

MA Political Culture and National Identities

Conservative Party General Election Manifesto
Objectives and Purposes 1945-1983

Candidate: **Jure Kosec**

Student number: **S1388134** Thesis supervisor: **Prof. dr. Joost Augusteijn**

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Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology & Sources	5
Historiography of the Conservative manifesto	8
1. Lessons learned: The Churchill years	11
1.1 The benefits of being in opposition	11
1.2 The long road	16
1.3 Prepared to lead	21
2. From government to opposition in the 1960s	24
2.1 The leaders	24
2.2 Declaring policy, moving forward	30
2.3 Tasks of opposition	34
3. Second thoughts: Heath, Thatcher and the Party	37
3.1 Party in transition	37
3.2 Economic realism	42
3.3 Conservative consolidation	48
Conclusion	51
Bibliography	54

Introduction

I am sure no competent politician has ever done what I have been asked by some people to do except under duress, and no politician who has done it in duress has ever done so without repenting what he did for the rest of his natural life.

(Arthur J. Balfour on the risks of defining policy, 1907)

Political parties face various problems when addressing their voters, the most troubling of which originate from policy decisions and commitments they make. What politicians write in their policy statements is recorded in the public mind, making it all the more necessary for parties to exercise prudence when defining their plans. The most widely distributed of these documents are election programmes, more commonly referred to as manifestos, which parties use to set out priorities and argue why they and not their opponents should be given the chance to govern. While election manifestos represent an important element of political propaganda, there is often more to them than meets the eye. For most of the twentieth century British political parties have devoted considerable attention to formulating these documents, placing them at the very centre of their policy-making efforts.¹ Their gestation usually took months of detailed preparations in which policies and commitments were carefully selected and written down in more or less certain terms. Since the specific structure and considerable length of the final product often meant that it had little appeal to the average voter, it makes sense to assume that election manifestos served other purposes as well,² – particularly those that went beyond outright political propaganda and were concerned with wider aspects of policy making, electoral strategy and party management. Nowhere does this mixture of purposes seem more apparent than in the case of the Conservative Party, the dominant force in British politics during the twentieth century, which experienced and survived some of the greatest shifts in policy direction of any mainstream political group in the post-war period.

The question this thesis raises and tries to answer by studying the example of the Conservatives is why were election manifestos so important in the process of making policy? Election studies have generally undervalued the role manifestos played in determining party

¹ Barnes, John and Richard Cockett. The Making of Party Policy, in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 354; Butler, David and Dennis Kavanagh. *The British General Election of 1979* (London: Macmillan, 1980): 144.

² Butler, David and Dennis Kavanagh. *The British General Election of October 1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975): 54.

priorities. While there is a consensus among authors that these documents often serve not one but many purposes at the same time, the election manifesto has hardly ever been the subject of study in itself. Previous research has been fragmented, with most authors focusing their attention on individual election campaigns rather than longer periods of time, effectively reducing manifestos to nothing more than simple policy pronouncements. Even less has been written on the subject from the viewpoint of conception, with no significant long-term analysis made on how these publications came to life under different party administrations. While authors of these same election studies have identified the process of preparing manifestos as “as a set of calculations about how to win the favour of the electorate”,³ they nevertheless failed to show how the functions of these documents developed and evolved through time.

The notion of electoral strategy in contemporary democratic political systems has been described by the economic theorist Anthony Downs as parties competing on ideological grounds and consequently investing most of their resources and work in the formation of policy as a mean of achieving their main goal – getting elected into office.⁴ Once the policies are set the focus shifts on persuading the electorate. In the realm of British politics the basis for this was the election manifesto.⁵ The amount of work that went into preparing these documents gives an idea about their significant role in garnering voter support. But this is only one part of the story. The reality was that once the votes were cast the election manifesto also functioned as a future reference point for judgments on the winner's performance in government. In the words of former Labour minister Richard H. Crossman, the point of the manifesto was not to persuade the voter, but “to give yourself an anchor” when confronted with opposing views.⁶

Whether in government or opposition, the Tories from 1945 onwards used their manifestos to woo the electorate by voicing the concerns and perceptions that constituted the essence of Conservative thought. The manifesto represented an essential part of electoral strategy. To this extent it was used to sustain the left-right ideological cleavage after the end of the Second World War right up to the late 1980s⁷ when the first signs of Labour's transformation and its subsequent

³ Butler, David and Dennis Kavanagh. *The British General Election of 1979* (London: Macmillan, 1980): 144

⁴ Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957). 35

⁵ Ibid, 94. The end of the War marked the beginning of the most challenging period in recent British political history. Ideology was a product of post-war uncertainty developed by parties in their struggle for office. Downs argues that uncertainty gives rise to the possibility of persuasion, as it divides voters according to their varying degrees of confidence in their voting decisions, and competition, as parties try their best to accommodate their voters preferences. See also: Mansergh, Lucy and Robert Thomson. Election Pledges, Party Competition and Policymaking, *Comparative Politics* 39 (Apr., 2007): 311-329.

⁶ Harrison, Brian. *The Transformation of British Politics 1860-1995* (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 1996): 314

⁷ The link between voter ideological position and vote choice appears to be weakening in recent years. See also: Green, Jane and Sara B. Hobolt, Owing the issue agenda: Party strategies and vote choices in British elections, *Electoral Studies* 27 (2008): 460-476.

shift to the right started to emerge.⁸ In retrospect, none of this would have happened if the Second World War hadn't altered the British political landscape leaving the Conservative Party with no other option but to support the policies of the mixed economy and the welfare state. Following their surprising election defeat against Labour in 1945, the Conservatives had to change the way they functioned and existed in the eyes of their electors. Most of all they had to dismiss old beliefs that had little or no prospect of garnering voter support: for instance the assumption that defining policy to the electorate brings unnecessary risks every sensible politician should want to avoid.⁹ What Conservative statesmen like Arthur J. Balfour, quoted in the beginning of this introduction, adhered to at the start of the century seemed to have no electoral value in the post-war period. Instead, the Party decided to pursue an open approach where the election manifesto became the centre of attention and the most important product of Conservative policy-making efforts.

The significance of election manifestos in terms of electoral strategy and party performance raises relevant questions concerning the general attitude of parties towards these documents, the decisions that stood in the background, the way they resolved issues and conveyed policy to the electorate. In order to understand how consecutive Conservative Party leaderships from 1945 onwards forged their central policy declarations and how the evolution of Conservative thought affected the Party's manifesto this thesis examines the roles of individuals, groups and interests involved in this process.

Methodology & Sources

David Butler and other authors of British election studies have for long been observant of some of the limits to their approach. For all the insight they bring forward, studies have focused their attention predominantly on the formal election campaign, which usually lasts a short time, while offering little or no additional information about the economic, political and social changes that might have occurred after the last election and influenced party and voter behaviour since. Furthermore, such studies have also suffered at the level of *haute politique*, by having no opportunity to gather any relevant information from private papers that would explain the rationale of election decisions.¹⁰

⁸ Sanders, D. The impact of left-right ideology. in: *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, ed. Evans, G., Norris, (London: Sage1999): 181-182.

⁹ Conservative Policy, The Times, September 29th 1951.

¹⁰ Butler, David and Donald Stokes. *Political change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969): 15.

With the opening of archives this issue no longer poses a significant problem. Private papers from Party officials, ranging from Prime Ministers to research officers, that had been previously closed to the public now offer new insight into the way election decisions were made at the top level. The release of Cabinet and private records up to 1983 gives researchers a chance to contribute additional knowledge and understanding of the role election manifestos played in determining party policy. The characteristics of this process, which were outlined by previous studies, can now be discussed and analysed in depth.¹¹

Ways to examine the changes in attitude of the Conservatives towards their manifesto involved tracing the process of preparing these documents from start to finish, which was achieved by looking at aspects such as the positions of individual party members and larger groups on questions of policy and the way their ideas were integrated in the final drafts of various general election manifestos. On the other hand, the thesis looks at long-term policies associated with the post-war economic consensus, like the push for full employment, which offered interesting ground for examining how a changing balance of power inside the Party can affect the way a certain policy is presented to the electorate. By examining how different administrations treated the policy of full employment in their manifestos, the thesis explains the significant role these publications played in determining whether a policy existed or not. From these aspects similarities and differences can be drawn to give a sense about how the Conservative manifesto came to life under different Party leaderships.

Each of the twelve Conservative general election manifestos published between 1945 and 1983 is approached with a set of questions about their content, origins, authorship, implications and relation to the past. This thesis tries to determine who were the authors; who was involved in the drafting process; was the leadership open to suggestions; what were the differences between the first and the final draft; who's opinion counted; what party resources were used; what policies were used; were they consistent with the past; was it divisive or did it help strengthen the party etc. Issues are structured and presented chronologically; the thesis consists of three sections, roughly dividing the second half of the twentieth century into decade long periods. Each of the sections looks at how the Conservatives framed their central policy declarations and how the changes in Conservative thought affected this process: they start with an examination of the party organization and general attitude towards policy making, the politics of persuasion and the role of policy publications before moving on to the manifestos of that particular period – the way they originated, the way they were structured both in terms of form and content, and the effect they had on the Party itself.

¹¹Even though Conservative Party records dating up to 1984 are opened to the public they still remain the property of individual party members or their legal descendants. As most historians and students of history know, copyrights make quoting official documents a rather troublesome task. If researchers wish to quote official party documents they require written permission of the copy right owner. Of course, there are ways around these rules. The most eloquent solution, which this thesis employs heavily, is to paraphrase the material. Paraphrasing requires no formal permission. For further details see the webpage of the Conservative Party Archive at <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/cpa/regulations/copyright>.

The first section, starting in 1945, deals with the Party under Winston Churchill, its surprising electoral defeat after the end of the War and its return to government six years later. The second part examines the Party and its manifestos under Churchill's successors Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home as well as the years the Conservatives spent in opposition in the second half of 1960s. The last part is dedicated to the difficult period of the 1970s' when the Party was run by Edward Heath, and provides an examination of the changes the Conservatives endured under the first Thatcher administration leading up to Mrs. Thatcher's second consecutive election win in 1983. Part of the reasoning behind these dates has already been explained in the introduction: it takes into account the end of the Second World War that brought major political, social and economic changes to Britain, leaving the Conservative Party no other choice but to support the policies of the mixed economy and the welfare state. Little more than three decades later the Party faced a similar situation, the only difference being that this time the Tories, and not Labour, were those who would be implementing change. Under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher the Party brought a definitive end to what was left of the post-war political and economic consensus, opening the door to an even greater ideological divide between the left and right. By 1983, Thatcherism was showing all of its positive and negative aspects.

To provide answers to the questions above the thesis relies on primary and secondary source material, attained from the Conservative Party Archives and the Churchill Archive Centre. In addition to Conservative Party general election manifestos, the research focuses on minutes from party and government meetings that specifically dealt with manifestos; personal papers from party leaders, including manifesto drafts; and correspondence between party leaders and aides. Additional primary sources, which are used to fill potential gaps that arose during research, include memoirs of prime ministers and their aides, studies by the influential Conservative Research Department (CRD) and personal papers from the men who ran it.

The most important of the sources used are papers from leaders of the Party and their aides along with correspondence between the members of the CRD. These documents provide good insight into the organization of the Party, the attitudes and beliefs of its members, and various problems everyone involved had to address along the way. It should be pointed out, however, that not everything was included in these volumes mostly for reasons of confidentiality. Some of the records of intraparty correspondence which date back more than thirty years still remain closed. To complement official Party documents, secondary sources consisted mainly of newspaper articles, published in the weeks and months running up to a general election. These provided further information about election strategies, party preparations, and the individuals involved in the drafting process.

Historiography of the Conservative Manifesto

Previous research on the subject, as indicated, consists of political studies of British general elections since 1945 along with wide ranging accounts of twentieth century British politics. Furthermore it includes histories of Conservative Party institutions, like the Conservative Research Department, which seemingly played an incremental role in the preparation of policy ever since its foundation during the interwar period. Many of these accounts imply that the history of the manifesto ended in the early 1950s when the Party adopted a more open approach to policy-making, and that from that moment on the manifesto, and the purpose it was designed for, remained static. None of these works examines the role manifestos played in later years, and most of them fail to go beyond the sphere of political propaganda in their attempts to explain the efforts that went into the production of these publications.

Previous research, however scarce, shows how preparing a general election manifesto has been an exercise in party management, reflecting both a balance of power and a set of calculations about how to win the favour of the electorate". David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh's study of the British General election of 1979, in which the authors trace Margaret Thatcher's ascent to the post of Prime Minister and offer some explanations about how and why this came about, provides an analysis of different party manifestos published during the 1979 election campaign and shows how these represent part of the ritual of British democracy. Butler and Kavanagh's study compared the Tory, Labour and Liberal manifestos by focusing on the policy perspective, while also delving deeper into the process of preparing each individual publication. For all the conflicting purposes they are often designed, manifestos can function as double-edged swords; parties have no other option but to take them seriously so they can, in the event of electoral victory, claim they have a mandate for their proposals.¹² According to the authors, the Conservative manifesto up to that point "remained a product of party traditions, personal preferences, previous policy commitments, reactions to other party manifestos, and political circumstances of the time". These influences, to a degree represented in the content of Conservative programmes dating back to at least 1945, varied from election to election.¹³

This wasn't the first time Butler and Kavanagh wrote about various types of influences. In their study of the 1974 general election, which the Conservatives lost, they emphasize the importance of parties' ideologies and traditions as well as differences in organization and structure

¹² Butler, David and Dennis Kavanagh. *The British General Election of 1979* (London: Macmillan, 1980): 144.

¹³ *Ibid.*: 155-156

in the process of preparing manifestos.¹⁴ In his review of British general elections between 1945 and 1987 at the end of the eighties, Butler gives a short account of the importance of the manifesto in British politics as a promissory note. The idea that there should be moral and political pressure on politicians to exercise prudence in making promises, and to keep them when made, for him indicated that “the fiction of the mandate has its value”.¹⁵ Along with his co-authors, Butler is one of the rare writers to single out this seemingly important aspect of manifesto-writing.

Unlike Butler, historians of the Conservative Party tend to be less interested in content and party organization, focusing most of their attention on the structure and appearance of the manifesto instead. John Barnes and Richard Cockett's account of Conservative policy making offers a somewhat short description of how the Conservative manifesto changed through time. While the authors delve deeper into history by tracing the origins of the manifesto, the only examples they discuss in detail are publications issued under the leadership of Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher. The problem with their analysis lies in the fact that manifestos are discussed only in the context of political propaganda. By focusing on important years like 1951 when the Party finally realized it needed to change the way it presented policies to the electorate, the authors forget to look at how these changes in approach affected electoral strategy and party organization. The same year Churchill was quoted as saying: “It is not so much a programme we require as a theme. We are concerned with a lighthouse not a shop window.” Was he merely talking about publicity or wider issues of political strategy and party management? By the end of the decade, according to the authors, a stable pattern was emerging in the way the Conservative manifesto came to life.¹⁶

Barnes and Cockett unfortunately fail to describe the nature of this pattern in any great detail. They do, however, mention Conservative Party institutions such as the Conservative Research Department and the Advisory Committee on Policy and the significant role they played in the Tory policy mechanism, as well as in the production of manifestos. Most of their conclusions are based on John Ramsden's history of the Conservative Research Department in which the leading Conservative Party historian places the CRD at the heart of the Party's professional policy making machinery. Ramsden explains how “almost all that was said, published or broadcasted in the name of the Conservative Party was in some way affected by the Department's work, and how much of it was actually written there”. In his analysis he poses some interesting dilemmas about the relationship between the CRD and the leadership of the Party, including the difficulty of defining where Conservative power actually lies. Unlike most of the authors described in this overview, he

¹⁴ Butler, David and Dennis Kavanagh. *The British General Election of October 1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975): 54-55.

¹⁵ Butler, David. *British General Elections since 1945* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 87.

¹⁶ Barnes, John and Richard Cockett. The Making of Party Policy, in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 354-357.

delves deeper in the organizational aspects of policy making, explaining how the Tories have “no binding rules on the central question of the leader's authority when it comes to determining policy priorities. Still, he fails to offer the same level of insight when it comes to the differences in the roles the Party leader and the members of the CRD had in the process of preparing election manifestos. While Ramsden argues that the CRD remained one of the most important elements in the Party's policy making network for more than half of a century, he nevertheless concedes that “Conservative policy making remains a grey area, partly because it is not easy to say what that policy is at any one time.”¹⁷ This notion alone has significant implications for what the Party expects to achieve with its manifestos. As the following chapters will try to show, the tendency of the Conservative Party to change its policy position makes disclosing priorities even more difficult than it already is. A similar argument can be found in Alistair Cooke's short description of the evolution of the Conservative manifesto. The journalist's rather superficial analysis results in an interesting conclusion about the difficulties that go into producing manifestos, from the gathering of ideas to the writing of policies, which he describes as the chief lesson to be learned from studying these documents. Cooke argues the difficulties “only become overwhelming when a party lacks clarity of purpose”.¹⁸ This is where his argument and explanation stop, leaving readers no other option but to wonder how the Conservatives dealt with this recurring problem that seems to represent an inherent part of their style of politics.

The following chapters will address this issue while the study tries to make sense of the many conflicting purposes of the Conservative manifesto that historians have so far neglected to examine in their writings. The post-war policy making exercise, indeed, presents the most interesting period for researching the various aspects of election programmes. Tracing and examining the history of the Conservative manifesto will hopefully bring new understanding to the way these documents influenced contemporary British politics.

¹⁷ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 2-5.

¹⁸ Cooke, Alistair B. Introduction, in *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos 1900-1997*, by Iain Dale (Abingdon: Routledge 2000).

1. Lessons Learned: The Churchill Years

1.1 The benefits of being opposition

In order to understand what the role of the manifesto was in the context of the new approach to Conservatism that followed the Party's electoral defeat in 1945 it is necessary to address some of the difficulties of defining what Conservative policy was and who had the power to make it, similar to what Ramsden did in his analysis of the history of the Conservative Research Department. He was the first to point out the fact that the Conservative Party in general had no binding rules for the leader's role in the making of policy. In other words, there was no clear definition of how policy came to life. Even though Ramsden acknowledges that the Conservatives were traditionally more oriented towards their leaders than other mainstream political parties, it is nevertheless hard for him to accept the official Tory line that all policy decisions were made by a single person. In reality, he writes, the role of the leader and the Conservatives approach to policy making was much more complex.¹

Ramsden's analysis shows that the Party essentially lived a double life, projecting an image of strength and coherence on the outside while having no desire to share internal differences and disputes with the rest of the country. The task of the leader was not to exert total control over policy decisions, but to manage this double life in such a way that would not jeopardize the internal stability and bring the Party closer to its final goal. For quite a long time Winston Churchill, both as a person and politician more fascinated with the world scene than “bread and butter” politics, seemed unfit to fulfil this task. His contempt and indifference for the role he had to play as the Leader of the Opposition after Labour took over governing the country in 1945 is well documented. Interestingly, this did not have much an effect on Churchill's standing within his own Conservative ranks. In the six years it took the Tories to regain lost ground and return to Government he remained in complete control of all segments of the Party, be it the Conservative front bench, the Parliamentary Party or various agencies.²

Churchill's character certainly had an effect on the Party and how it approached the issues of electoral nature. Lord Hailsham's claim, that Churchill never saw the need for presenting policy to the electorate in any definitive form or fashion, simply because he believed that his personal qualities, or those of any politician that possessed outstanding courage and leadership skills, were

¹ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 2

² Theakston, Kevin. Winston Churchill 1945-51, in *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*, ed. Timothy Heppell (Basingstoke etc. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 12-13; Blake, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London: Methuen, 1985): 258.

enough to win the Party the votes it needed to return to Government, in retrospect nevertheless seems exaggerated, especially for the time Churchill headed the National Government during the War. Stuart Ball's explanation, that the Prime Minister was opposed to anything which tended to emphasize separateness and could, in Churchill's mind, derail the efforts and unity of the wartime coalition,³ makes much more sense both in light of the PM's motives and his history as a career politician, who understood very well the pitfalls of party politics. In retrospect, historians would see him as much of an asset as a burden to the functioning of the Conservative policy-making machinery, while some members of the Party proclaimed him to be one of the prime causes of the election disaster. The Conservatives, as the result in 1945 would show, suffered heavily from Churchill's tactics; still, not everything was his fault. The fact that the Party was associated with issues such as unemployment, depression and failure to prevent war, and that it had lost credibility in the eyes of much of the British voters⁴ who were desperate for change, would constitute a problem with or without Churchill in the leader's seat. The truth was the Party was not only lagging behind Labour in terms of policy but also in its ability to persuade.

The new political landscape in which the Conservatives found themselves unusually challenged by Labour would soon force the Party to define its position on the same policies of the welfare state that it had avoided in the last election. For the Conservatives to regain credibility, they needed a new, more effective approach to policy making, one that would correct the mistakes of the past and bring the party more in line with public opinion. The situation, some members agreed, called for a new 'Tamworth Manifesto',⁵ where the Party would embrace the new political and social reality of the post-war period. Their proposal was based on the idea that an abrupt break with the past was just what the Party needed to regain its confidence and control over the country.

While most in the Party saw the defeat of 1945 as an opportunity lost, others, including the leader's wife, felt differently. Clementine Churchill's remark about the 1945 defeat as a "blessing in disguise", which Butler years later described as prophetic, was certainly an accurate description of things to come, both in terms of organization and the Party's relationship with the public. Conservatives began thinking differently about passing their solutions on to the electorate, while at the same time laying more emphasis on making 'positive policy'. These steps would eventually culminate in publications, such as the Industrial Charter and the Right Road for Britain, and later in the 1950 and 1951 general election manifestos.

³ Ball, Stuart. *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 324; Hailsham 1990, 234

⁴ Blake, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (London: Methuen, 1970): 254-255; Cooke, Alistair B. Introduction, in *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos 1900-1997*, by Iain Dale (Abingdon: Routledge 2000).

⁵ Sir Robert Peel's manifesto, launched in Tamworth in 1834, marked the start of modern Conservatism. In it, Peel combined the idea of moderate political reform with a strong belief in traditional institutions. For more information visit http://www.conservapedia.com/Tamworth_Manifesto

The change in attitude towards declaring policy in detail is hard to recreate on paper, especially when the entire party organization is taken into account. What can be said of the process of change in general is that it was only natural for the Conservatives to embrace a new kind of structure, since the values for which the old pre-1939 Party stood for became dated after the War ended.⁶ After 1945 there simply existed no reasonable case for restoring the old party structure or continuing most of the policies associated with the inter-war years. This reaction to defeat was an instructive example of the Conservatives attitude towards change. When the Party confronted a similar issue in the 1970s, Ian Gilmour tried to answer it by quoting Lord Salisbury who in 1883 said that the object of the Party was not, and should not be, simply to keep things as they are:⁷

“In the first place the enterprise is impossible. In the next place, there is much in our present mode of thought and action which it is highly undesirable to conserve.”

Even though some contemporary accounts suggest this was not entirely true, especially when it came to policy, the organizational changes the Party pursued were genuinely innovative.⁸ It did seem, at least for a while, that the election of 1945 would not change anything. Churchill remained convinced that there was no need for the Opposition to spell its domestic policy in detail, putting it simply that this was solely the task of the Government. His refusal to spell out policies for fear they would commit a future Conservative Government⁹ implies that the leader fully acknowledged the political risk brought about by policy declarations, but instead of accepting this risk and working around it he simply continued to ignore it in the same way his predecessor Alfred J. Balfour did some four decades earlier.

Defeat at the polls, for all the shock it caused for the Party and its leadership, brought about a period of modernization, enhanced by a new found appreciation for policy research. The Party's policy-making machinery, which had come to a complete stop during the Second World War, did not fully revive itself until more than a year after the 1945 election, while it took even longer to produce any significant piece of legislation. According to Blake, party reorganization involved a constitutional reshuffle, change of committee nomenclatures and relationships, and a move for better representation of Party sentiment.¹⁰ Changes were observed on all levels: the front bench, the Parliamentary Party and agencies, such as the Conservative Research Department and the Conservative Political Centre, became more interconnected, their actions more coherent. The 'Two-

⁶ Ramsden, John. *The Age of Churchill and Eden* (London etc.: Longman, 1995). 94-95; Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980). 102; Butler, R.A. *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London : Hamilton: 1971): 126

⁷ Butler, R.A. *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London : Hamilton: 1971): 122.

⁸ Bale, Tim. *The Conservatives since 1945: The Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 14.

⁹ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 108.

¹⁰ Blake, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London: Methuen, 1985): 259.

Way Movement of Ideas', a concept originally proposed by Butler, made the Conservative Central Office more accessible, or so it was claimed. The flow of ideas, as Butler recalled in his memoirs, shortly took on a life of its own, opening the Party to rank-and-file members from various parts of the country that now had the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of this new approach to Conservatism.¹¹

The expansion of research also fostered new appreciation for producing policy declarations. Preparations for what would eventually become the 1950 General Election Manifesto date back to at least 1949. It is difficult, however, to pin point the exact date when the Party started talking about the next general election or the specifics of the next manifesto. It is highly unlikely that such a date even existed, since the policy-making machinery after 1946 never really stopped working. The Manifesto, which in many ways celebrated the Party's newly found coherence, was largely based on the most seminal publication produced during that era – the *Industrial Charter*. The Conservatives wrote the Charter to assure their voters that modern Conservatism would, in the interest of efficiency, full employment and social security, support the idea of a mixed economy.¹² Historians of the Conservative Party would later judge it not by its content but the signal it sent to both the electorate and the Party itself.¹³ The Charter, despite its success and important role in defying the new approach to Conservatism, attracted a significant amount of opposition from inside the Party, some members rejecting it as nothing more than 'pink conservatism'. To the relief of its authors, the Party finally adopted the Charter as part of its official policy during 1947 annual Conference. Before it was distributed to the wider public, Churchill, who also had his doubts about the Charter's implications at first but quickly came to accept it, wrote a foreword, which, according to Ramsden, meant that the opponents were defeated and that there was no going back.¹⁴

The ideas represented in the Industrial Charter two years later culminated in the launch of the *Right Road for Britain*, which took the title of the most comprehensive publication to be presented to the country since the Party entered the ranks of opposition. Two years after the launch of the Industrial Charter the Conservative Conference approved the text that would become the basis for the Party's next programme. The Conference showed that the Party was now ready and willing to go to the polls and face an election with Labour. Before Butler reassured the members that the Party was fully able to produce a manifesto at once, he delivered an emotional case for a new approach to Conservatism. The Times summed up his words:

¹¹ Butler, R.A. *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London : Hamilton: 1971): 137.

¹² *Ibid.*: 146.

¹³ Bale, Tim. *The Conservatives since 1945: The Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 30-31.

¹⁴ Ramsden, John. *The Age of Churchill and Eden* (London etc.: Longman,1995): 158.

*The Right Road for Britain was a policy of humanity and common sense: humanity because it associated the Conservative Party with the spiritual, human, and physical needs of our population, and common sense because it had used the instrument of change where change was in the national interests and accepted economic facts where they were unanswerable and irrevocable.*¹⁵

Butler's speech in essence confirmed where the framework for the next manifesto would come from. Despite the success of the Conference, observers remained convinced the Party still had a lot of work to do to get its message straight. The Right Road for Britain, as the Spectator commented not long after it was published, was an “excellent document”, despite the fact that it lacked any significant commitment on the part of the Conservatives for producing a fight to win the next election. For everything the Party and the current Government had in common, there still remained a number of issues where their approaches differed, and these, the newspaper pointed out, were not emphasized enough. The conclusion was that there was no reason anymore for the Opposition to remain quiet on issues that showed Labour's incompetence in governing the country and that the Right Road didn't bring the Conservatives any closer to victory than they were before.¹⁶

What the article proposed was something the Party wasn't prepared to put forward, at least not in a way that would please the Press or many of its constituents. When the Manifesto was finally published a year later it left a lot to wish for. It was perfectly clear that the Right Road for Britain was its main source of inspiration. Titled *This is the Road*, it preserved the spirit of the 1949 publication which some in the Press described as an “anodyne in that shade of pale blue which most nearly approaches pink”.¹⁷ Ramsden's account of how the 1950 Manifesto came about refers to the fact that the final draft contained a far smaller number of clear promises that the Party made in the Right Road for Britain. For some members, this was a mistake. The decision to name the manifesto *This is the Road* with the turn of fortunes only emphasized the extent to which the Party had been compelled to re-examine its tactics and policies. The Conservatives desperately wanted to avoid focusing the public's attention on something other than the mistakes of the Labour Government which in their view threatened the economic and financial stability of the country. An aggressive campaign, they feared, could undermine the Party's efforts and threaten its overall performance.¹⁸

In the end it would take not one but two general elections for Churchill and the Party to win back the trust of the British electorate. The task of writing both the 1950 as well as the 1951

¹⁵ 'Right Road' Approved, The Times, October 15th 1949.

¹⁶ Right Road?, Spectator, July 28th 1949.

¹⁷ Ibid.; Butler, R.A. *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London : Hamilton: 1971): 152

¹⁸ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 142.

Manifesto proved to be challenging, although the most difficult exercise – the making of policy – was completed more than a year before the first of the manifestos was published. The solid body of policy and a method for effectively presenting it to the electorate were two key components of success that would allow the Party to stay in power for the next thirteen years.¹⁹

1.2 The long road

The differences between the 1945 and 1950 Conservative Manifesto were significant. The former, titled *Mr. Churchill's Declaration of Policy to the Electors*, was to be the last one that took a more personalized form. Five years later the Conservative manifesto would become a statement of policy on behalf of the whole Party, breaking with tradition that appeared in the late nineteenth century when the Conservatives first started issuing personal election addresses made by the Leader.²⁰ To understand how and why this break occurred, it is necessary to trace some of the steps in the process of preparing *This is the Road* and the 1951 Manifesto that allowed the Party to return to office.

From a purely functional perspective the 1945 Declaration of Policy to the Electors was overshadowed in the election campaign by Churchill himself, who decided to engage aggressively with his Labour rivals, not realizing this would only hurt the Party in the end.²¹ The Manifesto, drafted by the Research Department, that at the time consisted of only four people, two of which were secretaries, was combative in language and style. Much of its content, however, was similar to what Labour had to offer. The fact that both parties were part of the Coalition Government influenced much of what they were willing to offer.²² Five years later the authors would be the same; the Party and the organization surrounding it, however, would be different.

The first draft of the 1950 Manifesto was prepared by David Clarke of the Conservative Research Department in early December that previous year. Clarke's correspondence with Percy Cohen, fellow joint Director of the CRD, and a group of research officers, consisting of Ian Macleod, Reginald Maudling and Brigadier Blunt, started when Clarke reached out to his colleagues, and asked them to share their thoughts on the first draft, specifically on three predetermined points of view. These were the general line of the document; the relative importance

¹⁹ Ibid.: 142.

²⁰ Barnes, John and Richard Cockett. *The Making of Party Policy*, in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 354-355.

²¹ Charmley, John. *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996):120-121

²² Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 102.

of different subjects; and the actual content of each section.²³ The fact that the first draft of the manifesto contained many “try outs” in possible policy, i.e. the abolition of certain Ministries, cuts in food subsidies, both for domestically produced and imported food, reforms in the Health services etc., and that certain proposals that were included in the Right Road for Britain would be subject to a caveat about the financial position,²⁴ shows how the body a policy was more susceptible to change as the day of the election got closer.

Within a week Clarke received answers from at least three of his peers. The comments from Cohen and Macleod were the most interesting in their criticism, because they contained more general notions of what an election manifesto should look like and what its purpose should be. Cohen, after congratulating Clarke for his well-written draft, immediately touched upon the rather technical issues of length and style. For the manifesto to be published textually by the Press and that the public could read it with ease, it needed to be shorter. Stylistically it needed to be clearer and different from the Right Road that the Party published only months before. Cohen's biggest fear seemed to be that Clarke's draft may invite criticism that it was a refined version of the 'Right Road'.²⁵ Macleod, in contrast, thought that the general line of the document was excellent, particularly the proposals related to solving the financial and economic crisis that the Labour government had no appropriate answer for. For him, Housing was the only section in need of re-evaluation in light of new calculations that showed some parts of the proposed programme could lead to unwanted pressure on scarce building materials. Even though Housing was one of the main themes developed by the Party in the Right Road for Britain, Macleod thought there was no need for being too rigid about keeping it in the Manifesto in its entirety.²⁶ He would nevertheless make it a point to also support a clearer and open approach. Macleod reminded Clarke of the political importance of securing and sticking to the themes developed by the Party. Restrictions on “try out” issues, such as the abolition of ministries, cuts in the food subsidies, and reforms in the Health Service would in his view place the Party's representatives in a difficult position, in which they wouldn't be able to put forward a new and coherent approach to social services.²⁷ The fear was this would be seen as lack of a general commitment to reform.

Macleod's comments reflected a prevailing public image of an Opposition, susceptible to backpedalling and U-turns. The fact that the solid body of policy prepared by the Party could be

²³ Clarke to Cohen, Macleod, Maudling and Blunt, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 2/48/13

²⁴ Rab Butler internal memo, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 2/48/13

²⁵ Cohen in a memorandum to Clarke, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 2/48/13

²⁶ Macleod in a memorandum to Clarke, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark:CRD 2/48/13

²⁷ Ibid.

modified accordingly to the changing economic situation in the country stirred much more controversy among contemporaries than it did among historians decades later. Labour used the disinclination of some Conservatives to be committed to any prepared policy as a political weapon, doing its best to portray the Opposition's approach as opportunistic. This is not to say Labour's own approach to declaring policy was any more transparent. The Times, commenting on the feud in early 1950, took the side of the Conservatives, defending their approach, while criticizing Labour for "having too closely defined a policy, too rigidly imposed upon Ministers and by Ministers upon Parliament".²⁸

These exchanges provide an instructive example of the most pressing issues the Party needed to address before it could publish its manifesto. On the one side it wanted to be careful not to give hostages to fortune; on the other hand it needed to provide Candidates with convincing material that would enable them to campaign effectively. The Conservatives experienced a similar problem in 1945, when the preparation of the Manifesto was taking too long, making the Candidates nervous. In a letter to Churchill, Ralph Assheton, the Party Chairman, complained how difficult it was for people to conduct the campaign until the Manifesto was published.²⁹ Although this was purely a time issue, it nevertheless showed the strong connection between the general campaign and the policy boundaries set out in the Manifesto. This of course did not help solve the many problems of the 1945 publication, which, among other things, suffered from a lack of substance. Five years later most officers of the Research Department did not wish to revisit that mistake.

Similar views were shared by Conservative representatives in Parliament, such as Richard Law, the son of former Party Leader and Prime Minister Andrew Bonar Law, who was an MP for Kensington South. Days after meeting Churchill in person, he wrote to him about the need for a stronger Conservative theme, one that would differentiate the Party in the eyes of electors from what the alternative option had to offer. He believed that some proposals would strike electors as only variations of what the Government was prepared to offer. The MP was convinced that people in the industrial north would only vote Conservative if they were afraid of a future under socialism or if the Party could offer them a viable alternative, embedded in a completely different theme. He would propose one based on freedom.³⁰ For people like Butler and Law being factual and positive meant being convincing. The one person they needed to persuade was the Leader of the Party. In a letter sent to Churchill, Butler expressed how inevitable and desirable it would be to keep the

²⁸ Parties and Policies, The Times. January 21st 1950.

²⁹ Asshton to Churchill, Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: CHUR2/554

³⁰ Law to Churchill, Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: CHUR 2/89

manifesto in as factual and definitive style as possible.³¹ It was obvious that Churchill still had reservations about certain aspects of the publication. Party members were relieved every time they were successful at persuading him to agree to a chapter or passage they wrote.³² Churchill made no secret that he wanted to be in control of the process and have the final word when it came to the content. Butler recalled in his memoirs how he would meet with the Leader on several occasions to discuss the Manifesto. The meetings would drag on for hours, with Churchill “shredding to bits every discrepancy, ellipsis or muddled metaphor”.³³ The reasoning behind such a cautious approach originated from his own and his predecessors’ mistakes. Butler remembered a piece of Churchill's advice:

*He warned me never in policy statements to postulate premises into single lines or generalize on vital issues; reminding me how in 1905 Lord Spencer had tacked on to a disparate thought “Nor must we forget Ireland”, thus bringing down devastating and irremediable ruin on his head.*³⁴

Churchill's words summed up a problem nobody in the Party in early December 1949 seemed to have an answer for: How to give the electors what they want without promising them something that a future Conservative Government wouldn't be able to deliver? Before the start of the new year the Advisory Committee on Policy (ACP), a successor of the Post-war Problems Central Committee (PWCCC), which would lay at the heart of the Conservative Party for more than twenty years, turned down Clarke's draft of the manifesto, criticizing it for being too long and weak in expression. The Committee assigned the Research Department to re-write the original draft in a completely different form, with an introductory essay that would attack the record of the Labour Government by highlighting the problems of Socialism, and a second part that would serve as a catalogue of proposals and steps the Party would take.³⁵

³¹ In his letter, Butler referred to one particular dilemma regarding the layout of the manifesto. There was a possibility that the Party would publish the document in two parts: signed by Churchill, the first part would take the form of an essay, in which the Conservatives would attack the Government's record and offer a viable alternative to the policies of the past five years; the second part would look more like a detailed catalogue, where voters would be given the chance to read about the entire range of Conservative policy priorities. As the content of the letter reveals, Butler tried to convince Churchill that the first and second part should be published as a single document and that the former should be as factual and definitive in style as the latter. The fact that their correspondence even took place clearly shows that the Party was not in any way united behind Butler's idea of a more open approach. For more details see Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: reference: CHUR 2/89.

³² In a letter to David Clarke dated January 20th 1950, Maxwell Fyfe, one of the members of Churchill's Shadow Cabinet, described how he, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Rab Butler and two officers of the Research Department successfully drafted the part of the 1950 manifesto which concerned the price of food. Fyfe underlined the efforts that went into the preparation of the passage and the fact that the group of men convinced Churchill to agree to it, despite the fact that the leader showed no enthusiasm for the work they had done. For more a more detailed account see Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 3/48/24.

³³ Butler, R.A. *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London : Hamilton: 1971): 152.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 152

³⁵ PBH to the Leader of the Party, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 2/48/15; For more information on the

The first version of the Manifesto to bear the title *This is the Road* was circulated between officers of the Research Department in early January. The comments Clarke received from his colleagues still focused on the factual side of the argument, but this time some were critical of the high number of positive proposals included in the draft. Reginald Maudling worried that the Party, “promising to establish a plethora of new boards, committees and inquiries”, looked even more like it was desperately trying to avoid making definitive choices.³⁶ There were also other issues. The growing economic and financial troubles prevented the Research Department from including definitive data in the draft, while the changing economic landscape, it seemed, also started threatening some of the Party's long-term policy priorities.

The policy of full employment, which represented one of the hallmarks of the post-war consensus, was already prominently mentioned in the 1945 Manifesto, where the Party stated that it intended to avoid the “disastrous slumps and booms” from which the country used to suffer during previous Conservative administrations and that one of the Government’s primary aims and responsibilities should be “the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment”.³⁷ Yet, in early 1950, the Tories were far from convinced that the policy could remain unchanged during the next parliament. As a result of Britain's ongoing economic difficulties, some members of the Party expressed concerns that sustaining the level of full employment could prove difficult, if not impossible, after the expiration of the Marshall Plan.³⁸ Conservative records show the impact these calls for restraint had on the 1950 manifesto. The feedback David Clarke received from his fellow officers confirmed that the Party was moving in two directions at the same time. On the one hand it wanted to make positive impressions on the mass electorate by placing the topic of employment in front of complex economic issues, like foreign exchange, which interested only a small fraction of voters. On the other, it was determined not to promise something it could not deliver.³⁹ Fears of an economic crisis never fully materialized in the final version of the Manifesto. Instead, the Party stated that it regarded full employment to be the first aim of a future Conservative Government, but issued a warning nonetheless: neither the Conservatives nor Labour could predict what the

Advisory Committee on Policy see <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/cpa/acp/acp.html>.

³⁶ Maudling to Clarke, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 2/48/18

³⁷ Mr. Churchill's Declaration of Policy to the Electors 1945. For complete text visit <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/con45.htm>

³⁸ In early 1950 some economists also feared that Britain's “sterling balance” debts to India and Pakistan may have formed an important and possibly dangerous element in the push for full employment. Sterling balances were credits in British pounds held overseas that Britain repaid in unrequited exports, which, by some statistics, reached 15 per cent of the country's total exports. Economists and politicians regarded this as a drain on the British economy. For more details visit <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/42665275>.

³⁹ Oliver Stebbings, a CRD research officer Clarke reached out to in search of feedback, also expressed concern that the cessation of, or reduction in, unrequited exports to other countries could have a serious effect on the level of employment, only secondary to the expiration of Marshall Aid. This, he believed, was something the Party needed to be prepared for. For more details see Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 2/48/18.

consequences of the cessation of American aid would mean for the British economy and for the level of unemployment.⁴⁰

Despite these issues the shared view of the Party was that the new, more positive version, including some minor parts that were re-written by Churchill himself, was better than Clarke's original draft.⁴¹

1.3 Prepared to lead

The results of the 1950 General Election were a disappointment for the Party, particularly because Labour's majority in Parliament was paper thin. The work that went into the Right Road all of a sudden seemed to be pointless, with the majority of voters still unconvinced by what Conservatives had to offer. Nevertheless, the experience proved far less worrisome than the one in 1945, and this time the wounds would heal much quicker. The fact that the Conservative policy-making machinery never really stopped running was good, since it would take only eighteen months before it would be put to the test again.

The Conservative manifestos of 1950 and 1951 were to become the foundations of future policy declarations, offering party administrations both a structural and organizational template for producing important publications. Not only would they provide the framework for expressing political ideas, they would also show how preserving and reinvigorating old policy patterns for the purpose of campaigning could help achieve excellent election results (Looking Ahead, February 5th 1962, ACP 3/8). It would prove far too ambitious at this point to recreate the period between the 1950 and 1951 General Election and everything that occurred during that time. All that can be said is that the Party still continued to show organizational strains, combined with a general mood of anxiety. The Conservatives weren't sure neither of themselves nor the remedies they were defending.⁴² This was reflected in discussions about policies, where the rank and file members would press for a more detailed approach. The three areas that proved particularly contentious were denationalization, the future of Health Services and housing.⁴³ For the first one, the consensus in the Party was that it was both politically and industrially impractical, especially in the case of the energy sector. As a result, any mention of gas and electricity was omitted from the 1951 Manifesto altogether.⁴⁴ The second area also proved difficult to manage. Conservatives, even though they accepted the principle of the National Health Service, were convinced that the programme needed

⁴⁰ For complete text of This is the Road visit <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/con50.htm>

⁴¹ Notes on third draft of Manifesto, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 2/48/18

⁴² Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 149.

⁴³ Ibid.: 153-154.

to be reformed, as its cost for the country was too great. They desperately needed a line of policy that would be distinctive in making the NHS more efficient and would not be seen as a way of damaging the programme or undermining the principle of free universal access to healthcare on which it was based.⁴⁵

The solutions they provided in two alternative economic schemes that would save the country between 25 and 50 million pounds per year were never included in the 1951 Manifesto.⁴⁶ All that was mentioned on the topic of Health was that the Party, if elected, will provide better services and so “fulfil the high hopes we all held when we planned the improvements during the war”.⁴⁷ The fact that the areas of health and denationalization proved too contentious or too impractical to address in the Manifesto meant that housing was going to be one of the central themes on the Conservative agenda. Not surprisingly, since it was announced at the 1950 Conservative Conference in Blackpool that the Party, if it were elected, would build 300.000 new homes per year. Butler's memoirs and historical accounts written by Ramsden show how divided the Party was on both the political and economic implications of such a high number. Butler and most of his colleagues were fully conscious of the political benefits: it was no secret the idea proved extremely popular among the rank and file. Butler, however, feared the effect it would have on Britain's ailing economy. The problem was in the scarcity of resources, which meant that the expanding of the house building programme would bring higher inflation.⁴⁸ Some fifteen years later he described his dilemma, pointing out the fact that both “/.../ the promise and the achievement were magnificent politically; economically, however, they placed a severe inflationary strain upon our resources which contributed to the difficulties of 1954-55”.⁴⁹ There was no turning back at this point. The only thing that the Conservatives could use as insurance in case they wouldn't be able to promise the 300.000 target in the next Manifesto was the Rearmament Programme. Correspondence between Churchill, Party Chairman Lord Woolton and Butler from February 1951 offers an instructive example of how the men tried to find the appropriate line on housing in view of the obligations concerning rearmament. The question that interested candidates and speakers was whether they should continue to state that that the next Conservative government will building 300.000 houses a year? The answer that Butler provided Churchill and Woolton was based on the

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 153-154.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 153-154

⁴⁶ Ibid., 155-156

⁴⁷ For complete text of the 1951 Conservative Party Manifesto visit: <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1951/1951-conservative-manifesto.shtml>

⁴⁸ Ramsden, John. *The Age of Churchill and Eden* (London etc.: Longman,1995): 157; Ibid.: 173; Butler, R.A. *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London : Hamilton: 1971): 154-155.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 154-155

Leader's own speech at the Conference in Blackpool. In spite of his previous reservations, Butler advised that the Party should stick to the 300.000 goal, but should consider this in terms of a target to be reached as soon as the Rearmament Programme permits.⁵⁰

For all intents and purposes Housing proved to be the ultimate Conservative pledge. Unaware that by the end of the year the country would be voting again, the Party embarked on a policy that, according to Ramsden, “allowed both a celebration of pre-war Conservatism and a denunciation of Labour failures”.⁵¹ While most members could now be certain that housing would play an important role in the next Manifesto, the programme still had its opponents, although mainly from outside the Party. The Times, in a comment about Conservative policy, argued that the Party needed to show that it could handle the country in an immediate crisis with “a ruthless reordering of the list of claims on the nation's purse, putting rearmament at the head and welfare including housing, far lower than most parliamentary candidates would like” (Conservative Policy, The Times, August 25th 1951). This, of course, was never going to happen. The Party was comfortable with the progress it made, even though it meant accepting Labour's social and welfare reforms and the state's role in the management of the economy.⁵² After six long years in opposition, the Conservatives finally improved their image and were on course to win the unexpected election Attlee announced for October 25th.

The short time span between Attlee's announcement and the date the Conservative manifesto was to be published heavily influenced the way the document's overall appearance and way it came about. The *1951 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto* was an entirely different publication from *This is the Road*. It was much shorter, to the point and almost all of it was written by Churchill. The policy basis for the document was a lengthier publication, titled *Britain Strong and Free*, which was launched by the Party only days after Churchill's signed off on his last party manifesto.⁵³ While the tone of both documents was more libertarian, the policies, with the notable exception of housing and its ambitious target, remained similar to those used in the previous Manifesto and the *Right Road for Britain*. The Times, observant of the similarities and the vagueness of the Conservative approach, commented “that the impression which all of this leaves is that the manifesto has been deliberately designed to cause the least offense possible – even at the

⁵⁰ Butler to Churchill and Woolton, Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: CHUR 2/105; Woolton to the Leader of the Party, Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: CHUR 2/105; Churchill to Chairman of the Party, Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: CHUR 2/105

⁵¹ Ramsden, John. *The Age of Churchill and Eden* (London etc.: Longman,1995): 172.

⁵² *Ibid.*: 174.

⁵³ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 161.

cost of diminishing its cogency”,⁵⁴ indicating the Party was making the same mistakes as the previous year. This time, however, the Conservatives would be rewarded for their cautious approach.

2. From government to opposition in the 1960s

2.1 The leaders

The period between 1955 and 1970 represented a much more turbulent endeavour in terms of organizational stability than the first ten years after the war. In 1957, after two years in office, Anthony Eden stepped down as Prime Minister and as Leader of the Conservative Party, and was replaced by Harold Macmillan. Despite Macmillan's six consecutive years in office, this was the first of three major leadership changes the Conservatives experienced in the thirteen years that followed. The effect these changes had on policy priorities is generally well researched, with authors such as Lindsay and Harrington, Barnes and Cockett, and Charmley addressing some of the main developments.

General election manifestos, like other Conservative policy statements published during this period, were products of careful considerations, although many concerns of the past, like the fear of defying policy seemed to have vanished with Churchill's departure. This chapter shows some particularities that evolved in the process of drafting these documents, especially after the 1964 Election which set of a chain of reforms to the Conservative organization. It starts of, however, with a general look at how the policy process was organized under four very different leaders. For various reasons, the impact these men had on Conservative policy making between 1955 and 1970 was much more obvious than in previous years. The examples discussed here generally confirm Barnes & Cockett's notion that the leader's role remained pre-eminent, compared to policy decisions made by other individuals within the Party, and that final decisions were usually made on a political rather than an ideological basis.¹

Policy making was still very much influenced by the personality of the individual that held the top position. In retrospect, Harold Macmillan and Edward Heath stand out as the most policy-

⁵⁴ Conservative Policy, *The Times*, September 29th 1951.

¹Barnes, John and Richard Cockett. The Making of Party Policy, in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 382.

oriented Leaders of the era, with the strength to mobilize the resources of their role effectively and to the benefit of the entire party. The men they replaced at the top of the organizational structure showed there was nothing self-evident about their abilities. In terms of electoral stability, Eden's mistakes were largely reverted, thanks to Macmillan's decision to postpone the next general election until 1959, which gave the Party enough time to regenerate. For Alec Douglas-Home, his successor, the election 1964, on the contrary, came too quickly.

The way contemporaries saw these men helps researchers better understand the qualities of their political style and the differences that set them apart. Anthony Eden, who took over the Party from Churchill in 1955, came to represent perhaps the poorest example of executive power, both in terms of managing the country and the Conservative rank and file. Most notable for his role as Foreign Secretary, Eden enjoyed an unblemished reputation among the electorate. His polished appearance and behaviour, however, concealed his lack of experience on the domestic and economic front. From a policy-making perspective, Eden's style of leadership became similar to Churchill's but for all the wrong reasons. To demonstrate he had control, he became obsessed with detail, keeping his ministers under constant pressure, which only enhanced his inability to cultivate a wide range of support within the Party, where a number of key people, including Rab Butler, who served as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Harold Macmillan, who was destined to become Eden's eventual replacement, had doubts he was capable of performing his duties to the standard set by his predecessor. Eden's reputation for indecision was perhaps the most troubling factor of all.²

Macmillan, by contrast, came to view policy making as a source of great enjoyment that allowed him to engage with ideas and arguments, particularly on issues related to the economy. His political career spread through decades, and much of what he experienced in his earlier years would influence the decisions he made later in life.³ His conservatism was essentially a manifestation of the post-war consensus, a compromise between the ideas of interventionism and free-market capitalism. Macmillan's time in office is well documented and researched, especially in terms of his policy making. Ramsden's detailed account of the way Eden's successor conducted his tasks and organized the Party shows a man in control: the scale of organizational change Macmillan undertook became representative of his style and approach to politics. The effect this had on the Conservative machinery was unprecedented in the history of the Party. The relationships the Prime Minister maintained with his Cabinet colleagues and intra-party structures, such as the CRD, allowed the Conservatives to undergo a transformation that would consolidate all their assets and allow the Party to recover from the disappointments of the previous couple of years under the

² Charmley, John. *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996): 152-153.

³ Green, E.H.H. *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford etc : Oxford University Press, 2002).157-160.

leadership of Macmillan's predecessor.⁴

With regard to the changes in electoral strategy and the way policy was communicated to the electorate, the Conservative Party from 1955 onwards seemingly experienced far less contentious dilemmas than during the first decade after the War. Despite many differences in their approach to policy-making, no administration wanted to revisit the days when policy was something to hide. Even after they re-entered opposition, the Conservatives tried to follow an open and transparent approach. In some instances, the solutions they were proposing came very close to what the other side was prepared to offer. By the end of the decade, their positions on key issues remained vague, mostly because they feared that the alternative would cause disunity among Conservative ranks.⁵

The manifesto continued to play the role of the Party's central policy declaration, while its other attributes became more apparent, particularly in situations that tested the resilience of the Leaders and the Cabinet. In the end of the 1950s, the Party had to find a way to deal with not only the economic but the political fallout of the Suez crisis. Eden's failure to restore control over the newly nationalized Egyptian canal using military force exposed his Government to criticism for its geostrategic short-sightedness. The fact that the failure wasn't military but political, brought about by American insistence that a final solution to the conflict be found in the United Nations, was later seen as a humiliating blow to the country's reputation for which Eden would have to carry the blame. The crisis reached its peak less than a year after the Conservatives wrote in their 1955 General Election Manifesto that the last government had successfully restored the country's prestige in the Middle East. Even though the reality on the ground at that time largely supported this view, the Government and the Prime Minister could now be seen as losing control over a significant part of their foreign policy.⁶ The alternative, however, was even less appealing. Britain was on the verge of another economic crisis, with the pound sterling suffering from heavy selling. The US was willing to offer assistance in reversing the fall of the currency, but only if Britain agreed to find a diplomatic solution for the conflict.⁷ The Government now needed to choose between fulfilling one foreign policy objective and protecting the stability of the British economy. Pride and humiliation aside, the choice was easy to make.

Unlike Eden, who was keen to use his predecessor's record to his own advantage, people like Rab Butler understood how risky it was for the Party to speak in definitive terms about things it

⁴ Clarke, Peter. *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1996): 24-28; Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 190-192.

⁵ Burch, Martin. Approaches to Leadership in Opposition: Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher, in *Conservative Party Politics*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry (London: Macmillan, 1980): 168.

⁶ Lindsay, T.F and Michael Harrington. *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (London etc. : Macmillan, 1974): 192.

⁷ Heath, Edward. *The Course of My Life* (London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1998):174.

had very little control of, i.e. issues surrounding war and peace. Even before the 1955 election, when the Conservatives were preparing their programme, there was significant concern that too much optimism, particularly in the area foreign policy, could cause trouble for a future Conservative government somewhere down the road. Butler, years later, recalled how a change in fortune was predicted by those who participated in the drafting of the 1955 manifesto:

... it was a fact that, for the first time since the War, no actual fighting was taking place anywhere in the world. The Prime Minister understandably proposed that this should be recorded in print, and Lord Woolton and I were deputed by our cautious and hard-headed colleagues to dissuade him from this course on the grounds that the fact could well be falsified before the ink was dry on paper.⁸

The Prime Minister, indeed, seemed to forget how important it was not to generalize on vital issues. Eden's optimism over peace, as the events of 1956 would show, didn't last long. The same was true for his successor, who was quick to realize the mistake he had made in believing the military operation in Egypt would be a success.⁹

In 1957, Macmillan introduced new party structures (and reinvigorated some old ones) that complemented existing agencies in their policy work, like the Steering Committee, which had the task of directing policy in a coherent manner, and the Liaison Committee, which tried to identify problems in policy ideas before they became apparent. In the end of the 1950s, the challenges brought about by modern communication were becoming increasingly harder to control. With the help of the Liaison Committee, the Party wanted to improve organizational issues, from timing in the execution of policy to the way it was communicating Conservative ideas to wider audiences. Through policy mechanisms, such as 'Weekend Talking Points' that outlined the most important topics of the week, the Committee helped the Party keep its various voices coherent,¹⁰ and over time managed to significantly improve its public image.

By far the most important piece of political propaganda Macmillan and his Cabinet produced was the 1959 Conservative Manifesto, *The Next Five Years*. Compared to the last election, the stakes were higher, even though the Party seemed to have recovered electorally from the disaster at Suez. Not surprisingly, the events of 1956 were still on everybody's mind when the manifesto was being prepared, even though the international climate at this point looked like it wouldn't have much influence on the course of the campaign. The Party, however, still needed to be cautious about any eventuality. For a while the Government even contemplated raising the issue of

⁸ Butler, R.A. *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London : Hamilton: 1971):184.

⁹ Lindsay, T.F and Michael Harrington. *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (London etc. : Macmillan, 1974):192.

¹⁰ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 193-194.

Suez itself before the Opposition could transform it into a serious election problem.¹¹ Such a strategy, despite the fact that it never came to fruition, demonstrated that propaganda was never the Government's sole purpose for writing the 1959 Manifesto. Instead, the publication, read by millions of voters, could be used for purely tactical reasons, to defend one's performance in office while at the same time discourage the opponent from bringing a problem or a controversial issue to light. With the help of their election manifesto the Conservatives could force an issue out in the open simply because it was the most politically sensible thing to do. By mentioning Suez, they would look like they were in control of their destiny, ready to talk about even the most controversial and potentially damaging topics. By using an open and straightforward approach, the Conservatives could effectively disarm their opponents of any munition that would target either their record or credibility. Lord Hailsham, who served as Party Chairman during Macmillan's six years in office, recalled the Prime Minister's personal motto, which also perfectly described the Conservative election strategy: "Play it long; play it down; play it slow".¹² It summarized the steady and above all safe approach to the way the Party was communicating its intentions and engaging with rivals.

By 1963, when Macmillan resigned from his position, the Conservative Party was no longer considered the face of modernity. It was losing the battle for the future, which was becoming increasingly associated with Labour. With their controversial choice for Macmillan's replacement, the Conservatives forced this perception even further. Alec Douglas-Home, who took over the Party in 1963, was not particularly interested in being personally involved in formulating policy, and believed that the essence of Conservatism was 'doing the right thing at the right time'.¹³ He seemed hardly the person to modernize Britain, especially when compared to Harold Wilson, his younger Labour rival. By selecting an old aristocrat-type diplomat to replace Macmillan, the Party was looking like it was determined to return to some of the certainties of the past to overcome the unpleasantness of the present.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the new Prime Minister showed great capacity for effectively using the organizational structure and policy-making framework that Macmillan and the previous Cabinet set in place. When Douglas-Home became Leader of the Opposition after the Party suffered its first election defeat in almost fourteen years, he veered towards the establishment of an alternative government, with a substantial alternative programme. He asked Edward 'Ted' Heath, the future

¹¹ Ibid.: 197.

¹² Hailsham, Lord. *A Sparrow's Flight: The Memoirs of Lord Hailsham of St. Marylebone* (London: HarperCollins, 1990): 323.

¹³ Hill, Michael. Alec Douglas-Home, 1964-5, in *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*, ed. Timothy Heppell (Basingstoke etc. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 72.

¹⁴ Blake, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London: Methuen, 1985): 293-294; Norton, Philip and Arthur Aughey. *Conservatives and Conservatism* (London : Temple Smith,1981): 143.

Prime Minister who was serving as chairman of the ACP at that time, to set in motion a review of policy and prepare prescriptions to prevent the Party from being caught of guard in case of a snap election.¹⁵ Compared to the period of 1945-1951, the Conservative policy exercise proved more complex, with 30 or more groups trying to find answers to very specific questions. Some of the recommendations they provided were so detailed, they could serve as blueprints for a future Conservative government. In his autobiography, Heath notably pointed out that the policy review he initiated and coordinated was the biggest since the work Rab Butler had done under Churchill in the late 1940s.¹⁶

The process continued throughout the end of the 1960s and well into the next decade, long after Douglas-Home stepped down as Leader of the Party. The first fruit of the policy rethink was a document called *Putting Britain Right Ahead*, which would serve as the basis for the 1966 Conservative General Election manifesto. The publication, subtitled 'A Statement of Conservative Aims', would in many ways define the new Leader's policy priorities for at least the next five years. Writing in his autobiography, Heath emphasized the importance of *Putting Britain Right Ahead*, both in terms of preparing the Party for a possible general election and outlining its course for the future:

The immediate priority of my team was to get our ideas ready for a publication called Putting Britain Right Ahead in time for the 1965 Party Conference /.../. This document set the tone of party policy throughout my years as leader. It began with a statement of principles, declaring that 'the State should serve the people, not dominate them'.¹⁷

Whether the publication constituted an example of ideological posturing is open to interpretation. The fact that the document continued to be the predominant charter of Conservative political priorities long after the 1966 election suggests the Party and the Leader had a high degree of confidence in the principles they declared. For Heath, this represented a way of controlling and, above all, limiting the amount of discussions about the fundamentals of party belief. Debates on the nature of Conservatism could lead to disunity among Tory peers, something he feared a party in opposition simply could not afford. Heath therefore tried to limit discussions on certain key issues, particularly in the economic sphere. As a result of this, some policy positions became increasingly

¹⁵ Burch, Martin. Approaches to Leadership in Opposition: Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher, in *Conservative Party Politics*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry (London: Macmillan, 1980): 164; Hill, Michael. Alec Douglas-Home, 1964-5, in *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*, ed. Timothy Heppell (Basingstoke etc. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 73.

¹⁶ Heath, Edward. *The Course of My Life* (London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1998): 267.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 275.

vague and ambiguous.¹⁸

2.2 Declaring policy, moving forward

The Conservative manifestos of 1955, 1959 and 1964 all needed to overcome one specific burden: their role was limited by the fact that the party issuing them had to defend its own record in government. Like any political party that won two or more consecutive elections, the longer the Conservatives remained in control of the country the more difficult it was for them to develop new policies without appearing exhausted and drained of ideas. In terms of continuing the policy pattern established in the beginning of the decade, both the 1955 and 1959 Conservative campaigns followed a predetermined election formula. By the mid-1960s, however, the Party's earlier electoral successes proved impossible to repeat.

Eden's and Macmillan's general election manifestos were both published during a time when economic prosperity and a period of international stability coincided and created a general atmosphere of hope. With a solid record in office and strong leaders in place, the Party had all the necessary ingredients for conducting convincing and ultimately successful campaigns.

In 1959, the Conservatives outlined their manifesto with two questions: 'Do you want to go ahead on the lines which have brought prosperity at home? Do you want your present leaders to represent you abroad?' The party that had been in power for eight years, and was now trying to secure its third election win, wanted to seem convincing. It was clear, that abrupt change in course would seem like an admission of failure – like the Government had nothing left to offer. Therefore, the Conservatives needed to promise more of the same prosperity and hope.¹⁹ In essence, this represented the same approach the Conservatives used in their 1955 Manifesto, called *United for Peace and Progress*, where voters were encouraged to compare the difficult life under Labour with prosperity during the last Tory government and ask themselves, which was better for their families and their country. The five years Labour spent in government could hardly compare with the higher standard of living and the preservation of peace the Conservatives had to show for in the 1951-55 period. Four years later, the situation proved very similar. Particularly on the domestic front, a relatively steady cost of living, full employment and rising incomes gave the Conservatives confidence that their position should continue to improve in the months and years ahead. Labour, understandably, tried to attack the Government's record by bringing more contentious issues like

¹⁸ Burch, Martin. Approaches to Leadership in Opposition: Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher, in *Conservative Party Politics*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry (London: Macmillan, 1980): 186-187.

¹⁹ Lindsay, T.F and Michael Harrington. *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (London etc. : Macmillan, 1974): 207; For the entire text of the 1955 Conservative Party Manifesto visit <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1955/1955-conservative-manifesto.shtml>.

Suez to the front of the nation debate.²⁰ But none of it seemed to work.

Both the 1955 and 1959 Manifesto were labelled by researchers as rather unexciting, slightly ponderous documents that highlighted all the achievements of the Government that was about to conclude its work, but made hardly any new pledges besides the obvious one – the reaffirmation of the status quo.²¹ The first drafts for the 1955 document were prepared by Martin Fraser of the CRD and Peter Goldman, the Director of Conservative Political Centre who also the author of the original draft for the 1959 manifesto. *United for Peace and Progress*, in which Eden took a great interest, was published in April 1955, well before any of the opposition parties could do the same. In fact, it took a little over a month for the drafting process to be completed, which was record time compared to similar policy declarations published in the past. *The Next Five Years*, by contrast, took five months to finish. The content of the document and its implications was discussed many times by the Steering Committee, where the Prime Minister, Rab Butler, Lord Hailsham in the role of Party Chairman, and other members of the Cabinet tried to devise new ways to present policy, which would make the Manifesto seem more original than it actually was. The electorate needed to be convinced that the Party was moving forward, which is why great care was taken to present voters with a clear choice between moderate change under Macmillan and radical change under Labour.²²

To some extent, this dilemma represented the sort of situation that occurred in the middle of every parliamentary term, when the policy effects of the last election begin to fade and the government starts searching for a new voice. Conservative Party records, published after the 1959 election, confirm that Macmillan's task represented nothing out of the ordinary. Preserving or reinvigorating old policies for the purpose of campaigning was considered routine and an example of smart decision making. In a paper distributed by the CRD, Michael Fraser explained that in order to be effective, a party needs to represent real interests and have relevant ideas. When these become dated or start to fade, the party needs to put forward new policies.²³

In 1959 neither Labour nor the Liberals posed a serious threat to the Government, simply because their proposals were either out-of-date or completely non-existent. Five years later, the situation proved different. Macmillan's departure and the rise of Alec Douglas-Home did not result in any substantial policy rethink, at least not until after the votes were cast and the election lost. The Conservative Party became a victim of its own success: much like in 1955 and 1959, the Tories

²⁰ Ramsden, John. *The Age of Churchill and Eden* (London etc.: Longman,1995): 276-277; LLindsay, T.F and Michael Harrington. *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (London etc. : Macmillan, 1974): 207.

²¹ Butler, David and Richard Rose. *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Macmillan,1960): 49; Ramsden, John. *The Age of Churchill and Eden* (London etc.: Longman,1995): 276.

²² Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 203.

²³ Looking Ahead, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: ACP 3/8.

were doubtful about introducing new policies that would cause the status quo to collapse or that could antagonize a certain part of the electorate. Ramsden wrote that this was the result of the long gestation period of the Manifesto, which “was marked by a series of radical departures that were discarded one by one.” New ideas and policies that would make it look less vague were systematically scaled down, to the point where some members began to wonder who exactly was the manifesto aimed at.²⁴

Contrary to Ramsden's account, Conservative records show how the lack of substantial policy initiatives was a conscious and deliberate decision on the part of the people that prepared the document: the Party wanted to move away from subjects of particular interest towards broader questions of state. The outline of the 1964 Manifesto, distributed by the Advisory Committee on Policy, proposed that the focus of the Party's campaign should move away from policies like Housing and Education, to more general themes of economic growth and international relations.²⁵ Meanwhile, long-term policies associated with the post-war consensus would largely remain intact. Like in 1955 and 1959, the pledge for full-employment was featured prominently in the Party's programme, which bore the title *Prosperity with a Purpose*. Even though the Conservatives acknowledged that a growing economy must remain flexible in order to anticipate changes in markets, methods and machines, they were determined to show that the interest of industry workers “must be fully safeguarded in the process”.²⁶

If the choice between Conservative, Labour and Liberal seemed clear in 1959, on the eve of the 1964 General Election the opposite was certainly true. Labour published its manifesto, *The New Britain*, one week before the Conservatives released their own document. The Prime Minister quickly went before the press to accuse Labour of putting forward “a menu without prices”, saying that the most absolute difference between the parties “is that every item in this programme has been costed.” This, however, could hardly hide or change the fact that the Conservatives were campaigning on the exact same themes of prosperity, modernization and peace that formed the base of Labour's election pledge.²⁷

The rise of Ted Heath soon put an end to the dominance of abstract conceptions that formed the core of Conservative policy. In retrospect, the episode of 1964 had wide-ranging implications for Conservative priorities. They will be discussed in detail in the last part of this chapter, along

²⁴ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 228-229.

²⁵ Manifesto in outline, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: ACP 3/11

²⁶ For the full text of the of the 1964 Conservative General Election Manifesto visit <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1964/1964-conservative-manifesto.shtml>

²⁷ 4% Growth Will Cover Tory Expansion Programme, *The Times*, September 18th 1964.; Lindsay, T.F and Michael Harrington. *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (London etc. : Macmillan, 1974). 231; Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 230-231.

with other changes to the function of the Conservative manifesto that have previously gone unnoticed. Heath, indeed, was the exception among Conservative leaders when it came to expressing specific commitments and pledges. His emphasis on policy work in opposition reflected a view that the Party should be prepared for office even if an election is not imminent.²⁸ The 1966 Manifesto, *Action Not Words*, which was heavily based on the 1965 policy statement *Putting Britain Right Ahead*, was a telling example of just how far the Party had come after less than two years in opposition.

The Conservatives now seemed solely concentrated on practical proposals. The search for ideas was widespread, and involved gathering examples from Britain as well as other countries. Officers of the Research Department circled the world in hope of finding solutions for problems the country was experiencing. The Party, above all, wanted to show that other nations were facing similar hard choices with regard to industrial relations, taxation, technology, government operating costs, education etc.²⁹ Historians would later point out that the policy exercise of 1964-70 was arranged in direct contrast to previous years, when themes were conceived prior to the actual proposals. This time around, the Leader and the Shadow Cabinet endorsed a bottom up approach, believing that themes could also emerge from specific ideas.³⁰

Of course, all eyes were focused on achieving as much distinction between the opposing sides as possible. Correspondence between David Howell, who prepared the original draft of the Manifesto, and other members of the Research Department from February 1965, include references about the difficulties of defying a “distinctive philosophical approach” or, in other words, a narrative. The debate around this issue, unfortunately, did not stay confined to inner party circles. In an outspoken article published by the Spectator, Angus Maude, a Front Bench spokesman on colonial affairs, complained how the Party had become “a meaningless irrelevance”, pointing out that it had produced no strong alternative with regard to trade unions, high personal taxation, and radical changes in welfare services. Maude was convinced the new technocratic approach to solving issues would only hurt the Conservatives in the end (Campbell 1993, 206). Afterwards, some members of the Research Department conceded that the Party had, indeed, been too focused on technical exercises instead of presenting priorities in a more comprehensive manor.³¹

With its 131 pledges the Manifesto was perceived as one of the most detailed policy statements ever published by the Conservatives. But even that couldn't help the Party garner the

²⁸Garnett, Mark. Edward Heath, 1965-70 and 1974-75. in *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*, ed. Timothy Heppell (Basingstoke etc. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁹ *Together We Can Do It*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 3/9/32,36

³⁰ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 241.

³¹ Howell to Fraser, Sewill to Fraser, January 1966, CRD 3/9/32,36

votes it needed; in fact, the result of the election was an even larger Labour majority. Heath's plan had backfired. Action Not Words was unconvincing, not because it did not have enough commitments, but because these had no common denominator, no common theme – precisely what Maude had warned about. In the words of Ian Macleod, “the net result of all of this was that everybody thought we had no policy”.³²

Most of the Conservative campaign revolved around Heath, who had only been elected Leader one month prior to the Election. According to Heath's biographer, the 1966 document expressed the Leaders “impatient, unreflective style”.³³ Paradoxically, Action Not Words was perhaps the most personal manifesto published by the Party since 1945. Closely based on Putting Britain Right Ahead, which remained the most important Conservative publication in second half of 1960s, it came across as a declaration of principles, firmly held by the man who would lead the Conservatives for the next eight years.

2.3 Tasks of Opposition

Conservative General Election manifestos published during the late 1950s and in the 1960s, remained products of careful calculations, drawing attention from virtually all sections of the Party,³⁴ which confirms the centrality of these documents in the process of Conservative policy making. Compared to previous publications, they remained centred around general principles established under the last Churchill government: in this sense, they were used for both promotional and policy purposes. Drawing on the manifesto's promotional attributes, Conservatives used these documents to establish direct contact with the electorate. At the same time, the manifesto and the way it came to life served as as a powerful method of selection. With its help the Party could instantly decide which policy priorities deserved to stay and which needed to go.

An example of the latter can be found in Ted Heath's 1966 Manifesto, which, for the first time in sixteen years, gave no mention of full employment. The fact that only two years prior to that, Alec Douglas-Home signed of on his own Government's manifesto where the long-standing policy was featured prominently among a wide selection of pledges, reveals just how much effect

³² Burch, Martin. Approaches to Leadership in Opposition: Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher, in *Conservative Party Politics*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry (London: Macmillan, 1980):168-169; Davies, A.J. *We, the Nation. The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power* (London: Little, Brown & Co. 1995): 199; Garnett, Mark. Edward Heath, 1965-70 and 1974-75. in *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churhchill to Cameron*, ed. Timothy Heppell (Basingstoke etc. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 85.

³³ Campbell, John. *Edward Heath: A Biography* (London: Cape, 1993): 208.

³⁴ This was particularly true in the initial stages of the process, when the CRD was receiving letters upon letters of policy proposals, written by various party officials and Conservative MPs. In most cases these letters were responses to initiatives made by the representatives of the CRD who encouraged Party members to share their opinions either on the general appearance of the manifesto or specific topics that they were associated with.

the 1964 General Election had on Conservative priorities. The Research Department's records show how the Party for long considered unemployment as the greatest threat to its electoral prospects. Wherever small clusters of unemployment appeared or were about to appear, the Party felt it had to deal with the problem head on.³⁵

In 1966, however, the Conservatives pledged to create new jobs, but not to preserve old ones. The preliminary focus of the Manifesto was on transforming Britain into a high-wage economy. Unemployment was only mentioned in the context of regional development, like in the case of Northern Ireland, where the Party wanted to offer inducements to new industry in order to raise the number of people working. Unlike 1964, there were also no references to the importance of maintaining high employment in the context of industrial relations, where the Tories hoped that targeted measures, such as benefits and compensations for redundant workers, would in the end help reduce the number of industrial disputes.³⁶

When a piece of policy disappeared from an election programme, it did not necessarily mean it was dead. As the next chapter will show, the pledge for full employment eventually resurfaced in the manifesto of 1970, where it was used to attack the Labour Government for its failed economic record, and to remind voters of the Conservative years of rising prosperity. Even though they failed to mention one of the predominant Conservative policies of the post-war period, the authors of the 1966 Manifesto had a tendency not to cause controversy. Much like Ted Heath, who for the sake of preserving unity among the Conservative rank and file avoided dragging the Party in a long discussion about the essence of Conservatism, *Action Not Words* could be seen as reaffirmation of his steady approach to leadership.³⁷ In the words of Margaret Thatcher, the document “accurately summed up Ted's impact on politics”.³⁸ The way it gestated, the way it was written and presented symbolized the leader's character, political style and conviction to a degree not witnessed since the days of Churchill.

The period which is the focus of this chapter also brings to light another function of the Conservative manifesto, related to the issue of party coordination. Correspondence between members of the Research Department shows how important it was for candidates, who represented and spoke on behalf of the Party at various events and gatherings, to have access to a coherent set of policy priorities. For instance, during the 1959 election campaign the Party's candidates particularly appreciated the simple, constructive and concise nature of the document, the fact that it was

³⁵ Reflections on the 1959 General Election campaign, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark:ACP 3/6,8.

³⁶ For full texts of 1964 and 1966 Conservative General Election Manifestos visit <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/>

³⁷ Davies, A.J. *We, the Nation. The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power* (London: Little, Brown & Co. 1995): 199.

³⁸ Thatcher, Margaret. *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins 1993): 137

published well ahead of rival declarations, and that they could use it in their individual election addresses.³⁹ Comments made by candidates imply that one of the functions of 1959 Manifesto was to provide Conservative members with a coherent voice. This development could very well be seen as a consequence of Macmillan's organizational changes, most notably represented in the 'Weekend talking points', which played a similarly important role in the Party's day-to-day operations.

The experience of 1959, unlike that of 1964 or 1966, when the Conservative suffered from electoral defeats, was for the most part positive. Like every post-election period, the Research Department circulated a list of general reflections about the campaign. The CRD confirmed that despite a strong start by Labour, the arguments for retaining the status quo (and a Conservative government) still remained convincing. Combined with confidence in the Prime Minister's leadership, the general atmosphere of hope strongly favoured the continuation of existing policies, while Labour's inability to provide any real alternative also improved the Government's overall standing. Perhaps the most interesting reflection of all was when Michael Fraser wrote how the electoral battle underlined the fact that elections are never won during the official campaign, but prior to that, concluding that the election campaign had almost no effect on the Party's overall performance.⁴⁰

Fraser's conclusion brings up an interesting point about the promotional function of manifestos and other important policy statements, which also arises in Party records published during later periods. In Autumn 1965, almost a year after the first Tory election defeat in more than a decade, when the Party was about to start preparations on its next manifesto, the Research Department published a paper in which it insisted that the *Industrial Charter*, and similar policy statements, had very little effect on the mass electorate. What the Charter did do, however, was convince the "informed opinion" that the Conservative Party had envisioned and devised a viable economic policy contrary to that of the pre-war period. Now that the Party was in opposition, it needed to achieve a similar result. Its tasks were to determine what caused dissatisfaction among the electorate, and offer a credible alternative to the solutions represented by the Government. Conservative researchers were convinced there existed a correlation between alternatives, set out by the Opposition, and people's dissatisfaction. The more convincing was the alternative, the more dissatisfied voters became.⁴¹ In 1965, the problems identified using data from public opinion polls were rising prices, the high price of housing, strikes and the behaviour of trade unions, traffic jams, the plight of old people, the inefficiencies in the organization of national life, and, not surprisingly,

³⁹ General Reflections on the 1959 General Election Campaign, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: ACP 3/6,8

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The Task of Opposition, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 3/9/32,36

politicians.⁴² To have a fighting chance, the Party needed to come up with viable solutions for all of these issues, with the possible exception of the last one.

The episodes of 1959 and 1964 had wide-ranging implications for Conservative priorities. When it came to the role of the manifesto, the Party used it to fulfil tasks that far exceeded its original purpose. From sending out a message to delivering an attack; from hiding behind its previous achievements, to speaking with a single and convincing voice. Even before the Party re-entered the ranks of opposition, and set its mind on changing the way it wanted to be perceived by the country, the Conservative manifesto was beginning to take on a life of its own.

3. Second thoughts: Heath, Thatcher and the Party

3.1 Party in transition

Historians generally disagree about Heath's role in the disintegration of the post-war consensus. Some see him not only as the political but also the ideological predecessor of Margaret Thatcher, a 'proto-Thatcherite' who anticipated her brand of Conservatism at least during the first years of his government, leading up to what would later be known as his U-turn¹. Others stress Heath's overall aim was to improve the post-war consensus and not to destroy it. During his time in office he adhered to full employment and the general concept of the welfare state, but at the same time rejected the idea of partnership with the trade unions². Even though writers may not agree about Heath's ideological disposition, one thing is for certain: in the 1970s, the Conservatives set out to redefine the role of the State under two leaders from similar ideological backgrounds but with very different solutions for Britain's political, social and above all economic problems. This final chapter examines how changes in Conservative policy priorities during the 1970s influenced the objectives and functions attributed to the Party's general election manifesto by earlier administrations. To get a definitive answer, the first part of the chapter follows the structure of the previous two, and looks at how the Party's organization and approach to policy making were reflected in the way the Conservative manifestos of the 1970s came to life.

⁴² Ibid.

¹ Charmley, John. *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996): 182-183

² Seldon, Anthony. Conservative Century in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 56-57.

In stark contrast to the periods 1945-1955 and 1955-1970, Heath and Thatcher became leaders during a time when Conservatives served in opposition. As a consequence both of them suffered similar handicaps: from the very start neither seemed to possess sufficient authority to impose their will on the Party and, in one form or another, both had to fight dissent among Conservative ranks, whether it came from Shadow Cabinet members or MPs who thought either of them was not fit to perform their tasks.³ Conservative factionalism which was rising ever since Heath took office gave a general sense that the degree of unity attributed to the Party in the past had been overstated. To some extent it exposed the double-life that previous administrations were trying to hide by making it harder for individual voices to penetrate through the party structure to the outside. What is interesting is that the majority of these intra party disputes were not targeted at any individual, but were predominantly aimed at providing an alternative platform for discussions concerning the direction of the Party.⁴

When Heath, who was the second longest running Conservative Leader of the Opposition of the 20th century, finally arrived at 10 Downing Street he was already known as the 'Selsdon man', in reference to a 1970 pre-election meeting he and his Shadow Cabinet held at the Selsdon Park Hotel in the outskirts of London. The meeting, which presented nothing more than a discussion about Conservative priorities in the next election, was recognized instantly by the press for the impact it would have on the British political landscape. The group of people who were meeting in a southern suburb of London, as the Times observed, were likely to be the next government. When the dust settled, the priorities of the future Cabinet became more apparent. The newspaper commented that “the only thing that Mr. Heath will have in common with the Mr. Wilson of 1964”, is a clear emphasis on the economy. In many respects, this was also the only true thing the Heath administration had in common with the governments that were run by Churchill, Eden and Macmillan as well. With the exception of Alec Douglas-Home, who kept serving in the Shadow Cabinet after his resignation, Heath's team of ministers contained none of the faces that had for so long been associated with the stability of the post-war era. The future Prime Minister was a professional politician, with a good sense for public opinion, who represented a new generation of leaders that were too young to have played any significant role in 1940s politics. The press compared Heath to Richard Nixon of the United States.⁵

Both know that they now depend for power and success far less than ever before on any definable collective interest (whether squires or businessmen) and far more on keeping the allegiance of a mass of ordinary individual people up and

³ Ramsden, John. *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830* (London : HarperCollins, 1998): 385-386.

⁴ Seyd, Patrick. Factionalism in the 1970s. in *Conservative Party Politics*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry (London: Macmillan, 1980): 241

⁵ Commentary, The Times, January 29 1970.

*down the country. Mr. Heath's strength is that what the Tory Party is now offering /.../ is precisely what the majority of ordinary people now want.*⁶

In the early 1970s indeed a lot of British voters were becoming increasingly attracted to the notion of clamping down on big government and big unions alike. With the promise that they will break the interventionist policies of the past, and substitute them with market solutions, Heath and his Cabinet were aiming to reconstruct the foundations of the post-war consensus. To their utter disappointment, they would soon discover that the painstaking preparations of the previous five years were useless, particularly when it came to the issue of industrial relations. As the British historian A. J. Davies notes, “people simply did not behave as they should have done on paper”.⁷ The Government's failure to convince trade unions to register their activities under the Industrial Relations Act of 1971 had disastrous effects on Heath's strategy to reform the British economy on the basis of efficient management and modernization, where the government would create conditions for growth and trade unions would not try to oppose it. By developing a system of industrial relations based on cooperation, not confrontation, the Government wanted “to restore profitability as the central criterion of economic activity”. Much of the central plan was dependent on the belief that reason will prevail, and that with a new business-like approach to conducting politics (economic) problems will simply cease to exist.⁸

Heath's ideological posture, summed up under the 'Selsdon man' line of thought, had a much stronger effect on his legacy and the future of the Conservative Party than the technocratic approach to making politics he pursued throughout his political career. *A Better Tomorrow*, a statement of policies the Party put forward for the purposes of the 1970 General Election, was ideologically much closer to what Margaret Thatcher nine years later attested to in her first manifesto, than to Conservatism of the 1960s. To some extent this confirms the notion that the newness of Thatcherism, in the words of Evans, “was personal and political, not ideological”⁹. What prevented Heath from succeeding was characterized by some as a revival of 'anti-intellectualism' within the Conservative ranks and anti-Conservatism among opinion makers. The cumulative effect of this was a Government lacking in resolve. Margaret Thatcher, by contrast, had the backing of an intellectual revolution, with many of the main protagonists convinced that collectivism had run its course for too long and that the time was right to break the link between the people and the State. She was also blessed with a strong team of ministers, something Heath was missing since his first

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Davies, A.J. *We, the Nation. The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power* (London: Little, Brown & Co. 1995): 199; Clarke, Peter. *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1996): 331.

⁸ Norton, Philip and Arthur Aughey. *Conservatives and Conservatism* (London : Temple Smith,1981): 150.

⁹ Evans, Eric J. *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (London etc. : Routledge, 1997): 5.

day at Number 10.¹⁰

Many in the Party, including Margaret Thatcher, were convinced that the Conservatives two consecutive General Election defeats in February and October 1974 were the result of policy U-turns – the reversals of course the Heath Cabinet undertook in the second half of its term on issues like intervention by government in industry, and wage and price controls.¹¹ For Heath, the episode spelled the beginning of the end of his premiership. For Thatcher, who was serving as the minister of education, it was a lesson in tactic and resolution, something she would use to her own political advantage after her first election win in 1979.

The trigger that caused Heath to reverse his Government's policy course was unemployment, which in January 1972 reached the psychologically important figure of one million. Realizing that the policy of full employment which he adhered to in his 1970 Manifesto was falling apart, Heath and his closest group of ministers retreated to the middle ground in hope that their problems would disappear. Losing confidence in his own non-interventionist policies, Heath became more corporatist, increasing government powers for intervention and using them to bail out shipbuilders on the Clyde and other industries. In addition to this, the Government adopted a statutory incomes policy to hold down inflation.¹² To contemporaries, particularly those that served in the Government, this was perceived as 'business as usual'. Many thought that the policy reversals were necessary in the face of extreme unionist militancy and that they were pursued on the grounds of securing growth and competitiveness, the same strategic objectives that the Government had adhered to all along.¹³

By February 1974, when Heath suffered the third election defeat of his career, Margaret Thatcher was convinced that Conservative policy had to be reconstructed to a new set of specifications advocated by Sir Keith Joseph, a long-time Cabinet member who would later become known as the father of 'Thatcherism'. Together with him she founded the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), a free-market neoliberal think tank that in many ways represented something of a counter weight to the Conservative Research Department. Backed by monetarist economists, Joseph became the leading voice of an opposition within the Opposition, gradually but effectively introducing an alternative set of policies influenced by ideas that came not from within, but outside the Conservative Party. Much of what later became known as Thatcherism was based on the works of

¹⁰ Blake, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London: Methuen, 1985): 309-311; Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 390-391.

¹¹ Charmley, John. *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996):194.

¹² Seldon, Anthony. Conservative Century in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 56-57.

¹³ Ramsden, John. *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830* (London : HarperCollins, 1998): 402.

free-market economists that rejected Keynesian orthodoxy and the core economic principles of the post-war consensus. Many of Joseph's ideas were essentially reformulations of those raised by radical thinkers such as Enoch Powell, a former minister during the Macmillan era and of the most controversial figures in recent Conservative history, and various names associated with the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), a free-market think tank set up in the late 1950s.¹⁴ Even though men like Powell provided Thatcherism with much of its language, the similarities between the two alternative lines of thought were never as strong as they might have seemed to contemporaries. Powell's reservations on the issues of race, immigration and Britain's relationship with America had no value to Thatcher or her closest allies. Many Thatcherites, nevertheless, admired Powell for his early attacks on economic planning, nationalization, high government expenditure, exchange controls and most importantly any government policy on prices or incomes.¹⁵

Acknowledging the Powell factor, John Charmley argues there was nothing really new about Joseph's ideas, except for his leading role and the presence of Mrs. Thatcher, who was “the one missing, yet vital ingredient” separating Joseph from setting the Party on a new course. Still, the first few years after Heath departure were seen as a time of ideological consolidation for the traditionally non-ideological Conservatives. In an article, the Times described how Tories had “abandoned their antipathy towards ideas” thanks to the work of the CPS and Keith Joseph, and started reaching out to those parts of society that had the power to change public opinion. Nobody, however, could predict whether the Conservative experiment would work. A particular problem, as the newspaper noted, was the British electorate's deep distrust of all ideology.¹⁶ By 1978, the Party had already published two major policy documents, each with the intention “to demonstrate the different face of Tory policy in outline, if not in detail”.¹⁷ The first, called the *The Right Approach*, was published in October 1976, and essentially represented a compromise between various groups within the Shadow Cabinet. It offered a very small sense of direction as far as economic policy was concerned. Many of the anti-statist and anti-interventionist ideas that were later captured in Thatcher's first manifesto were presented the following year, in a document called *The Right Approach to the Economy*.¹⁸ Whether any of these documents actually helped the Conservatives win the next election remains uncertain.

For all her leadership skills and resolution, Margaret Thatcher was an accidental Leader of

¹⁴ Charmley, John. *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996): 196-197; Heath, Edward. *The Course of My Life* (London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1998): 521; Thatcher, Margaret. *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins 1993): 250.

¹⁵ Vinen, Richard. *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval in the 1980s* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009): 51.

¹⁶ The Centre of Tory Thinking, The Times, February 13th 1978.

¹⁷ Ramsden, John. *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830* (London : HarperCollins, 1998): 433.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 434

the Party, a substitute for Joseph who first considered running against Heath, but later bowed out of the race. Most Conservative MPs decided to support her leadership bid not because they thought she could lead, but because they were convinced Heath needed to go. Thatcher would later write that she could not have become Leader of the Opposition nor achieve what she did as Prime Minister without Joseph standing by her side.¹⁹ Her success in the 1979 General Election, by contrast, was not an accident rather a product of luck. For all the troubles it caused the country, the Winter of Discontent helped the Conservatives further articulate their ideas to the point where most of the electorate would find them credible. Months of strikes by public sector trade unions targeted at Labour's efforts to curb inflation by enforcing limits on pay rises, resulted in a drastic change of the political landscape. Many of those who voted Conservative in 1979, Evans explained, did so “on the basis of retrospective rather than prospective evaluations”. In other words, it was mainly a protest vote against James Callaghan's Government and unionist militancy. The full nature of Thatcherism only became apparent long after the election. While the 1979 Conservative Manifesto gave clues about Thatcher's ultimate aims, her new brand of economic realism remained largely abstract.²⁰

3.2 Economic realism

For Conservatives, the 1970s among other things presented a period of rising disagreement about how much economic realism should there be in the Party's central policy pronouncements. Views expressed about the tone of one of the earliest drafts of the 1970 Manifesto significantly contrast those that became prevalent five years later, at the start of Ted Heath's second term as Leader of the Opposition. Many in the Party were convinced that a document, announcing big changes in taxation and a shift to selectivity in social policy²¹ had all the ingredients to make life miserable for Conservatives and ruin their chances of winning the next election. The relatively small group of people who actually read manifestos would be perplexed by the sudden dose of frankness. Members like Geoffrey Block, a long-time research officer at the CRD, were quite right to argue for a less stringent approach. The majority of the electorate, he explained, had by now forgotten that elections could also be fought on far more contentious and divisive issues. Too much frankness could encourage them to flee.²² Too vague of a policy, and the result would be no different. Finding the proper balance between the two was key to securing a strong and viable alternative to the Labour

¹⁹ Charmley, John. *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996): 197; Thatcher, Margaret. *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins 1993): 251; Sir Keith refuses to be drawn on Mr. Heath's future, *The Times*, October 25th 1974.

²⁰ Norton, Philip. Margaret Thatcher, 1975-9, in *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*, ed. Timothy Heppell (Basingstoke etc. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 108; Evans, Eric J. *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (London etc. : Routledge, 1997): 16.; For more information on the Winter of Discontent visit <https://libcom.org/history/1978-1979-winter-of-discontent>

²¹ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 275

²² Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 4/30/4/41

camp.

Conservative records belonging to this period contain some of the most detailed information about how the Party structured its manifestos. Eighteen months after the 1970 General Election, the Conservative Research Department published a paper on future policy making which included a detailed list of features that every manifesto should contain. These were: a central theme, several major proposals, a number of minor proposals also called “nuggets”, an attack against the current Government’s record known as a 'knocking copy', and last but not least the record of the previous (or current) Conservative Government. Even though the first references for these requirements are found well into the 1970s, there is nothing particularly new about them. Conservative terminology aside, most of the manifestos mentioned in this thesis contained all of the listed elements in one form or another. If the Party was in opposition, it made sure that its manifesto contained a 'knocking copy', where all the Government’s mistakes and decisions that could be used for political purposes were listed and condemned. A knocking copy played a smaller role if the Government was Conservative; in that case the Party had to focus its attention on producing and presenting a good and defensible record which was regarded as the foundation of the manifesto on which everything else was built. Without a good record, the CRD explained, new proposals had little or no credibility and were destined to fail.²³

Policy reversals seemed particularly hard to digest since their presence alone indicated that the government's record was flawed. This was the case in 1974, the year when Conservatives lost two general elections in a row. In order to lower the rising level of unemployment, Heath's Government performed a series of policy U-turns, effectively admitting that the policy prescriptions it introduced at the beginning of its run were useless. In terms of policy making, it was a sudden, albeit ironic development. In early 1972 the Conservative Research Department announced that the Party had fulfilled most of the promises made in its Manifesto, *A Better Tomorrow*, and that it was on course to meet virtually all of its policy commitments by the end of 1973.²⁴ According to Ramsden, policies that were successfully implemented included joining the European Economic Community (EEC), tax reforms, housing finance, restructuring of local government and of the machinery of government, and of course the flagship policy that was the Industrial Relations Act of 1971. The fact that some of these measures failed to deliver their anticipated results was not particularly surprising. What was hard to understand was the Party's reaction. In terms of election strategy, the Party's decision to change the course of its policy represented nothing ordinary. Yet Heath and many of those who stayed loyal to him throughout the period 1970-1974 believed that reversals of policy were not just good for the country but for the Party as well.²⁵ He certainly wouldn't be the first or the last Conservative Prime Minister to admit a mistake. Nevertheless, there

²³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: ACP72/74.

²⁴ Ibid.

was nothing humble or encouraging about the scale of reversal he undertook. The reintroduction of wage and price controls and a series of government interventions in industry put Heath on the spot. Combined with a general lack of ideas, the Conservative Party's complete failure to exercise prudence in making promises spelled trouble in terms of its re-election prospects.²⁶

The February and October 1974 Conservative Manifestos, entitled *Firm Action for a Fair Britain* and *Putting Britain First*, were essentially based on the same theme: national unity. The original drafts for both documents were prepared by Nigel Lawson, then a senior Conservative journalist who the Party recruited specifically for the purpose of getting its message out.²⁷ Despite their similar content, the documents were considered miles apart in terms of their tone. *Firm Action for a Fair Britain* embodied the ambivalence of the Party's position by focusing exclusively on what the other side was prepared to offer. The Conservatives' decisions to run a negative campaign, which would reveal the extreme nature of the political and economic situation Britain was facing as a consequence of the 1973 oil crisis, resulted in a document similar in approach to Churchill's Manifesto of 1945. Some members of the Party thought that Lawson's draft was far too radical to ever appeal to moderates. There was also no clear definition of what the Party would do in terms of reversing the situation after the election. None of those who voiced their concerns, however, wanted to propose an alternative set of policies, something that would actually deal with the crisis in the country head on. As Ramsden explained six years later, the price of doing anything was just too high.

*./.../ most Conservatives shared the sense that the country and Party were at a hinge of fate, but they also shared a reluctance to adopt Draconian measures against the unions. Hence, they drifted towards a crisis election without proposals that were of crisis proportions.*²⁸

The cumulative result of this was a manifesto which spoke of a Government that had nothing to offer except the status quo. The Conservatives essentially admitted that their sole task in office would be to guide the country safely through the difficult period that lied ahead. They were anxious to appear strong and defiant in their conflict with trade unions and miners. Nevertheless they failed to project the militancy of their opponents as one of the causes, not the consequences of the

²⁵ Ramsden, John. *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830* (London : HarperCollins, 1998): 402-403.

²⁶ Butler, David. *British General Elections since 1945* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 87.

²⁷ Nigel Lawson was one of the first notable examples of people from outside the Party participating in high profile Conservative affairs. The number of people who had no previous association with the Party, but were willing to help Conservatives defeat Labour at the next election particularly increased in later years, when Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher tried everything to associate the Party with businesses and companies from the private sector. Joseph's correspondence with Chris Patten, the Director of the CRD, demonstrates how the Tories were keen to seek advice and examples of good practice not only from British individuals but foreigners as well. For a more detailed account see Private Papers of Keith Joseph, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: KJ 8/15.

²⁸ Ramsden, John. *The Making of Conservative Party Policy* (London : HarperCollins, 1980): 302.

country's mounting problems.²⁹

By summer 1974, the rising fragmentation within the Shadow Cabinet was becoming increasingly apparent, especially when it came to presenting policy priorities. Keith Joseph became the main protagonist of a different Conservative ideology, which argued that Heath's *a priori* commitment to full employment was wrong and was in itself the cause for hyperinflation that Britain experienced in the past couple of years.³⁰ In a letter to Michael Fraser discussing the fourth draft of the October 1974 Manifesto, Joseph suggested that the tone of every reference to unemployment should carefully avoid implying that the Party will necessarily be able to prevent it.³¹ The majority of the Shadow Cabinet, however, remained convinced that curing inflation did not necessarily mean increasing unemployment. Heath believed that the state could still guarantee jobs with the pursuit of expansion, and lower inflation at the same time. While he seemed determined to maintain a high level of employment in the economy, Heath nevertheless realized that there had to be moderation in pay increases if a future Conservative government was to be successful in its fight against inflation. Stagflation and unemployment were considered all but inevitable if wages continued to rise.³²

The October Manifesto eventually included the warning that “in the absence of a viable prices and incomes policy any government would have to take harsher financial and economic measures than would otherwise be needed”.³³ By exercising prudence, although not to the degree proposed by Joseph, the Party was using its manifesto to hedge any potential future disappointments. Much like in previous elections, the manifesto was serving the Conservatives as a form of insurance – an anchor that fixed their ideas in place.³⁴ To Heath's bitter dislike, economic realism was slowly but steadily returning to the forefront of Conservative policy making.

In a paper, published a year after the October 1974 General Election, Joseph was still talking about the need for an economically realistic Conservative policy. This time around he could be sure that his words were heard by the Party, including every single Shadow Cabinet member. With Heath gone and Margaret Thatcher in the leader's seat, his ideas on Monetarism were at last gaining

²⁹ Campbell, John. *Edward Heath: A Biography* (London: Cape, 1993): 600-601.

³⁰ Evans, Eric J. *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (London etc. : Routledge, 1997): 7; Sir Keith Joseph Blames full employment policies for inflation, *The Times*, September 6th 1974.

³¹ Correspondence between Joseph and Fraser, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 4/30/4/41.

³² Putting Britain First – Briefing, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: CRD 4/30/4/45

³³ For full text of the 1974 Conservative manifesto visit:

³⁴ Harrison, Brian. *The Transformation of British Politics 1860-1995* (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 1996): 314.

traction.³⁵ Soon there was little doubt in anyone's mind that the falling standard of living would have serious implications on government expenditure. Joseph was convinced that the Party needed to propose cuts in public spending. This, together with solving the union problem, presented the only way to secure Britain's economic recovery and to preserve the Party's credibility.³⁴ Many Conservative officials, including Thatcher, were reluctant to share Heath's view simply because they felt that it was not realistic to expect a solution to the union problem any time soon.³⁶

While the showdown with trade unions was eventually postponed to Thatcher's second term, another question, identical to the one Geoffrey Block provided an answer for several years before, soon occupied everyone's mind. How should the Party present controversial proposals without the risk of alienating the electorate? This time it would be Geoffrey Howe, the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, who would expose the Party's difficult task and the chances it had of succeeding in its new approach. As Howe explained, most people cared for lower taxes, and many were becoming fed up with Labour's fiscal legislation and the growth of the public sector. These were powerful factors that could improve the Conservatives chances at the next election. However, there were negative aspects to the new set of policies as well, especially when it came to spending cuts which most people were deeply reluctant to accept³⁷. Howe's warning that a detailed list of proposals exposes the party to potential attacks from opponents served as an example of traditional Tory concerns that resurfaced in the years leading up to the 1979 General Election.

Conservative records, Margaret Thatcher's memoirs and her personal papers tell the story behind the 1979 Manifesto. The drafting process initially consisted of several stages, starting with the gathering of ideas that later formed the original draft of the document which was co-written by Chris Patten, the Director of the CRD, and Angus Maude, the Department's Chairman. In April 1978, the CRD presented Thatcher with a detailed explanation about how the presentation and the structure of the future manifesto might look like. First, the manifesto needed a main theme, something to set it apart from the rest. Second, it was best to leave details outside. Third, the Party's proposals needed to sound sufficiently distinct from those of the Labour Party. Above all, Thatcher had to decide what kind of policy course she would pursue. Would she seek to evoke radical

³⁵ Keith Joseph's correspondence with CRD research officers demonstrates how his economic views were quickly gaining interest within the Conservative ranks. By January 1976, discussions Joseph was having about the importance of money in influencing the behaviour of the economy were problematizing the scale of the Public sector. Joseph was convinced that the Public sector had to contract in order for the struggling private sector to expand. When it came to economic issues, Joseph searched for advice and opinions both inside and outside the Party. His personal papers, for instance, reveal how he maintained relationships with consultancy firms in order to hear what they had to say about economic forecasts. Overall, Keith supported including party outsiders in the policy making process. For more details see Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: KJ 10/5.

³⁴ Paper: Policy Group Exercise, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: ACP 3/21

³⁶ Balen, Malcolm. *Kenneth Clarke* (London: Fourth Estate, 1994): 106; Thatcher, Margaret. *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins 1993): 402.

³⁷ Paper by Geoffrey Howe; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: ACP 3/21.

change? Or would she like to be cautious in her steps, moving slowly towards her eventual goal? The Research Department advised Thatcher to consider any possible problems of implementation that might occur after the election and their effect on the Party's support³⁸. Keith Joseph, on the other hand, gave her more specific advice. He warned her about coming across too negatively with voters; the Party needed to tell the truth about Labour's mistakes, but also offer a positive alternative in the form of tax cuts and government non-intervention³⁹.

The manifesto essentially proved to be a document Thatcher and her team could mould however they choose. But before they could do anything, they had to be clear about what they, as a party, wanted to achieve. When Thatcher first received Patten and Maude's original draft she discovered the connective function of the manifesto: the fact that it was too vague, she explained in her memoirs, was an instant reminder of the Party's failure to come up with "clear and coherent policies in some crucial areas, particularly the trade unions"⁴⁰. From that point on her objectives would be far more obvious.

With the help of a series of strikes that took place in the winter of 1978-1979 Thatcher and Joseph were finally in a position to consolidate the Conservative Party around one central idea:

The balance of opinion in the Shadow Cabinet, following rather than leading opinion in the country, was now that we could and should obtain a mandate to clip the wings of the trade union militants. Similarly /.../ the collapse of Labour's pay policy made it easier to argue that the whole approach of prices and incomes controls /.../ should be abandoned. Above all, I was sure that there had been over the winter a sea-change and that our manifesto had to catch that tide.⁴¹

To prove her point, Thatcher compared the first draft of August 1978 and the final version of the Manifesto, which was published in April 1979. Indeed, the first text was much more conciliatory in tone than the second one, which was clearly moving away from the belief that the solution for the union problem had to be sought outside the parameters of law. Citing the final version of the Manifesto, Thatcher was convinced that "if the law can be used to confer privileges, it can and should also be used to establish obligations"⁴². With regard to incomes policy, she was somewhat less successful, evoking opposition from the likes of Geoffrey Howe who advocated an establishment of a special economic forum, based on a model of 'concerted action' used to great

³⁸ Leader's Consultative Committee, Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: THCR 2-7-1-5.

³⁹ Election Strategy – Industry, Cambridge, Churchill Archive Centre: shelfmark: THCR 2-7-1-14.

⁴⁰ Thatcher, Margaret. *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins 1993): 435.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 435

⁴² *Ibid.* 436

effect in Western Germany⁴³. In the end, the incomes policy was not agreed to the point where it could proudly stand on its own. Instead, the Shadow Cabinet decided to put it to rest at least until after the election was over. The final version of the document, which was simply titled *1979 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto*, helped the Tories convey a clear impression of what they intended to do in government, while many aspects of implementation were left to the individual's imagination⁴⁴.

3.3 Conservative consolidation

The final part of this chapter will show how the transformation of long-term policy priorities reinforced the sense of intra party cohesion which this study highlighted as one of the most important functions of Conservative election manifestos.

At the start of the 1970s, the Conservative Research Department predicted that economic and employment problems would continue to dominate the British political scene and influence public opinion for years to come. The rise in the level of unemployment, which was becoming significantly more apparent in 1972, was not perceived as a general problem until much later. Instead, it was regarded as a specific issue limited either to a few select parts of the country or particular economic sectors. How long this kind of situation would last was hard to say. The general feeling was, however, that the low level of unemployment associated with the post-war consensus was slowly but surely becoming a thing of the past⁴⁵. When the decade was nearing its end the pursuit of full employment was simply abandoned as a prime objective of government policy. Instead, the Thatcher administration focused all of its attention on lowering inflation⁴⁶. It claimed it did so in the name of securing more jobs. In the 1979 Manifesto, unemployment, inflation and public spending were linked together in a show of Conservative monetarist ideas.

The State takes too much of the nation's income; its share must be steadily reduced. When it spends and borrows too much, taxes, interest rates, prices and unemployment rise so that in the long run there is less wealth with which to improve our standard of living and our social services⁴⁷.

⁴³ Ibid. 403

⁴⁴ Ramsden, John. *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830* (London : HarperCollins, 1998): 435.

⁴⁵ CRD Paper on Future Policy Making; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive: shelfmark: ACP72/74.

⁴⁶ Seldon, Anthony. Conservative Century in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 59.

⁴⁷ For full text of the 1979 Conservative General Election Manifesto visit <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1979/1979-conservative-manifesto.shtml>

The emergence of the 1979 Manifesto was not only important in terms of laying down new policies, but in resolving intra party tensions which grew out of reactions to Margaret Thatcher's and Keith Joseph's radical ideas⁴⁸.

The situation proved similar to that of 1966, when Heath's manifesto took the form of a neutral declaration, persuading Conservatives to focus on those priorities they could actually agree on. While Heath tried to distance himself from ideological issues, the challenging circumstances of 1978-79 gave Thatcher enough momentum to push the Party further to the right on the spectrum of economic ideas. The 1979 election took place in a time when Britain was experiencing the most serious economic and social crisis since the end of the Second World War. Before Thatcher and her followers could seize the opportunity to guide the country out of the fog and into a new era, they needed to convince their own Conservative kind that the whole exercise would be worth it in the end. For Thatcher this was an unnatural experience. Preserving unity among Conservative ranks was never among her top priorities. Many forget that her own story was one of dissent. Historians generally agree that from 1975 to 1979 the Conservative Party saw a rise in bitter disputes, but none of them came even close to derailing the Thatcher's absolute devotion to her cause⁴⁹. In the end, the manifesto was used to rally the rank and file, and give them something to believe in. On the back of the 1979 document, consensus could once again flourish inside the Party, at least until the election was over.

The next Conservative manifesto, it seems, would not prove that much different in terms of seeking internal coherence. From a purely functional perspective, the 1983 document, entitled *The Challenge of Our Times*, bared many resemblances with Thatcher's first manifesto. Political commentators described it as a consensus document, where economic and financial realism were once again the predominant Conservative themes. The only real attribute it lacked in comparison with its predecessor was candidness. Butler and Kavanagh's analysis of the 1983 General Election showed how the Party and its leader were moving towards producing and presenting a more vaguely defined set of priorities:

./.../ Mrs. Thatcher in 1983, unlike her campaign in 1979, did little to prepare the electorate for future possible sacrifices and much to suggest (without explicit commitment) that these would not be required. The 1979 manifesto had laid the groundwork for making hard decisions acceptable and justifying a later 'stay the course' campaign. The 1983 manifesto did not.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Butler, David and Dennis Kavanagh. *The British General Election of 1979* (London: Macmillan, 1980): 144-145

⁴⁹ Evans, Eric J. *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (London etc. : Routledge, 1997): 42-43

⁵⁰ Butler, David and Dennis Kavanagh. *The British General Election of 1983* (London: Macmillan, 1984): 41.

Could this ambiguity have any effect on Conservative prospects if Thatcher a year earlier hadn't secured a military victory in the South Atlantic? It is hard to say, although her task would probably have been a lot harder. What is certain, in 1983 the promotional purpose of the Party's central policy declaration was significantly limited thanks to the success of the Falklands War. Margaret Thatcher's credibility and support within her own Cabinet and the country were at a record high, giving the Conservative Party enough clout to steam confidently ahead to the next general election.

Conclusion

This study has traced and examined the development of the Conservative election manifesto during the post-war period leading up to the end of the first Thatcher Government. Unlike those historical accounts that fail to go beyond the sphere of political propaganda in their attempts to explain the changing nature of these documents, its main concern has been to examine the reasons why election manifestos have for so long stood at the very centre of Conservative policy making. To understand their importance in the context of Tory politics, this study has demonstrated how these publications came to life under different party administrations. For this purpose Conservative Party records, including private papers of Prime Ministers, have been studied and analysed in order to provide a first-hand look at how policy decisions were made at the top level. Each of the three chapters has shown the tendency of the Conservative Party to produce election manifestos based on a number of contrasting purposes. By tracing the emergence of individual publications, the study has demonstrated the effect these had on wider aspects of policy making, electoral strategy and party management, essentially confirming what Iain Macleod's wrote in 1964, that the final product "reflects not only political aspirations but the interests, hesitations and even foibles of a composite authorship".¹

Records show that many of these purposes became apparent early during each gestation process. This usually started with determining policy priorities and developing convincing themes that would set the tone of the manifesto and make it more appealing to the average voter. As chapter one has revealed, the process was conceived in the late 1940s; from that point on the Conservative manifesto became a product of collective efforts, where virtually all of the Party's resources were used to determine an influential, coherent and above all convincing set of ideas and proposals. While manifestos were usually drafted by representatives of the Research Department, Advisory Committee on Policy, or even individuals from outside the Conservative ranks, the final product was often heavily influenced by the leader of the Party. Leaders were always kept up to speed about

¹ Barnes and Cockett 1994, 357

the progress of the drafting process. When it was time to decide, which policies were to be included in the manifesto, they had the final word. Party records confirm that the choices the leaders and authors of manifestos made were influenced by considerations that had as much to do with garnering voter support than with party management. What each of the three chapters has observed is the Conservatives remarkable ability for confronting change both in terms of developing and introducing new content to their existing set of priorities while at the same time achieving a high degree of intra party cohesion. Conservative manifestos, particularly those written in 1950, 1966, 1970 and 1979 when the Tories were in opposition, in their draft phase served as platforms for confronting controversial views and opinions, which eventually needed to be streamlined into more or less convincing themes. The gestation period of each of these documents saw drafts rewritten and revised several times in order to achieve a sustainable balance of ideas that permitted the Party to speak with a single, convincing voice. For Heath and Thatcher, and to a certain degree Churchill as well, the drafting process served as a litmus test, where the leaders were able to assess, but also influence in which direction the Party was headed.

For Heath, the 1966 election manifesto represented not only a way of controlling discussions about policy priorities but also limiting the scale of debates about the fundamentals of Conservatism, particularly those concerned with economic issues. His careful approach, devised to achieve a satisfactory level of intra party cohesion, resulted in a document which was depicted as vague and ambiguous, lacking any solid commitments that would set the Conservatives apart from their political rivals. Compared to the first two decades after the War, election manifestos published between 1966 and 1979 were conceived in an environment of increasingly contrasting views. When the post-war political consensus slowly started nearing its end, the level of intra party cohesion followed a similar path. The reasons for this are less important than the final outcome, which saw election manifestos become the focus of even greater attention. The result, in essence, confirms Cooke's notion that the difficulties in presenting policy “only become overwhelming when a party lacks clarity of purpose”.² Furthermore, it implies the existence of a correlation between intra party cohesion and unambiguous policy direction.

Clarity of purpose was also useful in situations when the Party needed to protect policy priorities or the mandate it received following an election win. This represented perhaps the most valuable and important function of the Conservative election manifesto, where policies would come to life or experience an uncertain death. Whichever commitments were included in a declaration of policy were there simply because the Party believed they could be fulfilled. Those which were thought to be too contentious, too expensive or not in line with dominant ideological streams were omitted. The push for full employment, for years a centre-piece of Conservative policy, by the end

² Cooke, Alistair B. Introduction, in *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos 1900-1997*, by Iain Dale (Abingdon: Routledge 2000).

of the 1970s experienced a familiar outcome when it was replaced by a focus on inflation.³ Even though the Party had been promoting monetarist ideas for some time, they only became part of their central strategy when they were written down in the 1979 manifesto. Once full employment disappeared from official declarations, there was hardly any way for it to return. Even though it still had electoral appeal, politically and economically it could no longer be sustained. In the interest of expediency, future research could focus on similar policies that defined the post-war era, and examine them in the context of the Conservative quest for prudence.

Another important aspect that would also deserve more attention is the publicity value of election manifestos. Taking into account the fact that these publications were widely distributed in the popular press, researchers could easily assume they had at least some influence on voter behaviour, especially if they were following Downs' economic theory of democracy.⁴ Yet, as Conservative records reveal, there existed a large amount of scepticism regarding their true value in terms of garnering electoral support. Party officials that were involved in preparing these declarations were generally convinced that the number of people who actually read what the Conservatives write in their programme was very small. In some cases, the recipients were identified by officials as members of the "informed public": those individuals and groups who could influence the opinion of the masses. In many ways these seemed to represent the Party's real audience.

What this study has highlighted is the versatility of the Conservative manifesto. Whatever the Party choose to record in or omit from its central policy declaration, the end result stayed the same: the set of commitments served as a foundation on which all decisions were based. In situations where Conservatives needed to reassess their mandate they could always look back at what they set out to do in the very beginning. The balance between movement and stability, which Norton and Aughey argue set Tories and their "limited style of politics" apart from the temerity of their political adversaries,⁵ also presents one of the defying characteristics of the Conservative manifesto. The interests and hesitations that went into the making of these documents, demonstrated in the constant search for prudence, give a sense about the importance of their role, not just in relaying but defining what the Conservative Party stood for and against.

³ Seldon, Anthony. Conservative Century in *Conservative Century: Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. Anthony Seldon, and Stuart Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 57-59.

⁴ Downs was the first to make the connection between voters policy preferences and party actions. The main premise of his mandate theory is that voters judge parties on the basis of their record in office. For more details see Mansergh, Lucy and Robert Thomson. Election Pledges, Party Competition and Policymaking, *Comparative Politics* 39 (Apr., 2007): 311-329.

⁵ Norton, Philip and Arthur Aughey. *Conservatives and Conservatism* (London : Temple Smith,1981): 280.

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