



The Conservatives plus the Liberal Democrats equals liberal Conservatism?

A study of political manifestos

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Abstract

This essay is a study of political manifestos using ideal types. The object of the essay is to establish to what extent the manifestos of analysis resemble the ideal types of conservatism and liberalism. The objects of study are the 2010 British Conservative election manifesto and the 2010 Programme for government that was co-authored by election winning coalition partners, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. Firstly the essay analyses the Conservative 2010 election manifesto by applying the ideal types of conservatism and liberalism to it. Secondly it analyses the Programme for government to establish whether or not the Conservatives, as the biggest coalition party, have made any compromises toward liberalism. The essay finds the Conservative election manifesto to be a genuinely conservative document. The ideological content of the Programme for government show signs of liberalism but is a predominantly conservative document.

Key words: Conservative Party, ideal types, political manifestos, conservatism, liberalism, Britain

Words: 12014

Everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. Without signs there is no ideology.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The 2010 general election

“Britain needs change”. With those words, with clear transatlantic reference, David Cameron, head of the Conservative Party, entered the battle field of the 2010 general election campaign in Great Britain. On May 6 the British electorate went to the polls and made him and his party the biggest, if yet not big enough to govern Britain in its own capacity. After a week of deliberations with both the Labour Party and the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats with leader Nick Clegg decided to join sides with David Cameron in 10 Downing Street. The Conservatives had gained 36,1 % of the votes and the Liberal Democrats had, having experienced a very good election, gained 23 % of the vote. As the Labour Party gained 29 %, the Liberal Democrats found itself in an unusual position of power. As the choice fell on forming a coalition with the Conservatives, David Cameron and Nick Clegg became Prime Minister versus Deputy Prime Minister of Great Britain (www.news.bbc.uk, 2010-11-15).

During the twentieth century the Conservative Party was commonly perceived as the natural party of government and it has been one of the most successful parties in any modern democracy. In 1997 Tony Blair and New Labour came into power and the Conservatives became the opposition – a position it kept until May 2010.

The 2010 British general election was one between a Labour Party that, after thirteen years of undisrupted power, appeared in somewhat desperate need of reform and a new leadership. At the same time the Conservative Party and its message of the broken society in need of rescue from five more years of Labour presented itself as the alternative. Armed with a relatively, in a political context, young leader and a message pleading for change the Conservatives seemed to have the upper hand during most of the campaign. For the first time ever in the history of British television, live debates were held between the leaders of the three main parties. The winner of these debates was, indisputably, Nick Clegg. Whereas Gordon Brown and David Cameron argued on matters traditionally associated with conflict between Labour and Conservatives, Nick Clegg managed to portray himself and the Liberal Democrats as a new voice in British politics – one that went beyond traditional quarrelling and actually seemed focused on delivering change to the political climate so many Britons were tired of.

The issue that dominated the election campaign was, unsurprisingly, the economy. The best remedy for tackling the poor state of the British economy was the question that took precedence over any other. Britain suffered at the time of the general election from the worst budget deficit since the Second World War (www.guardian.co.uk, 2010-05-06).

“As Conservatives, we trust people” David Cameron states in the Conservative election manifesto’s foreword written by him. The fundamental idea of the Conservative manifesto is one of a big society in which people come together to achieve common goals, as opposed to one in which much is left to the state to manage. David Cameron summons up the message of the manifesto, and of the Conservative election campaign, when he states that “a country is at its best when the bonds between people are strong and when the sense of national purpose is clear.”

Being referred to by newspapers as pragmatic and a, self-proclaimed, liberal Conservative, David Cameron has upheld a clear image of himself since he defeated David Davis in the run for the party leadership in late 2005. He sees himself first and foremost as a pragmatic, common sense, centre ground liberal Conservative who believes in society, not the state. Dylan Jones argues in his book “Cameron on Cameron” (2010:17) that “David Cameron himself is as central to his project to reinvent the Tories as Tony Blair was to his reinvention of New Labour.” He goes on to add that Cameron has – like Blair before him – tried to convince us that the party has changed because he, personally, has changed it, thus making him look strong and in control. This actualises the question of whether change has been brought about. The essay aims to bring clarity to the ideological composition of the Conservatives of today.

1.1.1 Aim

“Social responsibility is the essence of liberal conservatism.” This sentence is an example of what is today sometimes referred to as Cameronite Conservatism. This essay investigates the 2010 Conservative election manifesto in search of its ideological foundations. Is it a traditionally Conservative document or does it demonstrate signs of moving towards the centre, i.e. adopting more liberalism?

It then goes on to study the Coalition programme – the programme for government co-authored by the 2010 election winners, in search of changes. What policies has the biggest coalition partner, the Conservatives, had to abandon? Are there any noticeable adjustments towards liberalism, which this essay supposes is the ideology closest to the Liberal Democrats?

The essay will apply so called ideal types of Conservatism, and of liberalism, to the party’s 2010 election manifesto and the Programme for government which was written shortly after the formation of the Liberal Democrat/Conservative coalition. This essay is based on the assumption that an election manifesto, and in this case as a programme for government as well, is a presentation of the politics, and to a degree the policies, the party in question aims to realize if given the mandate to do so.

The essay aims at presenting a concentrated conclusion (Esaiasson et al.: 2007:154) of Conservative development as it is portrayed in the two documents of comparison. The essay aims to answer the following questions:

- How conservative is the 2010 Conservative election manifesto?
- How much less conservative is the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Programme for Government than the Conservative 2010 election manifesto?

It is the ambition of this essay to bring clarity to the ideological development of the Conservative Party from the election manifesto to the coalition agreement for government.

1.1.2 Essay structure

The essay begins with a background that introduces the reader to the British general election of 2010. Thereafter the aim of the essay is presented. It is followed by a discussion on methodology and the choice of theoretical approach. A short presentation of the method and material used follows. The third chapter introduces the reader to Conservative ideal types on the areas of analysis in the manifestos. These ideal types represent the utopian order of things from a Conservative point of view. The fourth chapter portrays the liberal ideal type. The essay then investigates how well the two political documents correspond to the above presented ideological ideal types. The essay concludes with an analysis of the result found.

2 Methodology

2.1 Theory

German Sociologist Max Weber is usually associated with the analysis of ideal types. An ideal type can be defined as an extreme, concentrated, representation of a phenomenon. An ideal type is a simplified description of certain elements of reality, however not a distortion (Esaiasson, et al. 2007:158). What is typical of the phenomenon of exploration? Gunnar Eriksson means (ibid.) that ideal types shed light on characteristics of those who ascribe to certain views.

An analysis of ideal types is a suitable theoretical approach when the interest lies in degree differences (Esaiasson et al. 2007:158). Degree differences are differences along a scale rather than differences in art. In the determination of, for example, to what degree the Conservative Party's stance on national security in 2010 can be defined as traditionally Conservative it provides a useful tool.

Esaiasson (et al. 2007:159) emphasizes that the ideal type does not represent an arithmetic average. To clarify; an ideal type Conservative is not the same as a member of the Conservative Party who resembles other Conservative Party members. It is more adequate to refer to a "generic Conservative" than to an "ideal type" Conservative. The authors (ibid.) go on to note that the difference between a logic class and an ideal type can be described through the example of a "five-year-old". "Five-year-old" is a class idiom if defined as "every being that age-wise is between its fifth and sixth birthday". If, on the other hand, referring to a "typical five-year-old" and by that indicating what is characteristic of the behaviour and whereabouts of a child that age, then the interpretation is ideal typical. The question asked at an ideal type analysis is, in other words, not if the phenomenon of study belongs to a given class but rather to what extent the phenomenon resembles the pure, utopian, ideal type.

Ideal types differ from other theoretical approaches that make claims to explain the reality. Such explanatory theories are either strengthened or weakened when confronted with empirical data. The status of the ideal type is less dependent on collected data. Given that the ideal type is not a direct reflection of reality it cannot be overthrown by empiric data. It is, as Petersson writes (Esaiasson et al. 2007:159) a matter of "if reality does not match the ideal type it is so to speak the reality's problem." This essay makes use of the ideal type as an instrument for analysis. By the comparison of the real phenomenon of society which interests us to the pure ideal type characteristics of the real societal phenomenon can be revealed – to what extent does the observed reality resemble the typified abstraction (the ideal type)? (Esaiasson et al., 2007:159).

Moreover this essay is a “time-comparing” analysis (Esaiasson et al., 2007:160) in that it aims to map out differences in ideology of the Conservative Party from the publication of the election manifesto to that of the programme for government. The ideal types of conservatism and liberalism constitute two extreme points on an imagined scale. Polarity is reached through turning one ideal type around so that it becomes its opposite; the precedence of the individual before the collective becomes the precedence of the collective before the individual (ibid.). In polar ideal type analyses the question of where on a scale the actual societal phenomenon is positioned. Ideal types of a polar kind are beneficial as conclusions are easily motivated. With only one point of comparison the problem of appreciation of just how far from the ideal type an actual societal phenomenon is comes to life. Given the use of two points of comparison, an establishment of “closer to” and “further away from” is sufficient (ibid.).

In the construction of ideal types Esaiasson (et al., 2007:160) recommend the use of earlier scientific work in the area. It is, in other words, a good idea to be able to reason along the lines of “Following characteristics are usually emphasized as features of liberalism”.

When it comes to the operationalization of useful ideal types they must contain elements that are able to compare to reality – the ideal type cannot lack relevance for the reality onto which it is to be applied. The categories of the ideal types are to be mutually exclusive which means that the components that are characterized must be substantially different (liberal/conservative). Esaiasson (et al., 2007:162) argue that there is no reason to have ideal types with two different components that represent almost the same phenomenon. Furthermore it is of relevance to mention a technical requirement for studies that use polar ideal types. In such studies the proposed ideal types should be completely parallel. A characteristic of one pole shall be met by the corresponding characteristic of the other pole. This demand may seem obvious but unless the author does not practise thorough discipline and controls the tools of analysis mistakes are easily made.

2.2 Method

The ideal types represent the ideologies of conservatism and liberalism and are centred on the five main areas of the 2010 Conservative election manifesto. After the presentation of the ideological ideal types used the essay will examine how much conservatism and liberalism resounds in the Conservative election manifesto and whether there are any noticeable changes toward liberalism to be found in the Programme for Government.

An underlying problem facing authors of ideal type analyses is the risk inherent in stipulated limitations and restrictions. It is, put differently, difficult to agree on what to, for example, call “low tolerance” as opposed to “high tolerance” (Esaiasson et al., 2007:165). A way to get around this problem of level appreciation is to use the transformation strategy as it is presented in Esaiasson et al. (2007:166).

To tackle the problem of appreciation of different value levels the opportunity to ask questions of transformation and/or development opens up. The relevant question becomes not, as exemplified above, tolerance is high or low but whether it has changed compared to before. The point of such a shift in question is that the reliance on the answer can be much bigger than the same phenomenon is analyzed in an absolute way. In quantitative terms the conductor of a transformation study uses the same tools of analysis at two different times in order to examine possible transformation. The task is to see if the value of the tool of analysis has changed and in that case in what way. In terms of design it is about using time as a point of comparison. The results emanating from the use of transformation strategy are, perhaps compared to conclusions of absolute kind, less groundbreaking, but they can, however, provide relevant information that last longer than absolute answers (ibid.).

2.3 Material

The primary sources of information is the Conservative Party’s 2010 election manifesto – a document of 118 pages presenting the political agenda of the party and, the in length shorter but yet very policy-intensive, Programme for Government. For the construction of ideal types and the comparison of Conservative ideological development sources such as books and articles from news media as well as scientific ones are used. Autobiographies and textbooks are other examples of sources. References are also drawn from literature on the different areas subject to analysis in the essay. Examples thereof are theories on civic society and participatory forms of democracy. Both primary as well as secondary sources are, in other words, used.

3 The conservative ideal type

“The modern conservatives believe in the liberal democratic state as it has gradually evolved in adherence with British tradition...The sole basis of modern Conservatism is the rejection of the modern Socialist state’s absolutist claims.” These words, by Conservative Party theorist Quintin Hogg, summons up much of what is at the heart of today’s Conservatism (Larsson, 2006:50).

It has been argued many a times that Conservatism is not an ideology per se but rather a set of beliefs and a code of conduct – a way to view life and man’s role in history. In the conservative ideal type outlined here the focus will be entirely on conservatism as known in Great Britain.

Conservatism has developed as a “counter-ideology”. The French revolution in 1789 brought forward the first, and perhaps yet unequalled, definition of the Conservative counter-ideology. In 1790, only a year after the revolution, Edmund Burke published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. It contained a thorough critique of the revolution as a means to achieve societal change. Central to Conservatism is the idea that society should change little by little, based on historic experience and the national political tradition (Larsson, 2006:41). Burke noted that states should change through natural growth, not through artificial interference. Change is inevitable and something that comes with life. It should, however, happen “through invisible steps”, through constant compromises between powers of regeneration and powers of restraint (Nordin, 1999:127). To follow nature is, Burke means, “wisdom without reflection” in the same way as wisdom of prejudices. To Burke nature and history are not in opposition. Burke means that the British constitution has nature as its pattern. It is a permanent whole constituted by perishable parts, it unites the living and the dead and the unborn in a “state of unchanging continuity through the shifting process of decline, renewal and advancement” and it therefore produces an image of mankind itself (ibid.). Burke argued that by keeping nature’s own method in the organization of the state, anything completely new does never have to be brought in when improvements are to be made but on the other hand the state will never be decayed since what works well is kept.

Burke, who for nearly thirty years had been a peer in the House of Commons and a representative of the Whig Party, was a somewhat unexpected critic of the revolution in France. He had been in favour of American independence from Britain and many expected him to be appreciative of the French revolution. However Burke voiced comprehensive criticism against what he saw as the overturn of everything everlasting and the replacement of it with desk projects and abstract theories. He further criticized the French revolutionary philosophers for the use of violence in order to force their ideals upon reality. Against those abstract ideas Burke put experience, tradition and empiricism.

Stephen Ingle describes traditionalism (2008:23) as a fundamental principle of Conservatism. “A political system that evolves over a long period of time will come to represent the accumulated wisdom of the community, or at least of that part of community habituated to making decisions.” He goes on to note that a fixed and settled constitution should be regarded as representative of the numerous compromises, struggles and adjustments over the years. It may, in other words, be regarded as “a kind of residuum of practical political experience”. This describes well the core of Conservatism in that consolation is taken from the permanence of institutions and the ability to rationalise this disposition through the argument that it is only when we possess enough knowledge of institutions that we can make the fullest use of them. According to Conservative thought the complexity of society prevents it from being a suitable ground for institutions designed to fulfil social purposes. It is better then and much safer, to adapt those we have knowledge of and which have proved their worth over time (ibid.). Larsson writes (2006:45) that Conservatism’s most important source of norms is history or, put differently, the nation’s own political and cultural traditions. Traditions change and are renewed, but at a slow pace. To conservatives history becomes a filter that sorts out the unusable and keeps what works.

Organicism is another feature associated with conservatism. By organicism is meant the view that society is equivalent to a natural living body as opposed to a machine or other man-made structures. Anthony Quinton (Ingle, 2008:23) mentions three components of most organisms: they are particularly complex, interconnected and interdependent. Citizens are social beings who are dependent on one another in a complex pattern of mutually beneficial relationships. Whereas machines are designed for a specific purpose and may be adapted to fulfil that purpose optimally, organisms are not. An organism develops to fulfil certain functions and parts of it cannot be removed and replaced without severe repercussions for the organism as a whole. Moreover Quinton argues that even the slightest social engineering must be considered with the greatest care because of the effect it may have upon other parts of the living body of the state. O’Sullivan (Ingle, 2008:23) traces the origin of organicism to the German Romantic Movement, which was greatly influenced by Hegel’s dialectical view of history.

Nordin (1999:118) writes on Hegel’s dialectical view of man’s struggle for recognition. Hegel equals history to the self-development of reason through a dialectic process of opposition and reconciliation. Put differently, we become ourselves through the recognition of others. We are constantly searching for recognition from others without desire to return it.

Quinton goes on to stress another feature of Conservatism, namely scepticism. As previously stated, conservatism relies on history in that it seeks guidance from earlier historic events and institutions while dealing with issues of today. Anything completely new is regarded with scepticism as what is most suitable is derived from adaptations of historic versions of the object in question. This prejudiced preference of established institutions is, according to Burke, not a bad thing. It is, to the contrary, a sign of good self-perception. To the extent that humans realize their intellectual limits they put more confidence in established

opinions than in their own individual abilities of comprehension (Malnes & Midgaard, 2006:160).

Ingle (2008:24) adds defence of property rights as a fourth conservative attribute. Quintin Hogg has said (ibid.) that “the possession of property by the individual is the essential condition of liberty” and the defence of property, it can be argued, is a traditional conservative issue. The private ownership of the means of production is, to a conservative, a precondition for a democratic form of government and for individual freedom of action. Ideas about a so called “owner-democracy” or “people’s capitalism” (Larsson, 2006:52) were first presented by British and German conservatives with the intention to spread home ownership and possession of stocks to large groups. Employees should become stake holders of the company by which they were employed and public ownership of public means was to be the alternative to income redistribution by political interference. Since the 1980s this type of politics has been realized in countries through a rigorous privatization of state-owned companies. Owner-democracy makes everyone capitalists offering a stake in society to its citizens (ibid.).

Ingle (2008:25) argues that property gives the individual a stake in society, thereby offering an inducement towards social stability. Given the organic nature of society, it is implied that ownership of property brings with it social obligations as well as rights. A Conservative government might therefore be expected to take custodial action to secure the fulfilment of such obligations. Furthermore as property is seen a social good, as many opportunities as possible should be taken to provide citizens with a stake in society.

In order to realize conservative thought a few principles can be observed. Pragmatism is the conviction that doctrines should be judged by their impact upon human interests (Ingle, 2008:25) and is, in other words, a natural working principle to a conservative who is sceptic of doctrines and abstract theories. Conservative Enoch Powell argued that principles did not define what Conservatives might be expected to do in office; rather they were abstracted from “the way the Conservative Party...acts in politics” (ibid.).

Limited government is another working principle naturally derived from conservative ideology. When convinced of the frailty of human nature and of the benefits of tradition and order, property ownership, and of the complexities of large-scale social and political change, it is hardly likely to be in favour of a large state. On the contrary, governments are seen as a potential threat to individual liberty. A limited government however, is not the same as a weak government. Conservatives have traditionally argued for strong government in the areas of defence and law and order (Ingle, 2008:26).

An idea closely linked to limited government is that of the rule of law. Conservatism holds that the law is the main expression of the accumulated wisdom and experience of society and as such is a much more preferred guide to political action than any grand scheme. “The rule of law constrains governed and governors; it is the rock on which a stable society is set” (ibid.). It safeguards equality before the law, provides a structure for social transactions and, while so doing, enshrines the fundamental Conservative principle that is the right to private property.

Associated with British conservatism is also the attention to the national interest. By national interest is meant patriotism and a sense of unity within the nation. Benjamin Disraeli (Conservative leader in the mid 1800s) is closely linked to what is referred to as 'one-nation' conservatism which can be explained as a political attitude emphasizing the unity of the empire – Britain and its outposts as one nation (ibid.).

To sum up this ideal type it is worth noticing three, partly oppositional, tendencies within twentieth century conservatism that influence today's politics. The politically and economically liberal conservatism or "liberal conservatism" illustrates the adoption of certain liberal economic ideas introduced as a way to battle the expansion of the state and socialism. A second one is social conservatism which grew out of the acceptance of an expansion of public suffrage with the ambition to integrate the working class into the national community. The idea of a 'one nation' politics, a politics of imperialism, is an example of this branch. The aim of this politics was the avoidance of social unrest and revolution. Social conservatism, it can be argued (Larsson, 2006:43), and value conservatism are often united. Value conservatism encapsulates the opinion that the state shall uphold certain social values and ethical norms. An example of such values is the family as the fundamental building block of society. It emphasizes the state's responsibility to promote a Christian view on law and morals. Furthermore it holds the opinion of the state as nurturer of the cultural inheritance and favours, on the areas mentioned, a strong, and where necessary, intervening state (ibid.).

4 The liberal ideal type

Liberalism as widely known today has its origins in the doctrines of the enlightenment and the natural law. These were ideas of human rights; the right to life, freedom, property and the right to opposition toward oppression (Larsson, 2006:27).

English philosopher Jeremy Bentham's ideas on utilitarianism had brought about a different view on universal suffrage. Only a method of government which represented the interests of every individual to the same extent would bring happiness for all, or at least to a majority of people (ibid.).

Adam Smith (1723-1790) developed ideas on economic liberalism and has become known as a sceptic of state intervention, often summarized through the hypothesis of "an invisible hand" which ensures the happiness of all when given the opportunity to strive toward personal fulfilment. Adam Smith is more than anything credited as the forefather of economic liberalism or laissez faire as it has become known. Smith argued for economic freedom as a precondition for economic growth and general wellbeing. Economic freedom meant the absence of state intervention in the free market. Supply and demand were to be the determinants (ibid.).

The question Mill seeks to answer in *On Liberty* concerns what force society can legitimately practice towards the individual. What Mill asks is, in other words, about the freedom of the individual. His answer is based on what he calls "a single very simple principle". That principle says that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others (Nordin, 1999:130). Thus anything that can be done without causing harm to others should be lawfully permitted (ibid.).

Mill's arguments have been imperative to the freedom of thought and debate. Mill meant that if only one opinion is tolerated and all others suppressed the truth must, by necessity, suffer. Moreover Mill's importance for the defence of individuality is another matter on which he deserves recognition. Mill argued that the existence of creativity and originality among a society's citizens is of great importance. From this point of view he defended individuality and argued that the modern democratic society was threatened, in Mill's words, by the dictatorship of mediocrity. It was therefore important to value the rights of educated people to think differently and to question the opinions of the majority. Liberty had been the foundation for the success of the west, but liberty could just as well be threatened by noble tyranny. In this way Mill defended liberty and the private person. He did so not through the referral to natural law but through the accentuation of the free debate and the contribution of individuality to the common good (Nordin, 1999:131).

John Rawls has become known for the term 'behind the veil of ignorance'. This phrase refers to the question of what principles a number of individuals would agree on given that they act 'behind the veil of ignorance', i.e. without any knowledge of which positions they themselves were to hold in the imagined new society. Rawls believes that the individuals in such a situation would agree on two principles: Everyone would have the same fundamental freedoms and rights, without discrimination towards any group. The second principle would be that social and economic differences would only exist if to the advantage of the least well off (Larsson, 2006:31).

In economic as well as in political liberalism there is a strong belief in individuals' ability to value their interests and weigh the consequences of different actions. The notion of human rationality is a fundamental precondition for utilitarianism (ibid.).

Furthermore the definition of equality has adaptations outside the sphere of political rights. Philosopher Ronald Dworkin defines the concept of equality as the right of every individual to be treated with the same regard and respect. People are to be treated as equals, but also as different. The notion that every individual is to be treated as equals does not imply that they are always to be treated the same way. The implication is that the exact same treatment leads to a controlling society in which nobody can "choose their own life plan or their own consumer pattern" (Larsson, 2006:32).

John Stuart Mill argued that a society ruled by its citizens, the foundations of a liberal democracy, must consist of people that are able to realize their own full capacities. Economic and intellectual progress is, according to Mill, reached not through the care of the state but through people's own efforts. Scientific and intellectual progress in particular is achieved by individuals that are provided the opportunity to defy established opinions. Mill was a strong defender of spiritual freedom and the freedom to differ from established patterns of thought. He also noted that the level of general wellbeing was proportional to the degree of human powers concentrated on the promotion thereof.

Liberalism of today is interpreted in a number of different ways. Social liberalism, for instance, has its origins in the so called New Liberalism that evolved in the early 20th century. L T Hobhouse wrote the book *Liberalism* in 1911 in which he laid out the fundamental principles of New Liberalism. Hobhouse attempted to reconstruct the basic principles of liberalism in order to prove them compatible to the notion of a 'civic state'. The struggle for "liberty" that is held dear to liberals of any definition is at the same time a struggle for "equality" (Derbyshire, *New Statesman*: 2010). According to Hobhouse the role of the state is to "secure (the) conditions upon which its citizens are able to win by their own efforts all that is necessary to a full civic efficiency". Though he made sure to distinguish his stance from socialism Hobhouse's view was one of "economic justice" (ibid.).

Neoliberalism on the other hand is a tendency within the broad school of liberalism that has entered the political stage during the 20th century. Central to neoliberalism is the market and the importance of it being free and minimal governmental intervention. Neoliberalism in Great Britain is often associated with

Margaret Thatcher's political and economic philosophy of reduced state intervention and the promotion of free markets and entrepreneurialism. Neoliberalism opposes social liberal ideas of equality and society's responsibility for the weak. Philosopher Robert Nozick, who is strongly associated with the school of thought, argues that the function of the state should be confined to the minimal protection of life and property. The redistribution of the welfare state through taxation and benefits are seen as a violation of rights. Nozick argues that humans are individuals and that the interest or health of an individual cannot be weighed against that of another individual. The state must be kept minimal as the protection of the fundamental rights of its people is regarded as its only legitimate task (Bauhn, 2006:47-48).

Liberals often have a rather complex relationship with the concepts of nationalism and patriotism. Maibom and Bennett argue (2009:641) that liberal theory maintains that individuals have a moral quality that demands that their interests be given equal consideration irrespective of their talents and achievements as far as justice is concerned. Social institutions should respect this fact. However when this is established it becomes difficult to maintain that people on the grounds of not being citizens should be treated any differently when it comes to justice (Maibom & Bennett, 2009:641). To bring in special obligations towards citizens would be a violation of the fundamental structure of the liberal paradigm (Faskin in Maibom & Bennett, 2009:641). In reality however it is the state that administers and protects rights and entitlements and which state one is born into, much as it is arbitrary and a matter of luck, is of importance. National boundaries and their implications is a matter of much debate to liberal theorists. Social or political liberalism acknowledges the international community as being responsible for the provision of background conditions for good domestic societies, while each is responsible for its own citizens (Maibom & Bennett, 2009:642). Cosmopolitan liberalism on the other hand ascribes no moral privilege to domestic states. Cosmopolitan liberalism holds that principles of justice should be based on the basic interests of persons, not collectives (Beitz, 2000 in Maibom & Bennett, 2009:642).

5. From “Mending our broken society” to “Freedom, Fairness and Responsibility”

“There is such a thing as society; it’s just not the same thing as the state.”

The conservative election manifesto begins with a foreword by party leader David Cameron who presents his vision, that of the Conservative Party. It is a profoundly optimistic vision he argues. The manifesto contains a strong message of a broken society, a broken economy (in need of Conservative rescue) and struggling families in need of restored power and recognition.

The first document produced between the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats resulted in the programme for government of about thirty pages titled “Freedom, Fairness and Responsibility”. In its foreword, co-written by Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, it is emphasized that this is an historic document. It is made clear that although there are differences between the two parties, there is also “common ground”. A shared conviction that the days of big government are over is mentioned as well as the days of top-down control and centralisation. The programme is divided into 31 short chapters and differs much in style from the thorough text of an election manifesto. To provide any guidance on whether the Conservatives “have become less conservative” since the publishing of its election manifesto it is however interesting to compare analysed parts of it to the co-written document that is the Programme for Government.

5.1 Economy

Given the background of the global economic and financial crisis that emerged in 2008 it comes as no surprise that the British economy is given priority in the Conservative election manifesto. The first section titled “Get the economy moving” focuses on the urgent need for economic growth in the aftermath of the global financial crisis that has hit Britain hard. The election year of 2010 the nation is deeply debt-ridden with almost 4,000 billion pounds in debt (theindependent.co.uk) which some sources argue is comparable to the debt crisis of Greece (nytimes.com).

”Britain needs a new economic model” the chapter bluntly states. The Conservative Party promotes an environment where saving and business investment replace “reckless borrowing as the foundation of growth”. It promises, if elected, to create a tax system, education and national infrastructure that is supportive of British firms in out-competing their global rivals instead of holding them back, as it is implied is the case with the current system.

Throughout the 1980s and until shortly after the 1992 general election, economic policy, and the perception of the public in general of economic competence, had been major strengths of the Conservative party. This was the area in which the Conservatives enjoyed far more credibility than Labour. After all, the landslide 1979 victory was won against a background of an economic crisis. It can however be argued (Dorey, 2009:259) that since the enforced withdrawal of Britain from the European Union’s Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in September 1992 (despite the argument of many party members that the ERM withdrawal worked in favour of economic recovery) that the Conservatives have struggled to win back its reputation as the most economically competent party. After the forceful defeat in the 1997 general election the Conservatives’ attempts to restore its economic credentials was prevented in three ways (ibid.) Firstly the aftermath of the ERM withdrawal proved long lasting and damaging to the Conservatives’ reputation of economic competence and responsibility. Secondly the party was challenged by Tony Blair’s ‘New Labour’ which embraced much of Thatcher-Major governments’ neo-liberal economic policies such as the devotion to market instead of state intervention where possible challenged the party and the increased share of the private sector in the public services (Dorey, 2009:259). Tony Blair writes in his memoirs titled *A journey* (2010:20), that one of his ambitions for “New Labour” was the repackaging of the party to one which successful professionals would feel affinity towards. His own father grew up with small economic means and turned himself into an academic, a successful solicitor, and joined the Conservatives as a, to him, logical move for someone his position. Tony Blair set out to change the correlation between conservatism and professional and economic success and the 1997 landslide victory for ‘New Labour’, it can be argued, owes much this ambition. Thirdly Dorey (ibid.) writes of the beneficial circumstances of higher levels of employment, growing prosperity and increasing property values enjoyed by homeowners providing opportunities for a strong, reformed, Labour party. It can, and it has been, argued that the relative success of the Conservative party in the 2010 general election is due to restored confidence in the party as the economically competent and responsible party in a time of economic meltdown

and unpopular leadership of the Labour party. Dorey argues (2009:260) that the election of David Cameron as party leader, and along with it a change of focus to issues of social character, the party has been ‘modernized’. With statements such as “There’s more to life than economic growth” Mr Cameron has declared an interest in more values than strictly economic ones, emphasizing in particular greater priority of work-life balance and the protection of the environment.

The manifesto presents classically Conservative answers on how to best turn the country around economically. The initiative to freeze public sector pay for one year, excluding the one million lowest paid, may perhaps provoke the rise of some eyebrows. This is completely in tune with the Conservative intention to ‘reduce bureaucracy’ and increase transparency and ‘value for money’. In the sixth benchmark on how to change the economy one finds the ambition to give public sector workers ownership of the services they deliver, an ambition it can be argued is classic conservative ideology as it eventually creates a ‘stakeholder society’ – adhering to the idea of an ‘owner-democracy’ and ‘people’s capitalism’ as laid out in the ideal type of Conservatism. The sixth benchmark argues that by giving public sector workers ownership of the services they deliver increased efficiency is also achieved. The manifesto argues that by enabling people to become “their own bosses” *the most significant shift in power from the state to working people since the sale of council houses in the 1980s* will be achieved. Furthermore co-operatives will be supported as a way to increase self-employment and encourage entrepreneurship. As noted in the ideal type of Conservatism the promotion of home ownership and of employees becoming their own employers was largely introduced in politics during the 1980s. Under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher major privatizations were undertaken in Britain. Marquand (McCormick, 2007:26) argues that Thatcherism had four basic dimensions. He portrayed a sort of British Gaullism born out of a growing sense of despair with Britain’s difficulties, economic liberalism, traditional Toryism (including patriotism and a pride in tradition), and a style of politics that was both populist and charismatic (ibid.). It is a somewhat interesting parable to look at parts of the legacy of Thatcherism as Mr Cameron himself has confessed Mrs Thatcher is an inspiration to his political project. Marquand goes on to note (McCormick, 2007:26) that among other things, Thatcherism meant rolling back the state, privatizing businesses and industries owned and operated by the government, reducing trade union power, promoting family values in order to restore a ‘higher’ moral level in society, and a strong British role in international affairs. Very much of this resounds in the Conservative manifesto – and in the chapter of the economy in particular. Burke himself was a friend of reforms. In his own words he professed that “almost every question in which he had an interest (in the House of Commons) was a reform question. On a general level Burke argued “We must all obey by the great law of change” and added that it may be the most powerful natural law and perhaps the means to preserve it (Ljungberg, 2008:46). However he also argued that hasty reforms could harm freedom in the economic sphere. The wisdom of history could then provide guidance. Burke was devoted to a free market and reforms through liberalization. He was upset by restrictions preventing countries or groups from fair participation in business and

trade. According to economist Adam Smith, Burke was one of the few to understand his thoughts on division of labour and the invisible hand (ibid.).

Under the headline of “Encourage enterprise” (Conservative manifesto 2010:21) it is stated that “immigration has enriched our nation over they years”. However it is followed by the argument that “...immigration today is too high and needs to be reduced” as “we do not need to attract people to do jobs that could be carried out by British citizens” (ibid.). Such a view on immigration would be difficult do explain using neo-liberal/libertarian arguments (they would hold that the state has no rights to restrict immigration as long as people do not trespass on private property pr violate the rights of others (Bauböck 1999 & Carens 1987 in Nam-Kook, 2010:211). Nam-Kook (2010:211) argues that support for this restrictive view on immigration and free movement is to be found in republicanism. Republicanism emphasizes a different view of the role of the state and citizenship. According to republicanism, the state is seen as the center of formative politics. As such it should engage in the protection of values that a political community wants to preserve. Moreover individuals are supposed to be able to realize their liberty only when participating in public activities as citizens of a political community (Sandel, 1996 in Nam-Kook, 2010:211). It argues that consensus and a sense of belonging, generated through a shared identity, would bring better outcomes in achieving social justice and democracy (ibid.). In short the manifesto’s section on the economy conveys a message of savings, cuts and the urgent need to “go back to basics”. The message of coming together, realizing that “we’re all in this together” is logic given the background of the many savings and cuts in administration announced in the manifesto. Only if, and when, people understand and are willing to take on the responsibility that will be given to them for the healing of the broken economy it will come about. This idea of shared responsibility, it can be argued, stems from the conservative idea of communities as units of some degree of self-governance where everyone plays a part, i.e. share responsibility for the general wellbeing. Moreover the importance of restoring transparency in order to create “a value for money culture” is underlined - in tune with conservative ideas on sound scepticism towards societal institutions and their operations.

The Programme for government authored in coalition between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats contains three short chapters filled with policies that map out the aim of the economic politics of the government. Under the headlines of “Banking”, “Business” and “Deficit reduction” not much has changed from the Conservative election manifesto. An observable difference can be found in the “Deficit reduction” section (2010:15). One target reads, “We will introduce arrangements that will protect those on low incomes from the effect of public sector pay constraint and other spending constraints.” Yet vague this statement communicates a message of social liberalism among the surrounding continuation of the Conservative manifesto on economic policy.

A section titled “Consumer protection” begins by stating that “The Government believes that action is needed to protect consumers, particularly the most vulnerable, and to promote greater competition across the country”. The need to protect *the most vulnerable* of consumers, it can be argued, stems from

social liberalism that emphasizes society's responsibility for its weakest and worst off.

Under the very short section of "Immigration" not much has changed from the Conservative manifesto, perhaps for the exception that the space it is given is relatively small compared to other sections.

5. 2 Society

"Together we can build the Big Society", the manifesto's chapter on society reads. Since elected leader in late 2005 David Cameron has made himself known for his ambition as a social reformer. As expressed in the beginning of the essay Mr Cameron himself has uttered a desire to be as radical when it comes to social reform as Margaret Thatcher was in economic reform. In the manifesto the ambition to make Britain the most family-friendly country in Europe is voiced. Inspiration is drawn from Sweden where the free schools programme, established in the early 1990s, has proved successful (Conservative manifesto, 2010:50). The strong support for families is to be found in the conservative view of families as the building blocks of society. As noted in the ideal type social and value conservatism holds that a type of Christian morality in which the cohesion of the family, historically in the shape of a nuclear one, is to be promoted by the state. The following sentences capture this intention rather well; "Strong families are the bedrock of a strong society. They provide the stability and love we need to flourish as human beings, and the relationships they foster are the foundation on which society is built" (2010:41).

The beginning of the chapter makes clear that building the Big Society is not possible with a state that steps back and hopes for the best but rather through the active participation of the state can the Big Society be realized. "We must use the state to help remake society", the manifesto reads (2010:37). To a Conservative with a conviction that a limited government is the best government it may seem contradictory to favour a state that intervenes in society. Value conservatism however does, as stated in the ideal type, encapsulate the opinion that the state should promote certain social values and ethical norms. The ideal type exemplified with the family as a fundamental building block of society. Given an organic view of society, which the essay argues is a Conservative characteristic, it makes sense to favour state intervention when it comes to the promotion of such a thing as the Big Society. Organicism holds that citizens are social beings dependent on each other in a complex pattern of mutually beneficial relationships (Ingle, 2008:23). R.A. Butler, British conservative politician in the mid 20th century, said that "We are not afraid to use state intervention. A good Tory has

never in history been afraid to use the state” (Fredriksson, 1986:182). Ever since the days of Disraeli the Conservatives have conducted social reforms, even if few during the inter-war period. Fredriksson claims (ibid.) that certain allowances in social politics are made that are considered necessary in order to keep discontent and socialist tendencies down and to maintain the working class share of the conservative vote.

The education system is not excused from the call for increased transparency. Reform of the National Curriculum is announced in order to make it more challenging *and based on evidence about what knowledge can be mastered by children at different ages* (2010:52). To meet the demand for transparency and enable people to make choices about the services they use, reformed school league tables will show evidence that they are *stretching the most able and raising the attainment of the less able* (ibid.). This section indicates adherence to trust in history as the best guide to ‘what works’. The call for increased transparency in school performance is a message that resounds throughout the manifesto and can be argued to stem from neo-liberal appreciation for value for money and economic values applied to all societal areas – ideas on how to obtain the maximum benefit with the resources available (improvementnetwork.gov.uk).

Moreover the Conservative manifesto promises to “fight back against crime and anti-social behaviour” it argues blights the communities of Britain. “A Conservative government will help to mend our broken society and it will do so by targeting drink- and drug-fuelled violence, re-offending and intervening early to stop young people “getting onto the conveyor belt to crime” (C. manifesto 2010:55). Confidence in the criminal justice system will be rebuilt “so that people know it is on the side of the victims and working for law-abiding people, not criminals” (ibid.). Conservatism is closely linked to ideas of a strong government when it comes to defence and law and order. Given the perception that the law is the main expression of the accumulated wisdom and experience of society it makes sense to favour a strong stance on crime and criminals.

Furthermore the police will be reformed. The manifesto reads: “the police should be focusing on police work, not paperwork” (2010:56). Once again the manifesto shows evidence of being traditionally Conservative. Issues of law and order are associated with traditionally conservative thinking. Neoliberal objectives such as the need to increase efficiency within the police apart, the opinion that “the police should be focusing on police work, not paperwork” resounds the message of ‘common sense’, or ‘wisdom without reflection’ as portrayed in the ideal type.

The Programme for government is, as mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, divided into 31 short chapters or sections. Under the section of “Civil liberties”, the title itself hinting at liberalism, promises that the coalition will be strong in defence of freedom (Programme for government, 2010:11). It argues that “...the British state has become too authoritarian, and that over the past decade it has abused and eroded fundamental human freedoms and historic civil liberties (ibid.). The first policy proposal of the section reads “We will implement a full program of measures to reverse the substantial erosion of civil liberties and roll back state intrusion.” John Stuart Mill argued that people must be able to

realize their own capacities to the fullest in order to be make the most of their citizenship. Economic and intellectual progress is achieved not through the interference of the state but through people's own efforts. Therefore all things hindering people from realizing themselves to the fullest must be removed. Under the headline "Communities and local government" is more than anything a continuation of the Conservative manifesto. It does however state "We will provide more protection against aggressive bailiffs and unreasonable charging orders..." (2010:12) which may indicate social liberalism and its emphasis on protection of society's weakest. Another example may be found in the promise to "introduce new powers to help communities save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services" (ibid.).

On crime and policing the programme for government says it "...believes that we need radical action to reform our criminal justice system", quite like the Conservative manifesto. It goes on to add policies that promise to make the system more effective and accountable. Moreover the section presents the intention to "...ban the sale of alcohol below cost price" (2010:13) and "...review alcohol taxation and pricing to ensure it tackles binge drinking..." (ibid.). The Licensing Act is also to be overhauled to give local authorities and the police much stronger powers to control licenses to sell alcohol. This is news from a conservative perspective and may, as stated previous, indicate social liberal tendencies.

Interesting is the section titled "Equalities" (2010:18) as the mere existence of it implies a sway toward liberalism. The section argues "The Government believes that there are many barriers to social mobility and equal opportunities in Britain today, with too many children held back because of their social background, and too many people of all ages held back because of their gender, race, religion or sexuality" (ibid.). Furthermore this section has a somewhat different tone toward when it promises to ensure the British government is "a positive participant in the European Union, playing a strong and positive role with our partners, with the goal of ensuring that all the nations of Europe are equipped to face the challenges of the 21st century: global competitiveness, global warming and global poverty. These statements imply a consciousness that goes beyond the nation state which may imply cosmopolitanism. A social consciousness and the underlining of equal rights to use one's capacities to the fullest savours strongly of liberalism as well as its more socially concentrated forms. The same can be said about section 19, "Jobs and welfare", that argues that those who cannot work will be provided help, those who are looking for work will be provided targeted training and support. Those who "turn down reasonable offers of work or training" (Programme for government, 2010:23) will face sanctions.

5. 3 Politics

“Politics has not caught up with this new age” (Conservative manifesto, 2010:63). The third section of the Conservative manifesto deals with politics, and the change it argues is necessary in order to create a political system that serves people rather than politicians. In the aftermath of the revelations of MPs’ expenses where it was revealed how parliamentary allowances were used wrongfully by MPs, public trust in politics and its wielders was nothing but low. The manifesto reads: “...this political crisis is driven by a deeper sense of frustration – that people have too little control over the decisions that affect their daily lives”. It goes on to talk about the need to move away from the top-down model of power that it argues exist in Britain today. “We now live in an age when technology can put information that was previously held by a few into the hands of the many.” As believers in “people power” and given the practical tools by the information revolution to realize it, the Conservatives plan to change Britain with “a sweeping redistribution of power” (ibid.).

Support for the British first-past-the-post system for Westminster elections is voiced with the explanation that it gives voters the chance to “kick out a government they are fed up with”. The party sets out to build a consensus for a mainly-elected second chamber to replace the current House of Lords as it is believed that “an efficient and effective” second chamber should play an important role in British democracy and that it requires both legitimacy and public confidence. The Liberal Democrats have long argued in favour of a referendum on the electoral system as it effectively excludes parties from proportional representation that especially affects smaller parties. The coalition agreement includes, in the section titled “Political reform” (2010:27), the intention to bring forward a Referendum Bill on electoral reform. This must be regarded as a compromise on a matter of great concern to the Liberal Democrats as electoral reform is a key question to the party.

“There is such a thing as society, it’s just not the same thing as the state” (Conservative manifesto 2010:34). A Conservative ambition for bringing change to politics is to make it more local. It is the Conservative belief that “the more responsibility you give people, the more responsibly they behave”. The manifesto emphasizes (2010:73) that a totally different approach to governing is needed, one that makes people involved in the decisions that affect them. The term ‘collaborative democracy’ is mentioned as the preferred procedure for relations between the state and its citizens whereby people are taking the kind of powers that until now have been exercised only by governments (ibid.). As sceptics of grand political schemes and as strong believers in “owner democracy” or “people’s democracy” it makes sense to favour a political system in which power is mainly in the hands of the people. Limited government is, as portrayed in the ideal type, a dear feature of conservative thought, perhaps with the noticeable exception in the field of rule of law and order.

Moreover the programme for government argues, in the section titled “Social care and disability”, that promises reform of the system of social care and sets out to make care more individual to give people more control and ‘purchasing power’ (Programme for government, 2010:30) which implies increased freedom of choice and can be translated into both conservatism and liberalism in that it implies increased competition among care providers. It is not “the state” that chooses your care residence, it is you.

Section 16, “Government transparency” (2010:20), says “the Government believes that we need to throw open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account”. It adds that this increased accountability will “...help to deliver better value for money in public spending” (ibid.).

5. 4 The environment

”Vote blue, go green” (Conservative manifesto, 2010:87). The Conservative election manifesto presents an intention to cut carbon emissions and “rebuild our energy security” (2010:89). The Conservatives claim to have a vision of a greener Britain – a country that leads the world in the market for green goods and services. A new high-tech manufacturing sector and a new Green Investment Bank is to help create new jobs, wealth and growth. British cars are to run on electricity and high speed trains are to run across the country in less time than it takes to get around the capital. Furthermore the beginning of the chapter (2010:89) states that “We will fulfil our responsibility to hand on a richer and more sustainable natural environment to future generations”. Dobson argues (Barry, 123:2007) that “on the face of it”, conservatism as a political ideology offers a welcoming home for the integration of the nonhuman world into social theory. The necessary constraints of external nature in delimiting the options available to humanity fits with the ‘realism’ of conservative thought. Barry (2007:122) argues that right-wing perspectives on the environment and ecological politics can be historically be traced back to conservative reactions to the Enlightenment. Right-wing environmental perspectives range from early conservative reactions to the industrial revolution and the changes it brought about to so called eco-fascist positions and extreme market ideologies such as ‘free market environmentalism’, etc (ibid.). Burke was one of the first modern thinkers to consider obligations to future generations – a conservative trait given the organic view of society it rests upon. Burke argues that society is ‘a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born’ (Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in Barry, 2007:124). Moreover on the same page of the chapter on the environment (2010:89) the reader finds the Conservatives argue that “Our countryside is better *cared for*, we *conserve* more natural habitats, and we create new green spaces and plant many more trees”. The conservative vision for a greener Britain is one in which the conservation of and caring for the environment is stressed. Further down the same page more traditionally conservative thinking is observable. The manifesto reads “Instead of using rules and regulations to impose a centralised worldview, we will go with the grain of human nature, creating new incentives and market signals which reward people for doing the right thing”. The section goes on to note that “Instead of pulling bureaucratic levers from above telling people what they can’t do”, the Conservatives aim to provide people with the information necessary for making “more responsible choices”. Conservatives are likely to object to being told what to do, which is exactly what the manifesto speaks of. However, when it comes to being able to make “responsible choices” regarding the conservation and preservation of the environment the manifesto intends to give people the information they need. Pragmatism, as mentioned in the ideal type, holds that

doctrines should be judged by their impact upon human interests. Given that policies on how to become more environmentally friendly create homes that use less energy and “create a clean and healthy environment to pass on to our children” (2010:89) it can be legitimate.

The repeated use of the word responsibility in the chapter, it can be argued, adheres to the conservative view of organicism that sees humans, and their actions, as part of a whole, society, and that every single human is interconnected and dependent on one another. On page 95 (2010 Conservative manifesto) it states “Conservatives understand the inherent value of conserving things”. It goes on “...and we know the importance of ensuring that we provide a good quality of life for future generations” (ibid.). Wisdom without reflection, wisdom from prejudice, from knowing how it has always been is expressed in Burke’s “*Reflections...*” (Ljungberg, 2008:72).

Under the headline of “Promote sustainable and productive farming practices” (2010:96) the manifesto expresses the intention to “...seek to create a more effective system of environmental stewardship”. The conservative devotion to tradition may be seen as a form of stewardship looking to the future as well as honouring the past (Barry, 2007:124). Burke’s view sees the current generation as ‘stewards’ of the environment and society’s institutions and achievements in government, art, literature, etc, for the as yet unborn generations to follow, which they have inherited from the previous generation, themselves viewed as ‘stewards’ (ibid.). The ‘stewardship tradition’ Passmore (1980, in Barry, 2007:38) argues is an alternative interpretation of Christian teaching about the environment, one that differs from the view of domination that encourages people to use and value the environment only insofar as it is useful to human ends or purposes (Barry, 2007:37). The stewardship tradition legitimates the “reordering of the non-human world in the interests of human welfare provided this is balanced with a sufficient regard for obligations to conserve the natural world, to protect the moral interests of wild and domesticated animals, and to regard the interests of future generations as well as those of presently existing persons” (Northcott, 1996 in Barry, 2007:39). Historically conservatives have been suspicious of major societal transformations and the rapid changes characteristic of the industrial revolution were, by many a conservative, regarded with much scepticism. Change, if necessary, should from a conservative position be slow, small and based on practical experience and not on any abstract thinking.

The programme for government outlines its policies for the environment mainly under the headlines of “Energy and Climate Change” and “Environment, Food and Rural Affairs”. An interesting observation is the recognition of the difference in the opinion on nuclear power between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. Whereas it is acknowledged that the Liberal Democrats for long have opposed any new nuclear construction (Programme for government, 2010:17), the Conservatives “are committed to allowing the replacement of existing nuclear power stations...”. The programme then adds that a process allowing the Liberal Democrats to maintain their opposition to nuclear power will be implemented while the Government is permitted to “bring forward the National Planning Statement for ratification by Parliament so that new nuclear construction

becomes possible.” The construction of new nuclear power stations will, in other words, be possible provided that a process including a Liberal Democrat spokesperson speaking against the Planning Statement but that Liberal Democrats MPs will abstain (ibid.).

The section titled “Environment, Food and Rural Affairs” (2010:17) contains policies on animal welfare and expresses the intention to reduce the use of animals in scientific research. Another noticeable difference from the Conservative manifesto is the ambition to bring forward a motion on a free vote enabling the House of Commons to express its view on the repeal of the Hunting Act (ibid.).

5. 5 National interest

“A Conservative government will defend our national security and support our brave Armed Forces in everything they do” (Conservative manifesto, 2010:103). The same section reads “We will work constructively with the EU, but we will not hand over any more areas of power and we will never join the Euro.” The manifesto also states that “The steady and unaccountable intrusion of the European Union into almost every aspect of our lives has gone too far” (2010:114). The programme for government (2010:19) breathes compromise as it states that “...no further powers should be transferred to Brussels without a referendum”. All in all, chapter 13 titled “Europe” (2010:19), does not reveal much change towards a more Europe-friendly attitude. Its last statement reads “We support the further enlargement of the EU” which is about as compliant toward Europe as the chapter gets.

Promotion of national security and the inclination to defend Britain savours strongly of conservatism. Baker et al. (2002:400) argue that during the so called ‘Thatcher decade’, the Conservative Party played an important role in articulating the neoliberal doctrines of openness, flexibility and competition, which came to characterize globalisation, the idea of the unfettered economy. However at the same time the party under the leadership of Mrs Thatcher moved away from its earlier strong commitment to the European Union. “...although they seem to have few qualms in subordinating British sovereignty to the dictates of the global market, British Conservatives have become much less keen on subordinating it to Europe” (ibid.). At first glance this may seem contradictory, especially given that the Conservatives once strongly favoured European integration. The party once proclaimed it was the ‘party of Europe’. Main support for European integration was to be found in neoliberals but there were also security arguments which convinced many Conservatives. The European Union was seen as a safeguard of the relatively new liberal democratic institutions in Germany, and Western Europe was to be strengthened against the threat of communism. The collapse of Soviet communism in 1989 was of great importance with regard to conservative attitudes towards the European project. With the need to defend Europe much reduced, many Conservatives instead looked across the Atlantic emphasising Britain’s economic, political and cultural ties to the USA, rather than its links with Europe. (Baker et al, 2002:401).

As noted in the ideal type of conservatism, national security is a question at the heart of many a conservative. Traditional Conservative descriptions of the nation emphasize the common values of national culture with common institutions, a shared history and common values thus constructing an idealised ‘imagined community’ (Anderson in Baker et al, 2002:402). Baker et al argue that at the heart of modern Conservative statecraft is the defence of executive autonomy, expressed as parliamentary sovereignty. British sovereignty has real and symbolic importance in the Conservative politics of nationhood (Bulpitt & Lynch in Baker et al, 2002:402). This vision finds both democracy and legitimacy located in the nation state, which is the basic unit of all legitimate democratic politics. In actual policy terms of today this view means seeking either more intergovernmental and decentralised forms of cooperation within the EU, or, as some conservatives would like to see, “a wholesale re-establishment of

parliamentary sovereignty” and British political independence through withdrawal from the EU (Baker et al, 2002:402).

Liberalism on the other hand has a rather different approach toward Europe and national identity in general. The ideal type describes the difficult relationship between liberals and nationalism. As great believers in individualism and the right of every individual to freedom and liberty, the promotion of nation states and so called common cultures and history have little attraction. Cosmopolitan accounts of liberalism, as portrayed in the ideal type of liberalism, ascribe no moral privilege to nation states.

Conservative attention to national interest is deeply rooted and can be traced back to the days when Britain was an empire. Philip Lynch argues (Baker et al, 2002:402) that the notion of a state based patriotism is “a limited one, shunning ideological nationalism and universalistic prescriptions in favour of empiricism, parochialism (including nostalgia and mythology) and philosophical scepticism”. The intention to “focus more on the poorest, paying particular attention to development within the Commonwealth” (2010:118) hints to an inclination to focus aid on the former territories.

The programme for government contains no remarkable lapse from the Conservative manifesto. It proposes a number of benefits for Service personnel and their families while at the same time stating that the coalition “will aim to reduce Ministry of Defence running costs by at least 25 %” (Programme for government, 2010:15). John Stuart Mill argued that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.

The section “International development” (Programme for government, 2010:22) argues that “...even in these difficult economic times, the UK has a moral responsibility to help the poorest people in the world.” Aid is to become more transparent and effective and new mechanisms to give British people a direct say in how an element of the aid budget is spent are to be created.

6 Conclusions

The purpose of this essay has been, firstly, to establish the ideological composition of the Conservative 2010 election manifesto. Secondly, the essay has investigated the ideological development from the Conservative party manifesto to the Programme for government. To be able to say anything about potential developments in ideology the essay has firstly tried to establish the ideological composition of the Conservative 2010 election manifesto. The essay has used so called ideal types of conservatism and liberalism that correspond to the focus of the essay. Secondly the essay has applied the ideal types to the Conservative election manifesto's five chapters and the sections of the Programme for government matching those.

The essay has found that the Conservative 2010 election manifesto is a genuinely conservative document with the exception of elements of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is observable in the demand for a smaller state and in the call for increased efficiency in all parts of society. The Conservative manifesto can be summed up "by back to basics" conservative thinking. Leader David Cameron has, as noted in the essay's introduction, been credited for reforming the party but as a careful reader of its 2010 election manifesto will notice, the change constitutes going back to the 'ideological' roots. As noted in the ideal type of conservatism, it is debated whether or not conservatism is an ideology or rather a set of beliefs. David Cameron himself notes in the manifesto's foreword on the ambition of the document that it is "A profoundly optimistic vision. It is also an authentically Conservative vision: sound money, backing enterprise, trusting people" (Conservative manifesto, 2010:ix).

The Conservative 2010 manifesto is, as Mr Cameron implies in its introduction, a conservative document. Ideal types do not resemble other theoretical approaches that make claims to explain the reality. It provides a statement as to how much of the ideal type is found in a piece of analysis. Results tend therefore not to be as groundbreaking as studies aiming at explanations of societal phenomena. The point of ideal types however lies in them providing information on, for example, to what extent the observed piece of reality, in this case an election manifesto, resembles the typified abstraction, the ideal type.

The Programme for government, co-written by the coalition partners, differs from the Conservative manifesto. Perhaps not very surprising, the reader finds more elements of liberalism, and social liberalism in particular, in the coalition government's programme. However, it is somewhat interesting that so much of the conservative manifesto's content is transferred into the coalition agreement. To answer the question of the essay's front page – yes, and no. The coalition's Programme for government is more than anything a conservative government programme. It does, however, contain elements of liberalism. Elements of the

Programme for government resemble ideal types of liberalism portrayed in this essay but the dominance of conservative ideal types makes it hard to label 'liberal conservatism'. The document is, to use ideal type terminology, closer to conservatism than to liberalism.

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