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Extract from a speech by Rt Hon Michael Alison MP (Selby), at the Annual General Meeting of the Selby Constituency Association at Selby, North Yorkshire, on Friday 22nd March 1985.

It is 12 months or so since we last met formally as an Association, and much the most significant event in that period was itself a 12 month event - the miners' strike. How many of you would have dared to believe, when a national coal strike loomed up as a possibility last year, that it would be 'business as usual' in Britain for the whole of its 12 month duration, and that the strike would collapse in the end as an abortive fiasco? Something very fundamental has changed in Britain in recent years for things to have worked out the way they did. The change has been dramatically for the better. We would do well to analyze it and to reflect on it.

The change, essentially, is a resurgence in Britain of a national sense of self-confidence and unity. You will recall that the traditional unity of the National Union of Mineworkers is something of a by-word in the trade union world, and it has certainly been a formidable factor in the past. In the recent coal strike, however, NUM unity was confronted and surpassed by a greater, national unity. The politically-motivated leadership of the NUM sought, often by violence and intimidation, to lay a lawless seige to the British economy. They were defeated because their own unity, itself buttressed by fear and coercion, simply could not match the unity of the British people at large, from every level and background of society, determined to defend their jobs, their industries, their fundamental freedoms.

What has caused this resurgence of national unity and self-confidence? It has flowed, I believe, from two related sources: the growth in Britain of a property-owning society; and a clear reassertion of the rule of law in Britain. To both, the Conservative party and government is profoundly committed.

The upholding of the rule of law in the recent coal dispute was clearly of immense significance. At the crudest level, a well-trained, well-equipped and ample police force was able to stand up to violent and carefully organised mass picketing so effectively that there were no occasions when working miners, railwaymen, steel workers and others were not able to exercise their right to work. At a more sophisticated level, you will recall how effectively the Notts. working miners were able to secure Court injunctions against the NUM leadership; and how effectively the Courts dealt with the NUM's contempt of Court, by causing their funds to be sequestered. The 1980 and 1982 Industrial Relations Acts were also of significance in strengthening the hands of the ordinary citizen, indeed the ordinary trade unionist against the 'big battalions'.

I mention the reassertion of the rule of law first, because it is so fundamental to the health and vigour of a property-owning democracy. It is, as Professor Brian Griffiths has recently pointed out, essential for risk-taking, for wealth creation, for property acquisition, that our people should have confidence in the stability and objectivity of our legal system. I believe that this stability, and the resulting confidence, has been sharply promoted and strengthened since Mrs. Thatcher became Prime Minister.

You may of course think that there is something rather inward-looking and selfish, indeed materialistic about my emphasis on property rights and acquisition. But Conservatives are not so naive or unimaginative or lacking in ideals as regards private property as an end in itself. Essentially we value private property as a means to non-material ends. It is above all to safeguard individual and family freedom and independence - against the state; against a bullying bureaucracy, whether local or national; against coercion by a dominant employer or trade union - that we want people to have the independence of their own home, their own savings and pension fund, even their own car and their own telephone, underlining freedom of communication. All these material goods promote family life and well-being. And in the real world, family life is probably the environment in which most people are most free. It is also in family life that the ideals of self-sacrifice, of service to others, of uncomplaining responsibility, are most actively and regularly expressed. Anything which Governments do materially to enhance family life - promoting home ownership, giving more individual control over pensions, encouraging capital accumulation, reducing personal taxes - are actions to place real resources in the hands of those who are likely to dispose of them most responsibly and circumspectly. Socialist mythology tends to view the family negatively as inward looking or self-centred - the enemy of the collective. Conservatives see family life as the basic building brick in society in which freedom and responsibility tend naturally to co-exist.

So you will, I hope, applaud with me, and endorse with me, the general political strategy of the government, consistently pursued since the elections of 1979 and 1983: the huge increase in home ownership; the steady reductions in direct personal taxes and contributions; the reforms in capital taxation; the sweeping away of controls on prices, incomes, dividends, and foreign exchange; the increase in the number of police officers; the reform of trade union law; and so on. All these measures conspire to build up personal and family freedom under the law. And it is the kind of society which is emerging from these reforms which found the resolve and incentives to withstand the pressures of the miners' strike. Is this a cowed, or selfish society presided over by a harsh and uncaring Government? On the contrary: it is a society which found the will and resources to give a staggering £50 million pounds in private voluntary donations to relieve the Ethiopian and other African famines this year. And our Government is one which has taken the retirement pension to record levels, and NHS spending to record levels, to take just two features of the massive social spending undertaken by Mrs. Thatcher's administration.

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