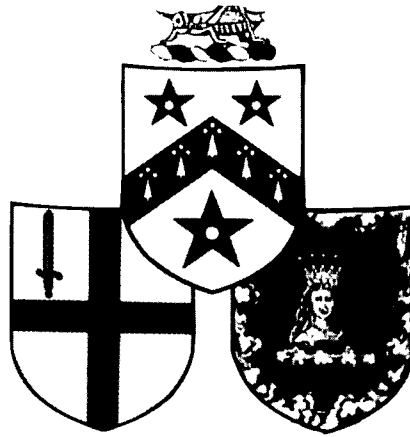


G R E S H A M
COLLEGE



PREMIERSHIP

Lecture 10

‘THE SOMERSAULTING MODERNISER’:
EDWARD HEATH, 1970-74

by

PROFESSOR PETER HENNESSY BA PhD
Gresham Professor of Rhetoric

4 February 1997

Come with to that choicest of London addresses – the Albany, just off Piccadilly – one evening in 1969. The Leader of the Opposition, Ted Heath, has invited five top trades unionists to dinner for the purpose of getting to know them and their movement a little better. He had, in fact, known one of them, Jack Jones of the Transport and General Workers', for thirty years, ever since the days when they both supported the cause of the Spanish Republic against General Franco. They had actually met in Spain in 1938. 'When we stood around chatting that day', Jack Jones recalled in his memoir, Union Man, 'we little thought that our paths would cross in later years in Downing Street and other prestigious places, very different to the Ebro front.'¹

With Jack Jones that evening in the Albany were the TUC General Secretary, Vic Feather, Alf Allen of the Shopworkers', Sid Greene of the Railwayman and Jack Cooper of the General and Municipal Workers. Jack Jones takes up the tale:

'The others were pillars of the TUC establishment, who set out to impress our host with their responsible attitude on all matters industrial. I tried to bend Ted's ear to the need for better pensions for the elderly, and industrial training for our young people. There is no doubting Ted Heath's sympathy for people and we quickly established a feeling of camaraderie.

'It was a pleasant evening, with Heath talking of his yacht and musical interests. At one stage he showed us a new piano he had bought and at our invitation played one or two short pieces. Then Vic Feather called out, "Play the 'Red Flag' for Jack" and the leader of the Tory Party cheerfully played Labour's national anthem.'²

I start with this glorious episode because Ted Heath is seen by too many people, and not just his political critics, as a rigid, humourless Easter-Island-Statue of a politician who first confronted the trade union movement, and then succumbed to their might before plunging the country into an unnecessary election and a whirlpool of seeming ungovernability.

Anthony Eden, and perhaps, Harold Wilson apart, Heath is the postwar premier most in need of rescue and repair. He is also, I think, the easiest to be so rescued despite the disdain of those within his own party who continue to see him as the incarnation of a failed 'corporatist' past and those beyond the Conservative fold who have not, like one of his senior Cabinet colleagues from the 1970-74 administration, detected that 'beneath that extraordinary exterior there is a little, pink, quivering Ted trying to get out.'³

Interestingly enough, Heath during his more difficult moments in the House of Commons during the early Thatcher years would turn not to the sometimes jeering Conservative backbenchers for support when outlining his alternative to the there-is-no-alternative economic line pushed from his own front bench, but to the Labour benches and to the former premier, Jim Callaghan, in particular who would often nod to him in a reassuring manner.⁴ And it was the leader of a rival party, David Owen in his SDP incarnation, who had the warmest things to say about the Heath approach to the practice of government. 'Ted Heath', he told me, 'had some of the best ideas of any postwar prime minister. He ...was a rather radical person.'⁵

It's that side of Ted Heath which provides perhaps the chief enduring interest from his period as premier between the Conservatives' surprising victory at the polls in June 1970 (legend has it his triumph was not a surprise to him though his biographer, John Campbell, reckons 'that is almost certainly part of the mythology of victory'⁶) to his equally surprising (to him as well this time⁷) loss of his majority on the last day of February 1974.

I tend to think that Heath alone did expect to win in 1970. He is a man of immense self-belief which often appears to manifest itself as stubbornness or rigidity. He was, and remains, a politician of great consistency in his ideas and philosophy. This may strike some as a very odd judgement of a Prime Minister whose name is almost synonymous with the U-turn. But should it? Any analysis of Heath's Downing Street years has to start with this paradox for unless it can be resolved to some degree, it is very hard to make sense of his stress-laden incumbency of No.10.

The old curmudgeon himself does not help much here. He refused to assist John Campbell with his fine and fair biography⁸ or to read the book once it appeared.⁹ And Campbell's thesis is central to the U-turn question. It is this — that both the press coverage and Harold Wilson's 'Selsdon Man'¹⁰ gloss on the pre-election Selsdon Park Shadow Cabinet planning conference at the end of January 1970 was fundamentally misleading about the man, his beliefs and his intentions.

'The philosophy of "Selsdon Man",' Campbell writes,

'as formulated in certain phrases of the 1970 manifesto A Better Tomorrow and in a number of other dogmatic-sounding statements by Heath himself and others during and after the election, was widely perceived as signalling a decisive break with the post war "Butskellite" consensus and the "One Nation" Toryism in which Heath's career had started. From the perspective of the 1980s it could be represented as proto-Thatcherite. It was claimed by Mrs Thatcher's admirers that he had fought the 1970 election on essentially the same prospectus that she offered in 1979, with the difference that she had the courage to stick to her convictions whereas he, a decade earlier, had not.'¹¹

For Campbell there is a degree of truth in this analysis to the extent that it embraces Heath's planned trade union reforms designed to curb their wildcat power by bringing reason to the processes of collective bargaining and his desire to create a freer and more enterprising economy. 'But', Campbell continues,

'to a much greater degree it reflects the misunderstanding which Heath allowed to arise — indeed positively encouraged — by going along with an aggressively free market rhetoric which he did not accept.'¹²

Campbell's evidence for this is partly to be found in that very 1970 manifesto with, for example, its advocacy of regional policy.

I share Campbell's overall conclusion that Heath 'never intended to break the postwar settlement accepted by Churchill, Eden, Macmillan and Home. His proposed "revolution" was all about trying to change attitudes and remove obstacles to growth within the existing economic and social structure.'¹³ He believed in the mixed economy - welfare state model, which was at the heart of that settlement, had no time for the idea of widespread privatisation which a party group under Nicholas Ridley had pressed as an element of the policy rethink in Opposition.¹⁴

While filming Sir Edward for Rob Shepherd's Channel 4 television series What Has Become of Us? in the summer of 1994, I had a chance to put the Campbell thesis to Heath himself. This is how the conversation went:

'HENNESSY: ...a debate about you when you became Prime Minister has happened in recent years, about whether you were a prototypical free marketeer, with Selsdon and so on. But others have argued that your premiership was designed to make Britain more efficient so that the virtues of that consensus could be sustained throughout the rest of the century...Am I right in thinking you always were a consensus man and all the modernisation plans for Britain you put in place in 1970 — no more "lame ducks" and so on — were designed actually to getting an economy to sustain that rather than changing the sole basis towards something that we might now call "Thatcherism"?'

'HEATH: Yes, I've always said that what I wanted was a balance and it's very important to achieve that otherwise you get into difficulties in all sorts of ways — technically and with people. What we wanted to do was to modernise. We'd done tremendous work as a shadow government planning all of this...so we had all of this on which to base our attitudes and our work when we took over. And you're quite right, we wanted to increase the efficiency of this country enormously...and if you can do it jointly with everybody else, so much the better. It avoids all the rows and you also avoid the dogma which has been the curse of recent years —

that we know this and we're going to do this because it's our dogma and let's get on with it; all those who aren't with us are against us. That's not the way to run a country. You can't run a business like that either (can't run anything like it) and you certainly can't run a government like it. So yes, I wanted to modernise, I wanted to do it as far as possible on a consensus. But one always recognises there are some issues on which it might not be possible to get a consensus. Well then you have to take your own line in the best possible way.¹⁵

This peroration, coming as it did at the end of a long interview in which the virtues of the 'One Nation' postwar approach to Toryism as the banisher of interwar policies and high unemployment, I took as an endorsement of the Campbell interpretation, even though Sir Edward, in some ways, answered my question tangentially rather than directly. If I was being unkind I would depict this as Heath's version of what Ralf Dahrendorf later accused the SDP of trying to do – to achieve 'a better yesterday'.¹⁶

Without this feel for the man and his purposes, the Heath premiership is inexplicable. If you accept the 'better consensus' interpretation, he appears not so much a compulsive U-turner but more of a somersaulting moderniser – a premier prepared to execute great leaps of policy for the purpose of continuing to move more effectively in the same direction with its trio of, interlocked signposts, full employment and a modernised economy well placed to take full advantage of that other great Heath ambition, UK membership of the European Economic Community.

Heath believed that Community membership and the enhanced competition that came with it would invigorate the British economy still further (he was a subscriber to the 'cold douche' theory) enabling the essentials of the postwar settlement (full employment, social peace and as high a degree of consensus as possible between the 'social partners') to be preserved and built upon.

What makes Heath unusual is the degree to which a streamlined system of Cabinet government and public administration was a central, crucial component in his wider scheme of modernisation and reform. The Conservatives, stimulated by Heath, had spent a great deal of time on this theme in Opposition and Iain Macleod, the Chancellor of the Exchequer cruelly lost to the Government in its early weeks when he died in harness, was justified in claiming they were the best prepared administration to have taken office in peacetime.¹⁷

No prime minister since Lloyd George in 1916-17 had made such a deliberate and determined effort to remodel the whole machinery of state.¹⁸ Like Lloyd George, Heath saw such matters as first order problems to be tackled as a priority and not as optional extras. They were integral to what he saw as a more focussed form of Cabinet government – the traditional collective approach but a sharpened version – another example, perhaps of the ‘better yesterday impluse’. Though Lloyd George’s brand was much more a tilt towards prime ministerial government than was Heath’s (Keynes was right to fear for the Constitution under LG¹⁹). Both LG and Ted Heath saw change as a symbiosis of improving process and outcome, or management and policy-making. Mrs Thatcher, a more Lloyd Georgian premier than Heath, concentrated almost solely on management reforms.²⁰ Conviction politicians tend not to be overly fascinated by the quality of policy analysis.

Not all of Heath’s pre-election thinking survived the attentions of the senior Civil Service when the plans were passed round the Cabinet Office and the Civil Service Department. For example, Mark Schreiber, David Howell and others involved during the Opposition years in the party’s Public Sector Research Unit²¹ had been keen on Heath building a personal ‘think tank’ around him in No.10. Such Americanisms did not appeal to the scholarly Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, nor did any seeming increase of prime ministerialism in what was supposed to be a collective executive. Trend persuaded Heath to call the new body ‘the Central Policy Review Staff’ and to place it in the Cabinet Office where it would service the Cabinet as a whole.²²

It is worth lingering over the thrust and the detail of the White Paper, The Reorganisation of Central Government,²³ which Heath presented to Parliament four months after assuming the premiership as it represented the first, serious across-the-board look at the quality of Cabinet government since the 1918 Haldane Report on the machinery of government,²⁴ itself a powerful shaper of Trend's thinking.²⁵

Heath had sat on the Cabinet committee which Macmillan established in 1957 to examine the Attlee Report on the Burden on Ministers.²⁶ He had seen how little of substance came of that or of Macmillan's revisiting the 'overload' theme in Cabinet as part of his own modernisation plans in 1962.²⁷ I have never asked Heath about these formative experiences but I suspect they were part of his determination to make things really happen on this front (if he got the chance) from the moment Alec Douglas-Home put him in charge of the policy rethinks which followed the 1964 defeat.²⁸

Once in office, he told a pair of Evening Standard journalists how he found machinery of government questions 'of extraordinary interest'²⁹ and railed against the lack of strategic focus of the Cabinets in which he had sat as Chief Whip or as minister under Eden, Macmillan and Home: 'I had seen Cabinets which all the time seemed to be dealing with the day-to-day problems and there was never a real opportunity to deal with strategy, either from the point of view of the Government or the country. What I wanted to do was so to change things that the Cabinet could do that.'³⁰

The 'overload' problem was central to the analysis behind the 1970 White Paper. Its second paragraph declared:

'This administration believes that government has been attempting to do too much. This has placed an excessive burden on industry, and on the people of the country as a whole, and has also overloaded the government machine itself. Public administration and management in central government has stood up to these strains, but the weakness has shown itself in the apparatus of policy formulation and in the quality of many government decisions over the last 25 years.'³¹

Here again is that key Heath linkage between overload, process and the calibre of policy outcomes and his desire, as he put it many years later in a Granada Television interview, 'to get a rational government structure' based on his experience 'at the centre of politics for 20 years'.³²

It is worth examining in some detail the ingredients of the 1970 White Paper because, for me, it remains the starting point for any future prime minister or prime minister-in-waiting with a serious intention of streamlining the central instruments of state, even given the substantial changes in the ecology of government over the past quarter-of-a-century. What were its essentials?

- Fewer and bigger ministries including a new Department of the Environment and another for Trade and Industry:

- This reform would have the double advantage of slimming the Cabinet down from 20+ to 18 thereby creating a body better placed for serious discussion and with fewer decisions cluttering its agenda as more could be resolved within the ambit of the new super-ministries.

- Departments themselves would be less burdened thanks to the hiving-off of certain executive functions, for example by the management of the government estate moving into a new Property Services Agency and weaponry passing to an equally novel Procurement Executive.

- The slimmed down Cabinet would be a better briefed Cabinet as, in the words of the White Paper, 'the necessary basis for good government is a radical improvement in the information system available to ministers.'³³

■ Information flow would be improved by the creation of 'a small multi-disciplinary central policy review staff in the Cabinet Office' which was 'to be at the disposal of the Government as a whole' and though 'under the supervision of the Prime Minister, it will work for Ministers collectively; and its task will be to enable them to take better policy decisions by assisting them to work out the implications of their basic strategy in terms of policies in specific areas, to establish the relative priorities to be given to the different sectors of their programme as a whole, to identify those areas of policy in which new choices can be exercised and to ensure that the underlying implications of alternative courses of action are fully analysed and considered.'³⁴

■ The new CPRS would become a player in the annual public expenditure cycle and the quality of that process would be made more thoughtful and rational by a system called Programme Analysis and Review (or PAR) for examining chunks of existing programmes to test their utility and efficiency, an idea developed by Heath's people in opposition after they had experienced the then novel techniques of zero-based budgeting practised in parts of the Washington bureaucracy.³⁵

Heath was keen, too, on the Cabinet and its committees working from agreed sets of data, the preparation of which was another task for the CPRS.³⁶

Surprisingly, Heath did not reshape the Prime Minister's Office though the personnel changed (Trend and the Head of the Home Civil Service William Armstrong decided that Robert Armstrong, no relation, should be the PM's Principal Private Secretary once Heath had quickly decided Sandy Isserlis, who he had inherited from Wilson, had to go. They reasoned that the rather solitary bachelor for whom music was such an important, humanising passion, would take to the charming and polished conductor of the Treasury Singers. They were right.³⁷) Perhaps because Howell and the other planners had originally intended the 'think tank' to be a part of No.10,³⁸ which would have been a step change four years ahead of Wilson creating the No.10 Policy Unit,

once that intention was modified there was little else on the drawing-board. Heath did, however, make use of his experience of the Foreign Office News Department by heading his press office with career officials rather than specialist government information officers. The diplomat Sir Donald Maitland was a considerable influence as Press Secretary in No.10.³⁹

Heath relied greatly on his No.10 staff. It would probably be going too far to suggest that they became a surrogate family for him, but they were required to spend a great deal of their weekends at Chequers keeping him company as well as briefing him. At one time thought was given to creating a Private Secretary's flat within the building to make weekend life easier for his Private Office aides.⁴⁰

Heath's Downing Street officials acquired a great loyalty and respect for their boss which was reciprocated and endured long after the premiership. Nearly 20 years later one of them said: 'Ted Heath was a very serious, very devoted man [who] lived greatly for the job – very straight, much more difficult to know [than other prime ministers]. Very shy, very reserved but somebody who every so often the clouds would roll back and you saw that he liked you and depended on you. And those moments were worth much more than more frequent signs of friendship from other people.'⁴¹

Sadly, those Cabinet ministers who were not close to him rarely if ever saw this side of their chief. He meant to be collegial in Cabinet but he could appear stiff – and he frightened them.⁴² Those ministers who were close to him, members of his very informal 'inner cabinet', as Robert Armstrong put it later,⁴³ have alluded to this. Lord Carrington recognised that 'Heath could, as Prime Minister, be abrasive and sometimes continued to seem at the same time both touchy and autocratic...He certainly listened. He may not always have been persuaded by what he heard – but that is the top person's prerogative.'⁴⁴

Heath's attempts at collegiality helped keep his Cabinet resignation-free and to a very large extent leak-free too. But he did by-pass them on occasion and not just on the traditional nuclear issues like updating the Polaris missile system with its 'Chevaline' refinement⁴⁵ or the intensely secret planning he oversaw to cover what would happen if he and the Cabinet were wiped out by a pre-emptive strike from the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ The policy I have in mind, which had an impact on each and every ministers' portfolio, both because of its centrality and its public expenditure implications, was the renewed dash for modernity through state intervention which was tacked on to the 1972 Budget and eventually took the form of the Industry Act 1972.

As John Ramsden has explained, 'the planning of the policies was taken outside normal departmental channels, and to a quite remarkable extent behind the backs of some key figures. The tilt of policy that led to the Industry Bill of 1972 was known about by the secretary of State for [Trade and] Industry, John Davies (but not by his more hawkish juniors who had to be moved or removed before the policy could be announced); detailed work was done by a special team of civil servants under William Armstrong, with little input from the DTI, the CBI [the Confederation of British Industry] or the Treasury. So secret were these discussions that Tory backbenchers were struck dumb with amazement when the proposals were revealed to the Commons at the end of the 1972 budget debate. 'What is even more remarkable', John Ramsden has discovered, 'that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Patrick Jenkin, who was responsible for public expenditure...and who had to wind up the debate only a few hours after John Davies made the announcement, had no inkling of the new proposals until he heard the announcement in the House, so far was the Treasury kept in the dark.'⁴⁷

In terms of back-channel policy-making, this even outdoes Whitehall's experience of Eden and Suez, though John Campbell indicates the full Cabinet was informed of the outcome on the morning of Budget Day itself.⁴⁸ In general, however, Heath if anything enhanced the status of full Cabinet by adding Europe and, after the imposition of Direct Rule in 1972, Northern Ireland to its traditionally regular weekly items on foreign affairs and next week's business in Parliament.⁴⁹

The Cabinet, so far as we know, was unanimous on the application to join the EEC. Only two very minor members of the Government resigned over the terms of entry.⁵⁰ But the tactics of piloting the European Communities Bills through Parliament and the selling of it to Parliament, Party and public were great absorbers of ministerial time.⁵¹ Northern Ireland became, in Paul Arthur's useful distinction, one of the 'required items', as opposed to 'discretionary'⁵² issues on the Cabinet agenda and was certainly one of the top three and possibly the greatest absorber of high-level prime ministerial time over the life of the government as a whole (the others being Europe and prices and incomes policy).⁵³ Though the papers of the Heath administration are still retained within the 30-Year Rule we know from the catalogue at the Public Record Office that its Ministerial Committee on Northern Ireland (NI) was one of the first Cabinet-committees he set-up on taking office.⁵⁴

Heath ordered a great cull of cabinet committees when Sir Burke Trend retired from the Cabinet Office in 1973⁵⁵ and his successor, Sir John Hunt, had been involved with the very secret review after the first miners' strike in 1972 which led to the replacement of the old Emergencies Committee with the new Civil Contingencies Unit which survives to this day as the only one of Heath's 'mixed' committees of ministers and officials to endure.⁵⁶ The Civil Service never liked these mixed committees; some officials even thought they were a dangerous blurring of the constitutional divide between the two governing breeds.⁵⁷ Heath got rather shirty when I put this point to him in 1989, arguing that it educated civil servants in the way politicians thought, 'put them in the picture' and drew them out of their 'ivory towers'.⁵⁸ (Heath is reluctant to admit any mistakes in his premiership. When really pressed by Michael Crick of the BBC in 1995 he grudgingly admitted to one: 'Some of my appointments.'⁵⁹) It was quite plain who he was talking about!

Sir Edward was not pleased either on an earlier occasion when I put to him the point that he had not shone when it came to fraternising with his backbenchers in the Commons' Tea or Smoking Rooms. ('This unclubbable idea is a myth which has grown up', he insisted⁶⁰) This not only proved a handicap when time and chance turned on him after the 1974 election losses, he faced tough criticism at the time as a Tory version of Nye Bevan's 'desiccated calculating machine.'⁶¹

Enoch Powell was not alone in this. Angus Maude had criticised Heath in 1966 arguing in the Spectator that 'a technocratic approach is not sufficient...we must have some philosophy' and lost his Shadow Cabinet place for his pains⁶². But it is Powell who has made the sharpest case for the prosecution Heath the flawed-technocrat-without-a soul. On one occasion Powell famously declared Ted 'didn't really think, I believe, that the House of Commons had a heart, let alone the British people. At least he's never showed any signs of being able to locate either.'⁶³

On another Powell said, with greater justification in my judgement, that Ted

'believes there is an answer to all problems which can be worked out by proper bureaucratic means — I'm not using that word abusively for once - by the proper approach. If all the relevant facts are assembled and put together by competent people, and logical analysis is made, then that will provide the answer.'⁶⁴

Private Eye made the same points rather more crudely with their caricatures of 'Grocer' Heath — the man who became obsessed with food prices as EEC negotiator in 1961-63 and as the abolisher of resale price maintenance in 1964 and in their stilted parody of him in their regular 'Heathco' strip cartoon.⁶⁵

The technocracy charge is important. The problems that came in battalions, especially after the 1972 Miners' Strike, have both obscured the governmental reforms which were central to Heath's so-called 'quiet revolution'⁶⁶ and put others off from emulating his approach on the grounds that those very reforms made no difference at all to his or his administration's capacity to cope with Macmillan's famous 'opposition of events'.⁶⁷ Heath has somehow become lumped with Wilson's departmental experimentation in the 1960s as a composite folk-memory of how not to do it.⁶⁸

This is not the place to do more than offer a flavour of the Sturm und drang which weakened the Heath administration before blowing it away in the 'Who governs?' election campaign of February 1974 (which also led to a potent don't-style folk memory; Willie Whitelaw once said many years later that it is always a mistake for an incumbent government to ask 'Who governs?' because the electorate tends to answer 'We thought you were'⁶⁹)

Describing the overlapping, running crises and problems — Northern Ireland; strikes; inflation and income policy; Europe; the disturbances and dislocations caused by the Government's industrial relations legislation; the protracted search in 1972 for an accommodation between government, employers and the trade unions; the surge in world commodity prices and, lastly, the chaos in energy markets and the explosion of oil prices associated with the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath in the autumn and winter, combined with industrial action in the pits and the power stations at home — is almost too clinical. To feel the stress and the overload, particularly when Heath was unwell in his last autumn in office (John Campbell believes he was already suffering from an underactive thyroid⁷⁰), you have to resort to vignettes.

In reality, the pressures were relentless for his last two years as premier. John Campbell has captured the early weeks of 1972, that 'traumatic year for the Heath Government', as he put it, ' — a year of crisis, humiliations and emergencies.'

'The pattern of the year was set in the first two months, which must rate as the most dreadful short period of concentrated stress ever endured in peacetime [up to that date]. Two events in particular shook the Government to its core. On 9 January the miners began an unexpectedly determined six-week strike in pursuit of a wage increase of 47 percent; and on 20 January the monthly figure for unemployment in the United Kingdom reached one million for the first time since 1947...

'But these were not the only hammer blows. To understand the pressure Heath and his colleagues were under at this critical moment of the Government's fortunes it is necessary to appreciate that they were simultaneously assailed by two further desperate crises which absorbed the Cabinet's time, drained its energy and stretched its nerve to the limit. First, Northern Ireland was erupting in a new wave of bombings and killings of unprecedented ferocity and the province was slipping closer to the abyss of all-out civil war. Second, the Government was embarking on a perilous parliamentary battle as the enabling legislation to take Britain into the EEC began its fiercely contested passage through the Commons.'⁷¹

Let us dip in now to an equally fraught period for the Heath administration with the help of his Political Secretary, Douglas Hurd, whose excellent short memoir of those years, An End to Promises, combines the graphic with the reflective. Recalling the period as the oil price quadrupled and the miners moved towards their second strike in two years, Hurd wrote:

'A rush of other events prevented senior Ministers from giving the coal crisis the attention which it needed. On Sunday 8 December, for example, the Prime Minister entertained the Italian Prime Minister, Signor Rumor, to dinner at Chequers. The meal was hardly over when

Mr Heath flew to Sunningdale by helicopter to preside over the last stage of the conference on the future of Northern Ireland. Three days later it was time for the State Visit of President Mobutu of Zaire. Two days after that the European Summit began in Copenhagen.

'These were four major events, two of them (Sunningdale and Copenhagen) of outstanding importance. They were all the kind of diplomatic event which in normal times Mr Heath would much enjoy and at which he would perform very well. They all involved tasks, travel, long meals, extensive briefing beforehand; yet none of them had anything to do with the crisis which was swallowing us up.'⁷²

As the stress grew, with a state of emergency declared, a 3-day week in force and Britain flickering as a lights-on, lights-off nation Heath retreated more and more into his Downing Street shell, closer to his officials than to many of his colleagues (one of whom, William Armstrong, while chairing a meeting of fellow permanent secretaries broke down under the increasing strain during the last weeks of the Government).⁷³

Heath was reluctantly pushed by the miners' ballot for an all-out-strike into asking the Queen for a ballot of the electorate.⁷⁴ But even the shortest campaign of the postwar period.⁷⁵ saw his strategy unravel as, inevitably, other issues crowded in other than 'Who Rules?' and the new relativities mechanism of the Pay Board exposed faulty official calculations of the miners' case which were promptly leaked.⁷⁶

Far from winning a refreshed majority on 28 February Heath found himself four seats short of Labour's haul (297 to their 301) though with a wafer thin lead in terms of the percentage of votes cast (37.8% to their 37.1%).⁷⁷ He hung on over a grim weekend trying and failing to do a deal with the Liberals⁷⁸ and some of the Ulster Unionists (who had ceased to take the Conservative whip after the imposition of Direct Rule in

the province in 1972⁷⁹). Finally, after two Cabinet meetings on Monday 3 March, 'poor Ted' as a Palace official put it, brought to an end 'this dicey weekend' and 'came round...very very depressed [to resign]...and the Queen sent for Harold Wilson which was the only possible thing for her to do.'⁸⁰

I think a great many things went out with Heath that day in March 1974. Of course the Heath-style mechanics of his 'quiet revolution' were among them. He himself had already begun the break-up of the giant Department of Trade and Industry in January 1974 when energy sprang back into a separate ministerial existence under Lord Carrington⁸¹. Wilson completed the process the following March splitting it further into three.⁸² Programme Analysis and Review expired gently through the mid to late seventies and was put out of its misery as one of Mrs Thatcher's first acts in 1979.⁸³ The day after she won re-election in 1983 the Central Policy Review Staff (unlike PAR, a serious loss) followed it into oblivion.⁸⁴

But Monday 3 March 1974 has a much greater significance than that. I think Vernon Bogdanor is right to treat it as 'the end of the postwar settlement'.⁸⁵ To Wilson's surprise, Labour got back (only as the polls were closing on 28 February did he appreciate he was likely to lead the largest single party⁸⁶). And though he and his successor, Jim Callaghan, were still conditioned by the mid-century culture that had formed them, British politics coarsened and stretched (this is the period when Professor Sammy Finer anatomised the malign consequences of adversarialism⁸⁷ and Professor Tony King dissected the punishing effects of governmental 'overload'⁸⁸). Equally significantly, the 1970 fall in Labour's core vote of just over a million 'was not to be replaced', and though, as John Ramsden has put it, 'Labour would still be able to win elections in 1974, on a lowish vote, when the Conservatives were even more unpopular, evidence of the new electoral balance that was to allow Tory dominance in the 1980s was there to be seen in the 1970 result'⁸⁹ as well as in the two 1974 elections.

And Monday March 3 saw too, the iron enter the soul of the great eventual beneficiary of that shift in the electoral geomorphology. At the second of the two Cabinet's meetings held to discuss the Liberals' demands before coalition could be contemplated (a Tory replacement for Heath and a commitment to proportional representation⁹⁰), 'Margaret Thatcher', according to Professor Bogdanor,

'hitherto one of the more silent members of his Cabinet, is said to have burst out, 'Oh, no we couldn't. Think how many seats we would lose.' It was at this point, according to one observer, that her hostility to Heath as a traitor to Conservatism crystallised. For in her view, Heath was prepared to sacrifice any chance of the Conservatives ever again achieving an overall majority on their own for a mere temporary renewal of power.'⁹¹

From then on, the writing was on the handbag.

For Douglas Hurd, writing himself on the cusp of the Thatcher era, 'the years of Mr Heath's government should be regarded as a necessary first attempt, the rough work of pioneers'⁹² for the reforms that were put in place in the 1980s. I don't see it like that. For me Heath, from first to last, was attempting to breathe new life, economic vitality especially, into that postwar settlement.

In words I suspect Douglas Hurd himself had written for him in 1973, Heath declared:

The alternative to expansion is not, as some occasionally seem to suppose, an England of quiet market towns linked only by trains puffing slowly and peacefully through green meadows. The alternative is slums, dangerous roads, old factories, cramped schools, stunted lives.⁹³

There spoke a Grade 1 Listed Postwar Settler. Heath was not alone when he called on the Queen on 3 March 1974. The postwar consensus, too, went with him to resign.

'THE SOMERSAULTING MODERNISER': EDWARD HEATH, 1970-74.

ENDNOTES

1. Jack Jones, Union Man, (Collins, 1986), p.70.
2. Ibid, p.215.
3. Private information.
4. Private information.
5. Dr David Owen interviewed for the BBC Radio 3 programme Routine Punctuated by Orgies, 10 November 1983.
6. John Campbell, Edward Heath, A Biography, (Cape, 1993), p.282.
7. Ibid, p.613.
8. Campbell, Edward Heath, p.xi.
9. Private information.
10. For the context, background and subliminal linkage of 'Selsdon Man' with 'Pitldown Man' see John Ramsden, The Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath 1957 - 75, (Longman, 1996), pp.13;249, 258, 300, 347, 351, 395.
11. Campbell, Edward Heath, pp.266-7.
12. Ibid. p.267.
13. Ibid.
14. Ramsden, The Winds of Change, pp.282-3.
15. Sir Edward Heath, interviewed for the Channel 4 Television/ Wide Vision Productions What Has Become Of Us? series, 27 June 1994.
16. Lord Dahrendorf has done this in my presence.
17. Ramsden, The Winds of Change, p.252.
18. For the impact of Lloyd George on several fronts see Peter Hennessy, Whitehall, (Fontana, 1990), pp.52-74.
19. Keynes' fears are quoted in G.M.Young, 'The Future of British Parliamentary Government' in Lord Campion et al, Parliament. A Survey, (Allen and Unwin, 1952), p.273.
20. See Hennessy, Whitehall, pp.587 - 688.
21. For a full and detailed treatment of Heath's election planning on the machinery of government see Kevin Theakston, 'The Heath government, Whitehall and the civil service', in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds), The Heath Government 1970-74, (Longman, 1990), pp.76-80 and Ramsden, The Winds of Change, pp.251-3.

22. Hennessy, Whitehall, pp. 221-2.
23. The Reorganisation of Central Government, Cmnd 4506, (HMSO, 1970).
24. Report of the Machinery of Government Committee, Cd 9230, 1918.
25. Hennessy, Whitehall, p.292.
26. The Cabinet committee, GEN 616, met but once in October 1957: Public Record Office, CAB 130/137. GEN 616, 'The Burden on Ministers'. For the background to Attlee's inquiry which Macmillan himself commissioned, see Peter Hennessy, The Hidden Wiring: Unearthing the British Constitution, Gollancz, 1995), pp.167-9.
27. PRO, CAB 128/36, CC(62)63. Cabinet conclusions for the meeting of 29 October 1962.
28. Ramsden, The Winds of Change, pp.253-61.
29. Edward Heath, My Style of Government, (Evening Standard Publications, 1972), p.5.
30. Ibid, p.3.
31. The Reorganisation of Central Government, p.3.
32. I have a copy of the undated World in Action interview transcript in my possession.
33. The Reorganisation of Central Government, p.6.
34. Ibid, pp.14-15.
35. David Howell in conversation with the author. See Peter Hennessy, Cabinet, (Blackwell, 1986), p.76.
36. Private information quoted in Hennessy, Whitehall, p.222.
37. Private information.
38. David Howell quoted in Hennessy, Cabinet, p.77.
39. Lewis Baston and Anthony Seldon, 'Number 10 under Edward Heath', in Ball and Seldon (eds), The Heath Government, 1970-74, pp.48-51, 56-61.
40. Private information.
41. Private information.
42. Private information.
43. Lord Armstrong of Ilminster speaking at the Twentieth Century British History Seminar, Institute of Historical Research, 9 March 1994.
44. Lord Carrington, Reflect on Times Past, (Collins 1988), p252.
45. Private information.

46. Private information. Sir Edward gently alluded to this in a 1989 interview with the author. See Peter Hennessy, Muddling Through: Power, Politics and the Quality of Government Postwar Britain, (Gollancz, 1996), pp.276-7.
47. John Ramsden, 'The Prime Minister and the making of policy' in Ball and Seldon (eds), The Heath Government 1970 - 74, p.40.
48. Campbell, Edward Heath, p.485.
49. Simon James,
50. John Young, 'The Heath Government and the British entry into the European Community' in Ball and Seldon (eds), The Heath Government 1970-74, p.276.
51. Ibid, pp.266-78; Campbell, Edward Heath, pp.396-405.
52. Paul Arthur, 'The Heath Government and Northern Ireland', in Ball and Seldon (eds), The Heath Government 1970-74, p.235.
53. Campbell, Edward Heath, p.423, 487.
54. See the CAB 134 catalogue at the Public Record Office. We don't have a complete list of Heath's first ministerial committees at the PRO (the entries dealing the with the Foreign and Defence policy ones are not there yet), but they included, as well as NI:
- Ministerial Committee on Economic Strategy (ES);
 - Home Affairs Committee (HA);
 - Legislation Committee (L);
 - Management Project Committee (MPC);
 - Ministerial Committee Regional Policy and Environment (RE);
 - Sub-Committee on the Reorganisation of Local Government (RE(G));
 - Ministerial Committee Rhodesia (RH);
 - Ministerial Committee on Science and Technology (SCT).
55. Hennessy, Cabinet, p.78.
56. Ibid, p.79. See also Keith Jeffrey and Peter Hennessy, States of Emergency, (Routledge, 1982), pp.236-7.
57. Private information.
58. Hennessy, Muddling Through p.271.
59. The occasion was the Institute of Contemporary British History's 1995 Summer School. Sir Edward delivered a lecture to it at Queen Mary and Westfield College on 11 July 1995.
60. Hennessy, Muddling Through, p.275.
61. For the genesis of this celebrated remark of Bevan's see Michael Foot, Aneurin Bevan.
62. Ramsden, The Winds of Change, p.255.
63. Phillip Whitehead, The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies, (Michael Joseph and Channel 4 Television, 1985), p.32.
64. Ibid. p.52.

65. For Heath and Private Eye see Campbell, Edward Heath, pp.125n, 303-4, 373n, 385, 426, 501.
66. Heath launched this phrase at his first Party Conference as Prime Minister. See *ibid.* p.311.
67. Hennessy, Hidden Wiring, p.165.
68. This was a theme reprised constantly to me by both politicians and civil servants during my time as a Whitehall correspondent 1975-84.
69. Private information.
70. Campbell, Edward Heath, p.576.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Douglas Hurd, An End to Promises: Sketch of a Government, 1970-74, (Collins, 1979), p.121.
73. Private information.
74. Dennis Kavanagh, 'The fatal choice: the calling of the February 1974 election' in Ball and Seldon (eds), The Heath Government, 1970-74, pp.362-3.
75. For an elaborate chart on the calling and duration of general elections 1922 - 66, see PRO, PREM 13/878, 'General Election 1966: arrangements for Prorogation and Dissolution of Parliament by proclamation.' Undated.
76. Whitehead, The Writing on the Wall, p.112.
77. Hennessy, Muddling Through, p.36.
78. *Ibid.* pp.35-7.
79. Vernon Bogdanor, The Monarchy and the Constitution, (Clarendon Press, 1995), p.149; Ramsden, The Winds of Change, pp.387-9.
80. Lord Charteris who, as Sir Martin Charteris, was the Queen's Private Secretary in 1974, interviewed for the Wide Vision Productions/Channel 4 Television series What Has Become of Us?, 6 June 1994.
81. Campbell, Edward Heath, p.579.
82. Hennessy, Whitehall, p.243; Hennessy, Cabinet, p.237.
83. *Ibid.* p.596; Hennessy, Cabinet, p.88.
84. Hennessy, Whitehall, pp.27-8, 312, 653, 655-7.
85. Vernon Bogdanor, 'The fall of Heath and the end of the postwar settlement', Ball and Seldon (eds), The Heath Government 1970-74, pp.371-90.
86. See Lord Donoughue's testimony in Hennessy, Muddling Through, p.259.
87. See S.E. Finer (ed) Adversary Politics and Electoral Reform, (Macmillan, 1975).
88. Anthony King, 'Overload: Problems of Governing in the 1970s', Political Studies, xxii, 2-3 (June - September 1975).

89. Ramsden, The Winds of Change, pp.316-7.

90. See Jeremy Thorpe's account of his meetings with Heath on 1st and 2nd March 1974 in Hennessy, Muddling Through, pp.36-7.

91. Bogdanor, 'The fall of Heath and the end of the postwar settlement in Ball and Seldon (eds), The Heath Government 170-74, p.373.

92. Hurd, An End to Promises, p.142.

93. Preconference message to Conservative Party workers, 30 September 1973, quoted in Martin Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980, (CUP, 1981), p.162.

GRESHAM COLLEGE

Policy & Objectives

An independently funded educational institution, Gresham College exists

- to continue the free public lectures which have been given for 400 years, and to reinterpret the 'new learning' of Sir Thomas Gresham's day in contemporary terms;
- to engage in study, teaching and research, particularly in those disciplines represented by the Gresham Professors;
- to foster academic consideration of contemporary problems;
- to challenge those who live or work in the City of London to engage in intellectual debate on those subjects in which the City has a proper concern; and to provide a window on the City for learned societies, both national and international.

Gresham College, Barnard's Inn Hall, Holborn, London EC1N 2HH
Tel: 0171 831 0575 Fax: 0171 831 5208
e-mail: enquiries@gresham.ac.uk