



ONE NATION AGAIN

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The One Nation Group of MPs was founded in 1950.

*The views expressed in this pamphlet are those of the author
and not necessarily of the whole group.*

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One Nation members



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ONE NATION CONSERVATISM

*The Tory Party, unless it is a national party, is nothing.*¹

The central tenet of One Nation Conservatism is that the Party must be a national party rather than merely the representative of sectional interests.

It is important to establish what this means – and what it does not. It is not a search for universal support or the elimination of conflict. No party can represent everyone, certainly not all the time. Much political activity reflects the clash of conflicting interests: there are limits to how far consensus can be achieved, and concepts of ‘national unity’ can be unhealthily authoritarian. In both a geographical and a social sense, some people have been more likely to identify with the Conservative Party than others.

Nonetheless, One Nation Conservatism is committed – in the words of an earlier group of Conservative MPs – to ‘the maintenance of a national community from which no citizen is excluded.’² This sense of national community is sustained, in

¹ Benjamin Disraeli, Speech at Crystal Palace, 24 June 1872.

² *Changing Gear: What the Government should do next*, Proposals from a group of Conservative MPs, 1981.

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part, by non-material factors, such as the importance of maintaining confidence in the country's institutions and a sense of shared national values. One Nation Conservatism draws on the deep British tradition of safeguarding personal freedom. This is sustained by a suspicion of the intrusiveness of the state. However, the One Nation tradition also emphasises the importance of the need for institutions to restrain the State: the tradition has no home for minimalist *laissez-faire*.

A sense of community may also be sustained by material factors: the provision of effective, high-quality public services and the spread of wealth and opportunity. One Nation Conservatism has both a social and a political dimension. From a social point of view, it aims to avoid alienation and exclusion – whether in the sense of groups who lose faith in the legitimacy of the constitution and political system, or in that of individuals or groups who are excluded from economic and social advances. From a political point of view, it enables the Party to build a wide-ranging coalition of support rather than retreating to its ideological and geographical core, as happened after 1846 or 1997, the geographical base in the two periods being very similar. At its best and most effective, One Nation Conservatism has offered ‘a shrewd mixture of social betterment with a patriotic appeal.’³

One Nation is a distinctive tradition within Conservatism in its urging of the Party to look more widely than its traditional core of support and in its emphasis on social concerns. It is conservative in that it applies conservative insights – about the limitations of

³ John Ramsden, *A History of the Conservative Party: the Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940*, p. 257.

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what the central state can and should do, about the importance of self-governing and voluntary organisations, about community and national identity – to tackling these problems.⁴

One Nation Conservatism challenges the Party to move and stay outside its traditional comfort zones: it was frustration at the weakness of a front bench neglectful of post-war social issues that triggered the foundation of the One Nation group in 1950.⁵ Similarly, in recent years, some Conservatives have felt that social policy concerns were ‘Labour issues’, thereby abdicating our responsibilities as a party of government and abandoning political ground of great importance to voters. One Nation Conservatism, by contrast, insists that the Party engage with these issues.

One Nation Conservatism can speak to idealism in politics. Conservatives, and not just their liberal-left opponents, ‘dream dreams and hope to see their dreams take practical shape’. The Party will not win over many voters ‘unless your appeal is not only to their head but to their heart.’⁶ The Conservative emphasis on economic and political realities, its scepticism about utopian schemes and its critiques of woolly thinking on the Left – valid and important as they are – can sometimes

⁴ Baldwin was definitely using the language of One Nation Conservatives when he said, in the aftermath of the Party’s victory in 1924, that voters trusted the Party ‘to do what we can to right those things that are hard and difficult for them, and to help them in what is always a difficult struggle in life.’ Ramsden, p. 208.

⁵ Robert Shepherd, *Iain Macleod*, pp. 61-62.

⁶ Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 224; Ramsden, p. 209.

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degenerate into the language of the counting-house or a dyspeptic pessimism about *any* prospects for improvement.

The One Nation tradition emphasises that Conservatives have a vision of the good society, and a belief in the possibilities of improvement – both of them more nearly achievable, because more firmly grounded in realities, particularly those of human nature, than those of the Left. Pessimistic, elegiac conservatism – what might be described as the Philip Larkin view of the world – has its place in the conservative tent, but the One Nation view is more optimistic, more comfortable with contemporary realities and more energetic in its desire to secure reform and improvement.

A similar approach informs One Nation Conservatism in foreign affairs. It is at ease with a sense of patriotism, is usually outward-looking and is cautious of theorising in international relations. It rejects both utopianism and Hobbesian pessimism: the fragility of international society and the weakness of its institutions have, for most of the tradition's life, generally represented a challenge and opportunity for improvement rather than a counsel of despair.

All Conservatives value tradition. One Nation Conservatives begin their search for policy direction at least as much by looking at the future as by looking at how much of the past can be preserved. But they engage in that search with considerable humility about what is achievable – the perfectibility of the future is not an ambition. When John Major said that he wanted a country at ease with itself he was drawing on One Nation ideas. Conservatives are at ease with the country that they seek

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to govern. Their starting point is not to rail at the society in which they live. It is to seek improvements by working from within and by mobilising its strengths. This is as true of international policy as it is of domestic policy.

One Nation Conservatism is more than a frame of mind, but it is not a set of specific policy prescriptions. The detailed policies underlying One Nation have often been disputed among Conservatives, and have varied over time. Nonetheless, certain themes have recurred frequently. One has been that Conservatism cannot simply be a form of libertarianism. One Nation Conservatives are often critical and distrustful of the initiative-happy central state, but ‘shrink the state’ as a political formula, although important, is not enough.

Nor is freedom enough, though it is a vital part of all Conservative values: with it goes also an emphasis on community and belief in public service. David Cameron has recently reminded us that ‘there is such a thing as society, it’s just that it is not the same thing as the state.’⁷ One Nation Conservatives emphasise a pluralistic approach to welfare, in which self-governing institutions and the voluntary sector play a central role. The state will nonetheless discharge important obligations in supporting communities, institutions and individuals, but not always from the centre: the original One Nation group in 1950, for example, emphasised local government as a counterweight to the centralising tendencies of socialism.

⁷ David Cameron’s speech following his winning the leadership of the Conservative Party, 6 December 2005.

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One Nation Conservatism has always emphasised the spread of economic opportunity – Conservative ministers have played a leading role in successive education reforms – and of capital ownership. The roots of the latter can be found in the inter-war period: Conservatives were already speaking of the need to see ‘every man and woman in this country a capitalist, necessarily, to begin with, in a small way’, and of ‘a property-owning democracy.’⁸ It was, however, Anthony Eden who later popularised the phrase. Iain Macleod widened it to ‘a capital-owning democracy’ and post-war Conservative governments, including those led by Mrs Thatcher, have been particularly active in ensuring its realisation, most emblematically through the sale of council houses in the 1980s.

⁸ Williamson, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-82.

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There have been three major flowerings of One Nation Conservatism. A fourth may be developing now. The first two – under Disraeli in the 1870s and Baldwin in the 1920s – followed major expansions of the franchise. A third – beginning after 1945, and continuing into the 1950s – followed an epoch-making electoral defeat. The recastings of the One Nation tradition have, on each occasion, represented the Party's attempts to come to terms with a changed political and social landscape.

Although many of its concepts can be found in earlier thinkers and politicians, the terminology of One Nation Conservatism begins with Disraeli. In his novels, notably *Sybil*, he was preoccupied with the social divisions or 'two nations' of early industrialisation. His 1872 Crystal Palace speech emphasised pride in the country's institutions, a broad sense of Britain's role in the world and practical measures for 'the elevation of the condition of the people.' All this was in contrast to the restless institutional reforms and little Englandism of Gladstone's Liberals.

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Domestic Policy

Historians have dismantled the notion of a consistent and distinctive Disraelian social programme. Nonetheless, the measures carried through by the 1874-80 Government, coupled with Disraeli's speeches and ideas, left the Party with at least the fragments of a philosophy that could transcend class differences and provide a constructive programme for government.

In the years after Disraeli's death, Salisbury's Governments introduced some significant social reforms – such as workmen's compensation and free state education. But there was no successor to sustain a 'One Nation' combination of rhetoric, myth and action. After the defeat of 1906, the Unionist Social Reform Committee tried to develop a comprehensive Conservative approach to social reform and to identify it with the Disraelian tradition. But this did not result in a unified party programme.

It was under Baldwin's leadership in 1923-24 that there was a revival in One Nation rhetoric and action, in response to further enlargement of the electorate and to the fear of social conflict. Baldwin wanted his Party to be 'Unionist in the sense that we stand for the union of these two nations of which Disraeli spoke two generations ago; union among our own people to make one nation of our own people at home, which if secured nothing else matters in the world.' This was the first time that a Conservative leader spoke of 'One Nation'. Disraeli had spoken only of the damaging effect of there being two.⁹ Baldwin

⁹ Alistair B. Cooke, 'Postscript' in *The Conservative Party: Seven Historical Studies. 1680 to the 1990s*, edited by Cooke, Conservative Political Centre, 1997.

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emphasised the non-material basis for national unity: a celebration of the country's achievement in building 'ordered freedom' and a call for an ethos of service inspired by the sacrifices of the Great War. However, he also urged young supporters never to 'let the Party sleep in these matters of social reform that affect the lives and conditions of our people.'¹⁰ This was given substance by Neville Chamberlain's reforms in housing, pensions and local government.

The transformation of the political and social landscape brought about by the Second World War resulted in the Party's landslide defeat in 1945. In its aftermath, Butler led a reassessment of Conservative policies to convince voters that the Party could 'release and reward enterprise and initiative but without abandoning social justice or reverting to mass unemployment.'¹¹ In this exercise, the One Nation tradition was frequently invoked. And, when a group of MPs elected in 1950 – including later famous names such as Heath, Maudling, Macleod and Powell – formed a group aimed at giving further substance to this modern Conservatism, they took One Nation as their name.

As with Disraeli, historians have peeled away some of the myths surrounding the One Nation group, pointing out that it was neither as cohesive nor as effective as its reputation suggested. The group could also – to use an anachronistic term – be surprisingly 'Thatcherite'. Its flagship publication, *One Nation* (1950) argued for hospital charges, and the Powell-

¹⁰ Ramsden, p. 210.

¹¹ Quoted in David Willetts MP with Richard Forsdyke, *After the Landslide. Learning the lessons from 1906 and 1945*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1999, pp. 68-69.

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influenced *Change Is Our Ally* (1954) was well to the economic ‘right’ of the Churchill Government. It did, however, emphasise the need for the Party to accept at least the broad parameters of the post-war welfare state and to engage constructively with the issues it raised.¹²

The problems of the One Nation tradition became more intractable as post-war economic problems mounted and as attempts to deal with them became more interventionist in the 1960s. This – along with a range of issues defining Britain’s post-imperial identity – drew out differences between the founding members of the One Nation group, seen most clearly in the deepening antipathy between Edward Heath and Enoch Powell.

With the breakdown of the post-war economic order, One Nation lost its central role in the Party’s political language and projection. By the early 1980s, it had, for the most part, degenerated to the point where it was little more than a code for opposition to the economic policies of the Thatcher Government. Many of the concerns of One Nation Tories – above all, about the social consequences of mass unemployment – were valid, but they underestimated both the economic effectiveness and the political robustness of the Thatcher-Howe-Lawson financial and wider supply-side reforms. The intellectual coherence and success of these policies exposed the bankruptcy of those which had preceded them, although this was only recognised in the 1990s.

¹² Robert Shepherd, *Iain Macleod*, pp. 62-67, and *Enoch Powell*, pp. 122-25; John Campbell, *Edward Heath*, pp. 76-79.

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What followed was more complex than many – particularly those hostile to the Conservative Party – have allowed. The Thatcher and Major Governments did enact measures in the One Nation tradition. In particular, the sale of council houses, and the improvement in primary education standards in recent years, owe a lot to reforms begun in the late 1980s and bedded down in the mid-1990s. Nor was Margaret Thatcher herself a crude libertarian: the famous ‘there is no such thing as society’ remark has been taken out of context.¹³ Nonetheless, the comment became a negative part of the Conservative ‘brand’, associating the Party with harsh and divisive policies.

Much of the rhetoric reflected the scale of the economic challenge of the time, with the need fundamentally to alter people’s attitudes to wealth creation, to restore a sense of personal responsibility and to wrench the major institutions of the country from the grip of powerful sectional interests, working for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many. Many of these changes have been enduring. Even after nearly a decade in power Labour are loath to challenge them.

Nonetheless, the experience of the 1980s offers at best a mixed guide for Conservatives now. A future Conservative Government may well inherit significant economic problems from the Blair-Brown administration, including over-complicated and excessive taxation, regulation and micro-management on the supply-side; and neglect of the extent to which they erode long-term economic performance. A cyclical

¹³ Interview in *Woman’s Own*, 31 October 1987. See also Samuel Brittan, *There is no such thing as Society*, Social Market Foundation, 1993.

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deterioration in the public finances and high personal indebtedness may also be part of the inheritance. Economic issues are likely to force their way higher on the political agenda. However, the next Conservative Government is unlikely to be forced to undertake radical economic reforms in such a single-minded way as was required of the Thatcher administration.

One undoubted side-effect of that single-mindedness was the perception of social polarisation, of “them” and “us”. This sits uneasily with the Party’s traditions. It narrowed the Party’s political and rhetorical repertoire, a phenomenon that has become more apparent as public priorities have shifted towards ‘quality of life’ issues. Only recently has the Party begun to find a language that responds adequately to this change.

Foreign policy

The similarity of instinct evident in the One Nation tradition, as it is applied to domestic and international affairs, has already been noted: the tradition accepts the imperfectability of international society just as it does in seeking to order and improve domestic life. It is therefore deeply suspicious of both institutional and ideological ‘solutions’ to the intractable problems of international relations. The utopian and the unilateral impulses of what has recently come to be called neo-conservatism are both alien to it.

One Nation Conservatives are not nervous of expressing an affection for their country. Patriotism is a positive word. However, the One Nation tradition has generally been cautious

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of moralising in foreign affairs, attentive to the danger that ‘do good’ interventionism often has pernicious longer-term consequences and can also act against British interests. Equally, it has rarely been allowed to degenerate into a narrow nationalism or into a belief that the country can avoid all foreign engagements. It has been prepared to act in defence of both the national interest and international order, unlike the ‘Country’ tradition that focuses on low taxes, economical government and avoiding foreign entanglements. Thus, in the Near East crisis of the 1870s, Disraeli rejected both the ‘Country’ quietism of his Foreign Secretary, Derby, and the high octane moralism of Gladstone’s Midlothian crusade.

It was Disraeli who, at least at the level of rhetoric, made the Conservatives the party of Empire. However, he and his successors recognised that British imperial interests also rested on a stable European order. As he remarked after the Franco-Prussian war: ‘the balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers most, and feels the effects of this great change most, is England.’¹⁴

When British power and European stability both declined, Conservative leaders recognised the need for greater British commitment in international affairs. This was reflected, for example, in Austen Chamberlain’s role in negotiating the Locarno Treaty of 1925. As Foreign Secretary, Chamberlain made the case for constructive international engagement, rejecting both isolationism and over-ambitious supra-

¹⁴ Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 155.

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nationalism. Against some opposition from within the Baldwin cabinet, he pushed Britain into shaping the Franco-German détente at Locarno. He also discarded the Geneva protocol, favoured by the 1924 Labour Government, that would have relied fairly heavily on arbitration on international affairs.

Europe – especially the supranational features of the EU – has divided Conservatives for much of the past 40 years, exemplified most starkly in the Heath-Powell conflict. For both men, this was driven by the end of Empire. Heath embraced supra-nationalism, at least in part because he saw Europe as a way of defending British power relative to bigger countries, much as Joseph Chamberlain and the tariff reformers had seen imperial unity 70 years earlier. Powell, once he accepted the end of the imperial mission that had originally attracted him, rejected both European and American encroachments and came closer to a ‘Country’ position on foreign policy. Both Heath and Powell eventually deserted One Nation ground on Europe, their commitment generating into dogma. It is the increasing globalisation of foreign policy rather than any final resolution of internal argument which is now most likely to enable the Party to mould a foreign policy in tune with a One Nation tradition. Some of the differences over Europe will remain; their relevance may be diminished, as the electorate has already sensed.

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One Nation Conservatism, apparently less relevant in the 1980s and early 1990s, is reviving. The factors that can unite a nation are now seen as increasingly important in helping to provide Britain's more diverse society with a common culture. This applies to the way that society operates within the country. It also affects our approach to a globalised world: the greater the stability that comes with a strong sense of one's own identity, the more confident one can be in deepening one's contact with others.

Nonetheless, today's policy implications are different from those of the past. Many of the policies pursued in the 1940s and 1950s reflected the intellectual ascendancy of collectivism, and the Conservative Party's effort to counteract the possibility of radical socialism, including wide-ranging nationalisation, with a programme of social reform. It was in many respects defensive. Britain was, in any case, a more deferential society, with the Conservative Party attracting significant support on the basis of its links to the country's traditional institutions, while millions in the Labour movement deferred to Trade Union and Labour leadership.

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Most of this political landscape has been transformed by education, political reform and the information age. Mostly this is for the better. Radical socialism is politically dead – though many of the regulating impulses associated with it are not – and union-organised monopolies are somewhat smaller and weaker. It is a society with a strong orientation to private rather than collective forms of advancement. Yet there is also a yearning for community and for ideals.

An ability to understand and find a rhetoric to express this was an important part of Tony Blair's early appeal, though not matched by an ability to turn this into policy outcomes, as he himself appears now to be admitting.¹⁵ The search for community is no longer held to be coterminous with a larger state.

This is the Conservatives' opportunity. Our success will partly be measured by the extent to which we can convince the public that reining back the intrusiveness of the state under a Conservative Government will not lead to the atrophy of community.

Conservatives are also still adjusting to their looser grip on a valuable electoral card. The democratisation of our social and political culture since the sixties, followed by the tough-minded economic policies of the 1980s, has eroded the Conservative Party's 'apolitical' appeal. Some have argued that it has become 'just another political party, in the same way that *The Times* is just another newspaper, competing in the political market-place

¹⁵ "Every time I've ever introduced a reform in Government, I wish in retrospect I had gone further", Tony Blair, Labour Party Conference, 27 September 2005.

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with this week's special offer.¹⁶ This is occurring at a time when apolitical appeal is at a premium in the market for votes.

The fractures in society today are of a different order from past fears of a simple class polarisation. Rather, they reflect the exclusion of a significant minority from economic prosperity and alienation among some communities, notably some young Muslims.¹⁷ They also reflect the persistence of questions of national identity, but in forms less familiar than those which derive from the changed nature of the Union. They also reflect divisions, largely cross-party, about Britain's relations with the EU and its role in the world. These fractures could all too easily translate into enduring political weakness: among younger voters, in the cities, in Scotland and Wales and among ethnic minorities. Given that the latter in particular is likely to be a growing share of the electorate, there is a strategic challenge here comparable to that faced by party leaders at times when, in response to a wider franchise, or the post-war collectivism, the One Nation tradition was successively recast. Such issues could become as significant in Conservative discourse as the well-trammelled and divisive One Nation v No Nation debates in the Party in the 1990s over Europe, resonant though they still are.

In this changed political environment, One Nation Conservatism is back. The apparent certainties of the Thatcher years, and the choices implied by them, are being replaced by a new Conservative agenda. A revitalised One Nation Conservatism now faces at least four pressing tasks: to revive

¹⁶ John Campbell, 'The Heath Era and Beyond', in Cooke (ed.), p. 91.

¹⁷ See, for example, the poll for *The Times*, 4th July 2006.

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confidence in our institutions, which has fallen to a dangerously low level; to ensure a quality of life and of public services that match growing private prosperity; to confront and reduce various forms of exclusion and alienation; and to redefine a Conservative foreign policy, one that can be enduringly rooted in a notion of the national interest as well as be more reassuring to Middle Britain.

What follows is no more than a thumbnail sketch of the political terrain in which One Nation Conservatives will continue to operate. It is not the purpose of this paper to develop a detailed route map on each of these for One Nation Conservatives to follow. Still less is its purpose to spell out comprehensive policy proposals. This can and will be done in the months and years ahead by many of a like mind in and beyond the Party and will inform the intense policy debate now underway under David Cameron.

Revitalising institutions

Action to restore confidence in our institutions is badly needed. There are many reasons for their loss of standing. Some, such as the supplanting of parts of Parliament's role by the media, have been growing for a long time and should not be laid at the door of the present Government.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the growth of Prime Ministerial power and the recent cheerful disregard for institutional forms and restraints in pursuit of 'what works' are hallmarks of the present administration. So is the disregard for

¹⁸ See by the author, *Mr Blair's Poodle*, Centre for Policy Studies, 2000, p 32-34.

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traditional civil liberties and their populist dismissal as the concerns of a liberal élite.

A strong executive has long been part of our political culture: few Conservatives would support a shift to a system of US-style gridlock. But the essential role of Parliament – to force the Executive to explain itself properly, and sometimes to think again – must be revived and reinforced. Both Houses need radical reform.

The current workings of the House of Commons need to be redesigned to meet the needs of 21st century executive scrutiny as well as responding to the legitimate complaints of a wider public that its discourse, particularly in the Chamber, is remote and antiquated. The yawning gulf between respect for MPs in their constituency work and the indifference to, and sometimes contempt for, their collective identification at Westminster needs to be narrowed. The current practices of the Commons owe more to ‘club government’ of the 19th century than of a 21st century Parliament. Nor can the Second Chamber remain exempt. Only a predominantly elected Lords (but on the basis of long, non-renewable terms, to reduce the power of patronage) can provide a Second Chamber with the moral authority to enable it to exercise its powers with confidence and effectiveness.

Other institutions also need to be secured. Civil Service independence has been eroded over the past decade and requires buttressing, probably by statute. Local government, under attack from the creation of regional institutions and other ill-considered restructuring proposals of recent years, needs to be revitalised. At least as important, the recent growth in small-

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scale voluntary action needs harnessing. Past Conservative Governments can be held responsible for a number of measures that undermined local independence, but it is the Blair Government which has developed a detailed target culture to the point that it saps so much possibility of local initiative.

The legitimacy and value of our institutions derives from one of their primary functions: their contribution to the defence of individual liberties. The Blair Government's determination not to be outflanked from the right on law and order issues, coupled with a populist disregard for civil liberties, predates 2001. Most recently it has been explained as a response to the growing threat of terrorism.

One Nation Conservatives should be sceptical. The traditional bias towards liberty within our polity must be defended. If the state is perceived to use its powers arbitrarily, social cohesion is put at risk, and the number of individual cases of injustice increased. Nor is it clear that such responses enhance the nation's security – their effect may be the opposite.

It will be a priority of One Nation Conservatives in the years ahead to re-examine the balance between the state and the citizen. The case for redress in favour of the citizen is growing. The public senses it, too.

Public services

A One Nation Conservative's instincts for freedom do not extend to the point where support for public services is an embarrassment or an anomaly. No single model is likely to provide all the answers.

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Institutions are seen as organic and progressive reform is generally preferable to wholesale destruction.

One Nation Conservatives see that choice and competition are important instruments for raising standards in core public services. The insistence, much beloved of the Liberal Democrats, that ‘all people are interested in is having good local services’ is largely true but also irrelevant: it offers no guide as to how these good services are to be provided. Nonetheless, the Party should bear in mind that competition is the means, good services the end. In the past, our rhetoric has suggested that as a party we have not fully grasped this distinction.

The other major feature of the One Nation approach to public services is a commitment to institutions that are, as far as possible, self-governing. This requires a reduction in the scale of intervention and in the administrative burdens on local bodies from the centre. The urge to decentralise propagates much soft thinking – models of ‘new localism’ rarely fully address its financial implications – but much of the meddling from the centre of the last decade can safely be dismantled. Labour’s corporatist roots run deepest in public services, particularly in education and health and, despite much rhetoric to the contrary, have not been severed by new Labour.

In education, Labour has groped towards the answer in principle, in the recent Education Bill, with the development of Academy schools, and with tuition fees. But it has baulked at sufficiently challenging its own vested interests, particularly in the teaching unions and local government. The language of

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decentralisation sits oddly with the mountain of extra regulation and guidance imposed on schools since 1997.

In health, the Government's original model of foundation hospitals – before it was watered down in deference to Labour's grassroots, Union and other interests – held a lot of promise. This independence of supply should also embrace some diversity of provision. 'Choice' policies in the past rightly emphasised the need to free up the ability to demand services but did not always give enough attention to new sources of provision. Without it, the current system which relies on manipulating bureaucratic rules will remain entrenched: the better-off and the articulate will continue to benefit while genuine opportunities for the least advantaged will remain more scarce.

The intractability of the problem, given financial constraints, has to be acknowledged. The most difficult nettle, to find an acceptable means of managing the demand of a service free at the point of delivery, remains to be grasped by those on all points of the political compass.

The challenge of exclusion

Despite the greatly increased prosperity of the last quarter of a century, a significant part of the population has not gained sufficiently. It is also in this part of the population that stable family formation is proving most difficult.

A certain amount of means-testing is inevitable, but the proliferation of means tests and their growing complexity serve only to make the lives of the poor more difficult. There is clearly

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a need for in-work benefits for the low-paid – there was a gradual expansion of them under the last Conservative Government – but a simpler, more predictable regime is essential.

Long-term dependence on means-tested benefits is itself a form of social exclusion. If this can be tackled, then we can have both a more integrated society *and* a smaller state. Measures that support greater personal responsibility and independence will, over time, reduce the demand for government intervention.

It is in this, rather than in the overall objective, that One Nation Conservatives differ from some colleagues who urge immediate targets for tax cuts. By reducing the demand for government intervention, the conditions can be created for a more durable move towards a smaller state. Government can and should give support for initiatives to support independence, but where possible it should devolve initiatives to draw on the flexibility and social entrepreneurship of the voluntary sector.

A new relationship with the voluntary sector is vital: one in which the public sector can give some support in terms of funding and infrastructure, but which is much less intrusive. This requires simpler, more stable funding rules, cutting back over-regulation and avoiding too close an embrace by central government, with its favoured initiatives. This is easily said but difficult to accomplish – it is the stuff of better quality government which the electorate now demands. Much of the electorate is less sceptical of the government's intentions than it is of the competence of politicians to govern.

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The chain of political accountability is also relevant. While central government, including Ministers, continue to take the blame for local failure it is natural for Ministers and their mandarin advisers to seek to obtain greater control. The regulatory itch is partly defensive.

Another group that considers itself excluded from modern Britain, and, in some cases, may wish to exclude itself, is a section of the Muslim population. Recent polls¹⁹ show that a third of British Muslims think that British society is decadent, and a much smaller percentage (though one which represents 100,000 people) have some sympathy with the suicide bombers on the London Underground. One Nation Conservatives are by instinct cultural integrationists although wary of the scale of the claims that public policy can make a major contribution to that objective.

A One Nation foreign policy

British foreign policy in recent years – very much driven by the Prime Minister – has seen a revival of nineteenth-century liberal imperialism. One Nation Conservatism stands for a different, more prudent tradition.

The new liberal imperialism has been concerning enough: its messianic and salvationist strands should make all Conservatives wary. Whatever the merits, or otherwise, of individual initiatives such as the Iraq War, the most striking feature of policy in recent years has been the growth and implementation of radical doctrine, both in the US and in the UK, overthrowing the

¹⁹ See Footnote 16.

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traditions of prudent and multi-lateral policy making that had characterised most of the post-war period in both countries. Paradoxically, the doctrine has been able to serve as an intellectual cloak for both the liberal imperialists and American nationalists. As a result, Prime Minister Blair has sometimes been able to sound more radical than even President Bush.

One Nation Conservatives believe that the spread of liberal, democratic values across the world is desirable in itself, and – given the collapse of many of the most obvious alternatives – has every prospect of significant advance. The issue is not of ends but of means. Support for this should remain central to British foreign policy.

One Nation Conservatives differ from the Prime Minister on three grounds. First, they are more cautious about what military force can achieve as a means of spreading values and institutions, especially in regions with an unstable security structure and little or no pluralistic history. Second, there is greater caution among One Nation Conservatives about the extent to which the spread of democracy is necessarily a panacea and about whether it necessarily solves intractable conflicts such as those in the Middle East. One Nation Conservatives are not millennial optimists. Third, the One Nation tradition values traditional security doctrines that enable states with different political systems to coexist. This contrasts with both the neo-conservatives' support for a muscular challenge to the existing society of states and the equally militant interventionism of the utopian salvationists.

A return to more reliable and tested security traditions does not mean, as has sometimes been charged, a cynical or value-

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free approach to international affairs. It does, however, answer the entirely correct worries of Middle Britain: the doctrines of recent years have been damaging both for international stability and security, and for domestic social cohesion.

The absence of a British foreign policy more responsive to these worries is a vacuum most naturally filled from the One Nation tradition. Filling that vacuum may come to be seen, in the years ahead, as the most important single contribution which the tradition can currently make to both the safety and the domestic well-being of Britain.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, there are none of the populist pledges for early action which flattered to deceive in the early Blair years, nor detailed policy proposals which can so easily be rendered irrelevant by the passage of time. Yet it describes a framework for action and one which cuts across current perceptions of what, particularly in the last decade, Conservatism has been held to stand for.

It is a framework of continuity. Few, if any, of the individual strands of policy belong exclusively to it. Yet the pattern of One Nation Conservatism formed from them has been discernible throughout much of the Party's history. That pattern is clearer again now, more so than for half a century.

The threads of One Nation lie deep in Conservatism. They increasingly touch many areas which most perturb 21st century Middle Britain. It is not by abandoning some of the most powerful strands of the Conservative tradition that the Conservative Party can now renew itself but by reclaiming them: revitalising our institutions, bringing a sense of balance to the tension between private prosperity and public service provision, tackling exclusion and a more considered approach to our sense of national identity, rejecting both militant liberal interventionism

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and xenophobic little Englandism. Much of the electorate, particularly the less 'political' and less committed, wants us to do so. By taking on that task, One Nation Conservatives can once again resume a central role in the country's future.

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