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# Tories, Social Democracy and the Centre

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Friday, 12th November 1982, 5.15pm  
David Hume Tower, Lecture Theatre 'A'  
George Square, Edinburgh

I feel very greatly honoured to have been asked to give this year's John P. Mackintosh Memorial Lecture. Britain has not been lucky in its politics since the war. And one important element in our ill fortune has been the early deaths of some of our best politicians. Iain Macleod and Hugh Gaitskell are two outstanding examples. Our history might have been very different had they lived even a few more years. Because of the extraordinary failure of Sir Harold Wilson and Mr Callaghan to offer him any kind of job, even though he was one of the ablest men in the Labour Party, John Mackintosh, unlike Gaitskell and Macleod, had no chance to shine in government. But his exceptional political abilities both in speech and on paper were clearly revealed, and had he not died so young he would surely have had to his credit important executive and legislative achievements, and he would certainly have been a major influence on politics today.

He did, in fact, have at least one important legislative achievement to his credit. That was his, together with Mr Brian Walden's, courageous abstention which brought about the defeat of the most iniquitous feature of the Labour Government's Dock Work Regulation Bill.

Most Members of Parliament when they dissent from the party line and abstain on an important vote — and I speak with some experience here — either go and skulk somewhere, perhaps in a television studio, or they sit firmly in their places in the chamber usually looking either massively self-important or shame-faced or both, while everybody else goes off to vote. John Mackintosh and Brian Walden did neither of these things. Their mode of abstention was to remain placidly enjoying their drinks in the press bar of the House of Commons. That showed considerable panache, and indeed panache was, I think, always one of John Mackintosh's political qualities. Not only did he do everything he did well, he did it with style.

In his introduction to *John P. Mackintosh on Parliament and Social Democracy*, the companion volume to *John P. Mackintosh on Scotland* edited by Henry Drucker, David Marquand says he thinks it probable that Mackintosh would have joined the S.D.P., but he cannot be sure. If he cannot be sure, nobody else can; but John Mackintosh's political record and writings both suggest that that might well have been his course of action. Whether he had joined the S.D.P. or not, he would certainly have had many illuminating things to say about the nature, prospects and influence of the new party.

In 1874 Bagehot — the transition from one of Britain's leading political writers in the last two decades to Walter Bagehot a hundred years ago is a natural one — wrote an article entitled "Not a Middle Party but a Middle Government". His argument was that a middle party was impossible because the constituencies would not stand for it. In London such a thing might be understood, and even in Parliament it would not be ruled out. Still, the activists in the constituencies, he believed, would not hear of such an unintelligible novelty.

But if, therefore, Bagehot went on, a middle party was impossible, a middle government was inevitable. By a middle government he meant one which represented the extreme of neither party but the common element between the two of them. For a long time, he believed, neither party would be able to govern according to the wishes of its extreme supporters. "Any extreme government would be plainly contrary to the wishes of the nation", he wrote; and the moderate members of both parties represented this spirit very fairly. He quoted a voter at a recent election, who had said that both candidates were very nice gentlemen, but he could not see much difference between them. That was the simple truth, commented Bagehot, and he went on to ask: "Between such a Conservatism as Lord Derby's and such a Liberalism as Mr Cardwell's, who can say that there is any difference much worth mentioning?" The "middle men", as he called them, could not set up a party of their own, but "at present", he believed, they could decisively enjoin their will on both parties.

There was nothing new in the state of politics described by Bagehot. Middle governments had been in power for many years and, as he foresaw, they were to continue for many years to come. Indeed even the arrival at the centre of the political stage of the Labour Party, encumbered with an avowedly socialist constitution, in the 1920s did not bring the era of middle governments to an end. As Beatrice Webb wrote in 1925 " . . . exactly as the Labour government failed to go rapidly forward, so the Conservative government will find itself prevented from going backward. Public opinion will insist on the middle way . . ." Mrs Webb's characteristically confident sense of direction and imputation of motives need not be accepted, but she was right about the middle way. Yet it did not depend just upon public opinion. There was the wisdom and skill of Ramsay Macdonald and Stanley Baldwin as well, even though their wisdom and skill did not, unfortunately, extend to evolving policies that fitted the challenge of the time.

Then the formation of Churchill's Great Wartime Coalition and the post war consensus which emerged from it produced another long era of Bagehotian middle government stretching into the early 1970s. During the century and a half of middle government, oppositions such as the Conservatives before the first war and Labour before the second sometimes strayed towards extremism, but government except for the very occasional aberration did not.

During all that time, therefore, the conditions which Bagehot described in 1874 remained broadly true of the British political system. The British people were not extremist, nor were their governments. There was seldom very much difference between a moderate on one side and a moderate on the other. The two party system, by which I mean not that there were only two parties, there were invariably more than that — but that only two of the parties had a chance of forming the government, produced middle government. And although there was often talk of the formation of a centre party — especially in the early 1920s — none was ever formed. The centre was already firmly occupied by the moderate men of the existing parties.

Today we plainly do not have a system of middle government in the Bagehot sense. When Bagehot said there was not much difference between the moderate men in both parties, he was talking about cabinet ministers not back benchers or fringe figures. Nobody could now say that there was not much difference between Mrs Thatcher's front bench and Mr Foot's. Moreover, Bagehot was talking about governments which represented the extremes of neither party but the common element between the two. Again that is not so today. For one thing, there scarcely is a common element between the two parties, and secondly, even if there was, the leadership of neither party would represent it.

So if we no longer have middle government, do we, and will we continue to, have a middle party? And if so, will that middle party be the Social Democratic/Liberal Alliance, or one of its component parties, or will the Alliance soon become nothing more than the post-1931 Liberal Party?

I hope that at this point I will be forgiven a short personal digression, and that the reasons for it will in due course seem sufficient to you.

In 1977 I published a book in which I was severely critical of those who were then called the Social Democrats in the Labour Party. I did not expect the criticism to be popular because, as I said in the book, the Social Democrats were for many the knights in shining armour of British politics. Their armour, I added, was indeed highly polished; unfortunately the last thing they ever did in it was fight.

Anyway, in my book I criticised the Social Democrats for their cowardice in not standing up for what they believed; their refusal to say how much equality they sought; their insincerity in preaching but not practising equality; their moral posturing in denouncing the selfishness of a competitive society, while accepting the necessity of competition; their disregard of freedom in their obsessive pursuit of equality; their intellectual dishonesty in pretending that liberty and equality are somehow the same thing; and their remarkable lack of squeamishness in allying themselves with people whose loyalty to free and democratic institutions was well concealed.

"Of all the equivocations of the Social Democrats", I wrote, "their alliance with the Left is the most glaring. They are remarkably careless of the company they keep. J. R. Clynes, a former Labour leader, said in the '20s that 'a Communist is no more a left wing member of the Labour Party than an atheist in a left wing member of the Christian Church'. The Social Democrats not only tolerate atheists in their church, they have accepted some of the atheists' creed. In all levels of the Labour Party there are now many people who are not democrats in the western sense and whose affinities lie with Eastern rather than Western Europe. One can well imagine the public outcry there would be if within the Conservative Party at all levels there was an increasing powerful body of men whose real sympathies lay with the National Front.

"Yet the Social Democrats remain the willing aides of Labour's anti-democratic Far-Left wing. Their acquiescence in what has happened to the Labour Party over the last few years has forced them continually to justify things which they know to be wrong. By their continued presence in the party they have given an aura of respectability to the Socialism in which they do not believe, thus hastening the arrival of a society to which they are opposed.

"And one wonders", I concluded, "if there is any point at which the Social Democrats will cry 'enough'. Will they always be content to stay in harness with what Churchill called 'the subversive and degenerate elements' in the Labour Party, even though those elements are much more powerful than they have ever been before? For the moment, at least, the answer seems that they will put up with anything rather than drive out the Far-Left wing or themselves leave the Party".

This summary necessarily makes my criticisms seem more intemperate than they were, though I confess that they were, and were intended to be, harsh. Mr Jo Grimond was perhaps even harsher in his book "The Common Welfare", he wrote in 1978: "Equality for Social Democrats is strictly for other people". And Mr Grimond is now married to the Social Democrats, though he may have been a rather reluctant bride, forced into the marriage, as it were, if Sir David Steel will forgive the expression, by his political children.

Anyway, the first thing I have to do is withdraw the charge of cowardice which I made against the Social Democrats. The second thing is to congratulate them on having cried "enough", and on having left the Labour Party. That certainly took considerable courage.

But I stand by most of the rest of what I said, as being true at the time, and, arrogant though it perhaps is to say so, I would claim that in general what I wrote in 1977 has been borne out by events. The Limehouse Declaration referred to the "drift towards extremism in the Labour Party". If that drift was clear to many people including myself in 1977 and was even clear to Sir Harold Wilson, who made a

speech about it in 1976, it should also have been clear to the Social Democrats.

So much for that rather egotistical digression, but I thought I should make clear that this was a subject on which I had previously expressed some views.

I do not think we need concern ourselves with the largely metaphysical question whether or not the S.D.P. is a true centre party. In his Dimpleby Lecture Mr Roy Jenkins was avowedly making "a plea for the strengthening of the political centre". On the other hand Mrs Shirley Williams once thought, and indeed may still think, that a centre party would have "no roots, no principles, no philosophy and no values". We do not have to choose between those two views.

The S.D.P. is plainly to the left of the Conservatives and it is plainly to the right of the Labour Party. So in that sense, which to my mind is the only relevant sense, it is a centre or middle party.

Similarly we need not concern ourselves as to whether or not the S.D.P. is or should be radical", a matter which Dr David Owen seems to think of considerable importance. The word radical is virtually meaningless, unless it is accompanied by information as to the sphere in which radicalism is proposed. Under the French Third Republic the Radical Party was a centre party, often achieving what is perhaps the ideal political position of being at the same time both in power and in opposition. And it is possible to be radical on the right as well as on the left. There are what Metternich called "White Radicals" as well as red radicals. Finally there are probably very few people in this country who do not have radical views on some subject and conservative views on others. Indeed one man's radicalism is another man's conservatism. It all depends upon their environment.

So let us ignore the labels that the Social Democrats stick on themselves and also the labels that other people wish to stick on to them. I call them a centre party in the obvious sense that I have defined, and I make a further not very daring assumption that they are Social Democrats. That in the future, perhaps not in the very distant future, could turn out to be untrue. Parties have often belied their names. But at the moment it seems a reasonable assumption.

What then should the Tory attitude be to the new party?

There is nothing about Social Democracy as such to provoke Tory hostility. Clearly there can be a number of particular Social Democratic policies to which Tories are or might be opposed. Indeed there are bound to be, since no two parties unless they are in alliance are ever in agreement with each other. But that is a different point. Mrs Thatcher has often expressed admiration for the economic policies pursued in Germany by Chancellor Schmidt, and on one occasion, at least, she said there was no difference between his policies and hers. So clearly it is possible for Social Democracy to be not antagonistic to Conservatism, or not necessary for

Conservatives to be antagonistic to Social Democracy.

There is at present a considerable difference between the Conservative government and the S.D.P. over economic policy and economic management. But that is in no sense a difference between Toryism and Social Democracy. It is perfectly possible to envisage a Conservative government adopting a policy on the lines proposed by the S.D.P., and possible to envisage a S.D.P. government adopting the sort of policy followed by Sir Geoffrey Howe. We only have to remember Mr Healey's chancellorship, or for that matter Mr Jenkins's.

How then should the Tories react to the S.D.P.? In a striking article in the *Financial Times* recently Mr Samuel Brittan wrote: "Those who have an interest in a mixed economy, with a strong market and private enterprise element, should have one political priority. This is that the Labour Party should not be able to form a majority government in the U.K. until it has reversed its present policy drift". He went on to argue for "a fairer voting system" and for welcoming "the Alliance as the responsible opposition the country so badly needs". I do not know what Mr Brittan's politics are, but I think he could fairly be described as a member of the monetarist tendency. Even non-monetarist Tories, however, have good reason for subscribing to Mr Brittan's sentiments.

Quite apart from the important question of the preservation of the mixed economy, the S.D.P. are committed supporters of N.A.T.O. and of British membership of the European Community. There are necessarily policy differences, some of which are quite wide, between the S.D.P. and the Conservatives on these matters and on nuclear weapons, but they are more matters of detail than of principle. Labour on the other hand is committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament and exclusion from the Community. If the S.D.P. became the main opposition party, there would once again be the sort of consensus on vital foreign policy concerns that there was in the years after the war.

There would of course be other advantages in the S.D.P. displacing Labour. To mention only two of them, the existence in a two party system of two parties which are a long way apart and diametrically opposed to each other in virtually every respect is clearly undesirable. Or putting it a little more precisely, it would be clearly undesirable if those two parties alternated in power. Such alternations would tear the country apart and do untold damage to the economy. As John Mackintosh who wrote so well and so much on all these subjects put it: "Democracy is not a machinery for conducting abrupt about turns, and if drastic changes are demanded, then long term planning and confidence will be damaged . . ." So long, therefore, as we have no "middle government", the two party system somewhat paradoxically can only work if there is in effect one party rule. These difficulties would be eliminated if Labour were no longer one of the two main parties.

Secondly, there would no longer be a close institutional and political link between one of the main parties and the trade unions. I am not at all arguing that trade unions should be excluded from politics, but I have no doubt that the Labour-T.U.C. relationship has been damaging to the country. Once again I should like to call John Mackintosh in aid. This is what he wrote in 1977:

"Without the built-in veto of the union leaders, Harold Wilson and Barbara Castle would have been able to carry out their 1969 attempt to legislate on industrial relations. While Mr Heath might have wanted to amend or improve the result, the whole confrontation over the 1971 Industrial Relations Act and the current assumption that no British government can legislate on such matters without T.U.C. approval would not have arisen. Secondly, when Mr Heath ran into difficulties over his incomes policy in late 1973, there would have been far less temptation for Labour leaders to argue that the whole concept of regulating wages was wicked or counterproductive. Then there might have been no 1974-75 wages explosion . . . We might by now have reached a reasonable *modus vivendi* between unions which did their job of looking after their members' interests and governments which set and enforced guidelines according to what the economy could afford without fuelling inflation".

In fact the present government has legislated sensibly and cautiously on industrial relations, but the rest of what John Mackintosh said is still valid.

That being so, it evidently follows that the Conservatives should want the Social Democrats to succeed the Labour Party as the main alternative to the Tories. But what, it may be objected, if the effect of the rise of the alliance is not to displace the Labour Party but to enable it to win the next election? The first answer to that is that it is very unlikely to happen, as the polls show. The second answer is that if it did happen, it would not be because the Conservatives hoped the Alliance was going to become the other main party. The third answer is that, if Labour did win, it would be quite largely the Conservatives' own fault. Admittedly governments have been falling like ninepins in Europe. But with the Labour Party in its present nearly suicidal state and with the Conservatives, in Mrs Thatcher, having a clear advantage in leadership, it would be something like negligence if we allowed Mr Foot to win with or without the aid of the Alliance. But if there is any danger of it happening, then the right course would be to minimise that danger by moving back towards the centre. I believe we should do that anyway. But that is another question, as is also exactly what the centre is which I will come to in a moment or two.

In any case it is the Conservatives' job to persuade people to vote Conservative, not to advise opponents how to distribute their votes. Further the national interest is or should be a dominant concern of Conservatives, as it should be for all political parties, and the health of the political system is inseparable from the national interest. That a moderate pro-western, pro-mixed economy party should take the

place of an extremist, potentially neutralist or even pro-eastern, pro full state control-seige economy party is to my mind clearly in the national interest.

But would it also be in the national interest if the Alliance did not succeed in displacing Labour but became a third party of a significant size? In other words having lost our system of middle government, should we try to replace it with what Bagehot called a middle party? If one agrees with Mr Brittan that the major priority of believers in the mixed economy and the Western alliance should be to ensure that the Labour Party is not able to re-form a majority government, the answer with one important *caveat* must be a resounding "yes".

That brings us back to Bagehot. Under our present electoral system, a three party system, unless one of them is a regional party, works badly. Either the third party remains minor yet like the Liberals in 1974 gets a lot of votes but only a few seats. Or it gets beyond the break-through point in which case the number of seats each of the three parties wins is almost a lottery: the party with the largest number of votes can win the fewest seats and vice-versa. So a three party system virtually demands electoral reform. Opponents of electoral reform can of course argue that because a three party system under the present arrangements is unstable, it cannot last and one of the parties will soon go into decline and become like the Liberal Party has been since 1931. That is indeed likely to be true. The difficulty is one cannot know for certain which party will be the one to decline or how long the process will take. So to use that argument against electoral reform is not so much treating the electoral system as a lottery. The gamble is more like Russian roulette.

I am in favour of electoral reform anyway, but even for those who would otherwise be against it, the argument that it would be in the national interest for the Alliance to succeed Labour implies that the Conservatives should help that process by embracing electoral reform. And we now come to the *caveat* I mentioned earlier. We cannot have electoral reform before the next election, and plainly for the moment that is the election that must concern us most. And even if the Conservative Party did come out for electoral reform, which it certainly will not, that might do the Alliance more harm than good: electoral reform is likely to be one of the Alliance's more popular policies, and if the Conservatives adopted it too, the Alliance's platform would be less distinctive and it might do worse in relation to the Labour Party than it otherwise would. But that is mere speculation.

For politicians the next election must always be the most important one. Indeed it is futile for them to try to see very far ahead. As President Woodrow Wilson once wrote, they should lead their own generation, not the next — something which he himself did not quite succeed in doing. But when the constitution and the health of the political system are involved, the political horizon should stretch over the next election. A three party contest makes the first-past-the-post electoral system inordinately chancy. And if we are going to have fullblooded socialism, with all the



incalculable consequences, it should be the result of the wishes of a majority of the electorate and not the result merely of the wishes of a minority and of the quirks of the electoral system. For these reasons, therefore, the right Conservative attitude to electoral reform in the present circumstances is to favour it.

A possible objection to electoral reform and to attempting to help the Alliance displace the Labour Party is that a middle party might drive the other two parties out to the wings. But the other parties being on the wings is the cause of the S.D.P. not the effect. And there is no reason why the Alliance should have that effect in the future. A middle party has not had that result in Germany, where Chancellor Schmidt's S.P.D. is well to the right of the Labour Party here and the Christian Democrats, to judge from Chancellor Kohl's initial policy statement and actions, are somewhat to the left of the Conservative government in this country.

If the middle ground is where elections are won, then the other two parties would be foolish to keep away from it, merely because it is already under partial occupation. They should crowd in too. If they did not do so, that would be not because of the existence of a centre party, but either because they believed the middle ground is in the wrong place and needs shifting, or because they were so blinded by their ideology that they do not recognise its existence.

At this point I should try to define what I mean by middle ground, which is of course only a metaphor and may be misleading. I mean the voters who are not committed to either of the main parties, and they are by definition moderate voters. Such people may in their ordinary life be choleric, intolerant and riddled with strong irrational, even violent, prejudices, but if they are uncommitted politically, they are moderate voters and they are the middle ground. Conversely strong committed Conservative or Labour voters may be quiet, tolerant, and moderate in their views, and as nearly rational as it is possible for human beings to be, but if they are committed to one side, they are not open to conversion by the other side. Hence they are not uncommitted or moderate voters, and they are not the middle or common ground.

Ah, but he is contradicting himself, some of you may be thinking, because having said a middle party should not have the effect of driving the other two parties from the middle ground, he has now defined the middle ground as the voters who are not committed to either of the present main parties, and surely those are the voters who would be most likely to be drawn to the new middle party. Therefore, the other two parties would be driven back to their own firmest supporters, which would inevitably take them out to the wings.

Funnily enough I don't think that is so. For one thing neither the Conservative nor the Labour Party has moved further out to the wings since the S.D.P. was formed. For another we have the evidence of Germany which I mentioned earlier. Thirdly the number of uncommitted voters is now very large. For instance the proportion of the

electorate who switched from one party to another or from abstention to voting or vice-versa between 1970 and 1974 was 42 per cent and between 1974 and 1979 it was 38 per cent. So if all those uncommitted or switching voters had supported the middle party, the Liberals would have long since broken the political mould without the assistance of the S.D.P. In the event, as we know, the Liberals won less than 14 per cent of the votes at the last election.

And fourthly we have the evidence of the polls. The Alliance's popularity shot up to incredible heights at the end of last year, and then plummeted down again almost as quickly. It was inevitable that the S.D.P.'s development would sooner or later pass beyond what one may call its children's crusade phase, but it happened sooner. I am far from writing off the Alliance as an electoral force. We have seen how the Liberals have spurred upwards during previous election campaigns having started from a much lower electoral base than the Alliance seems likely to start from next time. But the fact remains that the uncommitted voters have not stayed with the Alliance which was on its way down well before the Falklands war; and at present Mrs Thatcher holds the middle ground. And she holds that ground even though the government has not pursued what at least until recently were considered to be centrist policies.

Has the centre, then, got no objective policy foundation at all? Is it merely a tautology to say that to hold the middle ground is the way to win elections because by definition the winner of an election has won the middle ground? I have explained that in my view the answer to that second question is "yes"; the answer to the first question is, therefore, "no" in the short term.

But in the longer term the answer is, I think, rather different, for the reason that the political centre is not the same thing as the electoral centre. The middle ground which is the electoral centre is constantly shifting and its movements may be determined by ephemeral issues. The political centre is to my mind less subject to constant change and concerns the most important political issues of the period. Lord Hailsham has said there is rarely room in politics for more than one great debate in a generation. The political centre is formed in relation to that debate.

Obviously people's electoral choices are not made in a vacuum. They are shaped by events, by what happens to themselves, by what they believe to be their interest, by what they perceive to be happening to the country, by what they think of the government of the day, and by what they think of the other political parties.

Equally obviously the policies put forward by the political parties are not solely determined by what they think is likely to win most votes. I happen to think that the object of political parties is to win elections and to govern the country. But it is not their only objective, or rather it should not be pursued to the exclusion of everything else. H. L. Mencken once said of President Hoover that, if he thought it

would get him re-elected in 1932, he would be prepared to "turn Moslem or Single Taxer or New Humanist". I can't speak for Hoover, but that sort of allegation is not true of most politicians or of the political parties. Though some politicians seem liable to instant conversion — they seem to be born again with a frequency that would impress even Dr Billy Graham — there is a limit beyond which most of them will not go. And anyway the views of the political leaders are largely determined by what they conceive rightly or wrongly to be the national interest. They may confuse the national interest with their party's interest, or they may simply identify the two. But they adopt policies because they think they will work and because they think they are right, while at the same time of course not forgetting their electoral appeal.

So the post war consensus which lasted until the early seventies was not a mere historical accident. It had two specific causes. The first was that the leading politicians in both the Conservative and Labour parties saw that neither laissez-faire capitalism nor full-blooded socialism was feasible. The first would involve an unacceptable amount of unemployment and inequality, and the second an unacceptable loss of liberty and an unacceptable accretion of bureaucracy. And anyway neither would work. The consensus was, therefore, based on managed capitalism, a mixed economy and the welfare state.

The second cause was that the leading politicians believed their fellow countrymen to be basically moderate and non-ideological. As Mr Gladstone said at Oxford near the end of his life: "The English people" he was speaking at Oxford so it was an excusable lapse; I am sure he did not mean to exclude the Scots — "The English people", he said, "are extraordinarily difficult to work up to excitement on any question . . ." The post war politicians broadly shared that view of Gladstone's; so the post war consensus was based not only on what the politicians thought was the best mix of policies for the country but also on what they believed to be the basic political outlook of the British people.

At the present time the majority of both the Conservative and Labour Parties think those politicians were wrong. They think the policies were misconceived and did not work, and they think that the voters are ready for much stronger medicine than their predecessors ever thought the patient would be prepared to accept. At present the evidence suggests that the voters are much more prepared to accept Mrs Thatcher's medicine than Mr Foot's.

Be that as it may, we shall not, I think, get the answer at the next election whoever wins it. The eventual answer will be determined by whether or not the policies of the party which wins the next election, or the one after that, actually work. If, as I suspect, it turns out that the only policies which do meet both the national needs and the wishes of the electorate are a development of those that were adopted during the years of the consensus, which I would argue very strongly was at least as much Tory as Socialist orientated, then the post war politicians will turn out to have been

right after all. Their conception of the centre will be shown in the long run to have had genuine political content and to have been much more than mere calculation of electoral advantage.

But if the new Conservative policies or the new Labour Party policies work and also retain the favour of the voters, then a new political centre will have been created, and the political landscape will have been transformed. Regrettably, however, a successful government is not necessarily rewarded by the voters with another term of office. And an unsuccessful government is almost certain to be rejected at the polls. There is no symmetry in these matters. Either way, therefore, if the two main parties continue on their present lines, and there is no alteration to our current constitutional arrangements, we shall be liable to "abrupt about turns" and all the damaging industrial and political consequences which flow from them. Hence the case for change.

Modern society is so interdependent that middle government in the Bagehot sense is even more necessary now than it was in the past. I have always believed that a two party system, which works, is the highest form of political development. Unfortunately the British political culture is evidently now not sufficiently advanced to be able to sustain a workable two party system.

It has traditionally been a Tory objective to strengthen the centre, first by occupying it itself and secondly by encouraging others to lean towards the centre too. But no amount of encouragement would induce the Labour Party as it is now to lean towards the centre. So if we cannot have middle government by the two party system, then we need an aid to middle government which is a middle party. I think Bagehot would have taken the same view. And I am pretty sure, also, that John Mackintosh would have agreed. What a sad loss it is that he is not still here to give us the benefit of his knowledge and wisdom!