

# CONSERVATIVE AND UNIONIST CENTRAL OFFICE

FOR RELEASE ON—

SPEECH BY THE RT.HON.ANTHONY EDEN, M.C., M.P.  
AT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE HELD AT BRIGHTON,  
on 2nd OCTOBER, 1947.

On many occasions recently in speeches in different parts of the country, I have dealt with the present crisis<sup>is</sup> and made some criticisms of the Government's handling of it.

But today I want to concentrate in the main upon our position as a party.

It is, however, impossible in examining our own Conservative policies entirely to ignore the Government's contributions to the crisis.

We have a Socialist Government.

Nobody is in any doubt about that.

It is very close to us all.

It goes to bed with us at night in the form of outworn and tattered sheets.

It gets up with us in the morning when we find that the electric stove has shed its load.

It accompanies us wherever we go, when, for instance, we buy our four page newspaper.

It is a cadaverous guest at every meal.

We are hardly to be blamed if the embarrassing intimacy of this spectre occupies quite a lot of our thought.

For I think, should the Prime Minister complain if we talk about it from time to time.

But my task today is a different one.

It is to examine our own views rather than the shortcomings of

the Government.

I am well aware that many members of our Party have been reluctant to issue any declarations.

We are properly suspicious of detailed future policies.

We know that no set of complicated remedies can be devised in advance for the treatment of ills that shift and change their course from day to day.

The nation is now suffering from this Government's too rigid commitment to doctrinaire policies.

At the same time we know that it is impossible to go about the country without hearing on all sides: "What would the Tories do about it?"

It seems to us to be our duty to answer this question.

Therefore in respect of the immediate situation what would we do?

First: True Leadership.

We may quarrel with the Government about policy, but even that is not our main criticism.

True leadership means foresight, courage and single-mindedness.

We had such leadership in the war: who can say we have got it today?

You could not attribute foresight to a Government which includes Mr. Shinwell - political courage to a Government which includes Mr. Alexander, or single-mindedness to a Government which carries Mr. Barnes.

The public does not yet understand the true nature and full implications of the present crisis; and this is not their fault but the Government's.

In the war we had, under Mr. Churchill, true national leadership that took the public into its confidence and gave a lucid exposition of our problems and our prospects.

We must have such leadership again.

Second: Immediate steps to stop inflation, which is playing havoc with all our other plans.

Inflation is getting worse.

It is bound to continue to get worse as a result of Sir Stafford Cripps's export drive, however desirable that may be in itself.

As a result of that drive there will be less goods coming into the shops, and therefore more money chasing less goods.

How is this inflation to be dealt with?

I would suggest to you two ways:

By a really balanced budget and by this I mean a budget which is not merely balanced but balanced at a level which the country can bear.

And by a capital expenditure programme which instead of being based as it has been hitherto on the unco-ordinated appetites of individual Ministers bears a close relation to the nation's capacity in men, money and materials.

Such a budget would have to include a reduction of Government expenditure, and particularly of the present high cost of the machinery of government.

As to capital expenditure, the Government have been trying to do too much at once.

Now, admittedly, cuts in capital expenditure involve some most unpleasant decisions.

Hospitals, schools, public works, houses, the re-equipment of mines, of agriculture, of railways and of industry as a whole, all these things we all of us desperately want to see.

If we cannot have them all at once - and unhappily we know that we cannot - an order of priority must be established.

There is no escape from this, and if only the Government had faced up to this reality when we warned them a year or more ago, much waste could have been avoided and much work, now half completed, could have been finished.

/MORE TO COME.

Already inflation has raised prices, particularly for the old age pensioner, for children and for the lowest scale of wage earners.

The benefits of the now social services, which we all supported, are being rapidly dissipated.

More than a year ago the Chancellor warned Parliament of the heavy financial burden of the food subsidies.

But the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not a gypsy, who can be content only with a warning. He should be a great officer of state responsible for action.

What then does he mean?

If the burden of these subsidies is one which the country can and should bear, why warn us?

If it is too great for us to bear, then warning is not enough: action is what we need.

Should action be unavoidable and should the subsidies now be cut, account must at the same time be taken of the special hardship such long delayed decision will inevitably inflict on certain sections of the community.

It would, in our judgment, be necessary to make some compensating increases in certain of the social services and to reduce taxation particularly on the lowest incomes.

~~Secondly, our Imperial heritage.~~  
Thirdly, our Imperial heritage.

The Conservative Party has a vigorous and abiding faith in the future of the nation and in the future of the British Commonwealth and Empire, or it is nothing.

These are not only questions of economics, important though these are at the present time.

Foreign policy, defence policy, all these matters have to be thought out in Imperial terms, not in those of our Island nation alone.

As regards defence policy, I have been disturbed at the extent to which the propaganda of the extreme Left has concentrated on this part of our national expenditure.

Any reductions should be part of an agreed Empire plan.

No one would deny the need at this time to reduce expenditure upon the fighting services to the minimum consistent with efficiency.

We must constantly seek to comb the tail, as we did in war time.

But we must not allow our forces to fall into a condition in which they are incapable of meeting our international commitments.

That would be disastrous.

And then there is the economic aspect of Empire policy.

It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of Empire trade.

Before the war 49% of our exports were sold to the Empire.

X We as a party are proud that through long years we have played our part in that carefully contrived system of Imperial preference, which reconciles the ideal of unity with the aspirations of free and independent nations.

We maintain that within a system of preferences there are immense opportunities for the development of the resources of the Empire.

Empire policy cannot be a makeshift policy.

It must be a permanent policy.

Therefore, we welcome any new recruits, wherever they may come from and however raw and confused their thought!

We are of course delighted to hear that the Empire, for which only a few years ago some of their own Ministers could "blush", is now one they are prepared to bless.

But we cannot forget, nor should others forget, that ours is the party which has borne the heat and burden of the day.

X Fourthly, an intensive drive to develop our production.

You will notice I say our production and not our exports. It is not that I minimise our need for exports.

All of us, Tory or Socialist, employer or worker, all of us realise that our standards of life, indeed our life itself, depend on

MORE TO COME.

our ability to export.

But our aim should and must be not merely to distribute to the world the greater part of our scarcity, but to distribute to the world part of our plenty.

We cannot continue for ever consuming nothing and exporting all, nor can we expect other countries to be prepared indefinitely to take what we send them while we refuse what they wish to send us.

But certainly we as a party would do and will now do all we can to develop overseas markets.

For the problem of finding markets for our exports is perhaps the most formidable of all.

Government arithmetic alone won't find us markets.

There is nothing incompatible between what I have said about Empire trade and the importance of plans with our Western neighbours in Europe for greatly increased production and mutual exchange of goods.

Indeed it is indispensable that we should do this if markets are to be found for our exports.

The two conceptions are in fact complementary and must be worked out together.

Indeed, in this respect we have a special responsibility, for we are the bridge between these great new countries of the Commonwealth and our neighbours in Western Europe.

We should do everything in our power to further the constructive effort of the Committee of Sixteen Nations in Paris.

Fifthly, the intensive development of our own agriculture.

You might perhaps say that that is covered by the points I have already made with regard to production. But I look on agriculture as something standing by itself - not only because of the character of this industry but the importance of the results. Cuts in the petrol ration, the abolition of foreign travel, less flicks and less fags (to use the elegant language of the Chancellor of the Exchequer) all added together would only save a fraction of the dollars that would be got by the restoration of the level of agricultural production to where we left it

MORE TO COME.

in 1945.

But you cannot get increased production just by setting increased targets, not even just by giving increased prices.

It is no good giving the farmers the job unless you also give them the tools.

Priority in machinery, priority in spares, priority in houses, priority in the imports on which alone an increased meat and poultry production can be based.

These are the things the farmers need.

No one is in a better position than the farmer to know that fine words butter no parsnips and up to now he had had little except fine words.

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~  
Six, no more nationalisation.

Let us unite and not divide the nation on economic policy.

You will remember that earlier in my speech I mentioned that one of the qualities of leadership, which the nation expects in a time of crisis, is that of single-mindedness.

By that I meant that our rulers should abandon all thought of party advantages or political slogans.

Their thoughts should centre only on those things which promise relief from our present difficulties.

Even the most ardent supporter of Nationalisation - the man who goes furthest in those claims which we dispute for its long term advantages - would say that the result which he expects can have no possible effect on the present situation.

We believe - and I think even he would agree - that the immediate results - the complete change over from one system to another - must lead to disorganisation, confusion and loss of efficiency.

This is what the Conservatives have preached in the past as a matter of theory.

Today we can claim it as something which has been proved in practice.

MORE TO COME.

We have now, which we had not at the last general election, nearly a years experience of Nationalisation in the coal mining industry.

The other day there was a meeting, not of the Conservative Party, but of the National Association of Colliery Overmen affiliated to the T.U.C.

At that meeting it was said that 22,000 were employed in salaried positions, compared with 15,000 before the war, and that the administrative cost of raising coal which in 1935 was 2½d. a ton, is now in the great new bureaucratic paradise created by Mr. Shinwell, no less than 1/8d.

Is this dreary process to be repeated with Railways, Road Transport and other activities?

Is that great industry of Iron and Steel to follow the same road?

Finally, there is the question of Controls.

We all admit that there must be some controls while raw materials are scarce.

But let the Government concentrate on the main essential controls and relax the vast network of detailed controls.

They do not really work.

They only frustrate, and much time and labour is wasted in form filling.

The Government themselves have now taken our advice in respect of building materials.

Let them follow on.

In all these matters much excellent advice is given in the Industrial Charter, a piece of work which I must say in my judgment, reflects the greatest credit on its authors.

I am sure that you have been glad to hear that similar statements of policy are being prepared in respect of other spheres.

Let me then summarise what we think should be put in hand at once:-

1. Let us have real leadership showing foresight, courage and single-mindedness.
2. Stop the inflation by a properly balanced budget, and a programme of capital expenditure which puts first things first and then gets them done quickly.
3. Let us think imperially in foreign policy, in defence, trade and indeed every question that affects this island.
4. Let our exports come out of greater production so that we share in plenty rather than scarcity.
5. Give our farmers the tools to do the greatest dollar-saving job of all.
6. No more nationalisation.
7. Streamline the system of controls.

But beyond all these considerations is the great divide between us and the Socialists.

There are only two directions in which our country can develop. One is Socialism, which means in effect that industry becomes one giant State monopoly, or a series of State monopolies.

The other is what I called at Blackpool last year a nation wide property owning democracy.

The latter, I maintain, is in the true tradition of our Party and our race.

We do not want a Britain where a soulless State presides over and determines every movement of our lives.

Nor do we want a Britain of extremes of wealth and poverty.

We want to see ownership widely spread.

We want the farmer to own his land, the working man his house, the artisan to have an interest in the work he does, with liberty and justice and opportunity for all.

This is the time to state what we really stand for, and not just what we have come to be associated with.

For four hundred years Toryism, or Conservatism, has played a part in moulding the destinies of our country.

Other parties have come and gone, as they will come and go again.

Conservatism remains because it is based on certain fundamental principles, and not on a rigid formula applicable only to a single generation.

Take nationalisation away, and what remains of British Socialism?  
Precious little.

The great principles upon which our Party bases its conduct generation after generation go deeper than an economic doctrine.

They do not deal only in production and wages and profits.

All these are important limbs on the body of its political thought, but they are not the heart and soul of it.

At the core Conservatism stands for the individual, his right to liberty, to justice, to respect for his own distinctive personality.

It regards the family as the basic social unit, and the sanctity of family life as vital to the health of the State.

It does not regard the social centre, valuable as it can be, as a substitute for the family.

Conservatism asserts that the duty of government in this country, where the Christian virtues are still venerated, is to guard and encourage those virtues.

You cannot have an efficient working nation when you put temptation in the way of individual honesty and create a paradise for the spav.

We are not the party of unbridled, brutal capitalism, and never have been.

Although we believe in personal responsibility and personal initiative in business, we are not the political children of the laissez-faire school.

We opposed them decade after decade.

Where did the Tories stand when the greed and squalor of the industrial revolution were darkening the land?

I am content with Keir Hardie's testimony:

"As a matter of hard dry fact, from which there can be no getting away, there is more labour legislation standing to the credit account of the Conservative Party on the Statute Book than there is to that of their opponents."

These truths we must expound throughout the land.

Our creed is a mobile and living force which must impress the spirit of each unfolding age or wither.

I have said repeatedly for years past that the problem confronting every age is how to reconcile freedom with order.

"Laissez-faire" remembered freedom and denied order.

Socialism remembers order and has to deny freedom.

The message of Conservatism to a generation growing up in a regimented age is this.

Our faith is freedom within the law for all men.

Come, help us to reconcile this with the order which the modern world must have.

END.