

## Chapter Five

### Nationhood and Strategy, June 1997 – June 1999 European Elections Part II

The fundamental problem with the Conservative Party is that it doesn't have a strategy – and hasn't had one for at least four years and arguably for the best part of a decade  
(Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.1).

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will continue to examine the first half of Hague's tenure as Leader of the Conservative Party but focuses on the development of the party's European policy and the creation and implementation of its first formal strategy initiative, 'Kitchen Table Conservatism' (KTC).<sup>20</sup> It will analyse Hague's goals, his approach towards the politics of nationhood and whether the leadership were united in support for that approach and the strategy. Hague used the issue of Europe to demonstrate that the party had moved on from the Major years by apologising for the ERM debacle and he also halted the domination of the issue by imposing a clear policy which was consolidated by the support of the membership, demonstrated by an internal ballot. Hague appealed to the Britishness of the electorate, claiming that the Conservatives were the only party seeking to protect British identity, nationhood and prosperity in the face of European integration. Hague adopted KTC simply because the party required a strategy. Neither the Shadow Cabinet nor Hague engaged with the strategy and it was abandoned when it failed to yield positive results.

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<sup>20</sup> The paper 'Kitchen Table Conservatives' which led to the KTC strategy was quickly supplemented with 'Conceding and Moving On' (CMO) and both papers together will be taken to constitute the basis of KTC. This will be discussed more fully below.

## 5.2 European Policy

In comparison to the Conservative Party's devolution policy, the development of its European policy reveals much about its approach to the politics of nationhood. Similarly, it was an issue that Hague had to tackle shortly after assuming his new position as Leader. The second chapter discussed the devastating split within the party which came to a head during Major's leadership and which was caused by the issue of Europe. Hague inherited a party which was widely regarded as disunited and obsessed by Europe. He had to end this divide before the party could adapt to its new position in Opposition and before it could work together to maximise its electoral support. The party's approach to Europe and in particular the single currency is an indicator of the leadership's unity on its approach to the politics of nationhood and the use of the concepts of nationhood and national identity as part of its strategy. Hague set out his party's approach to Europe and its policy on EMU in a series of speeches in the latter half of 1997 and 1998. They reveal the party's European policy and how Hague hoped to unite his party.

### **Shadow Cabinet Acceptance of EMU Policy**

During the leadership election Hague had pledged 'that his party would not take Britain into the Single Currency at the next election, or during the lifetime of the following parliament'. Upon becoming Leader, however, his policy changed and at the October 1997 party conference, fearing that it would exacerbate already significant divisions over the issue, he did not repeat his 'two parliaments' policy (Nadler, 2000, pp.236-7).

On October 10<sup>th</sup> in Blackpool, Hague told his party that he believed 'in a Europe of nation states' (Hague, 1997b). He stated that Britain should take a leading role in promoting free trade throughout the EU and also in embracing new member states from Central and

Eastern Europe. However ‘we have got to have a flexible Europe of nation states: Europe itself is not a nation and it should not aspire to be a nation’. In comparison to his ready acceptance of devolution in Scotland and Wales, Hague demonstrated a strong desire to move the Conservative Party on from its recent past and the negativity with which the issue of Europe had tainted it. By apologising on behalf of his party for the ERM debacle he hoped to put Europe firmly in the past: ‘looking back, I believe that going in to the ERM was a great mistake. I am sorry we did it – and we should have the courage and the confidence to say so’ (Hague, 1997b). By making such assessments of the past conduct of Conservative governments, Hague was attempting to demonstrate that his party had changed. It was also a way to facilitate the party’s adaptation to the political environment of the late 1990s, move it on from past failings and to remove Europe from the top of the party’s agenda.

Hague then turned to the issue of EMU,

The prospect of a single currency may present this country with one of the most momentous decisions in its history. For a lot of Conservatives, there are profound constitutional objections to a single currency. Others in our party, while not ruling out entry at some point, believe it would be a mistake for Britain to take part in such a risky economic experiment with all its far reaching consequences – at least until we have had a decent opportunity to see whether it works in practice  
(Hague, 1997b).

He did not use the same timeframe on which he had campaigned during the leadership election process but instead stated: ‘that is why we say no to abolishing the pound for the foreseeable future’ (Hague, 1997b). Norman Fowler claims there was a certain amount of surprise at Hague’s change of policy, with Euro-sceptic and pro-European Conservative

MPs criticising its inconclusiveness. He spoke with his leader and implored him to settle on a firm policy on EMU. Eventually,

we had a meeting, the Shadow Cabinet and that policy [the two parliaments line] was confirmed on the basis really that he had actually stood on it, he'd been elected on it...on that particular pledge, on that particular ticket and it was a bit much to expect that he was going to then change his mind and go on to some alternative!  
(Fowler Interview, 29.03.2004).

That meeting was held on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1997. However, its suggestion of 'two parliaments' without the prospect of a referendum, was not met with universal support from within the Shadow Cabinet. As a result Ian Taylor, the party's spokesman on Northern Ireland and a renowned Euro-enthusiast, resigned on October 29<sup>th</sup> and on November 1st, a similar enthusiast, David Curry, followed suit.

Despite the lack of unanimous support, the party's policy on EMU was established. In November 1997, in a keynote speech to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Hague outlined the economic justification for the policy. He began, however, by requesting that Conservatives refrained from an activity which had damaged the party in its recent past,

Let us not have debates about who is pro- or anti-European. We should all be pro-European: pro- about a Europe that is flexible, not rigid; that is about diversity not uniformity; that is outward looking and does not turn itself in to a fortress  
(Hague, 1998b, pp.32-40).

Without economic flexibility, Europe 'could be left behind by the rest of the world'. The EU should be focusing on extending free enterprise within its borders, rather than focusing on the establishment of a single currency. Referring to the history of European integration,

he insisted that 'economic and monetary union is primarily a political idea', it would happen only if Europe became a 'federal state'. The economic reasons against Britain's involvement in a single European currency, specifically the dangers of losing control over interest and exchange rates were much more significant: 'it is tough being on a fixed exchange rate: booms are bigger; busts are deeper...It is even tougher when you cannot control your own interest rates' (Hague, 1998b, pp.32-40). Blindly joining EMU would carry with it the same risks for Britain as joining the ERM and these would be augmented by it being a permanent commitment so 'a hard headed assessment of the risks involved in a single currency [was vital] before we consider joining it'. He concluded,

I believe that a single currency carries with it fundamental economic and political risks. For this reason the Conservative Party believes it is a mistake to commit this country in principle to joining a single currency. We oppose Britain joining a single currency during the lifetime of this Parliament and we intend to campaign against British membership of the single currency at the next election – subject, like all our major policies, to the approval of rank and file Conservative members nearer the time  
(Hague, 1998b, pp.32-40).

The speech to the CBI clearly demonstrated that the 'two parliaments' policy on which Hague had campaigned during the leadership election, was unequivocally the policy of the Conservative Party and it also contained Hague's first hint of a ballot of members on the party's policy. Despite initially distancing himself from the 'two parliaments' policy, Hague demonstrated an unswerving scepticism about a federal Europe and a single currency. He dressed his scepticism with positive language, often reiterating his desire for the EU to be 'flexible', to embrace new member states from Eastern Europe and for the Conservative Party, rather than rejecting out of hand any further integration, being 'pro-European' and advocating the EU working together to spread free market economics throughout its borders. As George Osborne said 'William was always keen to show our

Euro-scepticism or our promotion of British identity as a forward-looking thing' (Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003). Hague himself insisted,

I am a positive European. I have always believed that Europe offered Britain a whole range of opportunities. I am excited by the prospect of a genuine free market embracing the entire European continent, and buttressing free institutions...but I did not come into politics to sign away the rights of this country without a backward glance, and I am going to stick up for what I believe in

(Quoted by Anderson, 1998).

Irrespective of the initial resignations, was the party's policy on the single currency approved by the party leadership?

When asked if the party's policy on the single currency was right at that time, Lord Strathclyde replied,

Oh absolutely. I have no problems with that at all. It was entirely right, it would have been madness to do anything else. History has proved him right although he was reviled and derided for doing it at the time, by many people including some leading Conservatives, to their regret. He was absolutely spot on

(Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003).

Strathclyde alluded to the fact that Hague's policy had not met with universal support but that, in the long-run, he had been proved correct in his approach (in as far as the 'two parliaments' policy was essentially adopted by the Labour government). Danny Finkelstein, although not a member of the Shadow Cabinet, held an influential role in the development of policy and strategy throughout Hague's leadership. He too agreed this was the correct policy,

First of all, he took the position early in the parliament, which he was able to enforce on the party early in the parliament and which got progressively clearer as he went on...The point that we kept trying to make to those who were against entry forever, is that you are trying to put together a coalition of people who want to say no. Saying no for that parliament was a policy that produced a unity of 'no's' – it united Brian Mawhinney, John Major, Bill Cash...It united the Shadow Cabinet. Don't forget that when he took that position, this is a very important point, Blair could have called a referendum in that parliament and the Conservative Party needed something that it could stick to, all the way through the parliament – choose it early and then stick to it over and over again. The only way of getting unity is by making the position absolutely unmovable (Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004).

After a brief flirtation at the 1997 conference, with a policy not based around a specific time frame, Hague settled on a firm policy, which although it did not suit all members of the Shadow Cabinet, the decision was taken early enough in the parliament to unite the remainder. If it did not heal the rift that had blighted the Conservative Party in its recent past, it papered over the cracks to prevent the issue from being as dominant as it had been during Major's leadership. Another reason for the early success of the policy was mentioned by Charles Hendry, 'it was probably the only policy available. William, in November 1997, went up and spoke to the CBI in Birmingham and the reaction from the press was that he made a brilliant speech and it was about the economic aspects of the Euro' (Hendry Interview, 11.12.2003). The economic reasoning seemed impressive because it was removed from the usual emotive arguments against Britain's membership of the single currency which normally came from the Conservative Party.

However, not all members of the Shadow Cabinet were delighted with the policy. Despite encouraging Hague to settle on a firm policy, preferably the one that he had been elected upon, Fowler had his doubts,

criticism of it was it didn't satisfy either side – it didn't satisfy the Euro-enthusiasts and it certainly didn't satisfy the sceptics. Having said that, there was nothing which would ever satisfy the Euro-enthusiasts because the party isn't particularly Euro-enthusiastic. As far as the Euro-sceptics are concerned there was nothing which would actually satisfy them apart from saying 'over my dead body, thou shalt not pass' etc. Clearly he could have said that but he would have split the party even more and I think that, in fact, as a sort of political formula it wasn't bad, I can't think of a better formula, a better form of words...it might not have held if anybody had been taking it seriously but as no one was taking it seriously it didn't matter what he said to an extent. That was the awful thing, the awful cloud over that period (Fowler Interview, 29.03.2004).

Unlike Finkelstein, Fowler did not see the policy as either clear or one that satisfied the party. If the Conservatives had actually been taken seriously by the press at the time, he believes the policy may not have achieved such credibility. However, it was the only policy available to the leadership at the time.

Peter Lilley described how the party's policy on the single currency was 'essentially...the right policy' and was designed to broaden the appeal of the party. The leadership understood that,

There were a whole range of views among the electorate, from those who were against it forever and ever to those who were just naturally conservative and planned to keep the status quo but could well believe they'd have to give in eventually and an awful lot of people thought it was inevitable and you had to maximise their support and if you said a vote for us is a vote against it forever, was asking too much from them. It would have been best just to have been honest about that and for William to have said 'well, I'm against it but I understand a lot of other people aren't and that's all we are going to be committed to' (Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003).

So, apart from an issue of phraseology, Lilley supported Hague's policy. Archie Norman, however, did not support the policy. He opposed it because of the time frame imposed. When asked whether it was the right policy for the Conservative Party at the time he said,

No and I never thought it was. I'm a Euro-sceptic but the trouble is that people don't see the logic of attaching a policy view to a parliamentary timetable. 'Not in this parliament' has no economic logic. What happens if the election is called early? What's politics got to do with this? It's either the right thing or it's not the right thing. If you want to go in then explain under what circumstances you would go in (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003).

In contrast to Lilley, the imposed parliamentary timetable did not concern a senior anonymous Conservative strategist who said that the party's policy on the single currency was the right one. On the issue of time frame he said 'no manifesto is forever so the Euro could not be ruled out forever. A manifesto is supposed to cover that and the next parliament' (Interview, 20.04.2004). However, irrespective of these views on the lifetime of policies, Norman, in comparison to other critics, conceded that the policy had been successful in silencing 'the group of Euro-obsessed MPs', something that he was 'under immediate pressure to do' (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003). Sir Richard Body felt that Hague's policy on EMU 'was certainly a step in the right direction. He needed to compromise with those who believed in British entry'. When asked if the policy was the only one able to unite the parliamentary Conservative Party he said 'Yes, it was. I can't criticise William but I can't agree with the policy. It should have been more sceptic' (Body Interview, 19.01.2004).

Although the leadership were not united on the policy's merits, even its most vociferous critics conceded it was the one policy most likely to unite the parliamentary party. As part of the party's survival strategy, symbolised by Hague's initial attempts to broaden his party's support and the *Fresh Future* and other organisational reforms, the leadership's approach to the politics of nationhood, in the form of its policy on EMU, was critical.

Without a policy which could contribute significantly to its unity, the party was likely to tear itself apart, making any future attempts to adapt to being in Opposition and to maximising its electoral support, futile.

### **EMU and British National Identity**

The conflict over the issue of Europe was by no means eradicated despite the affirmation of the 'two parliaments' policy on the single currency. In January 1998 a number of senior Conservative Euro-enthusiasts wrote an open letter to *The Independent* criticising Hague's policy. This group included Michael Heseltine, Lord Howe and Edward Heath and this public rejection of the policy defended by their Leader promoted the feeling that the issue of Europe was continuing to bubble under the surface, threatening to boil over at any time. On February 21st, 1998 *The Economist* described how Hague had been forced to publicly 'slap down' John Redwood over his negative comments towards the party's policy and stated that the Leader was seemingly unable to stop the party's squabbling over the issue (*The Economist*, 21.02.1998). This disunity continued throughout 1998 when in June, Heseltine used his speech marking the twentieth anniversary of the Tory Reform Group, to applaud the introduction of the single currency. In August, former Conservative MPs Nicholas Budgen and Tony Marlow, self-proclaimed anti-federalists, threatened to stand against pro-European Conservative candidates during the European elections planned for June 1999. However, although conflict did not cease, the disunity demonstrated by certain elements of the party was not significant enough to allow the party to tear itself apart over the issue. Using the analogy of Thatcher's approach to the economic 'wets' in her parliamentary party, Hague said,

She proved then as I intend to prove now, that you don't unite a party by seeking a lowest common denominator of blandness and fudge. You unite a party by giving it clear, principled leadership. And if ever there was an issue which requires clarity and principles, it's the Euro (Quoted by Anderson, 1998).

Hague had made it clear that the policy was set in stone and the majority of Conservative parliamentarians were sufficiently satisfied by the policy not to want to spark the destruction of their party over the issue.

Whilst these wranglings were taking place, Hague continued to develop his European policy. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1998 Hague made a key note speech to INSEAD at Fontainebleau in which he argued that a single currency would push the EU to the limits of political integration and that along with economic and political integration, an objective of many European statesmen was the abolition of nationalism within Europe. He also built on the economic arguments against EMU that he set out in his earlier speech to the CBI, by providing the constitutional and democratic grounds for his opposition (Hague, 1998b pp.116-135).

Hague began by concisely stating that 'there is a limit to European political integration and I believe that we are near that limit now'. He provided three arguments in support: the first was economic and was concerned with moving on from the 'intervention and regulation' which was favoured after the Second World War and creating 'a free and flexible Europe'. The second was strategic, concerned with making the primary goal of the EU the establishment of prosperity and stability in Eastern European states; and the third was political. It amounted to Hague's belief that 'if political integration is pushed too far, it becomes impossible to sustain accountability and democracy' (Hague, 1998b p.116). The

first two arguments were central to Hague's speech to the CBI. However, it is his political reasoning against political integration that is crucial in understanding Hague's conceptualisation of British nationhood and national identity and how he used these concepts to flesh out and promote the Conservative Party's policy on the single currency.

Hague repeated his belief that people who shared his views on Europe were 'the real Europeans, the people who really want to see a peaceful prosperous co-operating Europe'. They 'are the opponents of further political union and the supporters of a confident outward looking Europe of nation states'. He said 'I fear that the EU is channelling its energies in the wrong direction. I fear that European politicians have been concentrating on EMU at the expense of assisting and liberating Europe's businesses' (Hague, 1998b, p.117). Again, his approach was 'outward looking' and positive. He was concerned with destroying his image as a 'Little Englander'. As George Osborne commented,

he wanted to get away from the idea that those who opposed further European integration were 'Little Englanders' and the idea actually, was to portray the European federalists as 'Little Europeans' and if you look at the speech he gave in Fontainebleau in 1998, I think you can see that argument set out in the clearest way it was  
(Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003).

Hague claimed that along with economic and political integration,

the founding fathers of the European Union had a third, and even more ambitious, goal. They wanted to eliminate what they saw as the root cause of modern war itself: nationalism. They wanted to replace the nation state as the prime source of loyalty for Europe's citizens – and they wanted to replace it with loyalty to European ideal  
(Hague, 1998b, p.127).

Tainted by fascism, Europe had a different appreciation of national identity to Britain. 'It was our [Britain's] national identity, so powerfully expressed in Winston Churchill's speeches, which had helped see us through the darkest days of the war. For us, patriotism was the focus of our resistance against Nazi tyranny'. As a consequence of the objective of political integration, executive, judicial and legislative authority had slowly been eroded from members states and 'most fundamentally of all, the European Court has established the supremacy of European law over national law' (Hague, 1998b, p.127). The end result, according to Hague was that political union was constantly spreading and deepening.

Reiterating that there are limits to political integration, Hague briefly outlined his own views on national identity and nationhood,

I have argued in a series of speeches this year that human beings are more than just economic animals and that not all relationships are simply about buying and selling. There are tiers of family, community and nation which go beyond the shop counter. National identity fulfils a basic human need to belong...perhaps the best definition of nation is this: it is a group of people who feel enough in common with one another to accept government from each other's hand. That is why democracy functions best within nations. The defining characteristic of national identity is that when we disagree with a law we do not disobey it, we try to get it repealed; and when we dislike the complexion of our government, we do not attempt to secede from its jurisdiction, but try to persuade our fellow countrymen to change it. France in this sense is a nation. So is Britain. Europe is not (Hague, 1998b, p.128).

Hague believed 'nations are essential for real democratic accountability'. Individuals must feel that their vote counts but it is also vital that they must share a common identity. Highlighting the examples of unelected Commission officials and European Court judges, Hague described the lack of democratic accountability within the EU and also provided the solution to the democratic deficit, which was 'to increase the role of national governments;

for they are the real focus of democratic accountability in the EU. The answer is not, as some argue, to increase vastly the powers of the European Parliament or to elect a President'. Hague believed that 'the EU cannot, in the space of a few decades, hope to manufacture a sense of nationhood comparable to that which has grown organically among its separate peoples...there is no single European consciousness'. Although referring to abstract and contested concepts such as nationhood and identity, Hague concluded his discussion of the threat that the EU poses to the British nation with a concrete warning: 'I am, however, certain of one thing: if we establish common political institutions without such a sense [of a European consciousness], we will drive our peoples further apart' (Hague, 1998b, p.130).

Although the INSEAD speech began by repeating economic arguments Hague had previously made against the single currency, it was much more focused on political and constitutional arguments. After focusing on implications for the nation state, he went on to describe other constitutional and democratic repercussions of EMU. He described how voters in Britain expect the government to be accountable for the state of the national economy. However, the establishment of a single currency and the concomitant 'one size fits all' interest rate would have detrimental effects on the British economy. The British government would be powerless to alter the interest rate and therefore improve the state of the economy. The British government would not be responsible for the economy, the single currency would be permanent and ultimately no single body would be accountable to the British electorate. This would inevitably increase tensions between member states experiencing varying effects of the imposition of a single currency (Hague, 1998b, pp.131-4).

Hague warned his audience that contemporary European statesmen had publicly declared that the primary objective of the single currency was political. He quoted Chancellor Kohl of Germany as declaring that, 'if there is no monetary union, then there cannot be political union and vice versa' and pointed out that Tony Blair and Gordon Brown had explicitly denied that the introduction of the single currency would have any constitutional implications at all. Hague provided one example of such a direct consequence,

Even if the EU does not actually raise the taxes or spend the money itself, it will have increasing control over the decisions. The power to raise taxes from one's citizens and to spend the revenue on their behalf are defining features of a sovereign state. I believe that to delegate powers over taxation and spending to the EU would take us beyond the limits of political union towards the creation of what in effect would be a European state. It would be to cross a line and abandon the independence of nation states with all the consequences for the future stability of Europe which I have set out today. The centre would have more power than the component parts. It would have neither legitimacy nor accountability – since there can be no real accountability except in nation states

(Hague, 1998b, p.133).

Throughout the speech, Hague remained positive about the potential future of the EU and how it could work flexibly to promote free market economics within its enlarged borders. However, he remained passionately sceptical about the future of the EU as dictated by the establishment of EMU. He was aware that his comments would not be received as positively as he intended them and concluded,

Today I have set out a positive vision of an open and flexible European Union, but I know that not everyone will receive it in this spirit. For, as the intellectual case for the direction upon which the EU is presently set has become weaker, so those who advance the case have become more defensive...I believe the potential for the European Union is enormous, provided it has the courage and the imagination to recognise that it needs to change direction, accept the limits to political union and embrace the challenges of the new century'

(Hague, 1998b, p.134).

Hague was positive about the EU provided that it did not impinge on British nationhood and British identity.

### **In Europe but Not Run by Europe**

On September 7<sup>th</sup> 1998, Hague announced that the membership would be balloted on the party's policy on the single currency. If the policy was approved, the continuous squabbling over the issue would end: it would be futile for certain elements of the party to continue criticising the policy if it had been officially accepted by the rank and file. In a speech on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, Hague gave his reasoning for the ballot. Voters,

Need to be sure that when they vote for us at the next election they will not be bounced in to a single currency. We must provide them with a Conservative guarantee. That is why I have called a ballot of all Conservative members. We have rowed about this issue for too long. For too long, factions have tried to pull the party one way and the other. Our party does not belong to factions; it belongs to its members...because of the way we have changed, they have the right to decide. By putting their cross in the 'Yes' box our members will be saying two things loudly and clearly; the Conservative Party has changed and the Conservative Party is going to stand up for what it believes'  
(Hague, 1998b, pp.184-5).

Taylor believed that the decision to hold a ballot of party members 'marked a shift in emphasis back to European issues', the motivation behind it being to turn the attention of the electorate and the media towards Europe and away from the issues that the party was unable to make such an impact upon, in particular the public services (Taylor in Garnett and Lynch, 2003, p240). This hypothesis will be discussed in subsequent chapters but it is clear is that in at least some quarters, it was supposed that the ballot was called to attract, rather than detract, attention away from the issue of Europe.

The results were announced at the 1998 party conference: 60% of ballot papers were returned, of which 84% were in favour of Hague's policy. However, the 'ballot did not seek opinions on alternative policies' and the 40% who did not return their ballot papers was a sizeable minority to either abstain or hold no opinion (Lynch in Garnett and Lynch, 2003, p.149). During his first speech to the conference, Hague warned vocal Euro-enthusiasts to stop their 'self-indulgent' criticism of the party's official policy. He also injected some positivity when he said 'I say to those who disagreed with me on this ballot, but were clearly a tiny minority, I want you to move on with us. But be clear about this – we are moving on. If you choose not to move on, you will be left behind' (Hague, 1998d). Again, he wanted to demonstrate that the party was moving on and that he wanted all members to be on board. Rather than being dominated by this apparent victory, the day's news was instead focused on *The Sun*'s portrayal of Hague as a 'dead parrot' and the Conservative Party as therefore, extinct. It seemed that Hague had failed to overcome the image that certain parts of the media had given him after his public relations disasters in the early months of his leadership.

The result was warmly welcomed by the party leadership and those close to Hague. Michael Ancram believes that the ballot result was significant because it enabled the Conservative Party to finally stop talking about Europe,

I think the Conservative Party was tearing itself apart over Europe, as you know, from 1992 to 1997 and we would have gone on doing so quite happily. It was a very, very, deep rift and William wanted to put the issue effectively to bed – settle it so we didn't go on saying the party had two policies, we only had one policy and so that's why we had a referendum in the party on it. It was voted on by the membership and that was important. But it was still there. I think what we've successfully managed to do in the last few years is to have a much more united face on Europe than we've had for a long time' (Ancram Interview, 20.01.2004).

Finkelstein was equally positive in his assessment,

John Major's problem was that people thought that the position might move so they went on arguing about it. So you had to take a position that you could take early in a parliament and then stick to it until it became boring and everyone knew that there was no chance it would ever change. That was the only position that could be taken early in the parliament of which that could be true and gain the maximum amount of support. The result of the internal referendum was 85:15 rather than 60:40 – a crucial difference' (Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004).

Of course, the results of the ballot were promoted in the best possible light, which differed to the assessments of other analysts. However, it is also evident that Hague was deliberately demonstrating both the strength of his convictions and his role as leader by offering his policy to a ballot of party members. Once it had been approved by the membership, his policy was strengthened by being a lot less vulnerable to attack from Euro-enthusiasts among the party and as Cooper and Finkelstein discuss in Kitchen Table Conservatives, Hague also personally received a boost in poll ratings after the ballot (see below). This would have improved the security of his position and consequently his authority as Leader.

George Osborne expressed similar support for the ballot,

Hague's theory was that...what you've got to do is, is the party Leader says *this* is the policy and either you are with me or you're not – plant the flag in the ground and say this is where we are going to stand. So he did that, rallied most of the parliamentary party around him he then held a ballot of the party members to get the support of the membership to put pressure on the parliamentary party and basically resolved the single currency issue, in the sense that the Conservative Party now is not split on Europe, there is a very small number of quite elderly Tory MPs, less than half a dozen, who are not happy with our line on the single currency or the European constitution or

whatever but they are a tiny minority and the Conservative Party is not as divided as the Labour Party is at the moment on Europe. So that strategy actually worked, it just took a while (Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003).

However, Shaun Woodward opposed the ballot and was less than positive about its result.

There was,

a ballot of party members which I personally was against and voted against but nonetheless he [Hague] won. Again, I think what that helped to do was to shore up the position of the anti-Europeans and the attitudes that come from many of those who are anti-European and anti-Euro (Woodward Interview, 13.01.2004).

The ballot gave the Euro-sceptics a platform from which to promote their ideas and, despite the fact that those surrounding Hague believed the ballot would and did enable the party to stop talking and obsessing about Europe and the single currency, analysis elsewhere was that the party was emphasising the issue more and more. *The Economist*, for example, concluded that the Conservative Party's ballot only succeeded in once again raising the issue of Europe, which was not salient as far as the electorate were concerned. It was also unlikely that the ballot would silence Euro-enthusiasts such as Heseltine or Howe (*The Economist*, 12.09.1998).

Leading up to the June 1999 European elections, the Conservative Party was keen to raise the profile of an issue that they believed the majority of the electorate supported them on. However, it is doubtful whether raising Europe as an issue would work so dramatically in the favour of the Conservative Party as was intended. Immediately after the 1997 General Election, on behalf of *The Guardian*, ICM asked 'if the Conservative Party had been more openly against further integration into Europe and the single currency, would you have

been more likely to have voted for them, less likely, or would it have made no real difference either way?' Only 15% replied that they would have been more likely to vote Conservative, with 9% stating that it would have made them less likely. 75% stated that it would have made no difference either way. The situation had not improved in the Conservative Party's favour, when in October 1998, ICM asked a similar question: 'if a party were to oppose Britain's membership of the single currency at the next election as part of its manifesto for the next parliament, would you be more or less likely to support that party?' 43% replied that they would be more likely but this was almost negated by 39% replying that it would make them less likely. A significant minority of 18% replied that they did not know, obviously having no strong opinion or depth of understanding of the issue. Voters may have been sympathetic to the Conservatives' stance on Europe and the single currency but it did not appear to be a decisive issue at election time. Attempting to increase the saliency of Europe and the single currency did not always succeed for the party. During the campaign for the 1999 European elections, Amanda Platell, the party's newly appointed Communications Director, decided that it would boost both Hague's personal standing and the profile of the party's European policy, should he be seen to have given his wife a necklace with a pound sign pendant. However, the effect was tarnished by leaked reports that Platell had in fact purchased the jewellery and had left the bill unpaid (Nadler, 2000 p.222).

Interne conflict over the issue of Europe and the single currency continued in the period before the European elections. *The Economist* described how the 1998 conference was plagued by squabbles, particularly focused on the single currency and it warned that the situation had to cease before the party would be taken seriously by the electorate (*The Economist*, 10.10.1998). However, the elections held on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1999, were regarded by

the Conservative leadership as a great success for the party. The Conservative Party, whose manifesto was entitled 'In Europe, not run by Europe' title, won 36% of the vote compared to Labour's 28%.<sup>21</sup> Hague concluded that because the European elections had been fought on a Euro-sceptical line, based on the party's policy on the single currency, 'they showed that, when we set out a distinctive Conservative policy and make the arguments for it, we can win hands down' (Hague, 1999c). Conservative Party policy on Europe was distinct from Labour's and Hague concluded that campaigning on it had given the Conservative Party a great electoral victory, marking not only their adaptation to the political environment of the late 1990s but also the beginnings of its return to power. They had proved that they were an alternative to the Labour Party and they had succeeded at the polls, a significant victory since the crushing defeat in May 1997.

Michael Ancram was similarly upbeat in his assessment of the June elections: 'well, I think the main lesson to draw is that when we have a clear message which is in tune with the instincts, views and aspirations of the majority of the people of the country, we'll win elections' (Quoted by Grenfell, 1999). When asked what those instincts were that the Conservative Party was in tune with, he replied,

well, we were ready to make it clear that if people wanted, in William Hague's phrase, to be in Europe but not run by Europe, then they should vote Conservative because we were the only party that was offering that. Last week's elections to the European parliament demonstrated that it has very considerable potency [the idea that the Labour government is eroding the Britain's sense of nationhood]. So if one accepted your view that [the economic differences between the Conservative and Labour parties] are no longer there, then there would still be that difference  
(Quoted by Grenfell, 1999).

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<sup>21</sup> This was translated into 36 seats for the Conservative Party and 29 for the Labour Party.

Peter Lilley stated that after the elections, there was ‘certainly a clear belief that one area where we were strong with the electorate, about which, by and large, the shadow cabinet felt strongly about was defence of the pound as a necessary component of retaining national sovereignty...and it was a question of trying to raise its salience’ (Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003).

The party’s success must be placed in context. Turnout was only 23%, which meant that the Conservative Party were, in reality, only supported by 8% of the total electorate (Crewe in Seldon, 2001 p.88). Rick Nye described the Conservatives as regarding the results of the European elections as a turning point for the party because ‘they won those and they won *big* as well’. However, their victory was a consequence of it being a,

single issue election about keeping the pound fought on a very low turnout among the kinds of people who are most driven by issues European. At the time there was open talk about his leadership. Having pulled the European elections out of the bag, suddenly the pressure was off. He’d run a right-wing, traditionalist campaign on an issue that mattered to our traditionalists and he had scored spectacularly. The problem was the lesson that the Conservative leadership drew from the European election campaign, which was that you could do well in all elections if you ran a tightly focussed, single issue, populist campaign  
(Nye Interview, 17.02.2004).

### 5.3 Kitchen Table Conservatism

The first major strategy initiative developed after defeat was ‘Kitchen Table Conservatism’ (KTC). The KTC research was conducted and written by Andrew Cooper and Danny Finkelstein and was encouraged and overseen by Archie Norman. The ‘Kitchen Table Conservatives’ paper was completed in November 1998 and after being approved by the Shadow Cabinet, the strategy was launched in March 1999, with political broadcasts aired during April of that year. In February 1999, a follow-up paper ‘Conceding and

Moving On' (CMO) was written and presented to the Shadow Cabinet in May of that year. This section examines the role that British nationhood and national identity played within in KTC. It will assess the success of KTC as a strategy and explore the motivations of its authors and Hague, for endorsing the strategy and allowing it to be presented to the Shadow Cabinet.

Ancram described KTC as part of a fresh start for the party,

there was a feeling that was called the Fresh Start, that we needed to revitalise the party and reform it and we made a number of very substantial reforms. We created for the first time a legal entity called the Conservative Party...part of what we were doing was known as 'Kitchen Table' politics, which was trying to identify the issues that people talked about around their kitchen table and to become involved in those. I think we pursued those for two years and then in the face of no movement in the opinion polls, we had to begin to search for other areas that people were interested in (Ancram Interview, 20.01.2004).

KTC was part of the party's attempt to demonstrate that it was breaking with the past and moving on from electoral defeat. KTC very much fitted in with the modernising, forward-looking agenda that initiated the party's reforms and Hague's apology for the ERM. Cooper described how Archie Norman introduced into CCO many people with a modernising agenda and 'the basic plan was to bring in as many as possible who were able and agreed upon the direction the party needed to go in'. Cooper 'spent a year doing nothing other than polling, focus groups, trying to focus on strategy and trying to police the strategy, out of which was the KTC paper...so in theory, from about the turn of that year '98/'99 we were supposed to be following a Kitchen Table strategy'(Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004). KTC had, therefore, been in development long before the Kitchen Table Conservatives paper was presented to the Shadow Cabinet. Cooper explained that the term

'kitchen table' had come into Conservative parlance when used by Richard Gephardt, a US Democrat politician, when explaining on BBC Radio Four's *Today* programme that the Democrats had won the 1998 mid-term elections by talking about kitchen table policies, whereas the Republicans had focused on the Lewinsky issue. Cooper drew a parallel between the Republicans and the Conservative Party before the 1997 General Election: 'that's it, in a sense, the Conservative Party was perceived as a party which talked about what interested it i.e. Europe and tax, for the most part and not what interested most people i.e. the public services' (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004). However, what was the strategy that the papers KTC and CMO set out?

### **'Kitchen Table Conservatives'**

The opening line of 'Kitchen Table Conservatives' stated, 'the fundamental problem of the Conservative Party is that it doesn't have a strategy – and hasn't had one for at least four years and arguably for the best part of a decade' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.1). It continued by arguing that the Conservatives had failed to provide an argument against the integrity of the New Labour project and more importantly, had failed to communicate 'a clear sense of its own character, purpose and vision. We need a strategy to guide our words and actions; a strategy which must be understood and followed by every Shadow minister and MP, every press officer and researcher, every Area Campaign Director and agent' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.1). This introduction demonstrated how crucial it is for any party to develop and adhere to a strategy, including the Conservative Party, if it was going to adapt to being in Opposition and maximise its electoral support. The Conservative Party had not had a clear argument against the Labour Party or a clear understanding of itself. Cooper and Finkelstein stated that the party must answer three questions: 'where are

we now? Where do we want to be? How are we going to get there?' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.1).

The paper answers the first question, describing a party whose opinion poll rating had remained at 30% for the last five years and whose defeat on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1997 signified that 'the rejection of the Conservative Party was wholehearted, premeditated and thorough'. The party had lost its reputation for good economic management and had developed a reputation for lying since putting up taxes during the 1992-1997 parliament. Despite Hague's articulation of his understanding of why the Conservatives had been ousted from power, during his speech to the 1997 party conference, the public had not changed their negative perception of the party.

Cooper and Finkelstein stated that 'recovery cannot begin until we understand that a lot of the things that people said about us before the election were true' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p1). Conservatives were in touch with kitchen table issues in the 1980s but failed to realise these issues had changed by the end of that decade when 'Britain was no longer the sick man of Europe, the cold war was over and the Labour Party had demonstrably begun to change'. The Conservatives continued with the same agenda and stopping communicating their motivations with the public and consequently 'we grew increasingly out of touch with the people and less adept as a government' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.2).

The public's perception of Hague as Leader was worse than that of the party as a whole. Cooper and Finkelstein noted that his ratings among Conservative voters had improved since the imposition of his tough line on Europe and the single currency. Crucially, the

public were still willing to give the Labour government ‘the benefit of the doubt’ despite a growing sense of anti-climax and the authors attribute this to Labour’s response to initial negative mutterings in focus groups, for example by focusing political discussion around their increases in spending on health and education.

Cooper and Finkelstein then asked: where do we want to be? The party, they believed, would be in a much better position in the polls if it had articulated the belief that ‘we know why we lost and we’re changing’. However, this message had not been consistently and universally communicated and ‘18 months on from our defeat – and, probably, no more than 18 months before the near-term campaign of the next general election – we have now reached the point when we should stop referring back to the last election...we must, however, never stop showing that we know why we lost’. When the Conservative Opposition attacks the government it should do so on issues,

which show that we are a different kind of party than the one which broke faith with the people in the early 1990s’. The party should demonstrate that it is changing. ‘The objective of our internal reforms, our principled Opposition, our policy renewal process, and all the other changes we are making is to persuade people, by the time of the next election, that: the Conservative Party knows what people really care about, says what people really think and has policies to deal with the things that really matter. In other words we must become Kitchen Table Conservatives (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998 pp.3-4. Original emphasis).

The Conservative Party must do ‘four things’ to demonstrate that it understood the issues that mattered to the public. Firstly, the party must be ‘normalised’. that is be made to look and sound like the ‘rest of Britain’. It must, through opinion research, identify the issues that matter to the public. Secondly, the party must regain its reputation for economic competence. Thirdly, the Conservatives must ‘neutralise [their] vulnerabilities on key

policy issues, specifically the perception that they seek to reduce funding to schools and hospitals. Finally, through the use of opinion research and reliance on 'consistent Conservative principles' the party must define its purpose for the years ahead and construct a new narrative: 'we have to capture the mood of a changed country...take full advantage of our Conservative belief in tradition, nationhood, marriage, law and order, welfare reform, and services that provide choice and efficiency' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, pp.4-5). Nationhood is, therefore, specifically referred to by Cooper and Finklestein, as a traditional Conservative theme which can be utilised to demonstrate that the party is still in tune with contemporary Britain. However, it is just one of six such themes.

Promoting Hague as a 'normal' person had not succeeded in raising his personal opinion ratings. Instead he should be promoted as not only understanding the needs of normal people but also as being a strong leader: 'the reason that why there was a personal poll boost from William Hague's decision to hold the EMU ballot and settle the party's position on the single currency, is that it communicated strong leadership'. However, 'the reason why that boost was largely confined to party supporters was that the ballot itself was of little interest to non-Conservatives, and that the small corps of voters for whom opposing EMU is the most important issue of all are disproportionately concentrated among Conservative supporters' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p5). Cooper and Finkelstein advocated Hague adopting strong and principled stances on the issues that matter to real people. By doing this, the Conservative Party would not only become an effective Opposition but would broaden its support base and consequently maximise its electoral support. The crucial factor was ascertaining which issues are kitchen table issues and then formulating policies which appeal to the majority of voters.

In the final section, Cooper and Finkelstein ask: 'how do we get there?'. They provide a large number of suggestions on how the party can achieve their strategic objectives. These include being seen to actively listen to the public; rebranding the party; providing '10,000 volt initiatives', such as a high profile expulsion by the new Ethics and Integrity committee, to demonstrate that the party has changed; using language that people understood; using opinion research to track the party's process and increasing the party's utilisation of television (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, pp.6-9).

Three of Cooper and Finkelstein's recommendations, 'leading Conservative Britain', 'absolute discipline' and 'relentless repetition' deserve closer inspection. The first suggests that 'millions of Conservative people look to the Conservative Party to speak for them – and to lead them – on issues of the day. 'We can do much to restore our reputation as a party of principle, of strength and of purpose by providing leadership for them'. However, 'that does not, by any means, imply always saying the strident thing, or the obvious opportunist one'. By speaking out on such issues and providing strong leadership 'we will often end up speaking for non-Conservatives too' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.6).

The second and third recommendations, 'absolute discipline' and 'relentless repetition' operate in tandem to ensure that the KTC strategy would be implemented successfully. The former suggests that 'there is no point in having a strategy unless it is followed...it should be permanently at the heart of everything we do; as much a pre-requisite of membership of our Front Bench as support for the party's policy on the single currency'. Members of the Shadow Cabinet must only take 'positions [on issues] which are consistent with the pictures we are building up of ourselves and of the government' (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.8). This consistency would then be augmented by 'relentless repetition' of the party's

message because ‘unless we dedicate ourselves to the relentless repetition of our message it will not make any difference how in-touch we are with the issues people care about – they will not hear us’. Nevertheless, ‘it is also crucial to recognise that it is impossible successfully to communicate – even by repetition – lots of points at once. We will achieve the greatest success in getting our message over, and gather momentum more quickly, if we decide upon the right message – always using polls to help order our priorities – and repeat, repeat, repeat’ (Cooper and Finkelstein, 1998, p.8). Cooper and Finkelstein are, therefore, advising that in order to adapt and move on, the Conservative Party must avoid opportunism and opposing for oppositions sake but settle on a central message that is relentlessly repeated, facilitated by the utmost discipline, particularly within the shadow cabinet.

The Kitchen Table Conservatives paper was translated into eight rules of engagement which were put on the wall of the War Room and elsewhere:

#### Kitchen table Conservatives...

1. Concentrate on the issues that really matter to people.
2. Use the language of people not of politicians
3. Show – and say – that we listen
4. Talk about the future not about the past
5. Concede and Move On
6. Are for things and people not against things and people
7. Have a sense of proportion
8. Show integrity – strive to be consistent, honest and likeable

(Private correspondence from Cooper, 23.02.2004)

### **The Failure of ‘Kitchen Table Conservatism’**

Cooper described how ‘it became clear that everyone had agreed to it [KTC] and William called a Shadow Cabinet meeting and I did a presentation and then he had me go and see them all individually to make sure everyone had signed up for it. Because the Leader said it was the strategy, they all agreed the strategy’ (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2005). Cooper and Finkelstein were under the impression that the Leader of the Conservative Party had adopted KTC as the party’s strategy and that he had the full support of his Shadow Cabinet. They had demonstrated their support in Shadow Cabinet meetings and on an individual basis with Cooper. However, implementation was not as smooth as its adoption because ‘immediately, operationally, it became clear that they didn’t agree with it because they just weren’t doing it. Within it there were a set of operational rules, you know ‘what this means in practice’ and they just didn’t follow any of them. So my role increasingly became sending nagging memos to people saying ‘no, no, you shouldn’t have done that’ (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004).

Cooper and Finkelstein did not understand why the Shadow Cabinet had not engaged with KTC but when, in early 1999, it became clear to them that the leadership had collectively veered off course, Cooper wrote ‘a second paper which was called ‘Conceding and Moving on’ in which [he] tried to identify what it was about the strategy that people found so difficult’ (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004). CMO first asked: ‘where are we now?’ (Cooper, 1999, p.1. Original emphasis). Whilst acknowledging policy developments in health and transport, Cooper concluded that the party’s standing in the polls had not improved, that there had been no ‘10,000 volt initiatives’ and that the party had failed to promote a positive message about the Conservative Party in ‘*everything* we do’. He believed,

there has been a missing link in our strategy. What is holding us back, perhaps more than any other single thing, and what prevents any progress is this: we have been unable to concede and move on. We constantly associate ourselves with the last Conservative government and get drawn into defending it and, as a consequence, we find ourselves paralysed by Labour's constant characterisation of us in the terms with which that government became associated...When we defend the Major years, and stridently attack the Labour government without defining our positive alternative, we simply re-fight the 1997 election over and over again (Cooper, 1999, p.1).

The only consequence of this was that any negative issue that Blair encounters or any belief that the Labour government had failed to deliver could be turned into a re-run of the 1997 General Election. Cooper concluded that as soon as the Conservative Party 'concedes and moves on', Blair and the Labour government would be deprived of this luxury. Similarly, 'all of people's memories of what was bad about the last Tory government will work for us instead of against us' (Cooper, 1999, pp.2-3).

Irrespective of the initial support that Hague and the Shadow Cabinet gave to KTC and despite the CMO follow-up paper, the strategy was not implemented. Cooper says 'I know there were a lot of people going to William and saying 'look at all this modernising clap-trap' but having had a meeting in which he endorsed the strategy, Shadow Cabinet meetings etc. etc. There was never a meeting, no one ever had a meeting with me and said 'we don't want' (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004). Archie Norman, referring to KTC, said 'one of the major papers was approved by the Shadow Cabinet and then completely ignored' (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003). Why was KTC, a strategy which was compiled for Hague and adopted by him and his Shadow Cabinet, simply abandoned before it was implemented and could yield results?

Individuals who were involved in the development and implementation of KTC provide different reasons for the failure of the strategy, although there are some common themes. Cooper has already described how the Conservative leadership failed to adhere to the eight operational rules and introducing CMO did little to change the situation. There appeared to be very little discipline, a major factor cited by Cooper and Finkelstein, necessary for the successful implementation of the strategy. Malcolm Gooderham simply stated 'there was a lack of discipline', when asked why the strategy failed (Gooderham Interview, 26.02.2004). Responding to the same question, a senior anonymous Conservative strategist stated 'it had to be adhered to and getting senior people to adhere to it was difficult' (Interview, 20.04.2004). The Shadow Cabinet had officially adopted a strategy that had been imposed upon them and which they never engaged with. On the question of why KTC failed, another senior Conservative Party strategist replied that 'message discipline is bad in the Conservative Party, whereas New Labour are particularly good at it. This is because the Conservative Party is much more individualistic than Labour. New Labour work certain soundbites into every speech and interview so the message eventually gets through' (Interview, 05.04.2004).

It is not disputed that Hague and the Shadow Cabinet endorsed and adopted KTC but Cooper suggests that it was imposed on the latter as a *fait accompli*, with no discussion or opportunity to change it. He said that 'because the Leader said it was the strategy, they all agreed the strategy'. He also suggests why they gave their agreement: 'they all saw enough in it that they could cling to and that they did agree with' (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004). Every member of the Shadow Cabinet would find the idea of taking what they believed to be kitchen table issues to the British people appealing. However, as a senior anonymous Conservative strategist stated, 'KTC is open to wide interpretation – what is a kitchen table

issue?!' (Interview, 05.04.2004). The issues that one person discussed around their kitchen table could be very different to those of another.

Malcolm Gooderham suggests that 'William's heart wasn't really in it. I don't think he really understood what he had to do otherwise he wouldn't have gone down the course he actually went down' (Gooderham Interview, 26.02.2004). Cooper agrees with this diagnosis,

it wasn't authentically William. He could see the logic of it, he was a disciplined enough man and a student enough of history and military strategy to know that he needed someone to write these papers and do these polls but it just wasn't him, he wasn't comfortable with it. It was never internalised, which is the key with these things so, left to his own devices and responding simultaneously to things, it would never come out as we argued it should (Cooper, 17.02.2004).

There was an absence of conviction from Shadow Cabinet and Leader alike and if the party leadership were disengaged, a negative response in the press and from the opinion polls would have cemented their lack of support for the strategy. Cooper noted that Hague had,

endured two years of record-breakingly bad poll ratings as Leader and the party wasn't getting any traction and the party's core media, *The Telegraph* and *The Mail*, were getting increasingly hostile, you know *The Sun*. of course, had portrayed him as a dead parrot. So I think he lost faith in the professional structure which Archie [Norman] had put in place (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004).

Michael Ancram said, 'I think we pursued those for two years and then in the face of no movement in the opinion polls, we had to begin to search for other areas that people were interested in' (Ancram Interview, 20.01.2004). It did not appear from this that the party leadership was in for the long-term, as Hague had indicated in his early speeches as Leader.

The party wanted instant success and when this did not materialise, it moved on. Finkelstein spoke about the feeling within the Conservative Party about KTC and that at the time, the Conservative leadership was not in favour of the ideas promoted by himself and Cooper. Referring to the reasons for its failure, he said ‘some of these things were out of our control, questions like timing in the political cycle, whether the Conservative Party was ready to embrace an entirely different strategy and move away from the certainties of the past’ (Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004). The leadership was simply not ready to concede and move on, it wanted a strategy which would provide positive results instantly.

Three political events above all others were factors in the leadership’s abandonment of KTC: the R.A.Butler lecture given by Peter Lilley on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1999, the change of personnel at CCO, and the June 1999 European elections. Finkelstein explained,

that although political parties agree strategies, it’s not quite how it works – you are the prisoner of events and activities. I think the crucial moment in Conservative development came in the year of the European elections...two or three different things happened. One was the Peter Lilley speech in which, partly with my assistance, Peter attempted to move the agenda on public services on and say ‘this is where we now agree with Labour, this is where we don’t agree with Labour’ but it was so clumsily done that even those who supported it most, for example me...certainly couldn’t agree with it. So it was a political disaster for William which brought to a head right-wing misgivings with a whole series of things including drawing a line under the past, which was a critical element of a moving on to the public services strategy, a KT strategy  
(Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004).

Referring to Lilley’s speech, Cooper said,

several people said to me that William saw it as absolute proof that you couldn’t, that the Tory Party was not ready to go down that road. It would further weaken his own position and he was already very weak internally. He

needed to secure the base in order to be able to succeed as leader, continue even, as leader  
(Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004).

A senior anonymous Conservative strategist confirmed Cooper and Finkelstein's assessment. He said, 'in 1999 Peter Lilley made a speech about health, before the Thatcher dinner, and there were repercussions because the party saw it that we were conceding ground on health. The strategy was railroaded' (Interview, 20.04.2004).

Changes of personnel in CCO also contributed to the downfall of KTC. Cooper focused on the appointment of Amanda Platell in March 1999 as the party's Director of Communications. Not having a history within the party led to her developing a belief that she was working for Hague and that her mission was 'to save William's reputation'. He said 'her mantra was 'let William be William' and so I think William Hague was authentically what we saw at the backend of that parliament'. Cooper described how Platell formed an alliance with the new press advisor, Nick Wood,

he thought the modernising stuff was nonsense. He thought we should just set about the government and whip up traditional, core Conservative messages and that chimed well with 'let William be William' so I think they sort of formed an axis there and very quickly managed to create a climate in which to question that was to commit treason and so there was a quick succession of exits, including me  
(Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004).

Finkelstein agreed, 'the second element was letting Gregor MacKay, who'd always supported the strategy, go and bringing in Amanda Platell. She ended up reinforcing a very different strategy from the kitchen table one that we had devised' (Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004). Archie Norman alluded to the new atmosphere of strategic thinking that was developing within the Conservative Party at that time. He said 'the reforming group.

Michael Portillo, myself and Francis Maude, we think we won every argument but lost the war. Most of the staff in Central Office supported us because they were younger and working from the research and knew the extent of change required' (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003). There was a split between modernisers and traditionalists as far as strategic issues were concerned and which appeared to correspond with views on British nationhood and national identity. This divide was replicated within CCO.

Finkelstein simply stated that 'the third event was the Euro election victory' (Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004). Cooper believed the problem was,

a very focused European election campaign, at the end of which it felt as if going back to a core, Tory, reflex message had been usually successful, We'd won an election against all the odds and against what all the pollsters said so, let's keep going there. My perspective was that the European elections sort of cemented a shift in trajectory which was already happening (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004).

The reaction to Lilley's speech and the party's success at the 1999 European elections, led some traditionalist Conservative parliamentarians to believe that the party's core support base could not be taken for granted. George Osborne said,

Certainly by the middle of the parliament things were getting pretty desperate for us. We were not getting any press coverage and that press coverage we were getting was entirely negative. The party membership was sort of, I wouldn't say uneasy, but a bit non-plussed and unengaged with what we were doing...and basically an important part of being a leader is that you have to enthuse your base as well as reaching out (Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003).

Referring to the mid-point of the 1997-2001 parliament, Peter Lilley said, 'all I know is that their [the Conservative Party] opinion polling showed that they were no means sure of

keeping in the core vote that we'd had in 1997 and that they had to consolidate that' (Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003). More and more of the traditionalists within the leadership became convinced that the party had to secure its core support base. If not it would be even more vulnerable at the polls than it had been in 1997. Lord Strathclyde said,

I think shoring up the core vote became something we had to do. I'm not sure we expressed it in strategic terms at all but I think all of us felt that we had to restore morale in the constituencies, in the membership, to make sure that we didn't lose people who had voted for us in 1997, at the same time as reaching out for new people. I think it was quite a logical assumption, given to where we had got to. Of course...1997-1999, in '99 we had hugely successful European elections based on 'in Europe, not run by Europe' which went very well. There was an appeal to nationhood in that, which obviously struck a cord (Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003).

Strategies are simple to formulate but difficult to implement. Implementation relies on people and personalities, media perception, timing in the political cycle and specific political events. However, a senior anonymous Conservative strategist concluded that 'the climate just wasn't right for it [KTC] to be implemented...Oppositions have to get noticed. It is only when the government is seen as incompetent that the media seek an alternative from the Opposition...how can you transmit a 'we are nice' strategy? It could have worked in election broadcasts but not during peacetime – it just wouldn't have made the headlines' (Interview, 05.04.2004). It would appear that, rather than taking a long-term approach to the regeneration of the party as the leadership had hinted at in the early months of the parliament, it was now after more instant success. KTC was, therefore not considered suitable, a view that was given a certain amount of vindication by events such as Lilley's ill-received speech and the party's success in the European elections. The majority of modernisers did not share this assessment. Malcolm Gooderham stated that 'there's no point having a strategy unless you give it chance to work...whether anything could have

worked then is debateable and given the fact that whatever you try you are going to be struggling with it, you might as well be struggling in the right direction than the wrong direction' (Gooderham Interview, 26.02.2004). The leadership did not give KTC enough time and did not approach it with sufficient enthusiasm and discipline to enable it to yield results.

Only modernisers such as Norman and Francis Maude actually engaged with the strategy and attempted to make it a success. The remainder of the Shadow Cabinet agreed tacitly that the strategy was not right for the party. The politics of nationhood and national identity did not feature highly within KTC. The strategy was based around the public services and promoting the Conservatives as the party that was focused and dedicated to their improvement. By accepting KTC as the party's strategy, Hague simply wanted the party to have a strategy. He wanted to broaden the party's support, improve his standing as leader, make headway in the polls and move on. He was, however, unable and unwilling to wait for the strategy to yield results. Although the strategy fitted in well with his initial 'Fresh Start', his acceptance that the party's recovery would not be an instant achievement and his attempts to concede and move on, the weakness of Hague's own position and the realisation that the half-way mark of that parliament may well have been reached, led him to search for an alternative strategy.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

The following two chapters will examine how, in the second half of his leadership, Hague built upon the party's success at the 1999 European elections. However, in the first half, the Conservative Party sought to move on from its years of infighting over the issue of Europe. The internal feud continued but it did not dominate. Party grandees such as

Heseltine and Howe, continued their public denunciation of the 'two parliaments' line on the single currency and Taylor and Curry resigned from the Shadow Cabinet. These events were not accorded the publicity they might have been if, at the time, the party been taken more seriously by the media and other commentators. Cowley and Stuart conclude that 'despite being the major faultline during the Major leadership, there were remarkably few backbench revolts over Europe (none of them sizeable) under Hague's leadership' (Cowley and Stuart in Garnett and Lynch, 2003, p.70). Similarly, although some members of the leadership and parliamentary party were concerned about the party's policy on EMU, it was the only policy that could have succeeded in unifying the party. Hague gradually began to place more emphasis on the political and constitutional implications of membership of a single currency for Britain and the British people.

Despite his Euro-scepticism, Hague never advocated Britain leaving the EU and he continuously spoke about how it could be positively reformed to operate flexibly and promote free market economics within its borders. Hague strove to heal the party's rift over Europe by establishing a strong policy which was consolidated by the internal ballot. He also sought to demonstrate that the party was not only positive and forward-looking in its approach to the EU but that it had moved on from the Major years. His apology for the ERM debacle was part of this exercise. Hague also strove to prevent Britain's membership of a single currency by emphasising how EMU would push the EU to the limits of political integration.

Hague used Europe and specifically the single currency, to demonstrate that the Conservative Party had a distinct policy on the issue, imposed by a strong leader, with the support of his membership. The issue was used to promote the party as, not only a clear

alternative to the Labour Party but as the only major party to rule out membership of the single currency for at least the next two parliaments. Hague appealed to individuals' Britishness and spoke of the Conservative Party as the true party of Britain, protecting its identity, nationhood and prosperity against the repercussions of economic and political European integration. During the first half of his leadership, the European issue was used to maximise the Conservative Party's electoral support before the 1999 European elections and the leadership certainly believed that this was accomplished. The Party did better than they and the media expected in the European elections, pushing a strong policy which was a clear alternative to Labour and which resonated with the public. Hailed as a significant victory by the leadership, the fact that it was a single issue election, with a very low turnout was not brought into the equation. However, irrespective of those statistics, the leadership regarded the internal ballot as consolidating, and the election results as vindicating, the party's policy on the single currency.

Nationhood and national identity did not play a significant role in the development of strategy in the first half of Hague's leadership. Until the introduction of KTC, the party's strategy was based on survival, although Hague did speak out to ethnic minority groups, appeal to the identity of all British people, and attend the Notting Hill Carnival in order to attempt to broaden his party's appeal. Settling the European issue was part of this informal survival strategy. It may have been informal but it was also vital. Cooper and Finkelstein did not mean for nationhood and national identity to play a significant role in the implementation of KTC, which was focused on kitchen table issues, specifically the public services. However, one interviewee asked, 'what is a kitchen table issue?' The concept is open to wide interpretation.

The survival strategy was successful, the party did survive to go on and devise longer-term strategy initiatives. However, Hague's personal standing did not improve throughout the first half of his leadership. In September 1997 and 1998, on behalf of *The Guardian*, ICM asked respondents which of a number of characteristics applied to the three main party leaders.<sup>22</sup> In 1997, Blair was considered 'arrogant' by 21% of respondents and Hague by 44%. In 1998, the figures were 29% and 43% respectively. In 1997, Blair was considered to 'understand people like me' by 65% of respondents and Hague by 11%. In 1998, the figures were 48% and 12% respectively. In 1997, Blair was considered to 'have lots of personality' by 80% of respondents and Hague by 8%. In 1998, the figures were 60% and 8% respectively. It is certainly true that in those twelve months Blair's approval ratings slipped but Hague's standing did not improve at all, or if it did by negligible amounts. Hague was not benefiting from the Prime Minister's depleting popularity.

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<sup>22</sup> For simplicity, only those statistics for Blair and Hague will be discussed.

## Chapter Six

### Nationhood and Strategy, June 1999 European Elections – 2001 General Election

It is fundamental to our recovery that we have become the champions of the common sense instincts of the people of our country (Hague, 2000d).

#### 6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters examined the approach taken by the leadership to the politics of nationhood and the development of strategy during the first half of Hague's tenure as Leader. This chapter and the next will focus on the second half of Hague's leadership, after the June 1999 European Elections until the 2001 General Election. The former will examine the party's approach towards race relations policy, including asylum and immigration and will also examine the strategic initiative 'Common Sense Revolution'. The latter will focus on the party's approach towards European integration, specifically the single currency and will analyse the party's strategy throughout the second half of the parliament. Throughout the two chapters, the change in Hague's tone, when referring to nationhood and national identity, will be examined and by studying the second half of his leadership, it will be possible to determine whether the Hague era can indeed be divided into two clear phases. Did Hague stop trying to extend his free market ideals from economics to social politics during the latter phase?

## 6.2 Race Relations

Race relations policy, including the party's approach to immigration and asylum has relevance to a discussion of the Conservative Party and identity politics because Britain is becoming increasingly multicultural. Immigration has increased the population's exposure to many other cultures and inevitably raised questions surrounding appropriate levels of immigration and asylum and how to maintain harmony between ethnic communities.

During the first half of Hague's leadership, race relations, including asylum and immigration, were not high priorities on the Conservative Party's agenda. Resolving the issue of Europe and preparing the party's response to devolution dominated. However, during the summer of 1999, the leadership put the issue of asylum firmly at the top of the party's agenda. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that, 'Ann Widdecombe, the shadow home secretary, has led a direct onslaught on Mr Straw's competence, saying his policies have made Britain a 'soft touch' for bogus asylum seekers – a criticism echoed by immigration service unions' (Shrimpsley, 1999b). The issue was kept at the forefront of the party's agenda into early 2000, when on January 27<sup>th</sup> Widdecombe announced new plans to detain asylum seekers from countries with no record of human rights abuses. Again, the measures were designed to reduce the numbers of 'bogus' applicants. Widdecombe said 'the message would be if you come to Britain with a bogus claim from a safe country we will lock you up and we will turn your case around quickly and we will return you to your country' (Quoted by Shrimpsley, 2000a).

The asylum campaign and plans for detention centres did gain the party a great deal of publicity, something which it had been lacking since the 1997 General Election. However, not all of that publicity was positive. On March 9<sup>th</sup> 2000, Shaun Woodward used his first

speech in the House of Commons since defecting from the Conservative Party to Labour, to criticise the former for its inherent racism. He stated his belief that the Conservatives' new policy on asylum was a populist attempt to gain votes,

Perhaps the House should not be surprised by the way in which some Tories will use discrimination for short-term political gain. The shadow Cabinet Office Minister recently said that immigration was 'an issue which . . . played particularly well in the tabloids, and has more potential to hurt'. Such a view should be repugnant to any decent person. It should be condemned, not championed, by the Leader of the Opposition. It beggars belief that anyone could contemplate using the topic of immigration to hurt, or discrimination as a weapon to stir up prejudice and thereby secure votes; yet such prejudices lie deep within some in the Conservative party. That was one of the reasons why I left that party  
(Woodward, 2000).

Babara Roche a Home Office minister accused the Conservative Party of 'playing the race card' during the 2000 local election campaign. She said 'I think there is an issue and we need to talk about it, but I think the language they use is absolutely appalling. It isn't the first time they've done it...they said that it played well in the tabloids' (Quoted by Shrimpsley, 2000b). Language and tone had the ability to offend, on top of actual policy commitments.

### **Common Sense on Asylum Seekers**

The leadership had clearly demonstrated that it saw asylum as an issue that would serve it well electorally. Hague made a key-note speech outlining his party's asylum policies during the local election campaign, which indicated the prominence that the issue now held within the party's agenda. The speech, given to the Social Market Foundation (SMF) on April 18<sup>th</sup> 2000, was entitled 'Common Sense on Asylum Seekers' and formed part of the

party's CSR initiative, discussed below (Hague, 2000b).<sup>23</sup> In it, Hague gave his support for Britain's historic tradition of offering asylum to those suffering persecution but he also revealed his plans to reform the asylum system which he believed was antiquated and inefficient. He began by stating that 'Britain has a long tradition of providing hospitality to men, women and children fleeing persecution...this tradition is rightly a source of national pride and it has also brought important benefits to our country' but warned that,

That tradition is now under threat as never before. Not because our people have lost their sense of hospitality; not because we are unwilling to honour our obligations to genuine refugees; least of all because the British people are racist or xenophobic. The problem confronting us is that a system to identify and protect refugees which was designed half a century ago is near collapse in today's utterly different world  
(Hague, 2000b).

Hague detailed the extent of the asylum crisis by revealing the rise in claims for asylum. 'In 1988 there were just under 4,000 applications for asylum in this country. By 1996, the last full year before Labour took office, that figure stood at 29,000. last year, the number of claims was more than 71,000'. He said that the Conservative Party,

believe Britain has a moral as well as a legal duty to welcome people here who are fleeing for their lives. That duty includes providing them with decent accommodation, treating them if they fall ill, ensuring that their children have a proper education, giving them the freedom to accept work and the right to family reunion in this country. I believe that if the British people have confidence that they are helping those who have been genuinely dispossessed, they will accept that duty with cheerfulness and generosity  
(Hague, 2000b).

Hague then outlined six measures that a future Conservative government would introduce to reform the asylum system: 'First, we should make much greater use of reception centres'

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<sup>23</sup> The policies outlined in Common Sense on Asylum Seekers were therefore reiterated in the Conservative Party 2001 General Election manifesto, Time for Common Sense.

(Hague, 2000b). Reception or detention centres, had generated negative headlines for the Party as they were considered by some to be draconian but Hague said 'there is nothing inhumane or uncivilised about such an approach' which was commonplace in, for example, France and Germany. 'By detaining in reception centres, we can be certain that people are adequately housed and supported while their claims are being processed...so the next Conservative government will detain all new applicants for asylum'. 'Second, we shall take action to speed up asylum decisions and appeals' and 'third, we shall amend the law to deter applications by people who have come from a country which is manifestly safe'. Hague said 'it is extraordinary that we receive applications for asylum from countries which have now been formally accepted as candidates for EU membership'. 'Fourth, we shall also make clear to our European partners that we expect them to take seriously their obligations under the Dublin Convention'. Hague wanted asylum seekers to be dealt with in the first safe country they reach, rather than passing through Europe on their way to Britain. He demonstrated his confusion over the issue by stating 'for every genuine refugee, the priority is surely to get out of a particular country, not to get in to one'. Hague's fifth pledge was to 'set up a Removals Agency with the sole mission of making sure that people who are supposed to leave the country, do so at once'. He said that for the last six months that data was available '77% – 8,000 asylum seekers – had their claims turned down. Yet during the same period, fewer than 4,000 actually left the country'. A future Conservative government would ameliorate that situation. Finally, Hague said 'we need to make sure there is a dose of common sense in the way the existing law is applied' and cited the example of the £2,000 automatic fine on lorry drivers found to be transporting illegal immigrants. The penalty did not distinguish between those drivers who were unaware of their extra cargo and those who were (Hague, 2000b).

Hague certainly made sure that his commitment to asylum as a concept, was demonstrated within the speech. He also made clear that his party was simply approaching the issue with ‘common sense’, ultimately striving to protect the innocent claimant against an unfair, inefficient and abused system. However, as discussed above, the response of much of the press and members of other parties was not focused on these positive statements but on the language and tone with which Hague used to articulate his party’s policies. Hague dramatically warned of the expert bogus asylum seekers who are ‘arriving in Britain armed with expert knowledge of how to exploit our asylum laws; what to say on arrival; how to string out appeals and how to remain here if their cases are eventually turned down’. An example was given of just how far the system was being abused: ‘this month it was revealed that an Algerian asylum seeker who is living in Britain with his two wives and 15 children at taxpayers’ expense is in fact a convicted terrorist’ (Hague, 2000b). Those warnings, which conjured up a ‘them and us’ situation, were designed to alarm the British people and persuade them that the Conservative Party was the only party capable of protecting Britain from this onslaught. Shaun Woodward was particularly critical of Hague making generalisations from single examples of asylum seekers abusing the system,

There was no sense of ‘this is shameful, this is wrong’, picking on an asylum seeker, you know, taking one case and turning that into a general proposition. There was no sense of that being wrong, there was no sense that when they picked on an asylum seeker, they were actually talking about a mother or a grandmother with children, someone who might genuinely be fleeing terrible persecution and torture. There was just a sense that this was a person on the scrounge, wanting to take our welfare benefits and that this is good politics (Woodward Interview, 13.01.2004).

*The Daily Telegraph* reported criticisms of the policy proposals, including Gerald Kaufman’s comparison of reception centres to ‘prison camps’. Widdecombe, however, ‘rejected accusations that the Tory contribution to the asylum debate was ‘inflammatory’ or

'racist' saying, 'what we are doing is, like grown-ups, trying to provide a serious solution to a problem that anyone can see is out of control' (Jones, 2000b). Similarly, when asked by a member of a television audience to tone down the language he used to describe the asylum situation, Hague defended his approach and said,

we should use words properly with their full meaning and their true meaning. The dictionary definition of a flood is a flow that is out of control. There is no question, when we have more than 100,000 asylum seekers in the queue for processing their application, that we have a flow that is out of control (Quoted by Woolf, 2000b).

Hague concluded with a warning bearing a similarity to that made by Enoch Powell in his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech made on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968 (Powell, 1992, pp.161-169). He said 'a tolerant, welcoming society too weak and inefficient to determine whom it wants to welcome will decline into an intolerant and unwelcoming society'. He then spoke patriotically of the threat to British national identity that the state of the asylum system represented,

By itself, of course, the asylum crisis is not big enough to do this. It cannot destroy something as robust as British democracy and rule of law. But it can damage the rule of law and establish deeply damaging precedents. In other words the crisis in the asylum system damages many things that we value most dearly about our country. It damages many of the very things that distinguish this country from the places refugees are fleeing from. And when there is such a crisis, the Conservative Party will speak out (Hague, 2000b).

Hague was not deliberately striving for the press to compare him with Powell. If he was, he would not have spoken positively about the contributions made to British society by immigrant communities. However, in his attempts to raise the issue of asylum on the

political agenda he used tone and language designed to demonstrate to the electorate, in the midst of an election campaign, that the Conservative Party would stand up for Britain's interests and protect its identity in the face of a government that was not. Such tone and language and attempts to alarm the indigenous population, are comparable to Powell's rhetoric and did alarm people such as Barbara Roche and Shaun Woodward, quoted above, who feared that Hague's speeches would threaten racial harmony in Britain. However, it also appeared, from a memo leaked from the Prime Minister's office, that Tony Blair feared that the government was losing ground on the issues of asylum, law and order and the family. Irrespective of his criticisms of their policy, Blair believed the Conservative Party's tough stance on immigration and asylum was increasingly their popularity with voters, whilst that of the Labour government fell (Jones, 2000c).

David Heathcoat-Amory acknowledged that although he did not 'think Hague ever relinquished his idea of broadening his appeal to ethnic minorities' he did think that from 1999 onwards 'the mixture of a harder, more strident rhetoric about asylum and immigration, for instance, tended to give that impression' (Heathcoat-Amory Interview, 02.12.2003). During the May 2000 local elections and as the 2001 General Election approached, Hague believed that raising the issue of asylum on the political agenda and emphasising the implications of a failing asylum system would maximise the Conservative Party's electoral support. A firm but fair and distinct policy would appeal to people who believed that the Labour government were failing. Although race relations policy was not prominent in the first half of the parliament, Hague's approach to asylum in the latter half of his leadership suggests that at that time, he was unafraid of using emotive rhetoric to make his point and attempt to attract support.

## **Reaching out to Ethnic Communities**

Despite the obvious hardening of Hague's tone and policies on immigration and asylum, the party was aware that it had to reach out to ethnic communities, both to demonstrate that it was an inclusive party and attempt to broaden support. When Widdecombe announced the Conservatives' plans to detain asylum applicants, she made it clear that 'none of this is designed to make life harder for the genuine asylum seeker. It's designed to make life very hard for the chap who is abusing the system' (Quoted by Shrimley, 2000a). Hague also emphasised the positive effects for British national identity of waves of immigration throughout history. He said 'each new group of settlers has enriched our islands. Each has widened and advanced our sense of what it means to be British. And I am determined that we should never abandon our proud tradition of offering sanctuary to those who are fleeing injustice and wrong (Hague, 2000b).

Peter Lilley described how when the Conservative Party attempted to promote their asylum policy they found it very difficult to lose their 'bigoted' or 'racist' tag,

Well, I think it's the sort of policy where you are up against the liberal media, the intelligentsia and therefore you have to be extremely careful when handling it. Really, you have to make sure that every statement about asylum seekers begins with a statement expressing, not just willingness to provide a refuge for genuine refugees but also that economic migrants are decent folk who just want to improve the lot of themselves and their families, rather than you want to kick them out because they are nasty people. You have to go overboard in saying something that is pretty obvious to most of us, otherwise you will get slammed in the media and we did, they used that game-playing after Massow's defection and the little-known member for somewhere up in the north-east [John Townend] who made a speech which the Labour Party seized on (Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The furore surrounding John Townend's speech will be discussed more fully below.

Lilley demonstrated an awareness that the Conservative Party had to emphasise that its policies were designed to benefit those fleeing persecution, otherwise a suspicious media would focus solely on the controversial aspects of the policy. The party leadership constantly peppered their speeches and announcements with positive messages but these were subsumed by the reaction from other parties and from sections of the press, for example *The Guardian*, to the negative tone and language. Charles Hendry said, 'our approach towards asylum, which was couched in language which I think, now, looking back even from two or three years time, now looks to be pretty hostile...[and] which to an inclusive party generally were pretty much an anathema (Hendry Interview, 11.12.2003). Without such negative language and aggressive tone, the technicalities of the party's policies could have been analysed in isolation, without the assumption that the policies were equally negative and aggressive. It would have gone some way towards countering their 'bigoted' and 'racist' image. This was not a deliberate ploy by the Conservative Party to draw attention away from inadequate policy details because the majority of the leadership believed their immigration and asylum policies to be coherent and attractive to voters. Despite the criticism generated, the tone and language used were designed to maximise the profile of the issue in the press and to demonstrate that the Conservative Party had an approach distinct from that of the Labour Party. Hague wanted to reach out to those who voted Labour in 1997 but shared the Conservatives' sentiment and were unsatisfied with Labour's record. It may well be that such disproportionate analysis of policy alone, would have arrived at the same conclusions but the policy and the credibility of the party would have benefited from analysis and serious debate, rather than just the focus on semantics.

Hague continued his attempts to reach out to ethnic communities, whilst also continuing with his tough approach to asylum. On October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2000, Hague signed the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) Leadership Challenge initiative, designed to promote racial equality throughout Britain. At the same time he pledged to increase the number of party members and MPs from ethnic communities. Hague described how those potential recruits shared the same understanding of British national identity as the Conservative Party,

I believe in One Nation. As do hundreds and thousands of British blacks and British Asians who believe in the United Kingdom. They are proud of this country – its traditions and its achievements. I want to see more of them playing a full part in our national life. Not just in business, the professions, sport, the arts or in the media – but also in politics...and I passionately want to involve more British black and Asian people in the Conservative Party (www.cre.gov.uk, 02.10.2000).

Hague's appeal to ethnic minority voters and the simultaneous hardening of his tone and language appeared contradictory. However, discussed in more detail below, is the nature of the audience that Hague was aiming his rhetoric at. He was speaking to all British people, whatever their background, who shared his common sense agenda. He truly welcomed new Conservative Party members from ethnic communities, as long as they shared the values and beliefs of his Conservative Party. However, analysis of voting behaviour in the 1997 and 2001 General Elections revealed that for all his attempts to 'reach out' to ethnic communities, Hague failed to maximise the Conservative vote from this section of society. British Election Study data revealed that in 1997, 11.5% of ethnic minorities voted Conservative (Quoted by Saggar in Norris, 2001, p.201). In 2001, this figure had risen slightly to 12.9%. Although the proportion did not fall, the rise is negligible and does not suggest that Hague's explicit attempts to reach out to ethnic minority voters throughout the

1997-2001 parliament was successful. It does not appear that members of ethnic communities took up Hague's invitation to all British people, to support the Conservatives because only the Conservative Party stood for the commonsense values shared by the majority of contemporary Britons, irrespective of their social or ethnic backgrounds.

However, the leadership consistently attempted to 'reach out'. Michael Portillo, newly appointed Shadow Chancellor, delivered a highly significant speech to the 2000 party conference, emphasising the inclusiveness of the Conservative Party in the new millennium,

The Conservative Party is a party for our times. We are a party for people, not against people. We are for all Britons: black Britons, British Asians, white Britons. Britain is a country of rich diversity...we heard last week Labour's smears against our policy on asylum seekers. That policy will re-establish public confidence in our controls. That frees us to give a warm welcome to those who come to Britain in fear of their lives...we are a party that believes in Britain, a party for all our people, a party that offers them aspiration and hope  
(Portillo, 2000).

Portillo focused on the positive aspects of Conservative asylum policy but Andrew Cooper insists Portillo was not as supportive of the issue in private as he was at the podium (see below). Although the leadership maintained a public display of unity, Portillo did emphasise his personal commitment to British asylum provision. He said 'that's how my father came. Britain's willingness to take in refugees defines us as a generous and responsible people. It's a tradition that will be upheld by the Conservative Party' (Portillo, 2000).

During the 2000 conference Hague reiterated the inclusiveness of the Conservative Party: the Conservative Party would ‘govern for people of every community and background’ (Hague, 2000d). His speech outlined the party’s approach to tax, education, pensions, the National Health Service (NHS), crime, deprivation and the inner cities and Europe. Asylum policy was mentioned only briefly. First, Hague stated ‘for all the people who can see that our asylum system is in chaos and want political leaders with the courage to get up and say so – I’m in it for you’. Second, he declared ‘I want all the people who are angry at the way our asylum system is in chaos and just want enforcement of the rules – I want them to know that we’re going to govern for them’ (Hague, 2000d). The speech focused on the public services, the Conservatives’ plans to eradicate crime and deprivation, particularly in inner-city Britain and its European policy. Hague promised to govern for all Britons irrespective of ethnic background. The speech demonstrated a sudden reduction in the prominence given to the issue of asylum since mid-1999 and this will be discussed at greater length in the section on the 2000 party conference below.

### **Hague’s Response to the Macpherson Report**

The Conservative Party raised race relations to the top of the political agenda just two months later, when, on December 14<sup>th</sup>, in a speech to the CPS, Hague commented on the repercussions of the Macpherson Report (Hague, 2000f). The report, published on February 22nd 1999, followed an inquiry into the Metropolitan Police’s investigation of the murder of black teenager, Stephen Lawrence in London in April 1993. No convictions had arisen from the police investigation. The report included criticisms and recommendations including a charge of institutional racism throughout the British police and the need for more black and Asian police officers.

Hague claimed that there was an,

urgent task facing the next Conservative government, and that is restoring police morale which has collapsed in so many places since the publication of the Macpherson report...the way in which the Macpherson report has been used to brand every officer and every branch of the force as racist. has contributed directly to a collapse of police morale and recruitment, and has led to a crisis on our streets  
(Hague, 2000f).

He continued,

The liberal elite have seized on the report as a stick with which to beat the police... We will take on and defeat a liberal elite that has always given more consideration to the rights of criminals than the rights of victims  
(Hague, 2000f).

Hague was criticised for stooping to opportunistic populism and playing the race card because he had not commented on the Macpherson Report when it had been published 21 months before and yet he had seemingly pushed the subject to the top of the agenda when a General Election was likely to be only months away. However, in an article entitled 'Tory Leader Digs for Election Gold' it was reported that, 'on the day that radio and television bulletins should have been entirely dominated by the outcome of the US elections, they [Hague's advisors] had secured a decent billing for Mr. Hague's provocative speech on crime' (Watt, 2000). Much of the press and other parties concluded that Hague was utilising blatant populist opportunism to raise publicity before a General Election. It may have supplied the party with column inches but the sensitive subject matter and the timing of his comments led much of the press attention to be negative. Blair's official spokesman said that Hague was 'pretty desperate and pretty disreputable...casting around to get himself noticed' (Quoted by *The Guardian*, 14.12.2000).

Hague rebutted these criticisms in an article in which he controversially linked the death and suspected murder of the young, black Nigerian boy, Damilola Taylor, in a London estate, to a reduction in the number of police on the beat in the area (Hague, 2000g). He quoted a Sri Lankan member of the CRE and a police officer, who shared his conclusions about the report, to disprove the theory that he was playing the race card. He also said that 'it is revealing that none of these left-wing critics mentioned the fact that I said in the speech that the Stephen Lawrence murder was a wicked crime, that we should be angry that no one has been brought to justice, and that there has been shameful police incompetence'. Hague was convinced that the reporting of the Conservative Party response to the report was biased. However, he failed to understand that newspapers such as *The Guardian* or *The Independent* would naturally have emphasised their denunciation of Hague's conclusions. This and condemnation from other parties and organisations such as the CRE would have subsumed support offered from, for example *The Daily Mail* or *The Daily Express*. Media attention was therefore largely negative, focusing on the controversial aspects of Hague's article, rather than the positive messages. This was something that previous experience should have led him to expect. However, he continued to speak out in the hope of persuading dissatisfied people who had previously voted Labour, to support the Conservative Party.

Hague continued the trend of including in each speech or article an attempt to reach out to ethnic communities and to broaden the party's support base. Referring to a so-called 'liberal elite' Hague said 'they like to brand everyone who takes a critical look at the impact of Macpherson as racists, rather than confront the truth that it is the members of the ethnic minority communities themselves who are suffering the most from the post-Macpherson collapse in police morale and street crime' (Hague, 2000g). To Hague, the

‘liberal elite’ was synonymous with New Labour. It was populated by the architects of New Labour, New Labour supporters and like-minded ‘liberals’ who may, for example, write for supportive think-tanks or *The Guardian*. Hague believed them to be characterised by an innate support for political correctness, even at the expense of positive action on an issue such as race relations and by being detached from the real world which was experienced by the mainstream majority. Walters regards Tony and Cherie Blair as the quintessential ‘liberal elite’,

Their ability to reconcile left-wing roots with highly paid jobs, getting their children into elite schools without the nuisance of paying school fees and enjoying expensive holidays with flights on the Queen’s aircraft paid for by taxpayers, irked some  
(Walters, 2001 p.103).

Often Hague used a similar phrase ‘the metropolitan elite’ which emphasised the fact that they originated from cities, in particular London and that, once again, their lifestyles were not comparable to the average Briton. Hague’s attempts to draw a distinction between the ‘liberal elite’ and the mainstream majority will be discussed more fully below.

Crucially, Hague did not retreat from any of the observations he had made in the speech to the CPS on December 14<sup>th</sup>. Instead he took his use of individual examples, to back up his criticism of Labour’s policing policy, one step further when he alleged that despite a lack of police presence when he died, ‘when Jack Straw visited the North Peckham estate, in south London, where young Damilola Taylor was tragically murdered, the police were out in force, the hypodermic syringes had all been cleared away and the broken glass had all been swept up’ (Hague, 2000g). Irrespective of the inevitable criticism for once again opportunistically playing the race card, Hague continued his attack, hoping to gather the

electoral support of unsatisfied former Labour voters who shared Conservative sentiment on the issue.

### **A Foreign Land**

Undaunted by the criticism which followed his denunciation of the Macpherson report and buoyed by the column inches received, Hague did not shy away from once again controversially placing race relations and asylum high on the party's political agenda. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001 he made a speech to the party's Spring Forum in which he painted a picture of life during a further four years of Labour government. He said 'try to picture what our country will look like. Let me take you on a journey to a foreign land. To Britain after a second term of Tony Blair' (Hague, 2001a). Hague continued by making brief, yet damning, predictions of the state of sterling, taxes, crime, fuel prices and the NHS after a second term of Labour government. The Conservatives, he insisted, would speak on behalf of the British people: 'we're ready to speak for the people of Britain: for the mainstream majority who have no voice...who despair that their country is being taken from them...It's time to bring Britain home'. Once again he spoke about the unfairness of how the Conservative Party was treated when it spoke out: 'talk about Europe and they call you extreme. Talk about tax and they call you greedy. Talk about crime and they call you reactionary. Talk about asylum and they call you racist. Talk about your nation and they call you Little Englanders' (Hague, 2001a). 'They' were of course the liberal elite. The issues Hague mentioned were those that had been pushed to the forefront of the Conservative agenda since mid-1999 and that continued to be emphasised, in particular Europe, asylum and nationhood. However, he did not go into details on those issues. Instead he described the Conservative Party's approach to tax, education, health and crime.

He then turned his attention to asylum. He said,

it's common sense that when we're dealing with an international trade in asylum seekers, we should make Britain a safe haven not a soft touch. So to the law-abiding citizen, who wants to help those genuinely fleeing persecution, but who also wants fairness in the system, I say: we will sort out the asylum crisis  
(Hague, 2001a).

Again, the rhetoric was positive: a 'fair' system and a 'safe haven' but the essence was that the asylum system needed to be reformed and the Conservative Party would do this by speeding up the assessment of claims and deporting people immediately if their claims were unfounded. Hague continued by describing how Britain had historically 'aligned itself to the cause of nationhood everywhere' and he used the examples of supporting the independence of Greece and Italy in the nineteenth century. He said 'we introduced this world to free trade. We carried law and freedom to new continents...but now we have a government that scorns and despises all things that have made our country what it is. A government that holds Britishness cheap' (Hague, 2001a).

The speech was received as a Powellite prophesy of Britain becoming a 'foreign land' because of unchecked immigration. Charles Kennedy said,

I do not believe that William Hague is a racist. But by his use of emotive language over the issue of asylum and immigration, and now by his claim that Britain is becoming a 'foreign land', William is playing on some people's fears and pandering to some people's prejudices'  
(Quoted by Ward, 2001).

The positive messages about wanting to protect the genuine asylum seeker had been heard: Kennedy did not actually believe that Hague was a racist. However, he believed Hague's

language generated that impression. He was resorting to opportunistic populism to gather support before an imminent General Election.

However, the forecasting of Britain becoming a foreign land was at the beginning of what is a lengthy speech and the comments on asylum were at the end. Europe is the dominant issue, followed by tax, education, health, crime, asylum and devolution. In fact asylum was not mentioned in the brief introduction which summarises the issues crucial in transforming Britain into a foreign land. The speech emphasised patriotic sentiments and plays on the threats to British national identity from a number of policy areas, of which asylum is one. So why was the speech received as an attack on immigration and asylum?

Lord Strathclyde did not believe that there should have been any confusion over the content or the reception of the speech. He said,

William Hague made a very good speech, where he listed all the failings of New Labour and said 'you'll wake up in a foreign land'. Everyone took this as a racist remark. It wasn't supposed to be at all. What it was is that we are waking up in a country that we no longer recognise as our own and that all our values, our customs, our traditions, our practices, our conventions, which stood the test of time, served the interests of the British people for so long, will have been thrown away! Without any public debate. That was the point he was making and it was a powerful point but it got hijacked by the anti-racists and so it all rather backfired  
(Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003).

Despite that fact that it was not meant to be racist in content, the speech, according to Strathclyde, was demonstrating an attack on British national identity and, to the Conservative Party, this included asylum. Although not emphasised in as great a degree as the press reported, the leadership clearly believed asylum to be a threat and the party had attempted to push the issue up the public agenda since the summer of 1999. Strathclyde,

did, however, blame the 'anti-racists' for 'hijacking' the speech, manipulating its message and ensuring it was received as bigoted. 'Anti-racists' was another reference to the aforementioned 'liberal elite' and Strathclyde obviously believed they had consciously twisted the meaning of the speech.

However, in contrast, Archie Norman claimed that one should,

Most of the speech was very good but have a look at the colour of the opening and you will find that it uses the concept of foreigners as a dark force that threaten our culture, our democratic system. It was a speech that made some powerful points but signalled regret about the evolution of contemporary Britain. He felt that he was appealing over the heads of the intelligentsia, over the heads of the elite, to the real people of Britain (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003).

Both Strathclyde and Norman regarded the speech as being based on perceived threats to British national identity. The former viewed the threat as coming from a change in British culture and identity, whilst the latter believed that the leadership regarded it as originating from foreign people, whether in Europe or having migrated to Britain. Norman conceded that the focus of the speech may have been on Europe but the language and tone emphasised 'foreigners' threatening British national identity. Once again, a critic's focus was on tone and language, not policy or overt racist rhetoric and once again, Hague's attempts to speak to the mainstream majority, as opposed to the intelligentsia/elite was considered significant.

Peter Lilley believed the reception given to the speech, if not cultivated by the Conservative Party, resulted from its naivety. He said, 'I defended it at the time. The foreign land business was about sterling and the section on asylum is eleven pages away but actually the

briefing from Central Office was linking the two and that was asking for trouble' (Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003). This was echoed by Lord Taylor, who, as discussed below, was on occasion publicly critical of the Conservatives' race relations policy. He believed that, as far as the foreign land speech was concerned,

I'm prepared to believe that he didn't mean it in a racist way but of course Britain and the media especially were so sensitive to his image as a right-winger that using that phrase was very ill-advised because it laid itself open to being called a racist. It was out of touch with the British people (Taylor Interview, 20.01.2004).

Again, a critic conceded that Hague was not racist but that his language and tone made it appear that way. Taylor believed Hague should have anticipated such interpretation, after the media's previous focus on the controversial aspects of Conservative policy. However, opinion was split as to whether this lack of foresight was deliberate or the result of bad advice but either way, Hague's credibility was further weakened by the speculation.

When asked if the speech was deliberately spun as an attack on asylum seekers, Daniel Hannan replied that if the speech is read,

You will see that it was not about asylum seekers. The only person who could specifically answer your question is Nick Wood, he was in charge of selling it and I've no idea what he'd say and whether it was misinterpreted by the press or not (Hannan Interview, 12.05.2004).

In response to the same question, a senior anonymous Conservative strategist stated that,

the media's interpretation of the 'foreign land' speech was unintentional but once it had happened the leadership went with it. The speech did not say the

country would become a foreign land because of the swamping of foreigners but because of the culture of the country (Interview, 05.04.2004).

There was certainly a large amount of confusion within the party leadership over the content and reception of the speech, with, for example, Strathclyde believing the speech was hijacked, therefore destroying its intended reception and a senior anonymous Conservative strategist believing the party made the most of the media interpretation and attention. Hague believed that Britain would become a foreign land because of changes to its culture and although asylum was not emphasised in causing these changes, it was still a factor. Although asylum was not dominant within the speech, it was believed it to be a threat to British national identity and was therefore discussed. Hague was talking, once again, to the 'mainstream majority' of the British people and not the liberal elite who, as he described, called the Conservative Party extreme when it talked about Europe and racist when it talked about asylum. His patriotic sentiment was a direct appeal to the national identity of his audience and even his fiercest critics conceded that the content of his speech was not actually racist. However, it was the tone and language which allowed the speech to be interpreted as bigoted and which generated much negative comment from other political parties and within the press.

After the response to Hague's comments about the repercussions of the Macpherson Report, Hague would have been aware that the media and other political parties would be keen to comment on any speech that a member of the Shadow Cabinet made on race relations, including immigration and asylum. The content of the speech was written so that it could not be criticised for being overtly racist but its tone and language soon generated some negative publicity, as indicated above. Commentators made the link between Britain

becoming a foreign land and asylum and this was not denied by Hague or the leadership of the party. Instead the publicity, however much of it was negative, was embraced by Hague because it encouraged discussion over each political party's policy on asylum and immigration. He believed the media attention would persuade unsatisfied Labour voters who supported the Conservative Party's policy on asylum, believed they were a member of the mainstream majority and who were fed up with the domination of the liberal elite, to vote Conservative at the forthcoming General Election. As the strategist described, the leadership did not immediately denounce the reception to the speech but instead enjoyed the publicity given to, what it believed, was a crucial election issue.

Opinion over the speech was once again divided along traditionalist/moderniser lines. Those who supported the speech, including Hannan and Strathclyde were traditionalists and those who opposed it, including Norman, were modernisers. However, the general confusion surrounding the speech and its intended reception, suggests that senior Conservatives were not conscious of the party's strategy at the time and also the role that the speech was intended to fulfil. If the party had been dedicated to a particular strategy, the motivation behind the controversially received speech would have been clear, if not universally welcomed, to all members of the leadership. It can be concluded, therefore that even members of the Shadow Cabinet and those, such as Daniel Hannan, who were close to Hague were not aware of their Leader's strategy at the time. The Conservative Party did not appear to be operating to a clear strategy very close to an expected General Election.

### **The Townend Debacle**

As well as encouraging the concept of national identity to the top of the political agenda, Hague also had to deal with 'events' which can threaten any carefully made strategic plans.

During the 1997-2001 parliament, John Townend was an obscure Conservative backbencher who came to the attention of the press when he was the only MP to publicly refuse to sign the CRE's pledge to promise not to 'play the race card' during the 2001 General Election. In February 2001, he made a speech to his Yorkshire East Constituency Association in which he warned against the dangers of immigration and the effect that it had had on British society. He said,

our homogenous Anglo-Saxon society has been seriously undermined by the massive immigration – particularly Commonwealth immigration – that has taken place since the War. As a result of our efforts, massive immigration was eventually reduced to a trickle. We should certainly have acted sooner and I believe Enoch Powell was right in his pessimistic future (Townend, 2001).

Townend then made his own predictions:

If nothing is done numbers will continue to rise, dependents will follow, and in 10 years we could have at least another two million people. This will mean more pressure on jobs, on the health service, on schools, on housing and more of our countryside will have to be concreted over. Many come from violent societies without our traditions of freedom, free speech, tolerance and the rule of law and inevitably crime is already beginning to rise in the areas where they are (Townend, 2001).

The speech and its praise of Powell, was instantly condemned as racist in much of the press and by other political parties. Hague publicly disowned Townend in an attempt stop the extension of this condemnation to the Conservative Party as a whole. Hague said 'John Townend's remarks on immigration and asylum in no way reflect the position of the Conservative Party. They are totally unacceptable and I wholly repudiate them' (Quoted by Tempest, 2001). Francis Maude also shunned the MP stating that 'I don't agree with a

word of it. We don't have – and never have had, or not for 1,000 years – a homogenous Anglo-Saxon population here. We have an extremely rich mix of ethnic backgrounds which has been enriched over the centuries by a flow of refugees and immigrants and this is what makes Britain special and wonderful' (Quoted by Tempest, 2001).

Hague was accused of having fostered the conditions in which MPs felt able to speak out so controversially. Charles Kennedy said,

Mr Townend's remarks confirm the inevitable result of William Hague's leadership. Mr Hague has set an uncomfortable tone within his own party over the last few months. His comments on Britain being a 'foreign land' and his obsession with 'bogus asylum seekers' have given credence to offensive opinions within his ranks  
(Quoted by Watt and Wintour, 2001).

A leader in *The Guardian* described two different William Hagues. The former attended the Notting Hill Carnival and told his first party conference as Leader that he wanted more black and Asian Conservatives; the latter spoke of 'bogus asylum seekers' and 'foreign lands'. There was, it concluded, 'no sense in blaming this Mr Hague for failing to punish Mr Townend: after all, he has helped create the climate in which racist language can flourish' (*The Guardian*, 29.03.2001).

Hague was also criticised for not withdrawing the whip from Townend. Conservative Party spokesmen said that this action would not be taken because Townend was standing down at the next General Election (Sparrow, 29.03.2001). A leader in *The Guardian* said Hague 'could instantly have denied Mr Townend the Conservative whip, forcing him to spend his remaining weeks in the Commons as a partyless loner'. Referring to the fact that Hague did not specifically rebuke Townend for his praise of Enoch Powell and Townend's later

admission that the first draft of speech contained references to ‘coloured immigration’, the newspaper provided a sarcastic conclusion: ‘Sound move, Mr Hague: best to ignore it’ (*The Guardian*, 29.03.2001). Hague appeared lukewarm in his condemnation of Townend’s comments and weak as a leader and this was despite the fact that no faction of the party leadership demanded Townend lost the whip.

Townend believed Hague was a weak leader. He said ‘his views on multiculturalism are the same as mine and that’s a fact. But like everything else it’s a result of the media, particularly the BBC and *The Guardian*, in that they become frightened to express the views of the population for fear of being considered politically incorrect’ (Townend Interview, 18.12.2003). Echoing Hague’s criticism of the ‘liberal elite’ who condemned his comments about the Macpherson Report, Townend blamed the media’s agenda on its domination by a ‘metropolitan elite’. According to Townend, Hague’s reaction to his speech,

upset all those people who were coming back to the party – you know, the people who voted UKIP and Referendum Party, the real British/English patriots and he didn’t win back the liberal intellectuals because, you know, if you feel that way, you vote New Labour, don’t you, you’re going to vote New Labour anyway  
(Townend Interview, 18.12.2003).

Townend said ‘what kept me going was when I came home at weekends – I had no opposition in the constituency, I had universal support’. He also suggested the course of action that Hague should have taken,

what he should have said is ‘we are not like the Labour Party and control freakery, we believe in free speech! He’s only a backbencher and our backbench MPs can say what they like as long as they don’t vote against a

three-line whip. No doubt a number of people in his constituency have the same views and he is certainly entitled to express them (Townend Interview, 18.12.2003).

Lord Taylor of Warwick, the Conservative Party's only black parliamentarian, threatened to resign from the party if Townend was not expelled. He also criticised Hague's reaction to the speech,

leadership is about, for me, grasping a situation, understanding a situation immediately, in other words seeing the potential, 'could this blow up in my face, could this get bigger?' He didn't see it. He thought, 'well, it's nothing. He's an old man and he's going to retire anyway. It doesn't matter' (Taylor Interview, 20.01.2004).

Taylor described how the media were desperate for a comment from him,

I rang Central Office and said 'look, I have not said anything and I'm not going to say anything but you must act against this man, do something and then I just won't return the calls'. The response I got was 'no, we have no intention of doing anything about this man, he's an elderly man, it's nothing, nothing'. What do I do then? I couldn't align myself with that. So that's when I really had to speak out. And of course, again, he stuck his heels in (Taylor Interview, 20.01.2004)

Lord Taylor did not resign from the party but only because Hague forced Townend to publicly apologise and withdraw his comments. Hague also demanded that Taylor sign an open letter from the party's eleven ethnic minority candidates and MEPs, confirming their support for the party and its policies. However, Taylor described how a party whip 'brought this thing for me to sign, which I never did. I never signed it' (Taylor interview, 20.01.2004).

So close to an election, this further reinforced the image of Hague as a weak leader and that the Conservative Party was still out of touch with much of the population and its values. This was despite the fact that the leadership were united in Hague's repudiation of Townend's comments. These factors combined suggested that the party lacked a strategy. If the party had been working within a strategic framework, Hague would have acted swiftly to end the row, whether by expelling Townend immediately or supporting the free speech of backbenchers.

### **The 2001 General Election**

There is some dispute within the Conservative Party as to the prominence of race relations, particularly asylum, during the 2001 General Election campaign. On May 18<sup>th</sup> 2001, Hague travelled to Dover to make a major speech on asylum. He spoke under a banner announcing 'A Safe Haven, not a Soft Touch' and reiterated the party's policies on the issue, focusing on the proposal for detention centres. The speech and the location for its delivery, focused media attention firmly on the issue of asylum. This was not welcomed by all Conservatives. Although no longer a Conservative MP, Shaun Woodward believed that the Conservative campaign was dominated by negativity,

In a sense I think the Conservative Party found itself from 1997 to 2001 consumed by its own negativity and bile. It's a logical extension then, the campaign that they did have in 2001. It was nasty and unpleasant and touched on things that were homophobic. Those tinges of anti-immigrant, asylum bashing aspects to it were pretty close to obscene actually (Woodward Interview, 13.01.2004).

Archie Norman said,

I think the Hague manifesto had very strong elements of the state propagating a moral view of society. It was partly an Ann Widdecombe manifesto, it was

in favour of using taxes to promote marriage, it was very pro 'British' and anti EU, it emphasised measures on immigration and asylum. There is nothing wrong with these measures but the emphasis told a story (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003).

Boris Johnson also concedes that asylum was too dominant within the campaign. He said, 'the 2001 election? Well, I think people thought that it [the asylum issue] was just a bit overdone and actually the asylum seekers problem hadn't become as acute' (Johnson Interview, 20.02.2004).

Hague, himself, said that the campaign was based around 'a number of core issues, Europe, tax, crime and asylum' (Hague Interview, 14.01.2004). It is certainly true that asylum was perceived to be a major issue within the campaign. As Hague claims, it was one of four core issues, all of which could be considered to be the priorities of the traditionalists. However, at the other end of the spectrum, a senior anonymous Conservative strategist said 'very little was done on asylum. Hague made a speech in Dover but apart from that it was not much. It was the media and some Conservatives' agenda to tie the party to the issues of asylum and immigration. It was a misrepresentation' (Interview, 20.04.2004). This view was disputed by all other interviewees who discussed asylum policy, irrespective of whether they originated from a traditionalist or moderniser background. The assessment was heavily influenced by the benefit of hindsight and, it would appear, was an attempt to justify strategic decisions made at the time.

### **Race Relations as a Party Political Issue**

The issue of race relations, including immigration and asylum, was pushed to the top of the Conservative Party's agenda in the latter half of Hague's leadership. Were the leadership in agreement over its prominence and whether this was beneficial for the party? Lord

Henley did not mention prominence but he did say that he believed the issue of asylum deserved the attention of the Conservative Party. He said 'I think there was a genuine concern on this issue and it's right that we should have said we want to do something about it' (Henley Interview, 03.12.2003). If the people had concerns over an issue, a party attempting to prove itself a government-in-waiting must tackle it to demonstrate its ability to confront the hard choices of government.

Finkelstein believed that asylum in particular, was an issue that could benefit the Conservative Party. He acknowledged that he had a 'different view to most modernisers about the asylum issue'. Rather than believing that the issue should not be emphasised, for fear of appearing bigoted, Finkelstein said,

I think that controlled immigration is a serious issue, I don't think it's a bigoted issue, I think people are entitled to be angry about it, I think they *are* angry about it, I think it is a weakness of the government and on the crudest possible political level the Conservative Party can make a difference on an issue like that. The Conservative Party has an obvious position and could get itself trusted...Hague interpreted asylum as a Kitchen Table issue. I would argue very strongly that asylum belongs in the list of Kitchen Table issues but I am different from other modernisers. I am sure that the European constitution doesn't belong in that list nor probably does the Euro, especially not with the offer of a referendum but asylum does because people care about it (Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004).

Finkelstein is not suggesting that Hague implemented the KTC strategy but that he would have considered asylum and immigration to be Kitchen Table issues, that is, issues discussed around the mainstream majority's kitchen tables. The Conservative Party had clear and distinct policies and could gather support on that basis. This view was shared by Hague who described the position of the party during 1999 and his reasoning for adopting the issue of asylum. He said,

We had moved on by the middle of the parliament to a period where we were taking specific policy positions which we were not doing earlier in the parliament and so while earlier in the parliament we were necessarily dealing with party organisation and just trying to show, after an election defeat, we were still alive and people could still join us. By 1999 we were trying to adopt some specific positions and so that wasn't so much a shift of position as a bedazzlement of it. The other point to make about it would be that we were trying to unsuccessfully, well, probably unsuccessfully, because we don't know what the result would have been had we had not taken that step – which might have been worse – we were trying to reach out to new voters by adopting specific policies. Students of politics will see these as right wing policies but actually the trick – if we could have pulled it off – was to, was that a huge number of Labour voters agree with the Conservatives' position on Europe, crime, asylum and so we didn't actually see these as policies that were not designed for a broader appeal – that is precisely why they were being adopted. The difficulty is that they weren't seen as the main issues by people in the election but had we succeeded in making those things the main issues then we would have been reaching out and pursuing things that were true to the traditional Conservative platform. So in our minds they are not such contradictory things  
(Hague Interview, 14.01.2004).

The politics of nationhood were therefore crucial to the strategy of the party during the second half of the parliament. Europe, which had dominated the first half, and asylum were chosen specifically to broaden the party's support, whilst at the same time appealing to the core. However, as Hague described, the fatal flaw was that despite being popular, these issues did not determine people's voting behaviour when it came to a General Election. Moreover, it seems the public did not support the Conservatives' asylum policy anymore than that of the other two main parties. In April 2000, ICM asked 'which of the main political parties is making the most sense to you when they talk about their approach to the problem of asylum seekers?' 15% favoured the Conservatives, 16% favoured Labour and 12% favoured the Liberal Democrats. 20% did not favour any party and a significant 38% replied that they did not know. In May 2001, 16% favoured the Conservatives and 20% and 5% supported Labour and the Liberal Democrats respectively. 29% favoured no party

and a further 29% replied that they did not know. Throughout the second half of Hague's leadership, the Conservatives did not increase their support on the issue and despite pushing it to the top of the political agenda, significant proportions of the electorate maintained that they had no opinion on the issue. This does not suggest that it was an appropriate issue for the Conservatives to push to the forefront of its election campaign. However, Hague continued to do so in the hope that dissatisfied Labour voters who supported the Conservatives on the issue and who considered themselves to be part of the mainstream majority, would be persuaded to support his party at the forthcoming General Election.

Other members of the leadership supported the prominence of race relations, asylum and immigration. Norman Fowler and Michael Ancram were both in support and also believed the issue of asylum was particularly salient. Fowler said 'you have to choose the issues that are going around and immigration definitely was one that was going around, political asylum was one that was going around and I think with some justification' (Fowler Interview, 29.03.2004). Ancram described how the party conducted,

focus groups the whole way through the election to whether we were talking about the wrong things and the answer kept coming back – talk more about asylum. So there was a reason behind it, it wasn't just a prejudicial shift away from modernisation to traditional Toryism, it was in response to a lot of investigative work that was being done as to what people were talking about in their homes and in their pubs and in the offices (Ancram Interview, 20.01.2004).

In comparison to Finkelstein, Ancram suggests that although KTC was abandoned by the Conservatives, the party continued to emphasise what it believed to be the issues that people spoke about around their kitchen/pub/office tables. The party was trying to broaden

its support by focusing on issues that engaged people and their private research had concluded that asylum and immigration did just that. However, the prominence of an issue does not necessarily mean that it determines how people vote. Lord Strathclyde stated that the centrality of the politics of nationhood, during the second half of Hague's leadership, was not contrived. After the organised and codified KTC strategy, the Conservative Party resorted to something more organic: 'I don't think that was a deliberate strategy of 'gosh, let's get back nationhood' it was just 'hang on, we are Tories, what do we believe in? We *do* believe in these values so let's talk about them, let's talk about the Euro in these terms, let's talk about asylum seekers' (Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003). The party drifted back to its traditional issues which it knew engaged people but which, unfortunately for the Conservatives, did not determine voting behaviour.

Charles Hendry, was less positive in his assessment of the Conservative Party's approach to race relations and asylum and points to why the policy failed to attract support,

our approach towards asylum, which was couched in language which I think, now, looking back even from two or three years time, now looks to be pretty hostile, talking of a 'foreign land' and things like that, which to an inclusive party generally were pretty much an anathema. It was probably misjudged at the time and like the English parliamentary side of things, hasn't carried the test of time  
(Hendry Interview, 11.12.2003).

However, others were more critical. Peter Lilley claimed that the party's asylum policy,

was presented or came across as one of locking asylum seekers up but to be frank we wanted to send them home. This wasn't a credible policy, it was just thought to be expensive and rather pointless even from those who actually have a rather negative attitude towards asylum seekers  
(Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003).

Andrew Cooper identified those in the Shadow Cabinet who were unhappy with the party's approach towards the asylum issue,

in terms of policy, Portillo in particular found the asylum seekers stuff very difficult and offensive and even went out of his way to put into his conference speech in 2000 [reference to his Spanish background], just to make the point. Ann Widdecombe, I think, in the personality battles was a key figure as well. She was somebody who was absolutely at the antithesis of the Francis Maude/Michael Portillo view of politics (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004).

The majority of the leadership supported the stance taken by Hague over the issue of race relations, including asylum and immigration. These issues had not featured prominently during the first half of Hague's leadership but with a General Election approaching, had rapidly increased in significance. However the increasingly strident tone and language used by Hague and Widdecombe was not supported by the modernisers within the Conservative Party leadership and parliamentary party

### 6.3 The Common Sense Revolution

On October 4<sup>th</sup> 1999, Common Sense Revolution (CSR) was launched. It symbolised the party's attempt to gather its policies into a single document prior to the forthcoming party conference. CSR was seen as vital for the party if it was to maximise its support before the next General Election and would form the basis of the party's manifesto, Time for Common Sense (TCS).

CSR outlined the party's policies on many issues including education, transport, the countryside, crime, health, savings, tax, business and deregulation, the nation state, European integration and the single currency, defence, international development, the

accountability of politicians and legislative devolution. The prominent theme of the document was devolution of power away from government and to the people. The document was framed around five guarantees: the parents' guarantee, the patients' guarantee and the tax, 'can work, must work' and sterling guarantees. The public services, tax, welfare and the European single currency therefore dominated the document and also the presentation of its contents during the 1999 party conference. CSR and Hague's conference speech on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1999, constituted the Conservative Party's initial step in preparing itself to fight the next General Election and also indicated the issues that it believed the election would be fought upon.

Speaking about progress made during the conference, Hague said 'we've launched our Common Sense Revolution. We've set out our five common sense guarantees' (Hague, 1999d). The five guarantees formed the basis of the policy document and the first two, that is, the parents' and patients' guarantees, were focused on the public services. The former revolved around the promise to 'give parents the power to change school management that fails to deliver adequate standards' and the latter promised to 'give every NHS patient a guaranteed waiting time based on their need for treatment' (Conservative Party, 1999, p.11 and p.19, respectively). Following the public service pledges, the tax guarantee promised 'that taxes will fall as a share of the nation's income over the term of the next Parliament under a Conservative Government' and 'The Can Work, Must Work Guarantee' promised the that the Conservative Party would 'ensure that benefit claimants who can work but won't work, will lose their unemployment benefit' (Conservative Party, 1999, p.25 and p.29, respectively).

The next chapter will examine in more detail the approach that Hague took towards the issue of European integration in the second half of his tenure as Leader, however, the fifth and final CSR guarantee was the sterling guarantee. It stated that the Conservative Party ‘will oppose entry into the Single Currency at the next election as part of our manifesto for the next Westminster Parliament. We are the only serious choice for those people who want to be in Europe but keep the pound’ (Conservative Party, 1999, p.34). The guarantee was contained in a section of the CSR policy document entitled ‘Believing in our Country’, which opened thus,

People who believe in our country are worried, and they have cause to be. The British are unique – in our diversity, in our history, in our openness and in our potential. Yet now the independence of our nation is under threat, we risk squandering new opportunities and we are failing to respond adequately to new threats. It is time for a Common Sense Revolution. It is time to get away from the patronising view that patriotism and support for our independence are prejudiced and small minded. Conservatives share the British people’s belief in our nation.  
(Conservative Party, 1999, p.31).

This rhetoric was overtly patriotic: the Conservative Party was the only party able to protect British nationhood and national identity because it was the only party that not only understood those concepts but also shared the British people’s understanding and passion for them. The document described Britain with pride, stating that ‘Britain is the world’s fifth largest economy. We are the fifth largest trading nation in the world. We play a major role on the world stage. No other nation in Europe can claim the same global involvement’ (Conservative Party, 1999, p.31).

The document also spoke out in defence of the concept of the nation state,

A common sense approach means robust support for the nation state and the independence of our country...the world needs nations...just as we believe in local solutions within the UK, making the most of natural communities and affinities, so we believe that nation states tend to make the best decisions (Conservative Party, 1999, p.31).

The section then outlined the party's policy on European integration, free trade, defence and international development and concluded with an explicit appeal to British people on the basis of their Britishness; their national identity. It said,

The Conservative Party believes in our country. We want to give people who are positive and confident about themselves and their national identity the chance to build on their strengths and make the most of Britain and of Britain's contribution to the wider world (Conservative Party, 1999, p.37).

The latter half of the document was dominated by the Conservative Party's articulation of its belief and its pride in Britain. It aspired to reach out to all British people on the basis of their national identity, their pride in their country and the importance of maintaining the independence of their country. In a section entitled 'faith in politics in England', CSR reiterated the party's commitment to its policy of legislative devolution to England established during the first half of Hague's leadership,

We are and will remain the party of the Union, and we are determined to make the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly work properly. It is not sustainable, with devolution in place, that Scottish and Welsh members of the Westminster Parliament should be able to vote on those subjects and make decisions that affect English voters alone. **We must have English votes on English laws...**English votes on English laws will help to restore the confidence of English voters that they are not unfairly treated under devolution, while fully respecting the new autonomy of Scotland and Wales (Conservative Party, 1999, p.42. Original emphasis).

Although deeply patriotic, CSR was dominated by the public services which raised their prominence within the rhetoric of the Conservative Party. Only one of the five guarantees was based on the politics of nationhood and asylum policy was hardly mentioned. The document was, therefore, based around the public services and other related issues. This was in contrast to the increasing prominence of the politics of nationhood, in the form of Europe and race relations, including immigration and asylum, within the day-to-day politics of the party. Analysis of the 1999 launch of CSR and the 2000 conference will reveal how inclusion and the public services dominated the text of CSR and Hague's supporting speeches, however, the perceived interests of the mainstream majority dominated the real Conservative Party agenda in the latter half of the 1997-2001 majority.

### **The 1999 Conference**

In his 1999 conference speech, days after the launch of the policy document, Hague outlined CSR and discussed his motivations for it. He said,

How do we defeat the Great Labour Lie? By fighting a campaign based on common sense, clear convictions and a united Party. We know because we fought such a campaign in the European Elections four months ago and won. The biggest swing to the Opposition in any election since 1918...Did [the Prime Minister] listen for one single second to the message from the voters? Not for one second. He came out and called us extremists – as if wanting to keep control of our own currency is extreme...I've got news for Tony Blair. These people are not extreme. They're not fanatics. They've got more sense in their gut instincts than in all the collective wisdom of this Government and their fellow travellers. Now our task is to speak up with the same common sense and clarity and conviction on all the other great issues facing our country  
(Hague, 1999d).

Hague emphasised the success of the 1999 European elections and attributed that success to a campaign based on 'clear convictions' and the unity of the party. He described the

party's task as approaching all other issues in the same vein and praised the 'gut instincts' of the people. Robust and distinct policies were necessary, which, even if they alienated some parliamentarians and party members, would unite the majority of them.

Hague also answered attacks on the 'forces of Conservatism', made by Tony Blair in his conference speech days earlier. He said 'I am proud of the forces of Conservatism' and repeated his often-made criticisms of a 'liberal elite', which dominated contemporary politics. Appealing once again to the British people's national identity and to the role that the Conservative Party had played protecting that identity he said,

It is the forces of Conservatism which in a dangerous century beset by socialism, communism and national socialism, have left our country at the end of that century free and proud and strong. The Conservative Party and the British people, hand in hand, that's how we'll build our Common Sense Revolution. Hand in hand against the patronising elite who think it is small minded to believe in our country  
(Hague, 1999d).

Hague said that he was aware of the dangers of the boldness and imagination that the CSR demanded and said, 'don't tell me that it's difficult, because I know that; or that it has risks, because that is inevitable; or that it will be controversial because I relish it'. Hague was aware that the latter half of his leadership would involve risk-taking and would be controversial but he and his party would not shy away from the consequences. He concluded his speech with a patriotic and positive invitation: 'come with me, and I will give you back your country' (Hague, 1999d).

## **The 2000 Conference**

The 2000 party conference and its theme of 'inclusion' has been briefly discussed already, particularly the lack of focus on the issue of asylum, which had dominated the political agenda in the months leading up to the conference. Portillo's speech reached out to all British people, irrespective of their background but he also, at least publicly, spoke in favour of the Conservative Party's policy on asylum. It appeared that the Conservatives were orientating themselves in the centre ground, rather than maintaining their previous focus on race relations, asylum and Europe.

Hague's speech to the conference highlighted the party's approach to tax, education, pensions, the NHS, crime, deprivation and the inner cities and Europe. He spoke about his upbringing in South Yorkshire and about the aspirations of the people he grew up with,

these people, the people I grew up with, the mainstream people of this country, are the people who motivate me. And these are the people we will govern for. We will govern for hardworking families. We will govern for people of every community and background. We will govern for the mainstream Labour ignored. We will govern for all the people (Hague, 2000d).

Asylum was pushed to the bottom of the agenda and inclusion was emphasised as the theme of the conference. This was an attempt by the party leadership to promote the party to the wider audience of the British public as inclusive: the party for all. It was also an attempt by Hague to pacify the modernisers within the parliamentary party. Hames suggested that Hague wanted to go back to the agenda of the first few months of his leadership. Hames followed this up, however, with a warning that 'a party cannot adopt inclusion on an occasional basis' (Hames, 2000). The attempt to become the 'inclusive party' was too little, too late in the parliament. The public had made up their minds about

the Conservative Party and one conference would not change it. Far more powerful was the strident rhetoric on Europe and asylum, which, since the summer of 1999, really indicated to the people what the party stood for.

Although inclusion was the major theme of the conference, it was submerged by constant referral to common sense and the ‘mainstream majority’. Hague believed that ‘it is fundamental to our recovery that we have become the champions of the common sense instincts of the people of our country’ and after summarising his policies, Hague said ‘that’s why we are going to lead a Common Sense Revolution’ (Hague, 2000d). Hague’s 2000 conference quote in the previous paragraph emphasised Hague’s focus on the ‘mainstream people of this country’ and can be contrasted with his assessment of the liberal elite. Although, Hague had identified a liberal elite, personified by New Labour, members of the Conservative Party leadership also regarded themselves as belonging to that group. As mentioned above, Hague believed the liberal elite to be obsessed by political correctness and not to live in the real world, unlike the mainstream majority. Those within the Conservative Party, who believed they belonged to this group, were modernisers who regarded themselves as understanding contemporary Britain and contemporary British national identity and therefore, to actually represent the majority. As Archie Norman said,

He [Hague] felt he was appealing over the heads of the intelligentsia, over the heads of the elite, to the real people of Britain, who have these prejudices I, we share. He saw it as ‘reaching out’. One of William’s themes was the metropolitan elite. He used to go on about the metropolitan elite and Tony Blair because the metropolitan elite in his view was un-British, it wasn’t real. These were people who had liberal attitudes which apparently we disliked. But, you know, when you looked around the table of our Strategy group, at least three of us thought ‘well, oh dear, we are the liberal metropolitan elite’. OK, I live in the country but if I’m not elite, what am I? I went to Cambridge and Harvard. Am certainly am liberal in my attitudes and I think most Conservatives are and I think, actually most Conservatives and most people in

this country live in metropolitan areas and most of them would like to be part of the elite, even if they are not. I think William was in search of this Conservative Party that we all cherish but which had vanished, this little bit of 'England' that probably exists in areas of the country where people feel very discontented and unhappy about a long-gone era and feel betrayed by what the government has done to them, or their lot in life. But it's not what Britain is  
(Norman Interview, 09.12.2003).

However, Hague continued to reach out to the mainstream majority, that is, those who were not the liberal elite. The Conservative Party 'would govern for the mainstream that New Labour has ignored' and therefore the social or ethnic background of those people would not matter because as long as they shared the same values as Hague, they were part of the mainstream majority (Hague, 2000d). However briefly asylum was mentioned during the speech, the party's tough stance was reinforced, as was a tough line on crime and punishment, reducing taxes, saving the pound and combating overzealous political correctness. If an individual shared the Conservative Party's agenda, they were a member of the mainstream majority and the Conservative Party would speak for them, irrespective of their background. It implicitly set the majority against the 'liberal elite' and this was central to CSR. Hague's agenda was both inclusive because all Britons, whatever their origin, were welcome to support it and join the Conservative Party, and narrow because each supporter would have to accept the traditional values and understanding of contemporary Britain espoused by Hague. If a person did not accept Hague's approach to race relations including asylum and immigration, Europe and other issues including the role of the family, tax and law and order, they were not part of the mainstream majority.

Hague acknowledged that 'there are some who say there is a contradiction between traditional Conservative issues and winning new Tory audiences; between tolerance and

mutual respect for all people, and championing the mainstream values of the country’.

However,

there is no contradiction. I say being tough on crime, believing in lower taxes and the robust defence of our nation’s independence are not in contradiction with wanting better schools and hospitals and thriving inner cities; they are an essential part of all those things. I say defeating political correctness and refusing simply to accept every demand from every pressure group is not in contradiction with respecting the differences between individuals; on the contrary, the championing of mainstream values is the championing of tolerance, mutual respect and the rich diversity of our country’  
(Hague, 2000d).

As discussed above, Hague upheld this view when he subsequently concluded that,

we were trying to reach out to new voters by adopting specific policies. Students of politics will see these as right wing policies but actually the trick – if we could have pulled it off – was to, was that a huge number of Labour voters agree with the Conservatives’ position on Europe, crime, asylum and so we didn’t actually see these as policies that were not designed for a broader appeal – that is precisely why they were being adopted  
(Hague Interview, 14.01.2004).

In comparison to KTC, CSR did not receive universal support from within the parliamentary Conservative Party and different people have different opinions on why it failed to maximise Conservative Party electoral support. David Heathcoat-Amory said,

As far as themes throughout William Hague’s leadership, the Common Sense Revolution, he tried to appeal to what ordinary, non-political people think and want and that was perceived as rather the opposite. Several times we used the slogan ‘the Common Sense Revolution’ to try and cut through Westminster and Whitehall and reach out to people, not appeal to their base prejudices and to my knowledge, Hague never did  
(Heathcoat-Amory Interview, 02.12.2003).

The distinction that Hague was trying to make was that between the mainstream majority of the people, as symbolised by the Conservatives and the 'liberal elite', as symbolised by Labour. This belief was shared by George Osborne who said,

He thought he could run against London in the way that an American politician can run against Washington and he could speak for the ordinary people out there in the rest of the country and that is what, when he talked about the Common Sense Revolution, that was what he was trying to achieve and he was definitely trying to tap into the feeling that London doesn't understand, or that metropolitan government doesn't understand people's lives out there  
(Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003).

However, as Osborne continued,

However, I think that is quite a difficult thing to do in British politics as we have discovered, for a number of reasons, first, there is a national media which there isn't in the United States in the same way and that is all run from London by metropolitan people and you don't really have any other way of getting to the voters. You can deliver leaflets and put up the odd poster and you can film the odd party political broadcast but basically almost all your political message in the United Kingdom is carried through the media, through national newspapers and television news. So you can't do what George Bush can do in the United States which is spend a hundred million dollars on television advertising that allows you to communicate directly with people and people were, certainly the metropolitan elite were, were sneery of William, they thought he was this sort of nerdy boy from South Yorkshire and they didn't see him as one of them and I think that was always a problem for him  
(Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003).

Malcolm Gooderham believed that reaching out to the mainstream failed because the Conservative leadership had failed to understand who the majority of the British people were,

There's probably a parallel throughout the nineties and more pronounced when Blair took over, they the Conservative Party was out of touch with what

middle Britain wanted and was a kind of caricature of what middle Britain wanted and kept appealing to a caricature of what it was that defined middle Britain. That's where the disconnection came and that's what Labour and Tony Blair exploited. Blair recognised that actually, middle Britain was as interested in having a good NHS, good local schools as it was in having competitive personal tax and all the rest of it (Gooderham Interview, 26.02.2004).

Ivan Massow agreed that Hague was not, in fact, in touch with the majority of British people. He said 'people around him [Hague] were concentrating on things like the words 'common sense', like Danny Finklestein, people who were really messing it up for him, from the centre around him'. Massow described how Hague,

hadn't fundamentally understood that this new social inclusion malarkey, or 'stuff' as he'd probably put it as a Yorkshireman, has become part of our tradition, so they failed to keep up with our tradition, they became a caricature of Conservatism and what they thought Britain was (Massow Interview, 03.02.2004).

He also provided an example of Hague's commitment to what he considered to be the 'common sense' of the British people,

When I was having dinner with him in the Grosvenor House for their big bash...he got up to make his speech and someone whispered in his ear that they had defeated the abolition of 'section 28' in the Lords by rolling out every single peer they had, people coming in wheelchairs and being lowered into the hall to vote, who'd never voted at all...he just said 'today we have scored a victory for common sense' and that was when I walked out...after making such a big stand against 'section 28', I realised that there was no way back, I'd lost the battle and Danny Finkelstein had won (Massow interview, 03.02.2004).

Massow's example emphasised the division between the traditionalist and the modernising wings of the same political party. Each believed they stood for the majority of the British people. Andrew Cooper also referred to the division.

Ann Widdecombe, I think, in the personality battles was a key figure as well. She was somebody who was absolutely at the antithesis of the Francis Maude/Michael Portillo view of politics... William Hague actually said, when they adopted the title 'Common Sense Revolution', William Hague said: 'the Common Sense Revolution, what personified? Ann Widdecombe!' Which I think the modernisers regarded as a pretty scary thought (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2003).

During the 1997-2001 parliament the traditionalists within the Conservative Party leadership, such as Hague and Widdecombe, were not only in agreement with the party reaching out to the 'mainstream majority' but also believed that they reflected that majority. In comparison, modernisers such as Portillo and Norman, regarded themselves as belonging to the liberal elite and also believed that the traditionalists had misunderstood the values and desires of the majority of the British people. They believed that Hague's, or the traditionalists' understanding of the mainstream majority was outdated and in fact, the majority of British people at the end of the twentieth century shared the same values and desires as the modernisers.

CSR dominated Hague's leadership after the 1999 party conference. Hague made speeches entitled 'Common Sense for...' on a multitude of policy areas including rural Britain, health, E-Commerce, crime, pensioners, education and the aforementioned asylum, many of which were given during the 2001 General Election campaign. The party's 'battle bus' during the 2001 election was even named the 'Common Sense Express'. The CSR policy document and Hague's conference speeches were ostensibly dominated by the public services, Europe, tax, inclusion and devolution from the government to the people. The content was also very patriotic, appealing to the British people on the basis of their national identity and pledging to protect British nationhood and national identity because the

Conservative Party understood what the British people wanted. However, the politics of nationhood, in particular policies on asylum and Europe, dominated the party's day-to-day conduct, for example, Hague's response to the Macpherson Report and the party's 'save the pound' truck.

Hague's 1999 conference speech stated that the Conservative Party needed to approach all issues just as it had approached the 1999 European election campaign and that was with clear convictions and a united party. Hague praised the 'gut instincts' of the people in contrast to the values of the liberal elite and described how he relished the need to take risks in order for the policies in CSR to fulfil their potential in maximising the party's support before the General Election. Eventually, Hague's message of 'inclusion' was subsumed by his belief in 'common sense' and the 'mainstream majority'. The Conservative Party would speak for any British person who was a member of the mainstream majority and by default, not a member of the so-called liberal elite. CSR was inclusive, yet narrow.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined Hague's approach to the politics of nationhood by analysing the party's approach to race relations including asylum and immigration. The Conservative Party encouraged asylum to become a major issue in the run up to the 2001 General Election. The majority of the leadership supported the party's policy, especially because the party had a clear and distinct message on an issue which it felt could engage the public. however, the modernisers did not support the prominence given to the issue. Hague tried to appear firm yet fair but the language and tone used by himself and Widdecombe offended people within his own party and beyond.

The tone and language used was designed to consolidate the party's core support and shock disaffected Labour voters, who supported the Conservatives on the issue of race relations, to vote Tory. However the modernisers believed that it would demonstrate that the party was still out of touch with modern Britain and the priorities of the modern British electorate.

Despite the hardening of tone, Hague always attempted to 'reach out' to ethnic minorities. This was demonstrated within CSR, the main theme of which was 'inclusion'. However, this approach was too little too late and it was submerged by the party's focus on the 'mainstream majority'. As the comments from traditionalist and moderniser MPs show, exactly what was 'common sense' was disputed, as was exactly what the 'mainstream majority' stood for. As CSR and its related speeches showed, CSR was narrow, yet inclusive: it was inclusive to all Britons as long as they shared traditionalist values and a traditionalist approach to, for example, Europe and the issue of asylum. The mainstream majority was in direct contrast to the 'liberal elite'. The next chapter will continue to examine Hague's approach to the politics of nationhood in the form of the party's European policy, in particular its response to the prospect of Britain's membership of a single currency. It will also investigate the development of strategy during the second half of Hague's leadership.

## Chapter Seven

### Nationhood and Strategy, June 1999 European Elections – 2001 General Election, Part II

‘William likened the Euro policy to a Ming vase on a pedestal – don’t touch it or it will topple over and shatter’  
(Norman Interview, 09.12.2003).

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will continue to examine the second half of the 1997-2001 parliament by analysing the leadership’s approach to the issue of European integration, in particular the single currency and also the party’s development and implementation of strategy. It will examine the leadership’s goals, its approach to the politics of nationhood and whether the leadership were united both in that approach and in strategic decision-making. Hague continued to appeal to the Britishness of the electorate and unite the people behind a common enemy, the EU. This was in an attempt to broaden the party’s support by attracting those who may have voted for the Labour Party in 1997 but did not want to join a European single currency. However, the prominence of the European policy and also the focus on constitutional and political, rather than economic reasons for rejecting EMU, was resented by some members of the Conservative leadership and parliamentary party. The issue was neutralised electorally after Blair’s promise of a referendum on joining the Euro and it failed to determine the votes of individuals at the 2001 General Election. The second half of Hague’s leadership was not dominated by a coherent strategy such as KTC but was instead focused on raising the prominence of issues such as asylum and the single currency.

which Hague believed would appeal both to the Conservative Party's traditional core support base and disaffected Labour voters. This approach was not supported by the modernisers within the party leadership and although some traditionalists were supportive, others did not agree with the prominence given to issues such as asylum and Europe.

## 7.2 European Policy

### **A Sterling Guarantee**

Europe was of great significance during the first half of Hague's leadership as the party settled on a policy which the majority of its members could unite behind. That prominence continued and increased right through to the 2001 General Election campaign, as the party attempted to push the issue further up the political agenda. The previous chapter examined the October 1999 policy document, CSR, which dominated the latter half of the parliament and briefly mentioned the 'sterling guarantee', which was one of five made to the electorate. The section on Europe began with a declaration that,

Our belief in Britain and the value of the nation state is a primary reason why we are determined to be in Europe, but not run by Europe. The British people have a powerful instinct that they do not want to see anymore of their rights and powers transferred to Brussels. We share that common sense instinct (Conservative Party, 1999, p.32).

Hague used the title of the 1999 European election manifesto, 'in Europe, not run by Europe' to appeal to the Britishness and the national identity of the electorate. He repeated his belief, often articulated during the first phase of his leadership, that there was a limit to European political integration and that it was approaching that very limit. He described how the solution to the problems of Europe lay in 'flexibility', for example, apart from accepting the need for free-trade, national governments should have more freedom in

choosing which aspects of EU policy they adopted. Similarly, there should be 'new Treaty provision which would allow countries not to participate in new legislative actions at a European level which they wished to handle at a national level'. However, the crux of the section was the sterling guarantee:

We will oppose entry into the Single Currency at the next election as part of our manifesto for the next Westminster Parliament. We are the only serious choice for those people who want to be in Europe but keep the pound (Conservative Party, 1999, p.33).

The guarantee contained the same policy on the single currency that Hague had run upon as a leadership candidate and which was endorsed by the party membership in the internal ballot. However, in the earlier years of his leadership, the fact that the policy concerned only that and the next parliament was emphasised. The policy outlined in CSR stated that entry would be opposed at the next General Election, which amounted to the same as the initial policy, but the timeframe no longer featured. The possibility of a re-evaluation after the next parliament was not discussed. It was simply stated that the Conservatives' policy would suit those who wanted Britain to remain a member of Europe but without adopting the single currency. CSR also contained a list of the party's objectives which simply stated 'keep the pound', and also the declaration that 'alone among British mainstream parties, the Conservatives will be fighting the next election to **keep the pound**. That is our **Sterling Guarantee**' (Conservative Party, 1999, pp.32-3). The intention to keep the pound was, quite literally emphasised, the limited timeframe of the policy was not.

Time for Common Sense (TCS), the party's 2001 manifesto, repeated the policies outlined in CSR. Fearing that the EU would become 'a fully integrated superstate with nation states and the national veto disappearing', the party reiterated its desire for flexibility

(Conservative Party, 2001, p.29). The Conservatives' promised to 'lead a debate in Europe about its future, promoting our own clear and positive vision'. The tone had changed from that of the first half of Hague's leadership. The manifesto did not bother with the usual praise of positive implications of British membership of the EU but simply made demands, such as 'Treaty 'flexibility' provision' and offered solutions to ameliorate the problems caused by broadening and deepening integration. It was only positive about the prospect of Europe changing in the future, after a Conservative inspired debate.

TCS also stated that 'the next Conservative Government will keep the pound'. That was not to be equated with rejecting the Euro forever because the promise was based upon the *next* Conservative government. However, the statement was brief and sounded final. It made no mention of a re-evaluation of the policy at the end of the next parliament. The timeframe was not emphasised. Both CSR and TCS show that the Conservative Party maintained the same policy on the single currency but it was presented differently. The tone and emphasis had changed to make the policy appear much more opposed to the Euro but at no point did Hague rule out joining the single currency forever or advocate Britain withdrawing from the EU. The success of the June 1999 European election campaign had given Hague an incentive to emphasise but not actually increase in intensity, the scepticism he believed was shared with the electorate. When asked if Hague became increasingly Euro-sceptic throughout the parliament, Norman Fowler replied,

No, not really, I think that he was always Euro-sceptic and I think that he actually believed in the formula that he set out. I remember having a long talk with him about it but I don't think, at that stage at any rate, he believed in shutting the door completely. I don't know whether he does now or not, I haven't spoken to him about it, perhaps he does. But at that stage he didn't think it was necessary to close the door absolutely. When it came down to it, I think quite a lot of the centre of the Tory party agreed with him. He'd got the

right of the Tory party at any event, well, as much as you can ever get the right, they're with you for about two minutes! But the centre of the Tory party, I think, they shared the scepticism but they didn't want the door banged to in quite that way. But I don't think he got more sceptical as the parliament went on  
(Fowler Interview, 29.03.2004).

Fowler did not believe his Leader became increasingly sceptic and Hague himself, maintained that the policy remained constant,

many things remained the same throughout the whole period [of his leadership], for instance, our European policy...became ever more entrenched through party ballots and the success of the European elections. By the end of 1997 we had evolved the policy of opposing the Euro for the next parliament and that didn't change  
(Hague Interview, 14.01.2004).

Danny Finkelstein concurred with Hague's belief that deciding upon the policy in the early months of his leadership allowed it to become entrenched, which forced those who wanted to rule out Britain's membership of the Euro forever to accept it. The policy,

got progressively clearer as he went on and it was clear that he was against entry at the time of the 2001 election. So it was a policy that got better. The point we kept trying to make to those who were against entry forever is that you are trying to put together a coalition of people who want to say no. Saying no for that parliament was a policy that produced a unity of the 'no's', it united Brian Mawhinney, John Major, Bill Cash  
(Finkelstein interview, 19.04.2004).

So, Finkelstein acknowledged that the policy essentially remained the same throughout the parliament but also that emphasis evolved, which ultimately made it clear that although the party was still officially waiting to see if membership of the Euro would one day be beneficial to Britain, Hague was essentially against the idea. He was unable to rule out

joining the single currency because that policy would destroy the coalition of Euro-sceptics that had been united by the party's policy and endorsed by the ballot result.

Hague's tone and emphasis changed throughout the parliament as the party's European policy was presented as being more Euro-sceptic. As Strathclyde highlighted above, perceived electoral success at the 1999 European elections led the party leadership to believe that approaching the 2001 General Election in the same manner, would enable the party to maximise its electoral support. Since becoming Leader in June 1997, Hague had constantly attempted to create positive headlines for the party in a political environment which was dominated by the Labour government and its extended honeymoon period. Press reaction to his approach to the issue of Europe was mixed but there was positive reaction. In a leader entitled 'Mr Hague's Achievement', *The Daily Telegraph*, referred to Hague's decision to hold an internal ballot as being 'widely criticised as an unnecessary dogmatic gesture, which would open old wounds. In practice, the clarity it promoted has helped those wounds to heal. The Tories are now fiercely united behind Mr Hague's campaign to keep the pound'. The article continued, describing 'the astonishing distance which the Tories have already travelled under Mr Hague's leadership and – most importantly – his evident awareness of how far they still have to go. The Tories will win again. The question is no longer "whether?", but "when?"' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 08.10.2000). In the second half of his leadership, with a General Election approaching, the party used the issue as much as it could in its desperation to gain publicity, challenge Labour and maximise its electoral support.

## **Support for European Policy**

Despite a change in emphasis, the policy remained unchanged since the first half of Hague's leadership. Low-level expulsions and defections from the party also continued throughout the second half of the parliament. In August 1999, former Conservative MPs Sir Julian Critchley and Tim Rathbone were expelled from the party for supporting 'Pro-Europe Conservative Party' candidates in the June European elections. In November 2000, Bill Newton Dunn, Conservative MEP and former Chair of the Conservative Group in the European Parliament, defected to the Liberal Democrats in protest at what he regarded was Hague's hostility towards Europe (Crowson, 2001, p.200). Similarly, a number of pro-Europe, senior Conservatives continued their protest at the party's policy on EMU. In July 1999, Kenneth Clarke wrote a letter to *The Times* stating that he was in broad agreement with the Labour Party on all the significant EU issues (Crowson, 2001, p.201). Clarke and Michael Heseltine also publicly demonstrated their dissatisfaction by appearing with Blair at the launch of 'Britain in Europe' in October 2000. The group had been established by all parties to promote closer ties with the EU (Walters, 2001, p.52). The latter did provoke media attention but events of that nature failed to damage the party as they might have done. As chapter five discussed, this was because the Conservative Party was not, at the time, taken as seriously as its leadership would have liked, not only were its policies poorly scrutinised but defections and public criticisms were not afforded as much attention as should have been possible for the Opposition to achieve. Although there was discontent, the vast majority of the parliamentary party remained supportive of Hague's policy. The party did not implode over the issue, which had seemed possible after the 1997 General Election.

The issue of Europe had been prominent during the first half of Hague's leadership because a policy needed to be decided upon which could unite the party and be endorsed by the membership. This prominence increased as the leadership made it a central campaigning issue during the General Election. The sterling guarantee was one of five mentioned in CSR, which indicated that the party considered it to be of significant importance, particularly in the run-up to the forthcoming General Election. Europe also featured in the so-called 'foreign land speech' which was given to the party's Spring Forum on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and which was discussed in the previous chapter. The speech was considered to be Hague's last opportunity to address his party before the imminent election and although it was received by the press as being focused on the implications of an ineffective asylum system, the text was centred around the political and constitutional effects of Britain's membership of the single currency. When Hague invited his audience 'on a journey to a foreign land' he immediately prophesised 'the Royal Mint melting down pound coins as the euro notes start to circulate. Our currency gone forever. The Chancellor returning from Brussels carrying instructions to raise taxes still further. Control over our economy given away'. He went on to warn that 'within two years of winning an election, Tony Blair would force this country into the Euro...and I say to everyone who believes in our country: make no mistake about it, this election is your last chance to keep the Pound' (Hague, 2001a). Hague was appealing to the patriotic instincts of the British people, to rally behind the Conservatives in the defence of the pound, which was promoted as the very essence of British national identity. Appeals to nationhood and national identity were favoured, rather than economic arguments against entry to the single currency.

In response to Clarke and Heseltine's appearance at the 'Britain in Europe' press conference, Hague and his personal advisors developed the idea of a 'save the pound' truck

which would tour the country enabling Hague to promote his policy on the single currency. Once again, the focus was on *saving the pound*, not waiting to see whether the membership of the Euro would be beneficial to Britain. The truck made its first appearance on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2001, in St Albans and continued through the election campaign (Walters. 2001, pp.52-5). Lord Strathclyde discussed the motivation behind the ‘save the pound’ campaign. He said, ‘well, again, a background, 1999, excellent European elections, very much ‘in Europe, not run by Europe’ which appealed to a fairly patriotic streak, so, if it worked once, let’s try it again, here is ‘save the pound’ ’ (Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003). After its success at the 1999 European elections, the party believed keeping the issue at the top of the agenda would be electorally beneficial. The reasoning was, that if it had worked well in 1999, it could do so again in 2001.

Walters described ‘Europe’ as Hague’s number one campaign issue, stating that the Leader wanted it to be at the top of the political agenda because it was widely perceived that the electorate shared the Conservatives’ scepticism about integration and the Euro (Walters, 2001, p.54). However, Hague disagreed with that conclusion and said that during the election campaign ‘Europe was one of a number of core issues, Europe, tax, crime and asylum but I never said it was the number one. It did have great significance’ (Hague Interview, 14.01.2004). This view was reiterated by Lord Strathclyde,

Well, obviously, by the time we had got to 2001, we had developed two very important election themes, one was ‘save the pound’ which was clearly a British issue of nationhood, a symbol of sovereignty, as well as making very good economic sense and secondly, there was a huge row about asylum (Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003).

Strathclyde clearly regarded appealing to the Britishness of the electorate as a central part of the Conservative campaign, something which he approved of as the basis of the appeal and which certainly fitted in with his traditionalist view of British nationhood and national identity. John Redwood also approved of the issue's prominence. Just before the 2001 General Election he described how Europe would be a significant campaigning issue.

It's not just about how much income tax you pay or what's going to happen to your hospital service, although those are important issues; it's going to be about whether you wish to remain living in a largely free, largely independent democracy in Great Britain, or whether you wish to become a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Brussels superstate  
(Quoted by Isaby, 2001, p.22).

Redwood believed that the issue of Europe subsumed all others in importance because of the potential implications of continued European integration. The domination of the politics of nationhood over the public services throughout the Conservatives' campaign will be examined in more detail below.

Lord Henley and George Osborne both supported the prominence of Europe but were not happy with the methods used to push it to the top of the agenda. Referring to corruption within the EU and the treatment Britain received from other member states, Lord Henley said,

I think, just in terms of emotional national identity, again this feeling that there was a weakening of our national identity and I suppose it's for reasons like that that we very much wanted to fight the 2001 election on a 'keep the pound' strategy...in terms of keeping the pound, we tried to make use of national identity, I think it was irrelevant in that election...the pound was just being used in the place of the Union Jack. You could say the whole 'keep the pound' thing is a modern version of waving Union Jacks  
(Henley Interview, 03.12.2003).

The traditionalists within the party leadership believed Britain's national identity was being destroyed by European integration hence its focus on saving the pound. The pound became a symbol of British identity. The electorate may have supported the Conservatives' policy but that issue and the way it was promoted would not persuade people to vote Conservative.<sup>25</sup> Referring to the arguments Hague made against British membership of a single currency in his aforementioned speech to INSEAD, George Osborne said,

That's quite a sophisticated and complicated message to get across and if you end up with battle buses and campaign literature with Union Jacks all over it, some of the subtlety of the message is lost and at times I suppose we did look at little bit 'Little Englander' but we were consciously trying to avoid that (Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003)

Both Osborne and Lord Henley supported the party's policy but did not believe that a focus on the political and constitutional implications of British membership was constructive. Clear and concise economic arguments should have been provided, the implications of which would have made more of an impact on voting behaviour than patriotic rhetoric. During the second half of the 1997-2001 parliament, economic arguments did not feature in Hague's speeches or in the CSR or TCS documents. As chapter five demonstrated, Hague emphasised the economic implications of EMU in many of his speeches including those to INSEAD and the CBI but in the significant 'foreign land' and CSR-related speeches, these were conspicuous by their absence. During the latter half of his leadership, Hague chose to focus on the constitutional and political implications of British membership of the single currency.

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<sup>25</sup> The inability of the issue of Europe to influence voting behaviour will be discussed below.

Archie Norman described how the election campaign was dominated by 'saving the pound' which he considered to be strange, considering Hague's early attempts to neutralise the issue within the Conservative Party. He also said that cementing the policy with an internal party ballot prevented Hague from revising it within the parliament (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003). This meant that the change in tone and emphasis towards the party's European policy in the latter half of Hague's leadership were the result of Hague being unable to fundamentally change the policy because it had been endorsed by the membership. Alterations to tone and emphasis would have been all that was available to him.

Norman agreed that 'saving the pound' dominated the election campaign, however, a senior anonymous Conservative strategist stated that the membership controlled the agenda of the party. He said that the first week of the campaign was dominated by Europe because 'the membership wanted to talk about Europe. Different parts of the county wanted or not wanted to talk about Europe...we focussed on tax in the first ten days but at an event in Watford they turned up wearing 'save the pound' badges and 'save the pound' became the image' (Interview, 20.04.2004). This strategist did not appear to consider the 'save the pound' tour or the emotive speeches on the subject as any justification for the members deciding to campaign on the subject. If the party had not wanted such input from the membership, it should not have made saving the pound so prominent in the lead-up to the election campaign. This view was not shared by other interviewees.

Rick Nye supported the party's European policy but did not agree with its prominence for a multitude of reasons, the most significant of which was that the Labour government had already promised a referendum on Britain's membership of the single currency.

The problem with the keep the pound campaign was not the policy it was the prominence. It was fine to make it front and centre of a European campaign but to make it the centre piece of a General Election campaign was madness. People thought they were going to get a referendum anyway. A lot of people agreed with William Hague about wanting to keep the currency, they just didn't agree that the General Election of 2001 was 'your last chance to save the pound' and it reinforced the sense that the Conservative Party was just completely out of touch with the world (Nye Interview, 17.02.2004).

The parliamentary party continued to largely support Hague's European policy and Hague and other members of the party leadership both acknowledged and agreed with its increasing prominence. These supporters, such as Lord Strathclyde and Lord Henley, were mainly traditionalists, the centrality of retaining national sovereignty mirroring the centrality of sovereignty in their own conceptualisation of British nationhood and national identity. In contrast, modernisers, such as Archie Norman and Rick Nye opposed the prominence of the issue. National sovereignty did not feature prominently in their conceptualisation of British national identity and the appeals to British national identity symbolised by defence of the pound did not sit comfortably with their own understanding of contemporary Britain and British society. However, dissatisfaction grew across the traditionalist/moderniser divide over the methods used to increase the saliency of the issue, particularly the focus on the constitutional and political, rather than economic, implications of Britain's membership of the Euro and Hague's pronouncement that the election was the electorate's last opportunity to reject the Euro. Even strident Euro-sceptics voiced their dissatisfaction with the latter issue,

Dominic Cummings, the campaign director of Business for Sterling said the Conservative leader was wrong to describe today's poll as the last chance to

save the pound. He said 'this election is not a referendum on the Euro. Tony Blair says so, we say so, and the public know it's true'  
(Quoted by Sylvester, 2001b).

As Rick Nye mentioned above, the 2001 election was quite simply not the final chance for the electorate to reject the Euro and 'save the pound' because on February 7th 2001. Tony Blair had promised to hold a referendum on the issue. As Lord Strathclyde described, the people may have supported the Conservative Party on the issue but the offer of a referendum negated it,

What I think we misunderstood at the time, or discounted because we thought our line was powerful enough, is that we'd been outmanoeuvred by Blair by him saying there'll be a referendum on this. So he was basically saying to all his potential voters 'of course I understand your concerns about the Euro, I understand it so much that...this is nothing to do with me or Mr. Hague, *you* will decide!' So we were campaigning on something that mattered enormously to the people but not as a party political issue because it had been neutralised. I wholly understand why we ran it, it seemed like a good idea at the time, it was, the wonderful visuals, the truck, we had a good slogan, good stickers, the thing worked. A lot of the press liked it and people instinctively liked it  
(Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003).

This view was supported by Charles Hendry and Archie Norman. The former stated that,

I think traditional nationhood, anti-single currency were legitimate areas to stand on and all of our polling showed that 70% of people shared our views on the single currency. What we hadn't realised was the extent to which they didn't see that as being the reason for the election. They saw the election as being about who governs Britain and what the issues are going to be about Britain, but they didn't see the single currency as being one because they were told they'd have a referendum on it  
(Hendry Interview, 11.12.2003).

The latter was surprised at the lack of effect the party's campaign on the Euro had. He said,

It was amazing how little effect it all had. I think the electorate said 'we know you're sceptical about Europe and we rather agree with you about it but we'll get a referendum on that so let's talk about the things that matter to us' (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003).

Peter Lilley did not support the prominence given to Europe and resented his Leader trying to make the General Election a referendum on the Euro. He said that the issue of the Euro 'had largely been neutralised by the promise of a referendum so attempts to pretend the election itself was a vote to save the pound was not credible...the electorate were intelligent enough to see they'd get another bite of that cherry' (Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003). However, Andrew Cooper summed up much of the party's dissatisfaction with how the party's European policy was promoted. Once again, it was not the policy that was disputed but its prominence,

The really bizarre epitaph of the whole campaign was when everyone went scattering around the constituencies delivering these leaflets saying '10 hours to save the pound!' in campaigns where almost nobody on the doorstep had been talking about it as an issue...you may have well worn hats saying 'we're completely out of touch. We just wanted to talk about what mattered to us and it didn't matter to the voters because we'd never succeeded in making it an immediate threat or explaining how it might jeopardise people's living standards or whatever and anyway, we didn't respond to the fact that Labour had effectively neutralised it by saying 'well, we'll have a referendum on it' (Cooper, 17.02.2004).

The party's lack of economic argument against Britain's membership of a single currency had ceased to make real the implications of Britain joining and, along with a promised referendum, had effectively relegated the issue from the wider election agenda. This did not prevent the Conservative Party from featuring the issue significantly within their own campaign, with Hague also attempting to rebut the Labour government's promise of a referendum. In his 'foreign land' speech on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2001, he said,

Within two years of winning an election, Tony Blair would force this country into the Euro. It's true that he's had to promise us a referendum. But who will set the terms of that referendum? Tony Blair. Who will decide when to hold it? Tony Blair. Who will draft the question? Tony Blair...They've even written in a special exemption so that the 'Yes' campaign can receive money from elsewhere in the EU. They'll spend every pound they can lay their hands on, until there's no pound left at all. And I say to everyone who believes in our country: make no mistake about it, this election is your last chance to keep the pound  
(Hague, 2001a).

However, this rhetoric had done little to persuade his own parliamentary party that Europe and the single currency was a viable electoral issue and the result of the 2001 General Election suggests that the focus on Europe did little to persuade the electorate to vote Conservative. Peter Lilley described how the party knew the public shared its Euro-scepticism but that it had to raise the salience of the issue if it was to maximise its support before the next General Election,

There was certainly a clear belief that one area where we were strong with the electorate, about which, by and large, the shadow cabinet felt strongly about, was defence of the pound as a necessary component of retaining national sovereignty. All the opinion polling showed that that was one area where we were accepted by the public as having a better policy than Labour and it was a question of trying to raise its salience  
(Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003).

Lilley believed the Shadow Cabinet were largely united in support for promoting the issue of saving the pound because they regarded the policy as being vital in maintaining national sovereignty, a concept central to the traditionalists' understanding of British national identity. However, the leadership was aware that Europe was not a priority for most voters, so as the election approached, it tried to push the issue further up the political agenda to maximise the influence of the issue at the ballot box. Michael Ancram suggested that this attempt to raise its salience ultimately failed. He said, 'Europe always scored high in terms

of its impact on people's political views but it never scored very high on salience. People had strong feelings about Europe but it was never going to make them vote' (Ancram Interview, 20.01.2004).

Daniel Hannan was also aware that the public agreed with the Conservative Party's European policy but he believed that this would not maximise the party's support because people were just not willing to vote Conservative,

I must have knocked on 2000 doors in the six months before polling day, maybe even more and I didn't have a single person saying to me 'well, you know, I would vote Conservative but I think taxes are *way* too low and could do with coming up a bit' or 'you know, I was kind of tempted to vote Tory but I don't think there's enough asylum seekers in this country, we should try and bring more in' or 'I would vote Conservative but I'm strongly in favour of the Euro'. In other words, there was not a rejection of the manifesto on which he was standing, it was just that as soon as they saw the blue rosette, it was 'bye bye, after what you did to us when you were in power, forget it!' (Hannan Interview, 12.05.2004).

However, Rick Nye attributed the inability of the issue of Europe to maximise Conservative support to its neutralisation after Blair's promise of a referendum on the single currency. He said, 'a lot of people agreed with William Hague, they just didn't agree that the General Election of 2001 was 'your last chance to save the pound' ' (Nye Interview, 17.02.2004). Although there is debate among the party surrounding the reasons for the failure of the issue to maximise the Conservative vote, it is certainly clear that Hague's rhetoric cemented already existing support. Support may not have been broadened but it was deepened. Edward Garnier said,

The one thing that Oppositions want is to gain media attention but I think it is fair to say that we attracted the wrong sort of headlines and gave ourselves false encouragement from what we thought was massively popular support for

keeping the pound. In fact all we were doing was attracting, what I would call 'localised' support, people who were already going to vote for us anyway. we weren't reaching out to the voters we had lost in 1997 or attracting new voters, especially those under the age of 45 (Garnier Interview, 04.12.2003).

An ICM poll conducted for *The Guardian* throughout the election campaign also demonstrated that the issue was not electorally beneficial for the party.<sup>26</sup> It is certainly true that the electorate were sceptical about Britain joining the single currency. When asked 'If there were to be a referendum, would you vote to join the Single European Currency or would you vote not to join?', 61% responded that they would vote not to join, whilst 25% said they would want to join and 15% said they didn't know. The issue clearly made an impact on the electorate if 85% were able to express an opinion and it would suggest that the Conservative Party would benefit from 61% of respondents sharing their scepticism. However, when asked 'from what you have seen or heard, which party would you say has the best policy on the Euro?' the Conservative Party managed only a 1% lead over the Labour Party, achieving 27% of the vote, compared to Labour's 26%. A significant 37% said they did not know. Evidently, the proportion of the electorate that was sceptical, did not transform into a similar proportion of the electorate who believed the Conservative Party was best able to tackle the issue and over one third of the electorate were unable to express an opinion either way.

The party's efforts to maximise its electoral support were further undermined by the fact that when asked which issues, out of a list of eleven, were most important to them when deciding how to vote, only 40% of respondents mentioned Britain's membership of the Euro. The issue was relegated to the bottom of the list of eleven which was headed by the

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<sup>26</sup> The poll discussed in this section took place on May 28<sup>th</sup> 2001.

health service at 89% and law and order/crime at 82%. The Conservative Party's most significant campaign issue was considered to be the least important by the electorate.

### 7.3 A Lack of Strategy

During the second half of the 1997-2001 parliament, the Conservative Party leadership faced criticism from within its ranks and outside, for failing to follow a strategy to maximise the party's support before the forthcoming General Election. KTC had been abandoned but critics did not believe that it had been replaced with an identifiable strategy. In the winter of 2000, Francis Maude requested: 'William, please can we have a strategy? I don't even mind if it's the wrong one, because at least we would know what we were supposed to be doing. And that is better than no strategy at all' (Quoted by Walters, 2001 p.120). The confusion over the intended message of the 'foreign land' speech and Hague's weak response to Townend's condemnation of multiculturalism, discussed in the previous chapter, can be attributed to confusion within the leadership as to what the party's strategy was.

When Hague became Leader in June 1997, he needed to develop a strategy which would adapt the party to being in Opposition, in a political environment dominated by the Labour Party and which would maximise its electoral support before the next General Election. The survival strategy initiated by Hague in his first few months as Leader and the removal of the threat of the party imploding over the issue of Europe, meant that the party did survive and did come to terms with being in Opposition but in the second half of the parliament, the party needed to turn its attention to maximising its electoral support. A strategy should have been developed to do this. What were Hague's priorities during this period?

## **Hague's Priorities**

Hague strove to promote the issues of Europe, particularly the single currency, and race relations, including asylum and immigration, to the top of the party's political agenda. Race relations had not featured in the first half of Hague's leadership, apart from his attempts to 'reach out' to ethnic minority voters in the summer of 1997, by, for example, attending the Notting Hill carnival. Apart from specific speeches such as 'Common Sense on Asylum Seekers', race relations, asylum and immigration did not dominate Hague's major speeches or policy documents, such as CSR, in the latter half of the parliament. The public services featured much more highly. However, Hague raised the prominence of race relations in day-to-day operations, including, for example, his comments on the Macpherson report and his increasingly strident tone on asylum. Hague's tone also became increasingly aggressive on the issue of the single currency. The single currency, in contrast to the issue of immigration, did feature highly in major speeches and policy documents. However, one issue which was related to the politics of nationhood and which featured in the first half of Hague's leadership and did not do so in the second, was devolution. The party had settled on its policy of English votes on English laws and this remained intact. It was reiterated in Hague's 'foreign land' speech and articulated in the party's 2001 manifesto.

Referring to the Conservative Party's 2001 General Election campaign, Lord Strathclyde said 'well obviously, by the time we got to 2001 we had developed two very important election themes. One was 'save the pound' which was clearly a British issue of nationhood, a symbol of sovereignty, as well as making very good economic sense and secondly...asylum' (Strathclyde Interview, 10.12.2003). A senior anonymous

Conservative Party strategist described how the media were interested in crime, Europe, stealth taxes and asylum and so, as far the Conservative Party was concerned, in the second half of the parliament, these issues became 'the strategy' (Interview, 05.04.2004). The Conservative Party believed the government to be vulnerable on these issues, so they focused on them.

However, not all senior Conservatives were united behind the focus on the politics of nationhood. Edward Garnier said,

Well, I think they [the politics of nationhood] came to take on an importance to the Conservative Party which was not shared by the electorate because the electorate didn't think that we would be joining the United States of Europe the day after the General Election in 2001, they didn't think that the sovereignty or the independence of the British state was going to be reduced as a result of re-electing a Labour government in 2001 and they didn't think, although they might do now, that the asylum system was out of control and they didn't think that the shape of the country, both in terms of its population and its general look, was going to radically alter (Garnier Interview, 04.12.2003).

Boris Johnson agreed that Hague's focus on asylum and Europe was overdone,

Here was this party that seemed to be banging on and on about Europe and asylum seekers and it just felt a bit narrow, that's all. I think people were perfectly prepared to accept that there were points in both claims but they felt it sounded too monomaniacal and didn't reflect their real agenda...it resonated with some people electorally but it didn't suit the mood of the country (Johnson Interview, 20.02.2004).

However, Hague justified his party's focus on particular issues,

We had moved on by the middle of the parliament to a period where we were taking specific policy positions which we were not doing earlier in the parliament and so while earlier in the parliament we were necessarily dealing

with party organisation and just trying to show, after an election defeat, we were still alive and people could still join us. By 1999 we were trying to adopt some specific positions and so that wasn't so much a shift of position as a bedazzlement of it. The other point to make about it would be that we were trying to unsuccessfully, well, probably unsuccessfully, because we don't know what the result would have been had we had not taken that step – which might have been worse – we were trying to reach out to new voters by adopting specific policies. Students of politics will see these as right wing policies but actually the trick – if we could have pulled it off – was to, was that a huge number of Labour voters agree with the Conservatives' position on Europe, crime, asylum and so we didn't actually see these as policies that were not designed for a broader appeal – that is precisely why they were being adopted. The difficulty is that they weren't seen as the main issues by people in the election but had we succeeded in making those things the main issues then we would have been reaching out and pursuing things that were true to the traditional Conservative platform. So in our minds they are not such contradictory things  
(Hague Interview, 14.01.2004).

Although not as easily identifiable as KTC, Hague outlined the strategy by which he led his party in the second half of his leadership and by which he sought to maximise its electoral support before the 2001 General Election. In the second half of the parliament the party had moved on from its initial and vital survival strategy and Hague continued to believe that to maximise the Conservatives' support, the party had to broaden its appeal. This was done by highlighting specific policies and adopting specific policy positions, which Hague believed were supported by the party's core support and by people who had voted Labour in the 1997 General Election and were dissatisfied with the government's performance. He hoped that the sustained focus on these issues would persuade these Labour voters to support the Conservative Party.

Charles Hendry also discussed this strategy,

It was a very, very conscious decision and it was a sense that they weren't making the ground that they needed to be making and therefore if we started working on the *Mail*, *Sun*, *Telegraph* agenda we might get credit for that. I

think there is also a sense that we would then be able to appeal to those on the left who were patriotic, who were anti a federalist Europe and that they might join us on those issues alone. Which clearly didn't happen. They may have stayed at home but they didn't come across to us. But it was a very conscious tactical decision  
(Hendry Interview, 11.12.2003).

Hague was criticised for focusing on 'right-wing' or traditional Conservative issues but the leadership believed that it was, in fact, 'reaching out' and broadening its appeal to all members of the electorate, irrespective of whether they were part of the Conservatives' core support or whether they had supported the Labour Party in 1997. In this respect, the Conservative Party was following a dual strategy. It was working to shore up its core support, by focusing on traditional Conservative issues, such as those mentioned by Hague above (Europe, crime, asylum) whilst at the same time using those same issues to broaden the party's support to disaffected former Labour voters. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the second half of his leadership, Hague focused his attention on the mainstream majority. This group was the proportion of the electorate that shared the same values as Hague and other traditionalists within the Conservative Party and anyone could be a member irrespective of their ethnicity, social background or previous voting behaviour. Concomitant to his focus on the mainstream majority were his attacks on the liberal elite.

When the idea of the parliament being split into two phases, the first being modernising in nature, 'reaching out' and broadening the party's appeal and the second emphasising traditional Conservative issues and focusing on the party's core support was mentioned, Hague said,

The element of truth in the analysis you say is that there is some thought that because we didn't appear to be getting anywhere by the middle of the

parliament that we had to take more risks and adopt some clear policy positions to get people interested in us at all (Hague Interview, 14.01.2004).

To that extent, there was a change in approach during the mid-way point in the parliament. Hague believed that the party had to take more risks and that involved emphasising policy positions that he believed would eventually maximise the party's support, even if they would attract criticism from some sections of the press or other parties, that is, the section that Hague believed constituted the liberal elite. The strategy was to emphasise the party's position on issues such as asylum and the single currency. The former was risky because the CP was still tainted by a racist tag and the latter was a gamble because it was possible that the arguments within the party over the issue, which had threatened to destroy it during the Major years, could be reignited. Part of the risk-taking that Hague acknowledged was a change in tone. He said,

I think there was a change in tone but many things remained the same throughout the whole period, for instance, our European policy...that didn't change and nor did the efforts to involve, the reaching out efforts, if you like, to involve new candidates and that is still going on (Hague Interview, 14.01.2004).

Hague acknowledged that his tone changed throughout the parliament and that the change was an attempt to broaden the party's appeal. Only by emphasising the party's policies through the use of strident language and tone, could the party hope to influence as many disaffected former Labour voters as possible. However, he also pointed out that although tone may have become more strident, the Conservative Party policy on the single currency did not change. Tone and linked with that, language, were used as tools to maximise support. Similarly, as the parliament progressed, the Conservative Party did not give up its efforts to explicitly reach out, for example, to members of ethnic communities. As Hague

described, efforts to attract more members from ethnic communities did not cease and as the analysis of CSR and the party's race relations policies show, Hague did not cease to include in his speeches or policy documents explicit calls to the members of ethnic minorities.

This approach was far from universally supported. Members of the so-called liberal elite and also those modernisers within the Conservative Party leadership who regarded themselves as belonging to the liberal elite, criticised his actions as blatant populist opportunism, opposing for opposition's sake. As discussed in chapter four, during the early months of his leadership Hague was praised by, among others, *The Economist* for not opposing for opposition's sake and for looking at the revival of his party in the long-term. Conservative revival would not be instantaneous and in the first few months of his leadership, Hague acknowledged that. During the latter half of the parliament he was criticised for attacking the Labour Party for the sake of it, failing to follow a strategy and acting out of panic, seeking to gain publicity at all costs. It seemed he had forgotten that Conservative renewal was a long-term process. Hague continued with his strategy unabashed, hoping that speaking-out would eventually generate support from disaffected Labour voters.

Shaun Woodward acknowledged that Hague made attempts to reach out during the first few months of his leadership and broaden his party's support base. However, due partly to issues of personnel, which will be discussed below, he changed tack and ceased attempting to extend his free market ideals beyond the realms of economics. He said 'he made one or two speeches on an open and diverse party but this was not an agenda that any of those that he had brought around him were remotely interested in'. He continued,

in a sense I think the Conservative Party found itself from 1997 to 2001. found itself consumed by its own negativity and bile. It's a logical extension then, the campaign that they did have in 2001. It was nasty and unpleasant and touched on things that were homophobic, those tinges of anti-immigrant, asylum bashing aspects to it were pretty close to obscene actually (Woodward interview 13.01.2004).

Ivan Massow also acknowledged that Hague made initial attempts to 'reach out'. He said,

He rushed in too quickly and then it was like a chess game, he was then on the back foot because he had to repair the damage that he *thought* he had created...there was this collective feeling that perhaps he wasn't getting the grassroots support and was endangering his leadership and so he had to turn very sharply back to the extent that he spoke out in favour of the abolition of section 28 (Massow Interview, 03.02.2004).

Massow also accounts for Hague's tendency to oppose for opposition's sake. He said,

He was too good at debating. He was too good in the House and he loved to debate, it was like a science, an art form for him, he loves it, he loves the banter and so it was opposition for opposition's sake, in order to put what they described as 'clear, blue water' between us and them. I think they failed to understand what the electorate are looking for: a party, of course, whose values they can endorse and feel comfortable with, they are looking for a government in waiting, beyond the fundamental policy issues. This kind of reactionary politics, I don't think gave anyone very much confidence that they were a government in waiting (Massow Interview, 03.02.2004).

Opposing for opposition's sake and the opinion poll data, discussed above, which revealed that the issues of asylum, Europe and the single currency did not determine voting behaviour meant the Conservative Party was not on track in the latter half of the parliament, to maximising its electoral support. Hague also received public criticism from within his own party,

Edward Heath also spoke out against Hague's latter strategy, 'He said that the Tory Party under Mr Hague faced electoral defeat because of the Conservatives' "lurch to the right" since the election. The former Prime Minister said that Mr Hague had failed to frame "practical policies" that would win back Conservatives who had voted for Tony Blair at the last election'  
(Woolf, 2000a).

This criticism was directed towards Hague's own strategy for the second half of the 1997-2001 parliament.

### **Controversy: The 'Core Vote' or 'Core Vote Plus' Strategy**

When analysing Hague's strategy during the second half of his leadership, the idea of a 'core vote' (CV) or a 'core vote plus' (CVP) strategy was sometimes mentioned by interviewees. However, although he discussed KTC, Hague did not refer to CV or CVP. Interviewees had opposing thoughts on whether such a strategy existed but it does appear that it was created retrospectively, in response to criticism of a lack of strategy.

Discussing the latter strategy of the 1997-2001 parliament and his attendance at Strategy Group meetings, Rick Nye said,

the decision was never made between going for a core vote strategy and attempting to develop a more inclusive message and William Hague deliberately didn't make that choice for two reasons: one was that had he said he was going for the core vote, he would have had a problem with the modernisers and second...the longer he went without making a decision, the more he was just left with the core vote to appeal to. You are de facto making a decision (Nye Interview, 17.02.2004).

Nye believed that a core vote strategy may have been in place and orchestrated by Hague but it was certainly not an explicit strategy, agreed within the Conservative Party leadership

and formally adopted. Danny Finkelstein said, 'I can't remember when that term was first used but certainly it was not something that William would have used' (Finkelstein Interview, 19.04.2004). However, he did have an explanation as to where the title originated. He said that CVP would have been 'a Nick Wood phrase' to combat criticism from *The Times* that Hague was running a purely CV strategy. *The Times* developed the idea of a CV strategy, whereby the Conservative Party, in the latter half of the parliament focused on its traditional, core support base and Nick Wood countered that criticism with the Conservatives' CVP strategy, whereby the 'plus' was an additional focus on the public services. This addition was designed to stop any criticism from, for example, *The Times*, that the Conservatives had neglected anyone beyond its core support base.

Archie Norman agreed that 'it wasn't called the core vote strategy but it added up to the core vote strategy' (Norman Interview, 09.12.2003). Such a conclusion suggests that the CV/CVP title was retrospectively afforded to something that was not, at the time of its operation, considered by the Conservative Party to be a formal strategy. This was emphasised by a senior anonymous Conservative Party strategist who described how,

It was not a strategy on paper but was a de facto strategy. It should have appealed to swing voters as well as the core. The 1999 European elections were run on a traditional, Eurosceptic campaign...they knew it couldn't be replicated completely in a general election but they could do something very similar (Interview, 05.04.2004).

This assessment of Hague's strategy in the latter half of the parliament, concurs with Hague and Hendry's conclusions above, that the party believed its approach would appeal as much to the party's core support as it did those disaffected voters who supported the Labour Party in 1997. Hague did not put a title to this strategy and Andrew Cooper believed the reason it

had one at all was because it 'was a sort of post-op rationalisation. It was an attempt to intellectualise a position which they'd taken sort of randomly'. Distinguishing between CV and CVP, he said the latter was an after-thought: 'if we throw in on the flanks of that some stuff about public services and people being frustrated, we'll Hoover up a few more votes here and there' (Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004). Cooper cited the example of the 'You've paid the taxes so where are the...?' poster campaign as such an after-thought.

One senior anonymous Conservative strategist's assessment differed from that of Hague and the above commentators'. He declared that 'core vote plus was referred to explicitly and it came into effect from late 1999' (Interview, 20.04.2004). However, in discussions in previous chapters, this interviewee was similarly contradicted by both traditionalists and modernisers alike when he stated that a) it was the membership, not the leadership who determined the prominence of the issue of Europe within the 2001 General Election campaign and b) that the leadership did very little, apart from a speech in Dover, to make the issue of asylum prominent within the long and short 2001 campaign. On each occasion, the interviewee's opinion was countered by traditionalists, modernisers and Hague himself and his thoughts can only be attributed to a post-hoc desire to 'clear up' issues that may be damning to the party leadership at the time, for example the dominance of asylum and the single currency at the 2001 General Election and a lack of strategy throughout the second half of the parliament. CV/CVP was not an explicit strategy adopted by the Conservative Party during Hague's leadership but was a retrospective attempt to account for the strategic decision-making of the time, which may have amounted to an attempt to shore up the party's traditional core support. In reality, Hague saw his approach as wider than CV or CVP, the latter supposedly seeking to extend the party's appeal beyond the core, with references to the public services. Instead, Hague appealed to the mainstream majority.

whether they be from the core support base or disaffected former Labour voters. As long as they shared the Conservative Party's commonsense values, anyone could be part of Hague's mainstream majority.

### **A Change in Personnel**

The discussion on Hague's early strategic decision-making in chapter four, described how Hague and Archie Norman recruited into CCO a number of young strategists who shared the modernising agenda which was favoured by Hague at the time. Norman recruited young modernisers such as Rick Nye, Ceri Evans and Andrew Cooper. It is also significant to note that the reorganisation of the party which took place in the early months of Hague's leadership originated from within CCO, being inspired by Hague, Norman, the Chairman, Lord Parkinson and new Treasurer, Lord Ashcroft. As the parliament progressed, influence was transferred to the Shadow Cabinet.

After the abandonment of KTC, Andrew Cooper and Ceri Evans left CCO and Gregor MacKay who supported the strategy, was replaced as Communications Director by Amanda Platell. The number of modernisers was therefore reduced. Hague also began to build up a group of personal advisors, including Platell, Nick Wood and Lord Coe. As chapter five discussed, Wood, Hague's new press advisor, did not share the modernisers' agenda and he and Platell soon formed an alliance to protect Hague and his role as Leader. This group of close advisors were neither established as part of CCO nor were members of the Shadow Cabinet but were Hague's personal team.

Along with the aforementioned departures and arrivals, reshuffles took place within the Shadow Cabinet which changed the balance of traditionalists and modernisers within the

party leadership. On June 15<sup>th</sup> 1999, Peter Lilley was sacked from the Shadow Cabinet after the disastrous response within the party to his speech on April 20<sup>th</sup>, which sought to move the party on from a purely Thatcherite agenda on the public services. Andrew Lansley, who was considered by some as ‘more Thatcherite than Thatcher’, was made Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office and Policy Renewal and Tim Collins ‘a dyed in the wool right winger’ was made a senior party vice-chairman (Walters, 2001, pp.118-9).

John Maples, who was sacked as Shadow Foreign Secretary in February 2000, criticised the influence of Hague’s personal team. He said,

You [Hague] have surrounded yourself with a private office operation which is completely cut off from the Shadow Cabinet and parliamentary party. You get the loyalty and commitment of your staff, but none of them has ever actually been a minister or responsible for policy  
(Quoted by Hibbs, 2000a).

Andrew Cooper attributed the changes in personnel to Hague’s despondency at the party’s lack of headway in the polls,

I think he’d lost faith in the professional structure which Archie [Norman] had put in place and there was a sort of revolt of the politicians in June ’99 and he put in place a new structure that was very much ‘the politicians in charge’. Basically, every director reported directly to a politician, Tim Collins and Andrew Lansley crucially running the day-to-day operation  
(Cooper Interview, 17.02.2004).

As the number of young modernisers in CCO decreased, the number of young traditionalists in the Shadow Cabinet and CCO increased. Along with the traditionalist tendencies of Hague’s personal team, these moves increased the influence of traditionalists within the party’s upper echelons.

However, in a reshuffle on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2000, the newly re-elected Portillo was made Shadow Chancellor, Norman was promoted to Shadow Minister for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and Francis Maude was made Shadow Foreign Secretary. This gave the modernisers some of the most significant Shadow Cabinet posts, although traditionalists still constituted the majority: Ancram as Chairman, Widdecombe in Home Affairs, Heathcoat-Amory for Trade and Industry, Duncan Smith in Defence, Strathclyde as Shadow Leader of the House of Lords and Liam Fox remaining Shadow Secretary of State for Health. Although Hague followed a more traditionalist approach in the latter half of his leadership, he chose to keep Portillo and the other modernisers within the Shadow Cabinet. This was not only because they were talented politicians and it was likely that someone of Portillo's status, who returned to the House of Commons, would be given a significant position but because including them within the Shadow Cabinet meant that Hague had more control over the line that they took on political issues. He could also demand a certain amount of loyalty. Portillo's role could explain his public support of Hague's stance on asylum, which as Cooper mentioned in chapter six, was not felt in private.

The changes in personnel highlight the existence of a schism between the modernisers and traditionalists within the upper echelons of the Conservative Party and the interviewees mentioned above, believed the changing balance of power between the two groups contributed to Hague's different approach to maximising his party's electoral support in the second half of his leadership.

## **Public Services versus the Politics of Nationhood**

The 2000 party conference has already been discussed at length, in particular the fact that its official theme of inclusion was submerged by Hague's references and direct appeals to the mainstream majority, who, he believed, shared his commonsense values. The latter half of the 1997-2001 parliament was influenced by two bodies of strategic thought, that is, the modernisers, who believed social inclusion should be highlighted and the traditionalists who believed in a more narrow form of inclusion and appealed to any voter as long as they shared Hague's commonsense values. This dual approach can also be symbolised by the party's promotion of the public services to the forefront of its major speeches and policy documents, in particular CSR, whilst day-to-day activities were based around issues such as the 'save the pound' truck and Hague and Widdecombe's mini-campaign on asylum which started in the summer of 1999. The traditionalist/moderniser schism was evident in Conservatives' views over the prominence of the politics of nationhood compared to policies on the public services within the party's rhetoric.

Traditionalists such as George Osborne and Charles Hendry believed that the Conservative Party was right to emphasise the politics of nationhood, rather than the public services. Osborne said,

People often say now, with hindsight, that we should have talked about public services, schools and hospitals and so on but that just didn't seem credible in 1998 or 1999 when the Labour government had just been in for a year or two and many of their major education and health acts were just passing through parliament at that time. So to blame them for the failures of public services was really not an available option as it is now. Therefore we looked around for things that we could talk about. William himself strongly believed in this sense of British identity and that was being eroded by a number of things...the European issue played right into that of course. It was a way of expressing our concern at the loss of rights and powers of the country to European

institutions and the debate about the single currency was just getting going. All these things came together in William's mind and the minds of the people advising him as something for the Conservative Party to say...in the immediate aftermath of the first couple of years of the 1997 election defeat, there wasn't an obvious message on many of the domestic issues so that became an obvious thing to talk about...we never thought [the public services] would be an issue that would switch people's vote. What would switch people's vote were issues like tax, crime, Europe (Osborne Interview, 04.12.2003).

Charles Hendry shared Osborne's belief that the Conservative Party could not announce that it had developed a panacea for the ills of the public services, within four years of losing power,

In 2001 it was too early for us to be the party of the public services. We were still too associated in people's minds as the party that had run down the health service etc. Whether or not that was right, which of course it wasn't, that was the public perception and in 2001 that was still the public perception. If we had sought then to become the party of public services it would have been incredible. We had to try and find a different solution and I think traditional nationhood, anti-single currency, were legitimate areas to stand on and all of our polling shows that 70% of people share our views on the single currency (Hendry Interview, 11.12.2003).

Significantly, the Leader of the Party also believed that the Conservatives should not focus on the public services in their attempts to maximise electoral support. Concurring with Osborne and Hendry he said,

We did need issues to put clear, blue water between the parties because we were so far behind Labour on the public services, that it would have been damaging to campaign on them as an issue. We had to use the issues we had (Hague Interview, 14.01.2004).

Sir Michael Spicer was less sure of the merits of Hague's approach towards the public services but he conceded that increasing the prominence of the party's policies on, for

example, health and education, would not have made a tremendous difference to the party's electoral support. He said,

One of the features of the second part of William's tenure was there were certain areas that he felt the Conservative Party just didn't dare tread at that time, health was an obvious one...our credibility wasn't improved, let's put it this way, by not having some kind of view about it, which was distinctive from the government's...although we should have had it, I don't think it would have made a massive difference at the time (Spicer Interview, 02.12.2003).

Modernisers were much more critical of Hague's approach. Malcolm Gooderham conceded that political parties must play to their strengths,

Which in theory, on paper, sounds exactly what you should do. Then you don't have the discussion that you'll have now as to the impact your weaknesses had on your ability to register that you are a government in waiting. It's a question of whether you've got to address your weakness or not or whether your strengths are good enough to go on...It's difficult for me to say exactly where they were coming from but I think they'd say their priorities were the core issues of asylum, the Euro, so keep playing those (Gooderham Interview, 26.02.2004).

However, he raised the question of whether Hague's perception of the party's strengths, in particular a lead on the issues of asylum and the single currency, were really enough for the party to rely on. When asked whether it was right for the party to avoid discussing the public services for fear of damaging their cause further, Andrew Cooper said,

I know that George [Osborne] still substantially thinks that but I think all the evidence is that...most people felt that the health service, public transport, schools, in particular, were the priorities and the Conservative Party had to and still has to find a way to engage on those issues...I certainly think that George is right to say that it's very difficult to beat the Labour Party on those issues but if you don't even think about engaging on them at all I think the message the voters take out of it is 'you still don't seem to understand what matters to us. We want to see an opposition party that seems to understand

what matters to us and seems to be doing its best to address it'. You can't just opt out of these debates  
(Cooper interview, 17.02.2004).

Archie Norman was more critical. He described how health and education had been the top most salient issues in opinion polls since 1992,

neglecting them was a massive political gamble...it was a very explicit, very high risk electoral strategy...our strategy was designed to solidify Conservative support in the belief that this would attract enough votes to increase the number of MPs then we can move on. The belief was that there were 'real Conservatives' out there who would vote for us because they felt strongly about Europe, tax, etc and we were saying what they people outside the metropolitan elite really felt. In fact the electorate simply said you are just not interested in the things that concern us. We want to know about our public services and you're banging on about Europe. They were right.  
(Norman interview, 09.12.2003).

Peter Lilley highlighted the extent to which certain sections of the Conservative Party believed that the party's policies on the public services had been neglected. He said, 'the manifesto contained whole pages of this document I published on patient power, word for word and yet nothing was done on it...we didn't even talk about it, so much so that even *I* didn't realise it was our policy!' (Lilley Interview, 03.12.2003). However, the traditionalists justified their lack of focus on the public services by highlighting examples of when the party attempted to promote its policies received hostility or criticism. One such example was when Hague addressed the Royal College of Nursing on April 4<sup>th</sup> 2000. In an attempt to neutralise the issue of health, Hague promised a future Conservative government would match Labour spending on the NHS. However, a poll of the audience revealed that 85% did not believe his promises. It was the poll, not the policy that made it into the headlines the next day and as Rick Nye commented, in the aftermath, the reaction

from the traditionalists was ‘well, that’s what happens when you talk about public services, so why bother?’ (Nye Interview, 17.02.2004).

The traditionalists were also buoyed by two leaked memos from within the Labour camp. The first was written by Philip Gould, an architect of New Labour, in the summer of 2000. He warned Blair that ‘we are outflanked on patriotism and crime; we are suffering from disconnection; we have been assailed for spin and broken promise...we have appeared soft on crime, not pro-family, lacking in gut patriotic instincts’ (Quoted in Nadler, 2000 p.283). The second was leaked from Downing Street and appeared in *The Sunday Times* on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Prescott, 2000 p.6). In it, Blair stated that ‘over the next year, questions of national identity are going to be important’ and that ‘an important issue at the next election will be which party best stands up for Britain’. The letter demanded more ministerial speeches detailing how Labour was that party and warned them to expect advice from Michael Wills – who *The Sunday Times* refers to as Blair’s ‘patriotism envoy’ – on how to make their departments more patriotic. The traditionalists took this as vindication for their focus on the politics of nationhood because the Labour Party considered itself to be on the back foot on those issues. However, crucially, it was the Conservative Party who were seen as on the back foot on the issues that most determined voting behaviour, the public services.

Hague and his traditionalist supporters within the Conservative leadership, should have headed the warnings of the Romsey by-election result. The by-election held on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2000 saw the Conservative Party’s 51<sup>st</sup> safest seat transferred to the Liberal Democrats, with a swing of 12.5%. The Conservative lead of 8,585 after the 1997 General Election turned into a Liberal Democrat majority of 3,311. *The Daily Telegraph* commented that

‘the Tories struggled to put a brave face yesterday on their shock defeat at the hands of Liberal Democrats in the Romsey by-election which raised doubts about William Hague’s strategy for returning to power’ (Brogan, 2000). Hague did not view the result as a thorough rejection of his populism and focus on asylum, immigration and crime in the same way that he *had* viewed the June 1999 European elections result as vindication of his narrow, Euro-sceptic campaign and as justification for continuing with that approach. Referring to Hague’s latching on to the European victory, Rick Nye said,

the Liberal Democrats won the Romsey by-election. Now *that* should have been the warning, not the European elections being the portent of great things to come. As soon as people turned out to vote in numbers greater than a third of the electorate and as soon as they were asked to make a judgement about the characters of the parties in the round, rather than their stances on one narrow issue, we were going to be in trouble!  
(Nye Interview, 17.02.2004).

Hague could rely on the party’s traditionalist core support to turn-out in European elections thus providing the party with enough votes in a low turn-out election to make some headway. However, when it came to elections with a greater turn-out, the Conservatives were unable to attract the support of other voters. As Garnier conceded, the focus on the politics of nationhood to the detriment of the public services would not maximise the Conservative Party’s electoral support. He said,

We thought they [the politics of nationhood] were important but the public didn’t think they were important. Bear in mind that in the Romsey by-election we concentrate on keeping the pound and particularly on asylum and immigration and it did us no good whatsoever. In a safe Conservative seat they voted Liberal Democrat!  
(Garnier Interview, 04.12.2003).

However, as the analysis in chapters six and seven has shown, during the second half of Hague's leadership, he continued with his populist policies and opportunistic rhetoric. The warnings of Romsey were ignored and the relative successes in June 1999 continued to be emphasised. There were concessions to the modernisers, such as Portillo, Norman and Maude, who voiced their concerns about the neglect of the public services. Health and education, in particular, were pushed to the front of speeches and policy documents and the party made sporadic attempts to highlight its policies on the public services, for example with its 'You've paid the taxes so where are the...?' poster campaign. However, these efforts were seen as paying lip service to the requirement of a supposed government-in-waiting to have a coherent and comprehensive set of policies. The poster campaign, in particular, was regarded as too little, too late and because it was not part of a sustained campaign on the public services it faded into insignificance. It was the day-to-day emphasis of issues such as the Macpherson Report and the 'save the pound' campaign which registered with voters.

Hague could not change the fact that voting behaviour was determined by the parties' policies on the public services, not the politics of nationhood. The previous analysis of the Conservative Party's approach to Europe and race relations during the latter half of the 1997-2001 parliament, revealed that these issues were way down the electorate's list of priority election issues. So, however much the Conservative Party led on these issues and however much the public were aware of its policies on these issues, it was the various parties' approach to the public services that determined voting behaviour. In 2001, after the Conservative Party neglected the public services in relation to the other parties, the public were likely to have been as unaware, if not more, of its policies on these issues as Peter Lilley admitted to being on the issue of health.

The electorate's assessment of Hague's personal characteristics was discussed in chapter five. These assessments were not favourable and did not improve throughout the first half of his leadership however, there was some limited improvement throughout the second half. In October 1997, 44% of respondents to an ICM poll conducted on behalf of *The Guardian*, believed Hague to be 'arrogant'. In October 2000, this had fallen to 29%. The proportion of people believing Hague to have 'lots of personality' almost doubled between 1998 and 2000. However, this improvement was not as significant as it appeared because the proportion increased from a damning 8% to a slightly less disastrous 14%. Similarly, the proportion of respondents believing Hague to 'understand people like me' did increase throughout the parliament. In October 1997, 11% believed this to be true and this rose to 17% in October 2000. However, the improvement still meant that 83% of respondents did not think that Hague and the Conservative Party understood them. This was a damning verdict for Hague at the height of his campaign to appeal directly to the mainstream majority of the electorate, who he believed shared the commonsense values of the Conservative Party.

#### 7.4 Conclusion

Despite polls clearly indicating that the issue of Europe would not maximise the party's electoral support before the 2001 General Election, the policy continued to dominate the long and short General Election campaigns. The previous chapter discussed Hague's attempts to broaden the party's support by appealing to Labour voters who shared the Conservatives' views on policies such as asylum, Europe and law and order. Hague subsequently acknowledged that those issues did not determine voting behaviour but at the time, the party simply preached to the converted, deepening but not broadening support.

As the election approached, memories of success in the 1999 European elections and the positive reaction from some sections of the press to the party's European policy ensured that Hague doggedly continued to make his appeal to potentially sympathetic former Labour voters. In desperation, Hague believed that any issue which achieved positive column inches could be translated into votes for the Conservative Party. He also believed that criticising the organisation of the promised referendum would be enough to reverse its neutralisation of the issue of British membership of the Euro. However, the single currency had been relegated to such an extent in the list of people's voting priorities that such attempts appeared to be too based on desperation to be taken seriously.

Although disputed by a minority of Conservative MPs, who either wanted to rule out membership forever, or who wanted to embrace EMU, the party's policy on the single currency succeeded in uniting the party, which had not been inevitable. The policy maintained support, however, the prominence afforded to it and the focus on constitutional and political, rather than economic arguments, led to dissatisfaction from across the parliamentary party and within the leadership. Dissatisfaction tended to arise from the modernisers. It is also obvious that the tone of the policy changed in the second half of the parliament. The party's intention to 'save the pound', rather than re-evaluating the 'not in this or the next parliament' policy, became the focus and the policy appeared more Euro-sceptic. This change in emphasis occurred after the party's success in the 1999 European elections when the campaign had been run on a clear, Euro-sceptical platform. With a General Election looming the leadership hoped to repeat this success with a similarly focused campaign. However, as the polls indicated, at the General Election, the electorate focused on domestic issues, which affected day-to-day life, such as health, law and order and education. The issue was effectively neutralised when Blair promised a referendum on

the Euro. Despite this, Hague doggedly continued his attempts to push the issue further up the political agenda, in order to increase its saliency and influence voting behaviour. He appealed to the British identity of the electorate by using the pound as a symbol of that national identity, calling on the British people to save it from the external enemy, the EU. However, as his colleagues and the polls recognised, the British people just did not regard Europe as that external enemy. The issue was not going to maximise the Conservative Party's support and instead of broadening the party's support base by attracting those unsatisfied with Labour's policy, as he had intended, Hague simply preached to the converted and cemented what support the party already had.

The second half of the 1997-2001 parliament saw the party move on from its initial survival strategy and its flirtation with KTC. A second formal strategic initiative was not formally adopted, although retrospectively a CV/CVP strategy was discussed. Instead, the Conservative Party focused on cementing policy positions, on asylum and the single currency in particular, and increasing their prominence within its political agenda. This was in the hope of appealing to both the party's traditional core support and disaffected Labour voters, who Hague considered to be the mainstream majority of the electorate, sharing the Conservative Party's commonsense values. Hague acknowledged that this strategy was risky and that his tone and language increased in stridency, in an attempt to promote the party's message to the aforementioned former Labour supporters.

The prominence of asylum and the single currency within the party's later strategy was not supported by the modernisers within the party leadership, or some traditionalists. However, the approach taken by Hague can be partly attributed to the change in the balance of power between modernisers and traditionalists. Despite modernisers holding some of the most

powerful positions within the Shadow Cabinet, throughout the latter half of the parliament the traditionalists became dominant within the Shadow Cabinet and Hague's private team, just as the modernisers were decimated within CCO. The moderniser/traditionalist schism was also emphasised with regards to the party's focus on the public services and the politics of nationhood. The former believed that the party's policies on the public services should be emphasised whilst the latter believed they should be down-played, in favour of the politics of nationhood, which they believed the Conservative Party had a lead over the Labour government. The traditionalists did not take into consideration the fact that it was the public services, not the politics of nationhood, which determine the voting behaviour of the vast majority of the British electorate. The final chapter concludes the analysis of Hague's strategy within the 1997-2001 parliament and the role that the politics of nationhood played within that strategy.

## Chapter Eight – Conclusions

Despite [a] stronger base and the diminishing enthusiasm for New Labour, we have not yet been able to persuade a majority or anything approaching a majority, that we are yet the alternative government they need (Hague, 2001e).

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a conclusion to the dissertation. It will summarise the findings of the analysis conducted from the third chapter onwards and will discuss the hypotheses, which were mentioned within the ‘Summary of the Dissertation’.

### 8.2 Summary of Analysis

When Hague became Leader of the Conservative Party in June 1997, he needed to formulate and implement a strategy which would adapt his party to being in Opposition in a political environment dominated by the Labour Party and which would maximise its electoral support before the next General Election. It has been suggested that Hague’s strategic decision-making can be split into two distinct phases: an inclusive, ‘reaching out’ phase, whereby Hague sought to extend his belief in liberalism within economics to social politics, followed by a second phase where he appeared to abandon those objectives and concentrated instead, on traditional Conservative policies to shore up his party’s core support. It is certainly true that Hague’s strategic decision-making evolved throughout his leadership however, it is not quite as simple as a parliament simply divided into two distinct strategic phases.

## Early Strategy

In the first few months of his leadership, Hague employed a survival strategy. This strategy was never explicitly referred to but Hague's actions during this period were sharply focused around reviving his failing party and adapting it to being in Opposition, and they were implemented as a matter of urgency. As the second chapter discussed, in May 1997, the future of the Conservative Party was not guaranteed. The party had suffered a massive defeat and lost many of its experienced Members of Parliament, it was in financial dire straits, its membership levels were falling and it was dominated by arguments over the party's policy on Europe, in particular Britain's membership of the single currency. The party's organisation needed to be reformed and it needed to demonstrate to the British public that it was still functioning and would once again be a strong party of Opposition and a 'government-in-waiting'.

This implicit survival strategy included the *Fresh Future* and other related reforms, which involved alterations to the organisation of the party and saw Hague make explicit attempts to 'reach out', by, for example, sending a message of support to TORCHE and attending the Notting Hill Carnival, the very essence of multiethnic Britain. Hague wanted to broaden the party's support base by appealing to sections of society, such as ethnic communities, which did not traditionally support the Conservative Party. Hague also publicly acknowledged the danger of opposing for opposition's sake, that is, being reactionary and opposing the Labour government just to be distinctive and make headlines. Instead the party would take its time to develop strong alternatives to Labour's policies and attract support on that basis. He acknowledged that the process of Conservative renewal would be lengthy and he also made clear that he was prepared to see the exercise through to its conclusion, however long that would take. By attempting to broaden the party's support

so early in the 1997-2001 parliament, Hague hoped to begin to maximise its support before the next General Election.

The reform process improved the party's finances and was a positive exercise when the party was at the depths of defeat and despair. Significantly, Hague's approach to the issue of the single currency prevented it from destroying the Conservative Party. The 'not in this or the next parliament' policy, although not universally supported, placated enough parliamentarians to unite the parliamentary party and prevent it imploding over the issue. The endorsement from the internal ballot of party members was also significant in reducing the wranglings over the issue. The policy was developed as a consequence of Hague and his supporters' opposition to European federalism and his concomitant defence of the nation state. In response, there were resignations and rebellions but these were not afforded much attention within the media because the Conservatives were not taken as seriously as they would have liked during the early months of the parliament. Defections and rebellions were not regarded as significant because many commentators saw the party as a shadow of its former self, so close to collapse that another row over Europe would not make a significant difference. It was also old news, of no particular interest in a political environment dominated by the strong and dynamic Labour government. However, Hague's apology for the ERM debacle during the Major era, was another indication that he was at least striving to make a break with the party's past.

The survival strategy was successful, the party survived and it adapted to its new role in Opposition. However, it needed to develop and implement a successive strategy which would adapt it to being in Opposition specifically within a political environment dominated

by a very strong Labour Party and to subsequently maximise its electoral support before the next General Election.

### **Kitchen Table Conservatism**

That strategy came in the form of Kitchen Table Conservatism. In contrast to the survival strategy, KTC was an explicit strategy which was formally adopted by Hague and the Shadow Cabinet as the means by which the party would fully adapt to being in Opposition and which would enable it to maximise its electoral support. KTC dominated the party's agenda from November 1998, when the 'Kitchen Table Conservatives' paper was written, to just before the summer of 1999 when the strategy was abandoned. It fitted in well with Hague's initial attempts to reach out to new supporters, apologise for the consequences of Britain's membership of the ERM and also his acceptance of the Scottish and Welsh desire for devolution and his subsequent decision that a former Conservative government would not withdraw power from the devolved institutions. Instead, the Conservative Party would work with those institutions to prevent the break-up of the British Union. Hague was demonstrating a propensity to look forward and to be positive in his actions.

Indeed, 'conceding and moving on' was a significant element of KTC. 'Kitchen Table Conservatives', criticised the Conservative Party for not having had a strategy in the decade leading up to 1998. It also stated that the party would not enjoy electoral success again if it did not understand that much of the criticism levelled at it by the British people before the 1997 General Election, was accurate. The party had to concede and then move on to fight the next election. KTC dictated that the Conservative Party had to demonstrate to the electorate that it knew which issues the people cared about, that it stood up for what the people thought and ultimately that it had the policies to deal with the issues that really

mattered to the people, the issues that were discussed around their kitchen tables. The implicit warning was that if the Conservatives focused on the issues that interested them and not the issues that interested the British people, they would fail to maximise their electoral support.

Although the successful resolution of the issue of Europe was integral to the party's initial survival strategy, the politics of nationhood did not play a large role within KTC. It was one of six themes which Cooper and Finkelstein, the strategy's authors, believed the party could legitimately focus.

KTC was not a success for the Conservative Party, and although its authors acknowledged failings within the strategy, its demise can be attributed to its non-acceptance within the party leadership. KTC was formally adopted by Hague and his Shadow Cabinet but it soon became apparent that neither the former nor the latter were actually following the substance of the strategy. Each member of the latter found enough within the strategy to endorse it but then disregarded the operational rules which would have enabled its successful implementation. Similarly, Hague did not sufficiently believe in the strategy to force its implementation. He did not believe the party could wait for the promised long-term gains. There was no discipline within the Shadow Cabinet and traditionalists and modernisers alike, pursued their own agendas.

This lack of commitment was consolidated by a lack of improvement in the party's standing in the opinion polls, during the time that KTC was supposedly in operation. Hague had adopted KTC because he knew that the Conservative Party needed a strategy and it was handed to him, by modernisers within CCO, as a convenient, ready-made

package. He wanted to broaden the party's support base, improve his standing as Leader, make headway in the polls and move on to electoral success and that was what the strategy offered. However, when improvements in the polls did not arrive immediately and as the clock ticked towards another General Election, Hague abandoned the strategy. Traditionalists within the party leadership had not given it enough time to yield results before they took the opportunity to reject the strategy. This was particularly poignant because in his early months as Leader, Hague acknowledged that the party's revival would be a long-term process.

Three events also took place which compounded the need for the rejection of KTC in the minds of the traditionalists within the party leadership and those were the 1999 European elections, the reception of Peter Lilley's speech on the funding of the public services and a change in party personnel. Perceived successes in the 1999 elections led Hague to believe that future election campaigns should be run on a narrow, traditionalist platform and this opinion was augmented in Hague and his supporters' minds by the negative reaction within the wider Conservative Party to Lilley's speech suggesting that Conservatives should look beyond a purely Thatcherite agenda on the public services. Staff brought in to CCO by Archie Norman, to promote a modernising agenda, left the party just before and during the summer of 1999 and the influence that they held within the party's strategic decision-makers was transferred to newly appointed traditionalists within Hague's personal advisory team and within the Shadow Cabinet. Those traditionalists were less than supportive of the KTC strategy. As a consequence, Hague abandoned a long-term approach to the party's renewal just as he abandoned KTC.

## **Late Strategy**

When KTC was dropped, the party was left bereft of a strategy. At this time and in the period immediately preceding his decision to abandon the strategy, Hague made an explicit decision to alter his approach to adapting the party to opposing a strong Labour government and to maximising its electoral support. The party leadership could not be sure after the 1997 General Election that it even had the support of the party's traditional core support base and so Hague and his traditionalist supporters within the Shadow Cabinet, decided to employ an approach which would aim to shore up the party's core support whilst at the same time broadening its appeal to people who had not voted Conservative in 1997. As Hague outlined within both chapters six and seven, his approach involved developing specific policies which would appeal to both groups, including, specifically, disaffected former Labour voters. However, it also involved an element of risk-taking because the policies that were focused upon could be considered 'right-wing' or traditionalist, in particular the party's approach to Europe and asylum. The approach also involved Hague and his supportive colleagues hardening their tone and their language when discussing these policies. Hague believed that consistently and stridently highlighting these policies would shock former Labour voters, who supported Hague's stance, to vote Conservative. However, as tone and language changed, Hague remained consistent in his overt attempts to reach out to, for example, ethnic minority voters. The party's European policy also remained the same throughout the parliament, although as the General Election approached and Hague became more desperate to reveal distinct policies from that of the Labour Party, the scepticism of the policy was emphasised.

Central to Hague's latter approach was the Common Sense Revolution, a policy document which represented the party's initial preparations for the forthcoming General Election. It

dominated the second half of Hague's leadership and his approach towards maximising the party's electoral support during that period because of the number of spin-off speeches based around a 'common sense' approach to different political issues and also the frequent utilisation of the phrase 'common sense': the party's manifesto being named 'Time for Common Sense' and its campaign bus being named the 'Common Sense Express'.

Formed around five 'guarantees', CSR was ostensibly based upon the public services and Europe and the major theme running through the document and the speech Hague made at its launch in 1999, was inclusion. These themes, however, were submerged by Hague's vociferous appeals to those who shared his common sense values, whom he believed to constitute the 'mainstream majority' of the British people. It was references to this group that dominated Hague's approach to maximising the party's electoral support during the latter half of the 1997-2001 parliament. An underlying theme in speeches made by Hague and his fellow traditionalists, was the idea that contemporary Britain under a Labour government, was in decline, socially, economically and in terms of its identity. This was particularly evident throughout Hague's infamous 'foreign land' speech, in which Britain, after four more years of Labour rule, would be little more than a run-down region of a United States of Europe. Only a common sense approach to political issues could reverse the trend.

Whilst appealing to the mainstream majority, Hague contrasted them and their shared values to the external enemy, in the form of the EU and also to internal enemies, in the form of bogus asylum seekers and the liberal elite. All three threatened British nationhood and national identity. The latter were comprised of liberal-minded people, often Labour Party supporters, who lived in metropolitan areas, promoted political correctness at the

expense of positive action on political issues and were detached from the real world, as experienced by the mainstream majority. By creating a 'them and us' situation Hague hoped to appeal to what he believed to be the majority of British people, those who shared his common sense values. By emphasising the dangers of unchecked European integration and asylum and the domination of the liberal elite, Hague hoped to consolidate support from the party's core support base and extend its appeal to former Labour voters who were unsatisfied by the actions of the Labour government and supported the tough stance taken by Hague, particularly on the issues of the single currency, asylum and their repercussions for British nationhood and identity.

This approach was not supported by modernisers within the Conservative Party leadership who believed that they were part of the liberal elite. They also believed that rather than most British people belonging to Hague's mainstream majority, they instead, belonged to the liberal elite and if they did not belong, they aspired to. They believed the real majority of Britons shared the modernisers' beliefs and values and that Hague was focusing on an outmoded understanding, or caricature, of British society.

However, Hague was certainly inclusive in his appeal to the electorate. Any British person could be a part of his mainstream majority, irrespective of their social or ethnic background or former voting behaviour, as long as they shared the traditionalists' common sense values and agenda. Hague never stopped reaching out to ethnic minority voters, encouraging them to vote Conservative or join the party, as long as they shared his values. Hague's appeal was inclusive, yet narrow.

The approach adopted by Hague after the abandonment of KTC did not constitute an explicit strategy which was officially adopted by the Conservative Party. Even before KTC was acknowledged to have been rejected, Hague had made the decision to change his approach to promoting the party as a government-in-waiting and also to maximising its electoral support at the polls. The obvious lack of acceptance of KTC was indicated by the need for the second strategy paper, 'Conceding and Moving On' and the speed with which Hague and his traditionalist colleagues distanced themselves from KTC, for example the start of a mini-campaign on the issue of asylum which commenced in the summer of 1999, indicated their lack of commitment to making it a success.

The new approach did not have a formal title and it was not officially adopted by the Shadow Cabinet. Attempting to formally introduce the new approach would have caused serious dissent from the modernisers within the Shadow Cabinet and Hague feared the possibility of high-profile resignations from individuals who would not have publicly lent their support to such a strategy. However, from the summer of 1999 a de facto strategy, based around CSR, was employed. It was a de facto strategy because it was not formalised or explicitly referred to but Hague still approached the task of revitalising his party, with clear methods to achieve his goals. Hague had a clear objective of maximising his party's electoral support before the forthcoming General Election and by focusing on shoring up the party's core support and also broadening his party's appeal to disaffected former Labour voters by developing particular policies, he also had clear means of achieving his goal. The traditionalists within the Shadow Cabinet largely supported Hague's approach, even if some were unaware of just how coherent the strategy was. Hague was often criticised for jumping on band-wagons and resorting to populist opportunism to gain news coverage. However, in reality he had a distinct and coherent, yet informal, strategy. The

criticism that he relied on tactics, without an underlying strategy resulted from few people, apart from his closest advisors and colleagues, being aware of his unofficial strategy. His approach could not be formalised for fear of antagonising the modernisers within the party leadership.

There were some members of the traditionalist grouping such as Lord Strathclyde, Michael Ancram and Ann Widdecombe who lent Hague their wholehearted support on all aspects of the approach and others who found some elements uncomfortable, for example, Charles Hendry's criticism of the prominence of asylum within the party's day-to-day agenda and the tone with which Hague used to promote the policy. However, after the moderniser exodus from CCO and after several significant reshuffles, influence had been transferred to the traditionalists who were now dominant within the Shadow Cabinet and within Hague's personal team of advisors.

It is very much apparent that increasingly, throughout the second half of the 1997-2001 parliament, Conservative Party 'leadership' actually referred to the traditionalists within the Shadow Cabinet and within Hague's personal team. The de facto strategy with which Hague led his party's attempts to maximise its electoral fortunes was largely supported by traditionalists within the Shadow Cabinet and it was traditionalists who were supportive of and responsible for the prominence of the issues of asylum and the single currency within the long and short 2001 General Election campaigns. Hague and the traditionalists simply paid lip service to the demands of the modernisers by including but not emphasising, the party's policies on social inclusion and the public services. The traditionalist/moderniser schism identified within chapter three was based around members of the Conservative leadership and parliamentary party's conceptualisation of nationhood and national identity.

However, as the prominence of those concepts increased within the party's later strategic decision-making, the schism was emphasised. Hague's appeals to the mainstream majority and his attacks on the liberal elite were indicative of the wranglings within the party leadership throughout the parliament. However, the references to the mainstream majority and the liberal elite vastly increased throughout the latter half of the parliament and this was in direct response to the new-found dominance of the traditionalists within the Shadow Cabinet and Hague's advisory team.

There were of course some grey areas within the traditionalist/moderniser dichotomy. As chapter three identified, as far as Hague and George Osborne's conceptualisations of British nationhood and identity were concerned, they were clearly forward-looking modernisers. However, as the parliament progressed they adopted a traditionalist approach to the politics of nationhood and the strategic utilisation of those concepts. Hague certainly found himself completely supported by his personal team, including Amanda Platell and Nick Wood and this unity was indicative of a panic which had set in within Hague's team, when, by the summer of 1999, the party and Hague's standing in the opinion polls had not made improvements since the 1997 election defeat. KTC was a long-term strategy. It was based around the party slowly winning the confidence of the British electorate by demonstrating that it had understood the reasons for its defeat and had moved on and developed policies on the issues that mattered to the people. There would not be sudden successes. By the mid-point of the parliament, Hague and his traditionalist supporters were desperate for an improvement in the polls. The party's perceived success in the June 1999 European elections, demonstrated to the traditionalists that the party could be successful if it focused its campaigns on traditional Conservative policies. The party had succeeded when it based its appeal on a strong, coherent, policy which was distinct from that of the

Labour government and which explicitly championed British nationhood and British national identity.

The approach to maximising the party's support at the next General Election was based on repeating the message that the Conservative Party was the only party which would defend Britain's interests against the external and internal enemies of the EU, increasing numbers of bogus asylum seekers and the liberal elite. Hague's tone and language was designed to generate headlines and shock the mainstream majority into voting Conservative.

However, it did appear that Hague was implementing a dual strategy. CSR and TCS were based upon social inclusion and the party's policies on the public services, and mention of asylum policy was reduced to a minimum. At the same time, the day-to-day agenda of the party was based around the promotion of its approach to the politics of nationhood, in the form of policies on European integration and asylum. Hague and the traditionalists were aware that any potential 'government-in-waiting' had to have a coherent set of policies on the public services and attention was drawn to those policies in, for example, CSR, TCS and the party's brief campaign on 'You paid the taxes so where are the...'. These attempts were considered by the modernisers as 'too little, too late' but they were employed to satisfy high-profile modernisers' demands for the party to turn its attention to the issues they believed, mattered the most to the electorate. Hague was aware that if the party completely ignored those issues, he could face rebellion from his moderniser colleagues within the Shadow Cabinet. With a General Election rapidly approaching, a public display of unity had to be maintained.

Hague's approach to maximising the party's support during the latter half of the parliament was never formalised with a title and so it was never referred to as a 'core vote' or 'core vote plus' strategy by Hague or his colleagues. However, the phrases have been used by commentators to account for the strategic decisions made by Hague and as a retrospective means of dealing with criticism that after KTC, the party was devoid of a strategy. In reality, Hague saw his approach as much wider than CVP because he appealed to the mainstream majority. The traditionalists directed their appeal to all British people, irrespective of their social or ethnic background, as long as they shared Hague's commonsense values.

The introduction to chapter four discussed the theory that there were two phases to Hague's leadership, the first half of the parliament being concerned with reaching out to ethnic and social minorities and the latter half being concerned with purely traditionalist issues, such as the promotion of family values and asylum. It was suggested that Hague ceased to extend his free market ideals beyond the realms of economics to social politics in the latter phase. Hague did, for example, oppose the repeal of section 28 of the Local Government Act but right from the start of his leadership he spoke out in defence of socially conservative ideals, including, for example, the defence of marriage and the traditional family unit, in a speech to the SMF in January 1998 (Hague, 1998b, pp.53-68) Analysing Hague's approach to the politics of nationhood and his use of national identity as part of his strategic decision-making, is useful to determine whether the above theory is correct because the politics of nationhood spans both economics and social politics. As far as the politics of identity are concerned, Hague maintained his modernising conceptualisation of British nationhood and national identity throughout the parliament and he continued to explicitly appeal to voters from ethnic communities. He never ceased to appeal to all

British voters, irrespective of their social and ethnic background. However, it is certainly true that there were two phases to Hague's leadership. The metamorphosis can be attributed to desperation and panic from within the traditionalists at the mid-point of Hague's leadership, just preceding and including the summer of 1999. Hague was not unwilling to extend his free market ideals to social politics and neither did he turn to blatant opportunism to gather support, he simply craved improvement in the opinion polls, which, as Hague had anticipated at the mid-point of the parliament, KTC had failed to provide. In fear that the party was not making any headway within the opinion polls, the traditionalists developed a de facto strategy with their Leader to develop and promote policies, in particular on EMU and asylum, which they believed would shore up their core support base and broaden their support to disaffected former Labour voters. Short term successes were attractive to Hague who had never really supported KTC, not because he was unwilling to be socially liberal but because he did not believe that the party could wait for the long-term successes promised by the strategy. Hague was fearful that in the meantime he would lose the party's traditional core support, thus guaranteeing electoral oblivion. The leadership changed the tone and the language with which they discussed asylum and European integration, in the hope of shocking voters from the core and beyond, into supporting the party. It is not true to say that there was a clear divide across which Hague suddenly stopped reaching out. Hague spoke out genuinely about the issues that he cared about throughout the parliament and he never changed his forward-looking conceptualisation of British nationhood nor his desire to gather support throughout British society.

### 8.3 Hypotheses

The 'summary of the dissertation' outlined four hypotheses related to this research. This section will discuss whether those hypotheses were proven.

#### **Hypothesis One**

The first hypothesis stated that: during the leadership of William Hague, the concepts of British nationhood and national identity were understood differently within the party leadership. The third chapter clearly demonstrated that the hypothesis was proven by identifying two groups within the leadership and the parliamentary party: the modernisers and the traditionalists. The former were forward-looking in their understanding of nationhood and national identity. They focused on the present and future of British national identity and emphasised their pride in British multi-culturalism, diversity, tolerance, social justice and inclusion. The latter emphasised romantic views of a shared and unique culture and also myths and memories; attachment to political institutions; the retention of territorial integrity and sovereignty and sometimes, race. There were some shared themes such as stereotypical national characteristics but largely the modernisers and traditionalists were distinct in their conceptualisations. Therefore, those concepts were, indeed, understood differently within the party leadership. Hague's understanding of nationhood and national identity placed him firmly within the moderniser category and he remained so throughout the parliament. This was similar to other members of the leadership, there was no interchanging between the distinct division. However, demonstrated above was a change in the way that Hague believed these concepts could be strategically utilised. Hague's tone and language when referring to the politics of nationhood quickly became tougher and more strident as the 2001 General Election approached, however, his conceptualisation never swayed.

## **Hypothesis Two**

The second hypothesis stated that: during the leadership of William Hague, the Conservative Party employed the concepts of British nationhood and national identity within its strategy, to adapt to being in Opposition and to maximise its electoral support. Again, this was proven. The strategic role played by the politics of nationhood and Hague's appeals to the identity of the British people, increased in importance throughout the parliament. Apart from adequately resolving the wranglings over Europe, which threatened to destroy the party during the Major era, the politics of nationhood did not play a significant role in the party's survival strategy or KTC. However, throughout the latter half of the parliament they were considered by the traditionalists within the party leadership, to be the ground on which the election should be fought upon. The Labour government was considered to be the dominant force on the public services and because the politics of nationhood, in particular asylum and the single currency, were emotive issues and because the traditionalists believed the people shared their views on them, the traditionalists believed that by focusing on the politics of nationhood, they would appeal to disaffected former Labour voters, whilst at the same time shoring up the party's core support. Also prominent within the latter half of Hague's leadership was the belief that the country was in social and economic decline and that its identity was threatened, not only by bogus asylum seekers and European integration but by the dominance of the liberal elite, as symbolised by the contemporary Labour Party and its supporters.

## **Hypotheses Three and Four**

The third and fourth hypotheses are closely related and will be discussed together. The former stated that: the Conservative Party's strategy and its use of the concepts of British

nationhood and national identity within that strategy failed to maximise electoral support during the leadership of William Hague. This was followed by the final hypothesis which declared that: in the same period, the party leadership was not in agreement as to the optimum vote-maximising strategy available to it.

It has been ascertained within the preceding chapters that the party's use of nationhood and national identity did, indeed, fail to maximise its electoral support at the 2001 General Election. Although traditionalists believed the June 1999 European elections were a success for the Conservative Party, as the above analysis of the results and turnout indicated, the Conservative Party most definitely failed to *maximise* its support during the contest.

The Conservative Party failed to maximise its electoral success at the 2001 General Election because, when he abandoned KTC, Hague seemingly forgot that rejuvenating the party and preparing it for electoral success was not going to be a short-term process. He wanted immediate improvements in the opinion polls. KTC would have provided those results but not in the short term. Whilst discarding KTC, Hague also forgot the importance for the party to publicly acknowledge that it understood why it had suffered defeat in 1997 and that it had learnt from it and changed.

Instead of realising that the politics of nationhood should be part of a rounded strategy, focused towards fully adapting the party to its new position in Opposition, the politics of nationhood dominated the party's strategic decision-making in the latter half of the 1997-2001 parliament. It should have been obvious to the leadership that the Labour government would not enjoy an infinite 'honeymoon period' and that, to be considered a 'government-

in-waiting', the Conservative Party required a coherent and comprehensive set of policies. Instead, and as KTC warned against, the Conservative Party focused on issues that interested itself, not, which the opinion polls demonstrated interested the voters.

Although the Conservative Party focused upon the public services in its policy document, CSR and its manifesto, TCS, the day-to-day agenda of the party was squarely focused on the politics of nationhood, in particular, asylum and the European Union. The fatal flaw, within the de facto strategy, as shown by the opinion poll results discussed in the chapters above, was that those issues were not salient. The fourth hypothesis was also proven because it became apparent that the modernisers within the party leadership understood the fatal flaw of the de facto agenda. However, it was not grasped by the dominant traditionalists. The former understood that, as KTC dictated, the Conservative Party had to demonstrate that it understood what the people really cared about and that it had the policies to deal with those issues. As all the opinion polls revealed, the electorate focused upon the public services, not the politics of nationhood. The single currency and asylum were not salient and the former had been negated by the promise of a referendum. Quite simply the 2001 General Election was not the electorate's last chance to save the pound.

The initial survival strategy was successful because the party survived and adapted to being in Opposition. However, subsequent strategic decision-making was not successful because the party did not adapt to being in Opposition in a political environment dominated by the Labour Party. The latter de facto strategy could not have competed against the Labour Party, not only because they led on the most salient of issues, the public services but because the informal nature of the strategy meant that it was unable to encompass the entire parliamentary party. KTC, had it been given the opportunity and the time to function fully,

would have developed the Conservative Party into a government-in-waiting and an Opposition to the Labour Government. Instead Hague succeeded only in deepening, not broadening his party's support.

The opinion polls revealed throughout the latter half of the parliament that Hague's strategy was not succeeding in maximising the party's electoral support. So why did Hague continue with his fatally flawed de facto strategy? The most significant reason was that throughout the second half of the parliament Hague was very aware that the clock was ticking until the next General Election. He quite simply did not have the time to develop and implement an alternative approach. Instead he latched on to the party's perceived success at the 1999 European elections and consoled himself with the possibility that appealing to the mainstream majority and repeating his increasingly strident policies on the politics of nationhood, would eventually persuade disaffected former Labour voters to support the Conservative Party. It was unfortunate that Hague focused on the perceived successes of the European elections, rather than the implicit warnings of the May 5<sup>th</sup> 2000, Romsey by-election.

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## Appendix I

### Interviewee Biographies (accounting for the 1997-2001 parliament)

#### **Ancram QC MP, The Rt Hon Michael**

- June 1997 – June 1998, Spokesman for Constitutional Affairs
- June 1998 – October 1998, Deputy Party Chairman
- October 1998 onwards, Chairman of the Conservative Party
- Strategy Group and Leader's Meeting member, Gang of Four member throughout 2001 General Election

#### **Body, Sir Richard**

- Conservative MP for forty years, wrote 'England for the English' in 2001

#### **Cooper, Andrew**

- June 1997 – mid-1998, Director of Political Operations and Communications
- Mid-1998 – December 1999 (left amid claims of leaking against Hague)
- Opinion analyst and strategist who co-authored KTC and 'Conceding and Moving On'
- Worked with Archie Norman on reforms to Conservative Central Office
- Involved in the writing of Portillo's 2000 conference speech

#### **Finkelstein, Danny**

- 1995 – end of 1999, Director of Conservative Research Department
- Attended Leader's Meeting as Director of Policy
- Strategist who co-authored KTC and 'Conceding and Moving On' and helped prepare Hague for Prime Minister's Questions
- In Hague's so-called 'A-Team' of senior MPs and advisors.

#### **Fowler, The Rt Hon The Lord**

- June 1997 – June 1999, Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment

#### **Garnier QC MP, Edward**

- June 1997 – June 1999, Spokesman for Lord Chancellor's Department
- June 1999 – September 2001, Shadow Attorney General

#### **Gooderham, Malcolm**

- 2000 onwards, Portillo's spin doctor
- 2001 election campaign, discovered briefing against Hague but not removed by Portillo

#### **Hague MP, The Rt Hon William**

- June 1997 – September 2001, Leader of the Conservative Party

**Hannan MEP, Daniel**

- June 1999 onwards, Member of the European Parliament, South East Region
- 1994 – 1999, Director of the European Research Group
- 1996 onwards, leader writer for The Telegraph
- 1997 – 1998, special advisor to Michael Howard
- 1999 onwards, speech writer for Hague

**Heathcoat-Amory MP, The Rt Hon David**

- June 1997 – February 2000, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury
- February 2000 – September 2001, Shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

**Hendry MP, Charles**

- May – June 1997, ran Hague's leadership campaign
- June 1997 – December 1997, Hague's Chief of Staff
- December 1997 – start of 1999, Head of the Business Liaison Unit
- Close to Hague throughout the parliament

**Henley, The Lord**

- June 1997 – July 1998, Opposition Spokesman in the Lords for Home Affairs
- July 1998 – September 2001, Opposition Chief Whip in the Lords

**Johnson MP, Boris**

- 1999 onwards, Editor of The Spectator

**Lansley OBE MP, Andrew**

- May 1998 onwards, Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party with responsibility for Policy Renewal
- June 1999 – September 2001, Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office and Policy Renewal, member of Strategy Group
- Campaign manager for the 1999 European Parliamentary Elections
- In Hague's so-called 'A-Team' of senior MPs and advisors.
- Director of Listening to Britain
- Took part in constructing Believing in Britain
- Co-architect of 2001 General Election campaign with Tim Collins
- Attended Leader's Meeting and member of Gang of Four

**Lilley MP, The Rt Hon Peter**

- June 1997 – June 1999, Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer
- June 1998 onwards, Deputy Leader of the Conservative Party with responsibility for policy review
- Introduced Listening to Britain

**Massow, Ivan**

- August 2000 – entrepreneur supporter defected from the Conservative Party describing it as 'bigoted'
- Had fought Jeffrey Archer and Steve Norris in contest to select a candidate for London mayoral election

**Norman MP, Archie**

- June 1997 – July 1998, Vice – Chairman of the Conservative Party with responsibility for the party's reform and renewal programme
- July 1998 onwards, Chief Executive of the Conservative Party with specific brief to modernise Conservative Central Office
- June 1999 – February 2000, Shadow Minister for Europe
- February 2000 – September 2001, Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, member of Strategy Group
- Attended Leader's Meeting

**Nye, Rick**

- Beginning of 2000 onwards, Director of Conservative Research Department
- Strategist who attended Leader's Meeting and Strategy Group

**Osborne MP, George**

- June 1997 – September 2001, Hague's Private Secretary and Secretary to the Shadow Cabinet
- Leadership campaign onwards, speech writer for Hague, including preparation for Prime Minister's Questions
- Attended Leader's Meeting

**Spicer MP, Sir Michael**

- Prominent back bencher, as shown by September 2001 election as Chairman of the 1922 Committee

**Strathclyde, The Rt Hon The Lord**

- June 1997 – June 1998, Chief Whip in the House of Lords
- June 1998 onwards, Leader of the Conservative Party and Opposition Spokesman on Constitutional Affairs in the House of Lords
- Member of the Strategy Group and attended Leader's Meeting

**Taylor of Warwick, The Lord**

- Conservative peer who denounced John Townend's, March 2001, public repudiation of multiculturalism

**Tebbit CH, The Rt Hon The Lord**

- Active Conservative Peer and broadcaster. A dedicated Eurosceptic and Vice-President of Conservative Way Forward

**Townend, John**

- Conservative backbencher who made speech denouncing multiculturalism, March 2001

**Wood, Nick**

- 1999 onwards, press advisor with responsibility of lobby briefings
- Attended Leaders Meeting

**Woodward MP, Shaun**

- June 1997 – December 2nd 1999, Shadow Spokesman for London. Sacked as result of public attack on Conservative Party policy on Section 28
- December 18th 1999, defects to the Labour Party calling the Conservative Party ‘bigoted’

## Appendix II

### Methodology

This appendix investigates the research methods employed within this dissertation. It will determine why document analysis and elite interviewing were chosen as suitable methods, the positives and negatives involved in utilising such methods and how, by protecting against the negative aspects, the reliability and validity of the data gained, could be secured. It will also discuss the practical difficulties inherent in this research project and how they were overcome.

Document analysis and elite interviewing were chosen because they would ensure that data could be generated which would test the four research hypotheses detailed in the 'summary of the dissertation'. Qualitative methods were ideal because the research was investigating the perceptions of politicians and strategists. The two research methods also compliment each other. They are ideal to be used together because the data that is generated by one can be used to 'back up' the other. For example, data contained in documents can be used to corroborate information revealed in an interview. Information that is generated from elite interviews can be used to describe why, for example, a particular speech was made and can also be used to fill in the gaps created by restricted access to documents.

Document analysis can be defined as the examination of anything written and this dissertation involved the analysis of speeches, books, autobiographies, letters, campaign literature, the transcripts of television programmes and newspaper and journal articles. Document analysis is an ideal method to study the Conservative Party because of the plethora of documents which are easily accessible. The Conservative Party Archive in the

Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, holds a vast collection of papers, there are many books devoted to the study of Conservatism, many autobiographies of prominent Conservative parliamentarians exist, the internet and think tanks such as the CPS hold many speeches, Hansard is readily available in libraries and on the internet and there are many journals. This research project also benefited from interviewees providing hard to find documents, although, as will be discussed below, when information is provided by interviewees or those close to the subject under study, it must always be asked why the material was provided?

Document analysis enabled the 1997-2001 parliament to be examined in its entirety. For example, speeches made by Hague in the early months of his leadership could be compared and contrasted with those made in the latter months. This research method is also invaluable because it enables the analysis of individuals' views at the time that, for example, they made a speech. Unlike in an interview situation, they do not have the luxury of hindsight. This positive aspect is only relevant to certain forms of document analysis, such as speeches and not, for example, to the examination of autobiographical material, which would have been written after an event, such as the making of a key-note speech. Such material should be analysed with an awareness of the author's benefit of hindsight, however, as long as this is borne in mind, document analysis is an ideal way to ascertain the views of people, including those who will not or cannot, be interviewed.

Document analysis is also an economical research method. Taking into consideration travel to and from libraries and archives, which in the case of this research project was minimal, the financial cost involved is negligible. The true cost, however, is one of time. Analysing documents is time-consuming. Documents must be examined before it can be

decided whether they are useful or relevant. The Conservative Party Archive was not especially useful for this research project. Although some 1997 and 2001 General Election campaign literature was available, the vast majority of the documents pertinent to Hague's leadership were unavailable because they were yet to be organised and catalogued. The Archive was, however, rich in published material such as *Crossbow* and other journals published by Conservative groups. Where access to some documents was denied, elite interviewing generated much relevant and exciting data.

When examining any document, it must be taken into consideration that if an individual has written a piece which will be published, they are writing it in the knowledge that it will be read, possibly by many people. If the author is happy for it to be read and analysed, do they have an agenda which must be understood before the document can be analysed to its fullest? Speeches may well be taken to demonstrate the beliefs that an individual held at the time but a public speech means a public agenda. Autobiographies may detail an individual's beliefs but they have been written with the benefit of hindsight, in the knowledge that they will be analysed by many.

With the exception of 'Kitchen Table Conservatives' and 'Conceding and Moving On', the documents analysed as part of this research project were published documents. Published documents were of particular relevance because the dissertation examined the Conservative Party leadership's public approach to the politics of nationhood, as well as the leadership's own personal understanding of British nationhood and national identity. Examining speeches, manifestoes, newspaper articles and Hansard, eliminated the need to ask why each document had been preserved, as would be the case with collections of private papers. Public speeches made by Hague were, for example, documented by the websites of *The*

*Guardian, The Daily Telegraph* and the Conservative Party. As soon as public speeches are made or newspaper articles written, they remain public and easily accessible which removes the doubt as to why Hague or the Conservative Party specifically preserved it. Similarly, the accessibility and availability of documents from multiple sources, particularly on the internet, ensured that the completeness of a document could be counted upon. A single source, such as the Conservative Party itself, did not need to be relied upon. The information provided by papers, such as 'Kitchen Table Conservatives' could be corroborated by data provided by elite interviewing.

So, the validity of document analysis is high because documents can be considered a 'first hand account' but it is also compromised because of the possibility that authors are creative in their accounts of events because they want to protect themselves or inflate their status. In this research project, data obtained from, for example, autobiographies could be triangulated with data obtained from elite interviews.<sup>27</sup>

This research project also involved the use of semi-structured, elite interviews. Elite interviews are those that involve questioning people with such a status that allows them to have access to privileged information. This does not mean that they naturally have social, political or economic status but in the case of this research project, where members of the party's leadership and influential strategists were interviewed, they often did. Elite interviewees have privileged knowledge and are therefore treated as unique. This uniqueness means that the data generated from interviewing them does not have to be in a rigidly uniform format because there will not be any other data that will be directly comparable. For example, although Archie Norman and Lord Strathclyde were both

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<sup>27</sup> This will be discussed more fully below.

members of the party leadership, their experiences and inherent beliefs were so different as to make the information received unique to each person and to make each interviewee 'elite'.

So, a semi-structured format is ideal for elite interviewing. Certain topics will necessitate discussion but when the interviewer is aware that the interviewee is uniquely knowledgeable about the interview topic, rigid questions are not necessary. The interviews conducted for this dissertation alternated between structured phases and totally unstructured phases. The former was used to gain particular information from each respondent, for example by asking every interviewee: 'what does British national identity mean to you?' The latter was implemented when either the interviewee was providing valuable data without the need for prompting questions or when questioning an individual about an event or experience which was specific to them. For example, John Townend and The Lord Taylor of Warwick were asked specific questions about their personal involvement in the row generated by the former's critique of multi-culturalism. Unique data was generated. However, there would have been nothing gained by asking Townend or Taylor about the development of party strategy. Questions focused on strategy development, were tailored to interviewees involved in the process, such as Danny Finkelstein and Hague himself. Open-ended questions, such as 'what does British national identity mean to you?', were used to encourage interviewees to talk at length so that as much information as possible could be gleaned.

There are many inherent positive aspects of using interviews to generate data. Any uncertainties can be queried at the time of the interview, whether it is conducted face-to-face or by telephone. Some interviewees were also willing to be contacted at a later date if

any points needed to be clarified. The information received from interviews also facilitates real understanding of a topic. Questionnaires may explain *what* happened but interviews gain real understanding as to *why* and *how*. Unique information provided by interviewees enables a researcher to gain a real understanding.

This research project benefited from the significant number of interviews conducted (twenty-six) and also the range of people interviewed. All interviewees held unique positions within the 1997-2001 parliament, whether it was within the Shadow Cabinet, within the party's team of strategists or as individuals involved in particular events. People were interviewed who held important positions throughout the whole parliament, or who were influential during either the first or second phases of Hague's leadership. A cross-section of traditionalists and modernisers were also interviewed, whether they originated from the parliamentary party, the leadership or CCO. Of course, the project was augmented by an interview with Hague.

These factors meant that the twenty-six people interviewed, constituted a large proportion of those who held significant positions within Hague's leadership. Their contributions were also significant for their unique value and also by the fact that information gathered throughout the interviews, was not done so in the need to make statistical generalisations to the wider Conservative population. The research based around the leadership's conceptualisation of British national identity and the leadership's development and implementation of strategy, not the understanding of Britishness held by the wider Conservative population. Interviewees were significant because they were unique people with privileged information that was valuable in its own right.

All interviews were conducted less than three years after the 2001 General Election which meant that events were fresh in the minds of those questioned, however it did mean that because individuals were no longer involved with the Conservative Party, they were difficult to locate. However, this project enjoyed a snowball effect, whereby those already interviewed were often able and willing to provide contact details of those who were difficult to locate. This was particularly useful in regards to the young CCO modernisers who had left the party in mid-1999. However, whilst welcoming the opportunity to maximise the number of respondents, it must always be remembered that people will only facilitate contact with others who they believe will support their own agenda. This research project benefited from a good balance of modernisers and traditionalists and data was not distorted by input from one group over the other. Finally, due to extra funding from the ESRC, which is available to all research students to purchase books and complete fieldwork, document analysis and elite interviews, most of which of the latter necessitated a journey from Sheffield to London, could be completed. The research methods used in conjunction with the funding available, made this a viable and affordable research project.

However, there are drawbacks to the use of elite interviewing. Gaining access to potential interviewees is not guaranteed. Already discussed was the snowball effect experienced within this project. The benefits of such a method are that those individuals already interviewed will often make contact with potential interviewees, warning them that they will be contacted and advising them that the research is valid and sensible. This facilitates the gaining of access. However, even without the advantage of being introduced, access to potential interviews can be increased by a number of simple measures. Writing on University headed notepaper, making reference to supervisors who are recognised as authorities in the field, mentioning that the project has received funding from the ESRC.

giving the title and a clear description of the research and stating how invaluable a potential respondent's contribution would be, are all ways that will persuade an individual to consent to being interviewed. It is also vital to give the person the opportunity of anonymity, to decline to be audio-recorded, to be provided with a more substantial outline of the project before being interviewed and to be able to read through a transcript of their interview after its completion and finally, to be questioned in the environment of their choice. During this research project, people were interviewed in their offices and homes, in convenient restaurants or cafes and in the case of two former modernising strategists, at convenient moments during a conference organised by their newly formed polling company.

Of the twenty-six people interviewed, only two wished to remain anonymous and due to time and travel constraints, one interview was conducted by telephone. Descriptions within the dissertation, of the importance of the roles of those who wished to remain anonymous, minimised the negative impact on the significance of their interview data and apart from the inability to make a recording, the interview conducted by telephone was of the same length and enjoyed the same advantage of being able to clarify points, as those conducted face-to-face. One interviewee desired a fuller outline of the research project before being questioned and seven requested a viewing of the interview transcript. Of those seven, three demanded grammatical alterations as, of course, interview quotes were included verbatim.

A minority of interviewees agreed or declined to be questioned within two days of request letters being distributed and the vast majority of those who intended to respond, did so in the following two weeks. From this date, no potential interviewee made either a positive or negative response. Replies were made via e-mail, telephone and mostly letter, as all options were detailed in the initial letter. Three weeks after initial contact, a second letter

was sent to those who had not responded. A minority of people responded at this point but when no reply was received a third letter was sent and if that was unsuccessful it was reasonably assumed that the individual did not want to participate. Only when a potential interviewee had more than one business venture or multiple employers, were letters distributed to multiple addresses. Some investigation was required to locate some individuals who had either left CCO or parliament. Word of mouth, as already mentioned was invaluable, as was 'Who's Who' and internet searches. In no cases was a potential interviewee uncontactable.

Most interviewees had many demands on their time and interviews were sometimes shorter in length than would have been ideal. However, as with many potential pitfalls of conducting elite interviewing, the only safeguard was to be as prepared as possible. Audio equipment was organised and tested before contact time with an interviewee began and of course, familiarity with and preparation of interview questions was of the highest importance. This enabled interviews to be conducted as smoothly and as efficiently as possible. This was of particular importance in the single instance of an interview being conducted by telephone and on the two occasions that an interviewee declined to be audio recorded. It would be impossible to note down responses to questions, if the intended questions were not adequately prepared.

At all times the anonymity of two interviewees was respected, as was the consistent use of verbatim quotes.<sup>28</sup> Equally, when interviewees made clear that the interview had come to and end and they were talking freely, no 'off the record' information was included 'on the

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<sup>28</sup> This was in the exception of three interviewees who demanded grammatical corrections, which on each account, did not alter the substance of the excerpts.

record' in the dissertation. Although fascinating data was received in this way, the wishes of the interviewees were respected at all times.

One final disadvantage of elite interviewing is that researchers can never be sure that the interviewee is being entirely truthful, either intentionally because they have a personal agenda or through genuine mistake. This research project benefits from interviews being conducted less than three years after the 2001 General Election, meaning that memories will not have been distorted over the passage of time. However, the optimum method to increase the reliability of interview-generated data is to triangulate with other interviewee responses and with other research methods, in this case the analysis of documents. In essence, never treat interview data as purely factual. Instead treat the fact that it has been said as the data (Manheim and Rich, 1995, p.163).

This was of particular relevance in relation to one senior anonymous interviewee whose recollections of Hague's leadership were vastly different to that of any of his colleagues, whether they be traditionalists, modernisers or Hague, himself. For example, he stated that the Core Vote strategy was explicitly referred to by the party leadership and was implemented from the latter half of 1999. The fact that every other respondent failed to support his claims, leads to the reasonable assertion that he was engaged in a retrospective attempt to 'clear up' issues that may have been damaging to the party at the time. Only by interviewing enough individuals from across the moderniser/traditionalist divide and who were influential throughout the 1997-2001 parliament could this personal agenda be identified, clarified and understood.

Elite interviewing was ideal for gaining the understanding of how senior Conservatives conceptualised British nationhood and national identity, throughout the 1997-2001 parliament and document analysis was particularly useful in understanding the party's public approach to the politics of nationhood. Although each research method enjoyed a specialisation of its own, they complimented each other and enabled data generated to be triangulated, thus ensuring conclusions to be valid, reliable and substantially consolidated. No research method is perfect and it is of paramount importance that before embarking on a research project and specifically any periods of fieldwork, that the potential pitfalls of any research method are understood and protected against. Only by achieving this understanding can a researcher be certain that their conclusions are valid and reliable.