

STILL

A CONSERVATIVE

By

The Rt. Hon Michael Ancram QC MP

*Conservative Beliefs and Principles for the
Twenty-first Century*

I have a simple political creed.

I believe in people, and in their individual freedom and their right to choose; I believe in promoting aspiration and merit; I believe in the smaller state, in value for taxpayers' money, and in being 'the Good Neighbour'; I believe in the family; I believe in protecting and conserving our environment; I believe in the resolute defence of our sovereignty and of the realm.



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FOREWORD

Two years ago, in the aftermath of another heavy election defeat and in the run-up to party leadership elections, I published a pamphlet 'I am a Conservative'. I wrote of growing public disengagement from politics and of the feeling of alienation between 'the political class' and the public, the suspicion that the former spoke and listened only to itself, and that in this age of spin fewer and fewer knew what our party stood for. I sought to counter this by setting out what after over forty active years in the Conservative Party – not least as Party Chairman and Deputy Leader - I saw to be the principles and beliefs which allowed me to state 'I am a Conservative'.

Two years on, the problem of 'the disengaged' is still there. For all the laudable efforts of David Cameron to present a changed face of Conservatism, the distrust of Tony Blair and New Labour is still spilling over onto the Conservatives as well. Public cynicism is pervasive. So far the accession of Gordon Brown has done little to change this.

The art of spin which served the early Blair so well now feeds that cynicism. To counter it requires policies rather than slogans, beliefs rather than positions.

The party under David Cameron's leadership is currently embarking on a welcome publication and discussion of the snowstorm of challenging policy proposals published by the various high-powered Commissions over the last two months. However good they are, they will not of themselves alter the current public perception of the Conservative Party as lacking an over all sense of vision and direction and a clear projection of what it stands for. It is vital therefore that these proposals are presented within a framework of the principles and beliefs which in every generation, however differently articulated, have formed the solid and unalterable foundations of Conservatism which have historically been the key to our electoral success.

What follows offers constructively and in the spirit of the *consigliere* such a framework. It encompasses principles which I believe are instinctively understood and accepted by the British people, and with which they can readily identify. They reflect the beating heart of conservatism, while at the same time meeting the evolving challenges of the 21st century

Above all they demonstrate beyond question that we are still the Conservative Party.

Michael Ancram QC MP
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PROLOGUE

The Conservative Party throughout its long history has essentially been a coalition. The art of its leadership is therefore that of managing coalition, of encouraging newcomers through the revolving door without at the same time driving out those who are already in.

The key is to unite rather than to divide, and that the means to unity are shared values and principles. On their own, policies can be divisive¹. Policies based on enduring conservative principles and values rarely are.

In the early 1990s values got a bad name. This was politically damaging because values hold that essential ground between on the one side the political 'isms', the politics of the ideologue, and on the other opportunism, the politics of the populist.

Political 'isms' are alien to Conservatives. For us, human beings are not designed to conform to the rigid structures which ideologies and doctrines impose, almost invariably through coercion and oppression. Moreover 'isms' are usually value-free zones.

So are the politics of opportunism, which seek by riding ever-shifting popular opinion to harness their political wagon to the fickle public mood. They are the 'user's manual' for an easy if largely pointless political ride, ducking values to avoid confrontation and treating people as mere ciphers in a psephological exercise. They are the politics of stardust where what is needed are stars.

Values are stars, and they are Conservative stars.

There is a misconception that because values are constant, values-based politics must also be unchanging and therefore anachronistic. The reality is that although Conservative values do not change, the way in which they are articulated and delivered alters to reflect the conditions of the times. For example, Churchill's key value of 'freedom' was from external oppression and threat, Thatcher's was from Trade Union domination; today's is from increasingly intrusive regulation. We live in a world of shifting circumstances, changing challenges and evolving ways of life. Politics has to be the art of the possible, flexible enough to be able to adapt to such change. Indeed life itself is a kaleidoscope of conflicting and contradictory human activity to which it is the task of Conservative politics to bring some shape, purpose and stability. In doing so, values should be the points of reference against which political direction can be set.

¹ Viz. David Willett's speech on grammar schools May 2007

Political Britain today is largely values-free. A decade of cynical sound bites, vacuous slogans and empty promises has driven them from the political stage. 'New' politics seem to be 'values-shy' and wary of the disciplines which they impose. As a result too often principles are qualified and commitment to them diluted; and the public notice. For instance it does not wash for politicians to say at one moment that they are for marriage and the family and will financially support them, and then with the next breath pledge the same support to civil unions. It insults the intelligence of the British people.

Being essentially a coalition does not mean being values free. Nor does 'modernisation' mean that the Party has to become a theatre workshop of the purely pragmatic. We should beware over-reliance on opinion surveys and focus groups. They may help to sell products; they rarely assist in selling principles. And they can seriously mislead².

Nor should we mistake political consensus within the introverted 'Westminster Village' for being 'in touch' with the real world.

Democracy is about competition and choice. Competition isn't about being the same; it is about doing something different. The British people want choice between sets of beliefs. Pursuit of consensus and the centre ground is in one sense a denial of choice and undermining of democracy. It is a journey away from ideas rather than towards them, leaving only a choice between personalities rather than principles. It is a voting turn-off. There may be many good policies and practices to be found in the centre ground but they are no substitute for genuine political beliefs.

It is suggested that elections are only won from the centre ground. Indeed they sometimes are; but Ted Heath in 1970, Margaret Thatcher in 1979, 1983 and 1987 show irrefutably that they need not be. What matters is not the 'ground', but the ideas which are on offer and the relevance they have for people's lives.

Democratic politics therefore depends on the ability of the public to ask political parties what they stand for, and to get straightforward and credible answers. Our emerging policies therefore need a framework of principles and beliefs over which they can be fitted and which can give them philosophical shape and a sense of vision.

The following pages seek to update and rearticulate that body of principles and beliefs which I originally set out two years ago.

I argued then the need to bury once and for all the sinister concept of the 'conspiracy of the political class' which has sullied the popular perception of democracy today. It is founded on the suspicion that in the end politicians of all parties, aided and abetted

² Conservative General Election Campaign 2001

by the political media and academia, only listen and talk amongst themselves and that the interests they primarily serve are their own.

The Political Class Conspiracy has been given new life recently by Gordon Brown's 'big tent' attempt to build 'a government of all the talents' by recruiting across party lines. It feeds the 'of course they are only in it for themselves' accusation, which encourages some voters to withhold their vote in protest, and others to vote for parties that are perceived as not being part of that self-serving class – often parties of the extremes.

David Cameron has successfully revived interest in the Conservative Party brand. Now he must begin to unveil its soul. He must show that it is no longer part of that political class; that it stands on its own, on its ageless values, and on its enduring beliefs and principles.

Of course as Conservatives we must show we have changed, but we must beware doing so by trashing our past or appearing ashamed of our history.

Today we have a rare opportunity to re-establish the Conservatives as the party of the whole nation, totally clear about what we stand for. The choice is not between hard and soft conservatism, nor between modern and traditional conservatism, but between true and synthetic conservatism. Claiming somehow to be the 'heirs of Blair' in an attempt to recycle and benefit from New Labour's past political successes risks merely re-labelling yesterday's rubbish. Even Gordon Brown is distancing himself from many of Blair's New Labour policies.

We must show the true soul of the Conservative Party in the 21st Century'; defending our sovereignty, strengthening individual liberty, pruning the power of the State, enabling quality support for those who need it, and putting concern for the environment at the heart of Conservatism.

What follows are my suggestions as to what that Conservative soul is made up of, that set of beliefs which can give a common and recognisable shape and character to the totality of our policies as they emerge.

I begin with this declaration. I am still a Conservative and proud of it.

A STATEMENT OF BELIEF AND PRINCIPLE

A Conservative Britain, while holding faith with our past, should be bold, ambitious and forward looking.

A Conservative Britain should *'dream of things that have not been and ask why not'*³. Why not a Britain strong but at the same time kind, resilient but at the same time tolerant, outward looking but at the same time true to its instincts and values? Why not a Britain where people count, free to control their own lives and to enjoy the fruits of their own efforts, with their rights protected and their opportunities safeguarded? Why not a Britain where local communities matter and where being 'the Good Neighbour' comes naturally?

Why not a Britain where the State does only what it must, where quality replaces dogma in the provision of public services, where low taxation is an established objective and where regulation is the exception? Why not a Britain where stewardship of our environment is an instinctive responsibility? Why not a Britain where the family within the community is valued, where the distinction between right and wrong means something, where the legitimate and historic rights of minorities are defended and the Rule of Law is respected?

And why not a Britain where defence of our sovereignty is paramount, where pride in our country is encouraged, and where our Union Jack becomes again a symbol of stability and of hope in an increasingly turbulent world?

I have a simple political creed

I believe in people, in their individual freedom and their right to choose; I believe in promoting aspiration and merit; I believe in the smaller state, in value for taxpayers' money, and in being 'the Good Neighbour'; I believe in the family; I believe in protecting and conserving our environment; I believe in the resolute defence of our sovereignty and of the realm.

These are the fundamental beliefs upon which we should build our new dynamic Conservatism for the 21st Century; and from them should flow our values and our principles.

³ George Bernard Shaw: "Some men see things that are and ask why; I dream of things that have not been and ask why not".

THE CORE VALUES

There are three core Conservative values, integrity, national pride and humanity.

Integrity

Something which must be at the heart of any Conservative democracy. Without it genuine democratic choice cannot be made nor democratic accountability properly exercised. In politics a degree of propaganda, of presenting the facts in the best possible light, is inevitable. It should nevertheless be based on truth. Today too often it is not.

Integrity should give politicians the courage to admit mistakes and accept responsibility. Let me make a start. I was wrong about Iraq. I regret that deeply. I believe that democracy is stronger when we can concede that we were wrong. Furthermore, in an accountable democracy based on integrity, being wrong should always at least lead to an offer of resignation. The constant current 'blamelessness' of the political establishment merely serves to increase public irritation and contempt.

National Pride

A self-confident nation breeds self-confident people. The current culture of historical apology has undermined that confidence. Pride in our country, in its history and its present, is a unifying value. In Britain we have much to be proud of; our rule of law and civil liberties, our historic readiness to stand for freedom against totalitarianism, and our relative lack of corruption. If we are to apologise, it should not be for our history but for the present for which we are still directly accountable. Apologising for the Irish Famine was the worst kind of gesture politics. Apologising for the mess which is Iraq today would be infinitely more meaningful.

There is no successful country in the world that is not proud of itself. We seem somehow to have lost that habit. We need to rediscover it. National pride in Britain, however, does not need dedicated national holidays or stage-managed parades. It should not be thrust down our throats. It should be a natural part of our culture and of our psyche, particularly as we have so much to be quietly proud about.

Humanity

The core belief that each individual is a unique character with his or her own fundamental nature and rights. It totally rejects the values-free concept that human beings are merely components to be manipulated by some centralised authority. Of

course '*no man is an island*'⁴, but neither is he merely a cell within a much larger organism. He has his own vision, his own aspirations, his own fears and insecurities, and his own preferred quality and pace of life. Consistent with that are the values and principles by which he will be governed. At the heart of those lies the enduring principle of freedom.

⁴ John Donne

FREEDOM

Freedom of the individual lies at the historic heart of Conservatism and sets us apart from those who believe the state knows best. It should be the driving engine of Conservatism today, only restrained when it unfairly exploits or curtails the freedom of others.

It comes in a number of forms.

Freedom to choose needs genuine variety in both economic and social life from within which choice can be exercised. If we believe in choice we must enable that variety. The enemy of choice is monopoly provision, public or private, and we as Conservatives must be its enemy. In a free society people cannot be forced to choose. Freedom to choose is about giving people the right to control their own lives if that is what they wish. Choice must be for all and not just for those who can afford it. It must be based on the Conservative principle of equality of opportunity rather than the misguided left wing aim of equality of outcome.

The promotion of aspiration and of merit is a natural concomitant of the freedom of choice. It is a profoundly conservative principle that a healthy society is one in which aspiration is encouraged and merit is recognised. It is equally profoundly unconservative to seek to circumscribe aspiration and to undermine the systems by which merit can be recognised. Where selection by merit is denied it is almost invariably replaced in one form or another by selection by wealth. For instance educational opportunity exercised on the basis of parental ability to purchase homes in the catchment areas of the best schools⁵ is far more insidious and socially divisive than selective schools. The triumph of Thatcherism was that it recognised social and parental aspirations and sought to advance rather than to limit them. The effect of aspiration is to level up. Seeking to level down may fulfil many political patterns. Conservatism is not one of them. We may not be able rapidly to re-expand the grammar school system within the UK, nor may it immediately be appropriate. That does not mean that we should either denigrate or reject it.

Freedom to decide means removing the restrictions that prevent decisions being taken. It means encouraging enterprise. It means through lower taxes leaving people with more of their own money with which to make their own decisions. It means demonstrating that government cannot and does not need to keep taxes high, and that cutting public spending and tax need not damage public services provided the structures for reform are in place. It means more positively setting out to encourage

⁵ A phenomenon well documented in the early days of neighbourhood comprehensives

enterprise and growth through lower corporate and personal taxation. The principle of lower taxes, even if for economic reasons they may have to be delayed a little, must be clearly and unambiguously enunciated.

Freedom to choose one's own lifestyle is a key element of the freedom of the individual. So long as it is within the law and is non-exploitive it should be respected. You cannot believe in the freedom of the individual and then condemn his individually chosen lifestyle. You don't have to approve the lifestyle, but you betray the value by censoring it.

The same must go for dress. The freedom of the individual must allow for the freedom to choose your own clothing so long as it does not offend the genuine sensibilities of others. I deprecate politically motivated attacks on the Muslim wearing of the veil. If it separates communities, as some have argued, it does so no more than the garb and hairstyle of the Hassidic Jew or the dreadlocks of the Rastafarian. If the veil is a genuine barrier - for instance in teaching - then for professional reasons it should not be worn. But to seek to ban it more widely is the thin end of the wedge.

This freedom depends on it not being exercised in a deliberately provocative or antagonistic way, or one which impinges on the basic freedoms of others. That should be the real test.

Freedom of expression is currently in danger of being strangled by repressive legislation and misguided dogma. Free speech lies at the heart of democracy and where it is damaged, we as Conservatives must repair it. One of the most dangerous enemies of freedom of expression is the current infestation of political correctness. The conventions of common courtesy and the existing laws against incitement, defamation, provocation and behaviour likely to lead to breaches of the peace should be more than sufficient to deal with the abuse of freedom of expression. It is a pretty pathetic society that cannot deal practically with robust language and strong opinions, and must shelter behind a panoply of illiberal restrictions.

Freedom of conscience is also central to a free society. If as Conservatives we promote and defend the freedom of expression we must similarly promote and defend the freedom of belief. People should not be asked to act against their conscience any more than they should be penalised for acting in accordance with it. The law should clearly recognise this.

Freedom from poverty is a crucial value because poverty constrains freedom. We can hardly preach freedom unless we are prepared to deal with the obstacles to it. The fight against poverty, domestically and internationally, must therefore be a clear

Conservative priority. We need to encourage and promote long term self-help rather than short term subsidy. We should be driven by a belief in social justice which, although a term often hijacked and misused by the Left, has always been an intensely Conservative tenet. We must reclaim it and revive it.

Freedom from fear is central to the quality of life. Fear of terrorism or crime or motiveless violence erodes freedom. Credible deterrence, prevention and protection must therefore be a prime Conservative aim. Fear of uncontrolled immigration undermines social cohesion. Mature and sensible discussions and decisions on sustainable levels of immigration offer the only sensible way forward. Equally the purpose of Law and Order must become once again the protection of the citizen, the champion of the victim and the ruthless pursuer of the criminal. Too often today it seems the other way round.

Freedom under the Rule of Law is another fundamental Conservative belief. A free society is not governed by force or coercion but by consent and respect. Respect for the Rule of Law and for the standards that go with it has over the last decade been badly damaged and the principle of popular consent upon which it depends dangerously eroded. We must re-establish the Rule of Law not as an engine of repression but as a guarantor of freedoms.

RIGHTS

Many but not all of these freedoms are enshrined in rights. Those that are not, such as freedom from poverty and from fear, must be embedded in aspirations. Equally there are rights which are not exactly freedoms, but which also are crucial to modern conservatism and underpin our principles.

The right to basic and longstanding civil liberties is fundamental. The right of *habeas corpus*, the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty, the right to remain silent and not to incriminate yourself, the right to due process and legal representation, and the right not to be subjected to torture or inhumane treatment; these are basic and longstanding rights. In our new age of homegrown and international terrorism these rights inevitably come into conflict with the duty of the state to protect its citizens. There will always be a temptation on the part of the state and our security services to err towards stronger protection at the expense of civil liberties. It is a temptation which should be resisted. You do not defend liberty by diminishing it. The only exceptions should be where the right to life of the citizen is genuinely threatened by a particular form of terrorism which demonstrably would be relieved by civil liberty reducing measures. Where life - which is also a right - is directly threatened, it must always be the paramount responsibility of government to protect and preserve it. The balance however will frequently be delicate. As Conservatives our presumption on such close calls should always be in favour of civil liberties. Where the security services ask for restrictions on civil liberties, if they are seriously to be considered they must produce actual evidence that such restrictions would actually improve security. The terrorist seeks through fear to make us change our way of life, to revise our principles and abandon our values. We must beware giving them that satisfaction.

The right to privacy is a very conservative value which forms part of the respect for the rights of the individual. Every individual has the right to a private life as long as that right does not offend against legitimate public interest. I am totally in favour of an irreverent rumbustious media, both electronic and written. I believe that public position or rank should never inhibit disclosure of personal details or news which are of genuine public interest. However I believe firmly that any personal details which do not meet these criteria should be protected from disclosure by law. In a Conservative Britain every citizen should legally be entitled to a private life.

The right to parenthood is not so much about the right to have children – although that may still be pertinent in communist China – but about the rights of parents to bring up their children without undue interference from the state. We are currently witnessing an erosion of these rights, partly through the ‘dependency culture’, but

also as part of the determined drive by the Nanny State to control as much of our lives as possible. Classes in 'parenting', social services meddling and even removing children from their parents, legislators banning smacking; all of these strike at the right of parenthood and are profoundly unconservative. The human race and civilisation only exist because of the historically unaided success of natural parenting! Except where for particular dysfunctional or violent reasons it is absolutely necessary, we should keep the State out of the family home.

The right to own property is something of a throwback to the political era when socialism constantly threatened to abolish property rights. That threat may currently have receded, but the principle requires restating. Confiscation without compensation offends not only against natural justice but against the fundamental tenets of conservatism.

Rights to own property should be accompanied by the right to transfer that ownership to your children on death in as an unencumbered way as possible. The cascading of wealth is a dynamic force for growth from generation to generation. Inheritance Tax stands as a major inhibitor of this. I believe this inhibition should be removed.

These rights are all part of the culture of freedom which must form the base of modern Conservatism.

There is however another more general but essential freedom.

FREEDOM FROM REGULATION

Freedom from unnecessary regulation goes hand in hand with our belief that the individual is always more free where the state is less intrusive. In the late 1970s the State had become overbearing. It took a determined Conservative leader in the 1980s to cut it back to size. In this new century we once again face a State that has become overweening, if in a somewhat different way.

Today's overblown, interfering and insensitive State is inimical to freedom. As Conservatives we must achieve a smaller State, not just by reducing bureaucracy but by shrinking the ability of the State to intervene in the lives of ordinary people and ordinary businesses. Regulations which undermine personal freedom and civil liberties must be priority targets.

We must oppose the insidious personal intrusion of ID cards, the security case for which has simply not been made. If by the time we achieve office they have happened, we should abolish them.

Deregulation is therefore fundamental. Regulation is profoundly un-Conservative. We must commit ourselves without reservation to demolishing the mountain of red tape which is strangling businesses, professionals, private providers of care and many others too. Only that which in the public interest absolutely needs regulating should be regulated. We must devise urgently a transparent and effective mechanism for stripping out unnecessary regulations and for time-limiting new ones. We need a firm and binding timetable within which to lift the State off people's backs. Without this there remains a great risk that once again the pledge of deregulation will be honoured more in the rhetoric than in action.

Decentralisation goes hand in hand with deregulation. Decisions should be taken at the most local practical level; the hospital, the school, the Council and the voluntary or private provider, and by the people who actively provide the services rather than bureaucrats. Regional assemblies - elected or unelected - must be scrapped, and unnecessary layers of bureaucracy swept away.

The small state must remain a key Conservative objective which fundamentally distinguishes us from other parties. The reason it hasn't been achieved before is that it has never really been tried. Under a Conservative government the State should only be asked to do what it demonstrably does best, and in doing so should transparently give best value for taxpayers' money. A Conservative State should ideally provide direct to the consumer the funding for high quality services in health, education and

care for the elderly, so that people can themselves choose the best from public, private and voluntary provision alike. It should also actively encourage private and voluntary provision to complement that which is provided publicly. Rather than seeking to run businesses or create jobs, it should concentrate on freeing up the market better to be able to do both.

The State and European integration are mutually incompatible. European integration means the surrender of our sovereignty, while the freedom of the citizen and the safeguarding of civil liberties depend on the preservation of it. The duty to protect and preserve our sovereignty therefore shapes my attitude to the European Union. It is why I fundamentally oppose joining the Euro. It is why I fundamentally oppose a European Constitution, about which more later⁶. It is why I fundamentally oppose a European superpower with its own army and diplomatic service. It is why I believe that the only Europe compatible with the protection of our sovereignty and the smaller state is a European partnership of sovereign nations. I believe as a Conservative that anything more than that should be opposed.

There are those who argue that in the modern globalist world the smaller state is a chimera. As a Conservative I profoundly disagree. It may not be easy, but with iron political will and steely determination it can be achieved. It will require the unravelling of the all-pervading dependency culture which has taken such deep root in our country over the last generation. It is probably the greatest test of Conservatism in the years ahead, and I come back to vital aspects of it later.

⁶ See pages 44-45

COMMUNITY, THE GOOD NEIGHBOUR AND THE FAMILY

Community is a concept that often raises hackles amongst Conservatives on the grounds that it smacks of socialism and of social engineering. Once again the Left have hijacked a sensible concept and turned it into something unacceptable to Conservatives. We must reclaim the concept. Human beings are by nature social animals, and while our individual freedom is paramount, the means of our coexistence still needs consensually to be governed by the Rule of Law. That coexistence finds its natural expression in 'community'.

True 'community' is far removed from the vast homogenous centrally controlled 'society' beloved of the left. I believe that, whether in the country or city, we coexist within a circle of friendships and relationships of a nature and size within we individually can feel comfortable. That circle is 'my community', which prospers not from dictated social structures and rules but from its self-generated interdependence. Community is a natural coming together of individuals which gains its strength from the very fact that the coming together is instinctive. Today, when we live in a global village, it finds its essence in the coming together of manageable groups of people without a need for formal boundaries.

Sense of community is a realisation that if we are to have a happier and more cohesive society we all owe each other our support and help. Ideal communities should be like villages, big enough to be self-supporting but small enough for each of us to know everyone else.

That concept of Community is central to the Britain which I as a Conservative aspire to; interdependent, full of variety, interactive, and self-supporting. Conservatives should encourage such communities to speak for themselves and to take responsibility for their local aspirations. We should promote and support them as the base on which to construct a freer and less restricted society. We should listen to their anxieties and respond to their very real frustrations which otherwise can fester into resentment. We should shield them from the ravages of central bureaucracy which currently threaten to undermine and destroy them – especially in the countryside.

As a Conservative I believe that within the 'community' we not only have a duty but a right to be responsible as well. Caring in our communities has always been a Conservative quality. It has been undermined by the growth of the Nanny state, by restrictive regulations and downright bureaucratic hostility. Its rebirth can be driven by another Conservative value - good-neighbourliness.

The concept of the good neighbour is found in self-generated motivation to help others less able to help themselves without the State having to tell us to do so. It is an essentially conservative concept within which caring for others is not a dogma but an instinct. It is society from the bottom up rather than from the top down. It also means that while public services are vital to the nation's wellbeing they must never be allowed to suppress voluntary 'good-neighbourly caring'. Indeed they should encourage it. If they do not, they will help create a society which will increasingly walk by on the other side.

The Good Neighbour is not just at home. Modern communications bring distant humanitarian disasters into our sitting rooms and we are no longer, either emotionally or practically, untouched by them. Our Conservative aim must be to ensure that the help we give penetrates the web of corruption and tyranny which too often is the backcloth to many such disasters, and actually reaches the victims in a way which delivers or enables effective relief.

The family is the basic building block from which the community grows and within which the principles of good neighbourliness are first inculcated. It is of course not an exclusively Conservative concept; but its values are Conservative values. I am delighted that David Cameron has already invested so much political capital in it. The family is essentially about marriage, not only the commitment of a man to a woman and vice versa but also their joint commitment to the challenges of parenthood. I will talk more broadly later about stewardship. However parenthood is the most basic form of stewardship, providing the foundations for the moral and ethical spectrum of the next generation.

For Conservatives there can be no fudging the issue of marriage. There are of course other committed relationships outside marriage and we should welcome them for their commitment. But they are not the equivalent of marriage. Giving them that equivalence does not enhance them; instead it diminishes the value of real marriage. And in doing so it damages the concept of family and eventually of community as well.

Conservatives must champion the family; as the foundation stone of a stable society; as a source of emotional stability; as a starting place for advice and understanding; and as the first teacher of values and of what is right and wrong. If the current decline of the family is to be halted, incentives to promote and encourage it must be immediate, tangible and substantial.

This is not discriminatory; it merely reflects our appreciation of the contribution that the family makes to the stability and consistency of the community.

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship is an old-fashioned conservative value, but it has never been more relevant than today. It is the simple concept that as well as being beneficiaries of the responsible actions of our predecessors we owe that same degree of responsibility to the generations which will follow us. In an acquisitive age where the possession of the moment reigns supreme, stewardship is an awkward companion. No more so than in that area where it is most important and relevant today - the environment.

The definition of stewardship is that each generation hands on to its successors that which it was itself bequeathed in at least as good but preferably better condition than when it was inherited. In terms of standards of living, the current political generation can feel reasonably satisfied that they have delivered on their stewardship; in terms of quality of life we cannot.

In the pursuit of materialistic reward the current generation has not only largely ignored but often contemptuously rejected the legacy of our affluent society which increasingly threatens fundamentally to alter the world in which we live. That legacy is global warming.

The challenge of climate change is real. The exact causes of global warming may still be a matter for scientific debate. There is no scientific question however that our environment is changing. As Conservatives we have as our name suggests a duty to conserve, protect and enhance our natural environment. We have a clear duty of stewardship towards those who will come after us. We have no right to ruin the world in which they will have to live. *'We do no inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children'*⁷

Nor can we any longer expect nature to solve the problems we generate, nor any longer rely on nature's recuperative processes alone to combat the poisoning of the air we breathe, the earth we depend on for sustenance and the water upon which we rely for survival. We can no longer count on nature's regenerative ability to counter the profligacy with which our essential resources of water, of oxygen producing plants and of minerals are being exploited and expended.

We can no longer sit back and watch our climate changing, the icecaps and glaciers melting and our ecology altering, without urgently exploring how this damaging process can be mitigated. We can no longer continue to consume energy without facing up to the hard options for producing and using it.

⁷ Native American proverb

As Conservatives we must take immediate action to reduce pollution and more effectively to manage waste. We must grasp the nettle of energy generation to

ensure sufficiency of supply in the least environmentally damaging ways – including alternative and nuclear sources. We must be at the forefront of responding to the growing challenges of climate change.

Philosophically and practically the conservationist agenda should be ours. We must capture it.

Stewardship requires that even though the critical impact of global warming and of our affluent society may be some time off, the remedial action needs to be taken now. Such action will be uncomfortable and costly because stewardship of the environment is no soft option. While it may today have a helpfully fashionable public image, there should be no doubt that once the practical implications of the necessary response are understood 'on the street', it will be a hard political initiative to sell. Stewardship requires that we do not shirk it.

Stewardship is like being a trustee; the present must be the servant of the future. However hard, we must do what is needed to hand our planet over to the next generation in a state which can survive the challenge of climate change and which is contributing comprehensively to the resolution of it.

Climate change is however only one element of the current challenge to our environment. There are other major threats which equally challenge our Conservative duty of stewardship.

The rape of our environment is something which as Conservatives we can no longer afford to ignore. The wanton intention to concrete over yet more green land; the systematic erosion of the rural way of life; the encouraged population shift from north to south; the sponsored imbalance in conservation; the ongoing extinction of native species; these cumulatively will seriously damage our environment, not least in terms of the pressures which they will impose on essential local resources such as water and green-space.

The value of stewardship is high. It also defines the purpose of another increasingly undervalued element in politics.

The concept of public service is now generally treated with disdain. In today's competitive and unforgiving world, the concept of serving others within one's community, not for gain or advancement but because it is putting something back into society, does seem anachronistic. It is certainly a far cry from the multi-million

salaries of top sportsmen and businessmen. It confronts the virus of the celebrity culture. It is a simple statement that serving one's fellow human beings when one is in a position to do so is worthwhile. It is a tragedy for the values of our age that it is now so often mocked. It is a Conservative value worth resuscitating.

RESPECT AND TOLERANCE

Respect recently has become a much overused and consequently debased political word. It is however a highly Conservative concept.

It is about esteem, about being valued. If we believe in the individual, then each individual should have the capacity to value the other. 'Parity of esteem' allows for differences, but ensures that those differences are managed by an acceptance that each has the right to be different and deserves respect rather than bigoted vilification.

In divided societies it is difficult to achieve, even more so under the cosh of multiculturalism. Lack of respect, lack of parity of esteem, can lead within our society to smouldering resentments and ultimately to violence. Conversely parity of esteem has the potential to defuse even the worst of situations, holding within it the promise of advancing progress towards peace in a highly divided and explosive situation - as indeed in Northern Ireland in the end it did.

Tolerance, the concomitant of respect, is simply the willingness to recognise and respect the differing beliefs or practices of others. As Conservatives we make it a central tenet of our beliefs that we are all different and that no amount of social engineering will alter that reality. Tolerance demands not that we should all be the same, but that we should by interaction and dialogue identify and resolve our misunderstandings at the same time as admitting our differences and working to manage them. It can encompass benign multiculturalism, while rejecting the antagonistic variety which we too often see today.

Restrictions on immigration are absolutely essential to the delivery of both respect and tolerance. Where substantial demographic movements or unsustainable levels of immigration – whether legal or illegal – occur, tolerance is inevitably placed under enormous pressure, and respect becomes even less easy to deliver. Pressure on housing and other public services creates a sense of threat to indigenous populations, and that fear quickly undermines parity of esteem and the will to feel tolerant.

A Conservative Government must control such demographic movements and such waves of immigration within the bounds of that which is socially, economically and administrationally sustainable. At a time of growing migratory pressure, open borders are a recipe for intolerance and tension. We need to regain control of our borders and impose clear and fair limits based on a robust assessment of sustainability. Failure to do so will contribute to growing resentment within communities and will feed the agendas of those within them who wish to foment trouble.

SOVEREIGNTY, SECURITY AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The prime duty of Government is the preservation of our national sovereignty and the freedom of our citizens. From which flows that other central duty, the defence of the realm.

Preserving our sovereignty is central to our Conservatism. Sovereignty belongs to the people, held in trust by Parliament, and only to be surrendered with the express consent of the British people. Temporarily pooling our sovereignty for strategic purposes - as in Nato - is acceptable. Permanently surrendering it – to the European Union – is not.

There can be no further surrenders of sovereignty to the EU – except with the express consent of the people in a full referendum. The recent Treaty/Constitution agreed by European leaders on 23rd June clearly transfers constitutional powers from the UK to the EU, and undoubtedly further diminishes our sovereignty. It is unthinkable that it could or should⁸ be ratified by Parliament without a referendum. The only possible reason for failing to put it to the British people in a referendum would be the informed fear that the people would reject it. Refusing a referendum in the current circumstances would be an abject abdication of democratic accountability. It must not be allowed to succeed. If we however are denied a referendum on the constitutional treaty, however it is described, then we should enter the next election pledged first to repudiating this inadequately ratified treaty and secondly, recognising that the integrationist ratchet has taken yet another apparently irretrievable turn, to holding a wider referendum on our status within the European Union as embodied within this fundamental constitutional treaty. The purpose of such a referendum would be to seek a specific democratic mandate for fundamental renegotiation of our position within Europe, and indeed of Europe itself.

Our position on Europe must be clear and unambiguous. We must retrieve those areas of sovereignty, such as fishing and trade, which we should never have surrendered in the first place. As Conservatives we must never forgo our fundamental rights of self-determination. Even in an increasingly interdependent world Britain alone must decide what is good for Britain.

We are prepared to be in Europe, but only on terms which protect our sovereignty. That means we can never accept the Euro nor a European Constitution designed ultimately to create a country called Europe. We must reject the concept of a European Army or a European Foreign and Defence Policy or a European President.

⁸ As argued and pledged in the Labour Party Election manifesto 2005

We want a Europe which is a genuine partnership of sovereign nations cooperating and competing within a free market.

In pursuing this we do not need to be rude or aggressive, but courteously firm, declaring without histrionics our bottom line and exploring ways of achieving it. We do not need to threaten, but equally and calmly we must make clear that we have a choice; preferably to be active participants in a Europe which is a genuine partnership of sovereign nations, but if that option is no longer available to us then to get out taking our cheque book with us. There will be no need for rancour or vituperation, just a civil parting of the ways. One thing is clear. We cannot remain part of a Europe where the agenda of 'ever closer union' remains active, where the ratchet is one way, and where inch by painful inch we are being dragged against the will of the British people into a country called Europe – and at the same time paying through the nose for the privilege.

The defence of the realm is essential to preserving sovereignty. We must retain our ability to deter attack, and our deterrence must be both proportionate and credible. We must be able to defend our borders against both asymmetric and conventional aggression. We must be able to intervene to protect our essential interests overseas if they are threatened, and that alone should be the criterion for overseas military adventure. Current international commitments, such as Iraq, should be urgently tested against that basic criterion. In an international context Nato must remain the cornerstone of our security, and any enhanced European military dimension must be within Nato and not outside it.

The national interest must be the governing principle of our foreign and security policy. The national interest is primarily grounded in the preservation of our sovereignty and the defence of the realm. However it goes wider.

We must retain our freedom of action to pre-empt threats before they become lethal or severely threatening. Pre-emption can of course be military, economic, political or diplomatic. Alongside this we must continue to participate in worldwide initiatives to combat international terrorism, to forestall humanitarian crises in whose backwash we would otherwise become caught up, and to protect the availability of essential resources, particularly those relating to our future energy needs.

To achieve these international policy objectives we must remain at the heart of the Transatlantic Alliance. Our special relationship with the US is based on much more than political personalities and unquestioning British subservience. We must work urgently to restore the frank and mutual exchange of advice and information upon which that relationship has always at its strongest been based.

We must also in the future beware becoming involved in foreign military initiatives on the basis of questionable intelligence, as we did in Iraq. We must never again risk the lives of British troops for nothing more than to save the faces of discredited political leaders.

International relations like politics are inevitably the art of the possible. That does not mean that we should not seek a degree of moral consistency. If we condemn and act against ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, we should not turn our backs on the same horrors in Zimbabwe. If we impose sanctions against Iran because of her nuclear ambitions we must do the same against any other putative nuclear proliferators - even if they are our friends. If we actively seek to export and promote democracy we must recognise and respect the outcomes of it. We cannot tell the Palestinians to hold elections and then punish them for the result. If we make international aid contingent upon 'good governance', then we must be consistent in its application. And we must never again leave it up to the potential beneficiaries themselves to assess good governance.

We should also remember that it is nearly always a better use of our time to talk to our enemies than our friends.

Matching available resources to policy objectives must be a firm rule. We must never again pursue international objectives without the resources and means to achieve them. We must never undertake military initiatives without adequate equipment and backing. We must increase frontline capacity, equip our forces with what they require to carry out the commitments we ask them to undertake on our behalf, and provide them with sufficient training. For Conservatives the protection and defence of our country and its interests must be paramount.

THE MEANS OF DELIVERY

These are the principles and beliefs which I believe can and should drive the Conservative Party forward. However none of them mean anything in practice if there is not a credible system for delivering them. The institutions of state by which they can be delivered are therefore crucial.

The last ten years have seen those institutions badly undermined and in some cases neutered. We must determine to restore and revive them. For a start we should restate our confidence in them.

Our constitutional monarchy is an institution which as Conservatives we must strongly support. To have a head of state who is above politics but available to provide unique insight and advice, is invaluable - and unachievable in any other way. Any form of selection or election would politically contaminate an otherwise apolitical embodiment of the spirit and culture of our nation. As Conservatives we must fight to defend the Monarchy against an insidious coalition of covert republicans and sensation-seeking political commentators. This is more important than ever under the salami slicing attack on the institution of monarchy being pursued by the new Brown Administration. We are lucky to have a monarch who is a living embodiment of the qualities of that institution. That might not always be the case, so we must ensure we have an institution of monarchy that remains strong enough to sustain whatever personality is its incumbent.

The Union is not just a concept. It has over three centuries developed its own institutional personality, been branded as an icon by its Union flag and given life by its Union Parliament. Belief in the intrinsic value of the Union has long been a Conservative cause. Historically it gave us the confidence to build an empire and a real role in the world. For all the instability created by devolution, the Union still remains today greater than the sum of its parts. The Union is not about artificial Britishness. It is about a political, economic and military partnership which works. Like the British constitution - other than the somewhat dated provisions of the Act of Union - it is an unwritten institution which finds its essential balance in the concept of constitutional fairness, national cooperation and a sense of pride in being British. Leaving aside the emotional element, it is about our British institutions and the central role they play in our national life. Let us look at these institutions.

The UK Parliament represents all the elements of the United Kingdom. Disparate national sizes and economies inevitably lead to tensions and rivalries within the Parliament. Nevertheless in its strange disputative manner this Parliament emerges as the keystone of the Union. Despite devolution, and the existence of national

parliaments and assemblies, the Westminster Parliament remains the embodiment of our unwritten constitution and the voice of the United Kingdom as a whole. Its influence and reputation has recently been diminished. It must be a Conservative priority to rebuild that influence and restore that reputation as a bulwark against those forces who seek to destroy the Union.

Our Armed Forces are also an innate element of the Union. They include English, Scottish and Welsh regiments, yet they are British to their core. Our British Armed Forces, Army, Navy and RAF, embody the concept of the Union. Distinct in their culture and their pride, their driving inspiration is the service they give to their country, and that country is the United Kingdom. Their allegiance to the Crown of the United Kingdom reflects their role within the Union. They too have come under the cosh in terms of manpower, equipment and resources over these last years, to the extent that there is now nothing in reserve⁹. As well as needing to rebuild and re-resource them to continue to play their vital role in defence of the British interest across the world, we as Conservatives must ensure that they have the strength and capacity to go on providing the backbone of the Union.

The Law Courts cumulatively underwrite our ability to deliver our values as a nation. Despite current attempts to circumscribe them with codified charters of so-called human rights, and to pre-empt by draconian legislation their position as the defenders and deliverers of civil freedoms and liberties, they have managed to retain their basic independence. They too now find themselves under increasing siege from the Executive, their judgements questioned, their sentences dictated. As Conservatives we fundamentally believe in a totally independent judiciary as the guardians of our law and of our rights. We must restore and entrench that crucial independence.

Local Government is another useful institutional counterforce to the growing power of central government. It serves an important and irreplaceable purpose in terms of democratic accountability. It is near enough to people to be held properly to account. Unlike Whitehall it understands local issues, and can feel the brunt of people's displeasure. It is by no means perfect, but it brings democracy down to people at a level where the interface is a real one. As Conservatives we should robustly champion local government against its insidious and constant detractors. We must resist attempts to centralise local government which only serve to make public accessibility more remote.

The Police are too often overlooked as an institution which safeguards our freedoms and delivers our values. Over these last years they have not always received the support and encouragement which they require and deserve. Our police as well as being under funded have found themselves literally hog-tied by red tape. They are no longer able to deliver the hands-on style of community policing which previously

⁹ General Richard Dannatt , leaked memo 21.7.07

created respect and established law and order. Artificial targets and politically correct priorities have diminished respect for and confidence in the police. Given that respect for the law lies at the very heart of Conservatism, this is a situation which must be reversed. We cannot put a price on either justice or security. As a matter of urgency Conservatives must support the need for more effective policing. We must also in pursuit of this ensure that appointments and operational decisions are strictly non-partisan.

The NHS as an institution is psychologically our insurance and our comfort blanket. We expect great things of it. As it has become increasingly top heavy it has proved less able to live up to those expectations. As Conservatives we must break up this monolith and give it back to its professionals, the doctors and nurses, who really understand the nature and depth of the priorities facing the service and the patients which rely on it. Non-medical professional management may in most cases be necessary, but it should be in the service of the medical professionals rather than as the professionals' masters. If private investment can help to improve the NHS, then we should embrace it.

ACCOUNTABILITY

These are among the key institutions which can help to deliver and to underpin the principles and beliefs of Conservatism. That mechanism of delivery and underpinning must in a Conservative nation never be isolated from democratic accountability to the people. In many cases this will be achieved through the ballot box on the basis of transparent manifestos. Sometimes that cannot be. Such cases underline the need for a free, irreverent and rumbustious press. As Conservatives we must never fear an investigative media. The last ten years, at least until a few months ago, have demonstrated the encouragement a subservient media can give to the unbridled, self-serving and ultimately irresponsible hubris of an over-feted leader. We must try to ensure that this can never happen again. Where appropriate we must strengthen the ability of Parliament genuinely to hold the Executive to account.

A RENEWED CONSERVATIVE PARTY

It is sometimes suggested that the Conservative Party's problems can be resolved by 'a makeover'.

Successful democratic parties constantly have to change to meet emerging challenges and changed circumstances. But change for change's sake is a vacuous process, swiftly seen through by the electorate. That is why we should reject talk of a need for a 'Clause Four' moment. We have never been a dogmatic Party and we have no Clause Four.

Any change must be justified, real and necessary – and not just because the political elite demand it. A renewed Conservative Party must show that it understands the aspirations of a changing country rather than simply reflecting the machinations of an ultimately out-of-touch Political class.

The Conservative Party must restore integrity to the electoral system. We must ensure that voter registration is genuine. We must insist that voters vote in polling stations except where there are genuine and exceptional reasons for postal and proxy votes. We must remove the new postal vote regulations which have publicly been shown to be open to electoral fraud. We must as a matter of urgency re-establish public confidence in our electoral process.

The Conservative Party must become more representative. We must reflect the society within which we live and which we seek to govern. That can only be achieved by expanding and broadening our membership and our parliamentary representation to reflect new and changing interests. We need to reach out beyond our natural and traditional supporters to attract a new following, one which in fact already shares our principles but has not yet felt sufficiently in tune with us to support them. That however does not mean abandoning our natural and traditional supporters and the values for which they not only stand but which sustained them through the darkest days our party has faced. The Party should build on its traditional support, not replace it.

Extending democracy within the Conservative Party has to be part of this. If we are to demonstrate our political relevance to a wider following, then we need to demonstrate the growing breadth and influence of our Party membership. We should be looking to extend the active franchise of our membership in a way which would attract the enlistment of a much wider representation. A vibrant Conservative Party is one in which its members can actively participate in its growth and development as opposed to being sidelined.

A renewed Conservative Party must therefore be a party of mass membership. If we seek to reach out to the electorate at large, then we must also show we can do so within our own party as well.

CONCLUSION

The secret of the longevity of the Conservative Party is that it does not change its principles; it rearticulates them in a contemporary context. I am still a Conservative because I have never changed or abandoned my principles. I am still a Conservative because I believe passionately that those principles can lead a better life for all the British people. Above all I am still a Conservative because I love my country.

I detest New Labour's process of destructive change; from a decent Britain to a cynical and venal one; from a Britain of values to a Britain with no standards, no responsibility and no shame. It enrages me to see the furtive destruction of civil liberties and democratic accountability which are the hard-won birthright of the British people. I am sickened by the Spin, the half-truths and the blatant deception which now poison the well of public truth.

I do not buy the proposition that the accession of Gordon Brown has changed all that. The words may be a little different, but they still emanate from the longtime stentorian second-in-command of the New Labour Flagship.

I am still a Conservative because I want to see a Britain of which I can be proud again, a Britain in charge of her own destiny, a Britain in which values matter and people are paramount.

I am still a Conservative – and I am proud of it. I want to see a Party that is Conservative and proud of it too. Above all I want to see a country that is once again Conservative, and proud of being British.

