



Leadership and Change: Prime Ministers in the Post-War World - Edward Heath

Professor John Ramsden

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Forty-one years ago Edward Heath became Conservative leader; thirty-one years ago he ceased to be Prime Minister: his was one of the longest retirements in British political life, and like Winston Churchill, but unlike other Prime Ministers, he survived to become Father of the House of Commons, and died a Commoner. For me the greater hindsight we now enjoy increasingly makes Heath look to be a transitional figure, a key signpost to the future, but rarely a complete turn from the past – socially, politically, economically, and internationally, and if you will allow me that is the way in which I intend to present him.

It can sometimes be helpful to locate individual leaders within a broad social context, not only because this helps to highlight their individuality by identifying the pattern against which they have to be set, but also as a way of marking the signposts between different styles and periods of leadership. Thus Sir Robert Ensor, who had a special talent for such things, contributed to the Spectator to mark the centenary of Joseph Chamberlain's birth, an article in which the life and near-triumph of the Birmingham screw-manufacturer Chamberlain became a metaphor for the capitalists arrival at the summit of British politics. It was in 1936 not hard to see that the Chamberlains would indeed reach the very top in the near future, as Neville did in 1936, though Joe would hardly have expected his second rather than his first son to be the one who carried the family on to Downing Street.

Edward Heath's career, especially his leadership, was a similar milestone along the road which marked the social development of British party leadership. Aristocratic and gentry figures had been the Conservative leaders in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with even Disraeli just about fitting into that category once the Bentincks had bought him his landed estate at Hughenden, a period that culminated in the grandeur of the 'Hotel Cecil' between 1885 and 1911. Conservatives not only submitted to the Cecils and accepted the label 'Hotel Cecil' as a shorthand for their political elite, but often held large party meetings in the Hotel Cecil itself, Lord Salisbury's London palace. All this was rudely interrupted by the rise of men like the Chamberlains, so that in 1911, within months of the House of Lords losing its veto powers, the aristocratic Balfour was replaced by the distinctly bourgeois Andrew Bonar Law, first of four leaders over thirty years whose roots would lie in provincial industry rather than either London or the land. That thirty years was what Professor A.P. Thornton cogently called the period of 'Bonar Law's dynasty', but while it seemed at the time an inevitable step in a modernising direction, that process was put rudely into reverse by the stresses of war in 1940.

Churchill, Eden, Macmillan and Home, who led the Conservatives between 1940 and 1965, were successively a Duke's grandson, a scion of the Durham gentry, a Duke's son-in-law, and an Earl in his own right, all of them way above in the social hierarchy the Bonar Law type that they had succeeded at the top. This was though increasingly hard to defend within the increasingly egalitarian expectations of democratic politics, and especially once Harold Wilson began to play the populist card so blatantly in 1963. The refusals of Enoch Powell and Iain Macleod to serve under Douglas-Home, for the final year of Conservative government in 1963-64, and their undisguised advocacy of the view that their party had made a false step in electing Home in the first place, merely accentuated a perception that had taken hold in both the press and in the wider public debate. Powell and Macleod had themselves seemed to personify a more classless future Conservatism, but their dissent in 1963-64 ensured that neither could ever lead the Party in a more meritocratic direction. The irony here is that Macleod and Powell, while representative of the more socially inclusive 'class of 1950' MPs who had entered the Commons as the Conservatives made their post-war

recovery, were both from the professional middle class, Powell's father being a teacher, Macleod's a doctor. Their sudden slipping down the greasy pole in 1963-64 opened the way for Heath, whose own family background was considerably humbler than theirs, so that the Conservatives' abrupt shift from Douglas-Home to Heath in 1965 involved leaping at one go across several social classes as well as generation in terms of age.

Heath, the son of a carpenter and sometime railway porter, was in due course succeeded as leader of the party of the establishment by the daughter of a grocer, the son of a garden gnome manufacturer, the son of a fizzy drinks maker, the son of a middle-ranking RAF officer, and the son of an immigrant Rumanian shopkeeper. For the forty years until the election of David Cameron, when the wheel turned once more, every Conservative leader was from a relatively humble background - considerably more humble than the Cecils and the Baldwins, the Chamberlains, Edens and Macmillans. Apart from John Major all of them were brought up in the provinces (if Edinburgh and Llanelli can be so described, alongside Grantham and Wath upon Dearne), but then Brixton was hardly the fashionable West End either. Yet to view Heath as the beginning of this Tory wave of the future (though perhaps we should now call it the wave of the past?) is problematic, for while all four of his successors gloried in the ordinariness of their backgrounds and used it as a means to connect with ordinary voters, especially during election campaigns when they sometimes stopped only just short of Lloyd George's claim to have walked to school barefoot, Heath was clearly embarrassed when his public relations advisers suggested such a strategy, and vetoed it out of hand. Not for him, as for John Major, a party political broadcast which celebrated his climb from Broadstairs up to Belgravia; no tearful visits to the ancestral corner shop, no implausible claims about his typical life as a South Yorkshire teenager, solaced only by fourteen pints of beer a night, no references to the hard life of immigrant parents. When the Party's PR men were despairing of linking Heath with the voter on the Clapham omnibus, the best they could do with his life outside politics was to celebrate his prowess as a conductor of classical music, wielding the baton over not only the assembled carol singers of Broadstairs but even over the London Symphony Orchestra, and as captain of the prize-winning ocean-going yacht *Morning Cloud*. Both were major personal achievements, but both were also defiantly elitist, and exactly what his successors would not have wished to be linked to in public; the much-noticed (and later much recycled) photographs of Heath's grand piano being wheeled into the removal van when he lost power in 1974 indicates just how deeply that idea of Heath had been engraved on the media's consciousness, and hence no doubt on the public's too; not every Prime Minister would have celebrated the decisive Commons vote which guaranteed British entry into Europe by going home and playing Preludes and Fugues by Johann Sebastian Bach.

In other senses though, Heath's non-establishment origins kept coming back to haunt him in his key beliefs. As leader of the opposition after 1965 for example, he came close to committing the Conservatives to introducing a wealth tax, arguing that reducing income tax for high-achievers had nothing to do with windfall inheritances by the rich - the Research Department called this Heathite view 'Blessed are the Pacemakers - but a wealth tax was something which other Conservatives just could not accept, and the whole policy soon disappeared. Likewise, when a Commons debate was interrupted so that MPs could troop off to the Lords to witness a Royal Assent ceremony, Heath was outraged that such medieval flummery should be allowed to obstruct serious business in the elected House (and the real old 'Tory' Powell was even more outraged that the Conservative Heath had been outraged). When in due course Heath unwisely committed his party to cooperate with Wilson in plans to modernise the House of Lords itself, the backbenchers simply refused to be so led, and helped Foot and Powell to kill the bill with endless filibusters. That non-nonsense 'Heathco' tone that he adopted was regularly out of step with the more traditionalist Tories he was leading at the time, while many were simply baffled by his modernising reliance on technology and the methods - and language - of the business efficiency expert. It was also Heath though who made one of the most anti-business critiques of any Conservative leader, referring to the 'unacceptable face of capitalism', much as Baldwin had once detected 'hard-faced men who look as if they had done well out of the war'. Baldwin though made his remark quietly to a friend (J.M.Keynes), was quoted only anonymously at the time and identified as the originator of that famous phrase only after he had retired; Heath's was carried by the newspapers as soon as he had said it.

Yet Heath simply could not bring himself to play the part of 'man of the people', even when desperate for votes; in that sunny, shirt-sleeved general election campaign of June 1970, he descended into one marginal seat and was confronted as he stepped out of the helicopter by a loyal party worker with a foaming tankard of ale; 'I don't drink beer' he responded, without even thanking the local activist for her kind thought and pressed straight on into the canvassing. Arguably Heath could not in fact bring himself to

play any part at all - except himself, and as he aged even that role became steadily more recognisable as a parody of previous performances. In our current world of the sound-bite and the focus group, such a refusal to perform may sound admirable, but for Conservative campaigners at the time, it was all extremely depressing. Watching Heath sitting stonily through the Party Agents' Dinner and not apparently talking to either the chairman or his wife, who were sitting on either side of him, his friend and Party Vice Chairman Sarah Morrison, wrote a message on her napkin and passed it up to Heath, saying, 'For God's sake talk to them!' Back came the napkin with Heath's reply, 'I already did.' I witnessed personally a visit he made to two London marginal seats in February 1974, when he attracted a rather large audience for a public meeting, to which he read a stern, uncompromising lecture on the energy crisis; later in the evening he visited the Conservative Club, ostensibly to encourage the party workers who had been knocking on doors all night, but he then so steadfastly refused actually to talk to any of them that they all left a good deal less hopeful than they had been when they arrived.

In part, all this reflected that combination of the fastidious and the stubborn that was so very much Sir Edward himself, as his audible asides during Margaret Thatcher's rather more uninhibited electioneering made clear enough; we all knew just what he thought when 'that bloody woman' cuddled a calf for the cameras. Yet Heath's social uncertainty surely reflected too the fact that he moved on from his own social origins before he entered politics, through the by-then traditional route of the grammar school and Oxbridge, in his case reinforced by becoming what the army called a 'temporary gentleman', in wartime command of an artillery unit, though rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. There was of course nothing new about men of humble origin rising from the social ranks through education, though in previous generations the church or the law would have been more likely to have provided the ladder, as they did for Cardinal Wolsey and Lord Brougham, for Herbert Asquith and F.E. Smith. In his own generation it was for many the Conservative Research Department. Some early biographers, noting that Heath briefly worked for both the Church Times and the Civil Service suggested a similar process in Heath's case, but in both cases the period of employment was surely too short to have had much lasting influence on the man, who had already been transformed by Balliol in the 1930s and by the army during the war. Those tortured vowels which mangled English so appallingly – to say nothing of his French – were testament to the struggle he had had to live down his proletarian Kentish origins in 1930s Oxford, and unlike Margaret Thatcher (who abandoned all those expensively purchased Grantham elocution lessons without even a backward glance) Heath was just not going to do a social u-turn, even for popularity or success.

To a large extent, that must have seemed the sensible as well as the correct course, for once Heath entered the Commons in 1950 he rose very fast indeed, even amongst that historically talented intake of Tory MPs. And unlike say Powell or Angus Maude who were first elected on the same day as Heath, it was the inside track that Heath occupied; he had joined the Conservative political establishment rather than resisted it (as Thatcher continued to do even when she was Party Leader) and that in effect widened the distance between Heath the politician and Heath the grammar-school boy even further. He remained devoted to his mother until her death and a regular visitor to Broadstairs, but it was as a visiting celebrity that he returned, not as Broadstairs man who happened to have succeeded in life. In that sense, he straddled the older traditions of establishment Toryism and the newer populism, pointing the way to what was to come without ever wishing to tread that path himself.

That perspective is borne out by the way in which Heath's political career developed. Within a year he was a Government whip, and in five years he was Government Chief Whip, the ultimate insider position, repository of secrets and confidant of premiers. Not that Heath was especially close to Sir Anthony Eden who promoted him, though Heath did Eden sterling service in preventing the Party from falling into utter disarray over Suez – and then held his own counsel on that disreputable fiasco until, shortly before his death, Peter Hennessy trapped him on a live television broadcast and confronted him with what the then-released records showed that he had known at the time – Heath's frozen grin was never glassier. Under Macmillan from 1957 onwards though, Heath was very close indeed to the Prime Minister, with whom he dined alone on the evening that Macmillan succeeded to Number Ten. In due course he moved on to cabinet office in 1959, was chief negotiator for European entry from 1960, and became the key domestic minister under Douglas-Home in 1963. When the Conservatives lost office in 1964, he became shadow Chancellor and replaced Rab Butler as the Party's policy impresario, chairman of the Research Department and of the key Advisory Committee on Policy, the springboard that propelled him into the Party Leadership. That policy review was easily the most exhaustive that any party has ever conducted in opposition, tribute to Heath's well-developed understanding of the importance of process as well as content in politics, and the Conservatives duly achieved power in 1970 extraordinarily well-prepared for office. On

the day after the election, the Research Department sent over to Downing Street detailed plans for whole slabs of domestic policy, several political advisers moved directly into government along with their political masters, and the detailed plan for the first year's legislative timetable was almost completely implemented by the Summer of 1971. Few governments have ever hit the ground running to that extent: although already in office for four years by 1968, Wilson had fidgeted, tinkered and hesitated over trades union policy in the Winter of 1968-69, then eventually abandoned a badly thought-out set of proposals. Heath had his Industrial Relations Act pretty quickly on the books as a statute.

The case of that particular Act does though expose the fallacy within all that preparatory work in opposition, for within months of its coming into force in 1972 Heath's Industrial Relations Act was a dead letter, as a result of the trades unions deciding simply to ignore it and so challenge the government on the will of parliament. A Conservative trades union policy group that had in opposition been stuffed with lawyers had simply failed to imagine how the trades unions might react to legislation in their own sphere with which they fundamentally disagreed, though to be fair they had also been misled by TUC leaders regularly telling them in private that they would not defy the law if it were once passed. Equally seriously, Heath's team had failed to conduct a radical review of that policy after Labour's own reform plans for industrial relations were unceremoniously seen off by the TUC in 1969, so giving the militants a taste of blood. Yet, the entire approach – cogent in detail, meticulously planned in advance, balanced and fair (if judged by anyone but the trades unions themselves) – reveals something deeper about Heath's strengths and weaknesses. You could say that it showed that while he was very good indeed at policy, he was not all that good at politics, resented indeed the need to balance to two in his mind. The many political commentators who noted during the second half of Heath's premiership that he had come to rely hugely on the senior civil servant, Sir William Armstrong, popularly known throughout Whitehall as the 'Deputy Prime Minister', recalled Heath's own few months in the civil service and asked whether he was not himself actually a civil servant manqué, a man who would have been happier out of the grubby world of party altogether, a view of himself that Heath indignantly repudiated, it must be said.

Enoch Powell once argued indeed that this aspect of Heath was in itself merely a symptom of a deeper flaw in his capacities as a leader, a delight in process that mainly concealed his deep disliking for theory. If you confronted Heath with an idea, said Powell, he became very red in the face and started shouting. It is certainly true that when the economically liberal ideas associated with Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedemann began to permeate the British political world in the mid-1960s, Heath simply refused to let them onto the agenda of the shadow cabinet. While intellectually curious people like Keith Joseph and Edward Boyle debated them with real enthusiasm – and came to opposite conclusions – for Heath the new economics seemed to hold no intrinsic interest, and without his encouragement few of his shadow cabinet colleagues bothered to attend the unofficial meetings at which such ideas were discussed. Similarly, though probably with quite different motives, Heath successfully kept policies for core economic management off the shadow cabinet agenda too – papers on the subject were always placed well down the agenda and rarely reached in the actual meetings, mainly to avoid an explosive confrontation between the last Conservative Chancellor, Maudling, and the next one, Macleod, who held such incompatible opinions. As a result, the party was extremely well-prepared on issues to do with the tax structure, and carried most of its prepared reforms into law when in office, far less well prepared to run the economy. The sheer incompetence of the Wilson government in this area – or so at least it appeared to the Tories and to much of their support in Fleet Street and the country – allowed a dangerous delusion to develop, that Conservative managerial competence would in itself do the trick. However, when inflation suddenly surged to the top of the political agenda in 1969-70, the Conservatives were inevitably tempted to exploit it as the general election approached. They had though no worked-out policy of their own actually to reduce the rise in prices, and had made several commitments which were bound to raise them quite a lot. This left trades union reform over-exposed as the one agreed policy which might stem the rise in prices, and made trades unionists the scapegoats for the most pressing problems. Once in office, the failure of trades union reform while price inflation was itself accelerating as a result both of government policy and international events beyond its control, produced the very different approach to economic management that characterised Heath's term in office after the 1972 u-turn.

Until Spring 1972, Heath had been widely seen as an apostle of confrontation, the fruit variously of his 'Selsdon man' rhetoric in 1970, of his brusque determination to see policies through rather than make wishy-washy compromises like the hated Wilson appeared to have done, and of some unguarded statements by his less experienced ministers – notably John Davies' promise that lame duck industries would be left to go to the wall whatever the effects on unemployment and national output. Here then was

the gruffly matter-of-fact managing director of 'Heathco', mercilessly lampooned once a fortnight by Private Eye (though as humour no more than a pale shadow of both Mrs. Wilson's Diary and of the later 'Dear Bill' letters). It certainly seemed that Heath was fully signed up to that approach: when trades union reform was first officially discussed by the Conservatives in 1965, a staffer put up a paper which argued that, whatever the detail of the new plans, the real objective must be to engineer an irreversible change in the balance of power within British industry, a paper on which Heath minuted that he had previously had no idea that anyone in the party had so completely understood his intentions. Yet this was deeply misleading, for despite his determination not to be another Wilson, Heath was never far from the Macmillanite corporatist stance, ideas which Wilson was just then promoting through his National Plan. Wilson's failure to deliver economic growth through corporatism tempted the opposition to maintain their distance; in 1969-70 Conservatives opportunistically denounced the whole thing and promised a hands-off approach to industry and an end to interventionism, But Heath himself clearly never actually lost the corporatist faith, hence the ease with which he switched in 1972-73 back into an even more corporatist, interventionist, intended-to-be consensual stance than either Macmillan or Wilson had ever dared to attempt. Another way of expressing this and which corresponds closely to Powell's view that Heath was simply uncomfortable with theory, is to say that Heath was - like Macmillan and Wilson - an arch-pragmatist who would unsentimentally ditch any policy that was not achieving the result at which aimed. The objective was always economic growth, low prices and reduced unemployment, and any tools would do if they might build such a package. Tragically, few others were so quick in their footwork or so uncommitted to ideas, while the secrecy with which the 1972 u-turn was prepared and the suddenness with which it was launched only added to the sense of sudden, unconsidered retreat. The 1972 u-turn on economic policy therefore came to be seen in Conservative mythology - particularly after the Lady announced in 1980 that she herself was not for turning - a moment of betrayal: look for example at the way in which both Cecil Parkinson and Norman Tebbit describe it in their autobiographies.

That innate pragmatism largely explains why commentators had such difficulty in locating Heath on the political spectrum. When he became Conservative leader in 1965 he was variously identified by newspapers as a man of the right and as a Tory moderate. Had they but known it, the first policy statement that he had superintended, Putting Britain Right Ahead, which in the highway language beloved by the writers of such manifestoes offered turns neither to right or left, had initially been labelled Putting Britain Right. But discussions among leading Tories quickly established that he had actually meant not turning right, but actually putting right. When Alec Home pointed out that if Britain needed putting right, then it must be because the Tories themselves had put it wrong during thirteen recent years in office, the more neutral title was substituted. Such confusion of emphasis persisted right up to 1970, not least because Heath had to tack in confusing and sometimes contradictory directions so as to head off party strife over issues like Rhodesia and immigration, while simultaneously welcoming or at least acquiescing in Roy Jenkins' liberal reforms at the Home Office. In office after 1970, Heath part 1 seemed quite clearly to be a man of the right and an economic liberal, while after the 1972 u-turn he was a centrist, and by 1974 he was demanding a government of national unity - the absolute negation of party and partisanship. Even that was though a somewhat confused stance, for he would have no truck whatsoever with demands for proportional representation in parliamentary elections, the one political reform that would most have enhanced the centrist, consensual position that he by then favoured. Yet the bruises inflicted in 1970-72 had not yet healed: on the political and trades union left, Heath was hated as cordially as Thatcher was to be and far more than Macmillan ever managed, a fact which those with long memories had to keep pointing out to younger colleagues when Heath later emerged as the 'moderate' critic of Thatcherism, and as the apostle of national unity. It was therefore through an unforeseen and unwanted confrontation with the miners that the Heath government came to its sticky end. Even then, an election trenchantly called to assert the will of parliament over the unions, apparently the attempt to mobilise the nation against the enemy within, became all rather apologetic once it had started: this was, argued a Tory staffer, an election that demanded 'the scenario of Sophocles', yet nobody in Government was actually prepared to strew the stage with corpses. It was soon a campaign that revolved around the more typical issues of jobs and prices, and Heath the arch-preparer found himself fighting on issues for which he was ill-prepared. Heath's personal confusions thus contributed signally to his own downfall and his Party's. As Conservatives developed during 1974, that 'anyone but Ted' mood that allowed Thatcher to succeed him, this was certainly the conclusion that many Tories were drawing.

In the longer run though, the inability successively of Wilson, Heath and Callaghan to co-exist with an increasingly militant trade union movement was surely a necessary precursor to Thatcher's successes after 1979. She was elected in 1979 not only with the memory of Heath's failure and the determination to

proceed by quite different tactical methods – for example by tackling the trades unions ‘softly, softly’ rather than through a single big-bang statute – but also with public and media opinion now ready to believe that strong-arm tactics might actually be necessary to protect British democracy, and therefore ready to accept their use. Just as the failure of appeasement in the 1930s ensured that Britain went to war united in 1939, since nobody then thought it was all Chamberlain’s fault, so Heath’s failure to appease the trades unions after 1972 - and Callaghan’s later - were equally vital precursors of Thatcher’s later triumphs and of the prolonged economic recovery that Britain then made from the doldrums of the 1970s.

Thatcher had though another inestimable advantage when compared to Heath, which makes a nonsense of the frequently-repeated Thatcherite claim that Heath had simply lacked the courage to tough it out in 1972, while the Lady herself bravely refused to turn. To those leftist critics who said rather crudely that Thatcher was ‘Heath with tits’ (he was after all only called ‘the Grocer’, while she had actually been born over the shop), Thatcherites responded robustly that she was rather ‘Heath with balls’. In 1970, though Heath in his election campaigning was groping towards liberal economic rhetoric, and although some colleagues were like Keith Joseph already moving in that direction (though Thatcher herself had barely yet begun to see the light), there was simply no recognition even among economists internationally that Hayek and Friedemann had anything useful to say, far less among the political and economic commentators who shaped Britain’s internal political debate. By the time that Thatcher became premier in 1979, both Hayek and Friedemann had been awarded Nobel Prizes and had by then provided between them a respectable core of theory on which a different approach to economic management could be predicated, though Britain was even then to an extent the test-bed for the practicality of such theories during the first years of the 1980s. It seems unlikely that Heath would have committed himself wholeheartedly to such harsh, hitherto-untested abstractions, had he become premier in 1979 rather than 1970, but the fact is that they were simply not within the respectable political debate when he actually did occupy Downing Street. Heath was then once again a transitional figure, having to cope with the failure of Keynesian economic policies to ensure acceptable standards of living for the British people, but before the morning star had risen to herald the sunshine of economic liberalism. Heath’s transitional status is though even clearer in the context of economic policy.

Post-war Britain has been continuously caught ‘between the dog and the wolf’ (as Charles de Gaulle once put it), pulled between Europeanism and Atlanticism – though just what de Gaulle meant is open to question. Churchill’s fatal ambiguity on ‘Europe’, as the sponsor of the ‘United States of Europe’ who also told de Gaulle that Britain would always opt for America over Britain if forced to make the choice, has been a poisonous legacy. Edward Heath was the only British Prime Minister since 1945 who has sought consciously and deliberately to downgrade the American connection in British international policy – his suspicion of the United States being perhaps the single thing that he had deeply in common with Enoch Powell. Though he had visited America as a student, Heath had not fallen in love with it as so many of the world’s conservatives do. His biographer John Campbell notes that an earlier visit to Nazi Germany had already made a bigger and more lasting impact on Heath’s thinking, as would his European war experiences. In opposition before 1970, Heath had regularly embarrassed Harold Wilson’s Labour Governments with traditional Conservative accusations that they were not sufficiently supportive of the Americans. In this case the Conservative attacks usually centred on Vietnam, where Wilson was walking a tightrope between Lyndon Johnson’s urgings that he send British troops and the Labour left’s demands that he denounce America’s war altogether. Nevertheless, Heath’s attacks were pretty unconvincing, for though he celebrated the commitment to South-East Asian democracy being made by Australians and New Zealanders, he never came near to offering to commit British troops to the war.

Heath was indeed not all that interested in America, and found himself when elected Prime Minister dealing with an American President, Richard Nixon, who was himself pretty detached from Britain: the lengthy biography of Nixon by Herbert Parmet contains no reference whatsoever to Heath and no reference to Britain either, except during the Suez crisis. Nixon’s West Coast, relatively-impoorished upbringing was a long way from the world of Anglophiles like Dean Acheson and David Bruce, both men who still ordered their shirts in Jermyn Street, while the now-establishment-figure Heath seems to have regarded Nixon as rather uncouth. Their first contact as heads of government indicates that lack of mutual understanding. Rising late after an exhaustive polling day in June 1970, Heath was told by his housekeeper that some American called Nixon had been trying to speak to him on the phone. When Heath belatedly returned Nixon’s call, it was the middle of the night in Washington, but he received presidential congratulations on his election victory. It became clear though that Nixon had little idea what went on in Britain. At the end of the call, he urged Heath to take a good long rest during the hand-over period, while he assembled his new

governing team; when Heath protested that he was already Prime Minister, Nixon gasped, 'God, what a system!'

Nixon did though also offer Heath, as Henry Kissinger's memoirs have shown, immediate, personal telephonic access to the Oval Office, a practical way of making the relationship really special and something that Heath's predecessors as Prime Minister had often dreamed of acquiring. Heath, though politely thanking Nixon for the favour, rarely actually used this right of access, and later asked Kissinger not to give Britain such preferential treatment. He preferred to talk of a 'normal' rather than a 'special' relationship, while for Churchill (and in due course for Thatcher too) the whole point was its abnormality, the fact that it was not on offer to other NATO countries and their leaders. Over the four years after 1970 Heath and Nixon met only rarely, as Heath turned his sights eastward towards Britain's entry to the European Community and Nixon struggled to de-escalate the Vietnam War in which Britain remain uninvolved and to establish warmer relations with China. Anglo-American relations have rarely been so low in the order of priorities of both countries. Heath truly deserved then his Charlemagne Prize as a man committed to a European future for Britain, though Churchill, the first Briton to be so honoured, almost certainly did not.

Few who have written on Heath have doubted his personal commitment to Europe. Nor has anyone doubted that this commitment helped Britain finally to enter the European Community, or that this was his most important single achievement as Prime Minister. When Heath received an Honorary Fellowship at Queen Mary early in the 1990s, he was chosen from among the honorands to deliver the Fellows' Lecture, a decision not universally welcomed within the College by those with memories of Heath's oratory and awareness that the talk would come at the end of a long ceremony, during a steaming hot June afternoon and in a hall packed full of new graduates waiting to celebrate with champagne and strawberries. We could not have been more wrong: he spoke for forty minutes without a note, simply and eloquently explained his European faith, and received a standing ovation from the graduating students and their parents, most of whom must statistically by then have been Eurosceptics. It was Heath's personal tragedy as a politician that such communicative skills were so rarely on show during the occasions that really mattered twenty years earlier.

Crucially, when getting Britain into Europe, he managed to achieve a more harmonious relationship with Georges Pompidou than any British leader had ever managed with de Gaulle, and while he was certainly fortunate that it was Pompidou rather than de Gaulle with whom he had to deal, Heath's lack of warmth for the Anglo-Saxon connection might well have impressed even the General. Yet German and Italian lobbying in Paris was important to achieving British entry too. Heath had a good relationship with Willy Brandt, to which Brandt later attested both in public and in private: 'I never felt Edward Heath's reputed lack of personal warmth' he wrote. 'Uncomplicated and characterised by mutual trust, our talks might almost have been described, without triteness, as friendly.' In Heath's own memory, mind you, Brandt was recalled as 'one of the most perplexing personalities with whom I have ever had to deal', but he nevertheless paid tribute to Brandt's support for British entry. Ambiguous as this may be, as John Campbell points out, personal relationships with Heath just did not get any better than this,

Heath himself undoubtedly felt that his triumph in taking Britain into the Community represented not only a great success but a permanent one too, the end of a process that so many of his wartime generation, just like their European contemporaries, saw as the unfinished business of the Second World War – Jenkins, Healey and Crosland on one side, Heath, Barber and Whitelaw on the other. Hence his utter contempt for Harold Wilson's caving in to the Labour left's demand for a renegotiation of the entry terms and a referendum; hence the enthusiasm with which he campaigned in that referendum when it came in 1975. British membership of the Community was thereby confirmed – and has never been challenged from within the political mainstream ever since. Yet, this was all achieved more by default than through British conversion to the European idea: the 'full-hearted consent of the British people' for the entry terms -which he had promised to achieve - was not exactly delivered by the extremely tight Commons majorities secured for the European Communities Bill, and the substantial referendum majority of 1975 was as much due to the malodorous alliance of political extremists who campaigned for a 'No' vote as to full-hearted support for a 'Yes'.

Here too Heath now seems more a transitional figure than one who achieved finality. I do not by this mean simply that he was both the last premier who campaigned to get in, and the first who had the actually more difficult task of working out how to behave as a Community member, though this was of course true. Heath's personal faith had ensured that the Conservatives as a Party remained true to the European idea throughout the period of his leadership, and hence like the Liberals voted for all three of the applications to

join the EEC, while most Labour MPs voted only for the second of the three, but against the first and third applications. When the Conservatives went into opposition in 1964 and began that wholesale review of every area of policy, Heath set up no study group on Europe; when asked why, he responded robustly that there was no need for further study, since everyone already knew what the policy was to be. It may indeed be that Heath's finest hour in the European saga was when suppressing a Conservative debate on the issue in 1964-70, when the opposition could easily have been tempted to trawl for anti-European votes, as Labour did whenever out of office between 1960 and the mid-1980s. Both then and when Prime Minister after 1970, Heath banged on about the economic issues and underplayed the political ones when discussing Europe; back in 1962, when he was Britain's chief European negotiator, he had insisted to the Canadian High Commissioner that Britain joining the EEC would make no appreciable difference to the Commonwealth, and during later debates he generally dismissed the political aspirations enshrined in the Treaty of Rome as all pretty nebulous and anyway something would only happen far in the future. To be fair to him, it was then an Economic Community that Britain joined, and he never argued against the idea that political harmonisation was anyway a desirable long-term goal for Europe, but it is surely significant that the British debate in that era was invariably about a 'common market', while in most other member states it was about a 'community'. Now, we are of course two generations into that very future that was then so far away as to seem barely worth discussing, and the European project has moved way beyond what even its most fervent admirers can have hoped for in 1973. Yet British opinion has mainly refused to move with it in the way that Sir Edward's own faith certainly did keep up with the developing European agenda during his long retirement.

Tony Blair, by far our most pro-European premier since Heath, has been forced in sheer self-defence to make promises uncompromisingly to defend British interests in the Community promises that then continuously hampered his parallel efforts to broker the compromises that would allow the Union actually to function. Hence Britain remains outside the Euro, and a continuous brake on the wheel of European harmonisation, 'using Europe while abusing the Europeans' as Wolfram Kaiser has neatly put it. And even Blair, when forced to choose, opted for Atlanticism over Europeanism when the chips were down over Iraq, as Heath would surely not have done in similar circumstances. Here again then, Heath comes out as a Janus-like figure, looking back to that quarter century in which Britain grudgingly accepted that it could not stand aside from European integration, but simultaneously looking forward to a quarter century in which the British were thoroughly bad Europeans. Or to put it more brutally, Heath delivered European membership for Britain, but he was unable to make the British feel themselves actually to be Europeans; ironically it was his own Party that was to drag its feet most obviously in those thirty years (so far) of bruising debates about the post-imperial role that Britain has yet to find. Historians are currently fascinated with 'what if?' questions, how history might have turned out differently if a single variable had been altered. For my part, I can think of no more fascinating 'what if?' than how Britain's international role might have developed, if Heath himself had retained office for as long as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair were to do, so allowing an extended initial period of friendly cooperation within the European Community, rather than the permanent barricades which Thatcher soon erected and which both Major and Blair then found themselves obliged to defend to the last minutiae of policy and the last pounds sterling. But then, if Heath had indeed held office into the early 1980s, Margaret Thatcher would surely never have become Conservative leader and Prime Minister anyway, and when that domino topples over, almost every other certainty about contemporary Britain falls over with it. The continuous bad temper that Heath appeared to exhibit for the last thirty years of his life was surely in part due to his awareness of just that fact. He had after all hung on to office after election defeat, in the first days of March 1974, at considerable personal loss of dignity, more than anything in the hope that a Conservative-Liberal alliance would keep afloat Britain's European project. His proposal of a government of national unity later in the year had a similar purpose. When his personal decision then to stay on as Conservative leader after the Party's second election defeat of 1974 had the unanticipated effect of making Thatcher his successor, with all that this meant for Britain's future in Europe, he can hardly have failed to acknowledge in his heart of hearts that it was all his own fault. If we mercilessly adapt what Thatcher herself said of the Germans, it is not in hard to understand Heath's post-premiership angst, it was 'the agony of self-knowledge'.

I have probably gone on too long. I could sum up the story with a view of Heath the man, but I have probably already conveyed much on this subject already, and we have anyway present in Lord Jenkin someone far more qualified than I am myself to undertake that task. Perhaps though Edward Heath might at least identify with the fact that when I have no more usefully to say, I should say no more.

Response by Lord Jenkin of Roding

Well my friends, that was a tour de force. For those of us who lived through those years, and I certainly lived through most of them. People say even now it is too soon for proper historical perspective, but there were many flashes of brilliance, with the benefit of history. I was recognising, as Professor Ramsden spoke, many of those episodes through which one lived, sometimes playing an extremely minor part, and the extraordinary contradictions which were embodied in Ted Heath's personality.

I have said to many people that I owed any advance I made in politics to Ted Heath. I succeeded Winston Churchill in Woodford in 1964, and I don't think Ted had much to do with that, but it was within months of getting into Parliament that Ted Heath invited me to join the team that was fighting the 1965 Finance Bill. Compared with recent Finance Bills, it was comparatively short. It was in fact an extremely dramatic change of tax policy introduced by the then Chancellor, Jim Callaghan, with two entirely new taxes. Ted's fighting that bill, with his team of youngsters behind him – and John has brought this out – actually ensured for him the leadership of the Party when it became clear that Sir Alec Douglas-Home could not continue.

In those days, the whole of the Finance Bill was conducted on the floor of the House, and it was not until towards the end of the period that they began to take the Committee stages upstairs. So the whole of the Finance Bill, 1965 and 1966, was on the floor of the House, and we sometimes had three all-night sittings running, and I can tell you that by the Thursday evening, or Friday morning, we were, as the Army would have said, on our chin-straps, and yet, Ted continued fighting. He was a very remarkable leader to serve behind.

By 1966, there were three members of the Finance front bench team, and they were Heath, Thatcher and Jenkin. We had another major bill. By that time, it was Macleod of course, but Macleod, Thatcher and Jenkin; Heath was the leader of the Opposition, as John has properly described. But it was Heath's performance during those debates, where he simply pulled out the stops. His speeches were cognitive, they were convincing and they crushed the Government front bench, again and again. Although they had the majority, we always felt the arguments then went with the Opposition.

So, as John has described, Ted Heath became the leader of the Party. In those days, leaders emerged. I think we had the Humphrey Barclay reform by then, didn't we? Members of the Conservative Party in Parliament were voting, and of course I certainly voted for him. I remember asking Iain Macleod, who was and had always been my political hero, "Why can't you stand, because you would get a great deal of support?" Macleod was wise enough to recognise that the legacy of the time when he had been colonial secretary and had been stigmatised by yet another Cecil, as too clever by half, but he really could not expect the Party to back him against this immensely successful debater, Ted Heath. So Ted became leader, and then, when he became Prime Minister, a number of us who had worked very closely with him in Opposition became ministers.

John has given a very, very fair picture of what was a very difficult four-year period, which he rightly has divided into two: the first half up to 1972 and then the second half after the U-turn. I was present at the U-turn, in circumstances which may be of some interest. At the time, I had just been made Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and we had the budget debate, which had been opened of course by the Chancellor, Anthony Barber, and it was destined to go on for four days. I was due to wind up the second day of the debate. It had been opened for the Government – of course the Shadow Chancellor spoke first, but he was followed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, John Davies, I had my speech; I had been working on this with my officials in the Treasury. John Davies stood up, and in the course of his I think 40-minute speech, he announced a complete reversal of what we understood to be Heath's economic policy. We went back to an imitation of the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation. We went back to what eventually became a prices and incomes policy, first voluntary and then statutory.

I sat on the front bench, beside him, in total horror. I knew nothing about it at all. It had been entirely hashed up between Heath and Davies. So as soon as I decently could, when the back bench speeches started, I left the Chamber and summoned John Davies' top official who was there, a very able man who went on to do other great things, and I said, "Look, I've got to wind up this day's debate, and I have got to explain that what your Secretary of State has announced is quite, quite different from what Callaghan and Wilson were doing before." If you look back and read through the last few paragraphs of my speech in Hansard, I had a fair stab at it, but I have to say I didn't believe it! That's the nature of parliamentary debate! But it was the most extraordinary thing, that nobody – but nobody – had thought it appropriate to warn the Chief Secretary of the Treasury, due to wind up that day's debate on the budget, that there was a major change of policy, and of course the Opposition revelled in it.

Then when we went on eventually to a statutory prices and incomes policy, it was some of the most painful weeks that I think I can ever remember in politics. We had what I can only describe as an abortion of a procedure! We had a mixed committee of ministers and civil servants. John has reminded us of the enormously important role of the then Cabinet Secretary Sir William Armstrong, not to be confused with Robert Armstrong, who came later, but Sir William Armstrong, who absolutely was, as John has rightly said, sometimes described as the Deputy Prime Minister. We sat in this committee day after day, hammering out the prices code and the pay code of all the different phases and everything going into it. Looking back on it, I am astonished that one just did not say, "But this is all absolute nonsense! It can't work!" Of course, it did not work and it all blew up in our faces, and we were faced with the miners' strike, the miners saying to Ted Heath, over beer and sandwiches at Number 10, "You've given in to the oil sheiks in Saudi Arabia, why can't you give in to us?" Of course the question of fighting that February '74 Election, that started off as being an election as to who governs Britain, that lasted for about three days, campaigning in the country and getting regular messages.

I was by that time Minister for Energy. I had been appointed in January. That was another story...but I think quite interesting! I had talked to Ted Heath during the Sunningdale Conference over Ireland. Oil prices had doubled and then doubled again, and I was pointing out to him that this of course actually changes the whole nature of the production process in that those things that are energy-intensive are going to cost a great deal more, whereas things that are not energy-intensive will be much less affected. Obviously he thought that was rather sensible economics, so when he decided to set up the Department of Energy, he appointed Lord Carrington as the Secretary of State and I was the spokesman in the Commons, the Minister for Energy.

I got a message while I was addressing a Young Conservative audience in London: Number 10 is on the telephone, and they want you to go back immediately. I thought I was going to be sacked! It's perfectly true! I sat there, his PPS came out and said, "Patrick, you are as white as a sheet – what's the matter?" I said, "Well, I've got to go in and see the boss and I think I'm going to lose my job." He didn't know anything about it, so he said, "Oh I'm sure that's not true." So then Ted explained to me, in some length, of what the importance of this new Department of Energy was going to be, and how he was determined that this was going to get a grip on this very important subject. Finally, I said to him, "But Ted, where do I come in on this?" He said, "You're going to be the spokesman in the Commons! Don't be so stupid!" This was the way he would speak to junior ministers, and I probably was being very stupid, but I have to say, I didn't know what he was on about!

I may say, I heard this story: when Winston Churchill was Prime Minister, the man who is no longer with us, Nigel Birch, was summoned in to see him, and came out after three minutes when he had been harangued by the great Winston, and he had to go and ask the Chief Whip, "What's the job I've got?"! He hadn't been told! So these things are not always as straightforward as is sometimes presented, although I don't think anybody has made quite as much a mess of them as the present Prime Minister!

Ted was an extraordinarily difficult person to talk to personally. I have heard the stories of his bonhomie in the bar and so on. I have to say, I never saw that. On one occasion, he was invited to plant a tree at an arboretum in my constituency. The great Mallington family had this house and they had this estate, and it was a great timber family and so they had an arboretum. All sorts of distinguished people from across the world had been invited to plant a tree in the Mallington arboretum, and eventually it came to Ted. So I said to him, "Well, that's marvellous. I will drive you out. They will be thrilled to see you, and then there is a lunch – you will plant the tree and then lunch, and I'm certainly happy to drive you back." In those days, it would have taken certainly the best part of an hour to get from Westminster to Woodford Green, each way. I may say, it's not much less now, but there are one or two roads that have made it a bit quicker! I have to tell you, I tried to talk to Ted going out, and I tried to talk to Ted going back. I talked about music, I talked about sailing, and I tried initially on politics, and I could not get a word out of him either way. It was quite extraordinary! He was just sitting there. It was obvious his mind was on something, and there was no way that he was going to listen to any sort of polite conversation.

Later, after he had ceased to be Prime Minister, he had that marvellous house in Salisbury, where he finally died, and his funeral was in Salisbury. While he was there, he was a huge supporter of the Salisbury Festival. The Festival was sponsored, in those days, by the insurance company of which I was then chairman, so I saw a good deal of Ted, and he was always invited to our receptions. He came to the concerts in the Cathedral, and he played a very full part in this. There one saw a completely different Ted. He was delightful. There was a wonderful occasion when the young violinist Nigel Kennedy was there. Ted said, "Would you like to come and play at a concert I'm trying to arrange?" "Oh," says Kennedy, "That'll be

fun! Another gig!" You could not have imagined two people more different, but they absolutely hit it off, and that was the other Ted. He was there in his element.

You mentioned also his prowess at sailing. One forgets he and his boat won the Sydney to Hobart race, one of toughest sailing races in the world. I remember saying to people, you know, if you had a man who could conduct the London Symphony Orchestra and achieve enormous plaudits from an extremely well-informed audience, if you could have a man who could command a crew sailing in a highly competitive race under very tough conditions, if you had somebody who could do all that, surely he would rule the world? Yet the fact is, despite those things, Ted never really got into that position where he could be said to be a great colossus striding; it was always a battle. I think, if I may say so, John Ramsden's accounts of his internal struggles between his own background and the background of the Conservative Party, and then how he, in a sense, had to bring these two worlds together, it always made it clear that Ted was a very difficult person and he was difficult for himself. I think we have had a feast this evening from John Ramsden. I look forward to seeing it in print and reading it – I hope it will be – and reading it again, because there were some enormously perceptive analyses in that of Ted Heath's political life. As I say, I became, in a very curious way, very fond of him, although there were times when I could not have any conversation with him at all! John, thank you very much indeed. Your audience is deeply indebted to you for a very, very fine lecture.

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