

CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES

Blue Skies Ahead

Recapturing the Missing Generation

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POLICY STUDY N^o 156

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57 Tufon Street, London SW1P 3QL
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October 1997

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

- By the time the Conservatives will be fighting the next general election, the Party will, on a straight line trend, have ceased to exist. It will have no members. Most will have just thrown in the towel. One quarter of them will have died.
- The 1997 general election was a disaster for the Conservative Party which, for the first time in its history, is no longer a national political force. Yet the devastation was delivered when the Conservatives came within 1 million votes of their 1992 total. The situation is desperate, but not irredeemable.
- The Conservative Party has lost the goodwill of a whole generation, spanning broadly the 18-45 age group. This 'Missing Generation' does not recognise and does not like the Conservative Party, is voting for it in ever smaller numbers, and now accounts for under 20% of its membership.
- The Conservatives have actively sold themselves as a Party of warm beer and cricket in an age when today's icons favour diet coke and roller-blading. At the same time, the Labour Party has developed a new brand of extraordinary power.
- Party members matter: they can (and have on probably six occasions since 1945) determined the outcome of a general election. Yet the majority of the Conservative Party's members are old and out of touch with the aspirations and cultural reference points of the majority of the British people today.
- In 1949, there were 160,000 Young Conservatives. Today, there are 3,000. The Party's entire national youth membership is, numerically, more exclusive than Annabel's.
- The Party is failing to retain the support of women voters; given the increasing contribution that women are now making to all aspects of commercial and professional life, it is more important than ever before that active steps are taken to reverse the fall in support of this essential constituency.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Yet there is every reason for young people to support the Conservative Party: it is, after all, the Party of freedom and free enterprise; of mobility and change; of independence and self-determination. In the last 18 years, it has created the economic conditions in which the UK has created more jobs than the rest of the EU put together. It has enabled more young people than ever before to own their own homes; and enabled more young people to go to university than ever before.

Recommendations

- The Conservative Party can recover from its humiliating defeat. To do so will require extensive surgery – both invasive (in terms of party organisation) and cosmetic (in terms of its image).
- The Conservative Party must recreate its reputation as a Party which young people will want to join for reasons of both self-advancement and fun.
- The Party must make it easier for young professionals – and young women in particular – to participate both in the Party and in politics generally. This will involve the overhaul of its internal methods (ranging from its procedures for selecting candidates to the scheduling of Party meetings) and its stance on the *modus operandi* of political life.
- The Party must recognise that Jeffrey Archer and Andrew Lloyd-Webber are not role models for today's youth. It must revolutionise its approach to communicating with youth.
- The Party structure must be completely reformed. This will involve:
 - the creation of a centrally and professionally managed, locally accountable, national party organisation;
 - the sharing of power with accountability, particularly in the relationship between the Parliamentary Party and the local parties;
 - the evolution of the parliamentary party, and the active membership, more closely to reflect modern British society as a whole.
- Above all, the Conservative Party must recognise that modest reform is not an option. Such a path would condemn it to the wilderness of opposition for the foreseeable future. The new leader's Green Paper on Party reform therefore deserves the urgent support of a Party which needs to be transformed before it is ready again for office.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STRANGE, IMMINENT, LITERAL DEATH OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

What has gone wrong, and what to do

THERE IS A HOLE IN THE HEART of the Conservative Party which has been torn wide open by the unprecedented general election defeat of May 1997 and Labour's deft performance in office.

The Conservative Party has lost the goodwill of a whole generation, spanning broadly the 18-45 age group. This 'Missing Generation' does not recognise and does not like the Conservative Party, is voting for it in ever smaller numbers, and now accounts for under 20% of its membership.¹ The Party is becoming dependent on the heroic but geriatric contribution of a dwindling membership and machine.

By the time the Conservatives will next be fighting for government the Party will, on a straight line trend, have ceased to exist.² It will have no members. Most will have thrown in the towel. One quarter of them will have died.³

This paper sets out an analysis of the state of the Party today. It shows, in particular, how far the Party has lost touch with the Missing Generation, and how this group's values are shaping the way that Britain sees itself. It shows how the alienation of this Missing Generation has eroded to desperate levels the ability of the Conservative Party to form a government in the foreseeable future.

The remedy for the Party's loss of electoral appeal will require the renewal of its presentation and organisation. It requires the introduction of unprecedented democracy at the centre of the national Conservative machine, the inclusion of non-politicians in the senior councils and management of the national Party, and the creation of a marketing infrastructure designed specifically to attract the Missing Generation.

¹ *True Blues* by Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd, and Jeremy Richardson, OUP, 1994, pp. 51.

² Ibid. cites a forecast Conservative membership of 100,000 by 2000. In fact the Party has lost an average 64,000 members a year over the post war era (Parris, *Times*, 6th June 1997).

³ Ibid. cites an average age of 62 in 1994 (pp. 225), so the average member may be 65 rather than the 64 widely quoted in 1997. The result of this age weighting is that "45% of the Party's existing members will be dead in 10 years if actuarial projections are correct", *Members' Rights*, The Bow Group, September 1997.

BLUE SKIES AHEAD

The Missing Generation's new rules for Britain

Overwhelmingly, the aspirations of most British people have become those of younger people. In business or leisure, the language, dress and manners of today's culture are those of the young. Yet this is a group whose idiom and manners are almost completely alien to the Conservative Party, notwithstanding the youth and example of its new leader.

The Party's aspirations can seem frozen in a parody of the well-to-do of the 1950s, an era not thought groovy even by its average new member – someone who will be 54 years old.⁴ **Indeed, the Conservatives have actively promoted themselves as a Party of warm beer and cricket in an age when today's icons favour diet coke and roller-blading:**

Fifty years from now Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools-fillers and – as George Orwell said – 'old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist'.⁵

If the chief executive of a public company presented this as its 'mission statement', s/he would suffer a Gerald Ratner-like nemesis.⁶ As John Major did.

Today, the Conservatives face a New Labour leadership which has captured the attention of many high profile former Conservatives in business and the arts. New Labour, through the example of Tony and Cherie Blair,⁷ offers a seductive vision of what being young and successful is about. The Labour Party has caught the *zeitgeist*, a powerful electoral asset whose significance has yet to be grasped by the Conservative grass roots.

One need only compare the Major vision above with a statement by Tony Blair to see the paradigm shift consciously sought by New Labour:

I believe it is time to show a fresh face to the world and reshape Britain as one of the 21st century's most forward thinking and modern nations.⁸

⁴ *True Blues*, pp. 225.

⁵ Rt Hon John Major MP, Maastricht speech, 1993, quoted in *Anyone for England*, Clive Aslet, Little Brown and Company, 1997, pp. 25.

⁶ Gerald Ratner famously referred to his products as 'crap' in a speech given at the Institute of Directors. His jewellery retail business collapsed shortly afterwards.

⁷ *The Times* of 9th September 1997 reported: 'Cherie Blair is voted the top public role model for sixth-formers at Britain's leading girls' schools....Diana, Princess of Wales was second.'

⁸ The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Millennium speech, 17th September 1997.

THE STRANGE, IMMINENT, LITERAL DEATH OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Re-fashioning the Conservative Party to capture its Missing Generation

The Conservatives have shown they can come back from electoral disaster, if not yet one as bad as this. After 1945, the Party transformed the way it worked, rebuilt its candidates list on new principles,⁹ and recruited over 1 million new members in 1947¹⁰ alone, five times the current total Conservative membership.¹¹ It still took two terms to regain office.

It would be folly to think that reform any less extensive would work within a single term. The dimensions of this reform will have to test the traditional limits of what the Conservative Party feels about itself. The Conservatives will need to re-fashion themselves for a Missing Generation. They will need to look deep into the 'blue skies'.¹²

⁹ The 1949 Maxwell-Fyffe reforms banned the practice of wealthy parliamentary candidates and MPs of donating large sums to constituency associations, or effectively the 'purchasing of commissions' which had ceased some 70 years earlier in the British Army.

¹⁰ The Rt Hon William Hague MP, *A Fresh Future for the Conservative Party*, 23 July 1993.

¹¹ We assume throughout the lower end of current Party estimates of membership of 200,000 – 400,000, based on the low level of participation actually expected to warrant listing as a member of many Conservative Associations. There are no central membership records, and local estimates of membership can exaggerate by over 100%. The Party printed just 300,000 ballot papers for the 1997 autumn leadership consultation exercise, which suggests that the 'official' figure of 400,000 was known to be misleading. Forecasts for the ballot response rate – which will mark the effective benchmark of any meaningful membership level – were as low as 100,000 (Source: *Sunday Times*, 21st September 1997).

¹² 'Blues skies' research sets aside prior assumptions and seeks to change the parameters of what is previously assumed possible. INSEAD, a leading European business school, has begun to talk about 'value innovation' as offering some of the same characteristics in a business environment.

A BRAND IN CRISIS: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN 1997

A non-brand is a commodity. It cannot command a premium. It is no different from its competitors. The name has no equity: it cannot be sold for use by someone else. It demeans the buyer and the seller

Professor Gary Davies, Manchester Business School¹³

THE 1997 GENERAL ELECTION delivered a number of firsts. Everything changed. Even the polls were right.

The scale of the disaster redefined what the Conservative Party can claim to be. For the first time in its history, it is not a national political force. It may remain Unionist in name, but it does not exist, in parliamentary terms, in Wales and Scotland – where the Conservatives had an overall majority of parliamentary seats as recently as 1955.

In England, where the Conservatives hung onto 164 seats, the Party lost seats where wealth and deference had buttressed the Party for 200 years: Norfolk, Yorkshire, and Gloucestershire. The market towns, the big cities, and the centres of academic excellence nearly all voted Labour.

The Conservative Parliamentary Party has all but ceased to exist in any region in the UK which produces things, money or ideas.

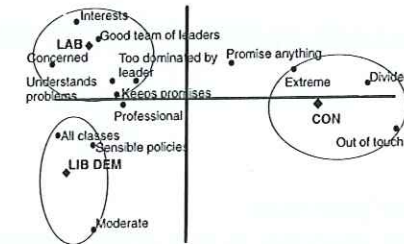
What is striking is that the devastation was delivered when the Conservatives came within 1 million votes of their 1992 total. Tactical voting certainly played a part, but it indicates that the Conservatives did least well where they had to do best: among swing voters distributed not only in marginal seats but also in formerly safe seats.

This sorry state is the last stage in the decline of the Conservative Party. The Party's credibility is now severely damaged with the electorate. A study by MORI in April 1997 showed that the most defined characteristic of the Conservative Party with the electorate was being 'out of touch'. The other key values were perceived to be

¹³ Quoted in *Brandometer*, The Quentin Bell Organisation.

A BRAND IN CRISIS: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN 1997

'division' and 'extremity'. It takes years of failure to get a brand as bad as that in the following perceptual map:



Source: MORI/*The Times* based on a survey of 1,118 adults aged 18+, April 1997

Labour, by contrast, was felt to 'understand problems' and to be 'concerned'. This was a party with which people felt there was an emotional dialogue, a party which had roots in the country at large.

New Labour has what would be regarded in the business world as a 'to-die-for' marketing asset, one which, translated into a political environment, should be profoundly disturbing for Conservative Party strategists. As the advertising guru David Ogilvy has commented:

A company with an emotional difference can potentially demand a premium forever.¹⁴

On the strength of its first six months in office, New Labour has done nothing to damage the premium it built for itself over the previous five years.

¹⁴ David Ogilvy, quoted in *Brandometer*, op. cit.

DEAD ROOTS LOSE ELECTIONS: WHY MEMBERS MATTER

The case against the grass roots

SOME COMMENTATORS ARGUE that the level of Party membership and effectiveness of local campaigning is not significant in terms of the result of general elections.

This was a particularly common view after 1992 when the Conservatives managed to win a marginal victory despite losing over two thirds of the councils they had controlled in 1979.¹⁵

The 1992 Nuffield report seemed to support this interpretation:

It is hard to locate evidence of great benefits being reaped by the increasingly sophisticated and computerised local campaigning.¹⁶

Even after 1997, Conservative commentators such as Matthew Parris, a former MP, maintained that party organisation is irrelevant to political performance, that political participation is generally in decline, and that membership grows in response to national performance, not vice versa:

There is no simple correlation between the size and vigour of a party's national membership and its propensity to win elections. In 1992 the Tory Party's membership stood at its lowest level for more than 50 years. That year, more people voted Conservative than ever before. In 1974, the year Harold Wilson won both general elections, the Conservative Party had five times as many members as the Labour Party.¹⁷

This assertion of course ignores the contribution of the membership directly to the financial health of political parties. In a rare public disclosure on Conservative Party

¹⁵ House of Commons Library, Paper 97/82, 27th June 1997, table 4.

¹⁶ *The British General Election* of 1987, David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, Macmillan, 1992 quoted in *True Blues*, pp. 190.

¹⁷ Matthew Paris, *The Times*, op. cit.

DEAD ROOTS LOSE ELECTIONS: WHY MEMBERS MATTER

funding, it was revealed that 70% of the Party's £26 million income in 1992 was based on the fund-raising initiatives of the associations.¹⁸

Some commentators are more willing to concede that money matters in politics, a contention borne out by numerous anecdotes¹⁹ as well as the spend/swing analyses. But there is also plenty of persuasive evidence that, in the street warfare of winning hearts and minds, effective and numerous activists can make the difference between winning and losing general elections.

'From little acorns...'; how Party members win elections

How low turnouts make activism decisive

In the United States, where television campaigning is a dominant element in the political marketing mix, one would expect that local activity would be marginal in congressional and senatorial elections. But this is not backed up by market research:

...the bulk of the research [in the US] supports the proposition that local campaigns by party members influence the vote.²⁰

In the UK there is little research, but low ceilings on local campaign expenditure and national television campaigning make personal effort inherently more significant. Local effort does seem to make a sizeable difference – certainly to council performance where turnouts are normally well under 50% and often under 35%. Recent Party Chairmen have tended to agree that:

...it is the voluntary commitment which gives a political party its strength. That means a strong party must have a large, nationwide, membership.²¹

Sir Norman Fowler, 1993

If you get your vote out, you will win seats. As Philip Norton, Professor of Government at Hull University, notes:

An active membership is absolutely critical in local elections, or any election with low turnout, like the European elections. The

¹⁸ 1993 Home Affairs Select Committee, evidence of the Chairman of the Conservative Party.

¹⁹ Lord McAlpine claims the honour as Party Treasurer of explaining to Mrs Thatcher that just as a Rolls Royce runs on 5 star petrol, so the Conservative's pre-eminent spin doctor of the early 1980s, (now Sir) Gordon Reece, ran on champagne.

²⁰ *True Blues*, pp. 190.

²¹ *Hansard*, 22nd June 1993, col. 206, quoted in *True Blues* pp. 3.

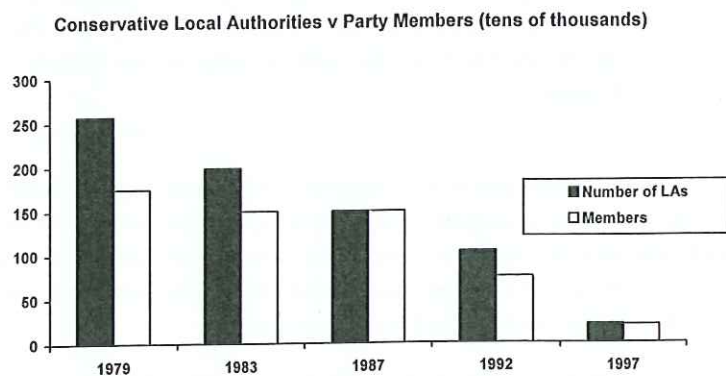
BLUE SKIES AHEAD

Conservatives benefited from the higher turnout in 1997, reflecting their heavier general election campaigning, and took back eleven local authorities and won a net gain of 220 council seats. In seats with strong local organisations, such as Westminster, the Tories have campaigned vigorously, securing well above average turnout figures of some 55% in 1990, and landslide success, despite damaging local scandals.²²

Three factors indicate that there is a material correlation between campaigning and electoral outcomes at every level of political representation. This interpretation suggests that there is a direct, causal relationship between party activism, council election results, and general election performance.

Activism begets council seats

There is a strong correlation between Conservative Party membership and the strength of its local election base as measured by the number of authorities under its control:



Source: House of Commons Library, Paper 97/82, 27th June 1997, table 5²³

While one cannot state that lower membership invariably results in weaker council election performance, there is a strong enough correlation to suggest at least a critical degree of inter-dependence. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence which suggests that a spiral of local ineffectiveness creeps in as councillors lose seats and cease

²² Author's interview (SB-F), 17th September 1997.

²³ Authors' graph. Membership sourced from *True Blues* estimates as follows: 1993: 750,000 (pp. 25); mid 1980s: 1.5 million (pp. 21). Estimates for 1979 are authors' own.

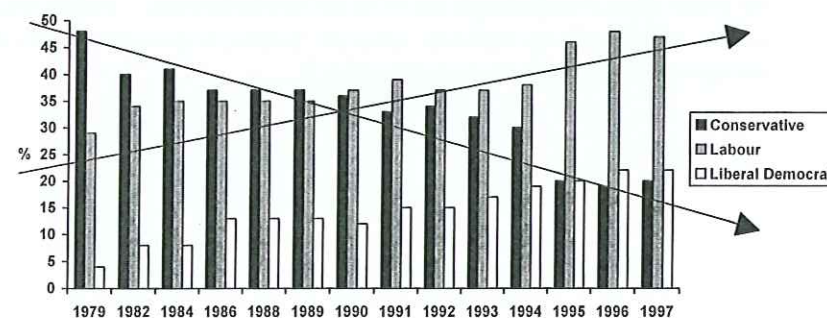
DEAD ROOTS LOSE ELECTIONS: WHY MEMBERS MATTER

their political commitments with a consequent multiplier effect on the future effectiveness of the local constituency association.

Council election performance leads general election performance

This multiplier effect extends from council election failure into general election performance. The following table demonstrates the progressive decline of the Conservative Party as a party of local government in Great Britain and shows how only after 1992 did Labour begin substantially to outstrip the Conservatives at local level, with a predictable impact on their subsequent general election performance.

Councillors in Great Britain 1979 - 1987 (per cent. of total)



Source: House of Commons Library, Paper 97/82, 27th June 1997, table 4²⁴

The results from 1993 onwards serve as an accurate forecast of the collapse of the Party in 1997. Even the poll tax conflict failed to deliver Labour the lead in local government it enjoyed from 1994 onwards.

Activists can also shape the results in marginal constituencies at general elections

Campaigning can also directly determine outcomes in key marginal parliamentary seats. Although direct correlations are hard to establish, observers remarked that the ability of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties to mobilise local support, particularly when national resources are stretched, proved decisive in a number of seats in 1997.²⁵

²⁴ Authors' graph.

²⁵ The Liberal Democrats secured 41 seats, more than twice their 1992 total, with a share of vote which fell to 17% (1992: 18%).

BLUE SKIES AHEAD

Even in 1994, when the Conservative Party could perhaps still claim 400,000+ members, Conservatives were judged by one study²⁶ to be the least effective major party in marginal Parliamentary seats, a fact acknowledged privately by many of those in command at Central Office.

Where there is polling evidence in key seats in 1997, it is clear that the Conservatives were simply out-canvassed and out-leafleted by Labour. This was, for example, true in the marginal constituency of Gloucester which sits in a county in which the Conservatives lost five seats in 1997.²⁷ The findings show that Labour was twice as effective as the Conservatives in the nuts and bolts of campaigning, such as the delivery of leaflets²⁸ and doorstep canvassing.

In national terms, both Professor Norton²⁹ and Paul Whiteley et al.³⁰ suggest that the impact of local campaigning can swing the vote by between 1 and 2%. That would equate to a 20 to 35 seat difference across the country, or enough to have influenced the result of six of the last 15 general elections.³¹

²⁶ Denver and Hands referred to in *True Blues* pp. 196.

²⁷ MORI conducted a survey on 22-24 April 1997 in the new, marginal seat of Gloucester and found that twice as many interviewees had received a visit from a Labour canvasser as from a Conservative one (*British Public Opinion, Vol XX, MORI*).

²⁸ Each parliamentary candidate is allowed one free postal delivery of 'election address' in a general election. All other literature, because of the tight statutory restraint on expenditure, must be delivered by hand.

²⁹ Author's interview (SBF), op. cit.

³⁰ 1.3% of total share of vote, *True Blues*, pp. 211.

³¹ 1950, 1951, 1970, February 1974, October 1974, and 1992.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AT THE HUSTINGS – OR HOW A GENERATION WENT MISSING

The bridge to Britain?

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS LONG PRIDED itself on the contribution its members make to wider community service, particularly in support of the state's religious institutions. But this relationship has become almost too strong perhaps for the long term health of either the Party or the established Church, whose demographics share much with those of the Conservative Party:

If, in the past, the Church of England has been described as the 'Conservative Party at prayer', then today's Conservative Party can be described as the 'political wing of the Church of England.'³²

Whiteley et al, *True Blues*, 1994

One of the strengths of the community participation of many Conservative Party members was that it enabled them to serve as a bridge between an absentee, élite leadership and the country as a whole. But as traditional community structures have broken down, and the Conservative membership has become more marginalised in everyday life, this function has all but disappeared:

The Conservative Party in the country is not and never could be a bridge to a wider Britain. It is a cul-de-sac of untypical electors with certain limited fund raising capabilities and an unusual wish to gather for mostly social purposes under the banner of an apparently political but covertly class-based national club.

Matthew Parris, *The Times*, 6 June 1997

³² *True Blues*, pp. 48.

BLUE SKIES AHEAD

This state of affairs sits ill with the Party's still confident view of its historic destiny. As William Hague has noted, the Conservative Party is:

...the longest standing, most successful political party in the history of democracy.³³

Yet, in 15 years, it has become for many observers a by-word for decline. According to the most recent independent study,³⁴ the Party's organisation is effectively a retirement club for people who feel they have done well:

- more than 80% of the membership is over 45 years' old;
- the average age of members in 1992 was 62 (now thought to be 64);
- the average age of new members is 54.

Over two thirds of Conservative Party members are not currently employed *at all* (Whiteley), and the majority left school at 16 or under. This is not a Party whose membership is working, earning or learning.

The Party represents a slim slice of Britain today. It remains actively Christian, with 70% of members being members of the established Anglican Church.³⁵ Only 1% of members are not white. **It is a looking glass that reflects an almost Edwardian Britain and that bears little relation to the aspirations or cultural reference points of the majority of the British people today.**

Indeed even in Edwardian Britain, this group of people were felt to be ancillary to the business of running the country. Balfour famously said that he would rather consult his valet than a Conservative Party activist.³⁶

The balance of support among Party officers for Kenneth Clarke in the leadership campaign suggests that it is hard to attribute an ideologically right wing view to association officers; but many observers suspect that the membership in general harbours reactionary views on race, youth, foreigners and society at large.³⁷

³³ The Rt Hon William Hague MP, op. cit.

³⁴ *True Blues*, pp. 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 28.

³⁷ 70% of Party members favour the voluntary repatriation of immigrants, *ibid.*, pp. 54.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AT THE HUSTINGS

As far as most younger people are concerned, the current membership of the Conservative Party is irrelevant to modern Britain, with predictable consequences for the Party's national youth organisations.

Youth: the alien nation in the Conservative Party

*How a generation went 'AWOL'*³⁸

In the 1960s, the Young Conservatives ('YCs')³⁹ were synonymous with wholesome, if already slightly un-hip, youthful enthusiasm. They were celebrated in popular light entertainment such as *Hancock's Half Hour*. John Major and Peter Walker held high office in the YCs as a natural stepping stone to national politics.

Today, the demise of the Conservative Party youth is a microcosm of the Party at large. William Hague, a former Yorkshire YC chairman, characterised even the politically active of his generation by giving up on the YCs when he went to university. The YCs, which at its apogee in 1949 had 160,000⁴⁰ members, has today fewer than 3,000 members.⁴¹ The other, newer, youth wings of the Party have fared little better:

- **The Conservative Students**, the official student wing of the Party, comprising the university Conservative associations, has no more than 5,000 members.⁴² Even the nurseries of the politically ambitious, Oxford and Cambridge, number just 1,300 association members between them.⁴³
- **Conservative Graduates** has some 500 members.⁴⁴ It is almost exclusively focused on London, where it has become a club for formerly active student politicians.

Much of the decline of young conservatism reflects the reduced dependence of the young on an institutionalised, monitored, social life. The night-club has replaced the ping-pong hall as the courtship venue of choice. **But it is sobering to reflect that the Party's entire national youth membership is, numerically, now more exclusive than the membership of Annabel's⁴⁵, the celebrated London night club.**

³⁸ 'Absent WithOut Leave', British military slang.

³⁹ Known widely as 'the YCs', whose membership is limited to those under 35, but whose core activists are usually in their mid 20s or younger.

⁴⁰ Source: author (AR).

⁴¹ Authors' informal CCO sources.

⁴² *Ibid.*

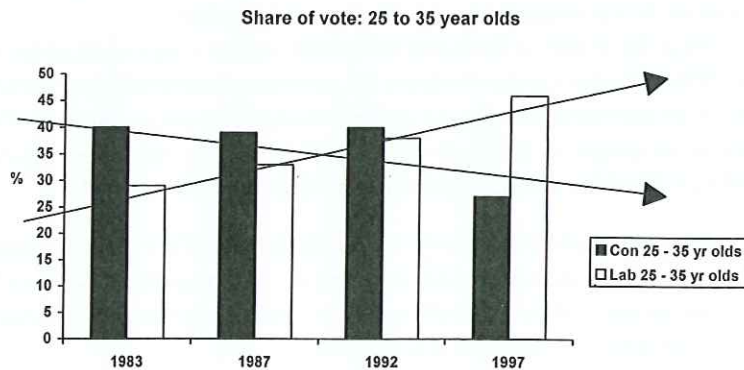
⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Annabel's, the Berkeley Square night club, has a reported membership of c 10,000.

BLUE SKIES AHEAD

The Party's appeal to younger people, even outside the traditionally elusive 18-24 age group, has also gone into decline.⁴⁶ In recent years, under 30% of those aged between 25 and 34 have declared themselves to be Conservative voters⁴⁷ – and this is the age group in which people traditionally start to vote Conservative as they seek and find stability. More worryingly, there has been a consistent adverse trend in the general election performance by the Conservatives since 1983. **Labour has increased its share of the 25 to 35 year old vote at every general election irrespective of the oscillations in its wider performance.**



Sources: Various⁴⁸

Among younger men and women (18-24), support for the Conservatives is regularly below even these levels. **Among younger women of 18-24, the Conservatives held less than a quarter of the vote in 1997, less than half the share of vote of Labour.**⁴⁹ Among 24-35 year olds women, Labour's lead is 22% against 13% for the general population, and 19% for men in the same age group.

The Bachelor Party⁵⁰ – why the women have left

There is a more than a degree of ambivalence in the Conservative Party's attitude towards, and involvement with, women in its affairs.

⁴⁶ In no general election since 1945 have the Conservatives gained as high a share of vote among 18 or 21-29 year olds as among every older age band (30-49; 50-64; 65+). Source: University of Hull communications with author (SBF), 4th September 1997.

⁴⁷ MORI, *ibid.*, pp. 2.

⁴⁸ Correspondence with Professor Philip Norton, University of Hull and authors (SBF/JB).

⁴⁹ MORI, *ibid.*, pp. 2.

⁵⁰ 1987 film starring Tom Hanks concerning a stag party which gets out of hand.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AT THE HUSTINGS

On the one hand, the Party has generated the highest profile female leader in the Western world this century. It has striven successfully in office to remove the bars to women in the professions and commerce, and the number of women in public appointments rose by nearly half in its last five years in office.⁵¹ The number of female graduates has risen by 129% since 1987,⁵² as a result of Conservative government educational initiatives. And women are broadly as likely to be members of the Conservative Party as men.⁵³ Older women are slightly more likely to vote Conservative than older men. A general assumption often voiced is that 'the Party is run by women.'

Yet younger women find the Party not only electorally unappealing, but are seemingly repelled from making an active contribution. Women hold only a tiny minority⁵⁴ of the association chairmanships in the country, despite being well represented on many of the logistical committees. In Parliament they have fared even less well: in 1992 there were fewer women Conservative MPs than men from one public school alone;⁵⁵ of the 25 most winnable seats that selected new candidates between 1994 and 1997, only two selected women;⁵⁶ there is only one female Conservative MP under 40;⁵⁷ and there are now fewer women Conservative MPs than there were in the 1930s.

For a country with the highest working female population in Europe, this female absenteeism cannot be attributed to traditional domestic commitments alone. Further research in this area is clearly needed, but some reasonable inferences would include:

- Associations reflect the cultural bias of their older membership; they are likely to have old-fashioned ideas on the 'place of women', which they can enforce through the non-selection of women for senior office, particularly as Parliamentary candidates.
- Women associate the Conservatives with support for outmoded Parliamentary working practices which are hostile to the participation of women, particularly with

⁵¹ *Campaign Guide 1997*, Conservative and Unionist Central Office, pp. 171. The percentage of posts held by women rose from 23% to 30%.

⁵² *Ibid.* Compared with an increase of 91% for men.

⁵³ *True Blues.*

⁵⁴ Exact figures are not available. Even urban, relatively progressive seats like Westminster South and Battersea have never had a female chairman. The authors are aware of one seat where all the officers are women, and the chair is still held by a man.

⁵⁵ The school being Eton, though Old Etonian Conservatives now number just six, against 12 women Conservative MPs.

⁵⁶ Eleanor Laing, MP for Epping Forest; and Theresa May, MP for Maidenhead.

⁵⁷ Julie Kirkbride MP, Bromsgrove.

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young families.⁵⁸ Labour has supported – to the point of illegality – the promotion of women through short-lists, and of female facilities at the House of Commons.⁵⁹

- The strength of Labour for many years on 'soft' issues such as healthcare and education has made them appear more credible on family issues. Labour's benches will be seen to represent a living embodiment of their commitment to the advancement of women in politics and by extension in society at large.

Given the increasing contribution that women are now making to all aspects of commercial and professional life, the absence of women is not one that the Party can afford either in terms of its own talent base or in its prospects for electoral support.

How the Missing Generation is different

Britain is beginning to be a place which many Conservative Party members do not recognise, let alone like. It is one where gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities are defining social paradigms, not only in the arts,⁶⁰ but in sport and, increasingly, in business. It is one where a third of children are now conceived out of wedlock; where just one fifth of babies are baptised into the Anglican Church of which nearly three quarters of Conservative Party activists are members;⁶¹ and where nearly half of all marriages end in divorce.

And there has been a wider cultural shift, which has revolutionised the way people speak, dress, and express their feelings in the last two decades.

Commentators write about the 'dumbing down' of British culture. What has certainly happened has been a 'younging down'. It can be seen in the 'dress down' Fridays of the City of London, and the gradual reduction of the average age of senior executives, so that the CEO of a traditional retail bank like Barclays is a decade younger than the lead singer of the Rolling Stones. Business people, even in the City of London, ape the manners of a classless, youthful international paradigm, which the *Financial Times* has coined as 'Ralph Lauren man'.⁶²

⁵⁸ This impression may be unfairly reinforced by the heavy presence of men without family dependents in the higher reaches of the Conservative Party.

⁵⁹ These now include a crèche, and a unisex health and beauty centre in place of a barber's shop.

⁶⁰ The performing arts are now central to the economies as well as the national consciousness in both the US and the UK. Media and entertainment in the US is now the country's largest export industry, and earnings from rock music in the UK now exceed that of the country's steel total output.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 48/49.

⁶² *Financial Times*, 16th August 1997.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AT THE HUSTINGS

It has been the more privileged elements of society that have taken to this 'younging down' most rapidly. And Labour has caught the wave, with the result that it is attaining unprecedented levels of support among business leaders (who selected Tony Blair as the individual outside business who would do best within it⁶³) and even in the City, where Labour achieved a 63% approval rating among fund managers, investment bankers and market strategists in August 1997.⁶⁴

More importantly, the aspirational lifestyle and icons of society at large are those of transatlantic youth: baseball caps, health clubs, theme parks. 50 year olds just aren't behaving as Conservatives expect them to, as the American marketing consultant Faith Popcorn notes:

None of these [people] will remotely resemble the fifty-year-olds that marketers have in their minds' eyes, because fifty doesn't mean what it used to. We're "aging" at different physical/psychological rates than our parents (or grandparents) did.⁶⁵

Popcorn argues that the Baby Boomers, who turned 50 in 1996, are psychologically 'touchy-feeley' 35 year olds who actively reject conventional concepts of 'mature' behaviour. The very language in which business and enterprise are discussed is that of the young. Tom Peters, the US management guru, talks about the 'Wow' factor being a defining competitive advantage in commerce⁶⁶ and Faith Popcorn notes that youth consumer trends predict general consumer trends.⁶⁷

The transformation of Britain wrought by the new respectability of emotional response and the power of youthful icons was perhaps symbolised by the national mourning after the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales. **The successful popular demand for a mass mourning of the fallen icon was a climactic victory for the assertion of feelings over the old forms, and a lesson for all in the business of mass communications.**

The Conservatives must accept that political parties in opposition are nothing if not in the business of mass communications.

⁶³ KPMG poll of business leaders quoted in *Observer*, *Financial Times*, 29 August 1997.

⁶⁴ *London Financial News*, 11 August 1997.

⁶⁵ *The Popcorn Report*, Faith Popcorn, Arrow Books, 1992, pp. 171.

⁶⁶ *Liberation Management*, Tom Peters 1992. He also notes how ephemeral consumer fashion, again determined by the young, creates new competitive environments almost over night.

⁶⁷ Op. cit., Faith Popcorn.

The implications

The Conservative Party is ill-equipped for the presentational and organisational implications of this cultural shift. On many tests of cultural affinity the Conservative Party looks hopelessly out of date. Its parliamentary rump exemplifies its predicament: fewer women members than in the 1930s; not a single representative of an ethnic minority; and no openly gay member.

The ability to appeal to a younger audience and to those with younger aspirations will be essential to the electoral prospects of the Conservative Party at the next general election. This will require the transformation of the Party machine and ethos, and of its targeting of younger members and voters.

WHY THE MISSING GENERATION SHOULD BELONG TO THE CONSERVATIVES

Why younger people should feel at home in the Conservative Party

THERE ARE MANY REASONS BOTH of principle and policy which should give the Conservative Party a strong allure to younger and early middle aged voters. The Party:

- incarnates freedom and self-determination as guiding principles;
- regards vigour and energy as core to the advancement of business and society;
- believes in mobility and change, and has proved remarkably hostile to the interests of what was regarded as the Establishment a generation ago.

In terms of policy, when in government, the Party has:

- opened access to education for millions of young school leavers, a third of whom go onto higher education, as against fewer than one in ten in 1979. Education ranked as the most important issue for first time voters (18-23) in 1997;⁶⁸
- over the last 18 years, created the economic conditions in which the UK has created more jobs than the rest of the EU put together. Jobs has recently been the second highest-rated issue for younger voters, and was the highest-rated earlier in the economic cycle;
- created a climate in which young people can own their own homes earlier, earn more, and retire earlier than ever before in the country's history;
- taken a leadership position on international green issues, a high ranking issue for younger people with 30% of first time voters citing it as 'important'.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ MORI, *ibid.*, pp. 30: Education (62% of interviewees regard as 'important') ranked just ahead of Jobs (59% regarded as 'important') among first time voters (*News of the World/MORI survey* 30 March 1997).

⁶⁹ MORI, *ibid.*, pp. 12 and 29.

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Finally, the Conservative Party has been the 'winning' team for the majority of its existence. Youth likes to be associated with success. Young people should find the Conservative Party disproportionately attractive once it begins to show that it is fit to govern again.

Why younger people feel the Party has let them down

The reasons for the failure of these underlying attractions to translate into electoral support in 1997 relate to both policy and presentation.

Policy

- The electorate's perception of the Party as a more reliable manager of the economy than Labour ceased on Black/White Wednesday's forced exit from the ERM.⁷⁰ In 1992, the Conservatives were still seen as the most credible party on the economy. Opinion polls throughout the 1997 election campaign showed Labour as more credible on jobs than the Conservatives, across all age groups and even more so among the young.
- Healthcare scores as the third most important policy issue for 18-25 year olds. On this policy area, Labour has a 30 point lead.⁷¹
- The apparent passivity of the Conservative Party towards the advancement of women, as shown by its parliamentary representation in particular, contradicts a trend to more equal and shared partnerships among younger men and women of all backgrounds.
- For international idealists, the Conservative Party once offered a European vision to which the Labour Party was opposed for the majority of its recent history. The approaches to Europe are perceived to have been reversed, with the Conservatives now seen as 'against' Europe.
- Among lower social groups, the Conservatives are seen as hostile to the benefits culture, and, in particular, to certain categories of young beneficiary such as single mothers and students.
- Government confrontation with the traditional professions (such as the law, medicine, and academia) was disturbing for younger people who felt that the

⁷⁰ Labour's average poll lead increased from a 1% prior to the forced ERM exit, and rose to 17% immediately afterwards, against a final of 13% in 1997.

⁷¹ MORI, *ibid.*, pp. 29.

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institutions to which they were now being given access by education were being made less prestigious by the Conservatives. Finally, the Conservatives are seen as hostile to, or at best suspicious of, gays and ethnic minorities, two of the most vital elements of youth culture.

Presenting to the Missing Generation

Understand first that this aging market [of 50 year olds] actually feels about 35 – the one that's vibrant, sexy, fun, still full of hope and possibilities.

Faith Popcorn, *The Popcorn Report, Targetting Your Life*, 1992⁷²

The Party has failed to 'go with the flow'. It gives the impression of being committed to hierarchies and expression that form a coda of exclusion save for the officer class for whose benefit these structures were invented, a class which has now largely deserted Conservative Party life.⁷³ Yet the structures and expectations too often remain, inflicting unacceptable damage to the Party's appeal among its potential supporters.⁷⁴ The Conservative Party is only belatedly learning the new language of informality and access which suffuses modern communication.

'Dumbing down' is intrinsic to popular culture, and to successful popular political parties. The rich and sophisticated increasingly see no need even to affect intellect or high culture. What has been long true of the United States is now true in the UK. Labour's spin doctors have learned this lesson well and it imbues every aspect of their presentation. The Prime Minister's sons wear Lauren Sport for photo shoots. Downing Street seems keen to suggest that Noel Gallagher is more welcome as a visitor than any

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1992.

⁷³ Julian Critchley, the former MP, has made a literary career as the chronicler of the exodus of the officer class from the Conservative Party. Save to say, here, that it remained prominent in the Parliamentary Party until even Mrs Thatcher's first administration. In Conservative local politics, the aristocracy had been a dominant presence in the pre-war era, and remained visible and influential until the 1970s. Patrician chairman of local authorities in the 1970s included Lord Porchester (Hampshire), Lord Halifax (East Riding of Yorkshire), and the Hon. Daphne Courthope. The gentry were represented as late as the 1970s in Shropshire by families such as the Morris-Egertons and Swinnerton-Dyers. The Chairman of the Conservative Association in North West Norfolk in the 1970s was the late Earl Spencer, father of the late Princess of Wales. (Source: *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, David Cannadine, 1990).

⁷⁴ A former President of the Cambridge Union was told by a Conservative Whip that, as a newly elected councillor in a Conservative borough, he would not be expected to speak in council until he had served for at least two terms.

trade union leader. Yet Conservative associations have become the last places in the country where it is possible to meet anyone in a tweed jacket and tie.

This Conservative lack of style is reflected in its touchingly, but disastrously, innocent view of whom the young might regard as role models. Jeffrey Archer and Andrew Lloyd-Webber have devoted themselves to the service of the Conservative Party but, even within their age group, offer none of the iconic attractions to youth of, say, Alex Ferguson, Sean Connery, Mick Jagger, Terence Conran or Richard Branson.⁷⁵ It has been game of the Tory lords, and a sign of the Party's desperation, for them even to try.

Showbiz has deserted the Conservatives. In the 1997 campaign, it proved almost impossible to get any celebrities to attend Conservative party rallies: Central Office's Broadcasting Unit being reduced to explaining that they didn't wish to 'lower the tone' of what were intended to be serious political events. Yet Labour Party rallies are like the back-lots of a soap show, so packed are they with youth stars from *Coronation Street* and *London's Burning*.

If the Conservative Party has not yet come to terms with the social revolution of the 1960s, it has certainly not come to terms with the musical one. **For some Conservatives, Kenneth Clarke's love of jazz music gives him the allure of a dangerous modernist.** The Party's campaign theme music was a Walton-esque dirge warmed up by a middle aged Dixie band. New Labour had the uplifting – and fun – *Things can only get better* by D-Ream, which re-entered the top five during the election campaign.

At local level, a prospective young Conservative encounters inadvertent reproductions of post war social life with neon trappings attached, endless demands for money, doorstep canvassing, and marketing literature which, with its dated torch logo, can seem reminiscent of some unpleasant right wing sect. Conservative associations do not seem engines through which the world is going to be changed.

A common mistake in marketing is to focus on features, not benefits.⁷⁶ The features of membership of the Conservative Party for the young are poorly explained, the benefits seemingly non-existent. The Party will only hold the interest, let alone support, of the young with a range of practical benefits.

⁷⁵ Although Branson's constant self-publicity makes him something of a joke figure among the urban sophisticates, he polled 13%, three times as high as the next most influential 'public' figure, in terms of ability to influence voting patterns among the general population, in a poll conducted for the *Sunday Mirror* by MORI on 13 April 1997. The next most influential figure was the Princess of Wales.

⁷⁶ A feature of a car may be its twin-drive camshaft; its benefit would be that it can get you from A to B more quickly than any other model.

RE-INVENTING THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY FOR A MISSING GENERATION

The Titmuss⁷⁷ effect: the social escalator

A GENERATION AGO, the benefits to the young of membership of the Conservative party were widely understood: a 'Leg-Up' for the ambitious, a 'Leg-Over' for the amorous.

The Conservative Party, with its local links with the Rotary club and the freemasons, was for many a practical route to self-advancement commercially and socially. This was the Titmuss effect: the Party was able to attract new members – particularly those who wanted to make more of themselves – from non-traditional backgrounds.

Secondly, with its balanced membership among young men and women, it was where women could meet motivated and upwardly-mobile men, and where men could meet the women of whom their mothers would approve.

Professional and social support are enduring needs of the young, and the Conservative Party can meet these needs with benefits which it can become uniquely placed to offer.

Moving on up

- **Conservative Jobs Network.** Constituency-based, centrally-administered, national job and work experience service available only to members. The many thousands of Conservative entrepreneurs and business people can offer a practical benefit outside donations, a benefit of which society and shareholders can be proud.
- **A ladder to advancement and equality.** Women, ethnic and sexual minorities should feel that Conservatives, with their powerful belief in justice and the individual, are their allies in taking their proper places in the workplace and in society. The Conservative Party should set up helplines for members who feel themselves the subject of discrimination or harassment. Every town and city should have a Conservative Women's Network of the sort informally promoted by

⁷⁷ Reference to the central character of John Mortimer's *Paradise Regained*, who joined his local YCs to get on, though he became rapidly disillusioned with the fellow members.

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various women's networking organisations. So much the better if these become popular among women who would not consider themselves to be Conservatives.

- **Conservative Skills Network.** The Conservative Party is still full of successful people in all walks of life. The Party can pull these together, and could even subsidise as part of its wider marketing, weekend teach-ins on media training, presentation, CVs and job-getting, even language training. The aim should be to combine real added-value with a social, non-challenging environment.
- **Conservative Scholarships.** Many students and young people lack the means to win the few international scholarships available. The Conservative Party should fund competitions open only to Party members, for scholarships in the US and Europe.

The fun machine

- **Ministry of Sound⁷⁸ not the Carlton Club.** The Party should signal its change of style with a new, high quality youth publication offering practical advice, reviews, and fashion aimed at Conservative youth in particular regions. It can form the focus for the regeneration of a national youth network based on non-political interests.
- Associations find it hard to get young members to come to them. It should go to them through the internet: association social network pages, on association web sites; association chat-line evenings.
- Association and Central Office sponsorship of young Party members to attend new **national events which consciously aim at show biz glamour and frivolity.** The best sales reps in most companies get away-weekends. 'Points mean prizes' can translate to recruitment, fund-raising and canvassing: don't reward good work only with the opportunity to do more good work.
- **A Policy Bulletin Board.** An internet-based policy web-site, access to which is restricted to Party members only through a piece of proprietary software, with open debate on Party policy issues. Existing security measures should ensure that all comments were attributable to a given Party member, which would reduce the scope for abusive contributions.
- **Never let a Dixie band grace a Party event aimed at young people again.⁷⁹**

⁷⁸ With 193,000 members, the Ministry of Sound's membership has probably already overtaken that of the Conservative Party in total (author's (JB) note).

⁷⁹ Early progress towards this goal is evident. Recent pre-referendum rallies in Scotland have been introduced by rock music from as recently as the mid 1980s.

WHY THE MISSING GENERATION SHOULD BELONG TO THE CONSERVATIVES

Changing the world

- **Policy Bulletin Board.** John Major astounded many associations by actually consulting them on policy in the penultimate year of his leadership. There should be ongoing policy dialogue through an internet-based policy site administered by Conservative Central Office.
- **Conservative Single Issue Initiative.** The single issue pressure group offers all the intensity of commitment and potential for a single, visible outcome which attract young people. The Conservatives have made a number of tentative efforts such as the Tory Green Initiative. Again, an internet-based range of special interest groups, each with a Conservative perspective, should be set up on subjects such as the environment, drugs, and animal rights.
- **Filling the empty sandwich.** There is a striking gap in the middle of the Conservative Party's organisation structure, between the genteel gerontocracy of the associations and the National Union and the younger policy and social groups which reject people over 30 years old (YCs) or 35 (Bow Group) as officers. Many Conservative supporters see no natural opportunity for peer group participation in the Party between 35 and 54 (when they might qualify as an averagely-aged new member of the Party). The proposed national organisation, the Conservative Generation (see below) will do much to fill this gap, but there should be active encouragement of the middle-aged to take a role in the party just when they are having families and achieving influence in business and professional life. **An alumnae network, and targeted marketing to these 'disappearing' Conservatives should be centrally run, and a high priority.** This should be an area of focus for the Conservative Generation organisation and new marketing posts proposed below.
- **A Party for, and of, the employed and the family.** Associations up and down the country hold key meetings and functions at times of day when key potential supporters are at work. Reform, promoted by Conservatives, of Councils which have day time meetings should be a priority. Similarly, the Conservatives should lead the reform of Parliamentary hours to suit mothers with young children, and provide crèche facilities in local authorities. A clear signal to women would be to develop tax incentives for child care, which release young mothers into the wider world, if they so choose.

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Stylistic changes will achieve much and have the advantage of being immediate and visible. But the Party will need to re-evaluate the central services it offers its new young membership in the form of the various youth organisations which cater for them.

Reform of the youth organisations

Style will need to have a conduit to substance

The Party needs to rebuild the infrastructure of its youth organisations, which succumbed to the party's wider unpopularity and the excessive zeal of some of its members: in the mid 80s, Central Office abolished the Federation of Conservative Students and created a centrally-appointed leadership to a new one, the Conservative Collegiate Forum.

Reform of the youth organisations will not solve the Party's wider credibility and presentational issues with the Missing Generation, but it must aim to link the stylistic shift to a structure which is able to convert social enthusiasm into some kind of coherent political effectiveness.

A new youth umbrella to be called Conservative Generation

We propose that the two principal youth organisations, the YCs and the Conservative Students, should fall under a new umbrella organisation, 'Conservative Generation'. The new group would serve both as a bridge between the two existing bodies, which have a distinct mutual suspicion of each other. It is intended to complement, not to replace, the existing organisations and to provide a forum building a mass movement aimed at the Missing Generation. Although the YCs and Conservative Students would retain their very distinct memberships and roles, Conservative Generation would promote joint events, including a joint national conference.

A Chairman of Conservative Generation should be appointed, to act as spokesman for all young people in the Party; the position would rotate between the respective National Chairmen of Conservative Students and Young Conservatives for the first two years, followed by open election from the whole membership thereafter.

All Party members under the age of 45 would automatically be a member of the Conservative Generation. In this way the Conservative Party would present a unified and credible young people's movement which was a serious alternative to the successful umbrella group 'Young Labour'.

Conservative Generation would also serve as a forum for active over 30 year olds, who are currently disbarred from office in the young Conservative groups, including the Bow Group. It would be expected that an active social aspect would develop, not least because of the growing singles scene for thirty-somethings which finds all forms of expression in the larger cities.

WHY THE MISSING GENERATION SHOULD BELONG TO THE CONSERVATIVES

Abolition of Conservative Graduates

The Conservative Graduates should be abolished. With only 500 members and with an exclusive London focus it encapsulates many of the problems facing the Party. It serves little purpose except as a forum for electioneering for politically ambitious twenty-somethings. Critically, it serves to direct the energies of the keenest Party members away from where they are really needed, and where they can have most effect: the constituency associations. Existing members would join Conservative Generation.

Stylistic and structural reform will do much to re-plant the Conservative Party among the vital younger groups, but this will be for nothing in the eyes of the missing generation unless they see a fundamental re-fashioning of the leadership of the Party to which some of them will aspire. Reform will need to embrace all aspects of the central structure, including how it selects its MPs, a body of mainly men who have traditionally sought to remain aloof from the goings on of the Party whose workers get them elected.

BLUE SKIES FOR THE STARS: REFORM AT THE TOP

'No reform is not an option'⁸⁰

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY DOES NOT IN LAW EXIST.⁸¹ Power is diffuse, held effectively by the constituency parties, the confederate National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, the Parliamentary Party and, through the authority of the party leader, Central Office. In a sense, nobody is in charge. **In a novel piece of corporate governance, the Party's collective assets are actually owned by its leader.** These are oddball if tax-efficient arrangements.

What is not in question though is that the current structure is a guarantee of defeat at the next general election. As William Hague has recognised:

No reform is not an option... Political parties do not succeed through good organisation alone. But they certainly do not succeed without one.⁸²

Reform, however, will need to extend to nothing less than the re-invention of the Conservative national organisation. It needs to bring about, urgently:

- the creation of a centrally managed, locally accountable, national party organisation;
- the sharing of power with accountability, particularly in the relationship between the Parliamentary Party (which elects the leader, who in turn has authority to spend the money), and the local parties (which raise the money, select the Parliamentary and council candidates, and represent the local face of conservatism to actual and potential supporters);
- the development of the parliamentary party, and the active membership, more closely to reflect modern British society as a whole.

⁸⁰ Section title, William Hague speech, CCO, *ibid*.

⁸¹ The Court of Appeal ruled in 1982 that the Conservative Party did not in law exist. *Ibid.* pp. 20.

⁸² William Hague, *ibid*.

Whatever the detail of this reform, though, there will need to be transitional arrangements. **The quixotic and, on some issues, antiquarian views of the Conservative membership, at least as currently comprised, is good reason enough for not repeating the consultative errors from which the Labour Party has learned hard lessons.**

However, the elimination of the Conservative Parliamentary Party from so much of the United Kingdom means that some greater involvement is essential if the Party is to be able to act with credibility outside its diminished English heartland.

Reform of the centre over two years⁸³

50/50 membership and parliamentary election of the Party leadership

The Parliamentary Party is well placed to evaluate the qualities of its future leaders at the despatch box. But the only box that matters in modern mass democracies is the television. Gifted amateurs are as likely to pick winners as MPs. The next leader of the Conservative Party should therefore be elected, not retrospectively validated as the new leader will be in the autumn, by the national membership as equal partners with MPs. This means a 50/50 split in the electoral college. **If the membership can't be trusted to pick a decent leader, how can the country trust the Party?**

Abolition of the National Union

The National Union should be reinvented as a centralist, national political organisation based at Conservative Central Office. It should be formally reconstituted on a statutory footing, managing a national membership list⁸⁴ and with the absolute discretion to remove parliamentary candidates, and to sanction or remove members. It would be administered by a board selected as below.

Formation of a national executive and non-executive board

The national Party requires professional management and direction. A Board of eight executives is recommended which would include three professionally-appointed executive officers: (Chief Executive, Finance Director, and Director of Marketing (see below)); three current Central Office officers (the Party Chairman, a redefined Deputy Chairman and a new vice-chairman in charge of marketing and the youth organisations (both see below)); and two board members elected directly from the membership. There would be, in addition, four non-executive posts, two of which would be open to

⁸³ Time is short. Assuming ratification of the proposals and timetable at a special Spring Party Conference in 1998, they will be in place barely three years before a likely general election date of June 2001.

⁸⁴ Labour's national headquarters have handled all membership applications since 1990.

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election from the membership and two of which would be professional appointments from outside the Party. **Elected association nominees would be entitled to a majority of the non-executive posts on the new Board, with political nominees (as with the current Party vice-chairmen) holding a minority.**

Appointment of a non-political Chief Executive of Central Office

The new national party will need a professional Chief Executive, professionally appointed by an executive Board under the Party Chairman (whose appointment should remain in the sole gift of the Leader).⁸⁵ The chief executive would be responsible for the management of the Party machine on a day-to-day basis, within policy guidelines. His role would be managerial, and internally focused, where as the Chairman would retain a political and external focus.

Appointment of an executive Director of Marketing

Central Office already has a Director of Communications – or rather has had a series of directors, with five holders of the office in as many years.⁸⁶ The position is effectively that of a senior press officer, with the weight of activity being dedicated to media management, much of it re-active. The role does not have any formal proactive marketing responsibility. It is spin-doctoring job which has to be done. It is not one which allows the time or authority to win the hearts and minds of the Missing Generation.

A new Board position, the Director of Marketing must therefore be created. This Director would have a much wider remit than the current Director of Communications, including the specific task of developing and executing strategies aimed at the lost generation, and for the wider, holistic presentation of the Party.

Unlike the Director of Communications, the effectiveness of the Director of Marketing would be evaluated by membership and revenue increases – as would happen in any private sector organisation.

⁸⁵ The Party has had two CEO-type appointments, Sir Michael Fraser in the 1960s, and Sir Paul Judge from 1994-1996. Both appointments seem to have ended as a result of Vice Chairmen and other senior officers by-passing the appointed executive. A more transparent and accountable reporting structure, on the lines proposed, should reduce the risk of this occurring, as will the abolition of all but one of the vice chairmanships.

⁸⁶ The last five Directors of Communications have been Shaun Woodward (now MP), Tim Collins (now MP), Hugh Colver, Charles Lewington, and the distinguished former *Today* producer Francis Halewood who resigned the post after four months' tenure. Of these, only Hugh Colver had any senior commercial (as opposed to journalistic) experience, and he was effectively fired within six months. Gregor Mackay holds the new post of press secretary to the Leader, which means that there is no professional communications counsel available within the Party over the age of 30.

WHY THE MISSING GENERATION SHOULD BELONG TO THE CONSERVATIVES

Rationalisation of the vice-chairmanships, and a new Vice-Chairman for marketing and youth

It is a long standing truism that the Royal Navy has more admirals than capital ships. On current trends, the Conservative Party risks having more vice-chairmen than members under 45.

The roles of Deputy and Vice-Chairman for organisation should be merged. Their task is the same: to secure the effectiveness of the fighting machine. The five other vice-chairmanships should fall away, save for a new post of vice-chairman responsible for marketing and the national youth organisations. Its status as one of the three senior officer posts reflects the scale of the task involved.

Research should be moved to a 'Policy Counsel to the Leader' post within the leader's office. It would have *ex officio* membership of a new policy advisory board (see below). The Directorship of the Conservative Research Department would continue to report to the Chairman, and the new Board, with a dotted line to the research post in the leader's office.

The vice-Chairman in charge of candidates would have a vital role in managing the selection of the Party's future MPs. Under any central list system, the potential for patronage is awesome. The management of candidate selection, particularly given the eccentricity of the list, is too important for any one individual. It should therefore become the responsibility of the Board as a whole, though aspects of management would be delegated to the new chief executive.

Power-sharing on candidate selection between associations and Central Office

The associations should surrender exclusive selection rights for parliamentary candidates, with the new national organisation having nomination rights of finalists, to be exercised sparingly, and the right to nominate up to half any constituency long list. It would be hoped that this right need be exercised only sparingly. The associations will retain their rights in relation to local candidates, but with the national party having the new right of veto, as it should also have in relation to parliamentary candidates. The candidates' list will ultimately be a matter for the full board, rather than one vice-chairman as at present, which should facilitate the taking of tough decisions in relation to sifting MPs.

Central veto on parliamentary and council candidates

Members of parliament and councillors should be able to be 'de-listed' as candidates at the absolute discretion of the national executive. The political list system inherent in proportional representation means that this sanction is enjoyed by most political parties in Western Europe, and one that is likely to be followed for second chamber elections in this country and at the European elections.

BLUE SKIES AHEAD

Candidates list reform to reflect modern Britain

A wholesale review of the candidates' list was announced in June 1997. Despite the still intense competition for some seats, less than a third of the list applied for the rock solid seat of Kensington & Chelsea when it became available in 1996, hardly evidence of a consistently eager potential parliamentary recruitment pool.

The Conservative candidates list needs to look younger, sharper, hungrier, and more representative of Britain if the next generation of Conservative MPs are to be the advertisement for the Conservative way of life that they need to be.

Central Office will have to ensure that constituencies tend to a proportionate selection rate to reflect the number of women on the list. Constituencies should be required to show in their nominations for candidates due regard for women, ethnic and sexual minorities.⁸⁷ The Party should initiate disciplinary action, including officer expulsion, against those associations which reject more qualified female or minority candidates in favour of white heterosexual males. The national party will of course have the ability to ensure a degree of proportionalism through its nomination rights. The Party would secure invaluable PR for its reforming zeal if it pushed its affirmative action for women, and ethnic and sexual minorities, to the brink of what is legal: it clearly cost Labour no votes.

Broadcast media competence should be an explicit selection criterion for candidates: only 30 Conservative MPs, and under a third of the Cabinet, were considered useable for the purposes of national broadcast media appearances in the 1997 campaign.⁸⁸

A National Policy Advisory Board, with a private Party membership majority

The issue of policy is the hardest one on which to introduce an overly inclusive approach.⁸⁹ It is therefore recommended that a policy advisory board is formed, reporting to the Party Chairman, but to which there would be open election from the national membership. There would be *ex officio* membership for the leader's Policy Counsel (see above). This board would assume the initiatives currently led by the CPC, but would enjoy a prominence which that body has never had. The advisory board could take lead responsibility for selection of policy motions at the various party conferences, though with the national party retaining current rights of veto on motions and speakers.

⁸⁷ No single openly gay member of the Party has been selected to a winnable seat, despite the ample representation of covert gays in many branches of Party activity.

⁸⁸ Authors' informal sources at CCO.

⁸⁹ As can be seen by the example of the Liberal Democrat Party, for whose leadership motions proposing cannabis legalisation are a recurring source of embarrassment.

CONCLUSION

BLUE SKIES FOR A GREAT BRITAIN

FOR OVER TWO CENTURIES, THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY has shown itself to be the most adaptable and ruthless political organisation in the history of liberal democracy. It needs to be both if it is to survive.

The national election successes of the 1980s concealed the steady erosion of the Party's membership and of its local electoral base. In 1997, the Party is devastated. It has lost credibility most with the younger people whose aspirations and culture are defining the nation's sense of itself. To many people in Britain, the Conservative Party is alienated, out of touch, and unelectable.

Modest reform is an option that will condemn it, literally for many of its elderly members, to the grave.

British people have changed since the Party's organisational heyday. They are no longer deferential. Most of them do not grow up or live in the family structures which Conservatives extol.

Labour's triumph has been to allow the country to feel good about itself. This has changed the political map of Britain as surely as it was changed when Mrs Thatcher first took office.

The task for the Conservatives, above all, is to show that they cherish the country for which they have done so much and for whose post war character they have been largely responsible.

A Party which cannot appeal to young people, cannot appeal to new Britain. It does not deserve to be allowed to guard over it.

Conservatives have been fortunate that, despite all the democratic deficits, their institutions have chosen as leader someone who by age, background and instincts is a living endorsement of what Conservative governments have made possible in Britain since 1979.

That good fortune deserves the patience of the country, and the devotion of the Conservative Party which must transform itself into a new, vigorous organisation in which the young are a central, not ancillary, part of its destiny.

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