



# LOGIC AND LANGUAGE IN CONSERVATIVE POLITICS: TIME FOR A REVIVAL?

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Foreword by Lord Sandhurst KC

### **About the author**

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## FOREWORD

I commend this crisp paper by a leading legal practitioner. Tim Lord draws on his experience as a master of oral and written advocacy to explain how Conservatives should build and present their case. Using the insights of lawyers who since Cicero in the Roman courts and Senate have understood the need for accuracy, economy and punch in presenting a case Tim Lord reminds us how the Conservatives won the debates of the 1980s. We applied analytical rigour to making, conducting and presenting policy. Of course, Mrs Thatcher had a science degree and then read for the Bar.

The author reminds us of the need for clear policy founded on sound moral principle. This must then be presented honestly but attractively, using clear language to persuade the public, as an advocate does the judge. Logic and language are essential to making and presenting a case to win power. The public must be clear what we mean to do and why. In a thoughtful section he asks what we really mean by redistribution of wealth. He reminds us of the

underlying moral case for the sanctity of private property and how the Left now use the term “wealth” perjoratively, playing on envy to advance redistribution. But as he reminds us, true redistribution has always failed. We should not shy from explaining to the public why it is good to strive and succeed; different people will always have differing wealth and resources in any society in which most if not all wish to live.

The author reminds us that we cannot all be “first timers” when applying for university. The children of such first timers who have themselves striven should not be penalised and disadvantaged to favour the following cohort of first timers. As his analysis shows, recent years have witnessed the demise of “logic and language”. Yet these forensic weapons are vital if we are to persuade the electorate of the righteousness of our policies. We must use logic and honesty to create and then present the case to win hearts and minds and the next election.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRINCIPLE: CLEAR THINKING AND PLAIN LANGUAGE MARCH TOGETHER

In the 1980s, the Conservatives took the philosophical and principled case for their beliefs to their opponents. They won the argument. New Labour and their jettisoning of Clause 4 were the proof of that pudding. The country was the winner.

Forty years later, these battles need to be fought and won once more. Decades of apology and appeasement have not gained the Conservatives any lasting credit. They languish in the polls despite having spent and taxed more than New Labour would have done. Their largesse with the NHS has reaped no dividend. They were always being dismissed as the “nasty but effective and necessary” party: now they are lampooned for being incompetent as well as unkind.

How did this state of affairs come about? And, more importantly, what can be done to remedy it?

The Conservatives have in recent times failed to appreciate the importance of winning the moral debate. They subscribed to the notion that politics is a game to be played in the (phantom) centre ground by reference to managerial platitudes and the placation of focus groups. They did not seem to appreciate that their opponents never truly abandoned their left-wing shibboleths; rather, they advanced them by stealth under Tony Blair and then more openly as the Conservatives ceased to make any contrary principled case. Thus, the Conservatives ceded the moral high ground. If you accept the rightness of your opponents’ case, your own case is lost.

The parallels with the world of law should be obvious.

## NO MORE APPEASEMENT BY WEAK ARGUMENTS

At the most macro level, the debate about public action and what it can do proceeds as if “the State” is necessarily benign and a force for good. The logical extension of this principle, namely an authoritarian world in which people are told exactly how they will live their lives, is never articulated. Many of the most repugnant regimes emerge out

One of the few institutions still venerated is the English system of justice and the rule of law which it cherishes. Why? Because it is seen as pursuing justice and the truth. There is a lesson here for the Conservative Party.

English lawyers are duty-bound to do their utmost to advance their client’s interests in their battle with the other side. This involves the art of persuasion. It has recourse to two tools: logic and language. First, in order to win the argument, you must show, through linear and reasoned submission, that your client is right, i.e. that the truth of the matter is on their side. Second, the way in which you serve up such (logical) arguments must be made attractive and thus persuasive by the language used, and the deployment of metaphors, analogies and other rhetorical weapons.

If (as I do) you believe that the Conservative approach to politics is the right one, then you must make the principled case for it through logic and language. Opponents on the Left and in the media are very alive to the power of an appeal to “justice” and to the use of a lexicon which cloaks their policies in a veneer of “fairness”. The Conservatives must regain some intellectual élan and moral jauntness if they are to capture hearts and minds again. Bold and confident advocacy should be the order of the day for every Conservative.

In almost every aspect of current political discourse, these fault lines may be detected.

of authoritarian states. It is often forgotten that the term Nazi was coined because the political party was the ‘National *Socialists*’. That an ever more muscular and powerful state tends to monstrous conditions is rarely explained by those promoting the importance of individual freedom or the dangers of burgeoning governmental intervention.

How many “Socialists” in Great Britain would like to live under a more paradigmatically socialist regime such as those in China, the old Soviet Union or Venezuela? Every Conservative should have a copy of Hayak’s *Road to Serfdom* under their pillow for inspiration and courage.

Public expenditure is another, allied example. There is almost now a presumption that any and all public spending is *ex hypothesi* a good even noble thing. Why? It all depends on where the money comes from, how it is spent and what opportunity costs are suffered. This encapsulates the challenge for the Conservatives: how to counter the emotive rhetoric of the Left, which makes any rightwards nudge seem extreme rather than sensible. When David Cameron sought to stabilise the public finances, which had collapsed under the last Labour administration (as they doubtless will again), the term “austerity” entered into the debate. What could more accurately have been termed “economising” and explained as “living within the collective means” or “a return to a sustainable level of public spending” was then portrayed by Labour as something harsh. So anxious were the Conservative incumbents, they resorted to the mantra “we are all in it together”. Well-intentioned though it may have been, it soon became a stick to beat the Conservatives with whenever the Left chose to point out any inequality of outcome. Thus a Conservative government imposed eye-watering levels of stamp duty on house purchases: clogging up the housing market, deterring mobility (instead, driving a craze for loft conversions and basements),

preventing the redistribution of property from older to younger generations, costing the Treasury the revenue which would be earned on more people moving more frequently and driving up house prices. It was a “mansion tax” by any other name, yet brought in by Cameron and Osborne, as if this would somehow atone and conciliate their adversaries. It did nothing of the sort. Rather, such penal even confiscatory taxes were an implicit attack on the sanctity of private property, however lawfully and painstakingly acquired. The failure to return the tax rates to those that had pertained under New Labour was another blow to the principles underpinning the Conservative party. Despite being in power for 13 years, these blights remain due to a fear of being unable to convince the electorate of why they must be repealed.

The term “austerity” is now wheeled out by every Left-leaning commentator or politician to frighten off any attempt at fiscal rectitude. So public spending grows and grows, without ever being questioned in the way that all citizens in fact do with their own spending every day of the week. In the same vein, the same people term all public expenditure “investment”, so as to conjure up the (financially prudent) idea of fructification and a long-term dividend. Hence the Left talk of “investing in public services” when in fact they mean increasing the wages of the public sector employees i.e. current expenditure, which has nothing in common with capital or investment. To use the right lexicon is vital if the Conservatives are to show what really does need to be done.

## **NEED FOR A MORAL COMPASS; RIGOROUS ANALYSIS MUST BE PLAINLY STATED**

This leads on to the next fundamental point about politics, as in life more generally. Many if not most states and conditions are binary. You either believe in self-determination and the inevitability that in a free society there will be unequal outcomes, or you subscribe to the socialist view that equality of outcome is the goal. The latter would have everyone in absolute poverty rather than a society where some have more than others. Logically, it would be better that nobody has a car at all if even only a few cannot afford one. In this dreary and

impoverished world, an equality of misery is apparently preferable.

This is where the importance for the Conservatives of rediscovering their moral compass can be readily seen: in exposing the incoherence and vice inherent in the goal of “equality of outcome”.

Take redistribution of wealth. What does this really mean? If you take from rich(er) Family A and give to poor(er) Family B, how are you going to maintain this alleged nirvana? What if Family B does well



and makes some money – this will presumably have to be taken off them and sent back to Family A. What are the incentives for either Family to try to achieve anything of lasting material value? This, of course, is what the Marxists covet: a world in which all private property is viewed as theft and the only survival is that gleaned from the uncertain support (or otherwise) of the municipal authorities. However, very few people would subscribe to such a society. Most want to do better for themselves in order to create a more stable environment for their children and grandchildren. This natural desire for material betterment is a vital foundation for a free, stable and sustainable society. Yet the underlying moral case for the sanctity of private property and its accumulation is rarely articulated by Conservative politicians. Hence the Left again take hold of the political lexicon so that lawfully accumulated private property is invariably referred to pejoratively as “wealth”, as if the latter were intrinsically wicked and in urgent need of redistribution. By skilfully hijacking the terms of reference, the Left usher in “wealth taxes” – as if these were somehow morally good. Thus, the agenda of Marx is brought into the mainstream of British political debate when it ought to be confined to the extremity.

The case against such a hard-Left agenda needs logical articulation in persuasive language, as if fighting a legal battle: the question should be posed, “Is any inequality of outcome unfair such that it needs to be reversed by state intervention?” If so, how is this to be done? Should everyone end up with the same income, dwelling, furniture, car (or more likely, bicycle)? Must everyone have the same education and upbringing? What about those parents who take time to read to their young children and thus instil an advantage? Will reading to children at home have to be banned? Should all children be taken into a State-run establishment where they can be brought up identically? And so

on – until the slide into the *Brave New World* of Aldous Huxley can be readily discerned.

The riposte would be “Nonsense. We are just after the fat cats, the very wealthy, the City boys and girls, the privileged public school children...” But, where does this politics of envy end? What seem the (relatively) privileged classes of today can of course be snuffed out by sufficiently drastic authoritarian and confiscatory mechanisms: taxes, quotas etc. But what then, when these alleged oppressors have disappeared (or emigrated)? What about someone who earns say £10,000 more than his neighbour – why should they enjoy this unequal outcome? Once you legitimise the politics of envy, it knows no bounds. There will always be those who can be said to be “doing too well” and thus fall to be brought down. As society becomes ever more desperate, the net of those deemed privileged has to be thrown wider and wider. But this creates a nihilistic society where nothing is worth doing and everyone ends up in an equally parlous state.

Conservatives need to be much more vigorous in calling out such destructive sentiments. Whenever an interviewer takes such a line, they should be asked “How much do *you* earn? How is that ‘fair’ given what [the subject under debate] earns?” The answer must be – “It is ok for me to earn say £60,000 even though the average wage is £30,000 but not ok for anyone to earn more than what I do...” In other words, special pleading and envy.

The Conservatives have got themselves into an ideological fog, where they cannot see the way in which they are dancing to their opponents’ tune. Too often they seem not to appreciate the illogicality of their position when set against the values which they ought to be upholding. They seem overwhelmed by the rhetoric of the Left and to have lost their bearings.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY: WHAT DO WE MEAN AND WHAT DO WE WANT?

The debate around social mobility is a good example. Removing barriers to mobility and advancement should be dear to any Conservative's heart. Encouraging aspiration and fermenting achievement should be lodestars. But imposing quotas which penalise those whose parents have previously achieved is irreconcilable with such values. It indirectly promotes inequality of opportunity in favour of equality of outcome.

It is fashionable at present to boast of being the "first" person in the family to go to university, to go to Oxbridge, to become a lawyer/doctor/accountant/judge etc. Under this rubric, quotas seem to have become acceptable so as to mark down those who may be "second generation" achievers or aspirants.

What now follows is its logical extension.

Someone manages to get to University for the first time in that family. They study hard, marry someone from the same place (also a "first timer"), get good jobs, live in a good area and then have children of their own. The latter cannot of course claim to be "the first" generation; rather, they are the product of the successful social mobility of their parents. However, the parents' success is to be held against their children, who will be penalised in the application process for having come from an allegedly advantaged background. In this way, society is encouraging its citizens to do the right thing and advance, but then punishing them as soon as they have succeeded. This is in fact a form of institutionalised "dumbing down".

## HONEST PRESENTATION OF HARD TRUTHS NECESSARY

In relation to public spending, the debate proceeds nowadays as if there are no trade-offs and therefore that all public spending is beneficial. But, of course, governing is about priorities. If you spend £x billion on one project, that is money that cannot be spent on other public needs. Cost-benefit and opportunity cost analysis should be on the tip of the tongue of every Conservative spokesperson.

Conservatives should have no truck with it and yet have over the past few years only fed this monster.

Any successful tribe or species exalts its successful members and looks to them for guidance as to how to survive and thrive. That is how the herd of elephants operates: the wiser ones will lead the others to the better grazing grounds and watering holes. They would not survive if they kept penalising those elephants who seemed to be doing well. So in our society, those who do well should not be condemned for their success and achievement. Rather than accusing them of having an unfair advantage, more attention should be paid to how and why such achievement has been enjoyed. To ascribe it all to the inherently unfair and unequal nature of society is a bootstraps argument of the Left, since this can only ever be remedied by imposing absolute equality of outcome on everyone, thus ensuring the spiral downwards into chaos and poverty. Until we are able to admire and seek to emulate those who do well, rather than vilifying them, we will continue "excusing downwards" rather than "exhorting upwards".

The points made above operate at a macro level, and show that the Conservatives must become zealous in their articulation of the philosophical case for their policies, with remorseless recourse to logic and language. There is a host of other examples, which feature prominently in the current political debate, where such an intellectually honest approach is long overdue.

When challenged as to why some public spending is not going ahead, the explanation must be because there are more pressing causes. The questioner should be challenged: "What other services would *you* cut/abandon given that you are adamant that this money must be spent on this project?" This would confound the abrasive interviewer and show that it is not "unkind" or "nasty" to be saying "no" to a siren call for yet more public expenditure. In fact, this country is living

beyond its means year in year out. What does this actually mean? It means that the existing citizens are happy to enjoy a lifestyle beyond that which their overall productivity has earned, which their

successors will have to finance through the increased public borrowing, thus in all likelihood condemning those future generations to a harsher life. How is that “fair”?

## CONCLUSION

The past few years have witnessed the demise of “logic and language” as the vital forensic weapons which the Conservative Party deploys to win hearts and minds, by persuading voters of the righteousness of their policies and of the underlying principles. There is always a tide in the affairs of men. We have lived through a lengthy spell where the culture of personality has triumphed as a medium over political principle. That tide seems now to be rushing out. It presents a great opportunity for the Conservative Party if, as

I believe, they have by far the better of the argument as to how to govern a society justly.

To get on the front foot, Conservatives should take a leaf out of the last successful Conservative administrations (of the 1980s), read some of the speeches that those political heavyweights gave and dust down arguments based upon logic, explained in attractive language, to persuade the country that they are right. Just like a good lawyer would do!





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