

GILMOUR, IR.

14th February, 1980

Thank you so much for having sent a copy of the speech which you made in Cambridge last week. It was very good of you to have done this, and I enjoyed reading it.

Ian Gow

The Rt. Hon. Sir Ian Gilmour, Bt. M.P.

LETTER DATED 7/2/80.

(F)

CONSERVATISM

SIR IAN GILMOUR

● (F)
GILMOUR

LECTURE AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION ON 7TH FEBRUARY 1980

I WAS VERY HONOURED TO BE INVITED TO GIVE THIS TALK ON CONSERVATISM. UNTIL 5 OR 6 YEARS AGO, IT WAS A SUBJECT WHICH COMMANDED LITTLE INTEREST EVEN WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. BUT ALL THAT HAS CHANGED. NOT ONLY DO CONSERVATIVES ARGUE WITH UNWONTED INTELLECTUAL VIGOUR ABOUT WHAT EXACTLY THEY SHOULD BELIEVE (AN ARGUMENT WHICH I HOPE WILL BE CONDUCTED WITHOUT THE PERSONAL INTOLERANCE WHICH FUELS SO MUCH DISCUSSION IN THE LABOUR PARTY), MORE THAN THIS, THERE IS ALSO GROWING INTEREST OUTSIDE THE CONSERVATIVE FOLD IN THE IDEAS WHICH SHAPE OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD. WHATEVER ELSE PEOPLE SAY ABOUT US, IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONTEND THAT WE ARE BORING.

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS FOR THIS GROWTH OF INTEREST. FIRST, THERE HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN AN INTELLECTUAL UPRISING IN PARTS OF THE MEDIA AND

THE CASE OF PRINCIPLE AND MORALITY AGAINST THE
SOVIET IDEOLOGY.

I HOPE THAT IT WILL NOT BE THOUGHT A REBUTTAL
OF WHAT I HAVE JUST SAID IF I BEGIN BY ARGUING
THAT BRITISH CONSERVATISM IS NOT REALLY AN 'ISM'
AT ALL. THIS IS OF COURSE AN ADVANTAGE. IN
1939 WHEN AFTER YEARS OF MUTUAL VILIFICATION BY
THE NAZIS AND THE COMMUNISTS, THE RUSSIANS AND
THE GERMANS SIGNED THE NAZI-SOVIET PACT AND MADE
WAR CERTAIN, A FOREIGN OFFICE DIPLOMAT SAID OF
THAT GREAT AND OMINOUS EVENT; "ALL THE 'ISMS'
HAVE BECOME 'WASMS'!" WELL BECAUSE CONSERVATISM
IS NOT AN 'ISM' IT HAS AVOIDED BECOMING A 'WASM',
THE ABILITY OF CONSERVATIVES TO ADAPT THEMSELVES
AND THEIR POLICIES TO CHANGING CONDITIONS HAS
ENABLED THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY TO FLOURISH AND
CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDES TO SURVIVE IN A WAY WHICH
OTHER PARTIES HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO MATCH.

CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL THOUGHT CAN BE REGARDED EITHER AS A VERY SMALL SUBJECT OR AS A VERY LARGE ONE. IT CAN BE REGARDED AS A VERY SMALL ONE IN THE SENSE THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO THINK THAT CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL THOUGHT DOES NOT EXIST AND IS INDEED ALMOST A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS.

CERTAINLY MANY CONSERVATIVES TAKE A NOT VERY ELEVATED VIEW OF POLITICAL THOUGHT AND THEORY. THEIR OUTLOOK CAN BE ILLUSTRATED BY THE YOUNGER PITT'S COMMENT ON BURKE'S WRITINGS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. HE SAID, YOU WILL REMEMBER, THAT HE SAW IN THEM MUCH TO ADMIRE AND NOTHING TO AGREE WITH.

AGAIN, SOME CONSERVATIVES THINK THAT POLITICS IS A PRACTICAL MATTER AND SHOULD NOT BE SULLIED BY THEORY OR BY INTELLECTUALS. THEY NOT SO MUCH

DISTRUST THEORY AS REGARD IT AS IRRELEVANT. THEY MIGHT AGREE WITH NORMAN DOUGLAS'S REMARK THAT 'A MAN CAN BELIEVE A CONSIDERABLE DEAL OF NONSENSE, AND YET GO ABOUT HIS DAILY WORK IN A NATURAL AND CHEERFUL MANNER'. THAT IS CERTAINLY TRUE OF SOME LABOUR M.P.s AND EVEN CONCEIVABLY A FEW CONSERVATIVES - THOUGH LIBERAL M.P.s TEND TO BELIEVE THE NONSENSE WITHOUT HAVING THE CHEERFUL MANNER.

CERTAINLY CONSERVATIVES ARE SUSPICIOUS OF CERTAIN SORTS OF POLITICAL THEORISING. INDEED IN HIS NEW BOOK 'THE POLITICS OF IMPERFECTION', ANTHONY QUINTON, RIGHTLY I THINK, FINDS THE FOUNDATION OF CONSERVATISM IN WHAT HE CALLS THE 'CONVICTION OF THE RADICAL INTELLECTUAL IMPERFECTION OF THE HUMAN INDIVIDUAL'. BUT THAT EMPHATICALLY DOES NOT RULE OUT ALL POLITICAL THEORISING.

BURKE WAS NOT OPPOSED TO THEORY AS SUCH. WHEN HE SPOKE AGAINST THEORY, HE SAID, 'I MEAN ALWAYS A WEAK, ERRONEOUS, FALLACIOUS, UNFOUNDED OR IMPERFECT THEORY; AND ONE OF THE WAYS OF DISCOVERING THAT IT IS FALSE THEORY IS BY COMPARING IT WITH PRACTICE'. CONSERVATIVES DISLIKE WHAT WORDSWORTH CALLED 'UPSTART THEORY', THAT IS TO SAY LARGE OVERARCHING ABSTRACT SYSTEMS OF IDEAS OR IDEOLOGIES, WHICH PURPORT TO EMBODY UNIVERSAL IMMUTABLE TRUTHS THAT ARE INFALLIBLE GUIDES TO POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR.

THEY BELIEVE INSTEAD THAT POLITICAL THEORY SHOULD BE EMPIRICALLY FOUNDED, SHOULD BE FIRMLY GROUNDED IN PRACTICE. SO FAR AS CONSERVATIVES ARE CONCERNED THERE IS AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEORY AND IDEOLOGY, TO WHICH I HOPE TO RETURN LATER.

THUS, WHILE FULLY ACCEPTING THE NECESSARY LIMITATIONS OF CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL THOUGHT, I THINK THE SUBJECT I WAS ASKED TO TALK ABOUT DOES EXIST AND IS A VERY LARGE ONE. IT SEEMED TO ME THEREFORE BEST TO TRY TO DEAL WITH JUST TWO ASPECTS OF IT. FIRSTLY, THE ROOTS OF BRITISH CONSERVATISM, WHICH HELPS TO EXPLAIN WHY CONSERVATISM HERE IS DIFFERENT FROM CONSERVATISM IN OTHER COUNTRIES, AND ALSO WHY CONSERVATISM HERE IS WHAT IT IS. AND SECONDLY, THE PRESENT-DAY CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDE TO THE STATE; THIS SECOND ASPECT IS MORE EASILY CONSIDERED AFTER HAVING HAD A LOOK AT THE ROOTS OF CONSERVATISM.

FIRST, THE ROOTS OF CONSERVATISM. WHEN BRITAIN JOINED EUROPE AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY TRIED TO JOIN UP WITH WHAT WE CONSIDERED TO BE

LIKE-MINDED PARTIES IN EUROPE, INITIALLY THEY WERE VERY SUSPICIOUS OF US BECAUSE OF OUR NAME. EVIDENTLY 'CONSERVATIVE' MEANT SOMETHING DIFFERENT HERE FROM WHAT IT MEANT IN EUROPE, WHERE IT WAS STILL SOMETHING OF A DIRTY WORD.

ONE THING, HOWEVER, FRENCH, GERMAN AND BRITISH CONSERVATISM ALL HAVE IN COMMON, AND THAT IS THEIR ORIGIN IN, OR IN REACTION FROM, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE REACTION AMONG THE FRENCH TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION WAS A GOOD DEAL MORE EXTREME THAN WAS THE REACTION AMONG THE BRITISH. BURKE, IN MY VIEW, GREATLY UNDERESTIMATED THE DEFICIENCIES OF THE ANCIEN REGIME - I THINK TOM PAINE WAS JUSTIFIED IN SAYING THAT HE PITIED THE PLUMAGE BUT FORGOT THE DYING BIRD - BUT WHILE HE WAS UNSPARING IN HIS CONDEMNATION OF THE REVOLUTION, HE WAS NOT DRAWN TO EXTREMES IN HIS REACTION TO IT.

AFTER THE REVOLUTION, FRENCH CONSERVATISM
SOON GOT MIXED UP WITH THE IDEAL OF A UNITED
CHRISTENDOM UNDER A UNITED CHURCH. FRENCH
CONSERVATIVES BELIEVED THAT SPIRITUAL UNITY
WAS THE BASIS OF POLITICAL ORDER, AND THAT THAT
UNITY MUST BE COMPLETE. HENCE, THERE WAS NO
ROOM FOR MODERATION OR FOR THE SOMETIMES MESSY
COMPROMISES OF DEMOCRACY OR LIBERTY. PLAINLY
UNITY IN THAT SENSE IS EITHER THERE OR IT IS
NOT; THERE CAN BE NO PARTIAL UNITY. AND
EQUALLY PLAINLY, DEMOCRACY AND/OR LIBERTY ARE
LIABLE TO LEAD - OR RATHER, NECESSARILY LEAD -
TO A FRACTURING OF THAT UNITY. THEREFORE
LIBERTY AND DEMOCRACY ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE
FRENCH CONSERVATIVE IDEAL. IN CONSEQUENCE,
FRENCH CONSERVATISM ENDED UP, PARADOXICALLY,
FAR CLOSER TO ROUSSEAU THAN TO BURKE. AND ITS
VISION OF HARMONY AND UNITY MADE IT UTOPIAN -
WHICH TO THE EYES OF BRITISH CONSERVATIVES IS THE
VERY OPPOSITE OF CONSERVATISM.

GERMAN CONSERVATISM GOT INTO EVEN BIGGER TROUBLE. IT SOON BECAME MIXED UP WITH A VERY HIGH VIEW OF THE STATE. ACCORDING TO GERMAN CONSERVATIVES, THE STATE WAS MORE REAL AND MORE RATIONAL THAN ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS. ONLY THE ORGANIC STATE WAS FULLY RATIONAL, AND THE ORGANIC STATE WAS MORE REAL THAN THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE WHOLE IS MORE REAL THAN ITS PARTS. WE ALL KNOW WHERE THAT IDEA ENDED UP.

BRITISH CONSERVATISM ALSO DATES FROM THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, (AND IN MY VIEW THE TORY PARTY DATES FROM THE SAME PERIOD, THOUGH THERE IS CERTAINLY ROOM FOR ARGUMENT ABOUT THE TRUE DATE OF ITS BIRTH). BUT BRITISH CONSERVATISM AVOIDED THE EXCESSES OF FRENCH AND GERMAN CONSERVATISM FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS. FIRSTLY, THERE WAS NO REVOLUTION OR FOREIGN CONQUEST. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO BE CONSERVATIVE IN THE BRITISH SENSE AFTER A REVOLUTION. SECONDLY, THE BRITISH STATE

WAS JUST ABOUT THE OLDEST AND BEST ESTABLISHED IN EUROPE. THIRDLY, BRITAIN HAD A SETTLED, IF CONTINUALLY CHANGING, CONSTITUTION AND A LIVING AND UNBROKEN POLITICAL TRADITION.

BRITISH CONSERVATISM THUS NEVER SOUGHT TO RESTORE SOMETHING THAT HAD BEEN LOST, OR TO RETURN TO A PREVIOUS ALLEGEDLY GOLDEN AGE, OR TO MOVE INTO A NEW IDYLIC CONDITION OF THINGS.

AS A RESULT, NEITHER THE IDEAS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION NOR THE IDEAS OF THE REACTION TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION HAD AS MUCH IMPACT HERE AS THEY HAD ELSEWHERE. THERE WERE BREAKWATERS IN BRITAIN AGAINST THE WAVES OF NEW IDEAS WHICH DID NOT EXIST IN OTHER COUNTRIES. BURKE, WHILE HE TOOK A HIGH VIEW OF THE STATE - 'THE STATE IS A PARTNERSHIP IN ALL PERFECTION'^{etc} - DID NOT HOLD THE ORGANIC VIEW OF THE STATE OR SOCIETY. THE STATE, HE BELIEVED WAS IN SOME WAYS LIKE AN ORGANISM, BUT

IT WAS NOT ONE. AND WHILE HE WAS HIGHLY RELIGIOUS, HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT SPIRITUAL OR ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY COULD OR SHOULD BE ENFORCED. POLITICAL WISDOM WAS, FOR BURKE, MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN ABSTRACT 'POLITICAL SPECULATION'. AND THE SAME IS OF COURSE TRUE OF DAVID HUME.

IT IS BECAUSE OF ITS ORIGINS, BECAUSE CONSERVATISM DID NOT IN ENGLAND FALL ON VIRGIN GROUND, AND BECAUSE BURKE WAS A VERY MUCH WISER MAN THAN ANY OF HIS CONTINENTAL EQUIVALENTS, THAT ENGLISH CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER VERSION. BECAUSE OF ITS ORIGINS IN AN ESTABLISHED POLITICAL TRADITION, AND BECAUSE OF ITS INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS IN BURKE AND IN HUME, BRITISH CONSERVATISM HAS NEVER BEEN A SYSTEM, AND THAT IS ITS DOMINANT CHARACTERISTIC, IN OTHER WORDS: THERE IS NO IDEOLOGY, AND THERE IS NO DOGMA,

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I WANT TO SAY JUST A LITTLE MORE ABOUT BURKE BEFORE COMING TO THE PRESENT DAY BECAUSE I THINK HIS WRITINGS ARE VERY MUCH THE ROOTS OF CONSERVATISM, AND STILL HAVE APPLICATION EVEN IF THEY ARE TODAY IGNORED BY SOME CONSERVATIVES.

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LIKE HALIFAX AND HUME BEFORE HIM, BURKE STRESSED THE OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE OF 'CIRCUMSTANCES'. POLITICAL IDEAS, HE THOUGHT, SHOULD BE JUDGED NOT BY THEIR SPECULATIVE ATTRACTIVENESS, BUT BY THEIR 'PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES'. FOR BURKE 'EXPEDIENCY' IS NOT IN OPPOSITION TO 'RIGHT'. WHAT IS EXPEDIENT IS RIGHT. 'EXPEDIENCE', HE SAID, 'IS THAT WHICH IS GOOD FOR THE COMMUNITY AND GOOD FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL IN IT' THE TEST IS A PRACTICAL ONE. DOES IT WORK? NO POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC STRATEGY CAN AVOID THAT TEST.

SIMILARLY FOR BURKE, PRUDENCE WAS THE FIRST OF POLITICAL VIRTUES, AND MODERATION WAS MUCH THE SAME THING. 'MODERATION', HE SAID, 'IS A DISPOSING,

ARRANGING, CONCILIATORY, CEMENTING VIRTUE , , , ,
MODERATION IS THE VIRTUE ONLY OF SUPERIOR MINDS'.
THAT IS NOT A VIEW WHICH IS HELD BY ALL THE
LEADER WRITERS OF SOME OF OUR RIGHT-WING NEWSPAPERS.

BURKE COMBINED ALL THIS WITH A STRONG DEFENCE
OF PROPERTY AND LIBERTY. BUT IT WAS 'LIBERTY
CONNECTED WITH ORDER'. LIBERTY WAS THE OUTCOME
OF 'GOOD AND STEADY GOVERNMENT' AND OF CONTINUITY.
THERE IS NOTHING SIMPLE ABOUT THE FOUNDATIONS OF
LIBERTY. THEY ARE NOT TO BE FOUND EITHER IN THE
INDIVIDUAL OR IN THE STATE, BUT IN A COMPLEX
ASSORTMENT OF HISTORIC RIGHTS, LAWS, TRADITIONS,
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND CORPORATIONS. IT IS
THESE BUFFERS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE
WHICH PRESERVE LIBERTY BY PREVENTING A DIRECT
CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THEM. NOT EVEN LIBERTY,
THEN, CAN BE PURSUED AS AN END IN ITSELF.

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'THERE IS NOT', BURKE SAID, AND I THINK THIS QUOTATION PERHAPS COMES NEARER THAN ANY OTHER TO SUMMARISING HIS POLITICAL THOUGHT, 'THERE NEVER WAS, A PRINCIPLE OF GOVERNMENT UNDER HEAVEN THAT DOES NOT, IN THE VERY PURSUIT OF THE GOOD IT PROPOSES, NATURALLY AND INEVITABLY LEAD INTO SOME INCONVENIENCE WHICH MAKES IT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO COUNTER-WORK AND WEAKEN THE APPLICATION OF THAT FIRST PRINCIPLE ITSELF, AND TO ABANDON SOMETHING OF THE EXTENT OF THE ADVANTAGE YOU PROPOSED BY IT, IN ORDER TO PREVENT ALSO THE INCONVENIENCES WHICH HAVE ARISEN FROM THE INSTRUMENT OF ALL THE GOOD YOU HAD IN VIEW'. THAT IS ADVICE WHICH SHOULD BE BORNE CONSTANLY IN MIND BY ALL POLITICAL PARTIES.

BURKE REFLECTED THE LONG-STANDING PRACTICE OF BRITISH POLITICS, AND BY HIS MODERATE THEORY OR THEORIES HE HELPED TO PERPETUATE THEM, AND THE FACT THAT

BRITISH CONSERVATISM HAS NEVER BEEN A SYSTEM OR AN IDEOLOGY HAS HAD THE MOST PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES, IN BRITAIN, ON THE RIGHT BUT NOT ON THE LEFT, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE TENSION BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE, AND EXCEPT BEFORE THE FIRST WAR THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS NOT BEEN REACTIONARY BUT HAS BEEN PREPARED TO ADAPT TO CHANGING CONDITIONS.

THAT BRITISH CONSERVATISM IS NOT IDEOLOGICAL DOES NOT MEAN THAT IT HAS NO THEORETICAL BASIS. IT IS PERFECTLY POSSIBLE TO HOLD A THEORY WHICH IS NOT IDEOLOGICAL AND WHICH DISTRUSTS ABSTRACT THOUGHT. AND THAT IS WHAT VIRTUALLY ALL TORY THINKERS HAVE DONE. THEIR THEORIES HAVE BEEN GROUNDED IN PRACTICE, (AND THEREFORE THERE HAS NOT BEEN, AS I SAY, THAT YAWNING GAP BETWEEN PRACTICE AND THEORY WHICH HAS BEEN COMMON ON THE LEFT).

BECAUSE BRITISH CONSERVATISM IS NOT A SYSTEM, BALANCE AND MODERATION HAVE BEEN AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT

IN IT. IF YOU HAVE A SYSTEM, YOU DO NOT NEED
BALANCE AND MODERATION. YOUR SYSTEM IS, BY
DEFINITION, RIGHT, AND YOU DO NOT WANT TO MODIFY
IT, SINCE THAT WOULD MAKE IT IMPERFECT.

BUT BRITISH CONSERVATISM IS ADMITTEDLY
IMPERFECT, AND IT REJOICES IN DIVERSITY AND
IMPERFECTION. IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A SYSTEM,
YOU HAVE TO BE EMPIRICAL AND YOU HAVE TO TAKE
CIRCUMSTANCES INTO ACCOUNT. YOU HAVE NO 'CRIB',
TO USE OAKESHOTT'S WORD, TO MEET EVERY CONCEIVABLE
CONTINGENCY. YOU HAVE THEREFORE TO JUDGE ISSUES
ON THEIR MERITS AND NOT BY DOCTRINE. THIS MEANS,
TOO, OR IT SHOULD MEAN, THAT MEANS ARE DISTINGUISHED
FROM ENDS AND ARE NOT ERECTED INTO ENDS. THUS
WHILE PATRIOTISM AND A BELIEF IN THE NATIONAL
IDENTITY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AT THE HEART OF
CONSERVATISM, THEY DID NOT STOP THE CONSERVATIVE
PARTY, IN RESPONSE TO A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES,
FROM BEING STRONGLY IN FAVOUR OF JOINING EUROPE.
SIMILARLY THE FREE MARKET IS A MEANS NOT AN END.

I AM AFRAID I HAVE RATHER DWELT ON BURKE AND THE ROOTS OF CONSERVATISM, BECAUSE I THINK THEY GIVE THE DIRECTION IN WHICH CONSERVATISM HAS NEARLY ALWAYS MOVED AND SHOULD BE MOVING NOW.

I WANT TO TURN NEXT TO THE CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDE TO THE STATE AND TO GOVERNMENTAL INTERFERENCE. I HOPE WHAT I AM GOING TO SAY WAS TO SOME EXTENT IMPLICIT IN WHAT I HAVE ALREADY SAID.

THERE IS, OR SHOULD BE, NO CONSERVATIVE HOSTILITY TO THE STATE. THERE IS NO CONSERVATIVE DOGMA ABOUT THE STATE AND THE INDIVIDUAL. CONSERVATIVES DO NOT SEE THESE AS MUTUALLY ANTAGONISTIC ENTITIES, BUT AS MUTUALLY DEPENDANT AND MUTUALLY SUSTAINING ENTITIES.

CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL THOUGHT IS WHOLLY OPPOSED TO THE SO-CALLED NIGHT-WATCHMAN STATE. CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE IT TO BE IMPOSSIBLE AS WELL AS UNDESIRABLE. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE SUCH A STATE WOULD NOT SURVIVE EXCEPT AS AN AUTHORITARIAN OR TOTALITARIAN REGIME.

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A FREE STATE WILL NOT SURVIVE UNLESS ITS PEOPLE FEEL LOYALTY TO IT, AND THEY WILL NOT FEEL LOYALTY UNLESS THEY GAIN FROM THE STATE PROTECTION AND OTHER BENEFITS. LECTURES ON THE ULTIMATE BENEFICENCE OF COMPETITION AND ON THE DANGERS OF INTERFERING WITH MARKET FORCES WILL NOT SATISFY PEOPLE WHO ARE IN TROUBLE. IF THE STATE IS NOT INTERESTED IN THEM, WHY SHOULD THEY BE INTERESTED IN THE STATE?

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IN THE CONSERVATIVE VIEW, THEREFORE, ECONOMIC LIBERALISM, A LA PROFESSOR HAYEK, BECAUSE OF ITS STARKNESS AND ITS FAILURE TO CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, IS NOT A SAFEGUARD OF POLITICAL FREEDOM

BUT A THREAT TO IT.

AND CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE THE NIGHT-WATCHMAN STATE IS UNDESIRABLE BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT ONLY GOVERNMENTS CAN DO.

IN 1887 PRESIDENT CLEVELAND VETOED A BILL TO SEND \$10,000 TO VICTIMS OF DROUGHT, SAYING: 'FEDERAL AID IN SUCH CASES . . . , WEAKENS THE STURDINESS OF OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER'. THAT WAS LIBERAL DOGMA AT ITS WORST.

CONSERVATIVES ON THE CONTRARY BELIEVE WITH BURKE THAT GOVERNMENT IS 'A CONTRIVANCE OF HUMAN WISDOM TO PROVIDE FOR HUMAN WANTS'. ONLY LIBERAL IDEOLOGUES, NOT CONSERVATIVES, ARE FUNDAMENTALLY OPPOSED TO THE WELFARE STATE.

INDEED THE WELFARE STATE IS A THOROUGHLY CONSERVATIVE INSTITUTION - WHICH IS WHY CONSERVATIVES

DID SO MUCH TO BRING IT INTO EXISTENCE - AND ITS
ROOTS GO DEEP IN BRITISH HISTORY,

CERTAINLY FOR CONSERVATIVES THE FAMILY COMES
BEFORE THE STATE AS THE PRIMARY SOCIAL UNIT,
FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS SHOULD AS FAR AS POSSIBLE
BE ENCOURAGED AND HELPED TO LOOK AFTER THEMSELVES,

YET, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THERE ARE MANY FAMILIES
AND INDIVIDUALS WHO FIND IT DIFFICULT OR IMPOSSIBLE
TO LOOK AFTER THEMSELVES. I REPRESENT A
RELATIVELY PROSPEROUS CONSTITUENCY, BUT EVEN IN
CHESHAM AND AMERSHAM THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO
UNDOUBTEDLY NEED HELP FROM THE STATE OR FROM
LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

WHAT THE PROPORTION OF STATE HELP SHOULD BE, AND HOW MUCH MONEY SHOULD BE SPENT ON THE SOCIAL SERVICES IS A MATTER OF JUDGEMENT. FOR MYSELF, I THINK THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE BALANCE WHEN WE CAME INTO OFFICE HAD TO BE REDRESSED NOT LEAST BECAUSE WE SIMPLY COULD NOT AFFORD TO GO ON AS WE WERE.

BUT GRADUAL CHANGE IS ALWAYS PREFERABLE TO VIOLENT CHANGE, FOR ELECTORAL REASONS AMONG OTHERS, AND PEOPLE NEED TO BE CONVINCED THAT THEY WILL BE BETTER OFF, NOT WORSE OFF, AS A RESULT OF PERIODS OF CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE TO CARRY THE COUNTRY WITH US.

IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO FORGET THIS, TO THINK THAT WE CAN IGNORE THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT WE DO. OF COURSE, THE WORLD

ECONOMIC CRISIS, THE NEED TO REVERSE YEARS OF RELATIVE DECLINE, LABOUR'S ECONOMIC LEGACY AND RUSSIA'S GROWING STRENGTH WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO MEET PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS AND AMBITIONS IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS. BUT THE SIZE OF OUR TASK SUGGESTS THAT WE SHOULD BE EVEN MORE MINDFUL THAN USUAL OF POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. WE MUST NOT MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AS MARX AND GIVE ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS PRIMACY OVER POLITICAL ONES.

THERE ARE OF COURSE A FEW BASIC RULES, FIRST, THERE IS A LIMIT TO HOW MUCH CHANGE THE PUBLIC CAN ACCEPT AND UNDERSTAND, ESPECIALLY IF IT IS FORCED THROUGH AT TOO FAST A PACE, SECOND, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO RETAIN A BARE MINIMUM OF PUBLIC SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT DURING THE PAINFUL PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT THROUGH WHICH OUR ECONOMY MUST PASS IF THERE WAS A SHARP DECLINE

IN ORDINARY PEOPLE'S LIVING STANDARDS, THIRD, WE MUST SPELL OUT TIME AND AGAIN THE PURPOSE OF OUR PROGRAMME, FOR EXAMPLE OF THE SPENDING CUTS WE HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO MAKE.

WE WANT TO SEE MORE NURSERY SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS AND BETTER CARE FOR THE NEEDY, BUT WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO AFFORD THEM UNTIL WE HAVE MADE THE SORT OF SHIFT IN THE ECONOMY ABOUT WHICH BACON AND ELTIS WROTE SO CONVINCINGLY A FEW YEARS AGO.

FOURTH, AS UNEMPLOYMENT RISES RAPIDLY THIS YEAR, WE WILL HAVE TO DEMONSTRATE NOT ONLY CONCERN FOR THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS BUT ALSO IMAGINATION ABOUT THE REFORMS OF THE LABOUR MARKET AND OF PAY BARGAINING WHICH WOULD HELP TO CREATE JOBS RATHER THAN DESTROY THEM.

CONSERVATIVES MAY BE TEMPTED NOW AND THEN TO LOOK ACROSS AT THE MOUNTING DISARRAY OF OUR OPPONENTS AND CONCLUDE THAT WE DO NOT NEED TO GIVE ANY ATTENTION TO POLITICAL REALITY IN OUR PURSUIT OF ECONOMIC REALITY. UNFORTUNATELY WE CAN NOT RELY ON THAT ROUTE TO RE-ELECTION. THE LABOUR PARTY HARDLY LOOKED VERY ATTRACTIVE IN 1974, BUT THEY STILL WON THE ELECTION. AS LEO AMERY SAID ABOUT CHURCHILL'S DEFEAT IN 1945, PEOPLE VOTE AGAINST GOVERNMENTS NOT AGAINST OPPOSITIONS. SO WHILE I AGREE THAT IT WILL TAKE TIME FOR US TO REVIVE THE ECONOMY AND THAT WE ARE EMBARKED ON A PROGRAMME THAT COULD WELL TAKE THE BEST PART OF TWO PARLIAMENTS TO CARRY THROUGH, I ALSO NOTE THAT BETWEEN THE FIRST PARLIAMENT AND THE SECOND THE ELECTORATE WILL HAVE ITS CHANCE OF A SAY.

AFTER THAT ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ PARENTHESIS, I RETURN TO MY ORIGINAL THEME.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF STATE HELP AND WELFARE IS THAT IT ENLARGES FREEDOM BY DIMINISHING POVERTY AND BY INCREASING SECURITY. THE WELFARE STATE IS THEREFORE AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY. BUT THE EXTENT TO WHICH HELP IS PROVIDED BY WAY OF SUBSIDIES OR BY INSURANCE OR BY VOLUNTARY BODIES OR BY SELF-HELP AS A RESULT OF LOWER TAXATION AND A MORE SUCCESSFUL ECONOMY, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SOCIAL SERVICES ARE FINANCED BY TAXATION OR CHARGES, DO NOT SEEM TO ME TO BE MATTERS OF FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE.

CERTAINLY LIFE IS NOT A MARKET PLACE, AND THE COUNTRY MUST NOT BE TURNED INTO ONE. BUT OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE COMBINED MARKET AND WELFARE PRINCIPLES MORE SUCCESSFULLY THAN WE HAVE.

THE RIGHT CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDE TO STATE INTERFERENCE IN THE ECONOMY IS TO MY MIND SIMILAR

TO THE ATTITUDE TO THE WELFARE STATE I HAVE JUST
OUTLINED.

SOMEBODY ONCE SAID THAT 'A BALANCED VIEW
IS MERELY A VAGUE POINT OF EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN
PLATITUDES', AND I THINK THAT WELL SUMS UP WHAT
I AM GOING TO SAY NEXT. ALL I WOULD PLEAD IN
ATTEMPTED EXTENUATION IS THAT AN UNBALANCED VIEW
USUALLY RESTS WITHOUT EQUILIBRIUM ON ONE PLATITUDE.
AND A GOOD TORY SEEKS BALANCE IN EVERYTHING -
INCLUDING PLATITUDES.

A MIXED OR FREE ECONOMY IS A NECESSARY
CONDITION OF FREEDOM. IF ALL ECONOMIC POWER
IS IN THE HANDS OF THE STATE, ALL POLITICAL POWER
WILL BE IN THE HANDS OF THE STATE, AND INEVITABLY
THERE WILL BE TYRANNY. THAT SEEMS TO ME BOTH
THEORETICALLY IMPREGNABLE AND EMPIRICALLY TRUE.

CONSERVATIVES THEREFORE FAVOUR A FREE OR MIXED ECONOMY. AND INDEED SOME OF THEM FAVOUR ONLY A FREE ECONOMY AND ARE CONVINCED THAT A MIXED ECONOMY CAN NOT WORK AND WILL LEAD TO SOCIALISM AND TYRANNY. HERE I THINK THEY HAVE FALLEN FOR THE BLANDISHMENTS OF LIBERAL IDEOLOGUES LIKE VON MISES AND PROFESSOR HAYEK.

VON MISES'S 'A CRITIQUE OF INTERVENTIONISM' IS LIKE MARX IN ITS DOGMATISM, ITS HISTORICISM, AND ITS AMPLITUDE OF INACCURATE PROPHECY. ACCORDING TO HIM ANY GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE IN THE ECONOMY IS BOUND TO LEAD TO SOCIALISM OR CHAOS. THAT SEEMS TO ME TO BE DEMONSTRABLE NONSENSE.

IN HIS 'ROAD TO SERFDOM', HAYEK PUT A SIMILAR POINT, THOUGH IN NOTHING LIKE SUCH AN EXTREME WAY:

'IT IS OFTEN SAID', HE WROTE, 'THAT DEMOCRACY WILL NOT TOLERATE CAPITALISM. IF CAPITALISM MEANS HERE A COMPETITIVE SYSTEM BASED ON FREE DISPOSAL OVER PRIVATE PROPERTY, IT IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT TO REALISE THAT ONLY WITHIN THIS SYSTEM IS DEMOCRACY POSSIBLE'.

HAYEK'S SECOND PROPOSITION IS CERTAINLY TRUE, BUT WHAT IF THE FIRST PROPOSITION IS ALSO TRUE? IF THE PEOPLE WILL NOT ACCEPT CAPITALISM AS SUCH, IT WILL DO LITTLE GOOD TO TELL THEM NOTHING ELSE IS COMPATIBLE WITH DEMOCRACY. CONFRONTED WITH SUCH A CHOICE, THEY MAY WELL OPT FOR THE NON-DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE. IN HIS BOOK, 'THE MIDDLE WAY', HAROLD MACMILLAN EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT 'IF CAPITALISM HAD BEEN CONDUCTED ALL ALONG AS IF THE THEORY OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE WERE A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE', AND ALL INTERVENTION BY THE STATE HAD BEEN RESISTED, 'WE SHOULD HAVE HAD CIVIL WAR LONG AGO'. IN OTHER WORDS THE TORY PARTY HAS ALWAYS TO MODIFY THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM

SO AS TO MAKE IT ACCEPTABLE TO THE ELECTORATE,
WHILE ENSURING THAT THOSE MODIFICATIONS DO NOT SPELL
THE END OF DEMOCRACY. CONSERVATIVES ARE PROFOUNDLY
AWARE THAT PRIVATE ENTERPRISE IS INCOMPAPABLY
PREFERABLE BOTH ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY TO
SOCIALISM, WHICH IS NOT COMPATIBLE WITH POLITICAL
FREEDOM. YET THEY ARE NOT BLIND TO THE IMPERFECTIONS
OF FREE ENTERPRISE AND THE MARKET, AND THEY ARE READY
AND WILLING TO REMEDY THEM. THEY DO NOT BELIEVE
THAT THE PROFIT MOTIVE WILL SOLVE ALL ECONOMIC
PROBLEMS. THERE IS NO TORY EQUIVALENT OF THE
LABOUR PARTY'S CLAUSE 4.

IT SEEMS TO ME FAIRLY CLEAR THAT TWO OF THE
REASONS WHY WE HAVE FALLEN ECONOMICALLY SO FAR
BEHIND MOST OF OUR COMPETITORS IS THAT WE HAVE
SUCH A LARGE PUBLIC SECTOR AND WE HAVE A GOOD DEAL
MORE GOVERNMENTAL INTERFERENCE IN THE ECONOMY THAN
MOST OF THEM. I BELIEVE WE WOULD DO BETTER IF WE
HAD MORE OF A MARKET ECONOMY.

IT IS ON THESE POINTS THAT MOST OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES HAVE IN THE PAST ARISEN. THERE HAS BEEN ONE FURTHER POINT OF DIFFERENCE: SOME OF THE FREE MARKET SCHOOL HAVE NOT ALWAYS SEEMED TO REALISE THAT EVEN IN COUNTRIES WITH ECONOMIES MUCH FREER THAN OURS, THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF GOVERNMENTAL INTERFERENCE AND THAT EVEN IF OUR ECONOMY WAS WORKING MUCH MORE EFFICIENTLY THAN IT IS THERE WOULD STILL BE PLENTY OF SCOPE FOR GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITY.

A TORY, THEN, DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT ANY SINGLE ECONOMIC DOCTRINE OR POLICY IS CAPABLE OF WHOLLY EXPLAINING, GUIDING, OR PREDICTING ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, IN THE SAME WAY THAT HE BELIEVES THAT ALL POLITICAL DOCTRINES AND POLICIES ARE TO A GREATER OR LESSEP. DEGREE DEFECTIVE.

THERE IS NO TORY ECONOMIC ORTHODOXY. AS BALDWIN SAID IN ANSWER TO THOSE WHO CLAIMED THAT THE OTTAWA AGREEMENT OF 1932 HAD IMPOSED A PERMANENT SYSTEM OF PROTECTION ON THE COUNTRY: 'NOTHING', HE SAID, 'IS PERMANENT EXCEPT THE FOLLY OF MANKIND IF IT FAILS, THE SYSTEM WILL BE CHANGED, AND THAT IS THE COMMON SENSE OF THE MATTER'.

THE INTERVENTIONIST STATE AND THE WELFARE STATE ARE NOT GOING TO GO AWAY. THAT IS SOMETHING, AS I HAVE INDICATED, WHICH I WELCOME. THOSE WHO BELIEVE OTHERWISE HAVE, IN MY VIEW, FALLEN INTO THE TRAP OF IDEOLOGY AND DOGMA - WHICH IS OR SHOULD BE TO CONSERVATIVES THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.

NEVERTHELESS, BY PRUNING GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION AND BY REDUCING THE POWERS OF THE BUREAUCRACY, WE SHALL NOT ONLY BE HELPING THE ECONOMY WE SHALL BE BUILDING UP THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT - SINCE IT

IS PARTLY BECAUSE OF EXCESSIVE STATE INTERFERENCE THAT THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN UNDERMINED, AND SINCE CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE AS MUCH IN AUTHORITY AS IN FREEDOM, SINCE INDEED THEY BELIEVE THE TWO THINGS TO BE INSEPARABLE, THE PRESERVATION OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE IS ONE OF THEIR PRIMARY CONCERNS.

BUT, TO REPEAT, THAT AUTHORITY WOULD NOT BE PRESERVED BY AN ATTEMPT TO REMOVE THE STATE FROM THE ECONOMY ALTOGETHER. THE GREAT CONSERVATIVE TASK IS RATHER TO CONJURE UP A BETTER ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE THROUGH MORE FREEDOM FOR THE INDIVIDUAL WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PRESERVING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

SALISBURY ONCE WROTE APPROVINGLY OF THE YOUNGER PITT THAT 'HE ALWAYS PREFERRED TO SACRIFICE ANY AMOUNT OF THEORY RATHER THAN MAKE FOR HIS PROPOSALS A SINGLE NEEDLESS ENEMY',

THAT REMARK COULD, I THINK, BE REMEMBERED WITH ADVANTAGE BY ALL CONSERVATIVES WHEN THEY TALK ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ECONOMY.

SALISBURY'S PRAISE OF PITT IS NOT DISSIMILAR TO PITT'S DISPARAGEMENT OF BURKE WITH WHICH I BEGAN. BOTH MEN WERE POINTING TO A FUNDAMENTAL CONSERVATIVE TENET: THAT POLITICAL THEORY SHOULD NEVER GET IN THE WAY OF SENSIBLE POLITICAL ACTION.

AND SO SALISBURY'S WORDS MAKE A SUITABLY PRACTICAL ENDING TO A LECTURE ON CONSERVATISM.