialist world, individuals are made to fit the system and all too often the outcome becomes nothing more than equal access to mediocrity.

The Left measure their success by the relative gaps between individuals and groups in society. Not for them the challenge and rigour of absolute achievements. But they have failed to understand – and continue to fail today – that if you hold back the brightest pupils, it doesn't make the less bright more clever; if you hold back the risk takers, it doesn't make the rest more secure, if you make the wealthy poorer, it doesn't make the poor wealthier. It is clear from today's Labour Party with the recent 'Jeremy Corbyn mania' that they have learned none of this.

Conservatives believe that talent should be free to flourish – that exceptionalism, innovation and excellence need trailblazers. We also believe that these trailblazers should not be held back by punitive taxation, and that people who work hard, who have ambition, who are driven to succeed should be free to spend their money however they please. It is not for politicians to tell them that they are wrong to do this.

Nor is it for politicians to offer people the opportunity to live on the taxes of others. The welfare dependency created by previous Labour governments is not only unfair to those who contribute to their society, but is also economically disastrous. By locking whole communities in a state of dependency, we have developed a situation where there is no incentive to succeed, to innovate, and to prosper. How absurd is it that someone who contributes nothing to the economy would be rewarded more than someone who has grafted hard? This is what the alternative to a liberating Conservatism is - enslavement by welfare and the State.

However harnessing the talent of our nation is not simply a case of eradicating dependency. We must also provide a vision of the future that inspires. People must be rewarded when they work hard. By allowing millions of citizens to participate in a property and share owning democracy with the sale of council houses and the privatisation of monolithic state-owned industries, Margaret Thatcher built a society where the best and brightest were able to shine. She unlocked the hidden talent in all sectors of the nation and allowed aspiration to turn into success - a success that was shared by more people than ever before.

The challenge to our values - underpinned by Liberation Conservatism - is to ensure that our passion for empowerment, freedom and opportunity is a global phenomenon. We need only look to our own recent past to see how successful we can be when we dare to believe and how failure can stalk us when we lose faith in our own convictions. What is it that makes these concepts so resilient and how do we mould them, if at all, in light of the challenges we face in this new globalized era?

Globalisation brings with it a number of positives and a number of negatives. There is an unavoidable loss of sovereignty in a world where our interests are increasingly intertwined with those of others and there is an unavoidable importation of strategic risk. But there is also a wonderful opportunity to help to shape this new world and see it imbued with our values of liberty, democracy and the rule of law.

“As Conservatives, now is the right to reassure people with the message: whoever you are, wherever you live, whatever your background, if you share our beliefs, our passions and our values then you are ‘one of us.’”

It is important that we keep emphasising that it is not a coincidence that those nations who have embraced liberty most fully have been the dominant global

economic and political powers. Free, democratic nations who allow their citizens to express themselves openly and without fear also unleash the powers of creativity and entrepreneurship which are the basis for success in a free market. We saw this most prominently during the Cold War, which was not only a military stand-off but an ideological clash between the capitalist West and the Communist bloc. It may now seem clear, as many of us believed at the time, that socialism was the intellectual hiccup of the 20th century doomed to failure in a world full of differing individuals, but its demise did not always appear inevitable.

In my book, *Rising Tides*, I described a conversation that I had in Paris. I was talking about how we had won the Cold War not just because of our military and economic superiority but because we also had a moral superiority and belief in our own values. I asked why it was that we had been so willing to use the word 'better' then - democracy was better than dictatorship; freedom was better than oppression; capitalism was better than communism - but seemed so afraid to use it now. Surely in relation to fundamentalist Islamist views our ways are better - better to have religious tolerance than violently imposed orthodoxy, better to have a concept of universal human rights than not, better to have societies in which women play a full and equal role with men? The answer was depressing: "I don't think we can really say 'better' nowadays", I was told by an official, only "different".

If this is what we really believe, we are in deep trouble. If we do not believe that our values are better than the alternatives, and worth defending, then why should anyone else listen to us. Liberty, equality

and the rule of law are better than the alternatives. We need more 'better' and less 'different' or we risk losing the battle of ideas and ideals for the future. That would be an unforgivable betrayal of those who sacrificed so much for what we too often seem to take for granted.

It is why I believe that in tangible policy areas, such as overseas aid, we should use our leverage to ensure that the ethics of those generous British citizens who provide the money through their donations and taxes should be reflected in those countries whom we assist. We should make clear that religious tolerance and equal rights are an essential part of our culture which we insist on being replicated within recipient nations. If they are not then our aid should be re-evaluated.

We are who and what we are not just because of our economic or military strength but because of what we believe. Our commitment to political freedom and expression, economic freedom within a free market framework, and a religiously tolerant society, has shaped not only this country but many around the globe. In the era of political correctness and moral relativism we need to remember what idealism can achieve. All around the world the conservative message should resonate: liberation, freedom, and empowerment. As Conservatives, now is the right to reassure people with the message: whoever you are, wherever you live, whatever your background, if you share our beliefs, our passions and our values then you are 'one of us'. And who are we? We have been, we are, and we should always be, Liberation Conservatives.

Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox is Member of Parliament for North Somerset.

Dedication is all you need

...if you want to be a family policy maker, writes Harry Benson

When couples have problems or split up, the taxpayer usually ends up picking up the pieces, especially if they have children. Some 45% of teenagers are no longer living with both parents. That's an unprecedented level of family breakdown. The current best estimate is that the total cost of this is £47 billion per year, rather more than we spend on defence and about half what we spend on education.

The state has a huge stake in the stability of couples. Yet despite spending so much time, love, money and effort when the room is flooded, nobody has much of a policy on how to turn off the tap.

Part of the reason, I suspect, has been an unwillingness of politicians to interfere in family life – despite the huge involvement when things go wrong. Part has been a lack of focus on the root cause – which is the trend away from marriage. Part is an unwillingness to accept that marriage itself, and not some other factor, is the solution. But whatever it is we are doing, it's getting worse and worse under all governments. What can I offer that might give you a little clarity on this issue?

I'd like to help you understand how commitment works. It sounds simple and is simple. I think a clear model of commitment will give you a solid understanding of relationships, a basis from which to think fruitfully about family policy, and a way to avoid getting caught up in so much of the guff that tries to complicate what should be a straightforward issue.

Every relationship begins with two individuals, 'you' and 'me,' facing one another. We find one another attractive and

begin to form a relationship. Imagine this as a giant bubble placed over our heads, giving a new identity called 'us'. As we enjoy each other's company, spending time together becomes a priority in our lives. We live in the bubble. This means we have to let go of other demands on our time. Both of us become willing to sacrifice 'my' and 'your' interests for the sake of 'us'. We also begin to wonder whether there is a future for 'us', initially just to get to the next date, but then until next week and then onward into the unknown.

"I think a clear model of commitment will give you a solid understanding of relationships, a basis from which to think fruitfully about family policy."

This bubble is what researchers call 'dedication'. Dedication boils down to three factors – a decision about being a couple with a future. The ultimate step of dedication is to get married. Dedication is what most of us are thinking about when we talk about commitment. But there's another side to commitment which is just as important but is rarely considered. It's called constraint.

Constraints comprise everything on the outside of the bubble that look in on us and

see us as a couple. Friends and family, living together, having a baby, having memories, having children: all of these things validate 'us' as a couple.

Constraints are good. They provide stability. It's nice having friends who see us as a couple. It's nice living together. It's nice having children. They reinforce our identity as a couple. Think of constraints as a fence around the bubble. A fence affirms our bubble, provides a clear boundary, and gives us some level of security and protection. But the key to successful relationships is dedication, how well things are going inside the bubble.

“Getting trapped in an unhappy relationship is much more likely to happen to those who ‘slide’ rather than ‘decide’. The story of family breakdown in the UK is all about ‘sliding, deciding, and inertia.’”

When dedication – our inner bond – is strong, then constraints – the outer bonds – feel positive. When dedication starts to dip, it's easy to see how constraints can start to feel negative. The fence that protected us now begins to look more like a prison wall. It makes us feel trapped.

So how do we keep our level of dedication sufficiently strong to make constraints feel more like a fence and less like a wall? Much depends on the order in which we do things.

Think about when couples move in

together. There are lots of different ways couples can do this. At one end of the spectrum is the gradual moving in. It started with the overnight toothbrush, then a spare shirt, and then it just kind of happened. Almost accidentally, we 'slide' into making the fence bigger. Alternatively we might move in deliberately as part of our clear plan to get married at some stage. We 'decide' to put the fence there deliberately. Whether we 'slide' or 'decide', moving in together can work out fine so long as our sense of dedication is strong.

Where things go wrong is when we haven't really talked much about our plan for the future and there's a mismatch of expectations. I might assume we're en route to marriage. You are quite happy with things as they are and haven't really thought about the future. So there's an uncomfortable degree of ambiguity about the relationship that never quite gets resolved. Instead of clearing it up, we drift onwards, held together by the sheer inertia of living together. Had we not been living together, maybe we could have drifted apart. But we don't. We didn't 'decide'. We didn't make things clear. We 'slide' along. And now we are stuck.

Getting trapped in an unhappy relationship is much more likely to happen to those who 'slide' rather than 'decide'. The story of family breakdown in the UK is all about 'sliding, deciding, and inertia'.

Until the 1970s when the pill became easily available, cohabitation wasn't really an option for most people. If you moved in with somebody, sex was going to lead to childbirth. So before moving in, most people needed to be really clear about their future together because it was going to involve children. It's hardly surprising that only 5%

of births were outside marriage for hundreds of years until then. Birth control was the game changer. It broke the link between sex and childbirth, and therefore also broke the link with marriage. Suddenly it was possible for women in particular to move in without worrying about the consequences. In 1980, still only 12% of births were outside marriage. Today it's 47%. Cohabiting has become an accepted norm.

"This is an astonishing finding. Understanding how commitment works makes sense of it."

However there's a downside to this. Whereas most of those who end up getting married are 'deciders', high in dedication because they are clear and intentional about their future (even if not all marriages work out), moving in early in a relationship will include those 'sliders' who are much less clear about their dedication and their plan for the future. By 'sliding' into cohabitation, those in more fragile relationships get trapped by the 'inertia' of living together and drift onward into childbirth. Having a baby becomes one constraint too many, giving the couple enough energy to break out through that enlarged prison wall.

We can see this clearly in the data. Half of all family breakdowns happen during the first three years of parenthood. Three quarters of that involves couples who weren't married.

Our role at Marriage Foundation is to rebuild confidence in marriage. Sure, not all marriages work out. Human beings are flawed. Relationships can be difficult.

There is no panacea. But, even today, most marriages last for life.

We've just done some new research, using data from Understanding Society, that looks at who stays together and who splits by the time their children are aged 14 or 15. Some of our key findings include: more than two thirds of couples who don't marry split up; more than half of couples who marry after their child is born split up; and less than quarter of couples who marry before their child is born split up.

Whereas staying together is very much the norm for couples who marry before having children - couples who have clearly 'decided' on their plan for the future together - it is the exception for couples who start off unmarried. Undoubtedly some unmarried couples do perfectly well: in among the 'sliders' will be some who 'decide'. But most don't. Getting married along the way knocks about a fifth off the risk of splitting up. But the odds are still stacked against.

And just in case you were wondering whether this is really about some other factors, it's not. Mother's age and education made little to no difference.

This is an astonishing finding. Understanding how commitment works makes sense of it. It means that instead of dismissing marriage as 'a return to the Edwardian era', we can see marriage as going with the grain of human behaviour. We make our relationships work best when we establish clarity about the future, know where we both stand, and remove any lingering ambiguity and uncertainty.

In the words of the late Roy Castle, dedication is all you need.

Harry Benson is Research Director for Marriage Foundation.

Sovereign over our own kingdom

What, asks Daniel Hannan, would it take to get Eurosceptics to vote Yes?

Is there a middle way on the EU? A ‘devomax’ option, so to speak, that would leave the United Kingdom inside the single market but outside the political union?

Yes. Plenty of countries in Europe are in that situation now. The European market covers more than 40 states and territories, of which only 28 are full EU members. One way to get to that middle option is, of course, to vote to leave, and strike a deal from the outside à la Suisse. But could the same result be secured through renegotiation from within? And, if so, what would be the key change?

The EU is different from every other international association in one critical regard. Its treaties do not bind their signatories as states; rather, they create a new legal order that is directly applicable to individuals and businesses within the member states. When a national statute comes into conflict with a decision by an EU institution, the courts of the nation concerned will automatically give precedence to the latter. The EU has thus, in the exact sense, assumed sovereignty over its 28 member states.

‘Sovereignty’ is a much misused word in the European debate. It is often employed as a loose synonym for ‘power’. Thus, for example, British Europhiles used to say that keeping the pound had not preserved UK sovereignty, because the Bank of England would generally have to follow the Bundesbank when setting interest rates (they have, obviously, had to drop this argument).

But ‘sovereignty’ doesn’t mean ‘freedom of action’; it means having ultimate legal authority, the right to set the rules. In most

European countries, sovereignty is vested in the general population, and guaranteed by a written constitution interpreted, ultimately, by a supreme court.

In the United Kingdom, sovereignty effectively passed from Crown to Parliament in 1689, a settlement enshrined by (in England) the Bill of Rights and (in Scotland) the Claim of Right. So things stood until 1972, when the European Communities Act recognised the primacy of EU law, obliging British courts to give it precedence over national law.

It was this element of the Act – Sections 2 and 3, to be precise – that led some Labour and Conservative Eurosceptics to vote against accession in 1972 and to campaign for exit in 1975. Few, if any, Eurosceptics opposed the idea of a common market in Europe, or of closer institutional links with Britain’s immediate neighbours. They objected, rather, to the EEC’s assumption of the prerogatives of statehood.

Because the word ‘sovereignty’ has slightly fusty connotations, many British Eurosceptics prefer to speak of ‘democratic control’ or ‘democratic accountability’. But it’s sovereignty we mean. We want, for example, to be able to determine who can enter our country and on what terms. But if MPs legislated to create an Australian-style points-based system, in which EU nationals were no longer privileged over Commonwealth citizens, Brussels wouldn’t have to take Britain to court. The legislation would simply be disapplied by our own courts the moment an EU citizen who had been denied entry claimed the right to reside here. That’s what loss of sovereignty means.

One politician who has recently used the word ‘sovereignty’ is David Cameron, who cited it at the recent Brussels Council as one of the four areas where he wanted reform. Indeed, it may be the only area which requires something to change, since the other three are things that can be legislated for domestically, or things that the EU is doing anyway.

However, what the PM seems to be proposing is not a restoration of sovereignty, but something that is, in many ways, worse than the status quo. He is after what is called, in Euro-cant, a “red card system”, whereby a number of national parliaments, representing a proportion of member states, can block a Commission proposal.

Think about that for a moment. National legislatures are being formally recognised, in effect, as sub-units within the EU. This is a long-standing Euro-federalist goal. It recalls, for example, the way in which two thirds of US states are needed to amend the Constitution. They, too, are thereby acknowledged as subordinate entities within a federation.

So, if not through this “red card” nonsense, how might sovereignty truly be restored? Very easily, by amending Sections 2 and 3 of the 1972 Act to remove the direct effect of EU rulings.

Philip Hammond has feebly dismissed this idea as “not on the agenda”; but why isn’t it? The supremacy of EU law was not in the original Treaty of Rome. It was, as even federalists admit, invented by the European Court of Justice in a series of power grabs from 1963 onwards. Nor is it recognised by most of the national supreme courts of the other member states. The majority of them, including France’s Conseil d’Etat and Germany’s Bundesverfassungsgericht, have, at one time or another, taken the opportunity to

declare their own sovereignty. The ECJ rejects their interpretation, but no one regards their rulings as a declaration that their countries have left the EU. The United Kingdom could argue – it would be slightly stretching the point, but only slightly – that amending Sections 2 and 3 was simply bringing its arrangements into line with those of other member states protected by written constitutions.

How would the recovery of sovereignty practically change things? It would mean that EU legal acts would come into effect in the UK only following specific implementing legislation by Parliament – something that is currently the case in some instances, but not all. This change may seem technical, but it would almost certainly curb the judicial activism of the ECJ and the power-hunger of the European Commission. More to the point, it would formally recognise that the United Kingdom’s relationship to the EU was that of a sovereign nation in voluntary association with others, not that of a province within a European polity.

Would such a change be enough to convince me to stay in the EU? Potentially, yes; especially if it were part of the wider reform package outlined by the PM in his Prague and Bloomberg speeches, involving the repatriation of significant powers. But we should be realistic. As things stand, bewilderingly, British officials are not proposing such a reform. Instead, under the rubric of ‘sovereignty’ they are pushing for something that would formalise the subordinate status of Parliament.

We are about to let this extraordinary opportunity slip through our fingers. It won’t come again.

Daniel Hannan is Member of the European Parliament for South East England.

What are we for in the world?

James Gray considers the lack of a British 'Grand Strategy'

That Defence of the Realm is the first duty of any Government is a bit of a Conservative truism. Nothing worth happening can happen unless we get defence right. Without defence we would be a cinder. Yet 'getting defence right' is an easier soundbite than to deliver. What should our defence priorities be?

Is Mr Putin's threat to the Baltic States, for example, of great concern to us? It may after all come in the form of cyber warfare, or unconventional war - men in green suits occupying an overwhelmingly Russian town in Latvia, for example. Would that be an Article 5 moment requiring a collective response from NATO, or not? Do we as a nation have an appetite for expeditionary high kinetic warfare in defence of a remote Russian town we have never heard of?

What should we do about Daesh (the so-called Islamic State)? Our eight Tornados based in Cyprus are doing great work in Iraq, alongside various other military assets. But what about Syria? If Daesh are our enemy, then why should we turn back as they cross the imaginary Sykes-Picot line, the wholly porous border with Syria? And will we really destroy Daesh from the air? There are at least some bold voices calling for a ground war.

The tens of millions of displaced people from Syria, Iraq and across North Africa are the largest human tide in the history of the world. How do we stop it? What do we do about it? Is it a military problem? Or one for DFID? Increasing pressure on water and food in much of the developing world will mean proportionately increasing disturbance in those countries, but an exponential increase in that tide. Climate Change can but make

that worse. Is there a real military threat to our peace and security in the prosperous Northern Hemisphere as a result? And what military steps can we take to counter it? Do we have a continuing military role to play in North Africa? Why should Daesh in Libya, for example, evade our action? They are arguably a greater threat to Europe than their Middle East counterparts.

And what of the rest of the world? The South China Sea is riskier than ever; parts of central and South America in turmoil. We ignore Russian adventures in the High North at our peril. Have we now discharged our duty in Afghanistan, and what can we do to prop up the close to failed state in neighbouring Pakistan? Will Trident deter an Islamic State with nuclear weapons? And if not, what then are they for? How can we justify the massive expense of renewing the four Vanguard Class submarines to ensure a continuous at sea deterrence? Will détente with Iran survive, and will it lead to Shia dominance of the region, with potentially lethal Sunni reaction to it?

Behind all of these questions lies a fundamental lack of 'Grand Strategy'. We really are not sure what Britain is for in the world. Are we the world's policeman? Do we punch above our weight in global peacekeeping? Or are we simply guardians of our own peace and security? Do we just retreat to these shores, pull up the drawbridge and hope like heck? These and a great many questions like them lie unanswered (perhaps unasked) on the table of the National Security Council.

If there were any logic in current discussions, the National Security Strategy would first of all be fundamentally

rewritten. We need to know what we are for in the world, and what our strategic aims are. The Security and Defence Review would then follow, presumably quite some time later. It would lay out the military plans and equipment needed to achieve the aims and strategy clearly laid out in the National Security Review. The Comprehensive Spending Review would then follow to ask how we should pay for the capabilities and mechanisms laid out in the SDSR. That would be a wholly logical sequence, and would enable us to have some degree of certainty that we are getting our defence and security policy and our military planning right to meet whatever challenges may lie ahead.

I fear, however, that that logical sequence of thinking, spread out over a lengthy period of time, is unlikely to occur. If the 2010 experience is anything to go by the NSS, SDSR and CSR will all happen at the same time and therefore be inextricably linked up.

The problem, I think, is that there is a large disconnect between our very high regard for the armed services, and a widespread lack of understanding about what they are actually for. We feel uneasy about any kind of expeditionary warfare, scarred as we are by the Iraq and Afghan experience. Yet we call for greater defence spending, despite our having little clue about what we are going to spend it on.

I am very glad that the Government have now committed to 2% of GDP for the rest of this decade. They could not reasonably avoid doing so having shouted at the other NATO members to come up to the mark. Yet it is an arbitrary figure, and may well be subject to a degree of manipulation by MoD accountants to make it look better than it really is.

So the National Security Strategy will not be truly strategic. (The PM is said to have

opined that the 2010 one “needs tweaking”, apparently ignoring the fact that in 2010, Daesh did not exist, the Crimea and Ukraine dispute had not occurred, and we were still active in Afghanistan. The world has changed unrecognisably since then, and our NSS needs a little more than “tweaking”). The SDSR will therefore be a pragmatic stumble in the dark, driven not by a radically rethought NSS, but by the simultaneous Comprehensive Spending Review. As usual the Treasury will win out.

The world is a more dangerous place than it has been for decades. We cannot know what horrors lie around the corner, nor what military strength we will need to deal with it. Yet our Army has been cut by 20,000 under this Government, the Navy and Air Force are shadows of their former selves. Is it an action replay of the ‘thirties when we disarmed at precisely the wrong moment? Hitler’s rise was the consequence then. Mr Putin, and no doubt the thinkers behind Daesh will similarly be watching the SDSR with interest.

Defence of the realm is indeed the first duty of any Government. It should overwhelmingly be the preoccupation of a Conservative Government. The armed forces have traditionally done much better under Labour than under we Tories. The sole exception to that was in 1979, when Margaret Thatcher boosted defence spending, and servicemen’s pay, as one of her first acts in office. Now is the time to repeat that Damascene conversion, follow through with our commitment to 2% of GDP, and show that we Conservatives are the true champions of our nation’s security.

James Gray MP is a Member of the House of Commons Defence Committee, Chairman of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust and Author of “Who takes Britain to War?”

Upholding the rule of law

What is the future of Conservative justice policy, wonders Richard Honey

The Conservative Party stands for upholding the rule of law. It believes that there should be checks on the power of the state and that the liberty of the individual should be protected. As propositions, these ought to be uncontroversial. They ought to be the foundation of any Conservative justice policy. In their publication *Churchill's Legacy*, Jesse Norman and Peter Osborne set out the historic context of the Party's commitment to the rule of law. They show that "freedom under law, restraint on the power of the state and a deep understanding of the link between individual liberty and private property, are based on ancient conservative beliefs".

More recently, policy under the Coalition government gave rise to questions about what a Conservative approach to justice should be. The 2006 'Built to Last' statement of the values of the Party said that it should cherish freedom and stand against an overpowering state; Conservatives should be "hard-nosed defenders of freedom". In his 2009 book, *The Assault on Liberty*, Dominic Raab – now a Justice Minister – wrote about the importance of judges acting as a check on the legislature and the executive and explained that the basic idea of placing checks on the power of the state, in order to preserve the freedoms of the citizen, was rooted in our history.

This approach was followed in the 2010 manifesto, which contained policies to "restore our civil liberties" after "Labour have subjected Britain's historic freedoms to unprecedented attack". In the realm of foreign affairs, it said that "liberal Conservative principles" included

"supporting human rights and championing the cause of democracy and the rule of law at every opportunity".

Few would take issue with this, no matter where they sit in the spectrum of views within the Party. But there is a risk that the point is so obvious it could be overlooked in practice, especially when the Party faces the harsh realities of government. The changes to judicial review in the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 provide a useful case study of whether the Coalition government followed the approach the Party so clearly set out in opposition.

Judicial review is the main way in which a commitment to the rule of law can be enforced. It provides an effective means of seeking to hold the state to account. It allows those with an interest in a decision or action by the state to ensure that it is taken lawfully, rationally and fairly. Restrictions introduced by the state on the ability of citizens to seek to enforce the rule of law are rightly regarded with suspicion. In a speech in to the CBI conference in 2012, the Prime Minister said the government would be "cutting back on judicial reviews", seeking to target those which were "completely pointless", "time-wasting" or "hopeless". Such aims would not be controversial, even amongst lawyers. Implementing the policy fell to Chris Grayling; he pursued the reform of judicial review vigorously.

When it came to the legislation, the reforms did not target "pointless" or "hopeless" cases. The reforms were different and much more wide-ranging. The changes introduced by sections 85 to 89 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 were essentially financial provisions. They

introduced considerable disincentives to claimants based not on the merits of a case but on their financial position.

The amendment in section 84 on the likelihood of a substantially different outcome being achieved if the decision was to be re-taken was a very important change, barring a claimant from bringing a judicial review or obtaining any relief from the court, even merely a declaration that there had been unlawfulness. This went far beyond dealing with what could be said to be “time-wasting” cases. It will protect the state from any consequences, even when it acts in a way which is plainly unlawful.

“There is a strong Conservative case for allowing vigorous judicial review, even from those on the receiving end of challenges. The spectre of the ‘judge over your shoulder’ makes for better government.”

This ought to be an alarming proposition to any Conservative, given the importance to the Party of upholding the rule of law. Whilst the legislation was controversial in the House of Commons, it was passed with little dissent from Conservatives – and the support of the Liberal Democrats in the Coalition.

In the House of Lords debate on the Bill, the conflict between these provisions and a traditional Conservative view of justice policy was exposed. Lord Faulks, speaking for the Government in October 2014,

recognised that judicial review was “an essential component of the rule of law”, but pressed the legislation as it had been passed by the Commons. The Bill ping-ponged between the Lords and the Commons in late 2014 and early 2015, largely due to the changes on judicial review.

A number of Conservative peers spoke against the reforms, for philosophical as well as practical reasons. Lord Deben said he thought judicial review had made him a better and fairer Minister. It was also reported that he said that it was unacceptable for the system to prevent the government being held to account in the courts where it acts illegally. Lord Mackay of Clashfern said in the Committee debate on the Bill in July 2014 that “the idea and doctrine of judicial review is extremely important and very precious”. He said that he was “not at all in favour of putting any more difficulties in the way of a proper litigant applying for judicial review than exist at the present time”.

As examples, these contributions from very experienced former ministers show that there is a strong Conservative case for allowing vigorous judicial review, even from those on the receiving end of challenges. The spectre of the ‘judge over your shoulder’ makes for better government.

With the changes to judicial review, and indeed to legal aid, introduced by the Coalition government, it is hard to avoid a conclusion that recent justice policy has cut across the Party’s historic commitment to the rule of law. This difference has been brought into focus by recent speeches by members of the new Conservative government. In his speech at Runnymede in June 2015 to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, David Cameron explained why he believed that “the limits of executive power, guaranteed access to justice, the belief that there should

be something called the rule of law” were “sewn into the fabric of our nation”. The Prime Minister explained why “liberty, justice, democracy, the rule of law” were all things we should hold dear.

Appearing to signal a change even more clearly, it was reported that, in an address to civil servants soon after the election, the new Lord Chancellor - Michael Gove - said that it was one of the heaviest responsibilities of all to be responsible for our justice system and upholding the rule of law, because it was upon the rule of law that civilisation depends - protecting the weak and the vulnerable from oppression and safeguarding the rights and the liberties of every individual. In a speech on 23 June 2015, Michael Gove said that “the rule of law is the most precious asset of any civilised society”, as it made sure “that when those who hold power abuse it, they can be checked”. Judicial review was cited as being one of the principles of the rule of law.

“The current Lord Chancellor appears genuinely to understand the significance of such policies for the rule of law, and the risks that they pose if the effect on limiting access to justice is too great.”

In the foreword to a consultation on the implementation of part of the 2015 Act in July 2015, Michael Gove said: “Without the rule of law power can be abused. Judicial review is an essential foundation of the rule of law, ensuring that what may be

unlawful administration can be challenged, potentially found wanting and where necessary be remedied by the courts.” The tone of the evidence Michael Gove gave to the Justice Committee on 15 July 2015 was markedly different from what had been said by his predecessor, including in particular on criminal legal aid and access to justice in employment cases given the increase in fees. The current Lord Chancellor appears genuinely to understand the significance of such policies for the rule of law, and the risks that they pose if the effect on limiting access to justice is too great.

Michael Gove knows something about judicial review. As Secretary of State for Education he was on the receiving end of a challenge by five local authorities when he stopped the Building Schools for the Future Programme. In a statement in February 2011, Mr Gove said that he was “happy” to comply with the Court’s ruling requiring reconsideration. This was rather different in tone from the reaction of some ministers over the years to losing a judicial review.

It is perhaps unlikely that the changes introduced by the Coalition government – to judicial review, legal aid, and court and tribunal fees – will be undone. But it does seem that the recent comments from the new Lord Chancellor signal a return to a more sophisticated, and a more Conservative, approach to justice policy: one based upon doing all that can be done to uphold the rule of law. Speaking of an amendment in a debate on the Bill in December 2014, Lord Deben said: “I hope that real Conservatives will support it because it is about the rule of law”. This should be the test of Conservative justice policy in the future.

Richard Honey practises as a barrister in the fields of public law and environmental law at Francis Taylor Building.

Happy families, uncharitable thoughts

Who will take on the 'new church,' asks Ed West

On the wall of our bathroom is a Matt cartoon from around the time our first child was born in 2008. It shows a man presenting flowers to a new mother and her baby, carrying the sweet message: "Hello little baby, you're billions of pounds in debt".

We have fond memories of the period, but the economic legacy of the government at the time was indeed just that: ruinous. Chancellor Gordon Brown broke the great cardinal rule that you don't get yourself into further debt during fat years. That is not just economically irresponsible, but immoral, and Matt was not joking in that my children's generation will now spend most of their lifetimes paying this off. Yet, despite this, it took the threat of a Labour-SNP coalition this year to give the Conservatives a small majority. How could the Conservatives, despite their huge advantage in the economic sphere, not be winning hands down?

Strangely enough almost no one has talked about the moral question of debt in public life, even though it is a Christian issue. While the hierarchies of both the Anglican and Catholic churches have been jumping over themselves to attack 'the cuts' or the increasing use of food banks, no one has had anything to say about the reckless spending of the previous years. Perhaps it is because Anglicans and Catholics leaders, scared to touch any of the difficult issues that make them unpopular, are more comfortable thundering about greed rather than lust.

But while the churches are not as

influential as they once were, the far bigger problem for the Tories in 2015 and 2020 and 2030 is what has replaced them: the new church, that of the established institutions of government, education, social work and media, and the moral and political consensus that has grown inside them. Sometimes this is called the Blob, or the Cathedral, or new establishment, but whatever we call it, it is understood this new church is all-powerful and institutionally hostile to conservatism.

Yet the Tory-led government not only made almost no effort in dismantling this network but has further empowered it. It cannot possibly hope to win in the long term with this strategy.

This new church incorporates most of the media, especially the BBC, as well as academia, the charity sector, civil service and education establishment. Charities are the most noticeably aggressive evangelizers. For the first three years of the Coalition government the state-funded and hugely powerful Today programme would invite representatives of large charities to condemn government cuts for increasing poverty; all of these charities, without exception, receive funding from the state, and yet are presented as disinterested bodies who profess these beliefs purely out of goodness. It would be like inviting on someone to wax lyrical about how the Catholic Church was the answer to society's ills without mentioning that he was a bishop.

Charities were once largely staffed by volunteers, often university-educated

stay-at-home mothers, and most had a Christian agenda. Today they are professional, employing humanities graduates and espousing what might be called a 'progressive' political agenda (as a rule one should describe people as how they self-identify). In some cases charities originally founded by evangelical Christians in the 19th century now espouse the polar opposite view of what their founders believed, so groups founded to discourage teenage girls from sexual activity and pregnancy now work to destigmatise lone parenthood. Where once these bodies relied on the church, they now rely on the state. Where once they were Christian, they are now statist.

“The next few decades promise to be conservative ones, if only the Tories have confidence in themselves and to see that the social consensus is no more inevitable than the economic one was in 1970.”

Then there is the education system. *The Times* columnist David Aaronovitch, in a piece criticizing the existence of religious schools, recently asked “We’d never allow Marxist-Leninist schools to brainwash children so why do we give religions similar rights?” Having gone to an ILEA school in the 1980s, I smiled at that one.

Sure, we might not have a Joseph Stalin Free School, as he put it, but the Anglican

equivalent of Marxism, the soft-Left, has almost total control of the state education sector, even (despite what many believe about religious indoctrination) Christian schools. It’s no coincidence that 50 per cent of pre-Corbyn Labour Party members are now believed to be teachers.

This domination extends up to universities, too, where the leaders of tomorrow are taught the Standard Social Science Model of human behaviour: people are born as blank slates and formed entirely by social structures. Once taught this (entirely erroneous) view of the world, progressive, state-centred politics based on utopian ideas about humanity make perfect sense.

This is before we get to the arts. Every time I’m dragged to the theatre the play seems to be about Margaret Thatcher, the evils of big business or racial injustice in the Deep South. How often does British theatre actually produce ‘controversial’ plays that challenge the Left-liberal narrative? When the arts were financed by the Church, artists gave glory to God. Now it is state-funded, they give glory to the state.

All of these powerful institutions help to create a social consensus, one that is internally flawed and resented by much of the population, and yet we have a government that accepts it, that actually believes the latter-day eschatology about there being a ‘wrong side of history’.

Much of the present Tory leadership are fairly relaxed about progressive domination, so long as the economy ticks over, yet so long as they accept the new church, conservatism will always remain a heresy, partly because the social liberalism of the 1960s requires a large state bureaucracy to take on the roles of family and other areas.

As Tim Montgomerie has pointed out, “conservatism cannot triumph in economics while it remains totally beaten in the cultural sphere”.

The F-word is central to this. Even I feel mildly bored and repulsed by politicians talking about families, especially if the word “hardworking” is inserted beforehand, yet there is a very good reason why progressive politicians are not so keen on old-fashioned ‘1950s-style’ families as they call them – married people are far more likely to vote for conservative parties. Much has been written about the ‘gender gap’ in US politics, but the voting gap between unmarried and married American women is a whopping 30 per cent. Conservative political success therefore really does depend on social institutions that encourage stability, social investment and, well, conservatism.

This makes the Government’s lack of enthusiasm for one-income, two-parent families so strange. George Osborne would clearly rather well-educated, highly-intelligent women were in the workplace generating tax revenue rather than producing and nurturing the next generation. Fine - but while the essence of liberal, pluralistic society is that people should be free to choose their own life courses, one would expect a Conservative government to not actively punish those who live a conservative lifestyle, if for self-interested reasons if nothing else.

Margaret Thatcher was opposed by powerful union interests, and when the manufacturing industries shed their jobs - with terrible human cost - its power base was destroyed. Yet, under Thatcher, the Conservatives built up a far bigger and more powerful enemy class, led by local government and the administrators of the

welfare state that flowered during her reign. Furthermore, by centralising education, she also made it more, not less, institutionally anti-Conservative.

The growth of the new church, vastly accelerated under Tony Blair’s reign, means that, for a new generation, huge numbers of talented people work in areas where there is an institutional hostility to conservatism, for the simple reason that conservatives do not believe their work should be professionalised and run by the state. The Conservatives should be trying to weaken the power of the Blob, by separating charities from government welfare, by decentralising education and even introducing parental vouchers, but most of all by doing everything possible to make it possible for a one-income household to afford a home, a car and a foreign holiday a year.

Instead of challenging this Blob, the current Government has followed their assumptions. Perhaps Cameron and Osborne, like Thatcher’s predecessors with the consensus establishment of their day, think they’re on the wrong side of history. Yet the socially liberal consensus faces three huge problems in the coming years: the shortage of available money to finance their schemes, the failures of the multiculturalism in which it has invested so much (in particular regarding Islam), and the further erosion of the blank slate model by science.

The next few decades promise to be conservative ones, if only the Tories have confidence in themselves and to see that the social consensus is no more inevitable than the economic one was in 1970.

Ed West is a blogger for the Spectator and deputy editor of The Catholic Herald, and tweets at @edwest.

The EU zombie staggers on

John Redwood on the EU's failure to cope with the influx of Syrian refugees

The EU's border and migration administration reveals a dithering, divided policy.

In recent weeks we have seen Hungary try to keep migrants out of the EU altogether, but have to accept thousands without legal documents. We have seen Hungary tell migrants under EU rules they must stay in Hungary and claim asylum there or leave the EU, only to see Austria and Germany welcome them without Hungary doing its stated job. We have seen Hungary refuse to allow migrants to use trains and buses to cross their country, and then to offer free buses to some migrants who decided on a dangerous walk on a motorway. We still do not know if Germany really means she is only accepting Syrian refugees, or whether she will accept anyone from anywhere that has made the difficult journey to her border, refugee or economic migrant. The BBC said there were people from many countries crossing Hungary, and many were likely to be economic migrants. Will Germany send back those who are not fleeing violence against themselves in Syria?

We have seen Germany change the rules over how to assess and receive migrants unilaterally, and say there must be a quota system to take more. Germany has not explained how you make migrants go to countries within the EU that they do not favour, or how you stop them going to countries already above quota once the migrants have gained legal documents allowing them to live and work in the EU.

This muddled policy can also be dangerous. I am sure they do not intend it to be so, but holding out the hope of an EU welcome and citizenship to any who use

people smugglers to make the hazardous journey from Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere and who eventually arrive tired and troubled at an EU border is in danger of putting more at risk. It could simply fuel the people smugglers' cruel bonanza. As we have seen, even when they arrive in the EU there are still travel dangers if the migrants walk with children on railway lines and motorways rather than have permission and tickets to travel safely.

I think the UK is right to say the best way to help Syrian refugees is to provide support and assistance close to the homeland they have left on a far bigger scale than the EU is thinking of doing for individual refugees coming to the EU by hazardous means. I also think the rich Arab states adjacent to Syria could offer more help and support. In the UK when our children in London and other at risk locations were threatened nightly in the Second World War bombing raids they were taken out of danger as evacuees to safer parts of the country. Shouldn't the Middle East's safer countries and areas be offering something similar to children at risk in the most troubled fighting zones, whilst the regional governments and politicians work out how to find a longer term solution to the wars?

There are so many tragic deaths of children in these conflicts, and many of them passed unnoticed as children are bombed or shelled in their beds at home in war zones or die away from western cameras on their long journeys seeking a better life.

Rt Hon John Redwood is Member of Parliament for Wokingham. This article first appeared on www.johnredwoodsdiary.com

The radical Tory: competent but not complacent

*We must focus, says **Damian Green**, on using technology and transparency to boost the private and public sectors alike*

Spending the summer watching the Labour Party drift helplessly away from the British people and towards the wilder shores of ideological purity has been a dangerous pastime for Conservatives. Like many holiday entertainments it was fun while it lasted but should not be confused with real life. The Conservative Party, and the Government which it now fully controls for the first time since the 1990s, will be judged on how it performs and whether it has the capacity to renew itself in office.

This means that the debate taking place in intellectual Tory circles about whether we can now afford to be more radical than we would otherwise have been is in practical terms irrelevant. Whether we are now in power for five years or fifteen we should treat each Parliament as one in which we need to get as much done as possible. We need to guard against complacency, to display an ability to govern effectively, and to show intellectual renewal.

The majority of the British people have accepted that austerity was necessary but they are now at the stage of wanting to see the fruits of their sacrifices. Taking a wider perspective, we need to win the argument that globalisation and free markets are the way to mass prosperity, and not just a way for a small elite to become incredibly rich. The key battle is to show that we can use Tory tools to spread prosperity. This will require us to be radical.

When Conservatives talk about being radical there is a tendency to assume that

this means repeating the 1980s, and taking Thatcherism to realms it did not reach then. This would be a misreading of history. Thatcherism was the way to cope with the collapse in the 1970s of the social democratic settlement of the post-war world. It is not a doctrine to be applied religiously in all circumstances and at all times. A modern radical Tory approach will enable the spread of wealth and power beyond the elites (as Mrs Thatcher aimed at, to be fair) but will require new tools.

Where privatisation was once the weapon to enrich and empower millions of people, the modern equivalents are transparency and technology. Making the public sector more open both in terms of providing information and in terms of providing services online makes it more efficient and cheaper to run, but more importantly forces it to provide a better service. This applies across the board from buying a driving licence to enabling people to contact their local police.

This is a long and difficult process which we are already embarked on. Even more radical is to insist that private sector providers of essential services meet the same criteria of transparency and the use of technology to make their customers lives easier. In too many areas of our economy we no longer suffer from monopolies but equally pernicious oligarchies; a small number of big companies who sell us the services we need and who do so with a mass of confusing tariffs, deals, and contracts that mean millions of people paying over the odds.

Adam Smith warned against this kind of subtle conspiracy, and a radical Conservative Government would support ways to subvert the conspirators. Being Conservatives we do not want to do it simply by giving control to the state, because that will cause more problems than it solves. (I confess it as a sign of age, but those of us who can remember British Rail are astonished that a majority of the public want to bring it back.) Instead we should harness the power of the market and digital technology to empower the consumer through the mandatory provision of easily accessible information.

This is all theoretical so let me give practical examples. The insurance market has been transformed by price comparison websites. Anyone who believes that being a loyal customer for home or car insurance means that you get a better deal has their eyes opened by the provision of comparative information. A Conservative solution to the energy price issue would be to mandate something similar in the energy field. Allowing millions of people to know that they were able to obtain accurate and independent information about gas and electricity prices, thereby creating genuine competition, would be a great step forward. We should do the same for the telecoms industry, not just for price information but also for the provision of broadband.

These are a couple of practical examples of how we can use the power of properly competitive markets to solve the everyday problems which people are increasingly unwilling to tolerate. They have become accustomed to the private sector providing goods and services which were unimaginable ten years ago, and therefore have become intolerant of those parts of “the system” which seem unable to reach the same level of service.

Conservatives must be visibly on the

side of those who expect excellent service not just from the state but also from those companies that have considerable power. It used to be said that loyalty was the secret weapon of the Tory Party. We clearly need a new secret weapon, and I propose a simple answer: competence.

We should provide a Government which recognises which problems grate most with the largest number of people, and is fearless in dealing with them. We should never forget that Tories can be captured by producer interests as well as Labour, and we should be vigilant in preventing this happening.

As well as energy prices, and broadband access, there is a huge discontent about housing provision, to take another practical example. We need to reclaim the mantle of the party of home ownership, and to do that we not only to build more houses but ensure that they are available for people to buy. Too many new houses and flats are immediately snapped up by buy-to-let landlords, and never become available for first-time buyers. I am delighted that we have taken the first steps towards removing the tax advantages for buy-to-let, but I suspect there is much further to go (and therefore more political courage required).

We need a fearlessly radical Government which will challenge vested interests not by imposing state power but by harnessing the increasing power of free markets in a digital world. This will enable us to provide improvements in the quality of life of millions of people, who will be able to enjoy the fruits of their hard work. This will be the best demonstration that Conservatives are on the side of the many not the few, and that our permanent values are more relevant than ever in today's world.

Rt Hon Damian Green is Member of Parliament for Ashford.

Conserva-optimism

We should have much faith in David Cameron, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown says

In May 2015 the Conservative Party won an election that surprised most people, including many within the Party if they are being honest. This is not because we didn't believe in ourselves, or were not proud of our record in Government or even because we didn't think the British public would like our manifesto. It was because history was against us.

No Prime Minister had continued in office immediately after a full term with a larger popular vote share since 1900 and, perhaps more crucially for us to secure that all-important majority, no Governing party had increased their number of seats since 1983 under Margaret Thatcher. Impressively, and against the odds, David Cameron achieved both of those feats, the first person to do so since 1895.

“We must carry on making clear that we are the party that will give you a hand up, not a hand out.”

History was against us but instead of crumbling beneath the pressure we created new history.

We were able to do that because, albeit in Coalition, we had set the groundwork to get our country back on track after the perilous situation it was left in by Labour. It meant we could go to the country with a truly Conservative manifesto, promising we could finish the job of creating a future of prosperity for Britain.

With the historic election behind us we must evaluate what that actually means for us as a party and for the Conservative ideology. We must make sure we take advantage of our majority by implementing the manifesto that got us there. With the Labour Party in complete disarray, concerned more with internal debate than acting as a force in British politics, we should be implementing truly Conservative principles which will benefit Britain, as well as changing the political discourse for the next generation. We should show that we really are a One Nation party that will be looking after the interests of the whole country.

We have made an excellent start. In less than a hundred days since the election we have begun setting out how the Conservatives will make Britain a country of aspiration, fairness, equality and success. This requires action at all levels, and all stages, of society.

We have already set out how we will help the younger generation succeed through the Education and Adoption Bill, which will tackle failing and coasting schools. The Child Care Bill will deliver 30 hours of free child care for parents of young children.

We have shown that we will be a Government that will protect the vital public services that we all need, such as committing the additional £8 billion needed by the NHS. The Prime Minister has confirmed his commitment to making sure that Britain gets a good deal from Europe by beginning his renegotiation, having already spoken to every EU leader since the election. The EU Referendum Bill is making its way through Parliament, and we will entrust the future of this country to the people. It is right that everyone has a say on this, and

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the Conservatives are giving them that say.

However, perhaps the clearest demonstration about the direction of the Conservatives in a majority Government came from our Summer budget, which I believe was a masterstroke in showing that the Conservative Party is there for everyone and will help all get on in life, as well as removing the culture of dependency that has existed for far too long.

There was a raft of measures in the budget which provide much encouragement about the future of Conservatism. The introduction of a new Living Wage is an excellent example of how we are shifting the burden of responsibility away from the state and the taxpayer to the private sector, as well as demonstrating how we are a party of workers.

This is on top of the further increases to the personal allowance which will benefit a huge number of people, allowing them to keep more of what they earn. The increases in the personal allowance have already reduced income tax for 26 million of the lowest paid workers. The Liberal Democrats tried to claim credit for the Coalition Government's move to increase the personal allowance. However this is a truly Conservative idea, reducing taxes especially on the lowest paid. In 2005 I introduced a Private Members Bill with the exact purpose of increasing the personal allowance which was co-signed by Conservative MPs from across our party's spectrum.

These are all signs that in exchange for people taking responsibility and getting work, we will reward them with low taxes. As well as reducing taxes on income we are, rightly, increased the inheritance tax threshold who that people are able to pass on hard-earned assets to their family. The budget also continued to make Britain one of the most competitive countries in the

world to do business with a reduction in Corporation Tax. All of the steps announced in the budget are aimed at continuing the Long Term Economic Plan that has already begun getting the country back on the right track, shown in the fact that we are growing faster than any other major developed nation.

However, while it is right that we celebrate increased jobs, apprenticeships, GDP figures and other such good news, it is important to remember why these things are important. When an individual gets a job it is not simply that they are then contributing to employment numbers. It means they are taking responsibility for their own lives, rather than living on welfare benefits paid for by taxpayers. It means they are taking a salary home and setting a good example for the next generation, breaking the cycle of joblessness and welfare. It represents a change in ethos which should, and is, celebrated by Conservatives.

With this majority Government it is important that we remember that our aim is to genuinely improve the lives of everyone. While Labour might think the best way to achieve that is to increase benefit payments, we need to make it clear that the Conservatives believe the best way to do that is by accepting responsibility for your own decisions and outcomes, where appropriate, and making sure if you can work you do. We should continue to focus on making sure we create the climate and the circumstances that allow people to take responsibility for themselves by implementing good education, business and taxation policies.

We must carry on making clear that we are the party that will give you a hand up, not a hand out.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown is Member of Parliament for The Cotswolds.

Authoritative localism

What, asks Paul Scully, is holding local authorities back?

Local government has been at the sharp end of the Government's drive to cut the structural deficit, with a further decrease in their Settlement Funding Assessment of 13.9% in the 2015/16 local government settlement. This is at a time the Localism Act led the way in pushing decision making closer to the people affected. By the very nature of localism, councils responded in different ways to the added responsibilities, challenges and threats that were brought about by devolving power. The challenge, especially for the Conservative Party, who holds 40% of the total number of council seats, is to be able to recruit, train, equip and retain the very best people at a local level who can think strategically and make the most of the opportunities on offer through devolved power.

At the heart of Conservatism is the drive to greater freedom, trusting people with meaningful choices and decision-making rather than a centralised state run by diktat. Localism offers that opportunity but is mistrusted by some local authorities for two reasons: lack of vision and a roadblock to further devolution.

Localism is not clearly defined. The underlying premise, known as the General Power of Competence, allows councils to do "anything that individuals generally may do". Essentially this removes the restriction that permitted local authorities only to do things for which they had specific statutory powers. Previously anything else was deemed to be ultra vires. This leaves an incredibly wide area for councils to cast their net. Officers who are used to running de facto branch offices of central government and councillors who act as the patricians of old will likely miss opportunities that will be snapped up by

their more entrepreneurial counterparts in a neighbouring authority.

While many local authorities welcome the opportunities afforded by a localist agenda, some are concerned when decision making is pushed further down than the local authority or they are bypassed entirely. Some are happy for devolution to come to a juddering halt at the town hall. Many of the most successful reforms to public services under the Coalition, continued with the Conservative government, have councils as a partner or facilitator rather than as provider. Free schools and academies have cut out the middle management of local education authorities, clinical commissioning groups work alongside 'health and wellbeing boards' in areas such as public health.

"Plenty of people do not see the local council as being an important part of their life"

There are hundreds of councillors up and down the country who will not be fazed by these changes, seeing them as a real opportunity to get stuck in and shape their local area as councils move from a large organisation that provides everything, to a sleeker outfit that takes a strategic lead. However, there will be some councillors who risk being left behind without the comfort of a blueprint to follow. This can be masked in the short term in a local authority with a set of top-quality officers but will soon be found out. The role of councillors has to change to reflect the moving landscape of local government. The Conservative Party

needs to make sure it is at the forefront of that change to ensure that there is no hiatus between the change in greater local decision-making and having councillors in place that can fully grasp the opportunities that this brings.

Conservative thinking need not be limited to policy; our approach, critical thinking and effective system planning, is just as crucial in delivering a Conservative agenda. We believe in the free market, free choice and trusting people. Smaller government would naturally lead to individuals and community groups taking greater responsibility; our instinct to lower taxes whenever possible stems from a belief that people can make better decisions as to how to spend their own money than government. Similarly, pushing decision-making closer to those affected is a free-market approach to governance.

In order to make this work without an anarchic free-for-all or a slow retreat back to Whitehall centralisation, we need local representatives that understand this and can make it work for their local area. In the same way that turnout is often low for local elections, many local associations find it hard to recruit new talent. Plenty of people do not see the local council as being an important part of their life, despite it being in control of most day to day, visible local services. Greater responsibility can lead to making the role more attractive, although that responsibility will be strategic, bringing together public services such as the police, the local hospital, CCGs, academy schools, charities, community groups, local businesses et al, all to help shape the locale. That is not an easy thing to manage. It is far easier to nod through a committee report written by the Chief Executive after asking a few searching questions.

In 2007, Stephen Greenhalgh, then leader of Hammersmith & Fulham council wrote a pamphlet, *Mind of a manager, soul of*

a leader, art of a politician, taking a well-known business self-improvement book and adding the third strand to best describe a truly effective councillor. Those three points should be the starting requirement of the selection process for council candidates with as wide a net cast as possible to encourage original thinking in local government.

If localism is to be realised, if local economies are to be reinvigorated and if good quality public services are to be assured, then the role of the councillor must be more positively supported by giving their recruitment, preparation and skill development greater attention. Tomorrow's Councillor, a 2012 report that I co-authored with Christina Dykes (and published on the ConservativeHome website) got its name through our belief that tomorrow's councillors should be able to walk tall. Then their worth will be seen in its true light as keeper of public services, shaper of the local area, and enabler and voice of local communities. Councillors should be fully supported as the first line political operators that they are. In return, councillors should be more proactive in looking for opportunities, be risk-aware rather than risk-averse, and be agents of change rather than being regulators of change. There are many examples of such work; there are many, many talented and dedicated councillors working all hours for their community. The challenge for those leading council groups or preparing to select the next slate of Conservative council candidates is to keep the pace in moving forward, look ahead to the next twenty years and help keep Conservatives at the front of the pack in shaping a successful new era of local government in what will be for some time to come a tough environment in which to work.

Paul Scully was first elected Member of Parliament for Sutton & Cheam in the May 2015 Election.

Resuscitating the NHS

Atula Abeysekera offers a five-point plan for keeping the NHS alive

Our policy recommendations are not radical, but they are incremental innovations. We are confident that they will achieve cost savings, improve efficiency and productivity to streamline workflow and foster collaboration to harness renewable energy of patients, carers, volunteers and social care services and million or more frontline NHS staff. Our objective is to decrease lengths of in-patient stay; reduce emergency re-admission rates and reduce number of repeat diagnostic tests and follow-up and broadly help NHS England to implement its 'Mandate'. Our proposals are:

1. Think digital

The world will be a different place in five years' time at the pace of technological innovation. The objective is to make more productive healthcare professionals and better acquisition of data for operational and decision-making. It will make better and safer hospital experience for patients with enhanced satisfaction. Accuracy and availability of patient data held in disparate legacy systems will hinder NHS England's objective to increase the use of technology to manage health and care. As the world is about to enter the 'second machine age', some few practical low cost innovative solutions are:

- Buy or develop in-house app (or apps) for hand-held devices (mobiles, tablets) so that doctors can access real-time dashboards of patient data and clinical results in a secure system in one platform. This app(s) should

allow seamless integration next generation healthcare applications and would be readily be able to compare best practices within the NHS and around the world. It should utilise artificial intelligence techniques and must be future proof and aim to help workflow and collaboration.

- Use artificial intelligence technology to cleanse the data every time a patient contact is made. It should also be used as an initiative to 'validate' patient static data held in a number of legacy systems.
- Allow wider email/SMS access to patients to contact NHS and care system professionals, which is commonplace in Denmark. Email access to patients is not obligatory in the UK, despite being endorsed by the UK Department of Health and the Royal College of General Practitioners. We support the NHS Mandate that "everyone will be able to have secure electronic communication with their GP practice with the option of e-consultations becoming much more widely available by 2015".

2. Think small-scale commercial Innovation in front line services

The establishments of clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and health and wellbeing boards and academic health science networks are all good initiatives to promote 'freedom to innovate' at local level. However, we feel that real innovation will come when NHS interact with practical risk takers in the local community –small to medium sized companies who may

or may not have a health care background. We propose:

- To create innovation hubs comprising of front line NHS and wider Care system professionals, in partnership with local SMEs. These enterprises, which account for nearly 99% of all businesses, have to innovate to simply survive. Yet NHS has effectively used their innovation and risk-taking skills to reshape the health care sector and thereby reducing the burden on the state.
- To allow access to commercialise any new innovation where the rewards are shared with investors. The idea is to harness and reap rewards from entrepreneurship spirit in the NHS and the wider health care services.

3. Think quality of product design and services during innovation

Use specialist skills of design experts during prototyping and testing stages in order to create simple, practical, future proof, sustainable and easy-to-use low-cost products. For example, develop a simple tool providing a warning of ward hygiene and cleanliness for people entering a hospital.

4. Think of a reward scheme to encourage entrepreneurship

We support the NHS Innovation and Challenge Prizes to encourage, recognise and reward front-line innovation and drive spread and adoption these innovations across the NHS. Over the last four years, these prizes have helped to identify and spread innovations, promote a culture of invention

and drive adoption of the best ideas. Despite this success, we feel that the NHS England could expand the prize scheme and link it to remuneration. We propose:

- Implementation of a reward system to pay for those who successfully bring ideas and products so that risk-taking can be encouraged.

5. Think always to reduce error rates in order to foster innovations

There is already a database of patient safety incident reports submitted by organisations across the NHS, National Reporting and Learning System (NRLS), specifically for the purpose of learning. This triggers action to help address the identified issues/risks through the provision of advice and guidance such as patient safety alerts. However, there is not a single incident reporting and learning platform, promoting innovation that meets the current NHS delivery model. We propose:

- Creating a national register of Human Factors failures and learn from failures to identify areas of innovation.

Finally, the Government's policy on the NHS should encourage 'open innovation' to discover and develop 21st Century healthcare innovations with collaboration from small businesses and individual entrepreneurs. Failure to do will result in a missed opportunity for the country as a whole.

Atula Abeysekera is Treasurer of the Bow Group and a chartered accountant. His full paper is available on www.bowgroup.org

On an upwards trajectory

Adam Afriyie sets out why Conservatives must rekindle social mobility for those who need it most

If you work hard then you should reap the rewards. This simple desire is at the heart of what it means to be a Conservative. We want a society and an economy in which the cards are stacked in favour of everybody who chooses to work hard so they stand the best chance of enjoying the rewards of their efforts for themselves and their families.

We celebrate success and particularly for those from less privileged upbringings. People might say that I came from a classically disadvantaged background, having been brought up by my mother in social housing in South London. Yet I was one of the few fortunate enough to get an education and earn enough as an entrepreneur to provide a comfortable life for my family. This should not be a one-off story; it should be commonplace.

What drove me into politics remains my guiding objective: everyone, regardless of background, should have the opportunity to make their way from tough beginnings to the top.

The Conservative Party must remove any remaining obstacles to success.

We should care about children in care

First, kids in care homes. Where children are brought up by state institutions, we have a moral duty to ensure these systems work as well as possible. There are almost 100,000 young people currently in the UK's 'care' system. The statistics demonstrate what we intuitively fear: children in care are much more likely to end up in prison, on drugs or living on the streets.

Despite the best efforts of selfless care

workers, who invest time and emotions into helping the best they can, our creaking care system is not working well enough. It is to our shame that so many children, through no fault of their own, end up in a system that fails them. It allows us to feel like we are doing something without looking at the results.

So here's my simple proposal: let's fund bursaries for these vulnerable children to attend top-quality boarding schools.

I know the instinctive reaction: this isn't affordable. But that's simply not true. While it costs an eye-watering £150,000 to care for a child in a children's home, it might cost around £10,000 to enrol a child in a state boarding school or perhaps £30,000 at an independent school.

Schemes such as the Royal National Children's Foundation, have been transforming the lives of vulnerable children by doing just that. Within three years, the majority of children on these schemes reach the same academic level as their peers, and almost 40% become 'star pupils'. They also gain the self-esteem and social skills that all children need to put themselves on the path to success.

Identifying strengths at school

School should nurture difference, rather than enforcing a conformity that brings out the best in some, but not all pupils.

The first step is to introduce sets based on ability. Not just for core subjects, but for as many subjects as possible. This will help children to know their strengths and areas that they might need to work on. If all subjects are setted, then everyone will identify at least one or two areas where

they perform better than the average. Setting allows children of mixed abilities to socialise within the same school, but vitally it will push the most talented youngsters and provide extra support for those who need it.

The second step is to give children practical experience of non-academic vocations at school. I might never have amounted to much without the passion for business that was instilled in me through Young Enterprise at school. Children, whose skills might lie in construction, caring or cooking, should dip their toe in the water to see what works for them.

Of course, it is vital that schools give their students the core numerical and reasoning skills that they need for adult life. But they should also have the chance to take up apprenticeships or enter work straight from school, without the stigma of worrying that they are under-achieving compared to their peers who go on to university.

Making work pay

Finally, the Government needs to continue its admirable mission to unpick dependency on state support, empowering people to take control of their own lives with the security of paid work. We must continue to strip away the over-taxing of those that earn the least.

There are still a host of taxes that apply to those at the bottom. The worst offender is Employee's National Insurance, which is nothing more than a stealth version of income tax. It should not be allowed to linger on beneath the radar, while the thresholds of income tax rise. They should be treated as part of the same package and should be cut accordingly for those families on tight budgets who have to make difficult decisions as it is.

The various duties, such as those applied to fuel or flights, hit the poor hardest. It's worth

considering whether reductions or outright abolition of these duties are possible. As the Exchequer's tax receipts start to grow and we move into surplus, we should consider whether the modest benefits of air passenger duty, for example, are worth the burden they place on all families, whether rich or poor.

The best thing we can do to help the poor is to stop taking their hard-earned money away from them. It makes no sense to encourage people into work, only to grab a chunk back in tax.

Using social mobility to create a country of opportunity and hope

While detractors on the left espouse support for the failed policies of the past, as Conservatives we have a job to do. We need to build on the improvements made since 2010, which have given people the dignity, security and hope of a paying job.

There are numerous ways we can improve social mobility. My recommendations deal with just three: transforming the life chances of kids in care, allowing children to embrace their strengths in school and making sure government gets out of the way of those who are doing the right thing, working hard on tight budgets to provide for themselves and their families.

As Conservatives we must not allow social mobility to become a political soundbite. It is the bright light of hope for families, a well-trodden path to success and, above all, it should permeate every policy we implement in Government. Social mobility can only be achieved if hard work is rewarded in every aspect of life and it is only Conservatives who have the wherewithal to deliver it.

Adam Afriyie is Member of Parliament for Windsor.

Finding our conservative mindfulness

Alvino-Mario Fantini calls for a return to Anglo-American conservative tradition – as European conservatives are beginning to do

To the chagrin of ‘progressives’ everywhere, Europeans in recent years have been discovering the virtues and wisdom of the Anglo-American conservative tradition. In the Netherlands and Spain, foundations named after Edmund Burke teach students about the free market, limited government, and the principles of ordered liberty. In Denmark, Italy, and Portugal, academics and other writers have published paeans to thinkers like Michael Oakeshott, Kenneth Minogue, TS Eliot, and the American, Russell Kirk. It seems the only place where this conservative tradition continues to be ignored is within the UK’s own Tory Party.

Turning for inspiration to thinkers of the British and American Right is not to be dismissed as lunacy. At a time when the Conservative Party seems to have continued its slow slide into irrelevance - thanks to the steps taken by David Cameron and his top aides to ‘modernise’ the Party - re-discovering Anglo-American conservatism seems like very sound politics.

The loss of voters and the defection last year of Tory Party leaders like Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless to UKIP - which in many policy areas offer more traditional fare - speak volumes. So in looking to the future of the Party, leaders should ignore the hand-wringing of people like Ken Clarke, who has fretted about the dangers of being too conservative - for it is traditional Tory ideas, principles, and values

that offer the Party the best way forward.

Britain’s challenges

There is no question that Britain today faces many complex challenges. From immigration and the defence of marriage to national security and the threat of supranational EU governance, traditional Britain has been under assault on many fronts for many years.

The one area that has flourished has been the economy. Perhaps that is why calculating Tory modernisers have chosen to focus almost all of their recent campaign rhetoric on this area - to the neglect of nearly all others.

But a civilisation depends on more than just the economic sphere, as Lord Salisbury admonished. In the words of Russell Kirk, godfather of American conservatism and Anglophile, beyond the economic lies the political, and beyond the political lies the cultural - the roots of which are mainly spiritual. To conceive of public policy problems as primarily economic is to adopt a narrow, materialistic view of the world, which reduces all men and women to mere consumers.

Conservatives traditionally rejected such an impoverished view of human existence. In the old days, as Roger Scruton reminds us, conservatives placed “politics, culture, and morality before economic order and the distribution of power” for these are “the true foundations of political order and the

driving forces of social community". But to the brash, young operatives of today's Tory Party, such ideas must seem hopelessly quaint.

The Party's errors

Scrapping traditional ideas about culture and morality is one of the principal mistakes made by the Tory Party. Since the time of John Major's government, Party leaders have enthusiastically sacrificed principles to politics. They have ignored Tory backbenchers and rural voters, and have replaced conservative theories with mere tactics.

"Despite many Tory mistakes and missteps, the Party did well at this year's general election in May, which was surprising, given the unprincipled and left-leaning manifesto that they offered."

But it really was under David Cameron that the Conservative Party underwent what some see as its greatest watering down. Beginning with the replacement of the Tories' 'flaming torch' logo with the silly and meaningless blue-and-green 'oak tree' in 2006, the Party sought to re-brand itself as hip and modern. It seemed desperate to prove its relevance and demonstrate that it cared deeply about young people.

But increasingly, voters - who are not to be fooled so easily - have seen through

such Tory artifice. It was no surprise then to witness the rise of Ukip over the past few years, which was perceived to have a more principled, if oftentimes simplistic, approach to many of the policy issues that are of greatest concern to John Bull.

Despite many Tory mistakes and missteps, the Party did well at this year's general election in May, which was surprising, given the unprincipled and left-leaning manifesto that they offered. In 84 pages of intellectual pap, the Tories proposed all manner of government schemes, programmes, and initiatives to improve people's lives, while increasing government expenditures. Its most chilling line, as other commentators have pointed out, was on page five: "We have a plan for every stage of your life". Never mind that most Britons simply want the government to step the hell out of the way.

The 2015 manifesto clearly demonstrated that Conservative Party leaders continue to be tone deaf when it comes to connecting with traditional conservative voters. It encapsulated perfectly what ails the Tories: their neglect of their own conservative roots. And one doubts whether a conservative 'conviction politician' will ever emerge from the Party's leadership - or whether it will ever find its way back to principled governance. Perhaps it will remain nothing more than a party of electable technocrats whose policy recommendations and legislative initiatives are based on nothing more than the economy, polls, and statistical inferences.

Anglo-American Europe

Meanwhile, other European countries have been re-discovering the Anglo-American conservative tradition. In

Denmark, the publication in 2004 of *Den konservative årstid* (The Conservative Season) was one of the first signs of this emerging trend. That collection of essays introduced Danish voters to British and American political ideas. Similarly, the establishment in 2006 of the *Fundación [Edmund] Burke* in Spain - and that organisation's subsequent translation and publication of works by G K Chesterton, Sir Edward Coke, and Richard M Weaver through its publishing associate, *Ciudadela Libros* - marked the beginning of that country's turn towards the Anglosphere. And this year, translators and publishers in Croatia produced the first Croatian language edition of Russell Kirk's 1993 work, *The Politics of Prudence*. And work is already underway on a translation of Roger Scruton's 2007 work, *A Political Philosophy: Arguments for Conservatism*.

It's not just Anglo-American ideas that are being disseminated. In Portugal, João Carlos Espada - an Oxonian who studied under Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - teaches his students not just about the political principles upheld by Churchill and Thatcher, inviting speakers like journalist John O'Sullivan and academic-turned-consultant Michael Pinto-Duschinsky for seminars. He also seeks to transmit to them the English manners and morals which epitomise Western civilisation. Even in France, where no love for England has ever been lost, organisations like the *Institut de Formation Politique* have been training young French activists for nearly a decade with ideas and techniques developed and perfected by British and American conservatives.

These are not coincidences; nor are they the result of the machinations of a 'vast right-wing conspiracy' between Britons and Americans. They are simply

the result of people in different European welfare states - from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds - seeking to identify the values, ideas, and habits of mind that constitute the Anglo-American tradition. After years of seeking to develop 'home-grown' approaches to their political, economic, and cultural challenges, continental Europeans have come around to the idea that perhaps there is something unique about the Anglosphere - something that has given the English-speaking nations an absolute advantage, and which has led to British and American primacy during the 19th and 20th centuries - which could also serve them well.

Much of this is expounded upon in Daniel Hannan's 2014 best-seller, *Inventing Freedom: How the English-Speaking Peoples Made the Modern World*. The ideas of individual responsibility, liberty, private property, representative government, and the rule of law are hallmarks of that Anglo-American tradition. The fact that it is now being discovered and celebrated by conservative thinkers across continental Europe is of great significance - especially given the surprising gains by less palatable and more extreme right-wing parties across Europe during recent EU elections.

Perhaps it is high time for the Conservative Party to re-discover this tradition as well. Tories need to ignore the nonsense that the Cameronians have been peddling and remember what it means to truly be a conservative. Otherwise, the Party, despite occasional electoral victories, may increasingly be seen, in the words of Maurice Cowling, as "simply no longer equipped to face the challenges of the modern world".

Alvino-Mario Fantini is the Editor-in-Chief of The European Conservative.

Not Engels but Angles

Alex Burghart reminds the Conservatives not to forget the poor and dispossessed

There are few political terms so revisited as ‘One Nation’. Inspired by (but not coined by) Disraeli, it has subsequently been used by Stanley Baldwin to quell class warfare, by Ted Heath to heal racial conflict, and by Ed Miliband (briefly) to push his equality agenda. Its roots, however, lay in the unease Disraeli felt about the gaping distance between the Victorian rich and poor. In his 1845 novel, *Sybil or the Two Nations*, he had one of his characters describe “two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other habits and thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding; fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.”

Disraeli actually had little intention of building One Nation – he was too much of a defender of aristocratic tradition for that – but he was keen to make sure the ruling classes recognised that the social order depended on noblesse oblige. Someone who saw the same problem but saw things rather differently was Friedrich Engels who, in the same year, published *The Condition of the Working Class in England* following a sojourn in the murk of industrial Manchester. Engels had also seen at close quarters the yawning divide between rich and poor and argued that the industrial revolution was actually making things worse for the poor by obliging them to live in increasingly putrid conditions. This was to be one of the most significant staging posts

on the road to international socialism as a mainstream political idea.

Few now would agree with the conclusions reached by either man. Fewer still would think that the divide today between the two nations was as great as it was in a time before the welfare state had been born. But, as the work of the Centre for Social Justice repeatedly shows, divisions there are still, and more, much more, must still be done to bridge them.

Despite the current jobs miracle which has seen unemployment plummet, there are still 226,000 households in which no one has ever worked, and 1.6 million children live in workless households. In one part of Rhyl nearly two-thirds of working-age adults claim out-of-work benefits. Some neighbourhoods in Liverpool have over 60 per cent of their households with no father. Nationally, a 15-year-old today is more likely to have a smart phone than a father at home. In Blackpool one in 17 girls under 18 gets pregnant each year, and one in every 66 children is in care. About a fifth of all pupils fail both English and maths GCSE and the equivalent of 56,000 school pupils in England and Wales play truant every day. Around 1.5 million children have a drug or alcohol addicted parent. Unmanageable debt is eroding family stability and mental health.

As my work at the Centre for Social Justice has shown me, these are the issues that really matter to people, the issues that really hold families and communities back. Under the Coalition, the modern Conservative Party showed that it had the appetite to

begin to address many of them. Tories went hard on job creation, reformed welfare and set up Universal Credit, built the Troubled Families programme, pushed through reform of social work and child protection, increased the number of adoptions, reduced crime to all-time lows, passed the Modern Slavery Act, established the pupil premium and drove up standards in education. All of this fed a long-held Conservative desire to help people get on, whenever possible, to help people find their feet and their own means of progression.

All the indications are this majority Conservative Government will seek to build on those successes. The PM used his victory speech on the steps of Number 10 to declare that his would be a One Nation government. As he said in a speech to the Centre for Social Justice a few weeks later: "if you work hard and get on in life, this government will be on your side. Whoever you are, wherever you live, whatever your background, whatever stage of life you are at, this government can help you fulfil your aspirations."

This determination and clarity will be needed. Just as the unmet needs of large numbers of British workers in the mid nineteenth centuries provoked the birth of a new Left, so too could the problems of today. Now the Labour leadership contest has resulted in a Jeremy Corbyn victory, it may be that we hear much more from the heirs to Engels than we have heard in some time. Indeed, even if we don't it is unlikely that the Old Left genie will be quickly put back in his bottle. Corbynite voices will argue that the modern world does not serve the poor and are likely to call for ever more radical action.

The Conservative Party will have to be ready to show that it has meaningful answers

to the country's deeper social problems. That it can start to reverse family breakdown in our poorest communities, that it can eliminate long-term unemployment and low wages, functional illiteracy and innumeracy, free people from addiction and crippling serious personal debt, provide more and better housing, tackle loneliness and poor mental health.

Achieving this will be no park-walk at a time when budgets are again being put through the mangle. Some solutions will be a long time in coming. But the willingness to seek them is a great part of the battle. Despite what its detractors would have us believe, the Conservative Party has a long tradition of compassion. Its future can only lie in the strengthening and advocating of that tradition so that its commitment to social justice becomes as much a part of its public identity as its commitment to bookkeeping. The willingness to solve the problems that really matter to people, and the practical ability to solve them, are a winning combination, one that can build a country of opportunity and compassion.

It is only by doing this that a modern One Nation can be built. Only by removing, wherever possible, the fences, tolls, border controls and queues facing those who wish to pass from one nation to the other, that we can build a single nation of opportunity. As the great (and too often forgotten) Iain Macleod told the 1960 Conservative Party Conference, "the socialists can scheme their schemes and the Liberals can dream their dreams but we, at least, have work to do."

Dr Alex Burghart is the Acting Director of the Centre for Social Justice and was the Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Islington North in May 2015.

Disraeli Cameron, Prime Minister

The One Nation approach, opines Will Blair, will make the Tories the only party of British government

Standing on the steps of No10 Downing Street on that unforgettable morning of 8 May 2015, as the first Conservative Leader since John Major to win a majority at a General Election, David Cameron uttered words that made me more hopeful and excited for the future of my Party than I've ever felt in 15 years of membership:

"We will govern as a party of one nation, one United Kingdom. That means ensuring this recovery reaches all parts of our country from north to south, from east to west. It means giving everyone in our country a chance so no matter where you are from you have the opportunity to make the most of your life. And of course it means bringing together the different nations of our United Kingdom."

The PM's words filled me with such optimism because I saw the potential we have, as a One Nation Conservative majority Government, to consign the Labour Party to the electoral oblivion of being a vocal, angry but fundamentally out-of-touch fringe pressure group, distrusted and unloved by middle Britain.

The election result yet again proved (if further evidence were needed) that the British electorate are a pragmatic, sensible bunch who eschews political dogma for practical and effective solutions to challenges facing community, society and country. The blatant statism and interventionism of Ed Miliband, and the mean-spirited and uncharitable nationalism of Nigel Farage simply jarred with the public's view of our country and society, and they were rejected as a consequence on 7 May.

But it wasn't merely that David Cameron and the Conservatives were picked as the

least bad option. There was an affirmative choice by 11 and a half million voters to support a party that was delivering not only strong leadership to the country and effective, recovery-building stewardship of our economy, but a Party that genuinely put aspiration for all at the heart of its message and offer.

A Party that could be trusted on and cared equally about the things the public feel strongly about – the NHS, educational excellence, dignity and security in retirement. A Party that didn't judge you by your sexuality, your religion, your ethnicity, your education or your family, but instead on what you could offer your family, your friends, your community and your country. A Party that takes action to ensure the poorest in society are supported and protected, and expects the most privileged to do the most and meet their obligations to the rest of society.

Call this approach what you like – 'One Nationism', 'Blue Collar Conservatism', 'Progressive Conservatism' – I just like 'Conservatism', as it's an approach that's been at the centre of our Party since its creation. It also has nothing to do with party factionalism – such as the antagonising labels of 'wets' and 'dries'. Boris Johnson, whom some see as the putative new torch-bearer of the Eurosceptic right, recently slammed 'trickle-down' economics, urging Tories to be 'door bursters of society', breaking down barriers to opportunity that the poorest in society struggle to overcome on their own.

It's not only the right politics chiming with what the public want to see from their Government, it's also smart politics.

With a Conservative Party that introduces a national living wage, champions equal marriage, increases investment in the NHS, honours our international and foreign policy commitments, takes the poorest out of tax altogether, and relentlessly promotes the ultimate British dream of home ownership, what's the point of the Labour Party?

If they agree with all these measures, what would a Labour Government do better than this? Deliver them with more feeling, more bleeding-heart sincerity? Nonsense. They'd end up having to bin half the policies because they'd grossly overspent and mismanaged the first ones.

Now Jeremy Corbyn has become Leader of the Opposition, we know that the hard left is now back in business, and will be exerting a powerful influence over the Labour Party's political direction for years to come. The zeal and passion for Corbyn's brand of straight-talking Trotskyism exhibited by the many new Labour Party members or supporters, whilst remarkable, is also toxic for the Party's electoral prospects. It's this type of aggressive and angry dogma that, from both ends of the political spectrum, repels vast swathes of the electorate.

The challenge for us Conservatives is how we react to Corbynism. Some on the fringes of our Party might be emboldened to embrace the opportunity to militate strongly against Corbyn's comrades, seeking to replay the black-and-white 1980s politics of hard-left-vs-radical-right. This would be a profound mistake, as an unapologetically aggressive right-wing approach will alienate just as many voters as Corbyn's will.

We must robustly oppose this new militancy in Labour, but refuse to be budged from the One Nation centre ground in so doing. Rooting ourselves there will keep Labour boxed in on the unelectable left, as well as ensuring no green shoots of tentative Liberal Democrat

recovery are allowed to break through.

In the foreword to the Party's 1992 General Election manifesto, John Major rightly asserted that only the Conservatives can truly claim to be the party of opportunity; choice; ownership and responsibility. And he spoke of his vision for our country:

That, I believe, is the way we all want to live - a decent life in a civilised community. That is the way we can live: celebrating our achievements, not nurturing old grudges; enjoying our successes, not talking Britain down. We can be free of old prejudices and class bafflers. We can encourage diversity, not division; achievement, not antagonism. We can all make our own contribution to the success of the United Kingdom; and we must keep that kingdom united.

These words seem as true today as they were 23 years ago, and, just as in May 2015, in 1992 a One Nation Conservative Party came from behind to defy the expectations of the pundits and pollsters to win a clear mandate from the British people. Mr Major and the Conservatives received over 14 million votes – more votes secured by a Party Leader at a General Election in British history. I believe this was because of the progressive, pragmatic and patriotic that he and our Party put forward.

The Prime Minister has clearly proven himself the greatest Tory Leader since Mr Major. He has unequivocally re-established the Conservative Party as the true Party of Government. By collectively sticking to and delivering his One Nation programme, we can secure this winning legacy endures for generations to come, and guarantee a prosperous future for our Party and our country.

Will Blair was Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Holborn & St Pancras in the 2015 General Election.

Tory Norn Iron

Robert Rigby on the electoral difficulties for Conservatives in Ulster

Politics in Northern Ireland is notoriously difficult. Consent not force is now the order of the day thanks to the peace process and Good Friday agreement; the absence of violence has enabled politics and democracy to flourish although there remains an undercurrent of sectarian tensions with isolated incidents of violence from dissident groups.

Trying to inspire people to vote in a different way is tough. Politicians set the tone so if that tone is consistently negative and divisive then trying to build a society which is respectful of different opinions and creating a united community is just that bit more difficult to achieve. Parties and politicians continue to use emotive language and tribal politics remain. The elements of point-scoring and accusations remain and have never really gone away; Northern Ireland is still in transition.

Set against this background the Conservatives fielded their own candidates in all but two of the Constituencies across Northern Ireland in May's General Election. 16 out of the 18 Constituencies were covered which was a contrast to five years ago when the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists joined forces to create a bipartisan electoral alliance which eventually separated in 2012.

The strong number of Conservative candidates was a first and sent a message to the electorate that the Tories were serious and the only national party fielding candidates in the four nations across the UK. The objective was to provide the electorate

with a real choice and an opportunity to start the process of moving away from what has always been, to begin thinking about a new era. It did not quite work out that way with the Conservatives struggling to be heard and registering much of an impact although a marker has been put down for the Conservatives to build on.

“For the Conservatives to succeed they need to be offering an attractive alternative promoting a positive message both politically and economically, one which reaches out to those disenfranchised and disillusioned voters who are crying out for real change”

Whilst out campaigning one got a real sense people wanted change and viewed the politicians from the established parties as being negative and offering nothing different. Often on the door step during the election one would encounter people who said if I lived on the main land then I would be voting Conservative but not here in Ulster. When it came to putting a cross next to a new party helping to create a different political climate that simply did not happen and most reverted back to the way they have always voted.

There is still undoubtedly a tribal mentality with elements of bigotry where religious divide is prevalent. This could be seen in the Ashers Bakery 'gay cake' issue and Jim Wells's resignation as Health Minister.

Ashers Bakery was a Christian run bakery in Belfast which refused to make a cake bearing a same-sex marriage image on it and Jim Wells resigned following remarks he made linking same-sex relationships to child abuse.

The economy and welfare reform however were at the forefront of discussions across the election. Today the crisis remains over welfare reform and the budget; deadlock exists creating a vacuum both politically and economically. And on the wider economy concerns remain on the opportunities open to young people.

Heavy manufacturing and traditional industries such as ship building, linen production and agriculture has been the staple of the day in Ulster but like a lot of other countries especially within Europe this has had to change as the economics of those countries has changed. Engineering and agriculture remain strong sectors for employment however the service sector - tourism, retail, ICT, financial and food processing now account for a very large proportion of the work force. Although

tourism remains a strong component in the employment mix it is in many ways lagging behind owing to the relatively poor transportation and accommodation infrastructure which exists across Ulster.

The election was a good one for Unionism with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) both increasing their share of the vote (they now hold 11 out of the 18 Westminster Constituencies) whilst the nationalists (Sinn Fein and Social Democratic Labour Party) both lost ground. Perhaps one of the reasons the Unionists did well was they formed a pact which allowed the DUP to run uncontested in a couple of Belfast seats whereby the UUP were able to do the same thing in two Sinn Fein seats including Newry & Armagh.

For the Conservatives to succeed they need to be offering an attractive alternative promoting a positive message both politically and economically, one which reaches out to those disenfranchised and disillusioned voters who are crying out for real change. The opportunities are there not in the short term but medium to long term.

Robert Rigby is a councillor on Westminster Council and was the Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Newry & Armagh in the 2015 General Election.



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Assisted living

Peter Williams explains why the Labour-backed assisted suicide Bill had to be defeated

One of the greatest strengths of the conservative and Tory tradition has been its ability to harmonise concern for, and appropriately weight, the various goods that lead to human flourishing. Strong law, compassion for the vulnerable and disadvantaged, limited-and-judicious use of state intervention, and a respect for the free action of individuals and civic institutions have all characterised our policy prescriptions at different times. The Government should use every one of these various elements together in tailoring its approach to end of life care, and in doing so help remove any perceived need for physician involvement in the death of their patients.

When asked by fellow Conservative Fiona Bruce at Prime Minister's Questions in June what his view was on the issue of assisted suicide, the Prime Minister answered that he opposed the Bill that had been proposed by former leading Blairite Lord Falconer of Thoroton, and that any "imperfections and problems" could be dealt with "sensitively and sensibly" without a new law that introduced that practice. This was a timely comment, as only around a week later the Labour MP Rob Marris won top of the Ballot for Private Members' Bills, and announced he would introduce a Bill which went on to form essentially a copy of Falconer's proposals.

All the most recent proposals for introducing assisted suicide into the UK are based on the system used in the US states of Oregon and Washington. On the premise that there exists a 'right to die', they have aimed to establish a process by which terminally-ill people who want to end

their lives, had been prognosed as having six months or less to live, and who were mentally competent, would be enabled to do so through the provision of lethal drugs. Whilst being presented as very limited and innocuously moderate, such a system is profoundly dangerous, and if passed would compromise public safety and the welfare of vulnerable people.

As any doctor will attest, prognosing death for six months is a best guess, not a certain prediction. By enabling people to take their lives on the basis of such a medical opinion, it runs the risk not only of ending the lives of people who, wrongly prognosed, could have lived far longer and happier lives.

It would also create a situation foreseen by the Prime Minister when he stated his ultimate issue with assisted suicide: "I think the problem is the pressure that is then put on frail elderly people to take a decision that actually they might not want to go ahead with". The reason why the law exists against assisting another to kill themselves, is that vulnerable people can be subjected to subtle pressure to end their lives by unscrupulous relatives, if not by medical staff who wish to empty a bed. Others might, simply by cultural inertia, choose to die because they feel a burden on others, as did 40% of those choosing to die in Oregon, and 59% of those choosing to die in Washington, according to the most recent figures. Such situations would far more often than not be undetectable by the paper-thin 'safeguards' given in the Bill, which constitute little more than a toothless procedural checklist.

Adopting the Oregon/Washington system would also lead to a manifold increase in the numbers of people choosing to commit

suicide: if we apply the death rate from legalised assisted suicide in Oregon in 2014 to the number of deaths in England and Wales, we see that such a system would lead to over 1,500 such assisted suicides annually here (compared to the 20 or so cases that go through the courts).

“Britain could provide for the world a shining example of how, without endangering the vulnerable or compromising fundamental medical ethics, true dignity in dying can be achieved.”

Further, in establishing the principle that there is a ‘right’ to be assisted in killing oneself, Marris’s assisted suicide Bill would set the inexorable precedent for incremental extension of assisted suicide to others beyond terminal illness, and the introduction of euthanasia for others who are rendered incapable of killing themselves. That is why it is opposed by elderly and disabled groups such as the British Geriatric Society, Scope, the Disabled People’s Council and Not Dead Yet UK. For all the reasons given above, it is also opposed by leading medical organisations such as the Royal Societies of Physicians, Surgeons, and General Practitioners, the British Medical Association, and the World Medical Association.

These are just some of the reasons why assisted suicide is a prescription that profoundly threatens public safety, and

particularly vulnerable people. Why then, should the lobby for such a discredited and dangerous proposal so perennially persist in British politics? To an important extent, it is because assisting suicide is seen as a solution to the suffering caused by failures of end-of-life care provision that have become more clearly explicit over time, particularly in the last five years.

Despite the fact that Great Britain possesses possibly the best and most developed system of palliative care (the medical removal of suffering) in the world, thanks to the pioneering work of Dame Cicely Saunders and the Hospice Movement, it struggles with under-supply, limited application outside of a hospice setting, and sometimes poor organisation. An independent review commissioned by the Government reported in 2011 that of just over 470,000 people who die in England each year, some 355,000 require palliative care, yet only 171,000 receive specialist palliative care. It also found a postcode lottery of palliative care that led to gross inequities, with only 56% of Primary Care Trusts providing 24-hour community nursing.

This “unacceptable variation” and other similar problems were confirmed earlier this year both by a Commons Health Committee report, and by researchers at the London School of Economics, in a report commissioned by the cancer charity Marie Curie, which found that more than 100,000 people a year who would benefit from palliative care are not getting it, leaving them without the sufficient pain relief they need. Groups most likely to be so affected were the “oldest old” (aged 85 and over), people living alone, people living in deprived areas, and black, Asian and ethnic minority groups.

In May, a report by the Parliamentary and

Health Service Ombudsman into complaints about end of life care found serious issues with the provision of that service. This included poor communication with families – tragically, meaning that some reported losing a chance to say goodbye to a dying loved one – and poor pain management resulting in unnecessary suffering of patients. The report also reported what the independent review, Health Committee, and LSE identified: poor planning and fragmented, uncoordinated care, often compounded by inadequate out-of-hours services.

In response to these structural problems, the pathway to proper reform is known, has been made clear, and could save money rather than lead to a greater strain on the public purse. The Commons report recommended access to palliative care in community settings and hospitals, as well as hospices. The 2011 review estimated that provision of more community-based services could reduce the number of hospital deaths by 60,000 a year, calculating that the annual saving to hospitals would be £180 million. The LSE report came to similar conclusions, finding that providing palliative community care to those that need it could improve the quality of life for thousands of patients and save millions in NHS money by preventing unwanted and distressing hospital treatment.

Meanwhile, Lady Finlay of Llandaff, a cross-bench peer, immediate former President of the British Medical Association, co-chair of end-of-life think tank Living and Dying Well, and one of Britain's leading experts in palliative care medicine, has tabled an Access to Palliative Care Bill in the House of Lords that would ensure that all health and social care providers receive the necessary education and training in palliative care and are thereby enabled to

provide a quality service for patients who need it. This would mean that the individual analgesic requirements of patients would become a priority and a duty for all medical professionals. It would also involve training all staff in how to handle the sensitive communications between themselves, dying patients, and their loved ones, so that needed psychological and emotional support is provided at all times. This would give the comforting sense of control back to people at one of the most uncertain times of their lives. In addition to this, Lady Finlay's Bill aims to resolve problems such as the access needed by healthcare workers to the essential palliative medication for patients at all times, and to the specialist advice needed to properly care for those with complex conditions.

All these changes would effectively create an efficient, humane, and universal system of palliative provision that would have the flexibility and trust essential to putting patient decisions about their treatment at the core of care. If this Government can support and accomplish such necessary healthcare reforms, complementing the crucial legal protections of vulnerable people, it would accomplish the necessary harmony between social compassion and legal strength that only a truly Conservative approach to the issue can provide.

By cementing British global leadership in the provision of end-of-life care and transcending the dangerous distraction of the assisted suicide debate, we could provide for the world a shining example of how, without endangering the vulnerable or compromising fundamental medical ethics, true dignity in dying can be achieved.

Peter D. Williams is Executive Officer for Right To Life and was part of Fiona Bruce MP's team that defeated the Marris Bill.

This isn't 1992 – it's 2015

We must focus on reforming the EU and rebuilding our defence capabilities, explains Gerald Howarth

As we embark on this exciting opportunity to shape the future of our country, there is merit in reflecting on the past to help guide our passage. Some have argued that there are a number of parallels between 2015 and 1992. In both general elections we defied the pundits and secured a narrow victory – 21 seats in 1992 and 12 in 2015. We faced an opposition lacking in credibility. The economy had taken a downturn and Europe was a key issue. However, beyond those similarities there are some fundamental differences.

First, far from having an uncertain agenda, this Conservative Government, constrained by five years of coalition with the Liberals, has a clear and challenging programme to eliminate the budget deficit, make substantial cuts to inward migration, overhaul the entire benefits system, negotiate a fundamental change in the UK's relationship with the EU, or, which failing, support UK withdrawal from the EU, press on with the renewal of our nuclear deterrent, remove the UK from the absurdities of the European Convention on Human Rights and resolve the unacceptable constitutional anomaly under which Scotland's nationalist MPs can vote on English matters whilst being unable to vote on those same issues in Scotland where they are devolved. This programme is more than enough to preoccupy a five-year Parliament.

Second, whilst Europe appeared as issues in both elections, the circumstances today are wholly different. The Conservative Party under William Hague campaigned vigorously to keep the pound, we opposed the Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon treaties,

and David Cameron has rejected the central tenet of the EU, of 'ever closer union', and has had the courage to veto an EU treaty change, as well as maintaining his commitment to offer the British people the final say in a referendum. The centre of gravity has shifted substantially in the Eurosceptic direction. There remain differences of view but the fact that the people will be the ultimate arbiters and that the debate is being conducted in a civilised fashion marks a major change from the atmosphere prevailing between 1992 and 1997. Ensuring that the referendum is fairly conducted without the government resorting to the use of its machinery to influence the outcome will, of course, be critical.

"The fact that the people will be the ultimate arbiters and that the debate is being conducted in a civilised fashion marks a major change from the atmosphere prevailing between 1992 and 1997"

However, there is one key lesson from 1992 which the Party cannot afford to ignore. In both elections, the Conservatives were not returned by acclamation. Rather, the electorate took fright of the opposition (compounded in 2015 by the spectre of

the SNP calling the shots in a Labour government) and gave the Conservative Party the benefit of the doubt. By 1997, our majority had been whittled away by defections and the grim reaper, the Maastricht debate had taken a toll, Labour had a sparkling new leader, the City had been soothed by the prawn cocktail offensive and, despite the heroic efforts of Ken Clarke to restore the economy to good order, we bequeathed a sound financial platform for Labour to destroy.

Thus, we are firmly 'on probation'. We should reflect soberly on the fact that four million people voted for UKIP and those large majorities which many of us are now enjoying could evaporate. We must spend the next years focussed on delivering the agenda we set out. That means being bold, whether on further welfare reform in the hands of the admirable Iain Duncan Smith, or on our renegotiation with the EU where the migrant crisis has added a new imperative to ensure we recover complete control of our borders.

"The international scene has changed out of recognition since we undertook the SDSR in 2010. The need for the new review to engage in a serious strategic assessment is paramount."

Simply changing migrants' benefits entitlement will not suffice; unless we restore to our United Kingdom Parliament the right to reject EU legislation not only will the whole exercise have been a waste of time, but we shall have sealed the long-term

fate of our country, doomed to be carried on the tide of 'ever closer union' to the avowed destination of so many of Europe's political elite, the United States of Europe.

To those who say such an approach is unrealistic and would require treaty change, the answer is that treaty change is inevitable if the members of the absurd Eurocurrency are to resolve the persistent crisis arising from their failure to accept that a single currency requires a single monetary policy administered by a single, i.e. supranational, monetary institution. Goodbye the nation states of France, Germany, Italy, et al.

If Harold Macmillan regarded 'events' as the major challenge of governments we can be assured that this Parliament will present a rich seam of foreign policy headaches. The international scene has changed out of recognition since we undertook the Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010. We have witnessed the Arab Spring uprisings across North Africa, Syria is in meltdown, Russia has invaded another sovereign state, North Korea continues to ramp up the violent rhetoric against its southern neighbour, China is engaged in a relentless campaign to construct runways and port facilities on a range of uninhabited atolls in the South China Sea whose ownership is disputed, and the jury is out on Iran's nuclear ambitions. Meanwhile, ISIL and its medieval barbarity have sprung from nowhere to spread its evil ideology like a plague across the Middle East. The need for the new review to engage in a serious strategic assessment is paramount.

We have in David Cameron a Prime Minister who quite rightly wants the United Kingdom to exert influence in this increasingly volatile world. He believes strongly that overseas aid can significantly enhance that influence, a view I do not share. However well-directed our international aid

programme may be, there is no evidence that by spending 0.7% of our GNP (over 60% of which is not spent direct by DfID but channelled through international agencies such as the World Bank) the UK can restore competence to incompetent or oppressive regimes around the world and stem the flow of those fleeing from oppression. Indeed, the news this summer has been dominated by a massive increase in migration pressures across Europe. I am not opposed to overseas aid, but now is the time to re-order our priorities by diverting some of the increase in aid to defence because in my view defence wields infinitely more influence than aid.

The Government rightly points to major investments such as the two Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers and the future Type 26 frigates, new battlefield taxis, the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter etc, much of which was initially ordered by the last Labour government. However, the prolonged failure to commit to spending at least 2% of GDP on defence, as required by our NATO membership, caused major alarm with our closest and most important ally, the United States, and contrasted starkly with the enthusiasm with which the leadership of our Party embraced the 0.7% aid target which it has equally enthusiastically enshrined in law. Furthermore, the Government's attempt early in the summer to assert that the UK is spending at the NATO minimum was somewhat tarnished by the acknowledgement that spending hitherto ascribed to other departments will all of a sudden be categorised as defence spending. Meanwhile, we are reducing Army numbers to 82,000, barely enough to match the crowd which will attend England's opening Rugby World Cup match at Twickenham, and Navy and RAF numbers have also been cut by 5,000 each. We now have 19 frigates and destroyers compared to 49 in 1990, and

the RAF has 7 front line combat squadrons compared to 33 in 1990. In addition, the military estate is being sold off, limiting our capacity to ramp up our capability should the need arise.

“We must be clear that the public gave us the benefit of the doubt this year and we have to work hard to justify the confidence they placed in us”

We cannot argue that the economic challenges prevent us from increasing our defence spending because we have found an extra £5 billion per annum for overseas aid, so let us respond to the new world order as a Tory government properly should, remembering that without adequate hard power there is no soft power to be deployed.

So, we have won a famous victory against the odds, we have a programme of measures to address the challenges we face, although, as I argue, we need to re-prioritise defence, so we have the foundations to build for victory in 2020. However, we must be clear that the public gave us the benefit of the doubt this year and we have to work hard to justify the confidence they placed in us. How we implement the policy changes, how we conduct ourselves, particularly over Europe, will have as much influence on the outcome of the next election as the policies themselves.

Sir Gerald Howarth is Member of Parliament for Aldershot and Chairman of Conservative Way Forward.

Immigration is our right to decide

Alex Deane argues that nation states are entitled to make their own decisions about who comes to their countries and the manner in which they come

The Conservative Party was elected in May on a manifesto which pledged to reduce net immigration to the UK to below 100,000 people a year.

Whether a net figure is the most helpful measurement is a genuine question: a nation may be losing valuable citizens in the emigration that effectively masks the size of the incoming population when it's stated within a net figure, a situation which produces doubly bad results but presents the former as ameliorating rather than exacerbating the latter.

“I support our Prime Minister in his intention to renegotiate our relationship with the European Union. Presently, the Government simply cannot curb immigration by citizens from European Union countries”

But putting this point to one side, it is plain that we are presently failing to come anywhere near this target. The most recently released information from the Office for National Statistics shows that the net

immigration figure to March this year is still over 300,000 – and rising. It's up more than a quarter on the previous year.

This is one of the many reasons that I support our Prime Minister in his intention to renegotiate our relationship with the European Union. Presently, the Government simply cannot curb immigration by citizens from European Union countries, which rose to 183,000 in the 12 months to March.

As a result, we clamp down on the immigration we can control: the arrival of skilled workers from outside the EU and those who come here to study. This is perverse, as in my view there is a pretty strong correlation between that which we can control and that which we shouldn't. The workers boost our GDP and come for jobs that need them with employers who can vouch for them. The students come and pay through the nose, effectively subsidising our educational sector. All can be easily tracked by dint of the processes they complete in order to arrive, and most go home.

In any case, that leaves aside unskilled and semi-skilled labour – mostly from within the EU – which makes up a lot of the immigration coming to the UK. It is often pointed out that those arriving are undertaking work that needs doing but British people seem unwilling to do. It's also pointed out that, contrary to stereotype, such immigrants claim less from our state

systems than UK citizens, too (albeit there is still a volume of use point to be made when immigrants are present in such numbers).

But even whilst acknowledging the validity of these points, there are two significant points to be made. The first is that my own generally liberal instincts about immigration aren't identical with those held in society or our Party more widely (perhaps, unlike others in the metropolitan bubble, at least I can recognise that point). There is a significant, society-splitting disconnect here. Generally speaking, those doing the deciding about immigration aren't competing for work against those who come as a result of the decisions they make.

For as long as the 'mainstream' parties continue to neglect this political ground, extremists either side of them will thrive in it. John Howard, arguably the most important conservative leader of the post-Thatcher era and certainly the most successful, had an answer to this. He consciously campaigned to convince those attracted by One Nation's message in his country that his Liberal Party cared about their concerns and would address them. He co-opted enough of their agenda within his own broad platform that the upstart party withered and died, its ground absorbed by the professional party of government which faced them.

This is predictable. All things being equal, voters generally prefer to vote for mature political parties with rounded platforms, so long as their agenda is addressed to at least some degree within that platform. It is when their concerns are ignored – or not even just ignored, but trashed and mocked, labelled as racist – that they turn elsewhere.

“The main principle presently at stake is that it’s our right to decide what the policy is in the first place.”

The second and final point is that nation states are entitled to make their own decisions about who comes to their countries and the manner in which they come. Even if it's right to have immigration running as it is – or even higher – we're entitled to choose the nature of our migration system, something that our present treaty arrangements with the EU denies. Whilst I wouldn't pursue such a policy myself, many within the Conservative Party and those likely to vote for it would like to 'clamp down' on immigration and – having had a manifesto commitment to that effect made by a Party subsequently successfully returned to our supposedly sovereign Parliament – if 'clamping down' is wrong then, bluntly, we are entitled to be wrong.

Anyone is free to agree or disagree with present or future British policy; the main principle presently at stake is that it's our right to decide what the policy is in the first place.

Alex Deane is Managing Director and Head of Public Affairs UK at FTI Consulting. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and not necessarily the views of FTI Consulting LLP, its management, its subsidiaries, its affiliates, or its other professionals, members of employees.

The not-so-silent majority

Laura Keynes reminds the Prime Minister not to forget the socially conservative woman

What are the most concerning issues for socially conservative women? I'd hazard a guess at care, first and foremost, both childcare and care of the elderly.

The socially conservative woman is most likely to have opted to be a stay-at-home-mum, since she's of the opinion that a child's primary educators and care-givers are its parents and that no-one else is going to put the needs of her child first quite like she will. She'd rather take a hit on the career front than have to dump her kids at nursery every day. And yet the only message the socially conservative woman is likely to hear from the Conservative government is that she should be back in work pronto for the good of the economy. More and more childcare, that's what Mr Cameron tells her must be good for women and children. Never mind that what women are actually saying is "More support for stay-at-home-mums please."

I've been hanging out on an internet mothers' forum (no, not Mumsnet - give me some credit!). For the uninitiated, expectant women join a 'Birth Board' to chat with other mums who are expecting a baby at the same time. The idea is that as your babies develop at the same time you can swap notes. It's a place to discuss boring things like nappies and weaning - the kind of stuff no self-respecting husband wants to listen to at the end of a long day at work. The main topic of conversation at the moment is the dreaded End of Maternity Leave. Bar

none, all the women on my birth board are concerned about having to go back to work and the effect it will have on their baby. They cite financial pressure as the main reason why they're forced back to work earlier than they'd like. Every day brings some new tale of woe about how distressed the baby was when separated from its mum at daycare, and how the poor mum then spent her first weeks back at work sobbing in the office toilets. None of them are skipping back to work sounding a rallying cry for feminism.

"The only message the socially conservative woman is likely to hear from the Conservative government is that she should be back in work pronto for the good of the economy."

A government that truly cared about women and children should be incentivizing stable family life through marriage and financial support for stay at home mums. Instead what have we got? In its last term in office the government focused on same-sex marriage (which will necessarily institutionalize surrogacy and donor

conception – hardly the most emotionally stable environment for a child, to be deprived of one of its natural parents at birth), extending paternity leave, and more provision of nursery places. The message for women is that maternity has no intrinsic value. Heavens, pregnancy and childbirth can even be delegated through surrogacy so career minded women can spend longer at work being good little economic units of society!

“The Conservative party considers socially conservative women to be such a minority that their votes are hardly worth canvassing.”

What women do is often invisible in economic terms, but adds up in the numerous little acts of charity a woman can perform if given the support to be at home. Things like cooking a meal for an

elderly relative struggling to maintain their independence at home, for example, or going in to check on an elderly neighbour who might be prone to falls. All of these things take the strain off social services yet aren't recognized as valuable contributions, despite Mr Cameron's rhetoric about 'Big Society'. No one trying to juggle work and a young family can contribute much to this fabled Big Society. It's too exhausting.

Where is there for socially conservative women to go, politically speaking, if the current Conservative administration no longer represents them? Some might feel uncomfortable about voting Ukip, but given the socially progressive policies of the other main parties, there's very little choice. Perhaps the Conservative party considers socially conservative women to be such a minority that their votes are hardly worth canvassing. However, if my 'Birth Board' site is anything to go by, women are waking up to what's been lost by decades of socially progressive policies. The ranks of socially conservative women are only going to grow.

Laura Keynes writes for The Conservative Woman – www.conservativewoman.co.uk



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The Neverendum story

Marcus Booth says that the impetus towards Scottish independence will not be halted without a proper vision for the United Kingdom

Just over a year ago, the people of Scotland voted decisively to remain part of the United Kingdom. To many of us on the Unionist side, the majority was not as large as had we had hoped for when the starting gun was fired but nor was it as narrow as many of us had begun to fear as the campaign unfolded.

The Yes campaign mounted a hugely impressive campaign, brushing aside some rather bruising economic realities and instead managing to paint a narrative of 'hope over fear'. An independent Scotland, free of Westminster's yoke, would be a land where anything was possible, independence would be the solution to the scourges of poverty and inequality, the panacea for all ills. Not always managing to control the uglier side of the campaign (the on-line abuse, the allegations that some Unionists were concerned about speaking out), the Yes campaign nevertheless appeared near to achieving what had seemed impossible when the Nationalists had been returned to power with a majority in 2011.

The Unionists, forced into a referendum campaign they never wanted, were an uneasy coalition brought together by default and seemed to struggle at times to project the positive message making the case for Britain. Of course, the Better Together campaign was right to highlight the risks of separation, but at times (aided by the Yes campaign attacking the messenger and framing the debate) the focus seemed to be fear as opposed to hope. The Prime Minister, amongst others, did make the positive case but too often these voices were drowned out as the debate took sway.

That said, Scots in sufficient numbers saw hope yet in the Union. A last minute intervention by former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown was galvanising, and a commitment by the UK party leaders to more powers (the so-called 'Vow') has firmly set Scotland down a path of greater devolution - a commitment that, despite the SNP's complaints, the Government is delivering upon.

For those of us who believe in the Union and who, despite the skilful messaging of the SNP, remain entirely unpersuaded that separation would be a good thing for any of the UK's constituent parts (not least Scotland), we should remain fearful for its future.

When David Cameron and Alex Salmond signed the Edinburgh Agreement on the terms of the Scottish independence referendum, the UK and Scottish Governments agreed to honour the result. Had the Unionists lost the referendum, there is no doubt in my mind that the UK government would have honoured its commitment in the Agreement and we would now be in the middle of protracted national divorce proceedings.

The Nationalists, however, despite proclaiming the vote as a 'once in a generation opportunity', seem to be treating the referendum as a temporary setback on an inevitable march to independence. I have not heard a convincing explanation of how discussion of a second referendum sits consistently with the terms of the Edinburgh Agreement, but why dwell on such legalities or expect the Nationalists to play by the rules? I am not surprised, as independence is the *raison d'être* of the SNP. It is the glue

that binds it. Without it, their very identity as a political party is challenged.

The battle may therefore have been won by the Unionists but the war may yet be lost. The 2015 General Election saw a Nationalist juggernaut triumph and the SNP are predicted to consolidate power at Holyrood in the 2016 Scottish elections.

“For those of us who believe in the Union and who remain entirely unpersuaded that separation would be a good thing for any of the UK’s constituent parts, we should remain fearful for its future.”

During the last month of the referendum campaign, I co-wrote an article with a former senior SNP activist in which we argued for a fundamental re-think of the UK’s constitutional settlement. We wrote that once the dust has settled, and the votes have been counted, Scotland and her nearest neighbours would need to sit down, talk things through, and negotiate a political settlement which took into account the referendum result.

I have long been sceptical of the lopsided New Labour devolution settlement, which ironically seemed to me to have as its goal the preservation of Labour’s position north of the border, as opposed to delivering a viable and lasting constitutional settlement for the people of these islands.

The tensions in the current set-up are obvious and the sense of unfairness in England has not gone away.

It is also clearer than ever before that simply feeding more and more powers to Holyrood will not satisfy the majority of supporters of independence and this should not perhaps be surprising. However, many in Scotland (if you are to believe the polls) seemed attracted by the albeit vague ‘Devo Max’ proposal that didn’t make it onto the ballot.

If we are to preserve the UK, those of us who believe in it in the Conservative Party need to be prepared to think radically and to seize the agenda in a far bolder way from the SNP, who currently seem to be setting the terms of the debate on its future.

We need to create a new Union, where decisions are taken as closely to the people as possible but where the constituent nations of the UK play their full part in the matters where it make sense to pool resources and sovereignty.

What would this constitutional settlement look like?

Many in our Party and beyond are already talking about a federal outcome. What is clear, however, is that we need a conversation across these Isles that leads to a binding settlement that can deliver a durable alternative to the spectacle of the Nationalist ‘Neverendum’, where the Scots will be asked to vote again and again until they get the right answer.

We have a unique opportunity as a Party and as a Government to seize the agenda and lead the debate. We should not let it pass and in doing so we should make the case for a Union that has served the peoples of these islands well for over 300 years.

Marcus Booth is a member of the Party’s Disciplinary Committee, a former Chairman of City Future, and stood for the Conservatives in Angus in 2001 (securing a 6.7 per cent swing from the SNP).

Growing the grassroots

Alistair Thompson offers three policies to help rebuild the broken Conservative coalition

The last five years have been fascinating for political anoraks like me. We have watched as the tensions between the left of the Lib Dems and right of the Conservative Party have risen to the surface, then quickly dissipated. But the fear, prior to the election, was that some form of coalition government would take the reins on 8th May. The Conservative victory begs a question. Why was Margaret Thatcher able to win three successive elections, while John Major polled more than 14 million votes in 1992?

The answer is simple. While the formal cross-party Coalition deal was a relatively new innovation, the Conservative Party itself has been a coalition its entire history, reforming itself and swallowing up interest groups and ideologies for the last 200 years or so. It is this 'big tent' approach that ensured conservatism was refreshed and renewed and its most political embodiment the Conservative Party dominated Westminster.

Despite the election victory, Mr Cameron and his supporters may not understand this, and they are lukewarm on the need to expand the reach and appeal of the Party. It's not as if Mr Cameron was uncommitted to 'modernisation', but his plans were mere gimmickry, more focused on the photo op than serious reforms aimed at addressing issues such as the housing crisis. And by using Tony Blair's triangulation strategy it invariably

concentrated on winning over left-wing voters, while ignore those on the right.

The second problem I would highlight is that, as Mr Cameron moved the Party on issues such as gay marriage, driving women into jobs, and the continuation of unpopular wars while traditional Christian around the globe were being butchered, he left increasingly large numbers of traditional Tories outside the Conservative tent. Half a century ago there was no viable alternative to mainstream politics and the two main parties hoovered up around 95 per cent of the vote. Today they jointly score barely 65 per cent as they compete against a range of alternatives. Deliberately antagonising social conservative has simply sparked an exodus, as the millions of people who voted for Ukip in May demonstrated.

So what are the policies that can enlarge the Conservative coalition, and reach out to those voters who put both Lady Thatcher and Sir John into No 10? I suggest three ideas.

A conscience clause to protect those with traditional beliefs

Introducing a conscience clause, would be a way of drawing a line under the war that has been raging between social Conservatives, traditional Christians and orthodox Jews and the Party since 2010. Michael Gove recently wrote passionately on this subject,

and he was right when he said Christians were increasingly being viewed with utter contempt or worse as something akin to child abusers. But Mr Gove and Mr Cameron have been as guilty in pushing an aggressive secular agenda that has done huge damage to this group. The introduction of the so-called 'British values' agenda has done little to tackle extremism, but has given carte blanche to the forces of political correctness to target Christian and Jewish schools, attacking them for their traditional beliefs.

“Introducing a conscience clause, would be a way of drawing a line under the war that has been raging between social Conservatives, traditional Christians and orthodox Jews and the Party since 2010.”

One example of this lunacy involves a small Christian school in Reading, which was downgraded for not having other religious leaders such as an imam leading their Christian assemblies. Another, Grindon Hall School in Sunderland, tops the area's A-level league table and was the runner up for GCSEs. It was downgraded by Government inspectors because those attending “didn't know what lesbians do” and had failed to celebrate festivals from other religions.

It's not just Christian schools that have

felt the full force of the State's PC apparatus. Under the last Government, lawyers were briefed to oppose the British Airways worker Nadia Eweida, who refused to remove a small cross she wore. The case ended in the European Court of Human Rights, despite the PM telling Parliament that he supported her right to wear a cross.

Now to top this off, a Government-funded quango has taken legal action against a Northern Ireland company, Asher's Bakery, for refusing to produce a cake bearing a pro-gay marriage message for a political campaign group. The £30 cake, which was purchased from a nearby baker, looks set to cost the taxpayer around £40,000 in legal fees and the family who runs the bakery a similar amount.

Bring back right-to-buy and boost house building

Whether we like it not, we have a housing crisis, a crisis that is relegating a generation of young people to a life as tenants, coughing up hundreds or thousands of pounds every month with nothing to show for it at the end of the year. In 1970, there were 287,310 new houses built in England, compared to just 133,650 between 2013 and 2014. One reason why these numbers have tumbled has been the collapse in local authority building. In 1970, councils built around 130,000 homes; between 2013/14, fewer than two thousand were built. Housing associations, the organisations that control much of the country's social housing stock, built just 24,000 homes in 2013. The upshot of this has been a crisis that has progressively worsened over the

last 30 years. Now the Left would have you believe that the crisis has been caused by the right to buy. This, of course, is nonsense. After all the two million homes sold under right to buy are still being used, they have not suddenly disappeared from face of the planet.

The failure has been not to invest the proceeds from the sale of these houses into building new houses to cope with the pressures of immigration and changing family units. The only way to start to address this is to extend to right to buy to cover all housing associations properties, not just those built or transferred after 1997. The money raised would then be reinvested into new developments. But even this does not go far enough. Some experts have suggested going further and extending it to the private sector. While I don't support this sort of universal extension, the Government must work closely with the larger landlords, such as Grainger PLC, which owns 13,000 properties in the UK, to encourage them to invest in new build, while disposing of their older stock. It should also introduce incentives for larger landlords to extend shared equity schemes. Polling suggests that this policy would be popular among the young and C2 voters, helping to create a genuinely aspirational message for two groups who have been allowed to drift away.

A moral foreign policy

Finally, introducing a moral foreign policy. The sad fact is that our current stance on a range of international issues is short term and displays a breathtaking

lack compassion. A direct consequence of the lack of compassion has been the continuation of the systematic eradication of Christian communities around the world. More than 100,000 believers died for their faith every year of the last decade, more than a million in total, with many more facing violence, harassment and imprisonment. And while there are those who say this is a job for the international community, that requires leadership and vision, both of which seem in short supply in the FCO. Just look at the abject failure of our policy in Syria.

A short while ago the UK wanted to arm and support insurgents in that country in bringing down the Assad regime. We ignored the fact that the insurgents were already beating and harassing Christians, which succeeded in driving all of the Coptic Christians into the arms of Assad. Astonishingly, had it not been for the intervention of Vladimir Putin, the UK, US and France would have handed the key to that country to Islamic State. Mr Cameron quickly followed this failure by refusing to take in more Christian refugees from that country, handing Nigel Farage another platform from which to attack the Conservative Party on immigration - this time from the left.

So while enlarging the appeal of the Party does not seem to feature highly on the agenda of Mr Cameron any more, this decision will have to be revisited. We must rebuild our support base, which is narrower than at any time since the Second War.

Alistair Thompson is the Managing Director of Media Intelligence Partners.

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