PARTY MANAGEMENT

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In terms of the approach of Conservative leaders to party management, we can distinguish between organisation and personnel. In respect of each, the leader may adopt a position that is close or distant. By this, we mean that in terms of party organisation, a leader may take a leading role in determining policy and structures, either by deciding matters personally or by putting close personal allies in charge (close) or may essentially leave it to others (distant). In terms of personnel, a leader may devote time and resources to communicating with party members, both at the parliamentary and grass-roots level (close) or operating at some distance, at times possibly appearing aloof (distant). Few leaders have devoted themselves both to the detail of party organisation and staying close to the party membership. Distance in terms of both organisation and personnel has tended to increase the longer a leader is in 10 Downing Street.

The capacity for a leader to determine the approach is marked in the case of the Conservative Party, given the distinctive role accorded the leader for most of the party's history. 'The most striking feature of Conservative party organisation', wrote Robert McKenzie in 1964, 'is the enormous power which appears to be concentrated in the hands of the Leader' (McKenzie 1964: 21). At the time, the leader not only controlled appointments to the party front bench and the professional organisation (Central Office), but also determined party policy. The leader could draw on party or

other bodies to assist in developing policy, but ultimately the decision rested at the top.

These distinctive features led to different models of the leader-party relationship being developed. Looked at it terms of sheer powers, the leader could be likened to a leviathan or monarch (Norton and Aughey 1981: 241). Given the extent to which the leader nonetheless depends on the party to achieve outcomes, a family model has also been offered, with the leader akin to the head of the household (Norton and Aughey 1981: 241-3). Heath, on this model, could be characterised as equivalent to a stern Victorian father, not demonstrating much love for the family and deciding both household policy and expecting things to be done in certain ways. Answering back, as we shall see, was neither expected nor tolerated.

ORGANISATION

In terms of the management of the party, leaders have differed in the attention they have accorded it. Some have been distant. Margaret Thatcher, for example, although keen to reform inefficient institutions, largely left the management of the party to others (Norton 1987: 21-37; Norton 2012: 102-5). Some leaders have taken a more direct approach. Edward Heath fell in the latter category when he was leader in Opposition, but became more distant once ensconced in Downing Street. As we shall see, there is a link in that his approach to party management was instrumental.

In terms of party policy, Martin Burch has argued that in Opposition, leaders have adopted either a *critical approach*, focusing on criticising and undermining the

position of the government, or an *alternative government approach*, concentrating on presenting the party as a credible party of government, ready to take the reins of office (Burch 1980: 161-3). The former approach runs the risk of not being seen as ready for office, whereas the latter may present too many hostages to fortune. The two are not mutually exclusive, but it is a matter of emphasis. Both Heath and Thatcher adopted the alternative government approach. There were, though, significant differences. As Brendon Sewill observed, some politicians are intensely interested in policy and view politics as a distasteful necessity (Sewill 2009: 56). Heath very much fell in that category, whereas his successor did not.

Heath had the advantage over Thatcher in that when he succeeded to the leadership he was not seen as a divisive figure and was not driven by the political imperative to achieve some balance between different sections of the party. He was able to mould the party organisation, especially the policy-making process, in the way that he wished. Thatcher's initial task was to keep the different parts of the party together.

Heath's approach to organisation was arguably a product of his philosophy. As John Biffen summarised it, 'Heath was a powerful exponent of managerial conservatism as well as having a One Nation social policy' (Biffen 2013: 252). When he was elected as leader, many MPs mistook his approach of freeing industry through the application of a free market as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. When it failed to deliver, he changed tack. As we shall see, the fact of doing so and the way he did it created tensions within the party. There was no clear goal-orientated approach and a failure to engage.

In Opposition

Once elected as leader, Heath drew on both the professional and voluntary wings of the Conservative party to help develop policy. In line with his managerial ethos, there was an emphasis on process and reaching outcomes by rational deliberation. He used Conservative Research Department (CRD), created in 1929 to provide policy advice to the leader and service party committees in Parliament (Ramsden 1980), to oversee a wide range of policy groups, drawing on parliamentarians, business people and academics. In the 1966-70 Parliament, there were 29 such groups, drawing on 191 politicians and 190 from outside (Cosgrave 1985: 78). The exercise was extensive and seen as preparing the party, in a way that had not happened before, for government. This was the alternative government approach in action.

However, as John Campbell recorded, 'for all his high intentions and some considerable achievements the policy exercise was not in reality quite so impressive – neither so thorough nor so well directed – as was claimed' (Campbell 1993: 217). There was a problem of numbers, with other bodies set up in addition to the formal policy groups. There was no over-arching philosophy imposed from above. There was 'a concentration on practical proposals and a belief that themes would emerge from these practical proposals as work went on' (Ramsden 1980: 241). The use of discrete policy groups led, as Chris Patten observed, to some eclecticism. It was a case of planting the trees and neglecting the view of the wood.

> Even the very full and lengthy discussion that took place over a whole
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> weekend at the Selsdon Park Hotel in 1970 did not, as popular mythology

would have us believe, result in the formulation of some general concept which could have been termed 'Selsdon Man'. This conference remained a series of discussions – often in very considerable detail – on a collection of specific policies listed for inclusion in the draft manifesto. (Patten 1980: 17; see also Sewill 2009: 68)

'Selsdon Man', rather like 'Thatcherism', was a concept given coherence not by supporters, but by opponents, in this case primarily by the Labour leader, Harold Wilson (Patten 1980: 17).

In terms of party organisation, Heath 'continued the process of overhauling the party organisation and shaping the party machine to his own purposes. He boasted of taking a closer interest in matters of organisation than any previous leader' (Campbell 1993: 214). He managed, after two years in the leadership, to dislodge Edward du Cann – a former minister who had served under Heath when he was President of the Board of Trade – as party chairman. The two had a notably fraught relationship: 'they jarred on each other' (Hutchinson 1970: 178) was one of the milder assessments of their relationship. Heath said of du Cann 'Instead of shaking up the party machine after the 1964 defeat, his only significant changes were increases in salaries at Conservative Central Office' (Heath 1998: 29) and replaced with the more loyal Tony Barber. In fact, du Cann had initiated various reforms, whereas Barber devoted himself especially to improving relations with the different elements of the party.

There was some reorganisation during the period of Opposition that proved fruitful. There was some improvement in the salaries of constituency party agents and by 1970

the party organisation was superior to that of the Labour Party, though – as Butler and

Pinto-Duschinsky noted – the principal explanation for this lay in the decline of

Labour Party organisation (Pinto-Duschinsky 1971: 291). Within Central Office,

there was a rationalisation of resources. Management consultants were brought in.

An internal budgeting system was introduced and staffing, not least at area level, was

slimmed down (Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky 1971: 96). 'If the activity at Central

Office from 1966 to 1970 is to be summed up in a phrase, it must be the same as for

Mr Heath's handling of the party as a whole: it was a negative success… Despite the

marginal advances made towards the goal of greater representativeness, the party

remained basically unaltered' (Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky 1971: 109).

There were attempts to widen the party's support base as well as engage more with

party members through the Conservative Political Centre (CPC) (Butler and Pinto-

Duschinsky 1971: 98-99; Norton 2002), but neither was to prove a notable success.

There was a recruitment drive ('Action 67') to encourage more young people to join

the Young Conservatives. 'Within a few months of "Action 67" YC membership

declined to its previous level' (Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky 1971: 101).

The CPC had been established in 1945 to stimulate party members to think about and

discuss ideas within the party (Conservative and Unionist Central Office 1964: 15).

Under Alec Douglas-Home as leader, Heath had been appointed to initiate and co-

ordinate 'the biggest policy review in the party since Rab Butler's in the late 1940s'

(Heath 1998: 267). The CPC under a new director, David Howell (a journalist

recruited from *The Daily Telegraph*), was used to generate new ideas – Howell

contributed to the 1966 party manifesto – and was active in disseminating pamphlets

and encouraging a two-way dialogue with party members (Norton 2002: 192-3). In many respects, this was a high point for CPC activity. However, although it may have helped reinforce views being developed by Howell, 'it made little impact on party or public thinking' (Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky 191: 102; see also Norton 2002: 193). It was a useful means for those appointed by Heath to develop ideas rather than a means of harvesting new ideas by party members. What discussions did take place in CPC groups were on topics initiated by the centre.

In government

Relations with the professional and voluntary wings of the party did not improve once Heath was in No. 10. He appointed Defence Secretary Lord Carrington as party chairman. As Jim Prior recalled, 'Peter Carrington is a great diplomat but was never very happy at Central Office. His liberal instincts made him dislike some of the hard-nosed characters in the constituencies. He had never experienced the cut and thrust of party politics in the Commons or on the hustings' (Prior 1986: 96). Carrington himself acquired 'a strong distaste for what he considered to be the ramshackle character of Tory organisation' (Cosgrave 1985: 80). He did, though, make some attempts to address it. There were tensions, not least as a result of attempts to reform candidate selection, making it more professional, as well as to draw together more the voluntary and professional wings of the party and also the parliamentary party. 'At the same time as "the centre" was worrying about surrendering autonomy to the grass-roots, the grass-roots were concerned about what they saw as a significant move towards centralisation. The cause of their concern was the decision… to establish a National Agency Scheme' (Bale 2012: 156). Constituency associations were keen to

protect their independence and did not want the constituency agent to become the employee of the centre. Anything that smacked of interference by Central Office – including in indicating a preference when a local party was interviewing for a new candidate – could be counter-productive. The need to render the party more efficient in fighting elections was resisted on grounds of maintaining constituency autonomy.

Tensions existed, though, not only with the voluntary wing of the party, but also within Central Office. As Douglas Hurd recalled:

> The leader of the party usually has trouble with Conservative Central Office. Hothouse intrigues flourish unnaturally in that unattractive hulk at the corner of Smith Square. Ted sought to control the situation by appointing Michael [Wolff] as, in effect, chief executive. Sara Morrison was at the same time put in charge of the women's section of the party…. Neither Michael nor Sara was allowed long enough at Central Office to complete the overhaul which they planned (Hurd 2003: 231).

The party was largely external to Heath's way of running government. Indeed, much of his time in Opposition was geared to thinking how to manage government effectively. As Peter Hennessy recorded, 'There was nothing DIY or improvised about Heath's ideas for the machinery of government. He was, in such terms, the most managerially minded prime minister since Attlee. As leader of the Opposition he had commissioned a depth of detailed planning unmatched by any premier before or since' (Hennessy 1989: 210; see also Hennessy 2000: 336-7)). In essence, Heath saw the party machinery in instrumental terms. For him, the party was essentially a

means to an end. He was focused on how to run an administration rather than lead a party. The latter was necessary to achieve the former. From the moment he was elected party leader, he gave thought to how to structure government. This, as he conceded in his autobiography, 'engrossed me' (Heath 1998: 314). He drew on consultants and people in business to assist in developing his plans. Four months after taking office, he presented a White Paper, *The Reorganisation of Central Government* (HM Government 1970), the first across-the-board look at the quality of Cabinet government, as Hennessy noted, since the 1918 Haldane report on the machinery of government (Hennessy 2000: 338). He sought to achieve a more streamlined system of Cabinet government and a hiving off of certain executive functions.

Once Heath entered No. 10, perhaps not surprisingly, party bodies were essentially sidelined. Although more party members got involved in CPC discussion groups (Norton 2002: 193), there is no evidence of the work of the CPC having an impact on the Prime Minister. The same applies to the professional wing of the party. 'After June 1970 coherent CRD [Conservative Research Department] input into Government ceased virtually overnight' (Campbell 1993: 513). During the election, Heath was helped by an external team, led by Geoffrey Tucker. Heath hosted a reception for them at Chequers. As Douglas Hurd recalled, 'I spent much time thereafter warding off complaints from the team that they never saw the Prime Minister, and that we were lost in a bureaucratic haystack' (Hurd 2003: 193).

It was not just the professional and voluntary wings of the party that were neglected, but also the very body that had made Heath leader. He failed to maintain good

relations with the 1922 Committee, the body drawing together all Conservative private members (that is, all Tory MPs bar the leader in Opposition and all backbenchers when in government)(Norton 2013). Although he had been elected leader by the party's MPs, he had not necessarily had a smooth relationship with them during his ministerial career. His successful attempt as President of the Board of Trade to abolish resale price maintenance had been resisted by many Conservative backbenchers, influenced by small shopkeepers in their constituencies. Heath appeared before a meeting of the 1922 to justify his policy: his argument 'went down like a lead balloon' (du Cann 1995: 88). His victory in the 1965 leadership contest – the first under the party's new rules for electing the leader – was narrow and generally unexpected. He was not the frontrunner, but benefited from a lacklustre campaign run by his opponent, Reginald Maudling.

As Prime Minister, Heath enjoyed the backing of the 1922 in the policy of joining the European Communities (EC), despite some dissent. It proved a forum, though, for criticism of his policy U-turns. At least with the policy of joining the EC, there was a clear goal. With the policy shifts on industry and the economy, the sense of direction was lost. At one point during passage of the 1972 Industry Bill, the chairman of the 1922, Sir Harry Legge-Bourke, fired a warning shot across the government's bows, suggesting ministers should 'give full weight' to the support given an amendment by leading figures in the parliamentary party (Norton 2013: 20).

As leader, Heath's relations with the 1922 Committee were at best correct, but in practice generally frosty. As one member of the executive recalled, 'He treated most of his Parliamentary colleagues with ill-concealed contempt, especially the Executive,

whose meetings with him appeared to us to be no more than a necessary nuisance as far as he was concerned' (Fisher 1977: 141). As Campbell recorded, he regularly attended the backbench business committee on Wednesdays at 6.15, following meetings of the Shadow Cabinet, 'but rather to tell the troops what the officers had decided than to listen to what they themselves might have to say' (Campbell 1993: 216).

Elections of officers and the executive of the 1922 were used, in the words of one Member, to give 'a signal to Heath' (Norton 2013: 21). The most notable example was the election in 1972 of Edward du Cann as chairman. He had been approached, he said, by a number of MPs and 'those who approached me were quite clear as to what they wanted – someone who would stand up to the Prime Minister, Ted Heath, and ensure he was made aware of Party opinions. They felt he was ignoring the views of his colleagues in the House' (du Cann 1995: 194). These views later spilled out into meetings of the 1922. Some members by the end of 1973 were complaining of Heath's 'presidential style of government' (*The Times*, 19 October 1973). Attempts to create good relations came to nothing. When Humphrey Atkins became Chief Whip in 1973, he arranged a dinner at No. 10 for the officers and executive of the 1922, 'in what was intended to be a grand rapprochement. It proved to be calamitous' (Ziegler 2010: 431). Heath apparently lost his temper and the experiment was never repeated.

Once in government, Heath favoured civil servants to party figures. 'Heath… made use of the Civil Service in a way rarely observed before or since' (Harris 2013: 470). He drew heavily on the head of the civil service, Sir William Armstrong, and his

principal private secretary, Robert Armstrong. Heath's reliance on William

Armstrong grew, especially after the introduction of a prices and incomes policy in

1972 (Holmes 1997: 130-1).   Economic policy was shaped by Heath and a small

group of civil servants (Baker 1993: 36). The Cabinet and parliamentary party were

largely excluded from the process (Holmes 1997: 132-3).

Heath's idea was 'to reduce politics to the minimum and adopt the best policy, arrived

at by experts thinking logically' (Harris 2013: 470). His means of achieving this was

using policy groups to help shape party policy in Opposition and the newly formed

Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) for coming up with innovative ideas within

government.   As its head, Victor Rothschild emphasised, it was 'for' government 'but

not a tool of the party' (Jago 2017: 58). The whole of government became more a

vehicle for effective administration that for thinking politically. As John Ramsden

noted, Conservative Research Department was limited 'by the strange reluctance of

Ministers to act like politicians' (Ramsden 1980: 294-5). This, though, reflected the

basic stance of the party leader.

Heath, then, relied on officials rather than party figures. However, according to

William Waldegrave, when the government ran into difficulties, Heath felt he had not

had the support he deserved from the party hierarchy.

> I believe that Heath's embitterment started then [1973-4], as he came to think
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> that the British Establishment, and particularly the Conservative Party
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> Establishment – which he had conquered from far outside its traditional

borders – had failed him. There were no strong and confident structures to rely on: just himself, and he could not do it all. (Waldegrave 2015: 119)

There was thus something of a growing disseveration between Heath and his party. As Waldegrave observed, there was no 'Heathism', so nothing distinctive behind which he could rally the party. The party organisation served him as leader, but he was busy being Prime Minister.

PERSONNEL

Heath had been an effective Chief Whip from 1955 to 1959, but he operated in an era when discipline was seen almost in military terms. 'Heath chivvied backbenchers with something of the manner of a sergeant-major' (Horne 1989: 10). Macmillan later described him as a 'first class staff officer', adding 'but no army commander' (Horne 1989: 242). Edward du Cann offered an even more critical interpretation: 'It was commonly believed that his four years as Chief Whip had given him a healthy contempt for his fellow Members of Parliament in the Conservative Party' (du Cann 1995: 194). When he became leader, he thus had a somewhat detached view of the very body that he led. The troops were there to support the leader and, in essence, to do so without question. 'Nothing was explained or justified in principle. The party was just expected to accept it' (Norton and Aughey 1981: 155). Heath was more at home with process than he was with people. 'He often failed to recognise that a party lives on custom and personal kindnesses more than on rational calculation' (Norton and Aughey 1981: 145).

Party members

As Robin Harris noted, 'The Conservative Party never learned to love Edward Heath, though it respected him and stood with him' (Harris 2011: 457). The respect was somewhat one-sided. Heath, as John Campbell observed, 'had little sympathy with the passions and prejudices of the retired majors, small businessmen and hatted ladies who organised fetes and stuffed envelopes in the constituencies and demanded tougher penalties for criminals every year at conference' (Campbell 1993: 509). As Campbell goes on to observe, Heath made little effort to disguise his disdain (Campbell 1993: 509; also Ziegler 2010: 232). In meetings with party supporters, he could be distant and sometimes silent. 'Sometimes he simply could not bother to make any effort at all, particularly if he felt there was little to gain' (Laing 1972: 173). He was notably antipathetic towards women. As one woman MP recalled, 'He disliked women intensely, and did not bother to hide his feelings. Even in the constituencies, where 90 per cent of the work is done by women, he could barely be civil to them' (Knight 1995: 129; see also Waddington 2012: 91-2).

In May 1973 he addressed the Scottish party conference. As Michael Wolff wrote to his wife, Heath used his speech to launch a ferocious attack on inefficient British industry, the ugly face of capitalism [the Lonrho company], 'and finally on the Conservative Party for being smug, upper and middle class and spending its time debating self-congratulatory resolutions' (quoted in Hurd 2003: 210). The location is significant. Heath had a particular dislike of the landed hierarchy of the Scottish Conservative party (Hurd 2003: 210; Ziegler 2010: 232), which essentially

represented the social snobbery that he despised (see Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky 1971: 100-1).

Conservative MPs

The respect of the party membership was maintained somewhat longer than that of the party's MPs. Party members rallied to the government's cause over membership of the European Communities, but began to waver over the government's direction from 1972 onwards. 'The rank and file remained supportive in public, while sending some remarkably crisp and frank reactions up through the confidential channels of communication within the party structure' (Ball 1996: 331). Worries over the sense of direction of the government – or lack of it – did not, though, threaten Heath's leadership. Party members remained supportive, even after support began to drift away in the parliamentary party. It was the party's MPs that were to be the biggest threat to his leadership.

Heath was elected by the party's MPs and was dependent on them for sustaining his leadership. He was a prime example of a leader who took a distant approach. He neither listened to, nor rewarded those who sat behind him on the Conservative benches. When he failed to deliver electoral success, his neglect of the parliamentary party was to prove fatal.

Heath in the wake of the 1970 general election was in a powerful position, largely credited with winning an election the Conservatives were expected to lose. He had the kudos of election victory and the considerable levers of power in No. 10 (see

Donoughue 1987: 3; Thomas 1998: 74-5). He was able to craft a personally loyal Cabinet and put in place loyalists as head of the party organisation.

However, his ability to command the loyalty of his backbenchers proved relatively short-lived. The root cause of conflict was the policies he pursued. Policy shifts, especially the U-turns on industrial and economic policy, generated opposition from some backbenchers and a wider sense of unease. The situation was encapsulated by Chris Patten, who served Heath as Director of Conservative Research Department: 'The Conservative Party shuffled, confused, with the Cabinet Secretary, William Armstrong, at Ted Heath's side, from a market-oriented policy, designed by a regiment of policy groups in Opposition, to dirigisme and corporatism in government' (Patten 2017: 135). The policy changes encountered dissent from neo-liberal MPs, notably those who shared the views of Enoch Powell (Norton 1978: 246-54), but it was not confined to them.

Although most Tory MPs supported membership of the EU, it was resisted by a significant, and well-organised, minority. The need for legislation meant that dissent was sustained during the passage of the European Communities Bill (Norton 1978: 64-82), though Heath was helped by the fact that, as a result of astute drafting by Geoffrey Howe, it was a relatively short Bill. Despite its brevity, there were over 80 divisions in which Tory MPs rebelled during its passage (Norton 1978: 64-82). When problems became more severe, Heath was vulnerable as a result of his failure to build a body of goodwill among backbenchers.

Conservative Prime Ministers are often adept at maintaining good relations with their backbenchers through the judicious use of promotions and honours. Backbenchers are promoted to junior ministerial office. Long-serving backbenchers are rewarded with knighthoods (or damehoods). The Prime Minister will go to the 1922 Committee and seek to charm the members. A good Prime Minister will spend at least some time in the House, occasionally dining there and visiting the tea or smoking rooms.

Heath's problem was not so much that he failed at one of these, but rather that he failed at all of them. The turnover of ministers was modest, especially at Cabinet level (Norton 1978: 230-1; Butler and Kavanagh 1974: 25). Those in office were seen as loyal to Heath – 'one of the complaints against Mr Heath was that he had created too like-minded a team of ministers' (Butler and Kavanagh 1974: 25) – and when occasional reshuffles occurred there was a perception of 'yes men' filling the vacancies. As Patrick Cosgrave observed, 'You cannot expect preferment, or even merited reward – so the belief increasingly goes – if you disagree with, or oppose, the Prime Minister' (Cosgrave 1972: 878). A consequence was not only to build resentment among those overlooked for office, but also to leave some notably able MPs on the backbenches, where they could act as effective critics of government (Norton 1978: 235). They included John Biffen, described by *The Economist* as 'an exceptionally dangerous parliamentary performer' (*The Economist,* 3 March 1973: 20).

Long-serving Members who would not expect promotion, but who saw themselves as likely 'knights of the shire' were also to be disappointed (Ziegler 2010: 237). Only a small proportion of those who had served 20 years or more in the House were

knighted. (No Member received a baronetcy and Heath followed Harold Wilson in appointing only life peers, and even then only two from backbench MPs; Norton 1978: 237). His failure to use his patronage went against the advice of his own Chief Whip, Francis Pym (Norton 1978: 237). As one backbench MP, Julian Critchley observed, the parliamentary party was 'once sweetened by the distribution of awards. Mr Heath has set his face against such baubles; just as it was said of Manning that "there is a lobster salad side to the Cardinal", so there is a Spanish Republican side to the Prime Minister' (Critchley 1973: 402). William Waldegrave summarised it even more pithily: 'his handling of honours was admirable but suicidal' (Waldegrave 2015: 141).

Heath's failure to listen to his backbenchers led to MPs taking their dissent to the voting lobbies and his failure to mix with them rendered him vulnerable when challenged for the party leadership. His approach was to decide policy, either along or in conjunction with a few trusted ministers (Money 1975: 131), and then essentially announce it to Cabinet and to the parliamentary party. There was no real attempt to explain or cajole. Heath expected loyalty and was not disposed to listen to those who took a different view. Fruitful dissent, as *The Economist* noted, tended to be confused with disloyalty (*The Economist*, 1 February 1975: 11). Expressing disquiet directly to the Prime Minister, and being listened to, was an avenue closed to backbench critics. This meant that the only remaining avenue for expressing dissent was the chamber. As one MP, Richard Body, expressed it: 'Macmillan always listened, but Heath did not. And if the Prime Minister did not listen to you, then the only alternative was to vote against the Government' (Norton 1978: 230). Heath variously ignored the advice of Francis Pym and insisted on pursuing measures in the face of backbench

opposition, with the consequence that the government experienced unprecedented levels of backbench dissent in the division lobbies (Norton 1975, 1978).

Tory backbenchers voted against the party whip not only more often than before, but to an extent that on occasion resulted in a government defeat. No fewer than 160 Tory MPs cast one or more votes against the whip during the course of the Parliament (Norton 1978: 206) and on six occasions did so in numbers sufficient to defeat the government: three of the defeats were on three-line whips. The most important defeat was on the immigration rules in 1972 (Norton 1976: 404-20). As *The Times* recorded in the wake of the defeat, 'There was considerable feeling at Westminster last night that that the Prime Minister must no longer seek to ride roughshod over his backbenchers' (*The Times,* 24 November 1972).

However, arguably the most important dissent did not result in defeat, though it came close to doing so. Heath was the first post-war Conservative Prime Minister to witness some of his own MPs vote against the government on a vote of confidence, when fifteen Tory MPs voted against (and five abstained from voting on) the second reading of the European Communities Bill. Potential rebels had been called in 'and told in no uncertain terms where their duty lay' (Kitzinger 1973: 387). Heath had made clear in the Commons that, if the vote was lost, 'my colleagues and I are unanimous that in these circumstances this Parliament cannot sensibly continue' (*House of Commons Debates*, 17 Feb. 1972, col. 752). The government was saved from defeat by the votes of Liberal MPs and by the abstentions of some Labour Members (Kitzinger 1973: 388; Norton 1978: 74; Renton 2004: 291). There was no love lost between Heath and backbench opponents of the Bill.

Heath's failure to listen to his MPs had an immediate effect in terms of votes in the Commons. His failure to engage with Members had a longer-term impact. The loss of the two general elections in 1974 left Heath especially vulnerable to backbench criticism. The Conservative Party does not reward failure and Heath had little reservoir of goodwill on which to rely once he had lost the status and power of a Prime Minister.

Heath not only failed to maintain cordial links with the party organisation in the House, he also failed to use opportunities to meet informally with Members. The use of informal space in Parliament is crucial to understanding parliamentary behaviour and not least the capacity of party leaders to maintain support (Norton 2019: 257-60). Heath rarely ventured forth to the tea or smoking room in the Commons (Ziegler 2010: 234; Campbell 1993: 216). As William Waldgrave recalled, it was difficult to persuade him to utilise social skills with colleagues. 'I would mention a backbencher who might be swayed by a little courteous treatment. Heath would wave away the idea: "I have spoken to him. Last year. He's a great friend." (Often, in reality, he was not.)' (Waldegrave 2015: 141). It was a characteristic observed by Jim Prior when he was PPS to Heath as Leader of the Opposition:

> Ted's difficulty was that he would win one group round – perhaps on the back benches, or amongst the Press – but then it was as though he said to himself, 'Well, thank goodness that's over, I won't have to worry about them again for a while'. So six months later he would be back to square one, and would have to make a special effort with them all over again (Prior 1986: 55).

In many respects, it was a problem when Heath failed to meet with colleagues and equally a problem when he did meet them. As John Campbell reported, 'When Heath did try to show himself he tended to alienate more good will than he engendered: it became part of Pym's task to keep the Prime Minister away from the House as much as possible' (Campbell 1993: 513). As Nigel Fisher noted: 'His rather rare visits to the Members' smoking room were unrewarding because, as a friend of his put it to me, he could not talk about unimportant things to unimportant people. It bored and embarrassed him' (Fisher 1977: 166). His Cabinet colleague, Peter Walker, was conscious of the problem:

> At one point I advised Ted to spend more time in the smoking room since MPs were seeing too little of him as Prime Minister. I went into the smoking room a few days later to find that he had taken my advice and was talking to a distinguished Tory. As I passed, I heard him say, "That was a dreadful speech you made last Wednesday" (Walker 1991: 120).

The behaviour was symptomatic of his period as Prime Minister (Norton 1978: 228-30; Clarke 2016: 88-9). As one backbench MP recalled: 'he has always been a prickly and difficult colleague, giving the impression that he neither knew nor cared to know even the names of his backbenchers, let alone the backbenchers themselves' (Knight 1995: 129).

Criticisms were taken personally. When Peter Tapsell, who had been Heath's neighbour in the Albany, criticised his economic policy, Heath never spoke to him

again (Peter Tapsell to author). When Heath sought to make pleasantries during the leadership contest in 1975, Members tended to rebuff his advances. It was seen as too little, too late. As one MP, later to be a Conservative Chief Whip, recalled, 'It was this feeling of being slighted and ignored that caused so many Tory MPs not to support Ted in the leadership campaign of early 1975…. There is no doubt that pent-up irritation with Ted rather than Margaret's virtues and skills caused her to win and Ted to lose' (Renton 2004: 294).

DOWNFALL

Heath's personality combined with his handling of the period in Opposition after the loss of the February 1974 general election proved fatal. Dissatisfaction with what was seen as timid leadership – not being prepared to force votes to try to defeat the Labour government – was expressed at meetings of the 1922 Committee in May and June (Norton 1980: 450). Loss of the October election led many Members to believe that he was no longer the right person to lead the party. Relations between Heath and the 1922 Committee executive became notably strained. The 1922 executive met at the home of the chairman, Edward du Cann, who recorded: 'They were clear and unanimous in what they demanded: Heath should stand down as soon as possible' (du Cann 1995: 200). Although du Cann thought this was premature, he reported the view to Heath. According to du Cann, he recommended that Heath consider appointing a body to devise rules for re-electing a leader, which would give him time to rally support (du Cann 1995: 201-2). Heath, on the other hand, recalled only that du Cann told him that the executive committee had decided that he should resign and

that he had retorted that the members represented no one but themselves (Heath 1998: 528).

When the new Parliament met, du Cann declined an invitation to join the Opposition front bench, 'undermining', as Heath recorded, 'my attempt to unify the party' (Heath 1998: 529). By then, it was rather too late. Heath noted that the problems were exacerbated when 'some of those Members who had been secretly plotting to remove me as leader were re-elected to the Executive of the 1922 Committee on 3 November' (Heath 1998: 529). In fact, the entire executive was re-elected, defeating a slate of candidates supporting Heath.

Pressure for Heath to stand in a leadership contest led to him conceding the case for a change in the rules and he appointed a small committee under Alec Douglas-Home to formulate those rules. The new rules provided for the annual election of the leader by the party's MPs, thus moving tenure from freehold to leasehold (Stark 1996: 26-30). Nominations were opened and Heath offered himself for re-election. Former Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher was also nominated, as was backbench MP Hugh Fraser.

Soundings of constituency officers as well as peers indicated that they clearly preferred Heath to continue as leader, given the choice available, though four-fifths of associations apparently indicated they would have preferred a wider choice (Gardiner 1975: 192). According to du Cann, the officers and executive of the 1922 'faithfully relayed' the preference for Heath to Conservative MPs (du Cann 1995: 207), though it was only relayed to those who asked (see Gardiner 1975: 192; Fisher 1977: 171), a

fact noted by Heath (Heath 1998: 533). In any event, the opinion of party activists failed to impact notably on the stance of MPs.

Heath was confident of victory, but his failure to rally supporters was largely unrewarding. When he saw MPs individually 'it was rather like being summoned to the Headmaster's study: one knew one was there for a purpose, it was rather uncomfortable, and the sooner it was over the better' (Baker 1993: 44). What is perhaps most remarkable about that observation is that it came from an MP helping to run Heath's campaign. One MP recounted being talked at by Heath for 20 minutes, justifying his stance on the miners' strike. 'Any doubts I'd had about whether to support him were certainly dispelled. I came away determined to vote for Margaret' (quoted in Gardiner 1975: 187). His campaign was outmanoeuvred by that of Thatcher, run by MP and former spy Airey Neave (see Fisher 1977: 167-70; Campbell 1993: 666-73). Heath lost in the first ballot, garnering only 119 votes against 130 for Thatcher and 16 for Hugh Fraser. Over half of his MPs – 55% - had voted for other candidates. Heath promptly resigned.

As Michael Jago summarised Heath's rise and fall: 'From being a widely popular Chief Whip – an achievement in itself – he evolved into a leader who rapidly and comprehensively lost the support of the very members who had promoted his candidacy for the leadership… Ultimately, the support of his colleagues evaporated; the Tory Party rewrote their account of the 1970s to exclude him; there were few after his fall in 1975, who admitted to supporting him a decade before' (Jago 2017: 71).

Heath had no lasting legacy in terms of the organisation of the Conservative Party and his leadership ended as a result of neglecting his power base in the party. He spent too much time being Prime Minister and not enough being party leader. Nigel Fisher quoted approvingly Churchill's observation: The loyalties which centre upon number one are enormous. If he trips he must be sustained. If he makes mistakes they must be covered. If he sleeps he must not be wantonly disturbed. If he is no good, he must be pole-axed' (Fisher 1975: 3). In 1975, Heath was pole-axed by his parliamentary party.

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