

'Why Tories Won: Accounting for Conservative Party Electoral Success from Baldwin to Cameron'

Dr Richard Carr, Churchill College, Cambridge - 15 November 2012

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Thank you Allen for that kind introduction. Thank you too, of course, to Jamie Balfour and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the support that enabled the research that I will lay out in part today. The research grant was extremely valuable for an early career academic – providing the means to support archival research that still informs my work some two years later, which has borne fruit in three of the articles that will be referred to at the bottom of the slides behind me, and in three monographs on twentieth century British politics I am due to publish in 2013. 6 publications and counting therefore owe part of their genesis to this grant, not withstanding the good work of my two sometime co-authors throughout this period, Dr Bradley Hart (a former PhD student here at Churchill College and current lecturer at California State University Fresno), and Rachel Reeves MP.¹ By final way of preamble I must also thank the staff here at the Churchill Archives Centre, and indeed the Master, for various kindnesses over the years – not least in relation to a conference Bradley and I played a small role in coordinating in November 2010, during my By-Fellowship.²

So, today's lecture is entitled 'Why Tories Won: Accounting for Conservative Party Electoral Success from Baldwin to Cameron.' Now, given Stanley Baldwin became Conservative Party leader in 1923, and David Cameron – Boris and the electorate permitting – seems likely to serve until at least 2015, that is quite an expanse of time to cover in 40 minutes, and broad brush strokes – not to say, missed policy areas - are inevitable. I want therefore to alight some common themes that have marked Conservative policy making over that period, and their relationship with the electorate in the democratic era. But first, it is briefly important to set out the overall context.

Since 1918, when women over 30 and the majority of working class men were able to vote for the first time in this country, the Conservative Party has won the most number of seats in 15 of the 25 General Elections that have taken place. In the interwar period the party was particularly dominant - in every General Election between 1918 and Labour's New Jerusalem victory of 1945, the Conservative Party won more votes than any other, including crushing landslides in 1924, 1931 and 1935. Between 1945 and 1997 the party never failed to reach 35% of the vote, roughly, by the way, the percentage David Cameron achieved in 2010. The Prime Minister who has received the most amount of votes in any General Election in British history was not Tony Blair in 1997, Harold Wilson in 1966, or Clement Attlee in 1945, but a Conservative – not Churchill, Thatcher, or Macmillan incidentally, but the 14 million ballots cast for John Major's Tory Party in 1992. So, to quote a late great historian of the party, John Ramsden, Britain is indeed 'a Conservative country which occasionally votes Labour.' I will return to this quote later on, and how it may be recast.

I want to offer a few contributions which may serve as something of an explanation here. These are as follows: the way the party has put its finger on the cultural pulse of the nation,

¹ See R. Carr and B.W. Hart, 'Old Etonians, Great War Demographics, and the interpretations of British Eugenics, 1914-1939,' *First World War Studies*, 3/2 (2012), 217-239. Bradley and I are also set to publish *The Foundations of the British Conservative Party*, (Continuum, 2013). Rachel and I are currently working on a biography of the Wilson era minister, Alice Bacon MP.

² The keynote speech from Sir John Major saw much coverage, e.g. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/8164066/John-Major-lets-keep-the-Coalition-after-the-next-election.html>

its handling of the various economic depressions that have occurred in the modern era, its willingness to ape the language of its opponents when necessary and, where necessary, to put itself above the whims of the electorate. These characteristics might, on first glance, seem purely negative. An ability to role with the punches is not exactly exciting stuff. But the positive, aspirational nature of the Tory appeal cannot be ignored either, and we will also alight on that at times. All this, I will attempt to do, in a broadly chronological order.

In terms of number one: tapping into the cultural pulse, let us begin in 1918. The period after the First World War was when, to quote the historian Stephen Ward, there was more chance of revolution on Britain's streets than at any time since the Chartists in the mid 1800s. The interwar period is instructive, because it saw almost two decades of continually high unemployment – particularly amongst ex-soldiers who had been promised so much in 1918 – ‘homes for heroes’ and all that – but it also constituted an era of virtual Tory monopoly on power. How so?³

I want to suggest that the Conservative Party's understanding of what the Great War had wrought on British society was, whether out of Machiavellian design, happenstance, or institution, more in tune with what ordinary British people wanted to see from their leaders, than their political opponents. Whilst other figures offered more dynamism (Mosley before he went drastically off the rails) and, probably, better policies (Lloyd George's Keynesian remedy of spending on public works in 1929 and 1931) to move the nation forward, the Conservative Party recognised that, to a meaningful degree, people actually wanted to look backwards. Unemployment in interwar Britain was, as mentioned, horrifically high.⁴ In 1932 there were 3 million people unemployed, more than there are even today. The Conservatives had no immediate remedy to this – in part, because their party was so split between free trade and tariff reform (i.e. putting trade barriers to all but the empire) wings in the 1920s. Cheap money – i.e. low interest rates of, by the early 1930s, 2% – was then, as now, the solution alighted upon – albeit with the party eventually settling on a form of imperial preference from 1932. Now of course we have the additional monetary stimulus from the Bank of England of Quantitative Easing.

But cheap money was hardly enough. Instead then, of an economic offer to the electorate, the Conservatives tapped into their psyche. Consider this fact: between 1914-18, over 4 million Britons served overseas at one time and in one form or another during the First World War. About 10% of the population. These people obviously had close relatives, parents, children, brothers and sisters. At the same time, to win an interwar election, you needed to get to about 8 million votes. So, if you could convince a majority of former soldiers and those closely connected to them that you were the party who best served their interests, you'd have a pretty good shot at reaching that figure. It is perhaps cynical to think politics is just predicated on winning a majority next time round, but it's a reasonable place to start, particularly given the high concentration of unemployment in areas almost guaranteed to vote Labour anyway.

The economy as mentioned, was a tough nut to crack, but the party was largely helped here by the fact that, as in 2008, a global crash – the Wall Street Crash of 1929 – happened under a Labour government and one, partly driven by a lack of parliamentary majority, which found

³ Stuart Ball is about to release a forensic study of the period which, judging by his previous work, will be required reading: S. Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945*, (Oxford, 2013).

⁴ Much debated. Perhaps the classic study remains W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939: A study in public policy*, (Cambridge, 1990). The historiographical arguments between Robert Skidelsky and Ross McKibbin are also important – widely discussed in essays in the recent J. Davis, J. Shepherd, and C. Wrigley (eds), *The Second Labour Government: A Reappraisal*, (Manchester, 2011).

it difficult to address the forthcoming depression. But the Tory appeal went beyond ‘we will clear up Labour’s mess.’

Part of the research I carried out here at Churchill was on the use of former veterans of the First World War as parliamentary candidates, and subsequently, as MPs.⁵ These individuals, I contend, lent the Conservative party a powerful appeal in years when its policy making – mass unemployment and appeasement of Hitler’s Germany – was often less than ideal.⁶ If you make the calculated, if not unreasonable, assumption that the majority of unemployed people would vote Labour, you need to tap into that other large group in interwar society, former soldiers and those otherwise affected by the war. I will not go into discussions of gender here, but its important to note that these soldiers were also useful electoral fodder for that other new constituency in post 1918 politics, newly enfranchised women.⁷

The Conservative Party, then, achieved much by forwarding, literally, hundreds of ex-servicemen in interwar elections. These included famous names: Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, and Harold Macmillan would all go on to serve as Prime Ministers. But the point was that the party got such types into parliament in staggering numbers. In the 1920s and 1930s being a soldier was the political norm. There is something of a chicken and egg causality question here – was interwar politics militarised because a lot of soldiers got elected, or were a lot of soldiers elected because the polity was militarised? There were elements of both.

In any case it is useful, in any era, to pay attention to the types of MPs sitting on the parliamentary benches. What do we have today, for instance? Well, judging by messrs Miliband (older and younger), Balls, Osborne, Cameron and others, it seems we are in the era of the career politician. Indeed 90 MPs at the last election had served as some form of special adviser or another. In the 1980s, the entrepreneurial era of Thatcher, the businessman was in: 157 MPs in 1983 were predominantly from this background. Going further back, in the 1960s the barrister or solicitor was king, some 129 such types entering the 1964 Commons. In the 1920s and 1930s however, the ex-soldier ruled. In 1924, 200 Conservative MPs had performed uniformed service in the Great War – about 1 in 3 MPs in the entire chamber.

‘The cessation of hostilities did not mean the end of the war experience’, noted the historian Eric Leed, ‘but rather the beginning of a process in which that experience was framed, institutionalized, given ideological context, and relived in political action as well as fiction’.⁸ Patriotism, as Hugh Cunningham has noted, had formed a contested space throughout the nineteenth century.⁹ In a newly democratic and mass media age, and with such visible symbols – veterans – of national virtue, what it meant to be British was even more up for grabs. The link between Conservatism and patriotism, as Cunningham argued, is and was by no means innate however. The narrative needed to be ensconced.¹⁰

⁵ To be published as R. Carr, *Veterans MPs and Conservative Politics in the Aftermath of the Great War: The Memory of All That*, (Ashgate, 2013).

⁶ Fringes of the party, including veterans, flirted with the extreme right on occasion. See B.W. Hart, *British, German and American Eugenicians in Transnational Context, 1900-1939*, (Cambridge PhD thesis, 2011).

⁷ See David Jarvis, ‘Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s,’ *Twentieth Century British History* (1994) 5/2, 129-152.

⁸ See Carr, *Veteran MPs*, chapter two.

⁹ See H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain 1832-1918*, (London, 2001).

¹⁰ Jon Lawrence’s work on electioneering and the hustings is of interest to anyone analysing British political culture between the wars, e.g. *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*, (Oxford, 2009), and ‘The Transformation of British Public Politics After the First World War,’ *Past and Present*, 190 (2006), 185-216.

An example of how the Tories did this occurred here in Cambridge.¹¹ In 1922 the Labour Party candidate for this City was Hugh Dalton – in the 1940s later Chancellor of the Exchequer under Clement Attlee. Now not only was Dalton an exceptionally intelligent individual (he was an economics lecturer at LSE), he had served incredibly bravely during the First World War and earned a medal from the Italian government for his ‘contempt for danger’ during the conflict. But during his 1922 election campaign, in a three page election pamphlet Dalton, if anything rather played this down, merely offering the dry perfunctory description that ‘during the war I served four years in the Army, including two and a half years at the front.’ Dalton duly lost that election.

Tories, on the other hand, would scarcely be so modest. In the 1923 election, when the Conservatives forwarded a veteran candidate in Cambridge – a man called Richard Briscoe – people were bombarded – no pun intended – with reminders of Briscoe’s service, and, now Dalton wasn’t standing again, the lack of service amongst the other candidates for the seat. ‘Ex-servicemen! Vote for Briscoe. The ONLY (capital letters) Candidate Who Served in France. He will see you have Justice and Fair Play. He fought in the War, let him fight for you in the House of Commons.’ So his leaflet proudly stated. Briscoe duly won.

Now, it must be said, there were certain advantages the Tories had to maximise the cultural gains of the First World War. Ramsay Macdonald, the Labour leader for most of the 1920s, had opposed the Great War in 1914. Similarly, David Lloyd George – the wartime leader who had lead his nation to victory, was rather stymied by his decision to fight the 1918 election in coalition with the Tories, thereby ensuring that when the economy crashed in 1920, he would be hamstrung to a Conservative agenda – the Geddes Axe in the 1920s taking about 10% off social security spend, and a third off defence spending. The man who won the war was thus not so popular in times of peace, something of a parallel later seen in attitudes to Nick Clegg before and after the 2010 election. It was hard, therefore, for either Labour or Liberal parties to jump on this bandwagon of patriotism.

Nevertheless, the Conservative Party milked the ex-serviceman for considerable political gain. Whether through getting ex-servicemen to denounce the events of the General Strike in 1926, add a genuinely ‘national’ flavour to the National Government that followed Labour’s fall from office in 1931, or perhaps most crucially – endorse Chamberlain’s appeasement of Hitler in the late 1930s (Churchill very much out on a limb as an ex-serviceman who opposed that policy), former soldiers were the glamorous icing on a Conservative cake that was rather humdrum, but one the electorate were prepared to accept.¹²

Now all this was not mere cynicism on the individuals’ part. These veterans were often talented men who, having served alongside the working man during the Great War returned with a burning conviction to help them in times of peace. Harold Macmillan, John Loder and Oliver Stanley all form distinctively Conservative voices for reform during the 1920s and 1930s. But the use the party made of them in scooping up swathes of floating voters in the inter-war period was, I underline this first section with, crucial.

This interwar era informs our second point – the relationship between the Conservative Party and economic depression. There have been five major economic slumps in the modern era – the effect of the Wall Street Crash in 29, OPEC oil crisis in the early 70s, Winter of

¹¹ Leed’s point discussed in R. Carr, ‘Conservative Veteran MPs and the Lost Generation Narrative after the First World War,’ *Historical Research* 85/228 (2012), 284-305.

¹² On Churchill’s isolated views on appeasement see R. Carr, ‘Veterans of the First World War and Conservative anti-appeasement,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 22/1 (2011), 28-51.

Discontent in 78/9, the recession under Major, and the economic slump seen since 2008. Economic policy making – stimulus versus retrenchment, Keynes v Hayek and so forth – aside, the results of the General Elections that follow such meltdowns are very interesting.

Period of Economic unrest	Party in Power at the outset	Party which won the next election	Effect on Tory vote	Effect on number of Tory mps
1930-34	Labour	Cons	+ 5 million	+ 262
1973-76	Cons	Hung parliament (Labour)	- 1.3 million (Labour also - 0.5million)	-33
1979-83	Labour	Cons	+ 3.3 million	+63
1990-93	Cons	Cons	+ 0.4 million	-39
2008-tbc	Labour	Hung parliament (Cons)	+ 2 million	+108

Unlike in the US, where there is actually almost no correlation between unemployment and predicting the next election (President Obama recently securing re-election with higher unemployment than which he took office), in Britain there is a distinct pattern. Basically, if Labour is in office during a period of economic slump, it will likely lose the next election. But if the Tories do similar, the results are harder to predict. In 1974 it took two elections to finally see a stable Labour government take office after Heath (and even it was reliant on Liberal support), whilst John Major, as mentioned, retained office in 1992 at a time of considerable difficulty. For those seeking to predict the next election incidentally, it is perhaps instructive to look at 1931, when a Tory led coalition replacing a Labour government unable to cope with a global economic meltdown actually did remarkably little to solve unemployment or fix the financial system long term, but still retained office comfortably at the next election.

So what informs this general pattern? The first lies with Labour. Labour government's find it very difficult to cut expenditure without splitting at the seams. The 1929-31 Labour government, fell eventually over a 10% cut to teachers salaries. The post-45 governments split between Bevanites opposed to implementing charges in the NHS, and Gaitskellites on the right thinking the party needed to get real and move beyond the totems of 1945. In this regard New Labour actually did quite well, with broad consensus that Darling's budget of 2010 to halve the deficit by 2015 was about right. But cutting is an issue that Labour finds hard – and, whether or not the Tories actually like to cut (and it's fair to say that they're less

enamoured with the state per se), the party generally holds its nerve – or at least quietens internal dissent, more effectively than Labour.¹³

But internal strife is not, to be sure, exclusively a Labour problem. Even in times of good, the Tories have faced problems dealing with the different wings of their party. There is some really great material here at the archives centre from a range of sources, from a range of periods on the internal conversation going on in the Conservative party on this type of thing. In January 1958 Enoch Powell resigned as Financial Secretary to the Treasury in Macmillan's government. Though Macmillan's government wasn't going as far as some argued (principally Labour, but also left leaning Tories) it might, it was financing a degree of central government intervention in areas such as house building (in this case largely through subsidy) that many felt unacceptable. One of these was Powell, later known for his views on race relations, but also interesting as an exemplar of the type of free market thinking that would gain real credence in the party under Heath and particularly Thatcher. With inflation at 2.5% - a post-war high though low by more modern standards – Powell began a lengthy correspondence with Nigel Birch, who had resigned along with him (and indeed the Chancellor Peter Thorneycroft) in 1958.

Writing to the two men, Powell commented that 'our colleagues in the Party, and indeed opinion in the country, seem inclined to tolerate an unwelcome consequence level of [inflation] from a belief that the increased Government expenditure has minimised the "recession" and assisted "recovery".' The majority inside and outside the House take it as axiomatic that we were wrong, because everything has gone well since then... The Conservative Party is now almost pathological in its concern with 2.8% unemployment...and has less than no interest in the level of government expenditure.'¹⁴

Macmillan referred to this collective right-wing resignation as 'little, local difficulties' in an attempt to portray himself as a national figure above such difficulties. But the reality was that the affluence engendered by Conservative governments after 1951 – on which they had been elected to deliver an alternative to Labour's austerity Britain – was throwing up an unusual level of intra-party squabbling. Free-ing people from controls, increasing the income tax relief threshold, and thereby lifting levels of consumption – people's spending – was welcome by many. But the problem came that in order to sustain this, and keep people in jobs to people to do so, required government spending – and thus of course inflation, not to say taxing the private sector. The presiding administration, in Powell's eyes, had failed to hold its nerve – they had become obsessed with popular pledges to keep people in work, and lost sight of the hard-headed unpopular business of government. In other words in his eyes, they were acting like a watered down version of Labour in office. But for all Powell's protest, Macmillan had the results to back him up. 3 election victories from 1951 to 1959 – and 3 ever increasing majorities for the Tory Party (with 3 different Prime Ministers) – was the consequence. Macmillan era Conservatism then, offers an important lesson in how to win British elections. Macmillan, Harold Wilson and Tony Blair all stand as figures to some degree willing to ape the policies and the politics of the previous, opposite party's, administration. The degree to which Thatcher broke the mould is probably exaggerated, but if she indeed did, it lies in the usual road to success in British politics: listen to the moderate voices in your opposition, rather than the radical elements in your own party. As a later nod to this, on election night in 1997, the outgoing Conservative Welsh Secretary, William Hague, declared that 'we have faced an entirely no phenomenon in British politics: a party

¹³ I don't deal with the trade unions in this paper, clearly a factor.

¹⁴ Powell to Birch, 22 January 1959, POLL 3/1/13, Powell Papers, Churchill Archives Centre.

willing to say anything to get elected, to speak, in many ways, the language of the Conservative Party.’ Cameron would seek to put the shoe on the other foot in the run up to 2010.

After Profumo, the fall of Macmillan due to ill health, and the perception that the party was out of touch with the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s – Alec Douglas-Home was many things, but JFK he was not – the Conservative Party lost in 1964, and then again in 1966. Heath would win in 1970 after pre-election balance of payments figures did for Wilson – introducing some of the free-market policies that would flourish under Thatcher, but he would be one of the few Tories to hold office for only one parliamentary term, and was swept out of the office – unusually for a Conservative – under the general view that his government had become incompetent. Incompetence would not be accusation his successor would wear.

Moving forward then, within the papers here at Churchill of John Hoskyns – head of the prime minister’s policy unit after 1979 – there is much to be gleaned about the Thatcher years. Addressing a confidential dinner attended by leading Tory lights such as Hoskyns, Nicholas Ridley, Keith Joseph and others at the right wing think tank the Centre for Policy Studies in July 1977, Geoffrey Howe – later Chancellor, Foreign Secretary and Deputy prime minister - under Thatcher, gave voice to what the coming administration would espouse:

‘the key to success in returning to a competitive productive economy is the stimulation of the private sector. And overwhelmingly the most important key to this is the reduction in personal and capital taxation.’¹⁵

Corporate tax under Thatcher fell from 52% in 1979 to 34% by her fall from office. The exemption from capital gains tax was raised from £1,000 to ten times that amount. The top rate of income tax was reduced from 83% to 40% where, of course, it remained until the final year of New Labour in 2010. To those arguing against the recent reduction of the top rate of tax from 50% to 45%, the current Chancellor has made much of this later 40% top rate under New Labour from 97-2010 point. Gordon Brown was certainly wary about touching income tax in later years, though throughout the early 2000s he would oversee a degree of central government expenditure that Thatcher would never countenance – with significant consequence for levels of unemployment.

The point, in electoral terms however, was the call to aspiration – which has formed such a considerable part of the Tory strategy. Shifting demographics in the UK after the Second World War have meant that the pre-1945 distinctions between working, middle and upper classes no longer hold, if they ever did. Margaret Thatcher took on the unions – traditionally a bastion of working class culture – but still received significant support from what was dubbed ‘Essex man,’ later Mondeo man – people from working class backgrounds and with working class parents, but who had moved into middle class professions. Whilst Harry Enfield famously mocked the ‘loadsamoney’ culture of the late 1980s – started by Thatcher’s tax cuts and exacerbated by the deregulation of the stock market in 1986 – in reality many voters were buying into the idea that, one day, they themselves could indeed be so affluent. I do not have time to go into it here, but the greatest manifestation of this was the notorious ‘Right to Buy’ policy of the 1980 Housing Act which took the traditional Conservative appeal to/desire for a property owning democracy and convinced people to buy into it. Though its affect on the ground would be highly ambiguous – helping create pockets of deprivation in areas where tenants could not afford to buy their own home – Right to Buy

¹⁵ ‘Confidential Dinner at the Centre for Policy Studies,’ 20 July 1977, HOSK 1/25, Hoskyn Papers, Churchill Archives Centre.

was the probably the greatest policy – defined in terms of pure electoral pragmatism – in 20th century British politics. Put simply, aspiration sold, much like the houses in certain areas. 3 election victories were comfortably won from 1979 to 1987.

By 1992 however, after 13 years in the wilderness, Labour looked ready to gain power once again. Aspiration, despite a working class boy made good as leader in John Major, was seemingly dead. Neil Kinnock's triumphalism at the famous Sheffield rally aside, all polls pointed to a Labour government – the only difference was whether they would have to rely on Paddy Ashdown's Liberal Democrats to prop them up, or could go it alone. Yet Philip Gould – in 1992, as under Blair, leading Labour communications machine - knew that the very people who told the traditional pollsters that they would vote Labour, were in reality preparing to vote Conservative – but were too embarrassed to admit it. The Tories were campaigning, as so often, on a low-tax platform, and in this instance, on a specific claim that Labour would put up the average bill by £1,000. All this was not going well, and Kinnock consistently led Major prior to the election. When asked about Labour's five point lead in the polls a couple of weeks before the 1992 election, John Major replied that 'I wouldn't worry about that – it's the feeling out on the street that matters. It's been feeling good on the streets for some time, quite surprising really, quite out of line with the opinion polls.' Even on election night, the 10pm exit poll on the BBC said that Labour could win up to 313 seats, short of a majority, but likely enough to govern. In reality, Kinnock would only win 271 seats. Now that isn't a great exit poll. But it's also evidence of the endurance of the Conservative appeal, and the underlying small 'c' conservative ethos of the British people. Though the Tory appeal quite ephemeral – flag, freedom and country – it has proved remarkably durable.

From 1997 until 2005, of course, the party would be out of office. But as Neil Kinnock had used the campaigning tools of the right with the policies of the left, Tony Blair went one step further – and placed a Labour flag on Conservative turf, 'tough on crime,' giving independence on interest rates to the Bank of England, matching Conservative spending plans for their first two years in office. Offering a distinctly Conservative message in such circumstances proved difficult, and made the party look extreme when, in reality, its message hadn't shifted much, Europe for one aside.

David Cameron confronted this reality by, initially, making a landgrab for policy areas of the centre-left. Vote blue go-green and hug a hoodie may have met with much satire, but helped 'de-toxify' the party to a point where power seemed possible, even likely, by 2008/9. His claim to be the 'heir to Blair' – i.e. a figure a largely centrist public could buy into – was given a structural boost, by the nature of the 2005 election – which had given Blair a third term in office, but not enough centrist Labour MPs that the more marketised elements of his policy – principally academic schools – could be passed in parliament without Tory backing.

Cameron had high profile successes in opposition – notably his opposition to the deportation of the Gurkhas saw him not only win much praise, but team up with Nick Clegg in doing so, his 'death tax' claim in 2007 also saw Gordon Brown shy away from an election he may well have won. Cameron also however got some major calls wrong – on the economic crisis in 2008, Labour got the majority of decisions on recapitalising the banks right (as they later did with stimulus) whilst Osborne and Cameron floundered. But it didn't much matter. Brown was viewed as unlikeable, Cameron – despite reservations over his background – rather more likeable: a Blair without the scars of office. In that regard, the current Prime Minister followed Baldwin in the 1920s and Macmillan in the 1950s in mixing an appeal to

aspirational values with a personably sympathetic demeanour. He would fail of course to get a majority, but the opportunity to govern would still come.

So, in summation, 'why have Tories won' so consistently? There are many reasons, but this talk has alighted on two.

Firstly, because they have identified that people's voting patterns depend on more than a cost-benefit analysis of the economic proposals within respective manifestoes. Whether it be through forwarding aspirational candidates in tune with the tenor of the day such as veterans, or a pledge to put more money in the pockets of voters whilst extracting greater cuts from public services, the Tories have tapped into a latent entrepreneurial ethos amongst elements of the electorate. That is not to say this is necessarily a good thing, but that it has largely been successful. Indeed, given the centrist politics of Harold Wilson and Tony, an argument could well be forwarded that only one Prime Minister in the democratic era – Clement Attlee, and he under special circumstances – has ever been elected without making a claim to this constituency.

Secondly, because their innate ideological flexibility or – one might say – obsession with power, allows them to move with the times better than their opponents. The Liberals died as a political force in this country – well, at least until 2010 – because they were unable to cope with the meaning of the First World War. The Tories turned it, through their veteran candidates, into a PR triumph and an electoral badge of honour. Labour fell apart at the seams just three or four years after winning a crushing landslide in 1945 because they had no answer to the question, "what do you do when the money runs out?" Radical manifestoes – the Liberals in 1929, Labour in 1983, even to some degree the Tories in 2005 – have more often than not, been resoundingly rejected by the British electorate. There are exceptions – 1945 for one – but, generally, moderation has been the order of the day. This gives the Tories a distinct advantage – if your *raison d'être* is to preserve the best of British whilst holding back the revolutionary hoards, you are more likely to triumph in a British election – not again, necessarily a good thing, but a clear pattern that has emerged. To return to the quote at the beginning of our lecture then, rather than Britain being a Conservative country that occasionally votes Labour, it is perhaps more accurate to say that the British electorate is small 'c' conservative where small 'l' labour are more often than not persuaded to vote Tory.

And there, as we are running out of time, I shall leave it. Thank you very much indeed for listening.