

The Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture

The Rt Hon The Baroness Thatcher LG OM FRS



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Liberty and Limited Government

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Liberty and Limited Government

Keith Joseph

Keith Joseph, in whose honour this Lecture is delivered, had the charm of a hundred paradoxes. He was a modest man; but, unlike so many modest men, he had really nothing to be modest about. He was (that overworked, but in this case appropriate word) “brilliant”; yet he never indulged in intellectual virtuosity. He was brave; yet by nature he was timid. He could seem cerebral and remote; but he had a warm heart and impish humour that made his friendship an inexpressible delight.

Keith was also unusual in that, even when quite old and frail, he seemed somehow to remain young. The secret of this youthful spirit was the opposite to that of Faust. For in Keith’s case it was the fruit of innocence. Not the innocence of inexperience, let alone of insensitivity. This was the innocence of the pure of heart — of those who have wrestled with the evils of humanity, while remaining unspotted by the world.

Keith’s *goodness* was shown by the little kindnesses which marked his dealings with both political friends and opponents — he had no enemies. But Keith was more than good; he was also great. And his greatness lay in his integrity.

Integrity is an old fashioned word. There are even some who will tell you it is an old fashioned thing. But, for a politician, integrity is everything. It is not just a matter of avoiding bribes and inducements. In our remarkably financially honest *British* politics, it is not even mainly about that — (whatever learned judges may say about the matter). In politics, integrity really lies in the conviction that it’s only on the basis of truth that power should be won — or indeed can be *worth* winning. It lies in an unswerving belief that you have to be *right*.

It was not that Keith wore a hair shirt from preference. He was averse to any kind of suffering, especially other people’s — and applying the right remedies to the British disease was bound to require suffering.

But Keith’s integrity was absolute. When he became convinced — finally convinced, after the endless discussions which were a mark of his open-minded, open-hearted style — that a proposition was correct, he felt he had to defend it. He had to fight for it. When he faced those raging, spitting Trotskyist crowds at our great liberal centres of learning, I suspect he

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wondered sometimes whether he would have to die for it. But there he stood. He could do no other.

This Lecture is not, however, intended as a eulogy. The purpose of recalling the turbulent times of 20 years ago when Keith Joseph and I reshaped Conservatism — with the help of a handful of others, whose dedication compensated for their fewness — is that the same qualities as Keith's are required in our Party today.

Rethinking Conservative Policy

Keith Joseph's name will always be closely associated with the rethinking of Conservative principles and policies in preparation for the Conservative Government of the 1980s.

You will recall that the Party was out of office — having lost the February 1974 Election — when Keith began delivering, in the summer and autumn, a series of speeches analysing what had gone wrong, and suggesting a change of direction. In June came the Upminster speech. Keith dared to talk about what he called the “inherent contradictions [of the] ... mixed economy”. This, in the eyes of the Tory establishment, whose only real *criticism* of the socialists was that they were mixing the economy in the *wrong proportions*, was bad enough.

But it was the Preston speech in September — delivered almost on the eve of a second general election — which most horrified Keith's critics. In it, he dared to tell the truth about inflation: and that truth was inevitably damning for the previous Conservative Government, of which he and I had been a part.

Inflation was properly to be ascribed to the excessive growth of the money supply. And since, as Keith devastatingly observed, there was a time lag of as much as a year or two between the monetary cause and the inflationary effect, the high inflation of the summer of 1974 — 17 per cent and rising — was the responsibility of the Conservatives.

Keith also rightly noted that the root of the Conservative Government's failure to control inflation was fear of unemployment. But — as he and I would go on to argue on other occasions — unemployment was not an alternative to inflation, but one result of it. Ever higher doses of inflation were required in order to have even a short term effect on jobs. And in the longer term inflation undermined confidence, pushed up wage costs, promoted inefficiency and aborted new employment.

For saying such things, Keith was publicly ridiculed and privately vilified. His colleagues accused him of disloyalty, splitting the Party and so on.

Those whom Hayek had described as “the socialists of all parties” united to denounce him. For Keith in their eyes was demonstrating the worst possible political seamanship. He was “rocking the boat”. But in fact it was Keith's compass that was true — and it was the *boat* that was already adrift and threatened by total shipwreck.

Most of the economic analysis which Keith Joseph offered has since been accepted. But Keith was not only, or even primarily, interested in economics. It was simply that in the 1970s the economics had gone so devastatingly wrong that this was where any new analysis had to focus. Indeed, that remained true to a large extent in the 1980s. Reversing Britain's economic decline was such a huge and painful undertaking that, at least until the later years, the economy had to come first.

Keith himself, though, was even more interested in social than in economic issues. He had come into politics not from personal ambition but from an idealistic urge to diminish the misery of poverty. But his one foray at this time into rethinking social policy, in the form of the Edgbaston speech, went badly wrong. In fact, though flawed in some respects, the speech with its emphasis on remoralising society and on strengthening the family, deserves re-reading. It does not though, reveal much about his essential philosophy, which with Keith — as with most professional politicians — remained below the surface.

The kind of Conservatism which he and I — though coming from very different backgrounds — favoured would be best described as “liberal”, in the old-fashioned sense. And I mean the liberalism of Mr Gladstone not of the latter day collectivists. That is to say, we placed far greater confidence in individuals, families, businesses and neighbourhoods than in the State.

But the view which became an *orthodoxy* in the early part of this century — and a *dogma* by the middle of it — was that the story of human progress in the modern world was the story of increasing state power. Progressive legislation and political movements were assumed to be the ones which *extended* the intervention of government.

It was in revolt against this trend and the policies it bred that Hayek wrote *The Road to Serfdom*, which had such a great effect upon me when I first read it — and a greater effect still, when Keith suggested that I go deeper into Hayek's other writings.

Hayek wrote:

“How sharp a break — with the whole evolution of Western civilisation the modern trend towards socialism means — becomes clear if we

consider it not merely against the background of the nineteenth century, but in a longer historical perspective. We are rapidly abandoning not the views merely of Cobden and Bright, of Adam Smith and Hume, or even of Locke and Milton, but one of the salient characteristics of Western civilisation as it has grown from the foundations laid by Christianity and the Greeks and Romans. Not merely nineteenth- and eighteenth-century liberalism, but the basic individualism inherited by us from Erasmus and Montaigne, from Cicero and Tacitus, Pericles and Thucydides is progressively relinquished.”

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, against that background, it is not surprising that the Left claimed all the arguments of *principle*, and that all that remained to the Right were the arguments of *accountancy* — essentially, when and how socialism could be afforded. It was this fundamental weakness at the heart of Conservatism which ensured that even Conservative politicians regarded themselves as destined merely to manage a steady shift to some kind of Socialist state. This was what — under Keith’s tuition — we came to call the “ratchet effect”.

But all that was not just bad politics. It was false philosophy — and counterfeit history.

Let me remind you why this is so.

Creativity is necessarily a quality which pertains to *individuals*. Indeed, perhaps the one immutable law of anthropology is that we are all different. Now, of course, individuals can’t fulfil their potential without a society in which to do so.

And to set the record straight — *once again* — I have never minimised the importance of society, only contested the assumption that society means the State rather than other people. Conservatives do not take an extreme atomistic view of society. We need no lectures now, or at any other time, about the importance of custom, convention, tradition, belief, national institutions or what the ancient Romans would describe as “piety”. Nor do we dispute that the bonds of society need ultimately to be guaranteed by the State. It is *Marxists*, not Conservatives, who imagined — or at least pretended to imagine — that the State would wither away.

No. What marks out our Conservative vision is the insight that the State — government — only *underpins* the conditions for a prosperous and fulfilling life. It does not *generate* them. Moreover, the very *existence* of this State, with its huge capacity for evil, is a potential threat to all the moral, cultural, social and economic benefits of freedom.

States, societies and economies, which allow the distinctive talents of individuals to flourish, themselves also flourish. Those which dwarf, crush, distort, manipulate or ignore them cannot progress.

Those eras in which a high value has been placed on the individual are the ones which have known the greatest advances. By contrast, although the great monolithic states, empires and systems can produce impressive monuments and a high level of cultural sophistication, they are not able to mobilise the initiative of their populations to ensure that each generation can expect a better life than its predecessor.

It is only Western civilisation that has discovered the secret of continual progress. This is because only Western civilisation has developed a culture in which individuals matter, a society in which private property is secure, and a political system in which a range of competing views and interests is accommodated. The *moral* foundation of this system — which is so spontaneous as hardly to seem a system — is the Judaeo-Christian outlook. The system’s *institutional* foundation is the rule of law.

Expressed like this, it all sounds very abstract. But we in Britain are extraordinarily, indeed uniquely, lucky. Because, with us, these things have become second nature and a way of life. Over the centuries, the habits of freedom became ever more established in these islands. They and the institutions which came to embody them — independent courts, the common law, above all Parliament — were in a special sense democratised: that is, they came to be regarded as the birthright not of any class or group, but of the nation as a whole. In a more doctrinal form they have found their way into the Constitution of the United States.

All this meant that when Keith and I were struggling to shift Britain back from the Socialist State, we were also acting as conservatives, with a small ‘c’. We were seeking to re-establish an understanding of the fundamental truths which had made Western life, British life, and the life of the English-speaking peoples what they were. This was the foundation of our Conservative revolution. It remains the foundation for any successful Conservative programme of government.

And that is the first lesson which needs to be drawn from the rethinking of Conservatism, which Keith inspired and led. The principles which he restated, and which formed the basis of the policies the Conservative Government pursued while I was Prime Minister, are as true and as relevant now as they were two decades ago — or indeed, give or take a little economics, two centuries ago.

The cause of *limited government* — in which the State is servant not

master, custodian not collaborator, umpire not player — is the one beneath whose standard Keith Joseph and I gathered all those years ago. It is time to take it out of mothballs, brush off the odd collectivist cobweb that's hung on to it, and go forth to meet the foe.

The *second* lesson is that avoiding debate about the large issues of government and politics leads to directionless failure. Being prepared to state uncomfortable truths, as Keith insisted in doing, is the pre-condition for success. It is extremely doubtful whether the Conservative Party lost support because of Keith's controversial Preston speech in September 1974. But I am quite sure that without it we would never have embraced the approach that yielded, first victory in 1979, and then a remarkable string of achievements in the years which followed. Splits and disagreements over important issues never did a Party so much harm as the absence of honest, principled debate.

There is, however, one apparent lesson that we would be most unwise to draw. That is the suggestion, which one hears from time to time, that the only hope for the Conservative Party is a period in Opposition. The situation today in the Party is entirely different from that in 1974, when Keith was making his great speeches. In the present Prime Minister, the Party has a leader who shares the broad analysis that Keith Joseph and I put forward.

It is no secret that between John Major and me there have been differences ... on occasion. But these have always been differences about *how* to achieve objectives, rather than *what* those objectives should be. What is required now is to ensure that those objectives are clearly explained, so that a re-elected Conservative Government can go further towards fulfilling them. The attractions of Opposition are greatly exaggerated by those who have not experienced it.

What has gone wrong?

But, judging from the opinion polls, Opposition is where the electorate is at present inclined to send us. For a variety of reasons, which I shall describe shortly, I believe that this would be ill-judged on their part. The Conservative Party still has much to offer. And from Mr Blair's New — or not so new — Labour Party there is much to fear. But we must not ignore the present discontent.

Some of it is more or less inevitable. A constant struggle is required to ensure that long-serving governments don't run out of steam. I always regarded it as necessary to combine my role as Prime Minister with that of Chief Stoker so as to keep up the pressure.

It is also true that the political world is more complicated than in the '80s. The sharp divide between the forces of freedom represented by the Conservative Party and the West on the one hand, and the forces of collectivism represented by the Labour Party and the Soviet bloc on the other, is a thing of the past. The extent of the success we achieved in the 1980s has, in this sense, caught up with us.

That may be politically inconvenient; but I for one would not change it. During most of my political life, freedom in this country was under a direct challenge from fellow-travelling Socialists and an aggressive Soviet Union. These challenges were overcome because the Conservative Party in Britain and other right-of-centre parties elsewhere — under the international leadership of Ronald Reagan — proved too much for them.

The fashionable expression is that Communism and indeed Socialism "imploded". If that means that their system was always unviable, so be it — though many of the people who now say this scarcely seemed to believe it true before the "implosion" occurred. But, anyway, let's not forget that the system collapsed because it was squeezed by the pressure that *we* on the *Right* — I repeat on the *Right* — of politics applied. And the Left should not be allowed to get away with pretending otherwise.

But, of course, in politics there is only gratitude for benefits yet to be received. That is why, however successful they've proved to be, governments and parties have to keep on reapplying their enduring principles to *new* circumstances.

The Conservative Party today has problems not because our analysis has been wrong or our principles faulty. Our difficulties are due to the fact that, in certain limited but important respects, our policies and performance have not lived up to our analysis and principles.

That is why the current idea, put around by some malcontents, that the Conservative Party is in trouble because it has moved to the Right, and that this is what needs to be remedied, is boloney — and Denis might be able to suggest a still more telling description. The test is simple. Just ask yourself: is it because the Government has *not* spent, borrowed and taxed *enough* that people are discontented? Or is it that we have gone *too far* towards increasing government spending, borrowing and taxation? The answer is obvious. We are unpopular, above all, because the middle classes — and all those who aspire to join the middle classes — feel that they no longer have the incentives and opportunities they expect from a Conservative Government.

I am not sure what is meant by those who say that the Party should return to something called "*One Nation* Conservatism". As far as I can tell by their

views on European federalism, such people's creed would be better described as "*No Nation Conservatism*". And certainly anyone who believes that salvation is to be found further away from the basic Conservative principles which prevailed in the 1980s — small government, a property-owning democracy, tax cuts, deregulation and national sovereignty — is profoundly mistaken.

That mistake in most cases has its origins in the acceptance of the picture of the 1980s which has been painted by the critics. That decade changed the direction of Britain to such an extent that it is unlikely that even a Labour Government would altogether reverse it — try as they might.

Inflation was brought down, without the use of the prices and incomes controls which the great and the good all agreed were indispensable. Public spending as a share of GDP fell, which allowed tax rates to be cut — and government borrowing was reduced. We repaid debt. 364 economists who claimed that it was madness to think you could get economic growth by cutting government borrowing were proved wrong: I'm told they were never the same again.

Reform of the public finances was matched by reform of the trade unions, deregulation and privatisation of industries and a great extension of ownership of houses, shares and savings — quite a lot of "stakeholding" in fact...

The economic growth and the improvement of living standards which resulted from these reforms were so great that for a time materialism, rather than poverty, became the main accusation against us. "Hunting the yuppie" became the favourite sport of the neo-puritan, liverish Left.

But, of course, the reality was that the success which free enterprise brought over those years was not just expressed in conspicuous consumption — though what would we give for a few more of those yuppies today!

It also allowed a doubling — that's over and above inflation — of voluntary giving to good causes.

Moreover, though we made mistakes of financial management by allowing the economy to overheat and inflation to rise towards the end of that period, the general advance of prosperity was solidly based upon real economic improvements. Above all, there was a rapid and sustained rise in industrial productivity, which has continued. And as a result of the control of public expenditure over those years — particularly the reining back of future commitments on pensions — Britain advances towards the next millennium with a large advantage over our European competitors as regards taxation and costs.

The message from all this is not that everything in the 1980s was perfect or that everything that has followed it in the 1990s has been bad. Every Prime Minister has his — and her — regrets. The important message, rather, is that in Britain we have seen from the 1980s what works — just as we saw in the 1970s what did not. And what works here, as elsewhere, is free enterprise and *not* big government.

So it would make no *economic* sense at all for us to move closer to the policies of our opponents. Rather, the *economic* challenge is to cut back the burden of state spending, borrowing and taxation still further.

And trying to move towards the centre ground makes no *political* sense either. As Keith used to remind us, it is not the centre ground but the common ground — the shared instincts and traditions of the British people — on which we should pitch our tents. That ground is solid — whereas the centre ground is as slippery as the spin doctors who have colonised it.

The Labour Party

Ladies and Gentlemen, one of Keith Joseph's most admirable characteristics — and one which secured for him respect and affection — was that he never cast doubt on the *motives* of his opponent. So, following in his footsteps, I am not going to cast doubt on the *motives* of the Leader of the Opposition.

But what about the Party he leads? The Labour Party itself may have changed many of its policies, but it hasn't changed its spots. You can tell this from the unpleasant noises it makes when anything like profits are mentioned. There is still virtually nothing that Labour spokesmen wouldn't spend more taxpayers' money on, or wish to control more tightly. They have learned to accompany these prescriptions with Conservative-sounding rhetoric, and even some Conservative-sounding policies. But the distinctive mark of every Labour policy, from health to education, from privatised utilities to the labour market, is *more government interference*.

All sorts of worthy people believe that Mr Blair in office would control his Party, and not they him. But this would be a large gamble to take.

Moreover, Mr Blair is not only human; he is also (as his record shows) by instinct a man of the Left. Confronted with the sort of choices you face in Government — decisions which often go unmentioned in the manifestos — it is the Prime Minister's gut instincts which count. The pressures to solve problems and assuage demands by more public spending, intervention and controls can become almost irresistible — *even* for an instinctive free marketer. Mr Blair may believe with his head that government spending is not the universal panacea: but what about his heart — and, indeed, his gut?

In any case, government is not about generalities but about specifics. Only if you have the conviction — the Conservative conviction — that it is wrong to spend more taxpayers' money unless the reasons for doing so are overwhelming — and even if *then* you don't sleep easily after doing so — are you likely, as Prime Minister, to face down the pressure.

Suspicious that a Labour government would in practice become too soft a touch on public spending are compounded by all the misty talk about boosting communities and community values.

Now, communities can be sustained in two ways only — either by the State, which is what community politics, community leaders, community health, community housing, community centres and so on ultimately rely on. *Or* communities can be based on genuine volunteers, sometimes local businesses, sometimes individuals with a common, freely chosen goal — like those who founded the great voluntary movements of the Victorian era which are still with us.

In some cases, to be sure, the State — often in the form of local government — can play a modestly useful part in “community projects”. But the risk is that community comes to mean collective; collective comes to mean State; and thus the State expands to replace individual effort with subsidised activism. It is free, enterprising, self-reliant, responsible individuals that Britain needs. It's when we have more of *them*, our communities will take better care of themselves.

But I believe there is a still more important reason why Labour should not be entrusted with government. They may protest that they are no longer Socialists: but they have lost none of their zeal for constitutional upheaval. The Labour Party's proposals on devolution threaten chaos, and possibly the dissolution of the Union of the United Kingdom itself. Moreover, by embracing European federalism — through the European social chapter and, above all, the European single currency — a Labour government could deal a terminal blow to the traditions of British parliamentary democracy.

Cutting the State Down to Size

Traditionally, the Socialists believed that the State must make people equal; though an honest look at the perks and privileges of the Communist *nomenklatura* might have set them right about that. The New-look Labour Party now apparently wants the State to make people highminded and socially aware; though a thought for how difficult the Churches find it to change people's behaviour ought to induce some doubts when mere politicians start to preach.

It seems to me that New Labour has a new song — one that was made famous by Dame Vera Lynn:

“Wishing will make it so
Just keep on wishing, and cares will go ...
And if you wish long enough, wish strong enough
You will come to know
Wishing will make it so.”

But it won't — any more than you can make people good by legislation.

So the limitation of government is *still* the great issue of British politics — and indeed to a remarkable degree of global politics. The threat to limited government did not end with the collapse of communism and the discrediting of socialism. It remains an issue in Western — particularly European — democracies.

There is a constant tendency, in which pressure groups, vested interests and the media play a part, for government to expand. One of Thatcher's laws — for which I owe something to Lord Acton — is that all government tends to expand, and Socialist government expands absolutely. If you start with *their* view of the State — that it exists to right social wrongs rather than to create a framework for freedom — you can never find the definitive justification for saying “no”. Above all, you cannot say “no” to demands for more spending on welfare.

That is why in Sweden the share of national income the government took reached some 70 per cent. It's why it's several points higher in Europe on average than here. The dominant political philosophies of those countries have been Socialist, or Social Democrat or Christian Democrat — all of them views which hold that the State, rather than individuals, is ultimately responsible for what happens in society.

This is in marked contrast to the United States which, even when the Democratic Party is in charge, has never been converted to the idea that government — let alone the Federal Government — has the right to intervene whenever it wants. It is also in marked contrast to those Asia Pacific countries — like Hong Kong, the Little Tigers and, of course, the mighty Japan — where government's share of GDP remains very low.

Spending at just over a third of GDP in the United States, and a quarter or less in the Asia Pacific, has resulted in low taxes and high growth rates. Their example, like that of Britain in the 1980s, shows what works — just as the overspent and over-regulated Scandinavian model shows what does not.

It was with the best intent that post-war governments spent more on welfare, believing that as the standard of living rose, people would do more to look after themselves. What we had to do, as Keith often said in earlier years, was to break the “cycle of deprivation”. But the more we spent, the greater the dependency, illegitimacy and crime became. And of course the tax burden rose.

Western countries have now woken up to the problem. But they are still paralysed by it. Here, though, Peter Lilley has been advancing steadily with social security reform, making important changes to reduce future burdens. Yet, as Peter himself often reminds us, social security still accounts for over 40 per cent of central government spending and costs every working person £15 every working day.

Certainly, the proposals increasingly favoured by the Labour Party for a much higher compulsory second pension — paid for by much higher compulsory contributions — offer no way out. It is one thing to *encourage* people to make provision for themselves, as we do with housing, health and pensions. It is also acceptable in some cases to *ensure* that people make some *minimum* contribution towards benefits, as we do through the National Insurance system. But the Labour Party’s plans would involve a large *increase* in *compulsory* saving which — as you would expect from them — results in a large *decrease* in *personal* liberty.

Alleviating the burden of the social security budget is a thankless but vital task, for which real *Tory* stamina is required. It will not be done by financial sleight of hand.

But the possibility of a *really radical* approach to spending, requiring large scale removal or transferral of government functions, must also remain on the agenda. Last November, a brilliant and provocative Centre for Policy Studies pamphlet by Patrick Minford — *Public Spending: a twenty-year plan for reform* — reminded us how far we still might go, and how great the potential gains. The spending cuts he proposes would also lead to dramatic tax cuts — with a big impact on growth.

Whether Professor Minford’s proposals are deemed acceptable or not, they are extremely valuable in illustrating the possibilities.

So I welcome the determination of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to bring public spending below 40 per cent of GDP. And I hope that at the next election we will be equipped with plans to bring it down over a period of years by *much more*.

Limited government doesn’t mean weak government, only less government. This is shown by the courageous and far reaching reforms which

Michael Howard has been making in the criminal justice system. The strength of the opposition he faces from the vested interests shows he is right — almost as much as do the encouraging recent crime figures.

“Our New (European) Masters”

But today the main challenge to limited government comes not from within these shores at all, but rather beyond them — from the European Union. There is, of course, also a challenge to *self*-government — and the two are closely connected.

The activity of the European Court, which can only ultimately be checked by amending the European Communities Act itself, is increasingly undermining our judicial system and the sovereignty of our Parliament. Proposals are being made for common European defence — proposals which Michael Portillo has roundly and rightly attacked. They too are a threat to national independence. But most important, of course, is the proposed single European currency which, as John Redwood has argued, “would be a major step on the way to a single European nation”.

The Prime Minister will have the support of all of us who wish to see these dangerous and damaging proposals resisted, and the present trends reversed, as he argues Britain’s case at the forthcoming intergovernmental council. And we look forward to a successful outcome.

But vital as the issue of *self*-government is, it is *limited* government that concerns me today. For the European Union not only wishes to take away *our* powers; it wishes to increase its *own*. It wants to regulate our industries and labour markets, pontificate over our tastes, in short to determine our lives. The Maastricht Treaty, which established a common European citizenship and greatly expanded the remit of the European Commission, shows the outlines of the bureaucratic superstate which is envisaged. And Maastricht is the beginning, not the end of that process.

Indeed, we are increasingly seeing the emergence of a whole new international political class. Some of them are politicians who have failed in their own countries, and so have tried their luck overseas. Some are officials who understand nothing of our *British* distinction between the legitimate powers of the elected and those of the unelected.

Almost fifty years ago, the Conservative journalist, Colm Brogan, wrote an incisive *critique* of the post-war Labour Government with its arrogant bossiness and intrusive cackhandedness. He called it *Our New Masters*. The title is equally appropriate to the “new *European* masters”. And it is no surprise to me — as someone who always recognised the Socialist destination

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of this Euro-federalist dream — that now the Labour Party welcomes it all so warmly. What they can't achieve in an independent, free enterprise Britain, they can hope to secure in a Euro-federalist Britain, whose people's instincts are ignored and whose parliamentary institutions are overridden.

Self-government, limited government, our laws, our Parliament, our freedom.

These things were not easily won. And if we Conservatives explain that they are now in peril, they will not be lightly surrendered.

In *The Reeds of Runnymede*, celebrating the signing of Magna Carta, Rudyard Kipling puts it like this:

“At Runnymede, at Runnymede,
Oh, hear the reeds at Runnymede:-
You mustn't sell, delay, deny,
A freeman's right or liberty.
It wakes the stubborn Englishry,
We saw 'em roused at Runnymede!

... And still when Mob or Monarch lays
Too rude a hand on English ways,
The whisper wakes, the shudder plays,
Across the reeds at Runnymede.
And Thames, that knows the mood of kings,
And crowds and priests and suchlike things,
Rolls deep and dreadful as he brings
Their warning down from Runnymede!”