



Spring Address

Natural partners

Co-operation and competition

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Natural partners of enterprise

It is an irony that many critics of 'Thatcherism' who allege that it has lost its connection with its ancient conservative roots, are precisely those who were complacent at Britain's steady movement into corporatism.

One of Marxism's more helpful metaphors is that of quantity becoming quality (the atoms rearrange themselves and water becomes ice or steam); and Britain's steady advance towards corporatism and unionocracy produced qualitative changes in our society. The only solution was a reforming government. Fortunately we got one.

This has produced a second irony; that of conservatism as a radical, reforming movement. How else was the State society to be dismantled and privatised, half time Britain to be made full time, schools to become educational and de-politicised, local government to lose its corruption, industry to stand on its feet and powerful trade unions to cease as political mafias?

A visual-media society cannot digest too many concepts and one essential word that has done duty for many of the essential reforms is 'competition'.

Politicians, the media and the public have taken 'competition' to heart as explaining the basis of 'Thatcherism'. Politics, however, is many-sided and the projection of one truth is often achieved at the expense of another.

The identification of conservatism mainly with competition has serious drawbacks. The deep attraction of conservatism is related to a strong sense of the desirable continuity and organic nature of society. This is summed up not only by politicians like Burke but also by greater writers such as Shakespeare and Goethe. For the ordinary man or woman, it arises from a sense (even if vague and intuitive) of the essential nature of man. And man's nature is by no means essentially competitive.

I am not rejecting the essential need for competition to be understood as a basic ingredient of success for Britain in the 1980's. As an Aims of Industry man since the 1960s, I am hardly likely to do that. In a hard, competitive world we will sink unless we have it. And our governments since 1979 deserve praise for

having brought this to the front of national consciousness. It has been a psychological accompaniment to astonishing successes. We have been some way along the road to a valuable and bloodless revolution.

In stressing the importance of competition, however, we have over-simplified the nature of the achiever. The motives of artists, entrepreneurs, and managers, are often creative rather than competitive. The poet's poem, the entrepreneur's enterprise, the manager's solution, are seen as worthwhile in themselves – not necessarily in relation to the achievement of a rival. That generalisation also applies to the factory operative or the shop assistant; sometimes the motive may be to earn more on piece-rates or commission than other operatives or assistants, but often it is the achievement of the job itself that is valued. The creative drive is generally there. Directors and managers are privileged in being able to practise it to the full. That is why it is necessary to build as much creativity and decision making into the jobs of those at the bottom of the organisational pyramid.

But modern conservatism needs to do more than broaden its concept of competition and of the nature of the achieving drives in men and women. It should also be aware that the identification of conservatives as the party of competition leaves out something of which the public are dimly aware and for which they should be looking to the Conservative party for clarification.

The lives of most men and women are not based on competition. Nor does society function solely on its values. Whether we live in a modern industrialised society or a primitive one, we live through a fantastically complex arrangement of co-operation. That applies whether we work in a vast industrial firm or a small shop, live in a family, and go about our business on the ground, on rail, by sea or in the air. The signals flash, the buttons are pressed, and we survive because of the co-operation of others.

That may sound like a truism – but it does reflect a truth not only about man but also about nature. I believe that conservatism suffers great damage if it is identified with an illiterate pseudo-Darwinism of competitive nature, red in tooth and claw. Conservatism stands for realism (and that includes an understanding of the irrational and super-rational nature and needs of man). It doesn't stand for hard-heartedness or romantic

brutalism.

Nor does it accept the heresy of subsuming man under the economic framework. That is the Marxist heresy. And naive economic libertarianism is the other side of the coin to Marxism.

It does behove conservatives to be semantically accurate when talking about the 'virtues' of competition and co-operation. These activities are morally neutral: good when used for good purposes and harmful when used, for example, for competitive and co-operative cocaine smuggling. A responsive market economy demands a co-operative society with effective rules on fair competition and the protection of the consumer. And the motives of the successful entrepreneur or manager are more likely than not to be an amalgam of self-achievement, morality and competition.

This is not, however, to argue that conservatives should leave the moral ground to socialists (as some sophisticated people have advocated, on the cynical grounds that the public will vote for efficiency). Such a view of human values, even of voting intentions, is very shallow.

No: the serious task for conservatives is to dispel the illusion that success for one person is always at the expense of another person. This pessimistic puritanism – or sad socialism – is still current; and is accentuated by the radical chic philosophy which adopts this chip-on-the-shoulder pessimism and applies it to a variety of human situations: eg. male happiness is only at the expense of female dolour. Or that success and profit is the child of 'greed'.

The origin of co-operation

One missing ingredient can be found in the major work of that brave and attractive anarchist, Prince Petr Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*.¹

Kropotkin was born in Moscow in 1842, and did original work in geography, geology and zoology in Siberia. His work as a zoologist started under the influence of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*.

Kropotkin looked for that bitter struggle for the means of existence among animals belonging to the same species which was considered by most Darwinists (though not always by Darwin himself) as the dominant characteristic of struggle for life, and the main factor of evolution.

What Kropotkin saw with his own eyes gave him a different view which he made public in opposition to T H. Huxley's famous manifesto, *The Struggle for Existence: A Programme*, which was published in *The Nineteenth Century*.

Kropotkin countered with *Mutual Aid* in which he drew attention not only to co-operation between animals of different species – but to the abiding role of mutual aid in man: among primitive people, in the medieval city and in the modern world.

Huxley, whose manifesto appealed to a fashionable, romantically brutalist laissez-faire philosophy, never replied to Kropotkin's articles, which later appeared as a book. As Ashley Montagu put it:

Kropotkin found that the interpretation of 'the struggle for life' in the sense of a war cry of 'Woe to the Weak' raised to the height of a commandment of nature revealed by science, was so deeply rooted in England that it had become almost a matter of religion.²

An awareness of mutual aid as a prime factor in life was not the only thing Kropotkin learned from his observations in Siberia. He realised:

the absolute impossibility of doing anything useful for the mass of people by means of the administrative machinery. With this illusion I

parted forever – I lost in Siberia whatever faith in State discipline I had cherished before. I became an anarchist.

Kropotkin stayed an anarchist for the rest of his life – though he abhorred violence and supported the cause of the Allies in 1914-1918 in what he regarded as a defensive war against Germany. Arrested a number of times, he rejected a government post from Kerensky and it can only have been his great reputation which prevented his liquidation by the Bolsheviks (especially when one considers the boldness and courage of his letter to Lenin reprimanding him for the taking of hostages).

If you admit such methods, one can foresee that any day you will use torture as was done in the Middle Ages ... Nor can you, Vladimir Ilyich, you who want to be the apostle of new truths and the builder of a new State, give your consent to the use of such unacceptable methods . . . What future lies in store for Communism when one of its most important defenders tramples in this way on every honest feeling?

We know the answer to that. Kropotkin ('personally . . . amiable to the point of saintliness and [who] with his red full beard and lovable expression might have been a shepherd from the Delectable Mountains,' said Bernard Shaw) died in 1921. If he had lived a little longer his reputation would no longer have saved him from the firing squad or the gulag.

His *Mutual Aid* should be required reading for any conservative (though not leading to the road of anarchism), along with other essential non-conservative books like Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty* and G K Chesterton's *Man who was Thursday* and *Orthodoxy*.

Kropotkin's evidence for the contribution of mutual aid is overwhelming. He begins with bees, ants, termites and thence to white-tailed eagles who combine for hunting; Brazilian kites who act as a kind of removal gang for heavy prey; co-operative fishing pelicans; lapwings who combine to take on an eagle; wolves and wild dogs who hunt in packs; the patriarchal society of rabbits; elephants and their sentries; and the mass ballet of certain birds.

On he goes through mutual aid in primitive man and the

role of parental love; co-operation in mediaeval society; the early protection of the market- place in which no stranger might be slain; the guilds; the unions between cities; the work on the miraculous cathedrals; the mutual work of the crafts.

And then on again to the spoliation of the guilds by the State; the assault on the independence of villages and communal ownership, the growth of trade unions.

Kropotkin, as an anarchist, omits the growth of mutual aid that accompanied the expansion of the church, the industrial revolution and the birth of capitalism which flowered into the complex organisation of the limited liability company³. Capitalism's achievements are based on a combination of creativity, competition, the urge for expression, the harnessing of science to the industrial revolution and business organisations which achieve an astonishing degree of co-operation.

The aberration of corporatism

The sense of mutual aid is deep in man and is not met by the edicts of compulsory co-operation under socialism and fascism. Nor by the corporatist arrangements of States to ensure that such co-operation is forthcoming.

The Labour party had a respect for democracy and (many fellow-travelling communists and Trotskyists excepted) still does – and yet its ideas have been anticipated by the corporatism of Marxism and Fascism. To take just one example: it is interesting that the terms of reference under which Labour first set up their State investment organisation are almost word-for-word those of Mussolini's I.R.I. (*Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale*). It is an ironic footnote to history that the great British prophet of State investment in industry, Mr Benn, was anticipated by the Quisling industrialist (there is always one) appointed by Mussolini to run I.R.I. – Signor Benni. History sometimes enjoys puns!

In the days of crawling and galloping socialism in Britain, co-operation was too often used as a semantic disguise for corporatism. The system of trinitarianism – bringing together government, industry and trade unions – was stale fascist theology. It is also well beloved of Latin-American generals and colonels, as I discovered when lecturing on that continent. 'Co-operation' for them, as often for the Labour Party, meant domination.

The catspaws

Another example of the perils of corporatism has been shown by the catspaw role of industry's personnel managers. They and their national organisations, with agreeable frontier relations with the trade unions, connived while Britain moved into unionocracy with debased closed shops, non-Labour trade unionists bullied and deceived into paying the political levy through their wage packets, corrupt ballots, inadequate membership records and restrictive practices. The initiative to break these and attempt to restore trade unions to their proper representative functions came not only from the Government,

but also from organisations like Aims of Industry and the Freedom Association. From the personnel managers' organisations there was much initial sorrowing with the trade unions at the harshness of Government legislation.

Socialist 'Co-operation'.

The danger of confusing co-operation and corporatism in the public's mind is a real one; but is not avoided by saying nothing. There is, as I have indicated, a missing ingredient in the current philosophy of conservatism. At least as it is communicated; for it is by no means missing in conservative plans and actions.

Mr Bryan Gould, the Labour party's Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary, has a keen sense for the music of political time and is putting forward Labour's intention to have closer 'co-operation' between government and industry. Perceptively, Mr Gould anticipates those critics who have seen that Labour's last General Election was stuffed full of corporatism. 'There will of course be those who fear that such a concept of co-operation will merely provide a cloak for corporatism', writes Mr Gould. 'This is certainly a charge to be taken seriously; but the dangers of renouncing this form of co-operation, or of undertaking it with the wrong partners (as is true at present) far outweigh the dangers of preferring mutual incomprehension to dialogue, and in consequence allowing our economic performance to decline, in comparative terms, still further'⁴.

You can (to put it vulgarly) say that again! Especially when you scrutinise Mr Gould's proposals more closely. The CBI, he states, is too dominated by financial institutions, importers and those who manufacture abroad. 'An industry which is offered a real role to play,' he states, 'in relation to government will find it necessary and desirable to organise itself rather better than it does at present'.

The message is clear. A Labour-sponsored and approved CBI is to be created with lots of Signori Bennis. It will be back to those days of the 1960s when industrialists beloved by Harold Wilson and passionate about national plans appeared almost nightly on our television sets.

The message is not only corporatist; it is ineffably condescending. Just imagine Mr Gould telling the TUC that it is unrepresentative and needs re-structuring in order to have a

'real role' to play with government.

Mr Gould's recent message to the TUC is, in fact, a very different one: 'The next Labour Government will naturally wish to bring the trade union movement back into the mechanism of decision-making on economic policy.'

Mr Gould knows a trend when he sees it. And so, like it or not, this Government must spell out, clearly, the antithesis between conservative and socialist ideas of co-operation.

Co-operation can be learnt

One of the best ways of displaying conviction is that of example. Government itself very often fails to display the co-operative virtues that it looks for in others. Departments fight their corners with a fierceness and a skill in leaking that makes the arguments in company board rooms look mild indeed.

Most politicians are professional arguers and most Secretaries of State are better at arguing than their humbler colleagues. Government departments are not only competitive for resources: they also face the great power of the Treasury.

Is it possible for Government to learn the skills and arts of co-operation from business?⁵ Sir John Hoskyns, a former head of the No 10 Policy Unit and now Director-General of the Institute of Directors, takes the view that Ministers will always have to fight their own corner as long as they are drawn from the ranks of MPs, are career politicians and are backed by life-time career civil servants.

On the other hand, as John Redwood, another former Head of the No 10 Policy Unit, points out, privatisation has shown that if politicians believe that they will be successful by *not* obstinately fighting their own corner, they are happy to carry out a group task (even if, as in this case, it means reducing their empires). The Government should use this *modus operandi* in other areas.

Privatisation, Professor Patrick Minford has observed, has improved government management. And there are lessons which government can learn from industry in promoting co-operation. For example, Nigel Mobbs has made the point that government management is too often concerned with conflict and confrontation, rather than maintaining a constructive partnership between departments. 'They also lack a sense of urgency in their decision-making due to the fact that they are not bound by the normal measurements of performance which would be applicable in the private sector'. Financial accountability and effective communication, as Lord Hanson and Walter Goldsmith indicate, are often lacking in government. Sir Frank Gibb of Taylor Woodrow supports the Ibbs Report which

recognised that management of government business had improved through the introduction of private sector disciplines but maintained that further substantial improvements were possible. He, too, believes that privatisation has removed the need for government to interfere in the running of industry and has diminished the habit of government departments fighting their own corners on every budgetary matter.

The possibilities for further privatisation (and thus of allowing the spirit of co-operation to enter in, in its manifold forms) are vast, almost limitless. Valuable experience has been gathered from the large-scale privatisation of the new towns. That exercise must come to an end and it would be a great pity to waste the acquired wisdom.

The rites of co-operation

Governments, national and local, are often responsible for the rites or liturgy of co-operation. By this I mean the events which celebrate and symbolise national occasions, the monuments or statues that express public attitudes, the cultural buildings such as opera houses, galleries and museums, the public glories like the London parks.

All these are, in a sense, offerings by the public (through the Government) to themselves. Walking through Regents Park, one can not only praise the Prince Regent and Nash and the then Government, but also acknowledge the modern presenters of these splendid semi-rural facilities – which include, via one's taxes, oneself.

The justification for acts of privatisation should not blind conservatives to the contrasting justification for preserving communal facilities which enrich our lives. What conservative will argue for privatising the Trooping of the Colour?

One problem in a democracy with public liturgy is that the left often wishes to politicise it, just as it tends to politicise art and literature. One of the ugly developments in the 1960s was the use of Arts Council money to stage left wing propaganda in some of our national theatres.

In the 1970s and 1980s we have witnessed a belief by sexual pressure groups such as so-called gay-rights, that the public should not merely attend propagandist performances, but also subsidise them through taxes and rates.

Because the left is often not conventionally religious, it compensates (for example in the Soviet Union, China, Albania and Cuba as well as in left wing British councils) by *ersatz* religious liturgy. A National Union of Miners' occasion with banners, music and Mr Scargill as mime, prophet, priest and rabble-rouser rolled into one, is a fair illustration.

The left are entitled to their partisan liturgy – but not at the national expense.

The monarchy is one of our greatest liturgies of co-operation. Its existence presents the left leadership, many of whom are republican and anti-monarchist, with an awkward

problem, since the monarchy's popularity in Britain transcends party affiliation. This is an issue on which the left dare not speak its mind for fear of losing public support. The blocked political career of the capable Mr Willie Hamilton is a salutary example of what happens to a moderate Labour politician who says aloud what is on the mind of most left wingers.

The NHS is, in many ways, a noble though old-fashioned liturgical monument, one for which the British public has a deep affection. It is right to look at saner ways of paying for it – but we should recognise the depths of feeling involved. As W B Yeats might have said : 'Tread soft when you tread on my NHS dreams'.

The webs of co-operation – at home and abroad

One false and misleading myth is that of the terrible isolation of individuals in our cities and suburbs. This may be true for some of the old and unfortunate; but it is by no means representative. Scratch below the surface of life in cities, suburbs and villages and an intricate web of voluntary groups and societies comes to light. The years of competitive Thatcherism are also years of burgeoning charities. The amount donated to them by industry has approximately doubled in recent years. And individual effort and enterprise are constantly producing new ones.

The desirable twin themes of co-operation and competition – the two faces of enterprise – exist at international level, too. In the Common Market, we see legitimate and fruitful competition between national and multi-national companies; but we also see, and need, co-operation at EEC level. If we are to seize the great opportunities, and surmount the great challenges, which the Common Market will present us in 1992 we need to understand the uses both of co-operation and of competition – as in practice we do in our domestic affairs.

In the world at large, too, we should work for freer trade and competition – but to achieve it we need rules, and some measure of monetary stability as an agreed framework within which to compete (and co-operate).

Lessons for industry

Industry's quest for the alchemy of co-operation has been long and expensive. It has been almost over-receptive to new fashions in industrial sociology and psychology in response to the question, 'How do we motivate the worker?'

Taylorism's 'scientific management' did not only appeal to American capitalists; it also produced enthusiasm from Lenin and Mussolini.⁶ This was succeeded by the participative approach of Mayo and his successors. Mayo placed emphasis on group cohesiveness and social skills in contrast to authoritarian approaches.

In Britain, the development of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology saw a different approach with studies on fatigue, rest-periods, factory conditions, absenteeism, etc.

In the United States, we saw the human relations school, experiments in organisational structure (pyramid and flat structure leading to differing results), and studies on employee satisfaction and efficiency – which suggested, as in the research on the accuracy of bomb aimers in the last war, that unfortunately happiness and efficiency do not always go together; some (though not excessive) tension seems necessary to group success.

In India, the classic research by A K Rice in the Ahmedabad Manufacturing and Printing Company examined a situation in which automatic looms, with workers allocated to each component, produced lower efficiency and morale than the non-automatic method.⁷

The research in which Indian workers were given the kind of social cohesion which they experienced in their villages resulted in satisfactory production.

In different forms, we have seen workers in the US and in Scandinavia achieve excellent results when decision-making has been pushed down, as much as possible, to the shop floor.

One obstacle to fruitful co-operation – and prosperity – in Britain is still the shop steward, who often acts as a bottleneck in communication; also the sense of the foreman or supervisor that he is being by-passed by managers and operatives, who prefer to talk to the shop steward. American managers working

in Britain are startled when they find that they are not expected to talk directly to the shop floor, and that operatives approach the shop steward rather than their supervisor.

A second major obstacle is that many Trade Unions still fail to look after the long-term interests of their members. The puritanism that rejects American rewards along with American productivity emerges as a death-wish that eventually (as in the case of the print workers) or suddenly (as in the recent Dundee catastrophe) leads to loss of jobs.

Hence the practical value of co-operation by unions and employers in keeping ahead of conflicts; and in producing stability by means of long-term agreements with one union, or at least a limited number of them – including no-strike agreements.

The American system of a big bust-up after a three-year agreement, which eventually clears the air and leads to positive results, is at least to be preferred to the sporadic testiness of some British labour relations (although, since 1979 wild-cat strikes have greatly diminished).

Joan Woodward and the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in the UK broadened their research into industrial behaviour to take account of the influence of organisation and technology. Tavistock's important work in the coal mines was, alas, allowed to lapse in Britain, but it led to major research on broadening the responsibilities of shop-floor workers in countries such as Sweden. The current approach is to take in both the organisation and the environment in studies.

The 'Half time Britain' thesis by consultant William Allen, produced partly as a result of his work for Esso which led to the Fawley Agreement, was almost too far ahead of its time. Allen postulated, in the early 1960s, that Britain had too many workers on the machines, had a low standard of rewards, poor education and was the country of excessive overtime. (The last has still not been tackled.) The disease of 'Half-time Britain' has been alleviated by the Thatcher Governments and by ambitious entrepreneurs like Murdoch and Maxwell. An ultimate test for companies is to produce ambitious targets, together with the necessary communication programmes, for management, supervisors, employees and trade unions.

Industrialists are sometimes bemused at being told that

British industry suffers from class rigidities, whereas the evidence of David Granick's studies in *The European Executive* and *The Red Executive* showed that we were alone in allowing promotion from the bottom to the top of industrial organisations: one emergent weakness, however, was the lack of qualifications of our socially mobile management⁸.

Britain has since the Middle Ages been a notably class mobile society. That is why we have a social ear for class consciousness. It is the result of our mobility – up and down.

What morals can industry draw from the variety of approaches enjoined on it in the last sixty years? There is evidence that effective communication, involving participation in the context of work, can reduce resistance to change. But that is not invariable; workers may sometimes look to their trade unions rather than to management for participation.

'Political' forms of communication such as elected workers on boards obviously present a threat to the enterprise structure of companies. Nor do they really touch on the fundamental problems of communication in the context of the job. So far Britain has resisted co-determination pressures such as putting trade union representatives on the board. We will have to continue to do so.

One major problem for the future is not that of the Marxist thesis: the alienation of the worker from his or her work. It is rather the alienation of the valueless worker from society. Work can provide important satisfactions but not the ultimate human solutions; and it is only too easy for the twentieth century worker to project his inner emptiness and lack of satisfaction onto his work. For the future, Jung and Kropotkin are likely to offer more hints than Marx.

We should turn also, if we can find a copy, to that small classic – the study of conservatism and literature by T S Eliot, *The Literature of Politics*, published by the Conservative Political Centre in 1955. May someone publish it again soon!

After giving his seal of approval to Bolingbroke, Burke, Coleridge, Disraeli, Canon Demant, Christopher Dawson and Reinhold Niebuhr, T S Eliot concluded his essay by emphasising the importance of tapping pre-political thinking which is the earth into which politics sinks its roots.

And my defence of the importance of the pre-

political is simply this, that it is the stratum down to which any sound political thinking must push its roots, and from which it must derive its nourishment. It is also, if you don't mind my changing the metaphor so abruptly, the land in which dwell the Gods of the Copy Book Headings; and, abandoning figurative language altogether, it is the domain of ethics – in the end, the domain of theology. For the question of questions, which no political philosophy can escape, and by the right answer to which all political thinking must be judged, is simply this: What is Man? what are his limitations? what is his misery and what his greatness and what, finally, his destiny? ⁹

The appeal of a conservative thinker is not that he answers all these questions but that he appears to have reflected upon and been preoccupied with them.

Dr Desmond Morris, author of the *Naked Ape*, points out that, for man, these pre-political roots go very deep indeed:

Early man is looked down upon as a thug – all *ug ug* and *thump thump*. In fact he was extraordinarily co-operative. We survived only because we achieved the perfect balance between co-operation and achievement¹⁰.

Early man may not have enjoyed a formal Conservative Party but his approach to co-operation and achievement provides an admirable lesson for us to-day.

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