



Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique

French Journal of British Studies

XXVIII-1 | 2023

One Nation Conservatism from Disraeli to Johnson

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/10423>

ISSN: 2429-4373

Publisher

CRECIB - Centre de recherche et d'études en civilisation britannique

Electronic reference

Edmund Neill, "Ian Gilmour and One Nation Conservatism", *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* [Online], XXVIII-1 | 2023, Online since 03 February 2023, connection on 27 February 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/10423>

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Introduction

- ¹ This article aims to assess the contribution of Sir Ian Gilmour to One Nation conservatism. On the face of it, this might seem a relatively straightforward task. Ian Gilmour has a reputation for being one of the most articulate and thoroughgoing critics of Thatcherism in the 1980s, the epitome of an old-style paternalist conservative opposed to neo-liberal ideologues such as F. A. Hayek, and indeed an advocate for the idea that proper conservatism was not ideological at all. As such, he seems very natural fit for the “One Nation” tradition, which often continues to be equated with an insistence on the importance of social harmony and a well-resourced welfare state – as opposed to those insisting that the free market is a self-correcting system, and that benefits ought to be channelled to deserving rather than undeserving recipients.¹ But as soon as one examines the issue more closely, matters become considerably more complicated. As we will become clear, one of the major challenges with pinning down the contribution of Gilmour to “One Nation conservatism” is the lack of consensus over what the term “One Nation” actually means, despite the ubiquity with which it is used. Just to give two recent examples, Ed Miliband’s Labour Party in 2012 attempted to purloin the term “One Nation” for the Labour Party, appealing to the heritage of both Benjamin Disraeli and Clement Attlee to try and justify a programme of decreasing economic equality, and combating post-2010 austerity. Conversely, Nick Timothy, Theresa May’s erstwhile adviser, has recently produced a work entitled *Remaking One Nation* which lays much more emphasis on criticizing excessive immigration and identity politics, at the same time as decrying an excessive devotion to the free market.
- ² Equally, categorising Ian Gilmour’s ideological position itself is less straightforward that might appear at first sight. Always very much on the Left-wing of his party,³

Gilmour was particularly unusual in consistently favouring serious constitutional reform from *The Body Politic* (1969) onwards,⁴ in unapologetically supporting the “permissive” reforms inaugurated by Roy Jenkins in the 1960s,⁵ and in defending Keynesianism to the hilt, even when it was clearly out of fashion in the 1980s under Thatcherism.⁶ Such convictions have led some commentators (like David Seawright) to accuse Gilmour of misrepresenting the nature of the One Nation conservatism wholesale⁷ – or to serious consideration that Gilmour should be labelled a liberal, rather than a conservative.⁸

- 2 In view of these difficulties, I will first try and establish the best way to delineate “One Nation” conservatism as an ideological phenomenon, before secondly investigating the extent to which Ian Gilmour remained true to its tenets in the 1970s and 1980s. For although the ideology necessarily required reformulation and reinterpretation to respond to new social and political circumstances after the end of the economic “golden age” of 1951-73, it is arguably still possible to make a judgment about the degree to which Gilmour remained a genuine “One Nation” conservative. Essentially, I argue that in some respects Gilmour stayed absolutely true to “One Nation” as an ideology; in others he developed or adapted it; and in some respects, he deviated somewhat from ‘One Nation’s original intentions. Before making a categorical judgment on this, however, we need to establish how to define “One Nation” conservatism in the first place.

Defining “One Nation” Conservatism: Disraeli or Thatcher?

- 3 How then should one define “One Nation” as an ideological position? The most obvious way of doing so is to take its proponents at their word, and date its origins back to the Victorian Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli. Famously the author of a novel *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), which dealt with the gulf between rich and poor in the “hungry” 1840s, Disraeli has often been credited by “One Nation” advocates with enacting a significant social reform programme when Prime Minister between 1874 and 1880 – in contrast to Whig/Liberal governments too fixated on upholding the dictates of political economy to do so.⁹ By enacting significant legislation concerning public health and social welfare, they claim, Disraeli established a Conservative tradition of caring about social policy which can be traced through Randolph Churchill’s “Tory Democracy”, Joseph Chamberlain’s Workmen’s Compensation Act, and even the incremental changes in social welfare policy in the interwar period. As such, although it had some queries about how the welfare state had been enacted by the Attlee administration, “One Nation” advocates argued that the Conservative Party was in a good position to assimilate the changes it had brought, since Conservatives had their own rich and well-established tradition of promoting welfare policies.
- 4 This depiction of Disraeli as an important initiator of welfare policies remains popular, indeed almost a shibboleth, amongst Conservative politicians – including those who were no admirer of him, such as the Right wing minister and diarist Alan Clark.¹⁰ Indeed he has even been admired by political opponents, notably the former Labour leader Michael Foot, who claimed he was “the only leading political figure in the Parliament of the 1830s and 1840s ... [to recognize] Chartism for what it was, the stirring of a new class, the movement of the future”.¹¹ But the depiction is largely a

myth, and for three reasons. First, it was unclear that Disraeli was particularly interested in social legislation – it ranked for him far below great policy questions concerning religion, the empire, or the balance of power in Europe, and even some Victorian contemporaries mocked his lack of a constructive programme for Conservative government.¹² Second, although some of Disraeli’s government’s social legislation was compulsory in nature, such as freeing workers from criminal prosecution for breach of contract and the legalization of peaceful picketing, much was also permissive and fairly ineffectual – such as the Artisans Dwellings Act, designed to encourage housing improvements, and the Friendly Societies Act, which aimed to make such entities more financially reliable.¹³ Finally, the contrast with Liberal indifference to social questions is overstated. Much of the legislation that Disraeli’s 1874-80 administration introduced was bipartisan in nature, and the Liberal administrations of the 1860s and 1870s had both produced significant reforms. Just to give some examples, Gladstone’s 1868-74 government had passed the 1870 Elementary Education Act, which established a national system of education, the 1871 Local Government Act, which reformed local authorities and gave them significant new powers, and the 1872 Mines Regulation Act, which established a detailed code of regulations covering safety, age and conditions of employment.¹⁴

- 5 Defining what “One Nation” means, therefore, cannot be done simply by locating its origins in the thought and policies of Disraeli, since these function at least as much as helpful myths, rather than as an actual guide. Other commentators, therefore, have taken a different tack. Noting the variety of personnel in the “One Nation” group in the post-war period – which included later monetarists like Enoch Powell and Angus Maude, as well as instinctive Keynesians – and the stress in some of its publications on targeting spending on the disadvantaged, as much as on a universal welfare state, they have sought to give a wider, more capacious definition to “One Nation” ideology. Just to take one example of this approach, Stephen Evans in an article published in *Contemporary British History*, seeks to claim that even Margaret Thatcher can, up to a point, be included within the “One Nation” tradition. In particular, he argues, Thatcher identified three aspects of Disraeli’s thought that could be updated and harnessed for the 1970s and 1980s. These were, first, a commitment to diminishing class tension – in contrast to a Labour Party that Thatcher claimed was obsessed with equality and the class struggle;¹⁵ second, a commitment to patriotism – particularly during the Falklands war, echoing Disraeli’s bid to enshrine the Conservatives as the party of empire;¹⁶ and third, a commitment to mass property-ownership, as proof that Disraeli, and not Marx, had been right about the direction of modern capitalism.¹⁷
- 6 However, in fact this approach does not help very much in providing a coherent definition of One Nation conservatism. It is helpful to the extent that it highlights that all ideological positions require adaptation to be relevant to changing historical circumstances. But in equating “One Nation” conservatism with a commitment to diminishing class tension, to patriotism, and to mass ownership of private property, Evans is in danger of producing such a wide definition of the term that it becomes indistinguishable from many other forms of conservative ideology – particularly since, as he admits, Thatcher’s “reinterpretations” of “One Nation” thinking are as much a “manipulation” as they are a genuine attempt at making the ideology relevant for a new era.¹⁸ The definition becomes simply *too wide*, in other words.

Defining “One Nation” Conservatism: The Original Pamphlets

- 7 In view of the unsatisfactory nature of these definitional attempts, I contend that the best way of seeking to pin down the nature of “One Nation” conservatism is to return to some of its original publications, notably the pamphlet “One Nation” (1950) itself, and “Change is Our Ally” (1954).¹⁹ By doing so, we can identify four aspects of the ideology. First, whatever qualifications they had about how the Attlee government had secured full employment, and enacted the welfare state, the collective authors of “One Nation” were clearly not reactionaries who thought that the post-war Labour government’s reforms should be jettisoned entirely. Nor did they resemble the type of 1940s individualist personified by Sir Ernest Benn – who worried that all social reforms endangered the ability of individuals to resist fascists and demagogues, because the resultant state intervention necessarily undermined individuals’ ability to make moral choices for themselves.²⁰ Rather, the authors of “One Nation” sought to accept some important aspects of the new social and political arrangements of the 1940s, whether these had been passed by the wartime coalition, or by the 1945 Labour government. In particular, they embraced changes in three areas. In the first place, “One Nation” embraced the ambitions of the Beveridge Report (1942) to provide comprehensive welfare, at least of a minimum standard to all citizens. Lauding William Beveridge as an ideal choice to bring cohesion to the “sprawling, unplanned growth of our social services”, the pamphlet explicitly cited Winston Churchill’s commitment to providing a safety net for all, and trumpeted that “the wall of social security has been built at last”.²¹ In the second place, “One Nation” conservatism had a much more emollient approach to trade unions than some of its predecessors, declaring that “a strong and independent Trade Union movement is essential to the industrial structure of a free society”.²² Expressly declining to re-enact the Trade Disputes Act of 1927, following its repeal by the Attlee government, One Nation conservatives envisaged a sincere dialogue with the trade unions to ensure that they refrained from indulging too heavily in party politics, and conversely stressed the importance of transparency within companies as to the extent of workers’ rights were, and how that company’s profits were used.²³ Finally, “One Nation” conservatives accepted the idea that the state had a role to play in the economic sphere, explicitly rejecting *laissez-faire* as a policy.²⁴ In particular, they stressed that the government had an important function in maintaining full employment,²⁵ in improving working conditions,²⁶ and to ensure proper standards of housing.²⁷
- 8 Second, despite their embrace of the Beveridge Report, of an important role for trade unions, and of state intervention to secure decent employment and housing conditions for workers, there were distinct limits to One Nation conservatism’s acceptance of the Attlee government’s program. A key component of “One Nation” conservatism, in other words, was a determination to distinguish it from democratic socialism, and this can be seen in three areas in particular. In the first place, both “One Nation” and “Change is Our Ally” were sceptical about the degree of planning the 1945 Labour government – and even to some extent the interwar Conservative governments – had undertaken. It is true that they showed some sympathy for the managing of demand through the management of budgets and credit, cautiously indicating a belief that Keynesian interventions in the economy could be prudent and efficacious.²⁸ But they were deeply

sceptical of the type of centralized planning practised by the Attlee government, which sought to control the economy directly through the rationing of physical products, by the central regulation of industry, or by nationalization. Rather, “Change is Our Ally” argued, insisting on the intrinsic superiority of the market: the efficient co-ordination of industry relied “not on centralised planning but on the exercise of consumer choice based on economic costs competitively determined”.²⁹ In the second place, following on from this, One Nation conservatives were much keener to promote use of the private sector, rather than the state, highlighting in particular its possibilities in the area of housing. Bad housing and inadequate education, “One Nation” declared, were at the root of most social evils.³⁰ Accepting that some of the housing built in the interwar period had been of poor quality, and insufficiently well planned, the “One Nation” pamphlet nevertheless strongly criticized the restrictions that the Attlee government had placed on the private housing market and argued that reviving it would have significant advantages. In particular, “One Nation” claimed, the private sector would be able to increase the number of houses built, would be more likely to use modern methods, and would be more responsive to consumers. Lastly, “One Nation” conservatism was deeply sceptical about the way in which the 1945 Labour government had sought to finance the new welfare state. Part of this was simply practical: “One Nation” conservatives felt that socialists were uninterested in what increasing the scope of social services would cost – in a context where money was very scarce, not least because of the Korean War. The logical consequence was that resources would have to be prioritized to key areas.³¹ But more fundamentally, “One Nation” conservatives also objected (in line with many others) with the overuse of redistribution of resources through taxation to finance the welfare state, which they maintained encouraged a lack of self-responsibility (to provide for oneself), discouraged the voluntary sector, and established an over intrusive state in the lives of individuals. To quote “One Nation” itself this socialist theory claimed that:

when the state redistributes income and property to give everyone the largest amount possible, the citizen who has paid his taxes has discharged in full his obligations to the huge benefit pool to which he belongs. The State is now the keeper of his conscience and duty; he gives and receives exactly what the State thinks right,

concluding waspishly that “perhaps this is the millennium of ‘fair shares for all’. [But] it is certainly the death of a human society”.³²

- 9 That One Nation conservatism was the product of a group with somewhat differing perspectives, and that the ideology struck a careful balance between accepting greater welfare provision and reasserting the importance of the market and the private sector, has been noted in the scholarly literature, at least to some extent.³³ But to capture the nature of One Nation conservatism fully, it is necessary to understand two further aspects of the ideology, which brings us to its third feature. This was the history of social reform that “One Nation” conservatism carefully crafted in order to add plausibility to its position.³⁴ The point of this was twofold. On the one hand, it sought to legitimize the growth of welfare provided by the state, against libertarians and individualists who were already beginning to criticize the level of state spending on welfare, even if they were to become much more influential later. But on the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, against liberal and socialist charges that Conservative dominated governments had done nothing for the needy, particularly in the interwar period, One Nation conservatives aimed to establish that conservatism

had its own tradition of enacting social reform, and one that was superior to the Attlee government's centralizing approach. The history provided was not excessively partisan, in that it gave some credit to liberal and socialist reforms as well as conservative ones, but it was still importantly revisionist. The history given consisted of four main stages.

- 10 Firstly, One Nation conservatives highlighted the fight for a more humane treatment of the poor against the doctrines of *laissez-faire* in the nineteenth century. Predictably, although it conceded that such campaigners had espoused a wide variety of political affiliations, including socialism in the case of Robert Owen and William Morris, "One Nation" (as we have seen already) gave Disraeli and his 1874-80 government particular credit in combatting poverty.³⁵ Secondly, "One Nation" emphasised the importance of the progressive push towards New Liberal social legislation in the Edwardian era, but highlighted the role of Winston Churchill in particular, claiming there was a direct link between the 'New Liberal' period, and the decision to commission the Beveridge report.³⁶ Thirdly, although "One Nation" stressed the importance of three major eras of social reform in particular – namely the Disraeli government, the New Liberal era, and the period after the Beveridge report – it also sought to defend the governments of the Conservative-dominated interwar period from the charge of being totally uninterested in welfare. In particular, it pointed to the "steady progress" of extending Unemployment Insurance and National Health Insurance, of passing the 1925 Widows and Orphans and Old Age Pensions Act, and of introducing State building subsidies to encourage the building of new houses.³⁷ Finally, "One Nation" conservatives strove to emphasize the importance of the Churchill coalition's role in initiating welfare reforms before the advent of the Attlee government, stressing the importance of appointing William Beveridge to enquire into social services, and particularly of the Butler Education Act (1944).³⁸ Indeed, it became a common argument for "One Nation" conservatives to contrast the successful nature of the Butler Act, which built organically on earlier pre-war education reforms, with the bureaucratic, centralized nature of the NHS than Aneurin Bevan brought into being under the Attlee government – the former was presented as incremental, a respecter of existing (local) institutions; the latter as unfortunately radical, elitist, and ideological. In short, therefore, an important component of "One Nation" conservatism was its insistence on the crucial contribution of moderate conservative reform to the gradual achievement of the welfare state – while not denying the input provided by Liberal and Labour politicians, provided they were not obsessed with centralization and planning.
- 11 If the third key aspect of One Nation conservatism was its distinctive historical interpretation of the advent of the welfare state, the fourth and final one to remember is that it was the creation of a particular historical context. As such, although it clearly addressed concerns that remained important in the later twentieth century, some of its arguments were formulated to solve problems that were specific to the 1940s and 1950s – or even reached further back into the British conservative tradition. There were essentially five of these. Firstly, "One Nation" talked fairly extensively about the need for a "population" policy, based on worries about a falling population (or at least an ageing one) in the late 1940s. If this worry was at the time understandable – or even ultimately prescient, given the later demographic distribution of the British population in the 1980s and 1990s – then at the time it soon looked outdated, given the baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s.³⁹ Moreover, this concern for maintaining the size of the British

population was combined with a desire to maintain the number of migrants leaving for the Commonwealth – a desire which recalled Edwardian aspirations to ensure closer links with British colonies.⁴⁰ “One Nation” even resurrected eugenic concerns about the problems associated with “unsuitable but fertile marriages”, even if it stressed that the best way of addressing such concerns was by improving housing and education, eschewing more illiberal solutions as “intolerably authoritarian”.⁴¹ Secondly, the context of the immediate post-war period clearly played an important role in the considerable emphasis that “One Nation” placed on housing – and particularly on building new houses, relaxing rent controls, and permitting private companies more of a role in the sector.⁴² Likewise, thirdly, when it came to education, considerable emphasis was put on the importance of building new schools and providing new school places – while recognizing that resources were so scarce that the school starting age might have to be raised.⁴³ Fourthly, “One Nation”, talked unembarrassedly about Britain being a “Christian community” and strongly defended the importance of religious instruction (guaranteed by the 1944 Butler Act) within state schools, and the continuing existence of voluntary schools run by religious denominations outside the state system.⁴⁴ Fifthly, “One Nation” referred romantically to the importance of land as an asset, arguing in frankly Burkean terms that if the possession of any wealth implied some obligation to use this for the good of the community, land had a particular and special value. Literally “the basis of all human activities”, “One Nation” conservatives claimed, land was least liable to devaluation by economic and political change – so that its possessors were the most reliable dischargers of their social obligations.⁴⁵ Whilst “One Nation” conservatism can certainly be analysed as a tradition, and a guide to future policy, therefore, it is also important to remember that it was formulated in a particular historical context, and had aspects which were as much backward-looking as forward-looking.

From “One Nation” to Ian Gilmour: Changing Historical Contexts

- 12 It seems plausible to suggest, therefore, that One Nation conservatism is complex, and has four distinct features. To what extent does Ian Gilmour’s thought conform to its dictates? Before answering this, it is important to stress that the context in which Gilmour was writing was significantly different from that of the original “One Nation” and “Change is Our Ally” pamphlets that defined “One Nation” conservatism. Gilmour’s most important writings date broadly from the 1970s and 1980s, from *The Body Politic* (1969) through *Inside Right* (1977), *Britain Can Work* (1982), and *Dancing with Dogma: Britain under Thatcherism* (1992), to *Whatever Happened to the Tories?* (1998). As such, although they addressed some similar themes to the original “One Nation” publications, they were written in a different intellectual environment, which had been shaped by important social, economic, and political changes. Five of these changes in particular were significant.
- 13 First, in contrast to the austerity of the late 1940s, when there were widespread concerns about a declining birth rate, and continued rationing due to post-war shortages, the economic “golden age” which followed it between 1951-73 represented a marked contrast, with a rapidly rising number of births, a historically high rate of economic growth, and a sustained increase in the use of consumer goods. Just to give

some statistics, the British population grew from 48.9 million to 54 million between the 1951 and 1971 censuses; the average rate of growth was around 3%; and the number of refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines and televisions all rapidly increased in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁶ Second, the nature of the welfare state, and the potential strains upon it, significantly altered between the 1940s and 1970s. Part of the reason for this was an ageing population (which “One Nation” had in fact to some extent predicted), with life expectancy for men rising from 66.5 years to 70 years between 1930 and 1977, and the number of people living alone also significantly rising.⁴⁷ But it was also due to the positive decision by both Conservative and Labour governments to increase welfare benefits between 1960 and 1975, the availability of (sometimes expensive) new health treatments on the NHS, and the abandonment of some of Beveridge’s rather austere assumptions about the nature and limits of welfare.⁴⁸ Third, the abrupt end to the economic “golden age” in 1973, associated with the massive rise in oil prices in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war had fundamental consequences for both economic policy and economic theory. Most immediately, the inflationary pressures caused by the oil price rises, and the much lower rate of economic growth in the 1970s, raised acute questions about which groups the welfare state should prioritize⁴⁹ – while trade unions sought to maintain the real value of their wages, often with increasing militancy.⁵⁰ And the attempts by the British government in the 1970s to intervene to control the situation by operating policies to control prices and incomes, often unsuccessfully, led to accusations of government “overload” – in other words that the government was trying to intervene too heavily in social and economic affairs, and by doing this ineffectively was undermining its own authority.⁵¹ Perhaps even more fundamentally, the new phenomenon of stagflation, the simultaneous rising of inflation and unemployment, undermined Keynesian assumptions that there was necessarily a trade-off between the two phenomena.⁵²

- 14 Fourth, in turn, these new economic challenges stimulated new ideological rethinking in the political sphere, particularly on the Right, where politicians like Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher argued there should be greater emphasis on individual freedom – not only to motivate greater entrepreneurship and wealth creation, but also encourage greater personal responsibility. Given their assumptions, the powers of trade unions and the size of the welfare state – both of which they claimed disincentivized individual effort – came under considerable increased scrutiny.⁵³
- 15 Finally, new constitutional challenges, absent at the time of the original “One Nation” pamphlet, came to the fore in the 1970s. These were partly the direct result of the end of the economic “golden age” and of gradual deindustrialization – so that, for example, class voting was less automatic than in the 1950s, which helped to diminish both major political parties’ share of the vote. But there were also new constitutional challenges less directly caused by economic changes – in particular the rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, the outbreak of the “troubles” in Northern Ireland from the later 1960s, and the eventual accession of Britain into the EEC in 1973, after two previous unsuccessful bids.⁵⁴ All of these raised important new and difficult questions about the relationship of citizen to state.
- 16 The social and political context which Ian Gilmour was addressing in the 1970s and 1980s, therefore, was in some ways a very different one from the early 1950s. Furthermore, interpreting what constituted genuine “One Nation” conservatism in the latter period was complicated by the fact that after producing “One Nation” and

“Change is Our Ally”, the group rarely produced explicit policy statements, let alone fully fledged programmes.⁵⁵ And indeed, it should also be pointed out that a “tradition” of any interest and complexity rarely points solely in one direction, but consists of a complex and multi-stranded set of presuppositions and arguments, which may be legitimately interpreted in a number of different ways.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is still arguably possible to make some judgments about the degree to which Gilmour’s arguments remain consonant with the nature of “One Nation” conservatism. In particular, we will look at three areas to do so – namely Gilmour’s approach to Conservative history and tradition, to economic policy, and to social policy.

Ian Gilmour’s Reinterpretation of “One Nation”

- 17 First, then, if we examine Gilmour’s approach to Conservative history and tradition, essentially what we find is a reiteration of the “One Nation” argument, but significantly amplified and developed. Echoing the original account given by “One Nation”, Gilmour argued that Disraeli’s 1874-80 government was the most important for passing significant social legislation in the nineteenth century,⁵⁷ and that by opposing doctrinaire *laissez-faire*, he helped the Conservatives to become a genuinely national party, uniting rich and poor.⁵⁸ He also, like “One Nation”, stressed the progressive nature of interwar social legislation, highlighting in particular the contributions of Neville Chamberlain as Minister of Health in the 1920s, citing his mass subsidization of housing, and passing of the Widows, Orphans and Old-Age Pensions Act, and the Rating and Valuation Act.⁵⁹ Equally, too, Gilmour echoed “One Nation” in emphasizing the 1940-45 coalition’s key role in setting post-war political norms, stressing Churchill’s continuing interest in social legislation from the earlier part of his career to the 1940s.⁶⁰ He was also a definite supporter of Britain’s continued participation in the EEC – with the important caveat that it must be a body that sought to care for the poor, rather than one that sought to maximize growth (and minimize inflation) at all costs.⁶¹
- 18 Thus far, Gilmour’s approach to history and tradition closely resembled that of “One Nation”, but there were also three important differences, or at least adaptations, of the ideology. In the first place, Gilmour provided a much more detailed history of British conservatism, which stressed that the Conservative Party had been most successful when it had been a moderate party, eschewing ideology, and governing flexibly for the benefit of all. Dividing the Party’s history before 1945 into three eras, 1794-1827, 1827-74, and 1874-1945, Gilmour argued that it was only when the Conservative Party sought to adhere to inflexible right-wing policies that it was unsuccessful.⁶² This was above all in the second period, 1827-74, when the party indulged itself in favouring sectional interests – particularly those of agricultural landowners and the Anglican Church – but also in the Edwardian period, when the Conservative Party under Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour seemed mainly intent on resisting social reform and favouring the rich.⁶³ The result was the disastrous defeat of 1906. Conversely, Conservative leaders had been successful when they favoured the national interest, whether this was George Canning celebrated the British victory in the Napoleonic Wars, or Stanley Baldwin seeking to accommodate the interests of labour (within limits) in the interwar period.⁶⁴ Perhaps predictably, this was linked in Gilmour’s account to an encomium to Disraeli’s ability to judge correctly what the most important national issues of the day were – particularly social reform and increasing

the franchise, in his case.⁶⁵ But, more interestingly, Gilmour linked this ability to Disraeli's foresight in being able to anticipate necessary changes, contrasting this approach with the more reactive approach to change associated with Sir Robert Peel. For if Peel deserved praise for accepting the necessity of Catholic emancipation, factory legislation, and repeal of the Corn Laws, nevertheless his approach to change was essentially reactive, leaving matters to the last moment. Whilst it was not always possible for Conservatives to anticipate necessary changes in advance, Gilmour conceded, where it was possible, the anticipatory, "Disraelian" approach should always be favoured.⁶⁶

- 19 In the second place, Gilmour went further than this developing his arguments about the nature of change into a fully-fledged statement of conservative philosophy. For rather than being content with the rather sketchy description of conservatism put forward by "One Nation", Gilmour argued that this cautious and pragmatic embrace of change actually represented the very essence of conservative thought, or at least of British conservatism. Thus, drawing on a variety of past conservative luminaries to justify his position – including the Marquis of Halifax, Lord Bolingbroke, David Hume, Edmund Burke, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Hugh Cecil, Michael Oakeshott, and Lord Hailsham – Gilmour argued that while real conservatism should certainly be wary of resisting all change whatsoever, it should also be deeply wary of advocating political positions based solely upon dogmatic adherence to inflexible principles. Rather, Gilmour maintained, conservatism should be identified by its commitment to careful, evolutionary change – and as such compared a genuinely conservative attitude to politics with that of an architectural conservationist who may regret the destruction of historic buildings, but nevertheless admits that a certain amount of updating and alteration is necessary.⁶⁷ Because of this Gilmour took particular issue with prominent thinkers and politicians whom he felt were in danger of seducing the Conservative Party away from such a moderate course, with the temptation of a more explicit, consciously formed, ideology. At various times in his writings, therefore, he took aim at F. A. Hayek, Enoch Powell, and Margaret Thatcher. The latter we will consider to an extent in a moment when addressing Gilmour's approach to economics and social policy, but addressing precisely why he criticized Powell and Hayek is also illuminating. For the fundamental point Gilmour sought to make about Powell was not so much that he changed his mind so often about political issues – such as whether to join the developing EEC or not – but rather that this exposed the weakness of trying to remain loyal to inflexible principles, since these inevitably proved inadequate when faced with changing circumstances.⁶⁸ While he respected Hayek's commitment to lowering taxation and upholding the rule of law, Gilmour argued against Hayek's conviction that these recommendations – to be properly grounded – had to proceed from "general principles which are always the same".⁶⁹ Far better, Gilmour argued, to admit that correct political decisions are based upon flexibility, and an intelligent borrowing from tradition, since this actually represented a much surer and realistic footing on which to base one's arguments. In both cases, in other words, Gilmour argued, the thinkers in question felt that establishing abstract universal principles was a necessity, when it was in fact a weakness – since it prevented sensitive, pragmatic adaptation.
- 20 Thirdly, if Gilmour sought to develop the "One Nation" approach to history and tradition, by celebrating conservative contributions to social reform, and advocating a cautious approach to change, he was also far from complacent about the British

constitution and British institutions, subjecting them to a far more critical examination than “One Nation” conservatives had previously done. Even in *The Body Politic*, written in the late 1960s, Gilmour criticized the secrecy of the British state, and advocated fixed-term parliaments, but his criticisms became far more developed and thoroughgoing in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, in *Inside Right*, Gilmour, addressing the problem of government “overload”, criticized the 1974-79 Labour government for its inability to restrain the trade unions – while it attempted to micromanage far too many other areas of British society. As he picturesquely put it:

at present ... [the government] is regarded as a bull who is afraid to take on other bulls, the big unions, but feels itself entitled to blunder about uncontrolled in the china shop which is the rest of the country.⁷⁰

- 21 This constitutional crisis, Gilmour claimed, was compounded by the willingness of Harold Wilson’s Labour Party to flirt with extra-parliamentary action, undermining settled political and parliamentary norms, both in opposition and in government, by the failure of increasingly Left-wing trade unions themselves to respect the rule of law, and by the diminishing share of the vote gained by the major political parties (compared to the 1950s). The “mandate” theory of government had always been somewhat fictional, Gilmour conceded, but the legitimacy of the state was clearly diminished when the governing party had received only 39% of the vote.⁷¹ And matters, Gilmour argued in *Dancing with Dogma*, did not improve in the 1980s. For if Margaret Thatcher’s governments successfully subdued overmighty trade unions, they also made much worse the key problem of government centralization. Already an established tendency in the 1960s and 1970s, the Thatcher government intensified such centralization by cowing the judiciary, attacking the independence of the BBC and encouraging a sycophantic print media, and above all by mounting an assault on the established powers of local government.⁷² Ostensibly due to a desire to reduce local government spending, the removal of local councils’ power to set their own rate level, and eventual attempt to remove the whole system of rates altogether, was largely undertaken by the Thatcher governments to eliminate potential opposition to its policies, Gilmour claimed.⁷³ The ultimate result he argued, was a system of government that was increasingly stratified, unaccountable, and unwilling to listen to sections of the population, and parts of the United Kingdom, that were allergic to Thatcherism.
- 22 In response to these problems, Gilmour proposed four potential solutions to make government more responsive, and combat centralization, though he did not advocate them with equal degrees of enthusiasm. In the first place, although Gilmour accepted there were limits to the degree to which the House of Lords ought to be able to impede legislation – since otherwise disputes with the House of Commons might become intractable – he nevertheless thought its role should be strengthened. Specifically, he argued for a hybrid house which contained members elected every six years like American Senators, together with members of the European Parliament and some hereditary and life peers for continuity, and argued that the ability of the House of Lords to delay legislation for two years should be restored.⁷⁴ In the second place, Gilmour sought to build on what he saw as the success of the 1975 EEC referendum, by advocating its further usage in constitutional questions, though he conceded that this could not by itself repair the British political system and could present potential dangers to minorities – even if these were probably no more than an unscrupulous government might pose.⁷⁵

- 23 Thirdly, Gilmour consistently supported devolution, particularly to Scotland, on the basis that the rise in Scottish nationalist voting represented a protest against over-centralization, and the failure of the two-party system in Westminster. Despite conceding that this would lead to anomalies – such as a lack of uniformity in the way that other parts of the United Kingdom were governed, and the potential for Scottish MPs to have more of a say over English affairs than the reverse – Gilmour felt these need not be insuperable difficulties.⁷⁶ Indeed, in harmony with his general philosophy, he contended it was the hallmark of conservatism that it was prepared to make sensible pragmatic compromises against those insisting on “neater” (but less practical) solutions, such as a full federal constitution or a written bill of rights.⁷⁷ Finally, Gilmour was a moderate supporter of reforming the voting system, but this did not play as prominent (or consistent) a role in his thought as reforming the House of Lords or devolution. It is true that in his lecture “Tories, Social Democracy, and the Centre”, delivered in 1982, in the heady early days of the SDP, Gilmour almost casually declared he was in favour of electoral reform.⁷⁸ But in *Inside Right*, he had been sceptical of full-scale proportional representation, instead cautiously supporting the German system of voting, because it “happily combines first-past-the-post elections in single-member constituencies with an element of proportionality”.⁷⁹ It is notable that even this relatively moderate reform is one he does not repeat in *Dancing with Dogma*, despite his strong indictment of the Thatcher governments’ tendency to centralization, and disdain for opposing opinion. Compared to some of his other proposed reforms, in other words, he gave reform of the electoral system only lukewarm support.
- 24 Second, if we turn to examining Gilmour’s approach to the economy, again we find that he reiterated some of arguments put forward by “One Nation”, but also developed and even to some extent departed from them. Thus, like the original advocates of “One Nation”, Gilmour disclaimed the applicability of unchained market forces to modern economies, arguing that genuine conservatives should not rely on the dictates of “political economy” or *laissez-faire* – since such forms of argument were signs of liberalism and rationalism.⁸⁰ On that basis, he consistently supported Keynesian arguments, contending that markets were not self-sustaining systems, that governments periodically had to intervene to manage demand when it became too sluggish, and that failure to do so had highly unfortunate social consequences (such as unemployment).⁸¹ As such, Gilmour was particularly critical of two facets of Thatcherism in the 1980s, namely monetarism, and the equation of government spending with that of a household budget. Monetarism was suspect since it posited a number of dubious and simplistic propositions, i.e. that the quantity of money in the economy could be defined, that the demand for money was more or less stable, that its supply could be effectively controlled by government, and that there was a direct and predictable relationship between reducing the money supply and controlling inflation.⁸² As Gilmour mordantly pointed out, the Thatcher government itself helped to undermine the likelihood of effectively controlling the money supply by removing credit controls,⁸³ and quietly dropped publicizing monetary targets as it became clear they were impossible to hit later in the 1980s.⁸⁴ The idea that a government’s budget could be equated with that of a household, Gilmour argued, was ludicrous since governments rarely know what their total income is with precision, and affects its very income when it spends less – since by spending less it indirectly causes its income to fall.⁸⁵ In short the problem linking both contentions was their common reliance on simplistic, rationalistic assumptions, as far as Gilmour was concerned, whereas in the

real world conservatives had to balance such arguments against more pragmatic considerations.

- 25 Thus far, it is plausible to claim that Gilmour's approach to the economy was reasonably in tune with the original thrust of "One Nation". But there were also three reasons why his approach significantly differed. In the first instance, the sheer *extent* to which Gilmour sought to uphold Keynesianism in the 1970s and 1980s when its recommendations were considerably less convincing than in the immediate post-war period, looks, at the very least, like a very particular interpretation of "One Nation" conservatism. Thus, despite the fact that traditional Keynesian remedies to reflate the economy seemed to lack efficacy in the 1970s, Gilmour continued to insist, even with hindsight, that they were not so much ineffective as applied incorrectly. Furthermore, although the post-war economic "golden age" had been given a fatal blow after 1973, with Britain's international competitors all struggling to match earlier growth rates, Gilmour resolutely argued in the 1980s that only an economic recovery that matched that of the 1950s and 1960s counted as a "real" one – faulting the Thatcher government for failing to achieve this.⁸⁶ In the second place, following on this, rather than arguing for the superiority of Conservative governments in the post-war period, Gilmour increasingly defended the policies of post-war governments in general, arguing that there had been a "consensus" between the two major parties in favour of managed capitalism, a mixed economy, and the welfare state.⁸⁷ Whatever the historical accuracy of such an account, such a position seems to represent a departure from the original "One Nation" approach, with its emphasis on a distinctively Conservative approach to economic problems, and the development of the welfare state. Lastly, by claiming that Thatcherism in general was not really genuine conservatism, but a form of nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* liberalism, Gilmour was arguably departing from the original position of "One Nation". For while it is certainly true that the priority that Thatcherite ideology gave to upholding free market principles, and reducing state intervention ruled out describing it as "One Nation" conservatism, Gilmour's claim that it was not conservative *at all*, was highly dubious. In particular it ignored the strong Thatcherite commitments to strong conservative norms – such as the "naturalness" of the family, and the importance of patriotism – and the inclination of some original "One Nation" conservatives to be critical of corporatism.⁸⁸ The degree of polarization that Gilmour sought to erect between "One Nation" conservatism and "Thatcherism", in other words, was not consistent with the more accepting and fluid economic positions of the original ideology.
- 26 Finally, if we turn to examining Gilmour's approach to social policy, again we see that some of his arguments closely resembled those of "One Nation", or at least can be reasonably interpreted as a development of them, while others marked more of a departure. Thus, in common with the original authors of "One Nation", Gilmour placed great weight on the evils of unemployment, arguing that it led not only to economic hardship but also loss of dignity and self-esteem amongst the jobless, strongly condemning the Thatcher government for allowing the number of unemployed people to rise so significantly in the 1980s.⁸⁹ Equally, in line with "One Nation" ideology, Gilmour was contemptuous of those Thatcherites who sought to blame the poor for their own woes, flatly dismissing the idea that their problems stemmed from being dependent on state welfare, and contemptuously rejecting the distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor as being "discredited nearly a hundred years ago".⁹⁰ He also staunchly reiterated the importance of ensuring that all citizens had a home

to live in, lamenting the reappearance of homelessness after forty years, and reemphasized how crucial it was to fund schools properly for all citizens to fulfil their potential. As Gilmour bitingly put it, having noted that 44% of schools had a leak in at least one roof by the end of the 1980s, and that the proportion of GDP spent on education had decreased from 5.3% in 1980-1 to 4.9% in 1988-89, “many school buildings ... if not their values, were ‘Victorian’”.⁹¹ Conversely, while he certainly did not approve of the unemployment that was partially responsible for their weakening, and believed that there was nothing wrong with trade unions that behaved responsibly, Gilmour’s disapproval of trade union militancy since the 1970s was also arguably entirely in tune with the original aims of “One Nation”. (The original pamphlet, after all, had stressed the opposition of “One Nation” to the “closed shop”, and stressed that “we do not believe that Trade Unions which make party politics their main purpose can ever be truly independent”).⁹²

- 27 Thus far Gilmour’s position on social policy appears highly consistent with the initial aims of “One Nation”. However, on closer examination, it is clear that he also significantly departed from some of their tenets, and in four ways in particular. Firstly, in contrast with the original pamphleteers, who had stressed the relative paucity of funds to spend on the welfare state, and hence the necessity of means testing, Gilmour was much more positive about universal benefits. A key example for him was child benefit, which he lauded as being easily comprehensible, administratively cost-effective to run, and which had a virtually universal rate of take-up – not least because its very universality prevented its recipients from feeling stigmatized.⁹³ Secondly, in contrast to the original advocates of “One Nation”, who tended to be highly sceptical of any centralized state structures, and particularly of the structure that Aneurin Bevan had established for the NHS, Gilmour was far more open to defending these, and particularly supported the continuing value of the health service. As such, he criticized Margaret Thatcher’s introduction of the internal market into the NHS, arguing that this rested on the questionable assumptions that the price mechanism was an effective means of allocating resources in healthcare, and that cost and patient ‘throughput’ indicators are effective measure of healthcare performance.⁹⁴ While Gilmour did concede that there were clear inefficiencies within the service, which the internal market might conceivably improve, he was emphatic that the most pressing problem facing the NHS was not its historic structure but lack of money – “persistent underinvestment”.⁹⁵ Thirdly, following on from this, Gilmour was much more forthright about the limits of using the free market in providing public services than the original advocates of “One Nation”. Consequently in his trenchant critique of Thatcherite approaches to social policy, Gilmour argued strongly that health and education could not be regarded as consumer products, where customer preferences could easily be maximized – since health and education are not simple commodities, but rather complex services involving a variety of human relationships, and where inevitably some kind of authority (whether local or central) has to decide where schools and hospitals are built.⁹⁶ Moreover he was much more explicit than the original “One Nation” protagonists that there a genuine “public good” that should be respected, apart from sum of consumer preferences – raging against the Thatcherite government of the 1980s that “the community and society do exist, and they are not the mere aggregation of individual wishes”.⁹⁷ Finally, seeking to simplify the welfare state system comprehensively, and transcend debates about which benefits ought to be paid for by national insurance and which by general taxation, Gilmour also explicitly backed

proposals for a universal basic income – which would be non-contributory, non-withdrawable, fully automated and tax free.⁹⁸ This would, he argued, greatly reduce the number of benefits necessary, and also drastically reduce the complexity and expense of means-testing. Whether such a system would have been approved or disapproved of by the original “One Nation” group is open to argument; but certainly it went far beyond anything that they themselves considered.

Conclusion

- 28 In summary, then, what does this tell us about “One Nation” conservatism, and Sir Ian Gilmour’s relationship to it? Essentially, we may draw three conclusions. First, neither defining “One Nation” conservatism narrowly by locating its origins in the thought of Benjamin Disraeli, nor, conversely, as a much broader ideology that can encompass Thatcherism as well as corporatism is satisfactory. Instead, it is important to return to the original texts of “One Nation” and “Change is Our Ally” to understand it. Second, doing so reveals that “One Nation” conservatism is a complex intellectual position, which has four aspects. These consist, firstly, of an acceptance and celebration of the advent of the welfare state, co-existing, secondly, with a caution about centralized planning and the amount of money that can be spent on welfare spending. Thirdly, “One Nation” conservatism puts forward a distinctive historical account of the development of the welfare state, accepting the importance of non-conservative politicians and intellectuals, but stressing the vital contribution of figures such as Winston Churchill and R. A. Butler. Fourthly it is important to remember that “One Nation” conservatism was the product of a particular mid-century set of concerns, that were backward-looking as well as forward-looking – including worries about a declining population, lack of emigrants to the British empire, and how to ensure that Christianity was supported.
- 29 To finish, while it is important to acknowledge that some of the challenges that “One Nation” conservatism (and indeed conservatism in general) faced in the 1970s and 1980s were importantly different from those of the 1950s, it is nevertheless possible to make some judgments about how closely Ian Gilmour adhered to the original ideology of “One Nation”. In some areas he remained true to it; in some areas he developed it; in some areas he contradicted it. So, if we consider Gilmour’s approach to history and tradition, he adhered to the “One Nation” account insofar as he agreed with its stress on the importance of conservative contributions to the welfare state. But he developed that account into a much more detailed account of the history of conservatism, which stressed its pragmatic, non-ideological nature, and the desirability of ‘anticipatory’ change. He also went beyond “One Nation” instincts altogether in consistently advocating institutional reforms to check government centralization, even before the advent of a Conservative government with authoritarian instincts in the 1980s. Equally, if we examine Gilmour’s arguments about the economy, to some degree he clearly remained true to “One Nation” tenets, in advocating Keynesianism over centralized planning and *laissez-faire*, and in rejecting monetarism. But the degree to which he continued to defend unabashed Keynesianism in the 1970s and 1980s, and his increasing tendency to defend the entirety of the post-war “consensus” arguably meant he went further than the original “One Nation” advocates would have been comfortable going. In the end, if we look at Gilmour’s approach to social policy, the picture is the

same. Clearly his stress on the importance of avoiding unemployment, his horror at the phenomenon of homelessness, and his desire for social harmony were all positions that the original authors of “One Nation” would have recognized. Yet his defence of universal welfare benefits, strong support for a centralized NHS, and advocacy of a universal basic income look much more of a departure. A powerful and imaginative thinker, then, Gilmour sought to update and reinterpret “One Nation” conservatism, and in doing so holds up a searching mirror to the original ideology.

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NOTES

1. For this kind of classic statement of One Nation conservatism, which approvingly quotes Ian Gilmour, see Damian Green, ‘One Nation’, in Kevin Hickson (ed.), *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 214-18.
2. Ed Miliband, ‘Speech to the Fabian Society - One Nation Labour: The Party of Change’, 12th January 2013, found at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140401081242/http://www.labour.org.uk/ed-miliband-speech-fabian-one-nation-labour-change> consulted 15 December 2022; Nick Timothy, *Remaking One Nation: The Future of Conservatism* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2020).
3. Just to give one example, Gilmour opposed the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which withdrew the right of Kenyan Asians to enter Britain as the appeasement of racial hysteria. This was very much a minority position within the Conservative Party at the time. See Randall Hansen, ‘The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968’, *Historical Journal* 42, 3 (1999), p. 810, n. 2, and Mark Lattimer, ‘When Labour Played the Racist Card’, *The New Statesman*, 22nd January 1999, found at <https://www.newstatesman.com/long-reads/1999/01/when-labour-played-racist-card> consulted on 15 December 2022, where Ian Gilmour’s recollection is that ‘the bill was brought in - to keep the blacks out. If it had been the case that it was 5,000 white settlers who were coming in, the newspapers and politicians who were making all the fuss would have been quite pleased’.
4. Ian Gilmour, *The Body Politic* (London, Hutchinson, 1969).
5. Ian Gilmour and Mark Garnett, *Whatever Happened to the Tories? The Conservatives since 1945* (London, Fourth Estate, 1998), p. 228.
6. See, for example, Ian Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma: Britain under Thatcherism* (London, Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 26-27.

7. David Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics* (New York, Continuum Press, 2010), pp. 78-80.
8. See Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers: The Key Contributors to the Political Thought of the Modern Conservative Party* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 135-7. It should be stressed, however, that these authors ultimately conclude that Gilmour should be labelled a conservative, despite his closeness to certain aspects of the liberal tradition, and indeed one who has a better claim to that title than his Thatcherite opponents.
9. To quote 'One Nation' itself: 'No one saw more clearly than Disraeli the social duty that lay on statesmen ... In 1874-80 the first great legislative programme of social reform ... went through Parliament. The Public Health Act, the Artisans' Dwellings Act, the Conspiracy Act which established the right of Trade Unions to strike, the Acts regulating the sale of food and drugs ... caused a Liberal-Labour Member of Parliament in 1870 to exclaim, 'Conservatives have done more for the working classes in five years than the Liberals have in fifty'. See Iain Macleod and Angus Maude (eds.), *One Nation: A Tory Approach to Social Problems* (London, Conservative Political Centre, 1950), p. 13.
10. Alan Clark, *The Tories: Conservatives and the Nation State, 1922-1997* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), pp. 240, 353.
11. Michael Foot, 'The Good Tory', in *Debts of Honour* (London, Davis Poynter, 1980), p. 57.
12. The 15th Earl of Derby, Disraeli's first Foreign Secretary, commented that he 'detests the class of business which he is apt to call parochial', and it is clear that Disraeli categorised social questions unfavourably with great historic problems and even with those of party-political squabble. See J. P. Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *Historical Journal*, 43, 3 (2000), p. 724, and p. 723, n. 137, and Peter Ghosh, 'Style and Substance in Disraelian Social Reform, c. 1860-1880', in P. J. Waller (ed.), *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain: Essays Presented to A. F. Thompson* (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1987), pp. 59-90.
13. Ian Machin, *Disraeli* (London, Longman, 1995), pp. 132-34.
14. Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 237-41; 233.
15. Stephen Evans, 'The Not So Odd Couple: Margaret Thatcher and One Nation Conservatism', *Contemporary British History*, 23, 1 (2009), pp. 110-11.
16. Evans, 'The Not So Odd Couple', pp. 112-13.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15. For a much cruder attempt to yoke 'One Nation' conservatism to Thatcherism, essentially by ignoring the more interventionist and corporatist aspects of the ideology, see David Willetts, *Modern Conservatism* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1992), pp. 36-38.
18. See Evans, 'The Not So Odd Couple', p. 105: 'Thatcher's commitment to One Nation Conservatism was not the product of sincere conviction. It was (and remained) an instrumental attachment pure and simple'.
19. See Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*; Enoch Powell and Angus Maude (eds.), *Change is Our Ally: A Tory Approach to Industrial Problems* (London, Conservative Political Centre, 1954).
20. For this, see Kit Kowol, 'The Conservative Movement and Dreams of Britain's Post-War Future', *Historical Journal*, 62, 2 (2019) p. 486.
21. Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, pp. 14-16.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
24. Powell and Maude (eds.), *Change is Our Ally*, pp. 96-97.
25. The 'One Nation' pamphlet specifically declared that 'the maintenance of full employment is a first responsibility of Government' - see Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, p. 73.
26. Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, p. 74.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

28. 'Change is Our Ally' explicitly sought to distinguish Keynesian arguments from the concept of 'planning' - see Powell and Maude (eds.), *Change is Our Ally*, p. 26.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
30. Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, p. 24.
31. As Iain Macleod memorably declared to the man who would become Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1951, R. A. Butler, 'we haven't enough manure to do more than dribble it around the farm: so then we must tend those fields which will show us a fine yield'. Quoted in Robert Walsha, 'The One Nation Group: A Tory Approach to Backbench Politics and Organization, 1950-55', *Twentieth Century British History*, 11, 2 (2000), p. 194.
32. Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, p. 18.
33. For just one example, see John Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill and Eden, 1940-1957* (London, Longman, 1995), p. 221.
34. For an insistence that a conception of history almost necessarily forms part of any fully fledged ideology, see Edmund Neill, 'Political Ideologies', in Chiel van den Akker (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Historical Theory* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2022), pp. 397-413. Despite a certain amount of work on the role of history and tradition in providing justifications for different ideological positions within the British conservative tradition - see for example Reba Soffer, *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America: The Great War to Thatcher and Reagan* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009) - there is still ample scope for more exploration of the role contested views of British history played in the construction of British conservatism(s).
35. Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, pp. 12-13.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 15--16.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 16; pp. 39-41.
39. See *Ibid.*, pp. 21-6, especially at pp. 24-5.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23. For a way into the Edwardian debates about imperial emigration, see Andrew S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880-1932* (London, Longman, 2000), chapter 6.
41. Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, pp. 23--24.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-38.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 46. There was also, interestingly, criticism of current education policy for favouring the 'pleasant frills' over traditional methods of learning. 'If education is more than the storing of knowledge, it is also more than the practice of hobbies', 'One Nation' declared severely.
44. Macleod and Maude (eds.), *One Nation*, pp. 47, 23.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 19. On the special status of land in Burke's thought, see J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 198-99; 204-205.
46. Michael Kitson, 'Failure Followed by Success, or Success Followed by Failure? A Re-examination of British Economic Growth since 1949', in Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain Volume III: Structural Change and Growth, 1939-2000* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 31, Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999), p. 74.
47. Lowe, *Welfare State*, pp. 74, 76.
48. Paul Johnson, 'The Welfare State, Income and Living Standards', in Floud and Johnson (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History*, pp. 222-24.
49. The lack of clarity concerning the concept of social justice underpinning the post-war welfare state - and hence its intellectual vulnerability once the post-war economic boom was over - is well brought out in Jose Harris, "Contract' and 'Citizenship'", in David Marquand and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *The Ideas that Shaped Post-War Britain* (London, Fontana, 1996), pp. 122-38.

50. One famous critique (from the Left) of the behaviour of trade unions in competing against one another - rather than shoring up genuine working-class solidarity was: Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted', *Marxism Today*, 22, 9 (September, 1978), pp. 279-86.
51. Another major reason for the erosion of government authority was the need to seek a loan from the IMF in 1976. Although the Callaghan government recovered from this debacle somewhat, before collapsing due to a wave of strikes in 1978-79 - usually known as 'the Winter of Discontent' - the episode clearly undermined government authority.
52. Economists inspired by Keynes had often argued that a rise in unemployment was the result of a lack of demand, which the government could often rectify by spending more money - so that the art of macroeconomic policy was to spend enough to stimulate demand, without spending too much to fuel runaway inflation. See Kitson, 'Failure Followed by Success?', pp. 48-9. In the earlier post-war period, confidence in the inverse relationship between inflation and unemployment was so strong that many economists thought it could be plotted on a graph as the 'Phillips curve'; the contradiction of this in the 1970s in practice was a real shock - see Angus Maddison, *Monitoring the World Economy, 1820-1992* (Paris, OECD, 1995), p. 84.
53. For a good account of how the Thatcherite position developed in the 1970s, see Robert Saunders, 'Crisis? What Crisis?' Thatcherism and the Seventies' in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds.), *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 25-42.
54. British entry into the EEC in 1973 represented a particularly major change in the orientation of the country's foreign policy - since in the later 1940s and earlier 1950s both Labour and Conservative governments had been wary about engaging with the developing EEC, because of continuing economic links to the Commonwealth, and worries Western European democracies might not survive. For a good overview of the developing British relationship with the EEC, see Stephen George, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998). More generally, for the new constitutional challenges facing conservatives by the 1970s, see Edmund Neill, 'Conservative Thinkers and the Post-War State, 1945-79' in Lawrence Goldman (ed.), *Welfare and Social Policy in Britain since 1870: Essays in Honour of Jose Harris* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 162-77.
55. There were a few minor exceptions to this, notably 'The Responsible Society' (1959), which, in addition to re-emphasizing the importance of striking a balance between the powers of state and individual, also sought to address the social problems associated with the late 1950s, notably rising crime and juvenile delinquency by stressing the importance of self-help and moral responsibility. But its practical impact was negligible. See One Nation Group, *The Responsible Society* (London, Conservative Political Centre, 1959), pp. 5-6, p. 11; pp. 57-8. Robert Walsha, 'The One Nation Group and One Nation Conservatism, 1950-2022', *Contemporary British History*, 17, 2 (2003), pp. 87-89.
56. See, for just one exemplification of this idea the shift in Michael Oakeshott's work in using the vocabulary of 'tradition' in *Rationalism in Politics and other essays* (1962) to that of 'practices' in *On Human Conduct* (1975). See Michael Oakeshott, 'On Misunderstanding Human Conduct: A Reply to My Critics', *Political Theory* 4, 3 (1976) p. 364.
57. Ian Gilmour, *Inside Right* (London, Hutchinson, 1977), p. 31.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-86.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.
61. Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma*, pp. 164-5.
62. Gilmour, *Inside Right*, pp. 27-39.
63. See *Ibid.*, pp. 37; 31-32.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28; p. 33.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 83, 127.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-29.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

68. Gilmour, *Inside Right*, pp. 133-39, and particularly Gilmour's conclusions at pp. 139-40: 'on the evidence of Mr Powell's career, an ideological approach does not produce loyalty, consistency, Conservatism, or chivalry ... consistency will paradoxically be best preserved by the absence of ideology not by its presence'. Gilmour's argument here is strongly reminiscent of Oakeshott - see Michael Oakeshott, 'Rationalism in Politics' in Timothy Fuller (ed.), *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN, Liberty Fund, 1991), p. 41: 'unavoidably the conduct of life [for the ideological Rationalist] is a jerky, discontinuous affair, the solution of a stream of problems, the mastery of a succession of crises'.

69. Gilmour, *Inside Right*, pp. 114-15.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

72. Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma*, pp. 202-205; 207-11; 194-97; 212-20.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17; 218-19; 214.

74. Gilmour, *Inside Right*, pp. 213-14.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-18.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 218-19.

78. Ian Gilmour, 'Tories, Social Democracy, and the Centre', *Political Quarterly*, 54, 3 (1983), p. 264.

79. Gilmour, *Inside Right*, p. 224.

80. This is a constant theme throughout Gilmour's work - for just one of numerous examples, see his critique of Hayek: Gilmour, *Inside Right*, pp. 116-17.

81. See Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma*, pp. 26-28. It is important to note, however, that Gilmour rejected cruder versions of 'Keynesianism'. It was not enough simply to spend government money in the hopes of stimulating growth under all circumstances, in other words - since (for example) reflation without sufficient prior investment would simply lead to a large balance of payments deficit. See *Dancing with Dogma*, p. 61.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

85. Gilmour's justification for this was the (Keynesian) argument that by cutting spending on good and services, a government is liable to increase unemployment - which both reduces its tax take and necessitates more spending on unemployment benefit. (See Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma*, p. 23) As a side note, is notable that he does not use another common argument against the equation of government spending with a household budget - namely that governments have to spend far more on future investments (such as infrastructure projects and education) than a household budgeter does.

86. Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma*, p. 27.

87. Gilmour, 'Tories, Social Democracy, and the Centre', pp. 266-67. This argument should be partially qualified in two ways. First, Gilmour was far more inclined to be partisan in the 1970s, insisting on the superiority of the record of Conservative governments over Labour ones - and particularly over the administrations of Harold Wilson. (See Gilmour, *Inside Right*, pp. 153-54.) Second, even in 'Tories, Social Democracy, and the Centre', Gilmour insisted that the post-war consensus was at least as much the ideological child of Tories as of socialists. Nevertheless, the trend in his thought towards upholding the values of the post-war 'consensus' in general - rather than specifically the conservative contribution to it - is clear. I owe this point to Dr Dean Blackburn (Nottingham University).

88. For an insistence on the conservatism of Thatcherism on this basis, see Michael Freedon, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 385-93, and Edmund Neill

'Intellectual Reactions to Thatcherism: Conceptions of Citizenship and Civil Society from 1990-2010', in Antony Mullen, Stephen Farrall, and David Jeffery (eds.), *Thatcherism in the 21st Century: The Social and Cultural Legacy* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 36-37. The strong emphasis within Thatcherism on the importance of patriotism also distinguished it from Hayek, who, in common with many post-war intellectuals and 'Cold War liberals' was deeply suspicious of nationalistic impulses. See Andrew Gamble, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty* (Cambridge, Polity, 1996), pp. 104-105.

89. Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma*, p. 119.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

92. Macleod and Maude (eds.), 'One Nation', p. 77.

93. Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma*, p. 129.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 157; 167-70.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

ABSTRACTS

This article examines the place of Ian Gilmour (1926-2007) within the "One Nation" conservative tradition. First, it examines possible definitions of "One Nation" conservatism, rejecting claims that one can fully find its origins in the writings of career of Benjamin Disraeli, or that the ideology is so wide and amorphous that it can encompass Thatcherism as well as those more sympathetic to state aid for the poor. Rather it suggests that to capture the essence of "One Nation", one should examine the original pamphlets of the group, "One Nation" (1950) and "Change is Our Ally" (1954). This reveals that "One Nation" conservatism has four aspects: a desire to accept the welfare state (albeit with more targeting and less universality), a suspicion of central planning (albeit with tolerance of Keynesianism), an emphasis on a distinctive conservative tradition to developing the welfare state, and a set of concerns that are particular to the mid-twentieth century – including underpopulation, a need for migration to the Commonwealth, and worries about lack of resources for the welfare state at a time of austerity. Second, the article stresses that by the 1970s and 1980s, five factors concerning the economy and the welfare state had significantly changed conservative thinkers' calculations, including the advent of affluence in the 1950s and 1960s, the increasing life expectancy of the population, the end of the economic "golden age" and the undermining of Keynesianism in the 1970s, the rise of "New Right" conservatism, and new constitutional challenges associated with the EEC, Celtic nationalism, and class dealignment. Third, the article argues that one can, nevertheless, make a judgment about how closely Ian Gilmour's work fits into the "One Nation" conservative tradition, and examines three areas of his work. Firstly, looking at his views on history and the constitution, the article contends he respects the original account of historical development given in "One Nation", but develops it, providing a more detailed account of Conservative Party history to try and prove that the party has been most successful when least "ideological". This is coupled with advocacy of constitutional changes to reduce centralized power – including

increased use of referendums and reform of the House of Lords. Secondly, considering economics, Gilmour's rejection of Thatcherite monetarism and advocacy of Keynesianism arguably remained true to the "One Nation" tradition, but his increasing tendency to uphold *all* of what he saw as a post-war "consensus" and claim that Thatcherism was entirely unconservative departed from it. Finally, considering social policy, again some of Gilmour's arguments remained firmly within the "One Nation" tradition – including those lamenting unemployment, criticizing the Thatcherite distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. But others – such as his strong support for a centralized NHS, advocacy of universal benefits, and support for a universal basic income – departed from it. Overall, the article contends Gilmour was a powerful re-interpreter of the "One Nation" tradition, even if he did not always remain true to its original tenets.

Cet article examine la place de Ian Gilmour (1926-2007) dans la tradition conservatrice One Nation. Tout d'abord, il examine les définitions possibles du conservatisme One Nation, rejetant les affirmations selon lesquelles on peut trouver toutes ses origines dans les écrits de la carrière de Benjamin Disraeli, ou que l'idéologie est si large et amorphe qu'elle peut englober le Thatcherisme ainsi que ceux qui sont plus favorables à l'aide publique aux pauvres. Il suggère plutôt que pour saisir l'essence One Nation, il faut examiner les pamphlets originaux du groupe, « One Nation » (1950) et « Change is Our Ally » (1954). Il en ressort que le conservatisme One Nation comporte quatre aspects : un désir d'accepter l'État-providence (bien qu'il soit plus ciblé et moins universel), une méfiance à l'égard de la planification centrale (bien qu'il y ait une tolérance à l'égard du keynésianisme), un accent mis sur une tradition conservatrice distincte pour développer l'État-providence, et un ensemble de préoccupations propres au milieu du XX^e siècle – y compris la sous-population, un besoin de migration vers le Commonwealth, et des inquiétudes quant au manque de ressources pour l'État-providence à une époque d'austérité. Deuxièmement, l'article souligne qu'au cours des années 1970 et 1980, cinq facteurs concernant l'économie et l'État-providence avaient considérablement modifié les calculs des penseurs conservateurs, notamment l'avènement de la richesse dans les années 1950 et 1960, l'augmentation de l'espérance de vie de la population, la fin de l'« âge d'or » économique et la remise en cause du keynésianisme dans les années 1970, la montée du conservatisme de « nouvelle droite » et les nouveaux défis constitutionnels liés à la CEE, au nationalisme celtique et à la lutte des classes. Troisièmement, l'article soutient qu'il est néanmoins possible de juger dans quelle mesure l'œuvre d'Ian Gilmour s'inscrit dans la tradition conservatrice One Nation, et examine trois domaines de son œuvre. Tout d'abord, en ce qui concerne son point de vue sur l'histoire et la constitution, l'article soutient qu'il respecte le compte rendu original du développement historique donné dans le pamphlet « One Nation », mais qu'il le développe, en fournissant un compte rendu plus détaillé de l'histoire du Parti conservateur pour tenter de prouver que le parti a connu le plus de succès lorsqu'il était le moins « idéologique ». Cela s'accompagne d'un plaidoyer pour des changements constitutionnels visant à réduire le pouvoir centralisé – notamment un recours accru aux référendums et une réforme de la Chambre des Lords. Deuxièmement, en ce qui concerne l'économie, le rejet par Gilmour du monétarisme thatcherien et la défense du keynésianisme sont sans doute restés fidèles à la tradition One Nation, mais sa tendance croissante à soutenir l'ensemble de ce qu'il considère comme un « consensus » d'après-guerre et à affirmer que le thatcherisme est totalement anticonservateur s'en écarte. Enfin, en ce qui concerne la politique sociale, certains des arguments de Gilmour restent fermement ancrés dans la tradition One Nation, notamment ceux qui déplorent le chômage et critiquent la distinction thatcherienne entre les pauvres « méritants » et « non méritants ». Mais d'autres – comme son soutien ferme à un NHS centralisé, sa défense des allocations universelles et son soutien à un revenu de base universel – s'en écartent. Dans

l'ensemble, l'article soutient que Gilmour était un puissant réinterprète de la tradition One Nation, même s'il n'est pas toujours resté fidèle à ses principes originaux.

INDEX

Keywords: Gilmour, One Nation, Conservatism, Keynesian, Thatcherism, ideology

Mots-clés: Gilmour, One Nation, conservatisme, keynésien, thatchérisme, idéologie

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