

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY & PERCEPTIONS OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES

TITLE: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE BRITISH
MIDDLE CLASSES, 1951 - 1974

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Abstract

“The Conservative Party and Perceptions of the British Middle Classes, 1951 – 1974,” explores conceptions of middle-class voters at various levels of the party organization after the Second World War. Since Benjamin Disraeli, Conservatives have endeavoured to represent national rather than sectional interests and appeal widely to a growing electorate. Yet, the middle classes and their interests have also enjoyed a special position in the Conservative political imagination often because the group insists they receive special consideration. It proved especially difficult to juggle these priorities after 1951 when Conservatives encountered two colliding challenges: the middle classes growing at a rapid rate, failing to form a unified outlook or identity, and the limited appeal of consumer rhetoric and interests owing to the uneven experience of affluence and prosperity. Conservative ideas and policies failed to acknowledge and resonate with the changing nature of their core supporters and antiquated local party organization reinforced feelings of alienation from and mistrust of new members of the middle classes as well as affluent workers. This research shows that there was no clear-cut path between postwar Conservatism to Margaret Thatcher’s brand of Conservatism in which the individual, self-sufficient and acquisitive middle-class consumer became the champion. Moreover, the Conservative Party revealed, in these discussions, that it was much less ideologically certain than narratives have allowed previously.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One The Middle Classes in Britain after 1951	41
Chapter Two The Conservative Party and the Political Discourse on the Middle Classes	78
Chapter Three The Conservative Constituency Associations	134
Chapter Four The Bow Group: Conservatives Thinking about the Middle Classes	179
Chapter Five The Case of South West Herts, Gilbert Longden and Conservative Discussions on the Middle Classes (1951 – 1974)	236
Conclusion	296
Bibliography	308

Tables and Figures

Table 1

Socio-economic group

68

Introduction

The task of education [political education for the Party] will remain and will become increasingly necessary if hard times impose on hard policies – that is to say, policies which go against the grain of traditional Conservatism – on the Government. For the leaders rely upon the support of a body which is largely middle-class, with a very powerful element of the lower middle-class in it; and this is a body to which traditional Conservatism makes an almost passionate appeal. Mr. Angus Maude ... has made clear the tribulations under which the middle-class feels itself to be suffering, and indeed, as a class, it is paying dearest for the welfare state... But one is apt to forget the force with which the lower middle-class, which is furthest from its goal, struggles towards a state in which thrift and personal effort will secure individual advantages.- Francis Boyd, 1953.¹

It is, of course, not only in the *Sunday Times*, that the middle class has found a voice in the past fortnight. Ever since the Tonbridge result ... men and women on salaries, men and women on fixed incomes, men and women earning from £1000 to £3000 a year, have been addressing indignant letters to editors of all the best papers, which they can still afford to buy ... The simple truth is that far too much is being read into the Tonbridge result ... One fact which seems to have escaped a lot of commentators is that there are just not that number of middle class voters, even in Tonbridge, unless middle class is defined so widely that it has no political significance. Even more certainly there are not the number of middle-class voters who are affected by the kind of factors which seem to oppress correspondents to the *Sunday Times*. Of course, Tonbridge is a dormitory area, and a prosperous one at that, but that does not mean that its streets are paved with unpaid school bills and unmet supertax demands. There may be good reasons why the Government should do more for the middle class, but the idea that the middle class is rebelling is not one. - Henry Fairlie, 1956.²

Britain used to be a pyramid society. The ruling few were at the top, and the moneyless masses were at the bottom. We are turning into a diamond society, where the middle classes predominate – in purchasing power, trend-setting and votes. Toryism was once the party of the apex. Since 1945, it has been fighting a battle for the diamond ... The growth of our diamond society is reflected in the rising proportion of young people at the Tory Conference. They are the products of the educational escalator, first generation of the enlarging middle classes; managers, technicians, executives, founders of businesses, organization men. For them, the traditional

¹ Francis Boyd, “Confident Conservatives,” *The Spectator*, 16 October 1953, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/16th-october-1953/8/confident-conservatives> (accessed 12 May 2015).

² Henry Fairlie, “Political Commentary,” *The Spectator*, 29 June 1956, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/29th-june-1956/6/political-cominentary> (accessed 12 May 2015).

Toryism of Church and Empire mean nothing ... As the beneficiaries of change and opportunity, they want more of both. – Charles Curran, 1965.³

The Conservative Party has crafted much of its electoral success since 1900 by creating wide electoral appeal, yet the middle classes of Britain have also received special attentions in Party policy, rhetoric and thinking. The prominent position of the middle classes within the Tory political imagination, however, does not mean that the relationship has always been harmonious and that support from these electors has been simple to secure. Numerically, the middle classes represent a minority of voters.⁴ Whether according to definitions established in Census data or survey and market research models, the manual working classes have represented a “clear majority” of the voting population throughout the 20th Century.⁵ This imbalance might have posed a threat to Conservative power except they were able to use the themes of national unity, which served as a contrasting characteristic to the Labour Party, and appeal to women and workers with specific policies and rhetoric. Conservatives never conquered the challenges posed by the mass franchise completely but they navigated its hurdles and secured electoral success by creating coalitions of support at a number of different moments.

³ Charles Curran, MP, “Strip-Tease Politics,” *The Spectator* 15 October 1965, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/15th-october-1965/8/strip-tease-politics> (accessed 12 May 2015).

⁴ Following the Third Reform Act (1884), the franchise was extended to rural householders. The franchise, therefore, added 1.76 million voters and two-thirds of the adult male population had the vote. Most significantly, new voters were largely agricultural labourers and “for the first time the electorate in both borough and county seats was dominated by the laboring classes.” E.H.H. Green, “An Age of Transition: An Introductory Essay,” *Parliamentary History*, 16(1) (Feb., 1997), 11. The Representation of the People Act (1918) further extended the franchise to all men over the age of 21 and women, who owned property, over the age of 30.

⁵ Robert Waller, “Conservative Electoral Support and Social Class,” in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, eds., *The Conservative Century: The Conservative party since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 580.

After 1950, class-based politics became supposedly less relevant to the postwar electorate. Certainly, between 1950 and 1970, the Conservative share of the middle-class vote fell from four-fifths to three-fifths, and the Labour Party's share of the working-class vote fell from three-fifths to less than half in the same period.⁶ This realignment suited the Conservatives since they claimed to represent national rather than sectional interests. But, the Conservatives were forced to deviate from their position because the middle classes frequently demanded they be heard as a separate and unique social category. In response, the Conservatives pandered to the middle classes and invoked an historic and special relationship in their appeals. They argued that they understood and represented the interests of the middle classes better than the other political parties. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Conservatives also sought to establish themselves in office as the purveyors of affluence and they appealed to the middle classes predominantly as consumers. The Tories promised to increase opportunities for home ownership, reduce the burden of taxation and control inflation in order to increase buying power, but they remained confronted with a vocal and seemingly unendingly frustrated and discontented middle classes.

This dissertation's primary aim is to examine how the Conservative Party conceptualized and engaged with their "core supporters," the middle classes, during the 1950s and 1960s. This research will show that discussions within the Conservative Party centered on economic aspects of middle class identity. Using local sources alongside writings produced by extra-parliamentary groups as well as public and political

⁶ Dennis Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 143.

discussions at the national level, this study will show that the Conservatives tried to engage with the middle classes as consumers since the Party collectively believed the middle classes' economic position and opportunities to improve their standard of living was their prime motivation for political participation.⁷ But social change, brought about by full and stable employment, as well as increased income and wages, meant that previously rigid social hierarchies shifted and the boundaries of the middle classes expanded. The Party's efforts to relate to these voters simply as consumers, masked its struggle to come to terms with a dynamic and fragmented middle class. Consumer-based rhetoric (employing gendered connotations when it suited) often glossed over competing interests, values or tensions within the middle classes and across all classes. Yet as Avner Offer has observed about their political agency: "Consumers have little in common, and are difficult to mobilize for collective action."⁸ Numerical growth especially within the middle and lower sections of the middle classes meant that consumer-centric policies did not always speak to the actual experiences or interests of many within the supposed core constituency of the Party. As such, the Conservatives found themselves at odds with the middle classes at key intervals throughout the period when consumer-oriented policies helped return the Party to power in 1951 and kept them in office for over a decade. The most vocal of the discontented middle classes certainly wanted greater access to consumer comforts, but conspicuous consumption and the prospect of being seen as *the* party of such values also sat uneasily with some party members and core supporters. This

⁷ The constituencies studied here are centered in South East England.

⁸ Avner Offer, "British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c.1950 – 2000," *Contemporary British History* 22(4) (December 2008), 13.

research, therefore, also highlights the tensions between economic and cultural aspects of middle class identity as it related to Conservative ideas, ideology, and policies.

As we shall see, the Conservatives themselves had difficulty defining who the middle classes actually were in this period, and so a note regarding the terminology of class in this dissertation is appropriate at this point. The terms middle class and middle classes evoke weighty debates regarding class formation, identity and consciousness. This dissertation will wade into some of these discussions, especially as it relates to the impact of postwar social change on the size and nature of the middle classes. Throughout this study, the term “middle classes” will be employed to describe those individuals who sat between the aristocracy and landed gentry at the top of the socio-economic order and the bulk of manual workers. This plural form of the label, rather than a singular “middle class,” calls attention to the shifting boundaries of this broad and diverse social group and its rapid rate of growth after 1945 rather than to its presumed oppositional relationship with the working classes as informed by Marxist political theory. The middle classes were fragmented and, while members of this group shared some overlapping interests, they did not develop a cohesive unified vision or organized means through which to achieve their goals. Many within the middle classes grew frustrated with the Conservatives because the Party assumed, and appealed to, the middle classes as a monolithic social category whose interests mostly aligned with those of idealized consumers.

The Party’s efforts to consolidate the demands of the middle classes into those of consumers were partly due to political expediency. The consumer, as Peter Gurney observes, “began to exert a hegemonic influence across both polity and civil society,

shaping the epistemologies and languages through which the political and economic domains were thought and represented.”⁹ The Conservatives understood this shift and capitalized, especially with women voters. During the First World War, the Conservatives appealed to women in their capacity as housewives and, as such, the primary consumer of goods for the family and household but the Party was more concerned with simply “educating” them on their newly won duties as voters.¹⁰ Following the Second World War, female voters were featured at the forefront of Conservative propaganda as consumers, and “shopping” became a matter of “utmost national importance.” Matthew Hendley observes that Conservatives saw the aspirations of women as one and the same as “an idealized vision of British middle class existence with a modern house complete with running water, a garden and a kitchen at the top of the list”.¹¹ The act of shopping became linked with a justification for citizenship and it helped the Party attack the system of economic controls offered by Labour.¹²

Invoking consumer-centric ideas and policies allowed the Tories to capitalize on the postwar economic boom and appeal widely to voters, who were tired of austerity and controls. As Offer has suggested, “The category of consumer includes everybody. It is thus one of the largest social categories.”¹³ The problem with this sweeping generalization, however, was that it facilitated characterizations and understandings of the

⁹ Peter Gurney, “The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain,” *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (December 2005), 959.

¹⁰ Matthew Hendley, “Citizens or Consumers? British Conservative Political Propaganda toward Women in the Two World Wars,” in Ho Hon Leung, Matthew Hendley, Robert W. Compton, and Brian D. Haley, eds., *Imagining Globalization: Language, Identities, and Boundaries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 129-133.

¹¹ Hendley, “Citizens or Consumers?” 136.

¹² Hendley, “Citizens or Consumers?” 137.

¹³ Offer, “British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c.1950 – 2000,” 13.

electorate that were too simplistic. Within this expansive category there were and are specialized actors, including female consumers, queer consumers, working and middle-class consumers, the imperial consumer, male consumers, and young consumers to name but a few.¹⁴ In creating and re-forming these social identities, an underlying binary between the “active male producer” and a “passive female consumer” persisted from the Victorian period.¹⁵ This binary establishes an unequal power relationship in which the former is the aggressor (strong and powerful) and the latter is considered the victim (weak). In the twentieth century, however, this binary and the gendered meanings of consumers changed as a result of experiences in the two World Wars. As Lizbeth Cohen has illustrated in the American context, consumer activity during the First World War and into the 1930s was equated with virtuous and engaged citizenship. In order to ensure the rapid postwar economic recovery and peacetime abundance, all consumers had to play their part by consuming responsibly and saving for the future. Women, in their role as “chief household consumer” were given “civic authority as guardians of the common good.” Consumers also took on the role of “activist” and many women were part of organizing and lobbying efforts as well as protests, which allowed them to imbue the “cultural and economic role assigned [to] them in the household ... [with] a new political significance” as well as gain “new responsibilities outside of the home.” Consumers were not passive and “weak” members of the economy. They were “loyal,” “self-sacrificing”

¹⁴ See Erika Rappaport, Sandra Trudgen Dawson and Mark J. Crowley, eds., *Consuming Behaviours: Identity, Politics and Pleasure in Twentieth Century Britain* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015). PDF e-book.

¹⁵ Erika Rappaport’s study, for example, highlights how consumerism, namely women consumers in the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras, disrupted masculine spaces (the city and even politics) and challenged the public and domestic divide. Erika Rappaport. *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s East End* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001) 10-14.

and, in fact, integral in shaping conceptions of citizenship, Keynesian economics, as well as democracy. But, this “citizen consumer” morphed into a “purchaser consumer” in the mid-1940s as “mass producers” sought to rebuild America into “a mass consumption utopia.” Within this ideal, all “purchaser consumers” would enjoy a higher standard of living in a modern homes outfitted with time-saving appliances. These consumers were much less concerned with maintaining the public good, and rather “consumed in pursuit of personal gain.” The positive, active, and strong associations women, as consumers, gained during the First World War and into the 1930s were all but removed in a systematic process. In efforts by the business community to remove price regulation, for example, those who fought in favour of price-control were largely composed of “female, black, working class, and progressive” members and they were portrayed by their opponents as “weak, dependent and feminine.” In contrast, those who wanted deregulation of the consumer marketplace were portrayed as “strong, independent and masculine.” Their foray into the public forum and the “civic authority” women gained, in their role as consumers, was further eroded when “the government buttressed a male-directed family economy by disproportionately giving men access to career training, property ownership, capital and credit, as well as control over family finances” as the foundation of postwar American society. Men supplanted women as “the postwar ideal of purchaser as citizen” and, as such, women were robbed of “full economic and social citizenship.” Cohen concludes that in the postwar period, in which the “purchaser consumer” reigned, “the critical goods became less the consumer perishables of meat, milk, canned goods, and other food that women doggedly pursued in depression and

wartime, and more the consumer durables of cars, houses and appliances that men played a larger role in acquiring” helped by policies and legislation like the GI Bill. Consumers, those with the power and a stake in the postwar economy, were conceptualized not as “female” but as married couples or just men as the “head of household, breadwinner, homeowner and chief taxpayer.”¹⁶

The politics of consumption in Britain too were clearly gendered. In Britain during the 1950s, it was publically popular to support greater consumer freedoms and the acquisition of material goods for an improved standard of living.¹⁷ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, for example, argues that the Conservatives’ attacks on austerity were especially successful in wooing women voters who felt the pinch in their pocketbooks when consuming household goods, which contributed greatly to the Party’s electoral recovery in 1951. Labour’s “essentially masculinist culture and ideology” and their reluctance to be more than an “attendant to women’s concerns” hurt their chances of winning a workable majority. In contrast, “the politics of affluence appealed to women in their roles as homemakers and consumers.”¹⁸ But, when Conservatives started promoting affluence and prosperity in the form of cars, homes and appliances, they too widened their conceptualization of consumers beyond that of housewives who consumed predominantly

¹⁶ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2003), 31-41, 70-71, 75, 80-83, 108, 109, 134, 137, 147. For a discussion on how the GI Bill discriminated against women in favour of men, see Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 137-152.

¹⁷ The Labour Party’s inability to overcome its moral zeal with regards to consumerism served as a source for conflict for Socialists during this same period and ultimately prevented them from launching a viable challenge to the Conservatives. Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951 – 1964* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), chapter 5.

¹⁸ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1935 – 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2, 252-253, 254.

for the home and family. Building on these discussions, the focus here is how the Conservatives attempted to harness and deploy the idea of the “individual acquisitive consumer” (or Cohen’s “purchaser consumer”) where the emphasis was placed on “competitive consumerism” and the acquisition of material goods, for private enjoyment and to improve one’s standard of life, was the reason for political engagement.¹⁹

Bridging the concerns of the middle classes with those of consumers also upheld traditional Conservative ideas on social unity as well as anti-Socialism. This rhetoric allowed the Conservatives to claim that they, unlike Labour, were a classless party that represented national rather than sectional interests. The concept of individual acquisitive consumers is especially significant because it formed part of the foundation of Margaret Thatcher’s ideology, as she argued the individual consumer was the key to transcending destructive class-based hostilities. Current commentators on social inequality have remarked that this idea has had an insidious impact. Sociologist Mike Savage and *Guardian* journalist Owen Jones argue, for example, that Conservative efforts, present and historic, to remove “class,” a collective identity, as a concept and term from our lexicon is, in fact, an act of class warfare.²⁰ According to Jones, Conservatives, especially under Thatcher, have systematically attacked working-class communities, industries and institutions. By proclaiming the triumph of “classlessness,” with the aid of an individual

¹⁹ Peter Gurney, “A House Divided: The Organized Consumer and the British Labour Party, 1945-60,” in Erika Rappaport, Sandra Trudgen Dawson and Mark J. Crowley, eds., *Consuming Behaviours*, PDF e-book, chapter 14.

²⁰ Mike Savage, “The ‘class ceiling’ and the new class war,” *The Guardian* (22 October, 2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/22/new-class-war-politics-class-just-beginning> (accessed 23 October 2015).

consumer identity, the Conservatives have silenced the majority of the population who would identify as “working class” and robbed them of their collective power.²¹

But appealing to the middle classes as consumers became difficult to sustain once the country encountered less stable economic circumstances in the 1960s. Employing consumer-centric rhetoric and policies as a one-size-fits-all strategy also prevented the Conservatives from seeing the complexities of this social category and any corresponding impact on political behaviour. Following the Second World War, the ranks of the middle classes were as fragmented as ever. John Goldthorpe posits that the rapid rate of growth within these ranks left little time for the development of allegiances or a unified identity like that which occurred amongst manual workers and the labour movement. Each subsection within the middle classes in the period after 1945 had different allegiances to the state as well as their workplace/employers, and they wanted different things from the Conservatives and the government.²² Some certainly felt entitled to a greater share of prosperity but, at the same time, others expressed concern about the status of Britain on the world stage, and the integrity of the monarchy. Some remained guarded about extolling consumerism and were concerned that consumer-centric rhetoric perverted the heart and soul of Conservatism. Examining local sources shows, in fact, that the long-established and the newer members of the middle classes co-existed uneasily, and that the former group perceived the latter as a potentially disruptive force in their lives. Henry Fairlie’s assessment of the nature of the middle classes quoted above, while prematurely

²¹ Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011), chapter 2.

²² Tim Butler and Mike Savage., eds. *Social Change and the Middle Classes* (Bristol, Pa.: UCL Press, 1995), 29.

dismissive, was not wholly inaccurate: increased numbers did not necessarily correlate to a greater awareness of shared identity or values amongst its members. The Conservatives, therefore, could neither rely on bloc support from consumers nor the middle classes.

One aim of this dissertation is to establish the meaning(s) that the term “middle classes” held for the Party, its thinkers, and rank-and-file members after the Second World War. Establishing these definitions will help measure the extent to which official definitions shaped interactions between Conservatives and their core supporters at the national and local levels. The core of this dissertation focusses on the challenges the Conservatives encountered with regard to harnessing the support of the expanded middle classes in the 1950s and 1960s. Firstly, the nature of growth affected the way members of middle classes, both those long established and those new to this social position, formed goals and alliances with one another. As the discussion below will illustrate, rapid expansion meant that the “middle classes” were only nominally united. Given the Party’s reputation for its ability to adapt to changing social and political circumstances, it is surprising that the Conservatives seemed unresponsive in the face of this dynamic social group. Were there structural and organizational impediments that prevented the Conservative Party from widening their appeal at the local level? Was, for example, the local constituency association (CA) a socially inclusive or exclusive space and were local Tories interested in integrating the new middle classes into their activities or organization? Looking beyond the local level, how were the Party’s self-proclaimed thinkers addressing the idea of the middle classes? How did all of these different aspects of the Party’s relationship with their middle-class voters collide with the ordinary lives of

constituents in a particular Conservative stronghold in the Home Counties? Did articulations of “class” identity mimic the national discourse? To what extent did local history and immediate context dictate the issues that preoccupied the Conservatives and their middle-class supporters?

Bodies of scholarship

The answers to these questions are informed by two main debates in the history of the Conservative Party: the nature and source of electoral success and class analysis. The first three sections below will explore how historians have sought to examine the Conservatives’ electoral success by probing, i) the Party’s organization, ii) popular conservative sentiments and iii), in the post-1945 period, the theme of affluence. The fourth section will explore historical and sociological discussions of class and class formation in Britain. Officially, the Conservatives maintained that they represented the nation and not any one particular section of society or voters. Yet, as the following chapters reveal, a significant section of their supporters refused to conform to the classless ideal. These individuals appealed to the Conservatives as members of the middle classes, which forced the Party to engage with them using class-centered language and treat this vocal minority as a distinct entity ahead of “classless” national interests. Class, despite the Party’s aims, remained a trigger issue for Conservative Party rank-and-file as well as supporters. Building on this scholarship, this dissertation will illuminate not only the history of the Conservative Party and the development of its ideas and policies in the twentieth century, but also attempt to access debates on class, class formation, and class-consciousness from an unconventional point of entry.

Explaining electoral success

Histories of the Conservative Party often begin by remarking at its record of electoral success.²³ During the 19th century, the Conservatives were in office, both serving as Government or as “a leading member” of a coalition, for a total of 58 years.²⁴ Between 1895 and 1995, the Conservatives were in power or served as “the most powerful element in a coalition” for 70 years and rarely did they fail to capture less than 40 per cent of the vote.²⁵ This remarkable achievement has led Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon to label this period, the “Conservative century.”²⁶ Ross McKibbin, in contrast, sees a great deal of “two-party competition.” McKibbin, citing the period 1886 – 1914, finds that the Tories were in power for 16 ½ years and the Liberals 12 ½. During 1940 – 1979, “the Conservatives were in office 17 years, Labour 17 years” and power was shared during the war. He concludes that the Conservatives were only truly “dominant” during the interwar period when they were in office for “17 of the 20 years” with “huge parliamentary majorities.”²⁷ While the extent of the Conservative Party’s success is disputed, the notion of Conservative ascendancy in the twentieth century is powerful and

²³ Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, eds., *The Conservative Century*, 1; Ball and Stuart, *Portrait of a party: the Conservative Party in Britain, 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1; E.H.H. Green, “The Strange Death of Tory England,” *Twentieth Century British History* 2(1) (1991), 67 and Martin Pugh, *Tories and the People, 1880 – 1935* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985), 1.

²⁴ Matthew Roberts, “Popular Conservatism, 1932-1914,” *Parliamentary History* 26(3)(2007), 387.

²⁵ Ball and Seldon, *The Conservative Century*, 1 and Green, “The Strange Death of Tory England,” 67.

²⁶ Ball and Seldon, *The Conservative Century*, 1.

²⁷ Ross McKibbin, “Class and Conventional Wisdom: The Conservative Party and the ‘Public’ in Inter-war Britain” in *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 259-260.

prevailing conventional wisdom. The influence of this perception is equally evident in the history of the Conservative Party in the post-Second World War period. The Conservatives have been characterized as master-manipulators of consumer-oriented politics but, as this dissertation will show, they often experienced resistance and uncertainty especially in interactions with their middle class supporters.

The earliest studies characterized the Conservatives as passive beneficiaries to the mistakes of political rivals; religious, ethnic or class tensions as well as “patriotic or imperial sentiment”; or to the peculiarities of voting behaviour, specifically the support of deferential working classes.²⁸ More recent studies have adopted positive interpretations in which the Conservatives are key figures in shaping not only their political fortunes but also the political discourses in which they operated. Whether as champions of Empire the astute manipulators of gendered rhetoric, or as agents of prosperity and advocates of consumers, and the opponents of Europe later, the Conservatives have practiced targeted electioneering to craft a wide alliance of supporters. As Martin Pugh observed, “Britain did not develop a system dominated by a Social Democratic majority in which Conservatives were reduced to a mere rump ... Conservatives survived by conscious

²⁸ See Eric Nordlinger, *The working-class Tories: authority, deference and stable democracy* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967); Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections: 1885-1910* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1967), 425-426; Alan Sked and Chris Cook, eds., *Post-War Britain: A Political History, 1945-1992*. 4th ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1993), 98-101. Goldthorpe *et al.* found that affluent workers at Skefko and Vauxhall were instrumental in their support for the Conservatives. They considered the Conservative Party to be the best suited to run the economy and to govern the country while others expressed “antipathy” for Labour. In fact, they found ‘deferential’ tendencies (when workers expressed a belief in Conservatives leaders being of “better quality”) to be the least important factor. See John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer, and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 20.

adaptation as well as through luck” to remain a dominant force.²⁹ Electoral success, therefore, was hard won despite internal rivalries, moments of ideological confusion and uncertainty regarding its future political prospects.

This dissertation contributes to this body of literature by calling attention to the confusion and uncertainty that the Conservative Party encountered regarding its relationship with supporters from the middle classes. The 1950s and 1960s were a period in which the Tories returned to government and put the crushing defeat of 1945 behind them. And yet, every level of the Party still had to come to terms with the changing social and political landscape and the Party had yet to fully understand the impact of postwar social and economic change on the boundaries and composition of their long favoured social constituency – the middle classes. Consequently, at times in this period, the Conservatives seemed perplexed by, and quite unresponsive to, “rebellious” and discontented elements of the middle classes.

The Conservative Party’s success in the face of the mass franchise has been one of the major questions with which historians have grappled. *How* and *why* have the Conservatives, the party most closely associated with tradition, privilege and inequality survived, and indeed thrived, when it appeared that they had little in common with the values of newly enfranchised sections of society? For some scholars, part of the answer to this question lies with the Conservative Party’s comprehensive organization and ability to blend into the communities and cultures that surrounded the local association and party branches.

²⁹ Pugh, *Tories and the People, 1880 – 1935*, 1.

The Conservative political machine developed in earnest in the later-Victorian and Edwardian periods. E.H.H. Green illustrates that the highly professional nature of Conservative politics, especially at the local level, was a response to the “sheer size” of the post-1884 electorate. All political parties needed a sophisticated organization as well as paid professional agents to exploit “informal associational and kinship ties” that were previously nurtured exclusively in local clubs and social gatherings in order to gain the support of voters.³⁰ The Conservatives were especially adept at integrating these key features, which helped secure electoral success even in uncertain circumstances. David Thackeray has also found evidence of popular grassroots activity despite the rejection of tariff reform and support for a variety of populist campaigns (defending Ulster, tariff reform and social reforms) that kept the Party relevant across class and gender lines up until 1914.³¹ Frans Coetzee too shows that the Conservatives, with the help of pressure groups like the Navy League, Tariff Reform League and the Anti-Socialist Union, actively confronted mass politics and socialism.³² Conservatives pursued “new forms of appeal and organization when it became apparent that the political reliability and social stability of the lower orders could no longer be ensured by traditional methods of social and political control.” These pressure groups also revealed new sources of support that allowed the Tories to widen their base to include “lower-middle-class voters,” which helped the Party evolve from representing rural and landed interests to “the predominant

³⁰ Green, “An Age of Transition: An Introductory Essay,” 11.

³¹ See David Thackeray, “Rethinking Edwardian Crisis of Conservatism,” *The Historical Journal* 54(1) (2011), 191-211.

³² See Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Party of government in urban, industrial Britain.”³³ During the Second World War, overt partisan activities were postponed in favour of the political “truce” and the Coalition. Many Conservative constituency associations curtailed activity but continued to maintain skeleton operations and social activities, which allowed the Party to return, with a bit of maintenance, to business as usual after 1945.³⁴ Retaining the local association’s social activities was also integral, as McKibbin has observed, to infiltrating middle-class associational culture during the interwar period.³⁵

Party organization alone did not help the Conservatives craft near dominance in the 20th Century. The Conservatives were highly successful largely due to the effectiveness with which they employed targeted electioneering in order to nurture and cultivate a wide electoral appeal. In the 19th century, the Conservatives served as “the political arm of the landed interest, drawing its leadership from the aristocracy” and “its parliamentary cohorts from the squirearchy and retain[ed] a solid electoral base in the English counties.” The 1880 general election as well as electoral reform in 1883 and 1885 signaled that the Conservatives needed to widen their appeal to include the urban and suburban middle-class elites as well as enfranchised masses.³⁶

³³ Green, “The Strange Death of Tory England,” 81.

³⁴ Andrew Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political Organization in Second World War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 5.

³⁵ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 58.

³⁶ Matthew Roberts, “Constructing a Tory world-view: popular politics and the Conservative press in late-Victorian Leeds,” *Historical Research* 79(203) (Feb., 2006), 118, 120.

Popular Conservatism

The term popular conservatism can be used generally as a way to describe avenues for popular mobilization within the party.³⁷ It is also an “umbrella term denoting a multifaceted strategy for reform” in the face of increasing democratization beginning in the late-Victorian period. After the Third Reform Act of 1884, the Conservative Party had to broaden its appeal beyond the aristocracy and landed elite to include the urban and suburban middle classes and those without property.³⁸ The party, according to Matthew Roberts, “straddled diverse constituencies of electoral support - from villadom to manufacturing districts.”³⁹ The Party’s work resulted in electoral successes in 1865, 1895 and 1900. The great surprise, for the Tories and commentators, in each of these elections was how well the Tories performed with an expanded electorate that included 7 million manual workers.⁴⁰

A large section of this scholarship is devoted to examining working-class Conservatism because, as representatives of privilege and inequality, the Tories’ continued cultural relevance and electoral successes as the franchise widened beyond the confines of the landed elite presents a paradox. Until the 1980s, scholars and contemporary commentators largely dismissed the phenomenon as “deviant” political

³⁷ David Jarvis, “British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s” *The English Historical Review*, 111(440) (Feb., 1996), 60.

³⁸ E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The politics, economics and ideology of the British Conservative party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), 15.

³⁹ Roberts, “Popular Conservatism in Britain, 1832 – 1914,” 400 and Matthew Roberts. “Villa Toryism and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902” *The Historical Journal* 49(1) (2006), 244.

⁴⁰ Martin Pugh, *Britain since 1789: A concise History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 108.

behaviour that was inconsistent with a worker's economic position within the social structure.⁴¹ Scholars have also relied on "psychological" explanations that attribute politics to deference or social identities.⁴² This approach influenced interpretations concerning working-class voting behaviour in the 1950s and 1960s when, again, the Tories seemed to benefit electorally from postwar affluence and supposed *embourgeoisement*.⁴³

More recent scholarship argues that contemporary Conservatives actually crafted their success by appealing to a number of targeted interests and creating a broad-coalition of support. According to Jon Lawrence, the strength of working-class Conservatism in urban settings during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was based on the Party's position on "religious, social and imperial questions."⁴⁴ The Tories opposed "mean-spirited and morally coercive Liberalism."⁴⁵ The Tories also would not stand in the way of a workingman's entertainment and believed that "life should be enjoyed."⁴⁶ David Thackeray also argues that the Tories attached themselves to populist issues including, "rural smallholdings, opposition to existing National Insurance and defence of the established church," which kept them relevant with the newly enfranchised sections of the electorate. Even the issue of tariff reform integrated seamlessly with the Tories' work

⁴¹ Jon Lawrence, "Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914," *The English Historical Review* 108(428) (Jul., 1993), 630.

⁴² Lawrence, "Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914," 630.

⁴³ Lawrence, "Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914," 630; Henry Pelling, "Working Class Conservatives," *Historical Journal* xiii (1970), 339-343 and Roberts, "Popular Conservatism, 1932-1914," 387, 397-398.

⁴⁴ Lawrence, "Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914," 638.

⁴⁵ Roberts, "Constructing a Tory world-view," 133-134.

⁴⁶ Roberts, "Constructing a Tory world-view," 136.

“defending the working man’s pint and masculine civic identity.”⁴⁷ The late-nineteenth century Conservative Party also employed patriotic language and courted Irish and Jewish sections of the population.⁴⁸ With each of these issues, the Tories successfully attacked the Liberals and presented themselves as protectors of the workingman.

These ideas were also not simply proclaimed to the electorate: the Tories employed existing local cultures, traditions and organizations (working-men’s clubs or supporting the local football club) to nurture alliances with the urban working classes.⁴⁹ As Roberts states, the Tories used “politics and ritual to socialize men, women and children” and indulged “‘manly’ pleasures,” to “knit together different strands of popular Conservatism.”⁵⁰ Since political allegiances and power are constantly in flux, the process by which the Tories maintained support from the working classes reflects specific historical contexts. The twentieth-century Conservative Party employed similar tactics though deployed different themes and interests to secure power. Nigel Keohane argues that throughout the First World War the Tories skillfully employed patriotic images and language to reinvent the party and control social change. Conservatives, for example, aligned themselves with franchise reform based on a definition of “citizenship” linked to military service.⁵¹ In this way, the party bought itself time to figure out how to integrate

⁴⁷ Thackeray, “Rethinking Edwardian Crisis of Conservatism,” 194, 197.

⁴⁸ Roberts, “Popular Conservatism in Britain, 1832 – 1914,” 395 - 400. See also Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1868 – 1906* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Press, 2007).

⁴⁹ Lawrence, “Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914,” 639-41.

⁵⁰ Roberts, “Popular Conservatism, 1932-1914,” 399-400.

⁵¹ Nigel Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 131 – 137. See also Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: men, women and the renegotiation of British citizenship during the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Hendley’s research shows that, during the same period, the National Service

women and workers into the party organization and its future plans. According to Lawrence, once the “populist male-centered” style of politics declined, organizations like the Primrose League gave women opportunities for participation and positioned Conservatives as advocates of the “virtues of domestic life.”⁵² Hendley argues that one of the chief reasons the Primrose League managed to stay relevant when other patriotic associations faded away after the First World War was because it integrated itself with associations in which middle-class women socialized and carried out philanthropic work.⁵³ These organizations and even the Party’s local associations gave the Conservatives direct access to female voters once they became enfranchised. David Jarvis and Ina-Zweiniger-Bargielowska have each illustrated the inventive methods with which Tories courted women from the 1920s through 1950s.⁵⁴

The second prong to the Party’s successes in the late-19th century and interwar period was based on maintaining traditional sources of support, namely the “genteel” suburban middle classes. “Villa Tories,” or suburban Conservatives, refers to those

League (NSL), in contrast, failed to create to mobilize the same themes to assuage the concerns of organized labour and create “patriotic labour,” which ultimately contributed to the organization’s demise. Hendley argues that the NSL’s singular focus on compulsory military service, rather than the wider concept of patriotism, made it less successful than similar contemporary organizations. See Matthew Hendley, *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War: Popular Imperialism in Britain, 1914-1932* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 50-56.

⁵² Lawrence, “Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914,” 645-646, 648.

⁵³ Matthew Hendley, “Constructing the Citizen: The Primrose League and the Definition of Citizenship in the Age of Mass Democracy in Britain, 1918-1928,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 7(1), 1996, 135. Hendley also shows that the Primrose League conceived of a woman’s duty to vote as part of her role in “maintaining the social fabric of Britain.” By voting, Lady Jersey proclaimed that women could ensure the well-being of their children, families, homes and access to food. Hendley, “Constructing the Citizen,” 141.

⁵⁴ See David Jarvis, “Mrs. Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s,” *Twentieth Century British History* 5(2) (1992), pp – 129 – 152 and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

conservative-leaning middle classes who moved from industrial and urban centers to the suburbs following the Redistribution Act of 1885.⁵⁵ In the nineteenth century, the label “middle classes” was used to identify those who worked in the “commercial and professional classes” and those who owned homes and lived in the suburbs (residential neighbourhoods away from commercial enterprise and industry). Clerks and artisans occupied the lower ranks of this group.⁵⁶ According to conventional interpretations, “villadom was once thought to be the electoral heartland of late-Victorian Conservatism.” Some scholars have argued that the politics of the suburban set was even dictated by its “innate conservatism” and bolstered by the creation of “socially homogenous single member constituencies which ‘created strongholds in ... suburbs, seaside resorts, and in the residential enclaves of hitherto radical cities’”⁵⁷ Such structurally centered interpretations tended to examine aggregate voting statistics to understand suburban politics. Yet, as Lawrence points out, these approaches do not explain the character or motivations behind of suburban politics or how the Tories constructed electoral success at the end of the 19th century.⁵⁸ Villa Tories, Matthew Roberts similarly asserts, is a descriptive rather than analytical term.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ The definition of “suburb” that Roberts adopts defines this area as: including “middle class residences,” and excluding “industry,” “commerce, except for enterprises that service the residential area,” and “lower class residents.” Roberts, “Villa Toryism and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” 220. This definition is instructive because it highlights the socio-economic sources for tension that become a problem in South West Hertfordshire, discussed in chapter five, when these exclusive communities become the sites of housing redevelopment.

⁵⁶ Matthew Roberts, “Constructing a Tory world-view: popular politics and the Conservative press in late-Victorian Leeds,” 127.

⁵⁷ Roberts, “Popular Conservatism in Britain, 1832 – 1914,” 392.

⁵⁸ Lawrence, “Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914,” 631.

⁵⁹ Roberts, “Villa Toryism and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” 244.

Roberts questions the extent to which redrawing constituency boundaries and isolating the “innately conservative” suburban middle classes played a hand in the Conservative Party’s electoral success in the late Victorian period.⁶⁰ Using Leeds as a case study, Roberts shows that the Conservative Party confronted a vigorous Liberal presence and political loyalties rooted in radical non-conformity.⁶¹ Contemporary Conservatives, in fact, worried that electoral reform would not be to their advantage. The idea that redrawn constituency boundaries helped the Conservatives consolidate the suburban middle-class vote also negates the fact that working class Tories continued to be a significant factor and the formation of new constituencies scattered traditional bases of support. Furthermore, the Liberal Party maintained a strong presence throughout the suburbs.⁶²

Roberts’ study of Leeds reveals that suburbia was neither “innately Conservative” nor “socially homogenous” and that a “permanent and monolithic suburban Conservatism” did not exist.⁶³ For the “genteel” suburban set and those who aspired to join these ranks, the Tories were portrayed by local papers as the representatives of respectability and domesticity. They were manifestly opposed the labour movement and

⁶⁰ See J.P.D. Dunbabin, “Some Implications of the 1885 British Shift towards Single Member Constituencies,” *English Historical Review* 109 (430) (February 1994): 89-100; and Paul A. Readman, “The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Victorian England,” *The Historical Journal* 42(2) (1999), 467-493.

⁶¹ Matthew Roberts, “‘Villa Toryism’ and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” *The Historical Journal* 49(1) (2006), 226-227; 230.

⁶² Roberts, “‘Villa Toryism’ and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” 239, 245.

⁶³ Roberts, “‘Villa Toryism’ and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” 225, 228 and Roberts, Matthew Roberts, “Constructing a Tory world-view: popular politics and the Conservative press in late-Victorian Leeds,” 118, 119-120

stood as protectors of property.⁶⁴ But, to win the support of the lower middle class, whose interests could overlap with manual workers, the Tories employed the empire and an “aggressive populist Conservatism” along with promises for greater social reform.⁶⁵ In addition to the “vibrant Liberal political tradition,” there were cultural divisions based on differing positions on education and entertainment (“drink and sport”) within the middle classes of Leeds and the Conservatives mounted targeted attacks, often through the Conservative daily papers, in order to expand Party appeal.⁶⁶ W.L. Jackson, representative of Leeds North, championed building societies, for example, as manifestations of virtues like “self-reliance” and “thrift,” but which also allowed artisans and those in the lower middle classes to own homes and “buy into a culture that included an instinctive small ‘c’ conservatism.” Indeed, “rugged individualism,” “self-reliance” and respectability became constant themes for Jackson since they touched on overlapping values as well as the aspirations of “established villa residents” and “lower middle class ... voters.” These rallying cries allowed Jackson and the Conservative Party to “strengthen the bonds of interclass community” and “transcend social divisions.”⁶⁷

Roberts’ research uncovers fissures within the middle classes that emerged in the 19th century and, as this dissertation will show, continued to persist and even intensify in the twentieth century. The established ranks of the middle classes, as the following chapter will reveal, felt little kinship with those lower in the social hierarchy and those aspiring to

⁶⁴ Roberts, “Constructing a Tory world-view,” 127,133-134.

⁶⁵ Roberts, “Constructing a Tory world-view,” 130-133.

⁶⁶ Roberts, “Villa Toryism and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” 227, 229, 230.

⁶⁷ Roberts, “Villa Toryism and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” 235.

attain middle-class status. Each group, rather, guarded the privileges they enjoyed from outsiders and appealed to the Conservatives for attention in their own right.

Discussions of popular conservatism show how the Conservative Party grappled with increasing the franchise in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period by exploiting opportunities to create constituencies of support where and whenever possible. Uncertain though their electoral prospects seemed at times, the Tories navigated ideological and electoral crises with targeted electioneering. The Party faced greater stresses following the First World War with the advent of universal franchise and political revolution abroad. Jarvis' research points to acute anxieties within the Conservative Party that again hinged on the impact of political realignment that came with universal franchise. The presence of the Liberals, for example, challenged Conservative held notions that they were *the* representatives of the middle classes. Additionally, fear of class conflict and an organized and militant working class helped inform party ideology and policies.⁶⁸ This dissertation will add to Jarvis' findings and show that Conservatives also struggled to understand the nature of political realignment after 1945, especially with regard to their core supporters within the middle classes.

According to Jarvis, the Tories "lacked confidence" in the face of full democracy and were convinced that universal franchise would "promote collectivist and socialist

⁶⁸ According to Jarvis, the Conservatives were not alone in feeling anxious about the uncertain political landscape in the interwar period. He observes, "The Party's preoccupations after the war were surprisingly similar to those of Communists and Socialists. Many Conservatives shared, if only implicitly, much of the deterministic class analysis that Marxists struggled to reconcile with electoral behaviour in the 1920s. The idea that class conflict had been pre-empted worried the Tory faithful as much as it worried the revolutionary left." Jarvis, "British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s," 61.

governments.”⁶⁹ The Conservatives, according to Jarvis, distrusted and resented their new supporters, of all class backgrounds, in equal measure. Tory leaders and rank-and-file were disdainful of new voters for their “venality, fickleness and stupidity.”⁷⁰ Tory workers also observed the “the growth in self-confidence and militancy of an increasingly industrialized workforce” with “apprehension.” The middle classes too were a source of anxiety in the period studied in this dissertation. The Tories, in response to lower levels of participation at the constituency level and a decline in fully paid subscriptions, expressed bitter disappointment in the lack of partisan enthusiasm amongst the middle classes. Jarvis found that Conservative agents, candidates and columnists “berated the middle class ...for their apathy and almost criminal neglect of their political duty.”⁷¹ The proliferation of “non-party” organizations like the Anti-Waste League, local Chambers of Commerce, and the Middle Class Union, exacerbated the Tories’ fears. These pressure groups represented a threat to the Tories’ efforts to consolidate support amongst the middle classes. As Jarvis argues, “The very existence of such bodies contradicted Conservative claims to represent middle-class interests.” More importantly, these organizations siphoned off potential activists and sources of funding.⁷²

The research thus far shows how successful the Conservatives have been in assembling support from a variety of social groups and interests but no one has attempted to explain for whom the Conservatives governed. As McKibbin has observed of the

⁶⁹ David Jarvis, “The Shaping of Conservative Electoral Hegemony, 1918 – 39” in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, eds., *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behavior in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1997), 131-132.

⁷⁰ Jarvis, “The Shaping of Conservative Electoral Hegemony, 1918 – 39,” 136, 140-143.

⁷¹ Jarvis, “British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s,” 70, 73-77.

⁷² Jarvis, “The Shaping of Conservative Electoral Hegemony, 1918 – 39,” 145.

interwar Conservative Party, “They could not and did not (at least objectively) govern in all their interests” even though they purported to represent the electorate widely.

McKibbin argues, by examining fiscal policy, that the Conservative Party was committed to a “deflationary political economy” until the 1930s. This approach “put the safety of financial institutions ahead of the interests of the manufacturing industry.” The Conservatives were also “happy to live with [unemployment] as part of a long-term ‘adjustment.’” As McKibbin asserts, “The country was governed *essentially* in the perceived interests of those who felt themselves most likely to benefit from deflation, the professional and commercial middle classes and the holders of government debt (often the same people).” The Conservatives adopted this policy because the Party experienced an influx in members in “almost exclusively middle-class suburbs and constituencies.” Secondly, the majority of Conservative MPs “had been in the armed forces, the civil service or the professions” and they were “instinctively sympathetic to the ambitions and worries of people whose life experience was similar to their own.” Even though the Liberals were a viable alternative behind which the middle classes could rally, the Conservatives mobilized “conventional wisdoms” to undermine them and play up public fear of enfranchised manual workers. As McKibbin states, “It was *known* that the Conservative Party was the party of bourgeois propriety and dignity. It did not need to be said ... that the Conservative Party was the best defence against a politicized working class.” And it was precisely that fear and “normative hostility to a political notion of the

working class” that allowed the Conservatives to appeal widely to the electorate between the wars even though it governed for the perceived interests of the middle classes.⁷³

Affluence and the Middle-Class Consumer

Affluence and consumption are central organizing themes in this dissertation because many of the Conservatives’ core supporters expressed dissatisfaction with their experience of, or lack of, prosperity. Beginning in the late 1950s, contemporary commentators remarked that the middle classes were fed up with post-Second World War austerity and wanted more opportunities for home ownership, greater purchasing power, and the ability to increase their savings. They felt entitled to a greater share of peacetime abundance and resented what they felt were investments made only for the benefit of the working classes. The Conservative Party, in response, promised to increase opportunities for home ownership, reduce the burden of taxation, and to control inflation. The Conservatives thus engaged with the middle classes as consumers, similar to those “purchaser-consumers” Cohen describes in the United States, who were primarily focused on acquiring material goods for their own private enjoyment.

The consumer as conceptualized by the Conservatives was one-dimensional: only concerned with acquiring certain material goods to improve their standard of living. He shared little of the ideals and aspirations, for example, of those who led the Consumers’ Association and planned to cultivate an army of active, knowledgeable value-oriented consumer-citizens who acquired goods for the purposes of efficiency and rationalized

⁷³ McKibbin, “Class and Conventional Wisdom,” 265, 266, 267, 281, 293.

living.⁷⁴ While these concerns were certainly present and shared by many at all levels of the Conservative Party, they were not driving forces that could unite middle-class voters. Moreover, the Conservatives were never as completely comfortable with overt materialism as they were portrayed to be by Labour. The Party was conflicted in discussions concerning the social consequences of unfettered consumerism and advertising techniques.⁷⁵ Examining the relationship the Conservatives had with the middle classes through the lens of consumption and consumer politics calls attention to one of the chief strategies that kept the Conservatives in power for over a decade after 1951. Such an examination sheds light on the fragmented nature of the middle classes in the post-Second World War period, and it interrogates the extent to which preaching consumer freedom and affluence resonated with the middle classes.

On the surface, the Conservatives' consumer-friendly platform seemed widely popular: after all, the Party increased their majorities in Parliament in the elections in 1955 and 1959. For many Britons, "old luxuries became affordable and new ones arrived at an increasing pace."⁷⁶ Families could buy televisions and a range of appliances that

⁷⁴ See Lawrence Black, "Which? Craft in Post-War Britain: The Consumers' Association and the Politics of Affluence," *Albion* 36(1) (Spring, 2004), 52 – 82 and "'Consumers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your illusions': The Politics of the Consumers' Association" in *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954 – 1970*, chapter 2. Also see Peter Gurney, "The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain," *Journal of Modern History*, 77(Dec., 2005), 979-989 and Matthew Hilton, "The Fable of the Sheep, or, Private Virtues, Public Vice: The Consumer Revolution in the Twentieth Century," *Past & Present*, 176 (Aug., 2002), 235 – 240.

⁷⁵ Black, *Redefining British Politics*, 37 and Brian Girvin, "Affluence, Conservatism, and Political Competition in Great Britain and the US, 1945 – 1964," in Black and Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society? Britain's Postwar 'Golden Age' Revisited*, 29.

⁷⁶ Offer, "British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c.1950 – 2000," 8.

“made homes more attractive and convenient to run.”⁷⁷ Selina Todd, however, cautions that the “people’s delight at the new consumer goods was tempered by the insecure nature of their prosperity.” Promises of “ease and plenty,” for example, did not always align with actual experience, especially for the majority of the population. Manual workers and “professionals” both benefitted from increased wages but the latter group “enjoyed a much bigger increase.” Only when married women joined the workforce did more families from working and lower middle-class backgrounds experience a measure of financial security. Many members of the working classes accessed comforts and consumer goods through credit or by working overtime to generate extra income.⁷⁸ But, overtime left many too busy or exhausted to participate in “middle class forms of leisure” and many workers also accumulated debt trying to acquire all of the markers of an affluent lifestyle.⁷⁹ Todd concludes, “The supposedly affluent society was in fact one that was incredibly socially divided.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900-2000*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 254

⁷⁸ Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910 – 2010*. London: John Murray, 2014), ‘Never Having It So Good’, 1, 3, 8, 9. PDF e-book.

⁷⁹ John Rule, “Time, Affluence and Private Leisure: The British Working Class in the 1950s and 1960s” *Labour History Review* 66, 2(20021), 229-230, 233.

⁸⁰ Todd, *The People*, ‘Never Having It So Good’, 5. PDF e-book. Also see Avner Offer’s discussion regarding the transformation of the working classes from producers to consumers in British politics and culture. This transition of their role in the economy ultimately undermined working class identity, which robbed manual workers of their bargaining power with political institutions. According to Offer, “As ‘consumers’, proletarians came to be doubly emasculated, both as citizens and producers. They lost legitimacy for their characteristic modes of collective action. Their typical objectives had been collective entitlements, the ‘social wages’ of health, housing and education, distributed in kind and not in money, treating everyone alike ... Where the consumer is sovereign, what counts is money, not votes. Already in the 1960s the conduct of politics was moving away from the party branch, the hustings ... towards mass media and mass marketing, in which (even in Britain) access to money counted for more, and concentrated voting blocs for less.” Offer, “British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c.1950 – 2000,” 12-13.

Consumer politics proved especially powerful after the Second World War because the postwar economic boom along with reconstruction created a social and political culture in which “private individual consumption triumphed over other ideologies.”⁸¹ The belief, shared by both political parties and social researchers, that poverty had been “eradicated” helped shift attention from “helping the poor” to “fostering prosperity.”⁸² Scholars have attributed the Conservative Party’s recovery after 1945 and subsequent electoral successes to their ability to mobilize the idea of affluence – in the form of material possessions like televisions, cars, and homes – more effectively than its rivals. They succeeded in making affluence a uniquely *Conservative* aim and took full credit for achievements in this area.⁸³ The experience of improved standards of living and access to consumer goods after the Second World War, in contrast, proved to be an immense ideological hurdle for the Labour Party. Labour leaders, especially those who occupied the traditional Left, appealed to the electorate on “entirely negative” terms and had difficulty reconciling affluence and socialist ideals.⁸⁴ The Labour Party was

⁸¹ Matthew Hilton, “The Fable of the Sheep, or, Private Virtues, Public Vices: The Consumer Revolution of the Twentieth Century,” *Past & Present* 176(Aug., 2002), 223.

⁸² Todd, *The People*, ‘Never Having It So Good’, 1. PDF e-book.

⁸³ Lawrence Black, “The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s,” in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society?: Britain’s Postwar ‘Golden Age’ Revisited* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 97. Also see James Hinton, “Militant Housewives: The British Housewives League and the Atlee Government,” *History Workshop* 38(1994), 129 – 156; Jarvis, “Mrs. Maggs and Betty,” 129-152.

⁸⁴ For a discussion on how affluence was discussed on the Left, see Stuart Middleton, “‘Affluence’ and the Left in Britain, c.1958 – 1974,” *English Historical Review* CXXIX (536) (2014), 107-138 and Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910 – 2010*, ‘Never Having It So Good’, 4. PDF e-book. Frank Mort also examines contemporary discussions regarding the vitality of democracy/ political participation in a consumer society. See Frank Mort, “Competing Domains: Democratic Subjects and Consuming Subjects in Britain and the United States since 1945,” in Frank Trentmann ed., *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (New York: BERG, 2006), chapter 10. Martin Pugh argues that

especially worried about how “status based on consumption” would undermine working-class identity based on the shop floor and one’s relationship within the economic structure.⁸⁵ The Labour Party’s troubles were compounded also by external factors and internal disunity. Namely, fewer people identified with the messages of struggle and protest under which the Labour Party was formed and turned instead to the Conservatives in order to preserve and increase their material gains.

The Conservatives had previous experience, in a more subtle fashion, drawing on consumer themes and ideas to appeal to the electorate. In the 1920s, the Conservatives had highlighted the strengths of women in their domestic roles and as a central cog in the family in order to undermine the “suffragette” and the “flapper vote.” Women, for example, “controlled the domestic budget” and played the vital role of “family financier.”⁸⁶ The Tories, therefore, targeted women’s votes with “bread and butter” issues and promised to reduce the cost of living though they acknowledged, “women’s [political] horizons needed to be broadened.”⁸⁷

the tensions between Gaitskellites and Bevanites in this period was not ideological rather the manifestation of a deeply personal rivalry. Bevan regarded his rival with “contempt” and considered Gaitskell a “desiccated calculating machine” who, along with his followers, were not truly representative of the labour movement. Anthony Crosland was the first to articulate a viable re-imagining of Labour Party ideas in *The Future of Socialism* (1956). He emphasized that “socialists should focus on *ends* rather than *means*, recognizing that the priority lay in promoting welfare and equality, ending class antagonism, redistributing resources in society, and opening access to the underprivileged through education.” Crosland, however, was “too bourgeois” to carry much influence and though well received and widely read, *The Future of Socialism* failed to change minds within the party. See Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), 302-305, 308.

⁸⁵ Todd, *The People, ‘A New Middle Class?’* 3. PDF e-book.

⁸⁶ Jarvis, “Mrs. Maggs and Betty,” 143.

⁸⁷ Jarvis, “Mrs. Maggs and Betty,” 138.

During the war, Britons accepted restrictions on consumption as necessary but continued regulation in peacetime became “contentious.” According to Zweiniger-Bargielowska, consumption politics resonated with the voting public because “people cared deeply about the food they were able to eat ... apprehension about the persistence of shortages was widespread particularly among women.” As champions of consumers, Conservatives were “well placed to exploit the low morale among women and especially housewives.” Beginning in the late 1940s, the Conservatives “actively engaged in forging an anti-socialist coalition of consumers disaffected with austerity, rationing and controls.” In their own publications and press, the Tories advocated “decontrol and a return to the free market” as well as an end to rationing. They were “hostile to economic planning, [and] were less egalitarian.” The Conservatives also characterized food shortages and continued curtailment on consumption as “mismanagement,” which challenged Labour’s claim that “socialist planning” was a suitable alternative to the established economy and worth maintaining. When they appealed to women directly, the Conservatives “emphasized the importance of family life and demanded adequate housing, more plentiful food and labour saving devices” to help make housework more convenient. They reiterated these themes for the 1950 and 1951 general elections and emphasized the inefficiency of the unwieldy bureaucracy that was required to administer controls. They argued, “Only a return to the free market would result in lower prices and a wider choice of consumer goods.” On the promise to “set the people free,” the Tories not only secured their recovery in 1951 but “returned to power with an increased majority.”⁸⁸ This

⁸⁸ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 3, 4, 7, 205, 206, 207, 218, 228, 229, 232, 254.

conception of the consumer, however, changes along with the economic situation, and complications arose when members of the middle classes did not identify with the depictions of ‘never having it so good’ as the Conservatives described.

Who exactly were the middle classes?

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Conservative Party adopted an understanding of their core supporters as consumers and, correspondingly, appealed to them with economic policies designed to help them acquire material comforts and improve their standard of living. This conceptualization of the middle classes, however, shifted emphasis from other qualities that had previously been used to demarcate this class, such as moral values, the ownership of property, and particular occupations. But the Conservatives, while electoral beneficiaries of affluence, did not seem to have a clear understanding of how postwar changes had impacted the socio-economic order and, as such, their general promises of prosperity did not appeal evenly to all of the sections of the middle classes. The key to understanding this confusion can be found in contemporary as well as recent efforts, especially in the social sciences, to define and measure the composition of the middle classes. This body of research reveals how the changes taking place within the middle classes after the war undermined the Party’s efforts to appeal to them as a socially homogenous and monolithic group of consumers.

The impact of postwar social and economic change on political behaviour was far reaching but contemporary social scientists were not immediately interested in the middle classes as a subject of study. British social investigations focused on the working classes, originating from Edwardian efforts to understand poverty and unemployment, and

suggest reform initiatives.⁸⁹ The middle classes were never a “social problem” that needed to be fixed and, as such, did not capture the interest of reformers.⁹⁰ After the Second World War, the middle classes came under scrutiny but largely from efforts to define and understand *working-class* identity.

Some social scientists looked to the voters to explain Labour’s electoral woes. The theory of *embourgeoisement* held that social change, namely increased affluence, disrupted the culture, and correspondingly, the politics of the working classes. More specifically, the experience of affluence had led the working classes to adopt middle-class tastes and outlooks. Mark Abrams as well as Goldthorpe and David Lockwood in *The Affluent Worker* (1963), discussed in-depth in Chapter One, found limits to the impact of increased consumer powers on working-class identity and, more importantly, did not find evidence that workers had shed their backgrounds in order to adopt middle-class values, culture or traditions. In 1980, Goldthorpe focused his attentions exclusively on the middle

⁸⁹ Jon Lawrence, “Class, “affluence,” and the politics of everyday life in Britain, c.1930 – 1964,” *Cultural and Social History* 10 (2) (2013), 274, 277.

⁹⁰ In Lawrence’s research, he finds that even though contemporary studies stopped casting the working classes as social “problems” they remained true to their field’s roots by casting attention on continued poverty and unemployment. They were not interested in “tracing the contours of new, prosperous working-class lifestyle.” In fact, many of those who were “comfortable” and even individuals who lived in prosperous neighbourhoods were excluded from studies. The way that these studies were designed obscures the fact that “affluent workers,” those who were paid well for a rare skills, existed before the concept and panic on the Left after the war. Lawrence, “Class, “affluence,” and the politics of everyday life in Britain, c.1930 – 1964,” 275, 276-277, 282. Also see Rosemary Crompton, *Class and Stratification: An Intro to Current Debates* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 32. Lockwood and Savage have also observed that the predominance of the working classes in research on class formation is rooted in Marxist-influenced scholarship, which casts the workers as the primary agents of historical change. David Lockwood, “Marking Out the Middle Classes,” in Tim Butler and Mike Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes* (Bristol, Pa.: UCL Press, 1995), 2,4.

classes and created a new class structure model, which organized individuals by occupation. This new social classification categorized the middle classes as the “service class” and defined them as fragmented.⁹¹

Goldthorpe’s work still stands as a foundational analysis of class structures and identities, though recent scholars have refined various aspects of his studies. Savage, for example, posits that middle-class politics was based on one’s relationship to the state.⁹² Historians like Lawrence have also returned to contemporary sociological surveys to uncover subjective accounts of the material circumstances in which their historical subjects lived. These encounters can be mined by scholars today for all sorts of codes and images of class that were not evident to contemporary researchers.

Study Outline

The structure of this dissertation is intended to move through different levels of the Conservative Party organization, from the national to the local, and to provide a multi-faceted view of how the Conservatives discussed and dealt with the middle classes amid social change and emerging political instability. This approach shows the extent to which

⁹¹ Part of the Nuffield Class schema/ UK National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification which also consisted of seven main categories of class based on occupation and employment status. The class groups are as follows: Higher managerial, administrative and professions; Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations; Intermediate occupations; Small employers and own account workers; Lower Supervisory and technical occupations; Semi-routine occupations; Routine-Occupations; Never worked and long-term unemployed. See “The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification,” Office for National Statistics, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html> (accessed 19 March 2014).

⁹² Savage’s conclusions come from examining voting records from 1987 general election. Also see Mike Savage, and James Barlow, Peter Dickens, and Tony Fielding, *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture: Middle Class Formation in Contemporary Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1992), chapter 3 and Harold Perkin, *The Rise of the Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1990).

ideas held by Conservative leaders and policy makers were shared or rejected by rank-and-file members and supporters.

The first chapter of this dissertation revisits contemporary sociological studies on the middle classes and the attempts to define and understand this social group through class analysis. The seminal work of Goldthorpe and Lockwood is examined alongside recent research led by Savage, which provides the theory and empirical data essential for contextualizing the Party's history with its core supporters. Building on McKibbin's work in charting out the actual boundaries of the middle classes up to the interwar period, this chapter concludes with an examination of Census data that helps focus the Conservative Party's usage of the term alongside official institutional definitions employed at the time.

Chapter Two explores the language employed by the Conservative Party and contemporary commentators in the 1950s and 1960s to discuss the middle classes. The Conservatives relied on the themes of consumerism and affluence when they discussed the middle classes, partly in an effort to appeal to the whole electorate as well as the widened and disparate sections of the middle classes. But themes like morality and anti-socialism were also prevalent. This chapter draws on examples of "middle-class revolt" as well as local correspondence with Central Office in order to show that the language employed by the Conservatives to discuss and appeal to the middle classes was consistently unclear.

The third chapter of this dissertation revisits the setting and activity of the Conservative Party's local branches. The constituency association represented a bastion

of unwavering support for the Party. Its members advocated unity, were self-sufficient, and dedicated to rousing up support in their local communities through membership drives as well as canvassing. The activities carried out here, however, reflected the interests and tastes of particular sections of the middle classes and efforts to integrate “new” members of the middle classes and working classes were stilted. Proclaiming to be the Party that represented national interests did not play out in local political work.

In Chapter Four, the dissertation turns its attentions to the writings of young Conservative thinkers on the question of the middle classes. At this level of the Party, self-proclaimed intellectuals actively and purposefully contemplated the role of the middle classes and their meaning, symbolically, as well as their significance as a base of electoral support. This group carried out internal studies for the Party and pushed up against conventional understandings in order to make space, within party thinking and potentially policies, for both the traditional and “new middle classes.”

The final chapter examines the political activity in the county of Hertfordshire with special attention to South West Hertfordshire and their Member of Parliament, Gilbert Longden (1950 – 1974). Throughout Longden’s lengthy tenure as MP, the Conservatives’ middle-class supporters illustrated that they were concerned about more than simply obtaining what they thought was their fair share of postwar affluence. Longden and his constituents expressed unease and even resistance to the influx of “new” middle classes and foreign social elements, which threatened their once socially homogenous communities.

This dissertation challenges several conventional wisdoms regarding the Conservative Party's supporters and how it charted electoral success in the post Second World War period. The Party may have been outwardly more cohesive and adept at deploying affluence and consumerism as part of its efforts to woo voters than the Labour Party, but they did not fully understand the impact of social change on their voter base. So while the middle classes (as an image, social group, and section of voters) have had an important role in Conservative Party history and they ultimately became the heroes of Conservative ideology in the 1980s, their role in Party policy and thinking was not so certain in the first decades after the Second World War.

Chapter One

The Middle Classes in Britain after 1951

Before the war, when textile supplies and laundry facilities were more ample, it might perhaps have been held that the middle classes were composed of all those who used napkin rings (on the grounds that the working class did not use napkins at all, while members of the upper class used a clean napkin at every meal), and that the dividing line between the upper middle and lower-middle classes was the point at which a napkin became a serviette.¹

This dissertation focuses on how the Conservative Party navigated the images and languages of class with special attention to the needs and demands of their “natural” constituency, the middle classes, between 1951 and 1974. In this period, the Conservative Party relied on support from the growing and increasingly fragmented middle classes but its discussions exhibited uncertainty over the composition of this social group and, therefore, the issues that would be most effective in securing their votes. The confusion centered on the party’s predominant conception and treatment of the middle classes as consumers who, they presumed, were united and motivated simply by the pursuit of material luxuries for personal enjoyment. In fact, rank-and-file members as well as Conservative supporters, who identified as members of the middle classes, asserted the importance of property owners, pensioners, those on fixed incomes, as well as owners of small businesses, and supporters of empire and the Queen when they engaged with the Party. Focusing on the acquisitive nature of consumers allowed Conservatives to capitalize on the experience of postwar prosperity but it ignored the more financially and socially precarious experiences of pensioners and small business owners, for example,

¹ Roy Lewis and Angus Maud, *The English Middle Classes* (London: Phoenix House, 1949), 1.

and angered some traditional established middle classes who worried about the moral integrity of the Party's principles. The Conservatives found it challenging to appreciate the different facets of their core constituency because the middle classes expanded rapidly in this period and their members did not see themselves as part of a united or cohesive social group, let alone as simply consumers. Despite how skilled the Conservative Party was in mobilizing consumer politics for electoral gains in general, it struggled to work out how this label applied to its core constituency.²

This chapter revisits contemporary sociological studies on the middle classes that emerged in the late 1950s alongside more recent research on class analysis and social mobility in order to contextualize the terminology, concepts, and processes discussed in subsequent chapters. This chapter also builds on McKibbin's work in *Classes and Cultures*, which established the statistical boundaries of the middle classes up to 1951, by extending the view into the 1970s. This chapter charts the official institutional definitions of the Party's core supporters and illustrates that growth continued to occur in the middle and lower middle sections of the middle classes. This pattern of growth should have meant unassailable electoral success and harmony within the Party that pursued consumer-oriented policies. But, traditional conceptions of the middle classes, which emphasized country, monarchy, and respectability over economic position, sat uneasily with consumerism and affluence.

² See Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939 – 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

An examination of how the middle classes were conceived and discussed within the Conservative Party helps to distinguish the unique characteristics of the ideological shift to the right in the British context. Unlike the American case, the shift to the right was not a sophisticated, well-funded and organized grassroots movement led by residents of affluent suburban communities.³ From the interwar period on, British pressure groups including the Middle Class Union, the Anti-Waste League and the Middle Class Alliance represented serious discontent but they were not sustained organizational forces, nor indeed a movement that uprooted the Party's postwar commitment to the consensus programme.⁴ These organizations, however, have been interpreted as expressions and representative of middle-class discontent. But this view fails to consider how diverse

³ According to historian Lisa McGirr's profile, the typical activist in Orange County during this period was of "solidly middle class" origin. They "benefitted from the affluence" brought about by "the emergence of new industries" (namely, information technology) and "the expansion of professional opportunities." These individuals were usually, "well educated, well read and knowledgeable" on politics and government policies. They included: doctors, dentists, aerospace engineers, military officers and their wives. Their unity was based on a shared experience of social mobility, which "affirmed their faith in the possibility of individual achievement." Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 84 – 85; 87. Journalist Rick Perlstein identifies the origins of the New Right in a small group of "political diehards" This group included radio talk show host Clarence "Pat" Manion and John Birch Society founder Robert Welch. These conservatives found sympathy with small-business owners and manufacturers who resented the New Deal state because it empowered unions and dictated the way they managed their businesses. Having found a suitable spokesman in Barry Goldwater, this network of Washington insiders and increasingly zealous activists worked tirelessly in 1960 and 1964 to make their case. Though 1964 proved to be a disastrous defeat, "Goldwaterism" endured and eventually dominated mainstream Republican thinking. Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001). Also see Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review* 99(2), April 1994, 409 – 429; Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989) and Julian Zelizer, "Reflections: Rethinking the History of American Conservatism," *Reviews in American History* 38(2), June 2010, 367 – 392.

⁴ E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 123.

elements within the Conservative Party understood the nature and source of this discontent and the supposed class interests it reflected. This chapter, and others in this dissertation, will rectify this omission by previous scholars, by examining how the party, the Bow Group and the constituency associations understood what ailed the middle classes, in order to create a more comprehensive image of what middle discontent comprised and how the Conservative Party tried to respond to it.

After the Redistribution Act of 1885, “Villa Tories,” those Conservative middle classes who moved from industrial and urban centers to the suburbs, became a notable factor in the Conservative electoral resurgence and the Party’s rebranding as a *national* party.⁵ The scholarly discussion on Villa Toryism is connected to the larger question of how the party has constructed its electoral success and maintained relevance with a widening franchise in the twentieth century.⁶ It has frequently been asserted that the experience of prosperity for more Britons after the Second World War was detrimental to the Labour Party’s electoral fortunes. Fewer people, according to contemporaries, understood the message of struggle and protest under which the Labour Party was formed and turned, instead, to the Conservatives in order to preserve their material gains.

⁵ See James Cornford, “The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century.” *Victorian Studies* 7(1) Symposium on Victorian Affairs (2) (Sept., 1963): 35-66. Coetzee’s study has shown these Conservative suburbanites were not, “drab, dull, and conformist,” but rather at, “the forefront of change.” Frans Coetzee, “‘Villa Toryism’ Reconsidered: Conservatism and Suburban Sensibilities in Late Victorian Croyden,” *Parliamentary History*, 16(1) (February 1997), 30-31.

⁶ See J.P.D. Dunbabin, “Some Implications of the 1885 British Shift towards Single Member Constituencies,” *English Historical Review* 109(430) (February 1994), 89-100; Paul Readman, “The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Victorian England,” *The Historical Journal* 42(2) (1999), 467-493, and Matthew Roberts, “‘Villa Toryism’ and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902,” *The Historical Journal* 49(1) (2006), 217-246.

Scholars have attributed the Conservative Party's successes, especially after 1951, to their ability to mobilize the idea of affluence more effectively – that is, the ownership of televisions, cars, and homes – and to make it a uniquely *Conservative* idea.⁷ Unlike the Labour Party, the Conservatives did not face the same level of moral anxiety over incorporating consumer issues into their policies.⁸ The Party, as in previous instances, adapted and adjusted relatively quickly to the changing electoral landscape and reaped electoral rewards. Conservatives, however, were never completely comfortable with excessive expressions of materialism or being seen as promoting what they considered irresponsible consumerism. In fact, the Party expressed concern regarding the social consequences of unfettered consumerism and advertising techniques.⁹ As Chapter Five will show, the traditional middle classes of South West Hertfordshire attributed conspicuous consumption to working-class residents of local council estates and used this characteristic to disparage and resist their presence in the community. The research in this

⁷ Lawrence Black, "The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s," in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society?: Britain's Postwar 'Golden Age' Revisited* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 97. Also see James Hinton, "Militant Housewives: The British Housewives League and the Atlee Government," *History Workshop* 38(1994): 129 – 156; David Jarvis, "Mrs. Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s," *Twentieth Century British History* (1994) 5(2), 129-152 and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: rationing, controls and consumption. 1939 – 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸ For a discussion on how affluence was discussed on the Left, see Stuart Middleton, "'Affluence' and the Left in Britain, c.1958 – 1974," *English Historical Review* CXXIX (536) (2014), 107-138. Frank Mort also examines contemporary discussions regarding the vitality of democracy/ political participation in a consumer society. See Frank Mort, "Competing Domains: Democratic Subjects and Consuming Subjects in Britain and the United States since 1945," in Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (New York: BERG, 2006), chapter 10.

⁹ Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism, and Participation, 1954 – 1970* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 37 and Brian Girvin, "Affluence, Conservatism, and Political Competition in Great Britain and the US, 1945 – 1964," in Black and Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society?*, 29.

chapter will, therefore, build on the observations of Lawrence Black and Brian Girvin and show that uncertainties regarding the social effects of consumerism were also reflected in how the Party's conception of the middle classes, as consumers, was contested and even rejected by competing understandings based on occupation, morals and values.

Affluence and consumption are central organizing themes in this dissertation because many of the issues that rankled the Tories' "natural" constituency were wrapped up in the experience of improving living standards and promoting greater prosperity. The middle classes, according to contemporary commentators, were fed up with austerity and wanted more opportunities for home ownership, greater purchasing power, and the ability to increase their personal savings. The Conservative Party, in response, promised to enact policies that would reduce the burden of taxation on this section of the electorate and continue to pull back the reins of wartime economic regulation so that consumers could flex their muscles in the market. But, as Cohen's study on the development of consumerism in the United States has illustrated, consumers were not always passive members of the economy and society. During the First World War and into the 1930s, US consumers helped shape the marketplace in which business owners and shoppers interacted. Women were key players in this movement and their involvement helped reshape gendered conceptions of women as active and strong rather than passive and weak members of the market. Specific stakeholders in the economy helped stifle these activist consumers and they were replaced with "purchaser consumers," whose only job was to consume. This iteration of the consumer was largely conceived of as married couples or the male breadwinner. In Britain, the Consumers' Association (CA), created in

1957, similarly sought to cultivate an army of active, knowledgeable value-oriented consumer-citizens who sought to acquire high quality goods for the purposes of efficiency and rationalized living. According to Black, this organization was “the fastest growing voluntary association in Britain since after the war.”¹⁰ The CA spurred the creation of the Birmingham Consumers’ Group in 1967, which was created by “a group of affluent professionals” to “increase the awareness of consumers, to identify and promote the proper interests of consumers and the means of their protection and to provide a channel for consumer opinion and representation.” Hilton argues that the Birmingham Consumers’ Group, and other organizations of this brand, sought to provide information that would “empower” consumers to spend their money wisely and, as such, “overcome the advantages given to the manufacturer in a technical age.”¹¹ The Conservative Party’s fixation on consumers simply as individuals who purchased luxury products, therefore, was not only out of sync with the majority of experiences of the voting population but also with this significant movement that supported informed consumerism. The Party’s view of the middle classes as consumers in the 1950s and 1960s, however, created a

¹⁰ See Lawrence Black, “Which? craft in Post-War Britain: The Consumers’ Association and the Politics of Affluence,” *Albion* 36(1) (Spring, 2004), 54, and “‘Consumers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your illusions’: The Politics of the Consumers’ Association,” in *Redefining British Politics*, chapter 2. Also see Lizibeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2003); Peter Gurney, “The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain,” *Journal of Modern History*, 77 (Dec., 2005), 979-989 and Matthew Hilton, “The Fable of the Sheep, or, Private Virtues, Public Vice: The Consumer Revolution in the Twentieth Century,” *Past & Present*, 176 (Aug., 2002), 235 – 240.

¹¹ Hilton notes that the Birmingham Consumers’ Group power was rooted in the “socio-cultural uniformity” but they are better described as a “habitus,” defined by “an ethos of professionalism and technocratic expertise,” rather than a class. Social, cultural and political dispositions united these activists rather than income alone. Matthew Hilton, “The Polyester-Flannelled Philanthropists: The Birmingham Consumers’ Group and Affluent Britain,” in Black and Pemberton, *An Affluent Society?* 150, 151, 162.

space in which Margaret Thatcher could nurture and develop her philosophy on individual achievement and greed in the 1980s. But the triumph of the middle classes, as the heroes of Conservatism, was not a foregone conclusion. In fact, a number of conceptions of the middle classes existed alongside the acquisitive consumer in this earlier period and they differed a great deal from that those which Thatcher hoped to rally around her cause in 1974.¹²

Of course, for much of its history, the Conservative Party did not have to articulate explicitly whether it viewed the middle classes as professionals, employees, white-collar workers, or suburban owner-occupiers. Once the franchise started to expand, Disraeli rebranded Conservatives as representing national over sectional interests. The Party has proclaimed to be a “classless” political party ever since. Yet, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Party’s core constituency urged its leadership to pay attention to middle-class issues that were, in fact, widely differentiated and sectional in their character. Evoking consumption as a common good was one way to undermine antagonisms within the middle classes that might arise if the Party was seen as overly sympathetic to one particular sub-section. This strategy served as a convenient but impermanent solution while Party intellectuals actually grappled with the role of the middle classes in Conservative Party thinking, which will be discussed further in Chapter Four. But, who then *were* the middle classes in the three decades after the Second World War? Surprisingly, this is actually a difficult question to answer.

¹² David Wood, “Mrs. Thatcher's middle-class uprising,” *Times* [London, England] 13 Oct. 1975. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 5 Dec. 2014.

Who Comprised the Post-Second World War Middle Classes?

In simple terms, the middle classes can be defined as those individuals sandwiched between Britain's upper classes (or the traditional elite) and manual workers.¹³ According to historians of nineteenth-century Britain, the middle classes were divided by "metropolitan" and "provincial" rivalries until their consolidation after the First World War.¹⁴ Sociologists defined this group even more simply as "non-manual" workers until the 1980s.¹⁵ In 1949, Journalist Roy Lewis and Conservative MP Angus

¹³ The upper classes in British society have, historically, enjoyed immense wealth, which was concentrated in land. While much diminished in political power since the First World War, this group maintains special authority in society and culture. Ross McKibbin counts minor royals, "senior functionaries of the court, the old aristocracy, [and] political elites attached to the peerage by birth, marriage or social affiliation" as members of the upper class. Small sections of the gentry and the very wealthy can also be included in this exclusive group. In the interwar period, the composition of this group grew to include wealthy (American) businessmen, who received an entrée to Society through Hostesses, as well members of the upper middle class through education and certain professions. As with membership in other class groups, behavioural codes and dress also helped demonstrate one's belonging to the upper class. The term "upper class" is employed here rather than "elite" because the latter term is focused generally on the idea of power and the ability of a small exclusive group to exercise their power to make decisions. There were "elite" members of the middle and working classes. The British upper classes certainly had authority and exercised political power but by 1951 their influence was largely indirect. The term is not meant to subordinate but to create an upward boundary and to evoke broader characteristics that differentiated this group from the members of the middle classes, including, for example, education, sources of wealth, and political allegiances. Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918 – 1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2, 31, 40-42. Also see Mike Savage and Karel Williams, eds., *Remembering Elites* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

¹⁴ Richard Trainor, "Neither Metropolitan no Provincial: The Interwar Middle Class," in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds., *The Making of the British Middle Class? Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity in the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998), chapter 12.

¹⁵ John Bonham defines his middle class as everything "other than manual wage," which includes individuals from business, professional, and white collar. Each of those groups includes occupied persons, dependents and the retired. See John Bonham, *The Middle Class Vote* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 101. Mike Savage, "Making sense of middle-class politics: a secondary analysis of

Maude hinted at the unwieldy nature of the middle classes as a social group when they wrote, “there remains the almost infinite variety of sub-groups within them, interlinked, each sharing a number of characteristics with its neighbor groups, and with a high degree of mobility between them.”¹⁶ Scholarly studies on the middle classes began in earnest in the 1980s and sociological surveys confirmed the existence of a middle class that had expanded rapidly and was still undergoing growth and, as a result, was highly fragmented in nature. Savage calls the situation of the middle classes “chaotic” because the stratum consists of people originating from varying backgrounds who hold differing values.¹⁷ The concept of the middle classes becomes even more complex when scholars try to associate occupations, economic status and values held by those within the stratum. Many of these efforts to categorize and label the middle classes with empirical data, however, can be static and inconsistent depending on the parameters used to establish the boundaries of the middle classes. Efforts to measure and categorize can also lead to the creation of rigid definitions that cannot accommodate conceptual overlap when discussing dynamic processes like social mobility. These approaches also do not consider individual subjectivities on class identity. Quantifying the characteristics of the middle classes is only one part of the equation. Culturally-centered scholarship has complicated conceptions of the middle classes further by taking into account the impressions,

the 1987 British general election survey,” *The Sociological Review*, 39(1) (1991), 28. The “Alford Index” measured class politics. Specifically, the method evaluates the extent of dealignment by subtracting the proportion of the middle class voting Labour from the proportion of working class voting Labour. This index split the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP/ Goldthorpe) class schema, based on occupation, along the lines of non-manual (I-IV) manual (V-VII).

¹⁶ Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, *The English Middle Classes* (London: Phoenix House, 1949), 19.

¹⁷ Savage, “Making sense of middle-class politics,” 28.

behavioural codes, style of life, attitudes and ideologies that imbued middle-class identity with meaning. These recent approaches, less concerned with measuring the size of the middle classes with empirical data, are instructive because they help reveal *why* the middle classes loomed large not only in Conservative Party policies but also in their political imagination after the 1951. In short, scholarship on the middle classes has only revealed a general image of what the middle classes have looked like and who ought to be included in that group.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Conservative Party, too, was in the process of working out what this historically and electorally important constituency looked like and how best to win their support. After the Second World War, rapid social and economic changes led to increased wages, greater employment stability and increased consumer purchasing power, which in turn led to improved standards of living.¹⁸ While the middle classes grew in numbers, contemporary qualitative survey data reveals that there were

¹⁸ Black and Hugh Pemberton have argued that postwar Britain, seen through an international lens, has overstated “decline.” Many Britons saw absolute economic growth, which brought about improved living standards as well as improving health and life expectancy, full employment, and the availability of luxury consumer goods. Todd, however, has shown that “affluence” was not a sweeping and general experience rather differed depending on region of the country, age, gender, class and more. See Black and Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society?* and Selina Todd, “Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Postwar Working Class,” *Contemporary British History* 22(4) (2008), 501 – 518. Goldthorpe’s social surveys in Luton, as well, highlight that increased wages and greater purchasing power did not translate into work satisfaction or increased aspiration in the workplace. Moreover, increased wages often meant more time at work, which meant that manual workers did not have time to socialize with friends and family. See John H. Goldthorpe, *The affluent worker in the class structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Also see John Rule, “Time, Affluence and Private Leisure: The British Working Class in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Labour History Review*, 66, 2 (2001), 223-242.

limits to the extent that economic changes had on forming or changing class identities.¹⁹

Economic changes, however, coincided with social shifts including a stagnant birth rate, greater suburbanization, and increased educational opportunities after the war.²⁰ These conditions put the values and concerns of the middle classes at the forefront of the national political discourse as well as the public consciousness.

Yet, ironically, the middle classes had largely been ignored by the social sciences for much of the first half of the twentieth century because these disciplines originated as part of Edwardian reform efforts aimed at understanding and solving issues understood as “problems” including poverty and unemployment.²¹ The middle classes were never a “social problem” that needed to be fixed.²² Those individuals who occupied the middle

¹⁹ See Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker: industrial attitudes and behaviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) and Mike Savage, “Changing Class Identities in Post-war Britain: Perspectives from Mass-Observation,” *Sociological Review Online*, 12(3) (2007).

²⁰ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 72-73; 103-105; 261-262.

²¹ Jon Lawrence, “Class, “affluence,” and the politics of everyday life in Britain, c.1930 – 1964,” *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), 274.

²² In Lawrence’s research, he finds that even though contemporary studies stopped casting the working classes as social “problems” they remained true to their field’s roots by casting attention on continued poverty and unemployment. They were not interested in “tracing the contours of new, prosperous working-class lifestyle.” In fact, many of those who were “comfortable” and even individuals who lived in prosperous neighbourhoods were excluded from studies. The way that these studies were designed obscures the fact that “affluent workers,” those who were paid well for a rare skills, existed before the concept and panic on the Left after the war. Lawrence, “Class, “affluence,” and the politics of everyday life in Britain, c.1930 – 1964,” 275, 276-277, 282. Also see Rosemary Crompton, *Class and Stratification: An Intro to Current Debates* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 32. Lockwood and Savage have also observed that the predominance of the working classes in research on class formation is rooted in Marxist influenced scholarship, which casts the workers as the primary agents of historical change. David Lockwood, “Marking Out the Middle Classes,” in Tim Butler and Mike Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes* (Bristol, Pa.: UCL Press, 1995), 2,4.

sections of society along with their values and characteristics only emerged in studies after the Second World War as part of efforts to define and understand *working class* identity. The continued interest in manual workers stemmed from a perceived crisis on the left and within the Labour Party, which had lost three consecutive general elections by 1959. Politicians and political commentators were perplexed as to why the Labour Party, a party historically linked to the interests of manual workers, failed to capture the votes of their “natural” supporters who represented the majority of the electorate. Social scientists were thus pre-occupied with what was different in postwar Britain that had changed the political allegiances to the Labour Party rather than with understanding how these changes also affected the middle classes.

Sociologists Abrams and Richard Rose suspected that Labour’s electoral woes were due to the *embourgeoisement* of sections of the working class brought about by increased prosperity. This experience of increased prosperity and social mobility among the working classes, they posited, weakened occupational and community solidarity, which were central to class formation and class-consciousness as well as informing their politics.²³ They tested their theory with a series of surveys probing thoughts on consumption habits, home ownership and nationalization policy.²⁴ In the end, they did not find a direct link between consumption patterns and politics but they concluded that Labour’s electoral position was due to three main issues: the relevance of socialism, the

²³ Fiona Devine, Mike Savage, John Scott and Rosemary Crompton, *Rethinking Class: Culture, Identities and Lifestyle* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.

²⁴ Mike Savage, “Working Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study,” *Sociology* 39(5) (2005), 931.

content of the Labour Party programme and the perception held by voters of a divided leadership. Respondents perceived Labour's programme of ideas as out of sync with the social and economic changes following the war. According to the social surveys, Labour was overwhelmingly associated with workers, underdogs and with "eradicating class difference," which made the party appear "restrictive," "depressing," and "obsolete."²⁵

The party was also dogged by the criticism from the left that it had sacrificed the purity of their ideas and principles in order to compete with the Conservatives and, therefore, became indistinguishable from their opponents. Party in-fighting brought about by frustrations with the lack of electoral success exacerbated these image problems. The Labour Party, according to Rose and Abrams, needed a complete ideological overhaul to change these perceptions.²⁶ According to this study, the politics of the working classes were not directly informed by consumption patterns and, most importantly, the

²⁵ Mark Abrams and Richard Rose, *Must Labour Lose?* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1960), 22-23.

²⁶ Crosland was at the forefront of trying to show people that Labour's principal tenants of equality and extension of democracy were not incongruent with an affluent Britain. Labour, in his opinion, needed to adapt socialism from being centered on asceticism to arguing for a balance in the public and private experience of prosperity. See Catherine Ellis, "Total Abstinence and a Good Filing System? Crosland and the Affluent Society," in Black and Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society?*, chapter 5. For discussions on how the Left's difficulties with affluence see Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951 – 1965* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Steven Fielding, "Activists against 'Affluence': Labour Party Culture during the 'Golden Age' circa 1950 – 1970," *Journal of British Studies* 40(2001): 241-267; Martin Francis, "Economics and Ethics: The Nature of Labour's Socialism, 1945 – 51," *Twentieth Century British History* 6(1995): 220-243; Gurney, "The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain," 978; Hilton, "The Fable of the Sheep, or, Private Virtues, Public Vice: The Consumer Revolution in the Twentieth Century," 241, and Nick Tiratsoo, "Popular Politics, affluence and the Left in the 1950s," in Anthony Gorst, Lewis Johnman and W. Scott Lucas, eds., *Contemporary British History, 1931 – 1961: Politics and the Limits of Policy* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 53 – 58.

embourgeoisement theory did not explain those who had acquired “durable consumer goods” and still voted Labour.

The *embourgeoisement* thesis remained a popular crutch for observers and commentators seeking to explain the postwar political alignment. Not all scholars, however, were convinced that increased prosperity had led resultant “affluent workers” to abandon their class identities, values and, most importantly, their political loyalties for the sake of comfort and consumer goods. Cambridge sociologists Goldthorpe and Lockwood revitalized class analysis with the *Affluent Worker* project published in 1963. This sociological survey was built on extensive interviews with “exemplars of affluent workers” in Luton.²⁷ The interviewers asked the skilled workers, employed at the local Vauxhall (vehicles) and Skefko (chemicals) plants, to consider various aspects of their class identity. Goldthorpe’s extensive fieldwork challenged some fairly shaky assumptions regarding working-class experience and identity. As with Rose and Abrams, the most important findings of this study were that class position was not directly related to “consumer power.” Goldthorpe also found that the lives of manual workers and their families did not conform to those of white-collar (non-manual) workers as a result of increased prosperity in a substantial way. They contended that the *embourgeoisement* thesis overstated the similarities between manual and non-manual workers because while the former group might well have gained more money to spend on cars, televisions and general leisure, they had not adopted “middle class” characteristics or values. Goldthorpe *et al.* found that unlike manual workers, non-manual workers benefitted from better

²⁷ Savage, “Working Class Identities in the 1960s,” 931.

working conditions, stability in their work, “fringe benefits,” as well as, “long-term income prospects and promotion.”²⁸ The study found that, on the whole, manual workers on the shop floor did not integrate within the networks of the company for which they worked and did not necessarily aspire to rise within the organization in the same way as “white-collar” workers.²⁹ There was no testimonial evidence to suggest that changing work and economic situation had a corresponding impact on orienting manual workers towards middle-class values, culture or traditions.

A later study by Goldthorpe *et al.* (1969), proposed that a better way to describe the social changes taking place due to prosperity was that of *convergence* rather than *embourgeoisement*. The latter concept saw the direction of change as a one-way movement up the social structure. In fact, economic and social changes brought about movement both ways, which blurred the lines between the lower middle and working classes. For instance, manual workers increasingly turned towards their family and home and retreated from their work-based community. In doing so, workers adopted an “individualistic” outlook with regard to work, leisure and consumption, but this did not make them “middle class.”³⁰ At the same time, the lower sections of the middle classes adopted “instrumental collectivism” as a part of their outlook. Owing to the type of work they held (in public institutions rather than private enterprises), “rising prices, increasing

²⁸ Goldthorpe, *The affluent worker in the class structure*, 25.

²⁹ Goldthorpe, *The affluent worker in the class structure*, 83.

³⁰ The problem that manual workers with an “individualistic outlook,” or reoriented toward home and family rather than the community presented was a widely held assumption that it would keep people away from participation in politics, which would bring about greater equality. See Lawrence Black, “The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s,” Black and Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society?*, 90-91.

large scale units of bureaucratic administration, [and] reduced chances of upward mobility,” the lower middle classes “accepted trade union activity as legitimate part of the process to secure work and wages.”³¹ Manual workers, therefore, appeared similar to non-manual workers but the opposite was also true.

This blurring of once distinct class boundaries, or at least the perception of distinct class divisions, did not create a new class identity nor did it fortify any pre-existing sense of middle-class or working-class identity. McKibbin argues that, beginning in the 1930s, the “new” middle classes who originated from working-class backgrounds effectively dulled anti-working-class sentiments characteristic of the middle classes in the 1920s.³² But manual workers were still a distinct group unto themselves.³³ John Rule has supported this point in his study on overtime and “work intensity” amongst urban industrial workers during the 1950s and 1960s. Workers had closed the earnings gap with the white-collar work force mostly through overtime, which had become “institutionalized,” rather than augmented through their base wages.³⁴ By these means the manual worker could afford material comforts that made them appear middle class. But they often worked much longer hours for their wages and their days were defined by erratic shift work. Even though manual workers could afford a middle-class lifestyle, they were robbed of the opportunity to participate in middle-class forms of leisure.³⁵

³¹ Goldthorpe, *The affluent worker in the class structure*, 26-27.

³² McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918 – 1950*, 68.

³³ Rule states that, “a strong sense of working class identity persisted in Great Britain until the 1970s.” Rule, “Time, Affluence and Private Leisure,” 223.

³⁴ Rule, “Time, Affluence and Private Leisure,” 228.

³⁵ Rule, “Time, Affluence and Private Leisure,” 229-230, 233. Also see Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910 – 2010* (London: John Murray, 2014), chapter 12.

Contemporary observations of decreased participation in union or community activity, according to Rule, owed largely to the fact that workers were tired and, therefore, preferred to stay in with their families when they did have time off from work. Workers were not, then, aping the middle classes by retreating from the factory, communal social settings or their unions.

Goldthorpe effectively dismantled the *embourgeoisement* thesis with his *Affluent Worker* study and it remains a touchstone for class analysis even though scholars have since revised aspects of his approach. One of the major points of revision concerned how Goldthorpe *et al.* defined the parameters of their study and the impact on their results. The “affluent workers” identified in that study were male, earned, “*at least* £17 per week gross,” and had some sort of savings.³⁶ Workers had been questioned on their prospects for promotion and on their consumption patterns, and Goldthorpe came away with a picture of manual workers who valued money and the prospect of increasing their earning power as motivation for work. For these researchers, relational concepts like status and power had little to do with how workers saw themselves.³⁷ Savage has revisited the original fieldwork from this study and found that class identity was informed by interplay between all three categories. When workers talked about money, for example, they were also making indirect comments about status and power. Respondents, for instance,

³⁶ Goldthorpe, *The affluent worker in the class structure*, 36-37.

³⁷ Savage, “Working Class Identities in the 1960s,” 932-933.

referred to the limitations of their own resources and that they acquired their money through work not inheritance.³⁸

Fiona Devine, building on the theoretical work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, along with Savage, has led class analysis away from studies that linked class identity and class-consciousness solely to employment or social background. Instead, these scholars focus on the characteristics that make it possible for people to differentiate themselves from other sections of societies and form bonds with those with similar experiences.³⁹ This body of work has uncovered a great deal regarding consumption patterns and relationships formed in communities of workers, all of which has been integral to debunking assumptions regarding the erosion of a working-class identity.⁴⁰ This research has shown that even without conventional understandings of working-class culture as primarily associated with shop floor and community based politics, as relationships to these social organizations have become more instrumental in nature, manual workers have maintained a distinctive lifestyle, community and outlook.

The middle classes became the subjects of sociological enquiry in another study led by Goldthorpe in 1980. His major contribution to the reconceptualization of the

³⁸ Savage, “Working Class Identities in the 1960s,” 935.

³⁹ Sociologists here remind us of E.P. Thompson who did not understand class as a structure or category. Class, as he understood it, is a process that occurs in human relationships. He wrote, “[c]lass happens when some men, as a result of common experiences, (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their shared interests as between themselves and against other men, whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs ... Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms.” E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 8-9.

⁴⁰ See Mike Savage, “Local Habitus and Working Class Culture,” in Devine *et al.*, *Rethinking Class: Culture, Identities and Lifestyle*, chapter 5.

middle classes was the introduction a new model of class structure, which organized individuals by occupation. The majority of middle classes fell into a category he called the “service class.”⁴¹ This new organizational category included, professionals, managers and administrative employees. Under Goldthorpe’s model, an individual’s class position, status and relationship to employer were determined by attributes like skills and education. Marxist conceptions of class assume that conflict, as a result of exploitive relationships, between classes brings about social and historical change. Goldthorpe’s theories, in contrast, have been considered by sociologists as part of the Weberian tradition of class analysis that focus on “differentiating positions within labour markets,” and examining how different positions result in different opportunities (“life chances”) to improve one’s quality of life, along with attitudes, actions, and behaviours.⁴² Unlike manual workers, the service class was highly educated and their “delegated authority and specialized tasks give them considerable autonomy.”⁴³ Their status and power came from specialized skills and education. These were salaried employees. This group and its sub-

⁴¹ Part of the Nuffield Class schema/ UK National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification which also consisted of seven main categories of class based on occupation and employment status. The class groups are as follows: Higher managerial, administrative and professions; Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations; Intermediate occupations; Small employers and own account workers; Lower Supervisory and technical occupations; Semi-routine occupations; Routine-Occupations; Never worked and long-term unemployed. See “The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification,” Office for National Statistics, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html> (accessed 19 March 2014). See Tim Butler and Mike Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes* (Bristol, Pa.: UCL Press, 1995), 276-277, chapter 18 and Savage, “Making sense of middle-class politics,” 27-31, 43.

⁴² Richard Breen, “A Weberian Approach to Class Analysis,” in Erik Olin Wright, ed. *Approaches to Class Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 44-48.

⁴³ Butler and Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, 1.

groups did not share a common identity or the same political allegiances because it grew rapidly after the war with large numbers being recruited from different backgrounds.⁴⁴ Members of this group were united in acquiring “middle-class” status, but there was no “consciousness” or common identity based on shared experiences, outlook, and aspirations. The growing service class demonstrates Goldthorpe’s contention that the middle classes of Britain were not “demographically formed.”⁴⁵ The fragmented quality of the service class was due to the rapid rate at which they grew as well as the large numbers that were recruited from different backgrounds to this class after the war.⁴⁶ He concluded, however, that Britain’s middle classes as a whole were “essentially conservative in outlook,” because they were in a position of “delegated authority” and held “specialized knowledge,” “favourable employment conditions” and the potential for mobility within the organizations where they worked and even within the wider social structure.⁴⁷ These individuals belonged to a “privileged class” and would want to preserve existing social structures.⁴⁸

Goldthorpe’s conception of the middle classes is instructive to this dissertation because it challenges the view of a unified, organized, and politically cohesive middle class threatening the electoral success of the Conservative Party. The “service class,” according to Goldthorpe’s model, was made up of three distinct sub-groups and the

⁴⁴ Mike Savage, “Class Analysis and Social Research,” in Butler and Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, 24.

⁴⁵ Butler and Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, 29.

⁴⁶ Mike Savage, “Class Analysis and Social Research,” in Butler and Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, 24.

⁴⁷ Butler and Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, 30.

⁴⁸ Anthony Heath and Mike Savage, “Political Alignments within the Middle Class,” in Butler and Savage, eds., *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, 276.

politics of each section were informed directly by their relationship to their employers and capital. Again, Goldthorpe attributed differing politics within the service class due to the fact that its members were recruited from varied social backgrounds, at a rapid rate, and they had yet to shed the political allegiances of their previous social class.

Savage has an alternative explanation for variations in middle-class politics based on the different relationships members have had to the state throughout their development.⁴⁹ The main divide in opinion occurs between professional or managerial occupations or, more simply, a division between those who work in the public and private sector. Professional workers, historically, worked for the state and its organizations while managers and administrative workers were beholden to private companies and employers.⁵⁰ Savage adds that the state is “not just an employer” to that section of the middle classes rather “their class formation and reproduction is tied to the activities of a state apparatus which trains and employs them.”⁵¹ Professional workers increase their employment status and worth within their professional hierarchy and improve their position with educational credentials. Managers, in contrast, do not rely on the state for validation and can accumulate wealth and security independent of the state’s protection.

Class analysis provides the theory and empirical data to complement historical narrative. Recently, historians have found contemporary sociological surveys to be

⁴⁹ Savage’s conclusions come from examining voting records from 1987 general election. Also see Mike Savage, and James Barlow, Peter Dickens, and Tony Fielding, *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture: Middle Class Formation in Contemporary Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1992), chapter 3 and Harold Perkin, *The Rise of the Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁵⁰ Savage, “Making sense of middle-class politics,” 47.

⁵¹ Savage, “Making sense of middle-class politics,” 48.

treasure troves for uncovering subjective accounts of the material circumstances in which their historical subjects lived. These sources also reveal indirect commentary on class identity not apparent to Goldthorpe and his team because this information did not fit into their variables or categories. Savage and Lawrence, for example, have each revisited original survey material and found surprising reflections on class identity.⁵² As mentioned above, Savage found that while the affluent workers of Luton seem primarily focused on their buying power and accumulating wealth, they expressed an awareness of their position in *how* they discussed money matters. These workers knew they were different from white-collar workers and the elite.⁵³ Lawrence uses these types of encounters to show different professional and everyday usage of class languages as well as how researchers, who were “marked by class,” as scholars from an elite institution, had an impact on responses from their subjects.⁵⁴ By flipping the perspective, Lawrence uncovers condescending comments about social graces, hospitality, home décor as well as manners and dress. More importantly, the ways in which researchers classified their subjects were imbued with their own understandings of class informed by their own class background. Lawrence noted repeated references to the words “status” and “display,”

⁵² Savage and Lawrence are part of an increasing awareness of the role of the social scientist and how their survey work shaped historical interpretations of postwar Britain. Also see James Hinton, “Middle-class Socialism: Selfhood, Democracy and Distinction in Wartime Durham County,” *History Workshop Journal* 61(1) (2006): 116-141; Mike Savage, “Changing Class Identities in Post-war Britain: Perspectives from Mass-Observation,” *Sociological Review Online*, 12(3) (2007) and *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Todd, “Affluence, Class and Crown Street” and Chris Waters, “The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain,” *Journal of British Studies* 51(3) (July 2012), 685-710.

⁵³ Savage, “Working Class identities in the 1960s,” 938.

⁵⁴ Jon Lawrence, “Social Science Encounters and the Negotiation of Difference in early 1960s England,” *History Workshop Journal*, Advance Access published November 19, 2013, 4.

both used to describe workers who were “trying too hard.”⁵⁵ These instances, Lawrence argues, illustrates the “performances of class” where workers behaved not as expected, which also helped researchers construct their images. In short, these encounters have been mined by scholars today for all sorts of codes and images of class that were not evident to researchers at the time.

How big were the Post-Second World War Middle Classes?

Journalist Roy Lewis and Conservative politician Angus Maude estimated the middle classes numbered 16-18 million and comprised of 40 per cent of the population in 1949. Their classification of the middle classes included “professions, business men, and managers above the grade of foreman, most farmers, the majority of the public service, the majority of shopkeepers, a substantial number of clerks and other non-manual workers, and some independent craftsmen.” This definition, they acknowledged, did not include “sentiments” or the “spiritual migration of the working to the middle classes.”⁵⁶ Though, as Goldthorpe *et al.* have shown, earning a “middle-class” income did not necessarily transform social identities in the way that contemporary observers assumed. John Bonham’s study constructed the middle-class electorate by counting, “all adults in occupations other than manual employment ... add wives, retired, and other ‘unoccupied adults’ of the same class ... the total is about ten millions (10,400,000) in an electorate off

⁵⁵ Lawrence, “Social Science Encounters and the Negotiation of Difference in early 1960s England,” 8.

⁵⁶ Lewis and Maude, *The English Middle Classes*, 17, 18.

thirty four millions.”⁵⁷ This figure marked an increase from the 1931 numbers, which counted 7,850,000 adults as middle class.⁵⁸

Attempting to measure the middle classes according to categories like occupation and employment status can be problematic. As Cole observed at the time, a bounty of statistical data can still be unreliable due to the varied ideas surrounding the concept of “middle classes” and which individuals are included and omitted from this category in each study. An exact measurement of the size of the middle classes after the Second World War remains elusive.⁵⁹

In classifying occupations, data like that found in the Census made an effort to take into consideration the “kind of work” and the “nature of the operation performed.” Occupations were grouped according to “material worked in, the degree of skill involved, the physical energy required, the environmental conditions,” in which individuals worked, and general “socio-economic status ...” kept in mind.⁶⁰ The Registrar General’s Social Class Scale, which consists of categories including professional, managerial, technical, non-manual skilled, manual skilled, partly skilled, and unskilled, established firm boundaries for understanding the way that the middle classes were defined in official institutions and capacities lacking in more theoretical discussions. Beginning in 1951, the Census introduced classification by “Socio-economic Group” and “Salary/ Wage earner

⁵⁷ The figure included all persons over the age of 21 and covered Great Britain but not Northern Ireland and is derived from The Census Population, 1951. John Bonham, *The Middle Class Vote* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 101, 102.

⁵⁸ Bonham, *The Middle Class Vote*, 113.

⁵⁹ Cole, “The Conception of the Middle Classes,” 275; 277; 285-286.

⁶⁰ Office of National Statistics (ONS). *Sample Census 1966, England and Wales – Economic Activity, County Leaflets, General Explanatory Notes*, ix.

Group.”⁶¹ These two new categories were created to improve upon the broader categories under Social Class by allowing for greater specificity in occupations, which would help further distinguish between manual and non-manual labour. Political parties were more likely to have been informed by these officially sanctioned definitions rather than cultural conceptions and individual subjectivities concerning class identity.

Census material does not explain class identity or the process of class formation since it crudely gathers occupations into homogenous clusters. For the purposes of this dissertation, these groupings of occupations and their proportions within the wider population of “occupied” (individuals with employment) Britons contextualizes the Party’s focus on the middle classes, the language employed to discuss them and the extent to which the Party’s conceptions of the middle classes connected to or deviated from an official institutional view. It is striking, for example, that some Conservative rank-and-file continued to evoke “shopkeepers,” “small-business owners” and those with “lower incomes” when they talked about the middle classes. In fact, shopkeepers (the classic

⁶¹ “Social Class,” employed first in 1911, includes five broad categories: Professional, etc. Occupations; Intermediate Occupations; Skilled Occupations; Non-skilled Occupations; and; Unskilled. This information was used to help create the Fertility Report of the Census. The “Salary/ Wage earner Group” is primarily used in studies of national income. It only takes into account working members (“occupied”) of the population. In Social Class as well as “Socio-economic Group,” the whole of the occupied and retired population is analyzed. Socio-economic Group includes 13 categories: (Agricultural) Farmers (I), Agricultural Workers (II); (Non-agricultural, non-manual) Higher Administrative, professional and managerial (III), Other administrative, professional and managerial (IV), Shopkeepers including proprietors and managers of wholesale businesses (V), Clerical Workers (VI), Shop Assistants (VII), and Personal Service (VIII); (Non-agricultural manual) Formen (IX), Skilled Workers (X), Semi skilled Workers (XI), Unskilled (XII); (Special groups, not included elsewhere) Armed forces (XIII).ONS. “Programme of Census Reports and other census information.” *Census 1951, England and Wales – Occupation Tables* (London: H.M.S.O., 1956) x – xii.

petty bourgeoisie) were a minority amongst these occupations in this postwar period. The majority of those considered part of the middle classes actually worked in clerical positions as clerks and cashiers. Yet, the continued relevance of shopkeepers and small business owners highlights the power of historic archetypes in postwar Conservative rhetoric, which perhaps suggests why the Conservatives seemed out of step with the patterns of social change in this respect. Conservatives continued to draw from this resource presumably because many party members and supporters saw themselves as industrious and self-sufficient individuals of old.

If the above discussions that illustrated characteristics typically associated with this social class are applied to Census data, “middle-class occupations” can be defined as those that were: non-manual, requiring university standard education or a high degree of specialized education, and with supervisory, managerial, planning and directing roles.⁶² In 1951, the total number of occupied males and females in Britain numbered 14,063,542 and 6,272,876 respectively.⁶³ Those individuals belonging to Social Class I and III-VIII, which included farmers and non-manual professional, administrative, managerial, shop-keeping, clerical, and personal service occupations numbered 3,891,072 males and

⁶² Lewis and Maude indicate that “most farmers” belong to the middle classes. This criteria was applied to the census data where available and counted if they were enumerated as “Farmers, Farm managers” (1951) and “Farmers, farm managers and market gardeners,” (1966).

⁶³ This total excludes 2,003,541 males and 11,726,417 females listed as “retired or not gainfully employed.” ONS. *Census 1951, England and Wales – Table 1 Occupations of Population aged 15 and over by Industrial Status showing also Social Class and Economic group assignments* (London: H.M.S.O, 1956)

3,830,554 females.⁶⁴ The following table shows how the occupations were distributed into each category of the Social-Economic Groups in question:

Social-Economic Group	Males	Females
I – Farmers	273,288	18,610
III – Higher Administrative, Professional, Managerial	412,859	83,332
IV – Other Managerial	1,255,026	781,340
V - Shopkeepers	478,663	161,954
VI - Clerical	686,579	987,600
VII – Shop Assistant	477,151	556,688
VIII – Personal Service	307,506	1,241,030

Table 1: Socio-economic group - distribution by sex and in Social Class I, III - VIII (Farmers and non-agricultural, non-manual)

The figures in this table show that the majority of occupied males held positions listed as “Other Managerial,” which included those who worked as teachers (119,270), the position of draughtsman (106,802), in the engineering and allied trades (89,683), as well as heads or managers of commercial or industrial office departments (52,3654). Women, as McKibbin observed, predominantly held “minor” middle-class positions. In this period, women occupied positions in “Personal Service,” which included occupations such as indoor domestic servants (373,480), charwomen and office cleaners (215,336), kitchen hands (170, 560), cooks (121, 960), as well as nurses and midwives (130,179).

Men and women, therefore, experienced the world of middle-class work in vastly

⁶⁴ I arrived at this total by adding the figures of all those occupations listed as Social Class I, III to VIII in *Census 1951, England and Wales – Table 1 Occupations of Population aged 15 and over by Industrial Status showing also Social Class and Economic group assignments*. This total includes those who were “out of work” on the day of the census.

different ways even though the language and official social categories employed by official institutions regarded them as part of the same broader grouping, who all benefitted from increased affluence.

Occupation classification in the 1961 Census was streamlined given that “overelaborate” divisions did not enhance the quality of data. The occupational unit groups, which numbered about 600 in 1951 were reduced to 200 and based on the *International Standard Classification of Occupations*.⁶⁵ The 1961 Census, however, continued to employ “Social Class” and “Socio-Economic Group” classifications though the later category was adjusted to include 16 socio-economic groups from the previous 13.⁶⁶ It is still possible to gain a general sense of what occupations could be considered middle class with these coding and organization modifications in mind. In 1961, economically active males numbered 14,649,080 and 7,045,390 women, which represented a slight increase for men and a more significant increase for women from 1951. Of those economically active individuals, 5,039,500 males and 4,965,610 females held occupations belonging to Socio-Economic Groups 1-7.⁶⁷ The majority of females

⁶⁵ Office of National Statistics. *Census 1961, Great Britain, General Report* (London: H.M.S.O.), 185.

⁶⁶ The new socio-economic groups included: (1) Employers and managers in central and local government, industry, commerce, etc., - large establishments; (2) Employers and managers in industry, commerce, etc.- small establishments; (3) Professional workers – self employed; (4) Professional workers – employees; (5) Intermediate non-manual workers; (6) Junior non-manual workers; (7) Personal service workers; (8) Foremen and supervisors; (9) Skilled manual workers; (10) Semi-skilled manual workers; (11) Unskilled manual workers; (12) Own-account workers, other than professional; (13) Farmers – employers and managers; (14) Farmers – own account; (15) Agricultural workers; (16) Members of the armed forces. Office of National Statistics. *Classification of Occupations 1960* (London: H.M.S.O., 1960), x, xi-xii.

⁶⁷ Socio-economic groups 1-7 are not directly comparable to that used in 1951 but approximate the occupational organization based on non-manual professional, administrative, clerical, sales.

(1,795,950) occupied clerical positions with a significant proportion (1,130,170) working as clerks, cashiers and office machine operators. Still, the number of women employed as “charwomen, office cleaners; window cleaners, chimney sweeps” (312,900), “maids, valets and related service workers” (300,640) and as “restaurateurs, waiters and counterhands” (274,810) remained comparable with the numbers from ten years prior. Males were more evenly distributed amongst clerical (1,045,380); sales (1,165,120); and professional, technical, artist occupations (1,172,770). A significant number of males (980,870), like females, worked as clerks, cashiers, and office machine operators. For males and females, large proportions of professional, technical, artist occupations were made up of elementary school teachers (183,240 males, 261,660 females) and 262,740 female nurses and 150,170 male draughtsman. From 1951, more women, though still occupying “minor” middle-class occupations, gained positions in white-collar work while the number of men who held occupations in this category remained stable though were dominated by clerical and sales positions.

In 1971, 5,324,330 males and 6,142,110 women held occupations that would be considered part of the middle classes.⁶⁸ Unlike in 1951, there was a greater distribution of workers in different fields. A large proportion of occupied males held clerical positions (995,680) with an overwhelming majority as clerks and cashiers (861,410). Many

Of note, the category of “junior non-manual” includes, “clerical, sales, non-manual communications, and security” and, thus, “guards” and “police men” were counted here unlike in 1951.

⁶⁸ I arrived at this total using “Occupation by sex and usual area of residence - Economic Activity – Table 15,” which grouped occupations in a similar fashion to Economic Activity tables 2 and 3 from the 1966 Sample Census. As with the data from 1966, the total is the sum of all numbers listed for occupations considered non-manual, requiring university standard education, and with supervisory, managerial, planning and directing roles.

occupied males held positions in service, sport and recreation (1,085,370) as well as professional, technical workers and artists (1,545,030). Women, in contrast, held predominantly clerical occupations (2,280,140) followed by sales workers (947,400) and professional, technical workers, and artists (956,430).⁶⁹ The number of women who worked as domestic housekeepers (30,570) and cooks (111,570) might have declined but just as many women worked as “charwomen, office cleaners, window cleaners” (375,890) and “canteen assistants, counterhands” (272,310) as in 1951. In 1971, there were 787,960 males and 72,960 females in administrator and manager roles. Both males and females in the category of professional, technical worker and artist were predominantly those who worked as primary school teachers (164,040 males and 284,880 females) as well as 131,430 male draughtsman 352,190 female nurses.⁷⁰

From 1951, the number of those with “middle-class” occupations grew steadily. These statistics illustrate that the growth of the middle classes in this twenty-year period occurred in the “middle-middle” and the “lower middle” sections of this social category. These individuals, as McKibbin observed of those who were regarded as middle class in the 1930s and 1940s, continued to draw their occupations from professional-clerical-commercial sectors of the economy, with an emphasis on the latter two sections. By 1971, the majority of women still held “minor” middle-class occupations as largely clerks and cashiers whereas twenty years prior most women worked largely as domestic servants, cleaners and cooks. These figures might suggest that consumer-oriented policies would,

⁶⁹ “Occupation by sex and usual area of residence - Economic Activity – Table 15”

⁷⁰ The numbers here are related to 193 Primary and Secondary School Teachers. The Census also counted 93,290 males and 53,570 females under “Teachers, n.e.c.”

in fact, appeal to these socially mobile sections of the middle classes who aspired to secure their position in society and enjoy material luxuries that were once out of reach. But, this perspective ignores the precariousness of their lived-experiences, which heightened the tensions that existed within the middle classes that the Conservatives had to manage and reconcile in their politics.

The lower middle classes have figured most prominently in the research of Richard Crossick and Lockwood. In each instance, this sub-group of the middle classes has been explored in order to gain insight, again, on characteristics of working-class consciousness. Namely, Crossick and Lockwood have tried to explain the sense of alienation that existed between the lower middle classes and the working classes especially given that many of those lower middle classes originated from working-class settings. In Crossick's study, the lower middle class was a position to which members of the working classes could rise with some education or a small amount of capital. Working classes who had achieved this position either experienced some degree of "conscious separation" from their working-class origins or treated their new position as a mere change in occupation rather than a product of social mobility and, therefore, did not register any new sense of identity or affinity with the middle classes. Crossick's examination of the lower middle classes in the late Victorian and Edwardian period differentiated between the "classic petty bourgeois," which included shopkeepers and small business owners and "white collar salaried workers," which was comprised of clerks, teachers, managers, shop assistants and even minor professionals. The lower middle classes, Crossick found, had distinct regional and local characteristics that

reflected the specific social experiences of small towns, suburbs or industrial settings, which undercut a unifying and cohesive ideology or large organizational expressions. Crossick observed that politically, the lower middle classes tended to support Conservatives but only because “the Liberals were in decline” and they were “terrified of the advance of Labour.”⁷¹ Ball, studying the basis of the Party’s electoral support in the interwar years, has shown that the relationship was not entirely a negative one. The Party’s lower middle-class members formed the “backbone” of the Party in an electoral and organizational sense. They “gave the party a living presence that upper-class wealth alone could never provide.” The direct involvement of the lower middle classes over time meant that Conservative policies and values reflected many of their own concerns and demands and voting Conservative became a tradition and a marker of status and “respectability.”⁷²

Unlike examples on the continent, the British lower middle classes did not partake in extremist right wing movements to the same extent even though both the petty bourgeois as well as the white-collar workers felt increasingly insecure in the 19th century. Both of these sections of the lower middle classes “operated in sections of the economy under relatively free market conditions.” For the petty bourgeois, occupational insecurity in the 19th century came from the changing retail landscape in the form of competition from department stores as well as problems with obtaining short-term credit. Small business owners and shopkeepers did not have the ability to compete with larger

⁷¹ Richard Crossick, ed., *The Lower Middle Class in Great Britain, 1870 – 1918* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 12, 35, 40.

⁷² Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain, 1918 – 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 107.

retailers. Salaried white-collar workers were equally undermined by changes in the “composition of the labour market” and the structure of firms in which they worked. Namely, better education opportunities led to an increase in the number of salaried white-collar workers and the limitations on advancement within firms posed as obstacles. Factors including, “respectability,” “career ambitions” and “security of income,” deterred the lower middle classes from collective political action.⁷³

The clerk, the subject of Lockwood’s study on the class-consciousness of non-manual “blackcoated workers” in relation to manual workers in the 1950s, occupied fuzzy terrain. From a plainly economic perspective, the clerk and the manual worker shared similarities in that they owned no property and, removed from the means of production, engaged in contractual labour with employers. This definition of class is informed solely by “ownership” and “non-ownership” as key characteristics. With this understanding, the lack of unity between clerks and manual workers has been characterized as a result of “snobbishness” on the part of white-collar workers. Clerks additionally have been regarded by manual workers with contempt and ridiculed for “indulging in middle-class pretensions” and acting as impediments to the success of the worker’s movement.⁷⁴ If the meaning of class is broadened, however, to include factors like market situation (potential for advancement, income), work situation (the nature of tasks), and the status associated with white-collar work, the clerk’s class consciousness was not just a construction based on prejudices against the working classes though such feelings certainly helped some

⁷³ Crossick, *The Lower Middle Class in Great Britain, 1870 – 1918*, 14, 22, 24-25, 40.

⁷⁴ David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 13, 14.

middle classes differentiate themselves, and, as such, make the case against the further development of social housing, from working classes in their community as illustrated in Chapter Five. Rather, the work experiences and relationships within the work place of office clerks were actually quite different from manual workers and, as such, it is not surprising that they did not share in “worker solidarity.”

Overall, despite the specific problems of definitions noted above, Census data confirms that the middle and lower middle sections of the middle classes experienced sustained growth after 1951. Women, especially, moved out of the realm of personal service or working in different areas of food service and into the office setting where they carried out non-manual work. The individuals studied by Crossick and Lockwood were among those who felt ignored in by the Conservatives beginning in the 1950s. Crossick and Lockwood have illustrated that steady growth only exacerbated extant anxieties regarding economic position and identity. These individuals existed on the fringes of the middle classes, both economically and culturally, and were, using a broader definition for “class” but distinctly separate from manual workers. The Conservative Party’s reliance on the themes of affluence and consumerism ignored not only the dynamic nature of this social category and its varied experiences but this approach also negated that reality that prosperity was out of reach for some members of the lower middle classes. For this reason, rank-and-file members persisted in vocalizing their demands as not just Conservative supporters but specifically also as pensioners, those on fixed incomes, as well as shopkeepers and owners of small businesses in addition to complaints regarding

the experience of prosperity and affluence as well as the rights of individuals and property owners.

Conclusion

Using the idea of the consumer as their predominant label for their voters also represented an effort by the party to shift the conversation away from the class-centered and divisive rhetoric that they characterized of Labour politics. Yet, despite these efforts, Conservative members continued to employ class-based language in their interactions with their party. The middle classes mattered for the Party as a source of votes, though no longer assumed in their loyalty, and they mattered as an identity for the Party's members and supporters though in much more specific language that reflected the patterns of social change.

The British middle classes began as ancillary subjects in studies geared towards understanding the working classes and, as postwar economic and social changes took hold, became the subjects of study themselves. G.D.H. Cole concluded in 1950 that this group showed “no sign of disappearing.”⁷⁵ The middle classes occupied a distinctive place in the political and public imagination. The Conservative Party might not have experienced the same level of internecine strife as the Labour Party over its relationship with post-war affluence, consumerism and middle-class voters; however, the Conservatives, while beneficiaries of affluence, did not have a clear understanding of how

⁷⁵ G.D.H. Cole, “The Conception of the Middle Classes,” *British Journal of Sociology* 1(4) (December 1950), 288.

social change had impacted the middle classes and, as such, their general promises of prosperity did not appeal evenly to all of the sections of the middle classes.

By revisiting contemporary sociological studies alongside more recent work, this chapter establishes the official terminology with which class was discussed in Britain after 1951. The concept of the “middle classes” has been contested, depending on the parameters scholars have used to measure the requirements for this social position whether it be economic or cultural, but there is consensus that this group experienced unprecedented and sustained growth after the Second World War. The rate at which this social group expanded meant that membership was fragmented because there was little time for individuals to form cohesive and unifying ideologies or organizations to represent their interests. Indeed, their varied relationships to employers, both in the public and private world, meant that sub-groups within the middle classes did not necessarily share interests or goals. Census data from 1951 to 1971 confirms that the Party’s preoccupation with the “consumer” exhibited a lack of awareness of broader social changes affecting the composition of their core supporters, especially those taking place within the lower middle sections of the middle classes. As such, activity and organization at the constituency level, which is the subject of the third chapter, remained unchanged and unable to attract a more diverse membership.

Chapter Two

The Conservative Party and the Political Discourse on the Middle Classes

That the middle classes are depressed, that they are being destroyed by taxation, that some Chancellor of the Exchequer must do something about it - and that none ever does; these are the truisms of the 1950s. But who are now the middle classes? Are they still the “backbone of this country”? Where socially and politically do they belong? A century ago the middle classes were easily identifiable – between the big landed proprietors and the mass of manual workers. Since then the expansion of the professions and the emergence of a huge new group of salaried managers and technicians, coupled with the erosion of the landed proprietors, have gone far to establish a classless society. The middle class, as now depicted, stretches down financially to a level well below the higher paid manual workers; it stretches up to include many with incomes far larger than a country squire. Yet it still stands for something definite.¹

I am myself passionately a defender of the middle class and of the professional class into which I was born and of which I have been a member all my life. I do not believe myself to be a snob in the social sense, although I would prefer to be thought one than to fall into the inverted snobbery which is so popular nowadays. But I will maintain with my last gasp the right of the middle class, and of the professional class, to its own way of life, its own standards of living, its right to spend its money on the education of its own children and its own way often at very considerable sacrifice and always at considerable saving to the public, and the right to spend its money on private medicine ... I see absolutely no reason why we should be grudging the liberty we demand, and, although I would never wish the Conservative Party to be a class party, I see the liberties of my own class bound up with the liberties of other minorities [*sic*] those who do not wish to strike, those who do not wish to join a particular union, or any union, those who prefer to remain self-employed, those who farm, those who fish, those who can own small businesses, or shops ...²

Contemporary commentators and some Conservative politicians characterized the middle classes as discontented during the 1950s and 1960s. They were “anxious,” “worried,” and filled with “dread” owing largely to the perception that their economic

¹ “Middle Class,” *Times* [London, England] 27 Feb. 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

² Lord Hailsham, “Conservative Philosophy” Address to Executive Committee of National Union of Conservative and Unionist Association, 9th November 1972. (NUA 2/3).

position and social status had declined after the Second World War.³ This prevailing generalization, that the middle classes (and the upper classes) were “worse off” than in 1939, was based on incomes, which critics argued had not kept pace with rising costs of living and the demands of taxation. The middle classes found it increasingly difficult to maintain their pre-war standard of living in the areas of food, housing, education for their children and other material comforts.⁴ McKibbin’s study of the middle classes in the 1940s found that wartime austerity had chipped away at the “conventional standards of middle-class life,” and that some members of the middle classes did indeed experience a “genuine decline in status.”⁵ In 1956, an article in the *Times* reiterated an image of the middle classes as financially strapped, frustrated, and adrift in the changing British social structure.⁶ As the party with historic ties to the interests of the middle classes since the late-nineteenth century, these voters held the Conservative Party chiefly responsible for their plight.

The Party leaders and thinkers used a number of labels interchangeably to identify the middle classes throughout this period – owners of small businesses, salaried employees, pensioners and young marrieds – but each of these labels represented unique experiences and individuals who did not necessarily view themselves as part of a unified middle class. These labels created an impressionistic understanding of the middle classes

³ Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, *The English Middle Classes* (London: Phoenix House, 1949), 273, 288.

⁴ Lewis and Maude, *The English Middle Classes*, 205-212.

⁵ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 64.

⁶ “Middle Class,” *Times* [London, England] 27 Feb. 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

both amongst leadership and the rank and file, which undermined the Party's efforts to engage with the middle classes as consumers and, correspondingly, develop policies that adequately addressed their needs and demands. In this way, when the Party endeavoured to appear "classless" and appeal to voters mainly in their role as consumers in the 1950s and 1960s, it was, in fact, engaged in a class-based effort to appeal directly to the middle classes. The Conservative Party's seeming inaction in the face of rising dissatisfaction, most notably at by-election protests in Tonbridge and Orpington and in the face of the formation of the Middle Class Alliance (MCA) in 1956, help illustrate the persistent conceptual uncertainty. The following chapter studies the way that the middle classes and their interests were discussed at the national level, both within and outside the Conservative Party, alongside discussions that took place at the level of local constituency associations between 1951 and 1974. This chapter draws evidence from party publications, revisits key moments of presumed middle-class discontent, and examines local opinion through constituency association (CA) meetings and conference resolutions. These discussions show that there was no consensus amongst members and supporters concerning who the middle classes actually were and what they wanted from the Party.

Rapid social and economic changes in Britain after the war led to an increase in wages, greater employment stability and greater consumer purchasing power, which in turn led to an experience of improved standards of living.⁷ As the previous chapter

⁷ Average weekly earnings increased from £7 10s a week (1950) to £11 (1955) and £18 (1964). This increase in earnings had a tangible impact as they exceeded the rise in cost of living annually and were not "restricted through mass unemployment." Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory*:

illustrated, more individuals could be counted as members of the middle classes after 1951, with the most noticeable growth occurring within the middle and lower middle sections of this social category. Goldthorpe's studies argued that the rapid rate of growth within these sections and the varying social origins of these individuals meant that these "new" middle classes did not necessarily share traditions and values with each other. Once distinct social categories were blurred, the Tories had difficulty consolidating support from a group of voters they once considered their core constituency. This chapter will further illustrate that for many Conservative supporters and members, who identified as "middle class," their political goals and demands were not simply centered on participating in consumerism and the acquisition of material comforts and that, like the Left wing of the Labour Party, rank-and-file members felt uneasy with the idea of unfettered materialism as a tenet of Conservatism. They expressed frustration with economic instability but also appealed to the Conservatives on moral grounds, and expressed a persistent fear of Socialism.

Britain 1900 – 2000 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 255. According to Black and Pemberton, the narrative of decline is "partisan interpretation," which has been used by the right to discredit postwar consensus and "One Nation" politics and the left to highlight, in their minds, the ineffectiveness of Conservative rule. But, this sense of loss is overly concerned with the state of industrial capitalism and "international comparisons and too little on domestic experience." Rather than decline, Black and Pemberton see a period of transition, which bred "unprecedented wealth and health." Todd, however, has shown that "affluence" was not a sweeping and general experience rather differed depending on region of the country, age, gender, class and more. See Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society? Britain's Postwar 'Golden Age' Revisited* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 3-4 and chapter 7 and Selina Todd, "Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Postwar Working Class," *Contemporary British History* 22(4) (2008), 501 – 518. Goldthorpe's social surveys in Luton, as well, highlight that increased wages and greater purchasing power did not translate into work satisfaction or increased aspiration in the workplace. Moreover, increased wages often meant more time at work, which meant that manual workers did not have time to socialize with friends and family. See John H. Goldthorpe, *The affluent worker in the class structure*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

The predominant conception of the middle classes in public discussions, as united and driven by the acquisition of consumer goods, has led many historians to see the Party's relationship to the experience of affluence as a broadly positive one. The Conservatives were certainly better at deploying affluence and prosperity for electoral gains than the Labour Party. But our understanding of this relationship needs to be revised to include the difficulties that the themes of affluence and consumerism brought the Party. This chapter employs local materials to illustrate two things: that the "revolt of white collar workers" in this period suggests that the theme of affluence was as much a hindrance to the Conservatives as a political advantage and that the Conservatives conception of the middle classes helped to exacerbate existing ideological tensions on the frontbenches.⁸

The Middle Classes in Conservative Party Publications

In 1964, the Conservative Party occupied the Opposition benches for the first time since 1951. The defeat capped a period in which the Conservatives were plagued by scandal, the political blunder of Britain's EEC failed membership application, and the

⁸ For more on the internal divisions within the Labour Party between the Left wing (Aneurin Bevan) and revisionists (Hugh Gaitskell and Anthony Crosland), see Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Britain, 1951 – 1964* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Catherine Ellis, "Letting it Slip: The Labour Party and the 'Mystical Halo' of Nationalization, 1951 – 1964," *Contemporary British History* 26(1) (2012): 47-71; Stuart Middleton, "'Affluence' and the Left in Britain, c.1958 – 1974," *English Historical Review* CXXIX (536) (2014): 107-138). The term "white collar revolt," and its variations, is used here to define backlash against the Conservatives beginning in the late 1950s and into the mid-1960s over issues like taxation and inflation. Discontented members of the middle classes formed pressure groups like the British Housewives League, Middle Class Alliance and People's League for the Defence of Freedom and abstained from voting in key by-elections at Tonbridge (1958) and Orpington (1964).

departure of their once “unflappable” leader, Harold Macmillan.⁹ In May 1965, the Conservatives made significant gains at borough council elections. The Party interpreted these local results as “an indication of a change in mood,” and that “many electors, particularly middle-class voters who supported Labour at the last general election under Mr. Wilson’s promises to create a ‘dynamic, just and go-ahead Britain,’ [we]re becoming disillusioned with the Government.”¹⁰ In October 1965, Edward Heath made his debut as party leader at the annual conference in Brighton. He unveiled a “modernized” plan, which had been the by-product of nine months of study, that included “a new pattern for the social services, promotion of greater industrial efficiency regionally, reform of trade unions, greater protection for the interests of consumers, rating reform, land policy, export promotion, and measure to assist home owners.” It was a programme specifically designed to win back young voters as well as members of the middle classes generally who had “flirted with Liberal and Labour” in the last general election.¹¹ The Party

⁹ Harold Macmillan’s reputation for “unflappability” derives from the late 1950s, when he took the reins of the Party after the Suez Crisis (1956), steered it through protest from Peter Thorneycroft and the Treasury (1958), and helped secure Tory ascendancy in Parliament. With regard to Thorneycroft’s resignation, Macmillan was away on a tour of the Commonwealth and described the act of mutiny as “a little local difficulty.” This image of Macmillan as the last Edwardian gentleman with impenetrable nerves was, in part, immortalized by *Evening Standard* artist Victor Weisz (“Vicky”) in a cartoon that depicted him in the image of Superman (“Supermac”). See Harold Bogdanor, “Harold Macmillan: Unflappable Master of the Middle Way,” *The Guardian*. 30 December 1986.

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/1986/dec/30/obituaries> (accessed 18 December 2014); David Wood, “Mr. Macmillan as the Master of Style,” *Times* [London, England] 24 Sept. 1973; David Wood, “Tories know that times have changed,” *Times* [London, England] 7 Nov. 1977; “Vicky,” *Times* [London, England] 24 Feb. 1966. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 18 Dec. 2014.

¹⁰ Our Political Correspondent, “Tories To Press For A General Election,” *Times* [London, England] 15 May 1965. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

¹¹ Our Special Correspondent, “Important Timing Of New Conservative Plans,” *Times* [London,

explicitly targeted the middle classes as a section of the electorate that required special attention in order to regain power. Additionally, this decision represented a direct response to the Party's failings before 1964, which saw the emergence of pressure groups like the British Housewives League, Middle Class Alliance (MCA) and People's League for the Defence of Freedom, and also a series of poor by-election results for the Conservatives as evidence of discontent.¹² These developments have become known collectively as the "middle-class / white-collar revolt." Rank-and-file Conservatives received *Putting Britain Right Ahead* in generally favourable terms with some remarking that the document offered fresh or distinct ideas for voters. Others, in contrast, felt the document was a strong reiteration of the Party's commitment to the individual and modernization.¹³ Any optimism proved premature as Wilson's Labour Party increased their majority in 1966 and kept the Tories on the Opposition benches until 1970.

Appealing to their historic core supporters explicitly in the 1960s affirmed the central role that this group occupied in the Party's political imagination and rhetoric. Even though the middle classes were not the majority of the electorate and the Party could not hope to win a majority in Parliament on the support of this group alone, Heath and the leadership singled this group out and assured these individuals that a Conservative government could govern in their interests. But positioning the Party as *the* representative of the middle classes was an on-going and often-frustrating process. After

England] 9 Aug.1965. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 3 Sept. 2013

¹² The by-election defeats include: Tunbridge Wells (1956), Torquay, Edinburgh, Ipswich and Lewisham north (1957), and Torrington (1958). Middle class Conservatives also protested at Orpington in 1962.

¹³ "Conservative Policy, 1965," Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive (CPA): NUA 2/1/70.

the Third Reform Act of 1884, the Conservative Party had carefully and actively repositioned itself from being solely representatives of the landed elite and aristocracy to include the urban and suburban middle classes. This strategy, initiated by Disraeli, included rebranding itself as the party of property in general as well as promising to pursue deflationary economic policies.¹⁴ This approach did not solve all of the Party's problems. The Party had to manage rivalries between landed and urban property owners as well as the demands of those newly enfranchised individuals who owned no property.¹⁵ The Party's maneuvers in this period, however, resulted in surprising electoral successes in 1865, 1895 and 1900. No one, least of all the Party leaders, expected the Conservatives to perform so well with an expanded electorate that included 7 million manual workers.¹⁶ After success in the late 19th century, the Conservatives plunged their party into crisis over the issue of tariff reform in the Edwardian period.

Even though the Conservative Party refashioned itself as *the* national party, it was forced to deal with sections of their supporters in increasingly class-centered terms. Jarvis has shown that, following the First World War, the Conservatives thought a great deal about how the party would continue to transform and accommodate what they feared was an increasingly politically divided electorate. In party propaganda and publications, Jarvis shows a prevailing fear and mistrust of the industrial working classes.¹⁷ The Party's

¹⁴ E.H.H. Green, "An Age of Transition: An Introductory Essay," *Parliamentary History* 16(1) (Feb., 1997), 12.

¹⁵ E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The politics, economics and ideology of the British Conservative party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), 15.

¹⁶ Martin Pugh, *Britain Since 1789: A Concise History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 108.

¹⁷ Jarvis, "British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s," 75.

relationship with the middle classes was not by any means simple or assured either.

Jarvis' research also shows that in the interwar period, the Party felt "bitter" towards the political unreliability of the middle classes and was frustrated with their apathy.¹⁸ But, as McKibbin has found that after 1918 "middle-class families suffered an appreciable loss of real earnings and the social disappointment which comes with frustrated expectations."¹⁹ These losses, according to McKibbin, were largely made up within a couple of years. The perception, however, of a downtrodden middle class persisted and nurtured class-based antagonisms in the 1920s and the Tories, uncomfortable though they were with the concepts, had to deal with the middle classes on these terms.

Efforts to placate their core constituency helped drive a wedge between the interwar Conservative Party and Lloyd George's Liberals.²⁰ The Middle Class Union (MCU), founded in May 1919 to express grievances over taxation and organized labour, and the Anti-Waste League (AWL), founded to campaign for reduction of Government expenditure, were the most prominent organizational manifestations of middle class discontent in the interwar years.²¹ These pressure groups exerted influence from the fringes initially but planted a seed of doubt in the minds of leading Conservatives over whether the Coalition served Conservative aims and principles and vice versa. In 1921, a

¹⁸ Jarvis, "British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s," 78.

¹⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 53.

²⁰ E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 122-126; chapter 4 and 132.

²¹ David Jarvis, "Shaping of the Conservative Hegemony," in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, eds., *Party, State and Society: electoral behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997), 144, 145 and Phillip Williamson, "The Conservative Party, 1900 – 1930: From Crisis to Ascendancy" in Chris Wrigley, ed., *A Companion to Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 13.

by-election loss to a People's Union for Economy (PUE) candidate at Westminster and another nine days later at Hertford to an AWL candidate convinced Lord Salisbury that the Conservatives could not meet the demands of their core constituency as members of the Coalition.²² In October 1922, in addition to provocations of the sale of honours scandal, the partition of Ireland and the Chanak crisis, the Conservatives concluded their relationship with Lloyd George was no longer politically expedient and left the Coalition.²³ Andrew Bonar Law called an election one month later and the Conservatives returned to power. The concerns of the middle classes contributed to the breakdown of the Coalition but the Party explicitly and publically affirmed their commitment to key values of their core constituency.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the middle classes emerged on the political scene again, in the form of the Middle Class Alliance (MCA), and by-election protests in 1956-58 and 1962.²⁴ Their members were mostly based in southern England (particularly the Home Counties) and were private sector professionals with ties to professional associations and ratepayer groups. These individuals were considered "largely Conservative" because they asked the Tories to protect private property and their economic interests, which included controlling inflation and income taxes.²⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, personal income tax was

²² Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 125.

²³ Pugh, *Britain Since 1789*, 180.

²⁴ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 223.

²⁵ Green, "The Conservative Party, the state and the electorate," in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, eds., *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 1997), 184 – 185. The rate of taxation is dependent on a number of factors including earnings, marital status, and residency. P. Johnson *et al.* have produced a study exploring the relationship between taxation and voting behaviour and show that the former does not have a direct impact on the latter even though politicians tend to emphasize that they and their

a combination of a basic rate as well as surtax for those who earned a certain amount of money beyond an established national average.²⁶ The threshold amount fluctuated depending on inflation and earnings growth.²⁷ The protestors among the middle classes argued that added surtax, especially if one had dependents, was crippling and, like general inflation, acted as an obstacle to greater prosperity. Many members of the middle classes found themselves not quite well off enough to afford extra luxuries, like a second car or full-time domestic help, and yet, at the same time, earned too much money to be eligible for State subsidies for higher education.²⁸ The particular problem this raised for Conservative governments was that reducing taxation for the middle classes required reduced overall expenditures. Conservative Chancellors, in fact, did not make any significant changes to indirect taxes, which included duties on tobacco, alcohol or petrol. Harold Macmillan reduced tax on earned income, but only by increasing the rate charged to company profits.

Suburban private sector professionals were rankled by rising inflation, because it hampered incomes and savings, and felt they shouldered the burden of surtaxes. These

respective political parties will reduce taxation for those, typically, who earn more money annually. See P. Johnson, Frances Lynch and John Geoffrey Walker, "Income tax and elections in Britain, 1950-2001," *Electoral Studies* 24(2005), 393-408.

²⁶ The threshold for surtax was £2000 per annum until an increase to £4000 in 1961.

²⁷ This system of a combined taxation rate was replaced in 1973 with a unified rate.

²⁸ Not everyone understood middle class complaints over taxation. One reader contested the idea that the middle classes had a "moral right to a more comfortable and interesting life than most people." He continued, "The community accepted the necessity of alleviating the lot of its poorest members by raising the standard of living of those near or below subsistence level, and we must accept as a corollary that if the least privileged were given a greater share of the national wealth then the more privileged would get a smaller share. The process is not reversible, and the fact must be faced that some manual workers will, by their skill and industry, continue to earn more money than the lower paid and less successful members of the professional classes." This rebuttal against the tide of middle class discontent was rare. Henry Smith, "Salaries and Wages," *Times* [London, England] 8 March 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

middle classes, unlike those with occupations dependent on the State for training and employment, were less sympathetic to a government committed to public welfare provisions. Those individuals in the private sector, as Savage has asserted, had forged stronger relationships with their employers and relied on the accumulation of property for stability and security rather than, for example, education and credentials.²⁹ This section of the middle classes showed greater enthusiasm for right wing economic ideas because they flourished under such principles; indeed, they placed their faith in them. But the middle classes included more than the private sector professional middle classes residing in suburban England.

In order to discern how the Party conceived of the middle classes more generally it is important to revisit seminal Conservative texts from the post-1945 period. Some of the publications dealt with here, including, *The Industrial Charter* (1947), *One Nation: A Tory Approach to Social Problems* (1950), *The Social Services: Needs and Means* (1952) and *Change is Our Ally* (1954), as well as general election manifestos, have been examined by historians in an effort to discern the extent to which Conservatives actually embraced Labour policies or, in fact, articulated a distinct Conservative programme in terms of economic policies and values.³⁰ But these documents, essentially examples of

²⁹ Mike Savage, "Making sense of middle-class politics: a secondary analysis of the 1987 British general election survey," *The Sociological Review* 39(1) (1991), 43-48.

³⁰ See Harriet Jones, "New tricks or an old dog? The Conservatives and social policy, 1951-1955," in Antony Gorst, Lewis Johnman, and W.S. Lucas, eds., *Contemporary British History, 1931-61: politics and the limits of policy* (London: Pinter's Publishers, 1991); Harriet Jones, "The Cold War and the Santa Clause Syndrome: Dilemmas in Conservative Social Policy-Making, 1945-1957," in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, eds., *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995) and Neil Rollings, "Butskellism, the Postwar Consensus and the Managed Economy," in Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah, eds.,

Conservative rethinking of party policy after electoral defeat, also hold clues concerning the Party's understandings of the middle classes and their demands, values and goals. Collectively, these documents illustrate how the Party rarely engaged in explicit class-centered rhetoric when appealing to voters but that it was careful to articulate a vision of Britain and policies that it thought the middle classes, broadly conceived of as consumers, could embrace.

The Industrial Charter (1947) laid out the Conservative vision for the postwar British economy. Namely, the document discussed how the “worker,” “consumer,” “owners and shareholders,” and “managers” would stimulate independent productivity and the overall economy.³¹ The middle classes were not mentioned explicitly though these economic and occupational categories have been used to describe them and their work. The Conservatives, moreover, addressed issues that became concerns for the middle classes with plans to reduce taxation, allow greater freedom of enterprise and opportunity for the individual, and reduced government controls over various issues. This document also states that a Conservative government would “abolish those controls which prevent the private householder from carrying out minor repairs to his own house with his own labour.”³² This provision, with its reference to “private householder” in the immediate postwar period was an effort to relieve tensions from wartime restrictions and austerity. The term “householder” covers both owners as well as renters but, the Party's efforts to encourage pride in one's home through consumption evokes one of the central

The Myth of Consensus: new views on British history, 1945-1964 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 97-119.

³¹ Conservative and Unionist Central Office, *The Industrial Charter* (May 1947), 4.

³² Conservative and Unionist Central Office, *The Industrial Charter* (May 1947), 15.

tenets of a presumed English middle-class character.³³ It was also important for Conservatives to nurture desires to acquire and better one's home in order to build a foundation for a property-owning democracy, which they hoped would include the middle classes and those aspiring to join these ranks.³⁴ The document also expresses a belief in social mobility through meritocracy, which could be obtained through education and training in places of work. They believed an individual should be able to move, "from the floor of the shop, to the office, including the Chairman's office..."³⁵ The Conservatives advocated for the implementation of training and education programmes provided by local education authorities and supplemented by companies and firms, to aid this advance. The conception of social advancement and promotion, based on merit and credentials, is noteworthy in its dependence on State protection and encouragement. Traditional right wing Conservatives, in contrast, would promote social stability and security through the accumulation of property and assets. The document also called for "more technical experts, qualified engineers, chemists and others" to be "brought into industry" and "to open the highest positions of industry to those who combine technical knowledge and administrative ability."³⁶ Here, the Conservatives acknowledged and even encouraged the diversification of the types of professionals working in the British economy. At the same time, the Conservatives promised to trim the ranks of the Civil Service and needless state

³³ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 74.

³⁴ Homeownership in the 1930s was still an exclusive experience. McKibbin's research has found that those earning £350-400 a year (elementary school teachers, senior technicians, draughtsmen, senior clerical workers, and better paid shop assistants) could probably afford a home. But, "many who considered themselves as middle-class ... remained confined to rented accommodations." McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 74.

³⁵ Conservative and Unionist Central Office, *The Industrial Charter* (May 1947), 31.

³⁶ Conservative and Unionist Central Office, *The Industrial Charter* (May 1947), 32.

bureaucracy. As they stated: “The army of officials is so vast and is operating such a mass of minor harassing controls that senior administrators cannot keep check of what their battalions of juniors are doing.”³⁷ This opposition to bureaucracy indicates that the Party had yet to realize the significance of those public sector based managers and professionals, since this group generally self-identified as members of the middle classes. The Party published *The Industrial Charter* before it publically embraced the Welfare State and it establishes the rhetoric and some of the themes with which it would engage with discontented supporters from the middle classes after 1951. This example of early Conservative thinking reveals a fundamental conflict in the Party’s conception of middle-class values and aspirations. Did they view these voters as upwardly mobile, professionals and servants of the state or did they see them as individual consumers, based in private industries, who operated independent of the state?

One Nation: A Tory Approach to Social Problems (1950) outlined the Party’s approach to social policy. This declaration of Conservative principles indicated how the Party planned to maintain and expand education, health services, and housing in a more economically efficient and productive manner than the Labour Party had since 1945. As the Party stated, it would not justify spending on social services to provide “benefits for everyone,” rather it would provide a “minimum standard” to help “those in need.” The Conservatives would only spend “what the country could afford” on social services. In this way, the Conservatives set themselves apart from the notion of the universality of the provision of welfare as established by Beveridge in 1942, which was consistent with

³⁷ Conservative and Unionist Central Office, *The Industrial Charter* (May 1947), 13.

extant Conservative economic policy. This document is also embedded with messages that appealed directly to their core supporters with regard to social mobility and employment security. Conservatives promised to promote security of employment, good conditions of work and, again, the opportunity for reward and promotion through training and education. The Conservatives, as such, aligned themselves with the idea of meritocracy in the workplace and put its faith in education as the foundation of advancement rather than simply the acquisition of capital. Such promises would have benefitted new members of the middle classes as well as those who occupied the middle and lower sections of the social category.

With regard to trade unions, the document stated, “a strong and independent Trade Union movement is essential the industrial structure of a free society.” Trade unions could help ensure the best wages and working conditions for workers and all “employees should join their appropriate Trade Unions and play an active part in them.” The authors, however, warned that these organizations could not bargain collectively or strike as freely in a nationalized economy. The document stated, “Under nationalization the employer is not only more powerful than any private employer, he is also closely identified with the Government,” which leaves employees little room for negotiation or recourse. The Conservatives cleverly cast workers and trade unions as cogs in a vibrant free economy and nationalization as impediments to their interests and abilities. In this way, the Tories could again reassure those affluent workers, newer members of the middle classes. This position also allowed Conservative to bolster traditional anti-Socialist sentiment and appeal equally to employers in the private sector and the established middle classes.

On education, the authors declared Conservatives to be admirers of teachers, who were “long taken for granted” and “underpaid.” The Party, they stated, believed that in order to establish “the finest school system in the world,” they needed to staff it with excellent teachers. The only way to attract “first-rate” talent to the teaching profession was to offer competitive salaries. The authors wrote, “to expect first-rate staff to be forthcoming for ever at rates of pay lower than those of manual workers is ridiculous.” At the same time, the authors reveal their prejudices with regard to education. They wrote, “Some special treatment will have to be given to grammar schools, if the standards of these vitally important schools are to be maintained at a high level.”³⁸ It is hardly surprising that the Conservatives upheld the importance of grammar schools within the education system but this stance would have been especially significant to middle-class parents with academic aspirations for their children.³⁹ Indeed, many of those disgruntled within the middle classes cited the inability to pay for education as one of their chief complaints against the Conservative governments. *One Nation* represented a rethinking of Conservative ideas, in the wake of defeat in 1945, which accounts for the Party’s efforts to appeal widely to the electorate. But the document still contains evidence on the questions of social mobility, education, and trade unions that aligned them with specifically the interests the middle classes in a wide-reaching sense, which often created overlapping and contradictory messages.

³⁸ Iain Macleod and Angus Maude, eds., *One Nation: A Tory Approach to Social Problems* (London: Conservative Political Center, 1950), 9, 45, 73-76, 77-78, 89.

³⁹ Middle classes still preferred to educate their children in grammar school, according to McKibbin, even though “new” middle classes in the 1930s were more willing to turn to State alternatives. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 68.

In the 1951 General Election manifesto, the Conservatives reaffirmed their position as the national party. Winston Churchill appealed to voters declaring, “[w]e need a new Government not biased by privilege or interest or cramped by doctrinal prejudices or inflamed by passions of class warfare.”⁴⁰ Churchill reiterated, “The nation has a chance of rebuilding its life at home and of strengthening its position abroad. We must free ourselves from impediments. Of all the impediments, the class war is the worst.” He assured Britons that the Conservatives were the right party to unify the country, in distinct contrast to Labour, which thrived on “fomenting class hatred.”⁴¹ In his closing passage, he again underlined that the Conservatives “did not stand for one section of the people but for all.”⁴² Underneath this message of unity, Churchill offered a strong anti-Socialist message, a commitment to the Commonwealth and the status of Britain abroad, defence the property-owning democracy, and full support for hallowed institutions like the monarchy and Parliamentary government. Churchill invoked traditional Conservative themes in order to convey stability and continuity to his voters, especially their core supporters. The themes of affluence and the consumer eventually eclipsed these ideas, but rank-and-file members, as we shall see at the constituency level, continued to draw on these themes in their appeals to the Party throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s.

After suffering electoral defeat in 1964, the Party published *Putting Britain right ahead* in 1965. This document introduced the Party’s new vision and a “practical way out

⁴⁰ “The Manifesto of the Conservative and Unionist Party,” (General Election, 1951), 1. LSE Library, Longden 3/5.

⁴¹ “The Manifesto of the Conservative and Unionist Party,” (General Election, 1951), 3. LSE Library, Longden 3/5.

⁴² “The Manifesto of the Conservative and Unionist Party,” (General Election, 1951), 7. LSE Library, Longden 3/5.

of present frustrations.” Even though the middle classes formed the most vocal source of discontent immediately prior to its publication, the document does not identify them as a special section of the electorate the Party needed to win back. Instead, the Conservatives focused on the “individual” and the “customer” as the beneficiaries of their programme. In the Forward, Edward Heath stated, “Our Party has always aimed to be both the national Party and a Party with profound concern for the individual man and woman.” The publication outlined the Party’s belief that the “customer” should be given “more attention” and “enjoy a higher standard of living generally.”

This document’s central theme centered on providing greater opportunities for advancement and promotion through identifying “talent” and “individual enterprise.” The Conservatives would lessen the burden of taxation as a way to incentivize productivity and saving. A Conservative government would help make this possible by encouraging “more home ownership” and less reliance on municipal housing. The document even outlines how a Conservative government would enhance entertainment and leisure time for voters, which included provisions for a national network of sites for campers and caravans, better roads to lessen holiday traffic congestion, building more sports facilities throughout the country, and more choice in television and radio. Here, the Party highlighted traditional middle-class values like thrift and home ownership but also explicitly emphasized the comforts of prosperity, which was no doubt in direct response to those discontented middle classes complaining about their share of affluence.

The Party also reiterated its support for opportunity in education and improved standards education along with better facilities for learning. Notably, the Party

highlighted the importance of providing children a “technological education.” The Party also encouraged the development of better “management education,” whereby “future business leaders” could develop their skills at universities and other institutions of higher learning.⁴³ On the surface, this confidence in education and training seems consistent with statements made in the 1950s that recognized the factors influencing social mobility and advancement at work. Of course, these statements were also in direct response to Harold Wilson’s promise in 1963 aimed at the working and lower middle-class voters “who had bettered themselves” under the Conservative governments of the 1950s for a “revolution” based on “classless professionalism” and “technical expertise” was aimed at working and lower middle-class voters.⁴⁴

In the Party’s national publications during the 1950s and 1960s, they endeavoured to maintain their reputation as the national party with no special allegiances or sympathies for any one section of society. They emphasized time and time again their hatred of sectional rivalries, which illustrates a persistent anti-Socialism more than an aversion to actual hierarchical society or class-centered hostilities. When the Conservatives employed consumer-centric rhetoric hoping to reinforce national unity, they actually highlighted class tensions and the fragmented nature of the middle classes. The middle classes were also divided by public and private sector jobs, as Savage has shown, which could strongly inform their politics. Not all members of the middle classes demanded reduced taxation or

⁴³ The above direct quotes from *Putting Britain right ahead* are from “Putting Britain right ahead: A Statement of Conservative Aims,” (Conservative and Unionist Central Office, 1965), 3, 4, 7-8, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19-20. LSE Library, Longden 3/9.

⁴⁴ Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Abacus, 2007), 4 and “Putting Britain right ahead,” 9. LSE Library, Longden 3/9.

inflation as well as opportunities for home ownership. Not all members of the middle classes, especially newer members, had access to white collar jobs with opportunities for education, training and advancement. In some instances, including support for social mobility, the Conservatives targeted the middle and lower middle classes who were mobile and looking to secure their social position. The needs of consumers, while prominent, did not wholly uproot other values and ideas that the Conservative-supporting middle classes found important.

The Middle Classes in Revolt

The “white-collar revolt” that took place during 1956-58 and in 1962 included the creation of the Middle Class Alliance (MCA), a short-lived middle-class protest organization. During this period, there were also several key by-elections at which the Conservatives underperformed. These events have been cited as evidence by contemporary commentators and historians of widespread disapproval of the Conservative Party’s postwar activity amongst middle-class voters. Contemporary observers explained that the middle classes felt threatened and discontented with the Conservatives because they had failed to deliver on promises to control inflation and reduce taxation amongst other consumer-centric complaints. The middle classes felt they were worse off than they had been in the 1930s or, at least, feeling as if their lifestyle had been impeded by wartime controls and Labour Party policies. McKibbin points out that many had, in fact, seen “genuine status decline” from the previous decade, which fuelled

their resentments.⁴⁵ Public discussions about the middle classes during this period of unrest forced the party to discuss their role in the Conservative Party and explain their own association with their historic core supporters. In these examples, the middle classes were characterized as largely driven and motivated by their economic circumstances and yet, as the previous chapter has shown, there were larger issues including, culture, geography, education, and lifestyle that united and divided the subsections of this group. The Party's narrow conception of the middle classes as acquisitive consumers failed to capture and capitalize on the changes taking place within this group and consider their overlapping, and often competing, interests.

The Middle Class Alliance, led by Conservative MP for Lewisham, Henry Price, represented the first organized and public manifestation of the increasingly frustrated middle classes after the Second World War. The founding of the MCA overlapped with discussions in *The Times* regarding the declining disposable income of the middle classes. In these accounts and in letters from readers, the middle classes were almost always referred to in an economic context. This section of the population suffered from over-taxation and inflation. They struggled to make ends meet due to the rising cost of living. The self-employed, for example, were said to be under particular stress without company pension schemes to provide for them in retirement.⁴⁶ Members of the middle classes had their living standards reduced even further when they paid for the education of their

⁴⁵ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 64.

⁴⁶ John Senter and E.M. Thomas, "The Middle Class," *Times* [London, England] 01 March 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

children.⁴⁷ Passing utterances were made to the moral character of the middle classes but the main identifiers used in this example were related to occupation, income, and how much taxation, inflation, and rising living costs affected their lives. This definition of class, as it related to the middle classes, with its Marxist connotations, was a product of its time. As the previous chapter discussed, sociologists in this period continued their work from the prewar years in quantifying class status with survey data. The focus of these studies centered on manual workers. The middle classes came into view when contemporaries tried to explain why Labour failed to maintain support amongst manual workers. Since the *embourgeoisement* thesis, though quickly debunked by Goldthorpe and his team, linked political loyalties with the experience of affluence, it followed that the perceived loss of material comforts would have similar effects on middle-class support for the Tories. In this conception of the middle classes nothing - not geography, culture, nor education - but income level connected the members of this group.

The MCA's stated aims reflected this larger discussion. The group's three guiding principles were: 1) increasing the prestige and improving the public and business morals of the British people, 2) preserving the status and standards of the middle class, and 3) resisting Government and local authority proposals calculated or designed to increase taxation and the cost of living. Price was careful to define the requirements for membership more generally. He stated, "If a man thinks he is middle class, then he is middle class – that's good enough for us." To prove the group's expansive reach, Price

⁴⁷ Mary Nicholson and L.M. Robinson, "The Middle Class," *Times* [London, England] 05 March 1956 and "University Education for Middle Class." *Times* [London, England] 25 March 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

cited the attendance of a miner, a gardener, and an old age pensioner at the first meeting. The group's secretary worked as an accountant and the treasurer spent his workdays as a bank manager.⁴⁸ Price's broad definition for membership could be interpreted as awareness that the boundaries of the middle classes were expanding. It is more likely that it was a calculated effort designed to build momentum and capture popular support rather than insight into class position or the process of class formation. Price was also careful to explain that the MCA was not a "selfish" or sectional movement, though he contradicted this by declaring that its aims were merely to preserve and defend the needs of the middle class.⁴⁹

The popularity of this organization and the movement it attempted to ignite seemed overwhelming. Price reported that the MCA had established a foothold in nearly half of the country's parliamentary constituencies within six weeks of the group's founding. He reported that the size of each local habitation ranged from thirty to as many as three hundred members and 32,000 forms requesting further information had been sent out in response to enquiries.⁵⁰ The initial burst of enthusiasm, however, was short lived as a dispute arose within the group in February of 1957 over the activities of the MCA. Two executive members of the group left the MCA and organized their own "breakaway movement" because they felt that Price had not been critical enough of the Conservative Party's policies and the MCA had up to that point been too "moderate" in its approach.

⁴⁸ "Middle Class Alliance," *Times* [London, England] 25 April 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

⁴⁹ "Middle Class Alliance," *Times* [London, England] 25 April 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

⁵⁰ "Middle Class Alliance," *Times* [London, England] 11 June 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

Instead, the rebels planned to create a new pressure group “aligned in many respects but not identified with the Liberal Party,” in order to create a “new center party.”⁵¹ Price offered his resignation in response to the upheaval. By March, the MCA disbanded at a meeting where only five of the 11 executive members were present.⁵²

The MCA’s brief history reveals that there was a sense of frustration but that it did not form the basis of an organized and sustained protest movement. Price created an organization under the broad aim to defend the position and status of the middle classes by appealing to their pocketbooks. This limited focus, however, did not have staying power. The group quickly fractured under the pressure of a few members who sought to take the organization in different directions. The MCA just like the Party itself, did not have a clear understanding of who the middle classes were and how this group was changing. The MCA, also, did not articulate the discontent of the middle classes in a politically palatable way. The Conservatives, after all, were not supposed to be supporters of class-based antagonisms. However, the themes raised here reappear in Party discussions and news media and subsequent episodes of middle-class “revolt.”

In June 1956, the Party experienced one of their first electoral embarrassments in the by-election at Tonbridge. A market town in Kent, Tonbridge was a safe Conservative seat. Many members of this community were retired pensioners living on a fixed

⁵¹ “Dispute in Middle Class Alliance,” *Times* [London, England] 21 Feb., 1957. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

⁵² “News in Brief,” *Times* [London, England] 19 Mar. 1957. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

income.⁵³ The Conservative candidate, Richard Hornby, defeated his Labour opponent 20,515 votes to 18,913.⁵⁴ However, the earlier Conservative majority of 10,000 was reduced to 1,600 votes, which represented an eight per cent swing to Labour.⁵⁵ This result was considered a setback but did not prompt Central Office or the Government to act immediately because by-election post-mortems revealed that the losses in votes were due largely to Conservative voters who abstained in protest against the Party's policies.⁵⁶ The Conservatives had not lost these voters to Labour or, more worryingly, the Liberal Party.

In the immediate aftermath of the Tonbridge result, longtime Conservative supporters accused the Tories of neglecting and ignoring the demands of the middle classes.⁵⁷ The middle classes were the "people who put the Conservative Party in power, and on whom they must depend for their continued existence." One constituent felt that the Party focused disproportionately on the "big business man and the Trades Union

⁵³ "Tonbridge Jolt for Government," *Times* [London, England] 9 June 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

⁵⁴ Tam Dalyell, "Richard Hornby: Tory MP and Chairman of Halifax," *Times Obituaries*. 28 September 2007. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/richard-hornby-403738.html> (accessed 5 September 2010).

⁵⁵ Andrew Roth, *Heath and Heathmen* (London: Routledge, 1972), 103 and John Turner, "A Land Fit for Tories to Live in: The Political Ecology of the British Conservative Party, 1944-94," *Contemporary European History* 4(2), (July 1995), 199.

⁵⁶ "Tonbridge Jolt for Government," *Times* [London, England] 9 June 1956. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

⁵⁷ The episode at Tonbridge prompted many concerned voters to write to Central Office and share their views on how the Party had failed the middle classes. In some of those letters, constituents cited their status as longtime supporters as the basis of their discontent. Lt. Col. G. D. Castelli stated that he had voted for the Tories for "30 years" and helped variously with local committees and side projects. Mr. James of Bexhill-on-Sea described himself as a "lifelong Conservative" though signed his letter as "Ex-Conservative." Harold H. Woodcock of Lincoln expressed his disappointment as someone who has "always voted Conservative." See "Correspondence – Lt. Col. G. D. Castelli to CCO, 11 June 1956." "Correspondence – Mr. James to CCO, 18 June 1956." "Correspondence – Harold Woodcock to CCO, 9 June 1956." Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

working man,” while ignoring the middle classes.⁵⁸ Similarly, a constituent from Guernsey explained that it was the lower income categories of the middle classes that needed the Party’s attentions. He wrote while “the cost of living continues to rise the lower income groups of the middle classes have to struggle to make ends meet, but the executive and company director types and the working man category ‘get away with it.’”⁵⁹ Another exasperated constituent wrote, “[n]othing appears to be done against rising prices and inflation and the middle class must continue to suffer.”⁶⁰ One local Conservative Councillor concluded that the Party had followed Socialist doctrine too closely and were “out of touch with the feelings of Conservative and the floating voter.”⁶¹ Another constituent warned that the Party’s efforts to woo “‘pinky-blue’ voters” would lead to the loss of their “natural supporters.” For this supporter, a “natural” Tory voter was someone who opposed nationalized industries and supported a tougher stance against trade unions. He demanded income tax relief for private education and incentives to save and buy a home.⁶² Another Conservative, who had 30 years of voting Tory and party work to his name, observed that supporters in Tonbridge were “paying more for their necessities, crippled by taxation and increased rates, and living on rapidly decreasing capital.” He described a seething resentment for “paying for a welfare state enjoyed

⁵⁸ “Correspondence – June 1956 (Tonbridge B-election),” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/2.

⁵⁹ “Correspondence – R.M. Thompson to CCO, 20 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

⁶⁰ “Correspondence – P. Johnston-Saint to CCO, 11 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

⁶¹ “Correspondence – Mr. Miller to CCO, 9 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

⁶² “Correspondence – H.V. Griffiths to CCO, 11 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

primarily by people who have been given a better standard of living ... whilst they themselves are getting no alleviation.”⁶³

Tory supporters who wrote into Central Office expressed a myriad of frustrations and a few even threatened to withdraw support from the Party if it did not change the course of its actions. The majority of those who wrote into Central Office self-identified as members of the middle class. Some referred to occupational backgrounds and the type of income they earned. They called themselves owners of small to middle-sized properties as well as people with fixed incomes, which included salaried employees as well as pensioners. In each instance, citing economic background served to highlight a sense of going without and the complaints represented a range of experiences. Some individuals who wrote into Central Office were worried about material luxuries and the ability to pay for private school and servants while others were just “trying to make ends meet.” One party member cited the uneven nature of the Party’s tax cuts, with preference given to “executives and company directors,” as the reason the lower income middle classes felt ignored, which reveals an awareness of the different interests held

⁶³ “Correspondence – Lt. Col. G.D. Castelli to CCO, 11 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3. Another supporter (who worked in the Civil Service) wrote, “The only difference between the lower classes of to-day and those of fifty years ago is that they were always turbulent, but to-day are truculent. Notice the way in which workers demand an increase in pay, whilst people in authority appeal for restraint or a return from strike. A fatal mistake; such an apologetic attitude creates in the lower classes a sense of importance and power out of keeping with their position.” The emphasis is not my own. This level of animosity with regards to class position was a minority in this collection of correspondence. Most letters only focus on the plight of the middle classes with fear and anger directed at the government and not manual workers, trade unions of the Labour party. “Correspondence – L.E. Ingram to CCO, 18 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

within the middle classes.⁶⁴ Some Conservatives also expressed ideological concerns. These letters include anti-Socialist sentiment, namely in the form of opposition to sympathetic treatment of trade unions along with lamentations that the Party had diverted too far to appease “pinkie-blue” voters. The sample of Conservative supporters who appealed to the Party following the Tonbridge by-election, although small in number, reveals that these individuals expected a certain lifestyle with comforts that would elevate their social status and, more importantly, helped differentiate them from other social groups. This suggests, in a small way, awareness that middle-class identity was as much cultural as it was due to economic position. The tone of these complainants also suggests that their middle-class position was established before the war because they expressed discontent with reduced living standards. Those in the middle classes who were up in arms, then, were not from the “new” middle classes who were the by-product of higher wages and stability in occupation after the war. Those who wrote in shared predominantly economic-based reasons for their discontent, but were otherwise a disparate group.

The Party acknowledged that there was “widespread feeling of grievance among the middle classes,” but countered those criticisms with assurances that that Government had “taken a whole series of measures designed to help them.” Everything the Conservatives offered to placate middle-class discontent related to those handfuls of economic issues that undercut the middle-class way of life. The Conservative Government had, for instance, “taken steps to help the middle classes and retired folk, by

⁶⁴ “Correspondence – R.M. Thomson to CCO, 20 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/2.

reducing income taxes.”⁶⁵ In another written response to a concerned constituent, Central Office wrote that, “Old Age Pensions, Widow’s Pensions and the like have been twice raised, and these increases have more than compensated for rising costs.”⁶⁶ In another letter, Central Office rebutted that it had not “ignored the interests of the professional and executive classes.” In fact, the Party had “reversed the trend of socialist taxation ... income tax had been reduced three times and a number of favourable allowances had been made in tax allowances.” Central Office continued: “We have abolished rationing of food, abandoned Socialist controls on war materials and restored freedom to industry and commerce.”⁶⁷ In these responses, the Tories acknowledged that the middle classes were entitled to certain comforts and that austerity had curbed aspects of their lifestyle. Contrary to criticism, the Party was, “particularly conscious of the difficulties under which people living on fixed incomes and on pensions have struggled since the war. But the Government has not shown itself indifferent to their plight.”⁶⁸ Here, the Party’s tone borders on frustration similar to that described in Jarvis’ study of the Party’s perceptions of the middle classes in the interwar period. The Party seemed to have policies that addressed the varied concerns of the middle classes and yet their core constituency in these particular examples seemed perpetually unhappy.

⁶⁵ “Correspondence – G.D.M Block to H.H. Woodcock, 12 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

⁶⁶ “Correspondence – CCO to Hugh W. James, 12 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

⁶⁷ “Correspondence – O.W. Stebbings (CCO) to I.E. Ingram, 22 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

⁶⁸ “Correspondence – CCO to Hugh W. James, 12 June 1956.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

At the 1956 annual Party conference, R.A. Butler stated, “[w]hat is important for those who are sometimes known as the middle classes, [is that] we have raised the pensions of some 400,000 retired public servants and members of the armed forces and we have abolished the means test for these pensions.” He continued: “We have provided considerable help ... for those planning for retirement both by exempting from tax the capital element in their life annuities and also by tax concessions on savings for retirement for the self-employed.”⁶⁹ Butler also cited the Party’s economic incentives for retirees and the self-employed in his message as evidence of the Party’s commitment to the middle classes. These particular incentives were designed to appeal to this group’s desire for security and stability rather than experience in affluence.⁷⁰ Chairman of the Party Oliver Poole closed out the conference with the pronouncement that “our Party will never subscribe to any doctrine of class antagonism or rivalry.” He did promise to “ease the problems of those whose fixed incomes have not kept pace with the cost of living, and to reduce the burden of taxation on skilled men and women ... in the professions and in industry.”⁷¹ Poole’s message echoed Butler’s in affirming the Party’s commitment to securing the economic position of the middle classes. Both leaders resisted the currents of

⁶⁹ “Second Session – 11 October 1956 – Afternoon, Government Policy and Public Relations.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/63

⁷⁰ Butler gave this response to a resolution that was critical of the Government’s policy and public relations. The resolution stated, “That, as part of the large force which toiled vigorously to return the Conservative Government to power, we view with concern the Government’s apparent inability to reverse trends resulting from Socialist mal-administration, and we urge the use of its strong majority to implement more forcibly its election promises.” B.G. Raine (Rushcliffe) enumerated cost of living, home ownership, taxation as areas that required special attention. “An overwhelming majority” defeated the resolution.” Second Session – 11 October 1956 – Afternoon, Government Policy and Public Relations.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/63.

⁷¹ “Second Session – 11 October 1956 – Afternoon, The Conference Summed Up: Mr. Oliver Poole’s Speech.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/63

popular pressure and demands for a greater share of affluence and sought to assuage their core constituency with promises of security in the face of discontent in Tonbridge. In this example, the Conservative leadership was not ready to submit completely to consumer-centric policies and ideas even though they contributed to their electoral recovery five years earlier.

The Party reasoned that the source of frustrations was ineffective communication. In other words, the Party needed to educate the electorate rather than change their policies. The Conservatives had not presented fully and clearly to the electorate nor had the Government's measures been given enough time to unfold.⁷² Once the situation stabilized, CO assured supporters that they would proceed with plans to reduce taxation and "bring relief to the middle classes."⁷³ In another message to a concerned Conservative voter, Central Office tried to reason that the standard of living had, in fact, risen for the whole of the population, which should be the measure of a government's record. The response continued, "It remains true that the greatest help that can be given to this section of the population is to secure stable cost of living and a steady purchasing value for money."⁷⁴ Again, the Conservatives relied on general assurances directed at consumer concerns to placate the discontented middle classes.

⁷² "Correspondence – CCO to Mr. Miller, 12 June 1956" and "Correspondence – O.W. Stebbings to Capt. F.C. Baker, 20th June, 1956." Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3. "Party Publicity and Organization, 1957." Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/64.

⁷³ "Correspondence – CCO to P. Johnston-Saint, 14 June 1956." Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

⁷⁴ "Correspondence – O.W. Stebbings (CCO) to Lt. Col. G.D. Castelli, 21 June 1956" and "Correspondence – O.W. Stebbings to H.V. Griffiths, 25 June 1956." Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/11/414/3.

Similar to the MCA, the Party's encounters with middle-class discontent at Tonbridge were largely coloured by concerns regarding the way the economy had infringed upon their lifestyle. The Party's responses seem to indicate some awareness that this constituency was comprised of many subsections but there was no indication that it understood that the groups within the middle classes might have differing or even competing economic interests. The Party saw the middle classes generally as a group of consumers for whom stable prices and cost of living were paramount and sufficient to win their support. This is the image that they carried with them into the by-election at Orpington (March 15, 1962) and which they retained, indeed, until they were defeated in 1964. Consequently the Party made no efforts to incorporate other aspects of middle-class identity into their policy appeals. The examples below will show that, while many complaints expressed during this manifestation of "white collar revolution" were indeed based on the cost of living, other rank-and file members continually appealed to Conservatives to uphold older, non-materialist values regarding traditional institutions and cultural aspects of middle-class life that they felt were threatened by social change.

In 1962, another "revolt" of so-called "white collar workers" took place at Orpington.⁷⁵ This by-election loss also received a great deal of contemporary media attention because it was the first seat the Government had lost since 1959. The collapse of the safe Conservative seat into a marginal was considered by *The Times* to be a "humiliation" for the Government and the moment when "middle class suburbanites"

⁷⁵ According to Pippa Norris, writing in the 1980s, Orpington was considered a seminal by-election in the postwar period because it showcased all of the ingredients necessary for tactical voting. See Pippa Norris, *British By-Elections: The Volatile Electorate* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1990), 24-25.

transferred their loyalties from Conservatives to Liberals.⁷⁶ Support for the Conservatives decreased by 21.9 per cent from 1959, which represented a far more significant loss of support than in Tonbridge. The Liberals emerged from the Orpington by-election as victors, overturning a 34% Conservative majority and winning the seat by 7,855 votes.⁷⁷ Political commentators offered a variety of explanations for the Conservative loss. It was seen as a sign of the Liberal Party's resurgence in British politics as a viable alternative to the Left and Labour, and as evidence that voters wanted to send a strong message to the Tories that post-war center-right Conservatism was a spent force.⁷⁸

Orpington, like Tonbridge, was considered another middle-class suburban bastion of Conservatism. This Conservative seat became vacant when Conservative M.P., Donald Sumner, became a county court judge. The Conservatives selected Peter Goldman as their candidate in the 1962 by-election. Goldman was the director of the Conservative Political

⁷⁶ "The Lesson of Orpington," *Times* [London, England] 16 March 1962. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 12 Sept. 2013.

⁷⁷ This majority represented a 22% swing. At the by-election in Derbyshire, West (June, 1962) the Conservative majority of 8,109 (1959) was reduced to 1,220. Their share of the poll went down by more than 25 %, which was worse than Orpington. According to *The Times*, this result was due to abstentions and a shift to the Liberal party. In November, Labour beat Conservative Angus Maude at Dorset, South. He lost 18 % of the Conservative share of the poll compared with 1959. See Our Political Correspondent, "Timely Comfort To Conservatives," *Times* [London, England] 8 June 1962 and Our Political Correspondent, "Labour Capture Two Conservative Seats," *Times* [London, England] 23 Nov. 1962. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 12 Sept. 2013.

⁷⁸ "Revolt Of White-Collar Workers," 15 Mar. 1962: 12; Our Political Correspondent, "Conservatives' Autopsy On Orpington," 16 Mar. 1962; "The Lesson Of Orpington," 16 Mar. 1962; Coleraine., et al. "Orpington," 17 Mar. 1962; "Liberal Proof For The Doubters," 18 Apr. 1962; Our Midland Correspondent, "Liberal Again, Or-? Dilemma Of The Orpington Commuters," 4 Feb. 1964; Our Midland Correspondent, "Dangerous For Tories To Rely Upon Gratitude For Prosperity," *Times* [London, England] 12 Feb. 1964. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 29 Aug. 2013.

Centre and one of the Party's leading intellectuals.⁷⁹ Local Conservatives had expected their majority to be "much reduced" partly because the constituency had a tradition for returning a local Conservative and Goldman was a newcomer.⁸⁰ This area was a "prosperous commuting amalgamation of urban and rural voters with unusual numbers of ambitious young married people."⁸¹ But the constituency was also a breeding ground for discontent because, according to *The Times*, the incomes of Orpington residents had "not kept up with inflation," and many had bought houses "beyond their means" and faced "higher interest rates on their mortgages."⁸² Orpington was home to young voters who were participants in postwar consumerism and wanted to experience greater prosperity and comfort than the generation of middle classes before them. As in previous examples, the middle classes were mostly defined in the press by their economic position and material needs. The catchwords used to describe this group were those associated with consumerism and prosperity.

Contemporary accounts from the Conservative Party and national press seemed preoccupied with a middle class they viewed as predominantly united and motivated by their incomes and standard of living. As a result, the Conservatives thought they could

⁷⁹ Our Political Correspondent, "Revolt Of White-Collar Workers," *Times* [London, England] 15 Mar. 1962. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 April 2013. Goldman went on to lead the Consumers' Association. See Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism, and Participation, 1954 – 1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 36-37.

⁸⁰ Our Political Correspondent, "Liberal Prospects At Orpington," *Times* [London, England] 20 Feb. 1962. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 April 2013.

⁸¹ "No Flurry At Orpington," *Times* [London, England] 23 Feb. 1962. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 April 2013.

⁸² Our Political Correspondent, "Revolt Of White-Collar Workers," *Times* [London, England] 15 Mar. 1962. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 29 Aug. 2013.

win the support of the middle classes simply with promises to reduce taxes or improve opportunities for home ownership. Yet, the Party never achieved harmonious relations with their core supporters in the 1950s and 1960s due to the fact that engaging with the middle classes simply as consumers ignored other principles and values that these voters held dear. The middle classes, as the following section will show, also looked to the Party to fight for their morals and to uphold traditional institutions. The following section will compare local discussions with these national accounts and show that there were a variety of sentiments and impressions on the role of the middle classes and Conservatism. Rank-and-file members were not necessarily moved by these national contests and, in fact, resented some of their complaints.

Conservative Constituencies and the Middle Classes

The result at Orpington reverberated to the constituencies. The Putney Young Conservative Branch, for example, had a “spontaneous discussion” because members felt the urgency of the situation required their attentions.⁸³ In this group’s estimation, the electorate at Orpington was comprised of “‘middle class’ professional people including many young married couples.” The members continued, “This group [the middle class] is becoming a very significant force in the community and the removal of conventional class barriers has accelerated its growth.” The Putney YCs did not want the Party to “reflect the exclusive interests of a single sector of the community,” but it urged the Government to at least show awareness of the aspirations of young middle classes. When

⁸³ The Executive Committee also reported, “It is perhaps significant that, at a meeting attended by 15 members, no voice was raised in opposition to the views expressed.” “Putney Conservative Association – Annual Report, 1964,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/14/92.

the Putney YCs assessed the situation, they identified the discontented middle classes at Orpington as young people with “professional” occupations specifically, which suggests they saw them as having a higher level of education and an occupation with some stability and higher level of income. They concluded that the Party suffered not because of a poor economic record but rather because Conservatives had failed to communicate to the electorate how it had improved upon the work of the Labour Party. They stressed that the key to victory was to educate and explain the differences “between benevolent Conservative planning and doctrinaire Socialist control.”

In 1962, these Young Conservatives agreed that the (“new”) middle classes were an electoral force that could not be ignored if the Party wanted to remain in power. This position was grounded presumably in the belief they belonged to this group or, at least, shared attributes and interests. It is not surprising that an electoral upset like Orpington captured the attentions of local members. This example, however, shows that some members exhibited a greater degree of thoughtfulness and skepticism regarding the results than national accounts and public discussions alone have demonstrated. These YCs assumed that an organic and historical relationship existed between the middle classes and the Conservative Party and their understanding of the plight of the middle classes reflected their own experience of social change and mobility. These Putney Young Conservatives were aware that the middle classes, however loosely defined, were growing and formed an important section of support for the Party. The Putney YC’s described the nature of middle-class support as not contingent simply on whether the Conservatives could give them economic advantages. Rather, they believed that these

voters felt that their “aspirations” had been threatened. They counselled that the Party should continue to preach classlessness and to highlight anti-Socialist rhetoric in their appeals. The power of these middle classes was rooted in their growing numbers and the expansion beyond “conventional class barriers,” which meant it did not make sense for the Party to acquiesce to the demands of a group of angry middle class Conservatives in Orpington.

Local constituency associations in this period were not, as the next chapter will show, a hotbed of political discussions or debate. It is possible, however, to get a sense of how major national issues and events, like the so-called “middle-class revolt,” were received and interpreted by rank-and-file members. In Banbury (Oxford), Conservatives did not engage in discussions on the role of the middle classes in the Party’s electoral fortunes. It is apparent, however, that “suspicion,” “snobbery” and “social unease” towards local working classes persisted amongst local members. Local Conservatives, therefore, had a keen awareness of oppositional class identities, which ran counter to the Conservatives’ main position as a classless national party.⁸⁴ The industry in the area of Banbury after the war was dominated by agriculture and the production of aluminum, although in 1965, General Foods Ltd. opened a factory in the area. The Banbury Conservative constituency association counted the Duchess of Marlborough as a member. She often opened Blenheim Palace for annual fundraising events and championed the work of the local Women’s Divisional Committee. This association also tried to form a

⁸⁴ Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain, 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 158.

Divisional Council of Trade Unionists (DCTU) though it encountered difficulties recruiting members.⁸⁵ The effort to integrate local trade union members could be interpreted as an awareness of the Party's reputation for social exclusivity and, therefore, seen as part of an attempt to reach beyond their base and acquire support from the so-called affluent working classes and manual workers. In actuality, however, the DCTU's mandated function was to educate trade union members so that "individual members might be able to judge any issue intelligently, and not with any Party bias."⁸⁶ In 1953, Banbury Conservatives still held onto rigid notions regarding class position and its influence on politics. They believed that manual workers, owing to a blind allegiance to the Labour Party, represented a danger to the Conservative Party and, as such, it was their job to monitor their activity and to try and win them over. Targeting manual workers in this way suggests that these Conservatives felt alienated from local manual workers. Moreover, these local Conservatives felt that their political activity needed to be surveilled and corrected when possible, which also suggests latent feelings of mistrust and suspicion towards working classes in their community.

In 1956, Banbury Conservatives expressed frustration with the Government's inability to control inflation.⁸⁷ Members of the constituency association crafted a resolution for their Chairman and MP at their annual general meeting in order to convey

⁸⁵ "The City of Oxford Conservative and Unionist Association, 1 December 1953 – 11 – June 1956." Oxford Record Office (ORO). O19/A1/6.

⁸⁶ "The City of Oxford Conservative and Unionist Association, Divisional Council of Trade Unionists, 9 September 1954." ORO. O19/A1/6.

⁸⁷ "Annual General Meeting, 10 March 1956." ORO. N.Oxon. Con 1/5.

“unanimous disapproval of the handling of the economic situation by the Government.”⁸⁸ Members were clear that they only wanted to warn their MP of the increasing frustrations. Banbury’s MP Neil Marten urged supporters, however, not to let “‘We have never had it so good’ be the sole aim of our policy for the next five years.” He proclaimed: “This is a time for great social reform and slum clearance and the expansion of education ... One of the tasks for individuals at the present time was to see their responsibility in the right perspective within the present Welfare State.”⁸⁹ Marten presents an interesting contrast to the concerns of his constituents, which suggests that these two strains of Conservatism coexisted amongst members even at a moment of supposed ideological crisis.

Ilford (Redbridge), a northeast London community, was comprised of two constituencies with members who held fiery opinions, especially on race and immigration in the late 1960s. According to Ilford North MP, Tom Iremonger, the area was composed of “‘white collar’ workers – the types who slog away from 9-5 in City or suburban offices, often in conditions that are far from desirable.” An account in the *Ilford Pictorial* also referred to local residents as “blackcoated.” This reference to Lockwood’s research suggests that these individuals were probably clerical workers with a closer association, in terms of culture, employment stability and economic security, with manual workers than the established middle classes.⁹⁰ At the same time, the MP for Ilford South, Ted

⁸⁸ “Council Meeting, 21 November 1959.” ORO. N.Oxon. Con 1/5.

⁸⁹ “Council Meeting, 21 November 1959.” ORO. N.Oxon. Con 1/5.

⁹⁰ “Mr. Iremonger may have put some backs up.” *Ilford Pictorial* 17 December 1959, 6. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61. According to Lockwood, the clerk was “without exception,” considered as part of the working class because of shared interests. Both groups do not own property, for example, and both groups rely on selling labour in return for an income. The blackcoated worker, however, often “indulged in middle class pretension,” which has been

Cooper, spoke to issues including inflation, greater tax relief for those on fixed incomes, and the cost of living in his meetings with party members.⁹¹ The Conservatives in these constituencies saw the middle classes in a particularly sympathetic light. In Ilford North, Iremonger expressed great pity for the middle classes. He described the public and political climate as hostile to the middle classes because of their perceived comforts and prosperity when they were, in fact, “not very rich.” He explained they “were no longer able to maintain their standard of living. It might not be the stark tragedy which stalked into the homes of those on the breadline, but it did not make people less bitter.” He pleaded with the Chancellor to consider the “mental harmony of an important section of the people” in the creation of a budget.⁹² Ted Cooper (Ilford S) also described lower middle-class people and people on fixed incomes as Britain’s “new poor.”⁹³ Yet, Iremonger was not a Tory who espoused legislating to protect the position of the middle classes. He was criticized for his opposition to a Private Member’s Bill in 1959, which

interpreted as a “false consciousness.” Lockwood rejects this notion of a “false” consciousness, instead directs attentions to the wider context surrounding these groups. While clerks were certainly propertyless and worked on a contractual basis, their experience differed in terms of job security, opportunity for mobility as well as income. Additionally factors like the physical space and separation of the shop floor and office as well as values and attitudes, contributed to the development of a consciousness that stood apart from a working class identity. See David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

⁹¹ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Ilford (South) Executive Committee ... 24 February 1956,” “Minutes of the Meeting of the Ilford (South) Executive Committee ... 1 June 1956,” “Minutes of the Meeting of the Ilford (South) Executive Committee ... 21 June 1957,” “Minutes of the Meeting of the Ilford (South) Executive Committee ... 27 September, 1957.” Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

⁹² “MP pleads for the middle classes, ‘Souls being soured by bitterness,’” *Ilford Pictorial* 15 April 1957. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

⁹³ A. Cooper, “The Tories – the new poor of this country,” *Ilford Pictorial*, 10.21 November 1957. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

included provisions for health care and safety in offices.”⁹⁴ He argued that employers, not taxpayers, had the responsibility for the welfare of their workers. The middle classes, in his mind, had a primary relationship with their employer rather than the state, which aligns with his more right-wing approach to social services and the economy. By 1961, Iremonger claimed that the residents in his constituency were “rich and thriving,” and, as such, “there [was] no such thing as the ‘working class’.” He cited increased wages and living standards for this achievement.⁹⁵

The middle classes described in Ilford belonged to the lower middle-class clerical and white-collar workers enumerated according to categories established in the UK Census. The middle classes in this constituency were identified mainly by their occupation and income. The seemingly stark circumstances of these individuals in Ilford, no doubt used to highlight their plight, refer to Goldthorpe’s concept of convergence, which posits a two-way movement between the level of the lower middle and working classes. These middle classes were not those merely concerned with increased buying power but rather with increased living standards that kept them from falling below their position. Iremonger’s conclusion that increased wages and living standards were keys to shedding working-class identity emphasizes that both income levels as well as material comforts were necessary. It is also striking that Iremonger believed that these Tory supporters did not look to the Party for social welfare provisions, but rather they

⁹⁴ “Mr. Iremonger may have put some backs up,” *Ilford Pictorial* 17 December 1959, 6. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

⁹⁵ “There’s no such thing as the working class,” *Ilford Pictorial* 16 March 1961. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

supported the Conservatives because of their approach to establishing wider individualism opportunity and responsibility.

Iremonger's understanding of the middle classes, their situation and their politics, reflected his local situation but also included borrowed ideas and images found in contemporary national discussions. Ilford Conservatives bought into the idea and repeated complaints that the middle classes were hard done by and that their position was largely defined by their occupation and income. Race and immigration issues quickly displaced the economic plight of the middle classes and discussions regarding the country's economic performance, which suggests that these concerns, while momentarily significant, did not penetrate political discussions that deeply. Ilford South contained many vocal supporters of Enoch Powell both before and after his 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech. In this respect, the volatility of rhetoric and activity in Ilford with regard to the middle classes as well as other issues, was atypical of the local constituency association experience.

In Eastleigh, a railway town in Hampshire and a Conservative seat by a slim margin in 1955 and 1959, members of the local party agreed that the middle and lower middle classes had been most affected by inflation and the rising cost of living. But this constituency association expressed little sympathy for their local electorate and described them as insular to a fault.⁹⁶ Local individuals, who included "young marrieds," were only concerned "with themselves and their own personal fortunes...they have a strong desire

⁹⁶ 1955 - Total electorate: 48,929; Conservative (D.Price): 20, 215 (50.7%); Labour (J.Hare): 19,670 (49.3%); Majority: 545 (1.4%). 1959 – Total electorate: 55, 215; Conservative (D.Price): 24, 949 (53.5%); Labour (J.Hare): 21, 693 (46.5%); Majority: 3, 256 (7%).

to improve their own material standard of living, which they have come to expect as a right.” Members of the CA did not explicitly classify their local electorate as belonging to any specific class. In their discussions, they concluded that the frustrations of their electors stemmed from a sense that, “we are not having it ‘so good’ as expected from the Conservatives.” According to this CA, the local electorate was frustrated with, “high mortgages, ever increasing prices, high rates, credit squeezes,” and the power of unions. These issues aligned with national discussions regarding the discontented middle classes and so even though these Conservatives did not explicitly identify their woes as a product of the wider phenomenon, it is evident that that vocabulary permeated their discussions. These Conservatives also highlighted the youth of some of their local discontents, which perhaps suggests a generational gap between those who ran the branch and the local electorate. Eastleigh Conservatives, significantly, were unimpressed with the “selfish, envious and ungrateful,” behaviour of their local electorate and the instrumental nature of their politics. They were adamant that, “the party should not adopt [a] wholly materialistic stance” in their policies.⁹⁷ Thus, while Eastleigh Conservatives shared the Party’s view of the middle classes as an economically motivated group, they did not consider their values worth celebrating and certainly did not think the Party should bow down to their demands. The aversion to materialism as exhibited by these Conservatives illustrates that not all rank-and-file members wanted to be seen and treated as consumers. Moreover, the characterization of their local discontents as “selfish” and “envious” disrupts the later triumphalist narrative that describes Thatcherism’s ascent at the

⁹⁷ “Current Issues in Eastleigh, 1 May, 1962,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/14/471.

grassroots level and the elevated status of the middle classes in her ideology. For these local conservatives, the Party and its core supporters occupied a higher moral ground and they wanted the Party to actively protect this aspect of Conservatism rather than surrender to the corrupting force of materialism.⁹⁸

Conservatives in the Woodgreen and Lower Tottenham association seemed quite irritated by the state of the economy. Very early on they “urge[d] the government to implement its policy of ‘Setting the People Free’ by removing petty restrictions imposed by the Socialists.”⁹⁹ Even here, the complaints seemed targeted at vestiges of Labour policy rather than a lack of prosperity and material comforts in their lives. In Peckham (Southwark), conversely, Conservatives wanted, “to congratulat[e] the Government on the further strides it has taken to stabilize the cost of living ...It suggests continued close examination of the plight of many professional and retired people, unaffected by the continued wage demands and grants, whose standard of living has declined in the past 10 years.”¹⁰⁰ Inflation, the cost of living, and taxation were issues that surfaced as topics of conversation periodically, but the local rank-and-file was not especially engaged with

⁹⁸ This aversion to materialism and “vulgar display” or “conspicuous consumption” is similar to ideas held by the staunch Left wing of the Labour Party, which was maintained by Aneurin Bevan and those who prioritized nationalization as the key to equality and power for manual workers. Throughout this period, the Party’s Left wing was engaged in a struggle with the Party’s young intellectuals including Hugh Gaitskell, Michael Young, Anthony Crosland, Roy Jenkins, Evan Durbin, Herbert Morrison, and Hugh Dalton. See Jose Harris, “Labour’s Political and Social Thought,” 32-36; Jim Tomlinson, “Labour and the Economy,” 60-62; Pat Thane, “Labour and Welfare, 103 in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, eds., *Labour’s First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Catherine Ellis, “Letting it Slip: The Labour Party and the ‘Mystical Halo’ of Nationalization, 1951 – 1964,” *Contemporary British History* 26(1) (2012), 47-71.

⁹⁹ “Executive Committee, 11 September 1952.” London Metropolitan Archives (LMA)

¹⁰⁰ “Executive Council, 13 July 1955” and “Finance and General Purposes Meeting, 6 June 1956.” LMA, ACC1158/10.

these issues. Again, despite the grievances circulating in public and political discourse, these Conservatives did not clearly proclaim their solidarity with the plight of the “beleaguered” middle classes.

It is not surprising that the rank-and-file who occupied the local branches shared some of the views regarding the plight of the middle classes as established in the national discussion. The middle classes were typically referred to by these local Conservatives as “professionals” and “lower middle class.” These examples illustrate that these Tories shared a concern for rising costs and increasing taxation. These examples also show an awareness that the middle classes were growing and that this growth not only disrupted previously rigid social boundaries but that some of these “new” and young members of the middle classes could corrupt Conservative principles with their emphasis on individual acquisition. Additionally, local Conservatives were concerned not just about the economic position of the middle classes but also with coping with the changing social structure. The MP of Ilford, for example, stressed the importance of maintaining their middle-class status with better living standards and Banbury Tories sought to educate manual workers on Conservative Party policy. The lack of unified support for the plight of the middle classes at the local level meant that it was difficult for Conservatives to accurately gauge the extent of the frustrations and anger amongst their own rank-and-file. While the MCA and the by-elections at Tonbridge and Orpington were manifestations of discontent by a certain number of voters, the Party could not be sure that these feelings were actually manifest amongst the wider rank-and-file.

These local discussions often remained within the annals of their constituency association minute books. If the issues were pressing, they were forwarded to area leaders, local MPs and candidates, Central Office or the annual conference for debate in a wider forum. The National Union Executive Committee (NUEC) was (and remains) responsible for the organization of party conferences and, with the help of relevant committees, for group resolutions and discussion under relevant themes.¹⁰¹ Delegates from constituency associations were permitted to speak and vote on resolutions but they did not represent, “in precise statistical form,” the views of their members. Attendees from each constituency usually included members of the local executive, such as chairmen, treasurers, secretaries, agents, leaders of youth, women’s and trade union sections, along with two additional spots for a Young Conservative and a member who had never attended a conference.¹⁰² While not a direct representation of rank-and-file thoughts and feelings, resolutions debated at Party conferences provide insight into how Conservatives conceptualized the middle classes as it related to party policies and communicated their concerns to the Party. The images in these political representations of course contributed to how the middle classes were discussed more widely in political as well as popular discourses. More importantly, party conferences were opportunities to display party unity and strength so any hint of discord on the question of the middle classes represented important fissures in opinion and thinking.

¹⁰¹ Richard Kelly, “The Party Conferences,” in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, eds., *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 227 – 228.

¹⁰² Kelly, “The Party Conferences,” in Seldon and Ball, eds., *The Conservative Century*, 227.

The embarrassment at Tonbridge led to intense scrutiny of the Party's policies on rising prices, taxation, home ownership and questions concerning the general extent to which the Conservatives had improved the lot of the middle classes. Only one year earlier, the Conservatives won re-election with comfortable confidence. They won twenty seats, mostly in England, from the Labour Party and increased their majority in Parliament to 68.¹⁰³ The Labour Party, however, was beset with internal discord between Aneurin Bevan, and his followers on the Left, and Gaitskell and other young revisionist intellectuals who sought to shift the emphasis of party from nationalization to managing growth in a mixed economy. Gaitskell wanted to show Labour that Socialism did not have to be wholly incompatible with affluence and prosperity, but a significant section of the Party considered this to be a betrayal of the party's true principles. So while the 1956 Tory conference ought to have been an anxious meeting, the stakes were not so high because the Conservatives knew that Labour was not in a position to challenge them for power.

One of the major debates of that conference centered on the question of the Party "implementing more forcibly its election promises." One delegate from Wembley South confronted the issue of Tonbridge directly. She charged, "I believe that the people we should get tough with ... are those wavering, disgruntled supporters, those fair-weather Tories, those electors in Tonbridge who failed to vote ... I believe that we must remind these people again and again that the Conservative Party is a classless party." She continued, "Of course, we stand for the middle class, but we also stand for the other

¹⁰³ The Conservatives polled 49.7 % of the popular vote and Labour polled 46.4%.

too.”¹⁰⁴ Another delegate representing Peterborough also stood against the resolution. She stated, “The troubles of today ... come from having too great a quantity of foods and clothing, of too many of the goods and services that were not available in those days.” She continued: “We did not make any great promises to either the wage earner nor to the businessmen, nor to the middle classes. These people have our sympathies and we want to do our best for them. Our election promise was the continuation of free enterprise ... and this is the policy which we are following to try and solve the country’s difficulties.”¹⁰⁵

The delegate from Rushcliffe, B.G. Raine, who moved the motion, suggested that the cost of living and of home ownership were the major issues causing alarm. He agreed that while the Party had made marked improvements in each of these areas, the changes were not taking hold fast enough.¹⁰⁶ T.H.J. Heffernan, a Young Conservative representing Salisbury, described his situation as “lacking in all the various things of modern life which are supposed to be so necessary,” but was “fully-taxed and un-subsidized.” He evoked the burden of taxation, the lack of material comforts as well as the lack of State support to distinguish his circumstance. His main concern, as a young middle-class Tory, was the cost of running a large State apparatus. He urged the Government to run a “simpler and less expensive administration.”¹⁰⁷ While he supported the motion’s critical tone, he turned the discussion away from the demands of middle-class consumers to one

¹⁰⁴ “Second Session – 11 October 1956 – Afternoon, Government Policy and Public Relations.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/63.

¹⁰⁵ Miss. P. Brudenell. “Second Session – 11 October 1956 – Afternoon, Government Policy and Public Relations.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/63.

¹⁰⁶ “Second Session – 11 October 1956 – Afternoon, Government Policy and Public Relations.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/63.

¹⁰⁷ “Second Session – 11 October 1956 – Afternoon, Government Policy and Public Relations.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/63.

of the core principles of Conservatism, which similar to the *Industrial Charter* and *One Nation*, this delegate exhibited hostility towards a growing and unwieldy bureaucracy and the Civil Service.

Tonbridge, though it seemingly played out in dramatic fashion, held different meanings for members of the Conservative Party. Some rank-and-file members were defensive of the principles of the Party in the face of what they perceived to be hypocritical and “fair-weather” voters and the dangers of materialism. These comments laid blame for discord at the feet of those who were not committed Conservatives, which included the young, affluent workers, or new middle classes. For others, the Conservatives’ mistakes were not policy-based but stemmed from an inability to implement them and bring about changes quickly. Another interpretation for the discontent that led to Tonbridge was that it was rooted in the large and unwieldy bureaucracy of Government. Rank-and-file members adopted a vague terminology to describe the middle classes and viewed the group as largely an economically driven entity that could be pacified with stabilized cost of living, reduced taxation and opportunities for home ownership.

At the 1962 Party conference, a similar tone of discussion was carried out in response to the results at Orpington. One session was devoted to the discussion of Conservative principles. Mrs. R.H. Cobbold from N.W. Hampshire presented a motion to the conference urging the Party to show that there was more to Conservative policy and principles than its economic record. “Because the party is the only party composed of representatives of all sorts and kinds of people,” she stated, “not only made up of one

section of society, we always have been ... representative of the whole country.” And therefore, we “are not a party that woos one section of the electorate, and we must never make the mistake of becoming one.”¹⁰⁸ This motion was not hotly debated but there were a number of constituency representatives who felt that the plight of the middle classes had dominated the Party’s agenda and shifted focus from the moral to the material aspects of Conservative policy. The resolution was also carried unanimously by the conference. Angus Maude used the topic to criticize the Party’s image. He asked, “Do we have to project ourselves on paper as largely a collection of pensioners and property owners around the parish pump?”¹⁰⁹ Maude spoke specifically of the Party’s inconsistent approach to young members but that his penetrating caricature of the Party, in fact, fit with how it had hitherto described and understood their core supporters. He urged the Conservatives to engage with young voters by embracing technology.

After being narrowly defeated in 1964, the Conservatives focused on reframing ideas and party policies to win back the electorate. In a discussion regarding Conservative policy, the delegate representing the Cities of London and Westminster used the terms middle classes and “middle income” interchangeably at the 1966 conference, which conflates the economic and cultural boundaries of this category. She described how pensioners suffered due to the rising cost of living and claimed that the Rent Act and

¹⁰⁸ “Fourth Session – 11 October 1962 – Afternoon, Conservative Principles and Party Organization.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/68.

¹⁰⁹ “Fourth Session – 11 October 1962 – Afternoon, Conservative Principles and Party Organization.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/68.

“crippling taxation” adversely affected “middle income” people.¹¹⁰ The delegate representing Bristol University, and Vice Chairman of the Federation of University Conservative and Unionist Associations, asked the conference to consider the Party’s image. He asked, “[w]hen you talk to an ordinary man in the street, when you are canvassing, what is the image of the Conservative Party? It is a false image... It is an image of richness, snobbery, etc.” He concluded that the Party had done itself a disservice by failing to highlight its many varied attributes. This delegate’s question included references to the Party’s association with privilege and prosperity after the war, which he thought had been used against Conservatives by the Labour Party. The delegate representing Heywood and Royton (Greater Manchester), however, cautioned against worrying about the Party’s “so-called image” doing damage to their reputation. He observed, “[m]y impression in the last election ... was that in some of the worst houses in Nelson we polled better than we ever had before. Where we found our support had slipped was in new and good housing areas inhabited by the so-called new middle class.”¹¹¹ For this delegate, the Conservative Party’s problem was not rooted in the perception that it stood for privilege and inequality. Rather, their electoral fortunes suffered because the Party had angered those new middle classes either by failing to deliver on their expectations of affluence or perhaps it did not have their support in the first place because of their social class origins. As with Conservatives in Eastleigh, this delegate expressed uneasiness with the effects of a widening middle class, whether on the

¹¹⁰ “Fourth Session – 14th October 1965, Conservative Policy.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/70.

¹¹¹ “Fourth Session – 14th October 1965, Conservative Policy.” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/70.

Party's ideas, structure or the way in practiced politics, and questioned the depths of their allegiance to the Party. In 1965, the "new" middle classes were still seen as a separate section albeit within the larger category of middle class. The Tories seemed to understand that they needed more than just supporters who could simply be relied on to vote Tory because of a historical association or "common sense", but beyond appealing to their consumer sensibilities the Party had little else to offer them. The problem was that proclaiming affluence, as in the case with this delegate, was not universally appealing and Conservatives were not always comfortable with flaunting prosperity.

Sitting on the Opposition benches in 1968, members of the Conservative Party felt that they had struggled to make their case to British voters rather than single out their failures to address the needs of various sections of society. The major problem, members concluded, was a failure in communication. For some, the problem lay with the Party's propaganda and, for others, local party workers were at fault.¹¹² The issues that were discussed at these conferences emphasized greater individual responsibility accorded to people in their everyday lives, which was consistent with the Party's efforts to scale back bureaucracy and administration. In a discussion on social security and health services, delegates agreed that a Conservative Government should support the fundamental structure of State social services but also offer more private options and encourage Britons to fend for themselves, which would help reduce taxation.¹¹³ The principles

¹¹² "Morning Session - October 1968, The Party and the Future." Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/73.

¹¹³ "Third Session – 9th October, 1969, Social Security and Health." Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 2/1/74.

behind these ideas were the same as those used to appeal to the middle classes when the Party was in power. The Party still held these values to be central, which suggests that it still believed that it could win electoral support with the same policies and conception of their core supporters that had actually created conflict before 1964.

Conclusion

In national discussions, the Conservative Party viewed their core supporters, the middle classes, as predominantly united and motivated by consumer interests. In the 1950s and 1960s, this approach targeted those who, having experienced wartime austerity, were eager to enjoy the benefits of a booming postwar economy. A vocal section of the middle classes expressed its frustration and anger over what they perceived to be a lower standard of living and reduced status since the war. They complained about the burden of taxation and inflation as the chief factors that stood against a fuller experience of affluence. Expressions of discontent included the formation of pressure groups, of which the MCA was most prominent, and the by-election results at Tonbridge and Orpington. Contemporary observers and political commentators viewed these examples of discontent as significant and concluded that the middle classes felt ignored by the Party with whom they had an historical relationship. The Party countered these criticisms by outlining all of the economic provisions in place to reduce direct taxation, increase pensions, control inflation, and help young married couples buy their first home. The Party believed that by appealing to the middle classes as consumers it had adequate provisions in place to address their complaints. Yet, throughout this period, the Party

continually confronted increasingly frustrated voters claiming to be members of the middle classes.

In the examples above, the Party used a variety of terms to describe the middle classes including, shopkeepers or small business owners, professionals, white collar workers, self-employed, pensioners, suburbanites, young married couples, people on fixed incomes, and public servants. These labels served both to evoke their historic connections with the middle classes and to appeal widely to those who felt they belonged to this dynamic and growing group. The Conservatives tapped into affluence and prosperity as a unifying political theme but failed to understand that each of these sub-groups might have had different experiences of postwar affluence and, as such, expected the Party to address their needs in unique ways. As Savage illustrated, an individual who derived employment from the private sector would not be as sympathetic to a comprehensive system of social provisions as one with ties to the public sector. But appealing to these disparate and fragmented sub-groups within the middle classes as one unified group of consumers served to perpetuate the Party's aims to be the national party and appeal to voters on a platform of "classlessness," in contrast to the Labour Party, even though the Tories' core constituency themselves engaged with the Party in essentially class terms.

The Conservatives' strategy of appealing to the middle classes as consumers prevented the party from seeing and appreciating the wider patterns of social change. Sharing occupations and similar incomes did not necessarily mean that these voters shared similar values, class identity or politics but the Party persisted in appealing to them

as a homogenous social category that single-mindedly pursued material goods. The Conservatives might have believed that consumer-centric rhetoric and policies would help uphold their position as the national party, but the expanding boundaries of the middle classes disrupted the once-rigid class categories that dictated political loyalties and underlay traditional Conservative views of what being the national party meant: downplaying class conflict rather than embracing it. Local discussions revealed divisions between rank-and-file members and these “new” middle classes who were described as “fair-weather” and instrumental in their politics. Rank-and-file members did not automatically welcome and integrate the “new” middle classes, whether white-collar workers or young married couples, and, in fact, suspected them of potentially corrupting Conservative principles. These divisions amongst the Conservative Party’s members and core supporters help underline that efforts to maintain its classless image in this postwar period, in fact, heightened class antagonisms and kept this question at the forefront of discussions.

Chapter Three

The Conservative Constituency Associations

The reason for the out-datedness of nearly all local political associations is simple. Party organizations in the past grew up slowly out of some social need for better conditions or a social need to orbit around Lady Bountiful and her garden parties. In many towns, the Conservative Association still represents the centre of social life within it and any attempt to alter the status quo would bring an avalanche of resignations. This type of organization should now be superseded as the increased complexity of politics brings greater sophistication on the part of the electorate... Many party agents will claim that I am wrong. They will argue that they have highly efficient organisations. They probably have – by the standards of their training and party manuals. These standards are outdated and mean in essence a ward committee for each ward, plenty of activities like whist drives, dances, fetes and dinners to keep the faithful together between elections and a brace of political conferences each year to ‘spread the gospel’ ... The value of these people [party members] as opinion formers ... is completely lost. Attempts are always being made to tempt them into active work but who except the most dedicated politico would leave *Coronation Street* to sit in a gloomy Victorian office listening to some candidate pontificating at a ‘jolly’ coffee evening.¹

After 1951, the Conservative Party’s local branches operated in much the same way as in the previous century. This space served as a place where Conservative members met to discuss Party issues but they mostly gathered to socialize with other members at dinners, fetes and garden parties. Local events were often the highlight of the social calendar and even attracted local press coverage. These gatherings also served as venues for public speeches and, more importantly, as fundraising campaigns. In between elections, these branches were also responsible for canvassing their community and distributing Conservative Party literature. The local constituency association (CA) was a hub of activity though some locales, often reflective of the Party’s electoral strength, were

¹ Reginald Watts, “Outdated and Stereotyped: The constituency associations do not know how to sell ideas,” *Crossbow* 9(34) January – March, 1964, 15-16.

livelier than others. On a day-to-day basis, local members were not engaged in serious and sober political discussion but they could express discontent or displeasure with policies or party leaders through resolutions and motions put forward at annual meetings.² Ball observes that even in moments of intense debate, members adhered to conventions of “middle-class politeness” by qualifying criticisms and parting “in a friendly way.”³ Overall, local political work was all geared towards returning their candidate or Member of Parliament and the Party to power.⁴

Research on Conservative CAs has hitherto shown how these local bodies have contributed to the Party’s organizational sophistication and strength, especially in times of adversity.⁵ The extent to which local CAs actually contributed to the Party’s political operations and electoral success can certainly be questioned, especially as modern and professional campaigning strategies emerged in the late 1950s. As quoted above, Reginald Watts was certainly skeptical. The work and activity of local CAs, however, should not be dismissed based on their impact on party policy, direct relevance in the evolving political culture or campaigning techniques. As this chapter illustrates, this local setting not only appealed to the tastes and traditions of an exclusive social set, it was also only accessible to a narrow section of the middle classes. The middle classes who dominated local branches, as such, helped undermine the Party’s rhetorical and

² Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain, 1918 – 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 217-218.

³ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 219.

⁴ According to Ball, “the most characteristic of political discussion in the executives associations was its rarity and it was clearly not regarded as being part of their normal duties.” Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 217.

⁵ Stuart Ball, *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 261.

ideological attempts to transcend class-based rivalries and, more importantly, mobilize themes of consumerism and affluence with rank and file members. Chapters One and Two of this dissertation have illustrated that the Conservatives mobilized economic issues and affluence-centered rhetoric in order to create a wide electoral appeal. As part of this electoral strategy, the Party also conceived of the middle classes, their core base of support, as individual acquisitive consumers. Since the middle classes were fragmented and shared little in terms of ideas and aspirations, appealing to them as consumers, solely interested in acquiring luxury material goods, was not enough to secure the support of or unify those who claimed membership in this social category. Local level activity, despite seeming benign and inoffensive, actually highlights the tensions between the Conservatives' rhetoric, employed to capture wide-reaching electoral support, and the actions of rank-and-file members. The activity of local branches served to reinforce class identities and a paternalistic ethos that had dominated associational culture from before the First World War.⁶ By maintaining the same type of activities and electioneering strategies from the 19th century, the local branches had no place for the newer members of the middle classes or urban and industrial working classes to mix with the Party's committed supporters, which undermined their efforts to be classless in their appeal.

Participation at the local level required a commitment of leisure time and effort to which only a select group within the middle classes had the luxury to give. Women's

⁶ Ross McKibbin argues that the prevalence of anti-Socialist middle classes within associational culture in interwar Britain served to undermine the establishment of a full social democracy and reinforce social hierarchies after 1945. A fuller discussion of this debate follows as political parties and voluntary organizations overlap and the latter will help underline the continuities of local Conservative branch activity.

divisions, for example, tended to hold their meetings in the afternoons.⁷ Fluctuating work hours, child-care responsibilities, and access to transportation excluded most manual workers and many individuals from the lower middle classes from taking part in the activities of their Conservative branch.⁸ As Rule has illustrated, full-employment and increased wages may have brought the urban and industrial working classes more security and buying power than in previous decades, but this was accomplished by extensive overtime which limited the free time of certain workers for leisurely pursuits. The experience of overtime was so physically and mentally draining that there was even a marked decline in participation in union activity.⁹ Consequently, many workers “said that when they got home they were fit only to sit in front of the television.”¹⁰ Local sources confirm that the Conservatives, while successful in mobilizing consumer issues for wider electoral appeal, did not consider adjusting their traditional social activities in a manner that would welcome members of the new middle classes or manual workers into their local organizations.

The local CA, as the following chapter will illustrate, was a world frozen in time where political activity adhered to established traditions and form. Those who inhabited this world were predominantly those from traditional and long established middle-class

⁷ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 163.

⁸ In Stefan Ramsden’s study of working class life in Beverly (East Yorkshire), his interviewees recounted that “women spent much of their time at home as housekeepers and mothers,” which meant that they did not venture beyond their particular neighbourhoods or local communities for social activities. Stefan Ramsden, “Remaking Working-Class Community: Sociability, Belonging and ‘Affluence’ in a Small Town, 1930 – 1980,” *Contemporary British History* 29(1) (2015), 7.

⁹ John Rule, “Time, affluence and private leisure,” *Labour History Review*, 66(2) (Summer 2001), 231.

¹⁰ Rule, “Time, affluence and private leisure,” 230.

backgrounds. It is difficult to state definitively whether these individuals represented member lower middle classes without more specific demographic data absent from these particular records. It is possible to state, however, that the people who worked in these local branches perpetuated a culture that appealed mostly to those from similar social backgrounds and, as such, created a socially exclusive organization and limited the Party's interaction with more members of electorate, particularly the expanded world of white collared workers. The emphasis on the personal experience of politics for rank-and-file members reveals the persistence of a paternalist Toryism, which viewed members of the electorate as individuals needing guidance and political education. This chapter also serves as a foundational survey of the local CA landscape across a number of locales, which provides context for the closer inspection of events in the safe Conservative seat of South West Hertfordshire and their Conservative MP, Gilbert Longden in Chapter Five.

Associational Culture in Britain

The literature on Conservative Party CAs focuses primarily on their organizational structure, their functions and, more recently, the relationships between the national party and their local habitations.¹¹ This body of research on the Party's grassroots has tried to explain how its expansive organization supported it through social and political changes

¹¹ John Ramsden and Ball have written foundational histories of the Conservative Party that include accounts of what happens at the grassroots level (individual constituencies as well as at annual party conferences) alongside the discussions and decisions that take place at the national level. See Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party and British Politics, 1902 – 1951* (London: Longman, 1995); John Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902 – 1940* (London: Longman, 1978) and John Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill and Eden, 1940 – 1957* (London: Longman, 1995).

in the twentieth century.¹² Scholars have been most eager to explore the reasons for the Conservative Party's resilience. Namely, even though the Conservatives have strong historical connections with privilege and status as well as the monarchy, Church, and nationalism, the Party has remained relevant and, in fact, thrived electorally with a mass franchise in the twentieth century. This success has been partially attributed to the Party's expansive and cohesive organizational structure that has shown impressive ability to adapt in times of crisis or in Opposition.¹³ The organization functions so well, according to Ball, partly due to a carefully managed relationship between the national party and its local habitations based on a "constantly reiterated doctrine of local autonomy."¹⁴ CAs have exercised self-determination in internal affairs without interference from regional

¹² Andrew Thorpe, *Parties At War: Political Organization in Second World War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Thorpe's study shows that while Conservative constituency associations (CAs) were instructed to adopt a less partisan tone in their work, local activity did not cease as a result of war. Some CAs closed in 1939 but others considered it their patriotic duty to "carry on" and worked to support the National government. The challenges of maintaining the same level of work in constituencies increased as the war went on owing to a shortage in resources like meeting rooms being bombed out, for example, or the evacuation of members. Yet, enough branches of CAs maintained at least a basic level of activity throughout the war so that when talk of reorganization began in 1943 and 1944, there was a firm foundation upon which to rebuild the postwar Party. Janet Johnson, "Did Organization Really matter? Party Organization and Conservative Electoral Recovery, 1945 – 1959," *Twentieth Century British History*, 14(4) (2003), 391 – 412. Johnson's study of three marginal seats in South East England (Lambeth Norwood, North Oxfordshire Banbury, and Gravesend Kent) tackles the idea of the Conservative Party's organizational prowess after 1945. She finds that the connection between the Party's organizational strength and electoral success to be largely assumed. With regards to certified agents, for example, the quality of those recruited was uneven due to inadequate recruitment and training processes. While Norwood, Banbury and Gravesend benefitted from the services of capable agents the same could not be said for all associations. Even as the Party continued on its path to recovery, membership and fundraising at the local level stagnated or declined. Youth branches, trade union groups, and education initiatives all proved disappointing. Thus, Johnson argues, if the Conservatives achieved their electoral goals in seats with generally unimpressive organization, the hitherto assumption needs to be reconsidered. Electoral success cannot be attributed to a well-run organization.

¹³ Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, eds., *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition since 1867* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 1995), 13-14, 24-26.

¹⁴ Ball, "Local Conservatism and Party Organization," 261 and Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 146-147.

and national authorities like Central Office (CO).¹⁵ Local branches, therefore, have been left to fundraise, select candidates (from a pre-approved list of applicants supplied by CO), and conduct regular administrative business without interference. In return for independence, local branches were responsible for actively cultivating a relationship between the Party and its supporters using social activities at which Party ideas were both overtly and passively disseminated.¹⁶ The arrangement has helped the Party avoid damaging internal conflicts and present an image of unity and confidence to the electorate. The local branches reflected an ethos of unity within its ranks at times of discord. During the period of “white collar revolt” in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the local CAs supported the Party’s efforts and often criticized the motives of rebels. The Conservatives have indeed shown resiliency and a keen ability to adapt in the face of social change that threatened their political relevance.¹⁷ But the traditions and customs that dominated this socially exclusive space actually reinforced resistance to the expanding electorate, which could undermine efforts to appear unified and transcend sectarian and class-based dialogues.

The characteristics of civic culture in the twentieth century are illuminated by the scholarship and debates on associational activity and voluntarism in Britain. McKibbin’s

¹⁵ Johnson calls the organizational structure “a union of autonomous associations.” Johnson, “Did Organization Really matter?” 398.

¹⁶ Ball, “Local Conservatism and Party Organization,” in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, eds., *Conservative Century*, 264.

¹⁷ See Nigel Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); David Jarvis, “The Shaping of Conservative Electoral Hegemony, 1918 – 1939,” in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, eds., *Party State and Society: Electoral Behavior in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1997), 131-152, and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*.

study on political realignment in the interwar period, for example, highlights the central role of associational activity for the middle classes. In fact, this propensity to belong to clubs and organizations as “formal members” who paid dues, fees or subscriptions was a unique characteristic particular to this social set.¹⁸ Men joined clubs that catered to professional, political or sporting interests and those that served a purely social function. Women joined organizations that provided social services or operated as a charity. In most cases, respondents to the surveys understood their “membership” in these clubs and organizations as “friendship” and these relationships helped them feel like they belonged to a community, especially when confronted with “foreign” elements, including members of the newly affluent working classes as well as immigrants. For McKibbin, the popularity of clubs and organizations amongst the middle classes prevented meaningful inter-mingling within and between classes. These spaces for apolitical sociability offered the middle classes an opportunity to find common interests beyond politics and religion that might have divided them.¹⁹ Shared social interests in these various clubs and organizations were also governed by a repertoire of social manners that “emphasized social confidence over expertise,” “good humour,” and “getting on with people.” Apolitical sociability helped maintain stability and tranquility in public and private life.²⁰ This associational network and culture was so deeply rooted in British society, he argues,

¹⁸ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918 – 1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

¹⁹ The major issues that divided the middle classes (“traditional” and “non-traditional” centered on religion and geographical mobility. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 91 – 95.

²⁰ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 87, 88, 93-94, 96, 97, 98.

that it ultimately undermined the establishment of a social democracy in Britain after 1945.

McKibbin's portrait of middle-class sociability centers on the activity that happened outside political parties but he observes that this apolitical sociability was actually imbued with strong political sentiments. In response to near universal male suffrage and the heightened sense that class defined politics, the middle classes rejected what they perceived to be the overly aggressive, tension-filled politics led by the Labour Party. Many within the middle classes chose not to have explicit affiliation to any of the political parties and did not engage in any overt political discussion as a purposeful expression of conservative anti-Socialist values. McKibbin argues that the Conservatives were only too keen to capitalize on this phenomenon by emphasizing the social aspects of their work over partisan activities. In the interwar period, Ball found that Conservative CAs blended-in so well with their surrounding network of social clubs that membership was as beneficial, in terms of status and economic benefits, as belonging to one's local golf club or even the well-connected Freemasons.²¹ The significance of this ability to seamlessly fit-in with the surrounding networks of clubs and organizations should not be understated since, as McKibbin finds, one of the reasons the interwar Liberal Party failed to gain the support of the suburban-provincial middle class in a permanent way was due to the absence of any effort to "restore their old influence in secondary political bodies like farmers' organizations, rate payers' associations, women's unions, etc.— the great

²¹ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 162.

associational network of middle-class England.”²² Similarly, Janet Johnson has argued that local associations and their operations were “consistent with the grain of existing social structures,” which afforded members “valuable opportunities to promulgate Conservative policies” and “gave Conservative associations great credibility and high standing within the community.”²³

Social capital theory, as elucidated by Putnam, suggests that a healthy and productive society is built on physical and human capital as well as strong and vast social networks.²⁴ These relationships benefit the individual as well as the wider community. Those who joined their local branch of a political party or community clubs and organizations benefitted personally through “networking” but also took part in the organization’s fundraising initiatives that benefitted an external cause. In maintaining personal contact between the Party and local community members, the CA therefore reinforced a social connection that created a mutual obligation. The local CA reached out to potential voters and they were expected to reciprocate, hopefully with support, at a later date. According to Putnam, the decline in political participation in the United States (attending meetings and volunteering to work for election campaigns) and the rise of direct-mail fundraising and political action committees has meant that voters have steadily tuned out from the process.²⁵

²² Ross McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class: Social relations in Britain, 1880 – 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 279.

²³ Johnson, “Did Organization Really matter?” 412.

²⁴ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2000), 19-21.

²⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 39 – 40.

The Conservative CA in the 1950s and 1960s maintained the character and function of associations and clubs that formed the center of middle-class social life in the interwar period. Namely, they served to unite those from similar social backgrounds, cultural tastes and, of course, political ideas. Those who spent their leisure time campaigning for Tories enjoyed the socially and culturally narrow experience of local CA activity, which meant that there was little impetus for reform except in response to particular local circumstances. The continuity of such activity allowed for Ball to generalize that the Party's local branches were "both socially and temperamentally homogenous," and gave a sense of "team spirit."²⁶ The persistence of this form of local branch work is all the more remarkable given that the surrounding associational culture, according to Helen McCarthy, underwent changes in function and form that served not only to democratize political experience and also created conditions for social and gender mixing in the public space.

McKibbin's contention that anti-Socialist middle-class people monopolized and, therefore, shaped the experience of democracy after 1918 has been challenged by scholars who study the history of voluntarism in Britain. This body of work incorporates discussions on British democracy, its spirit and character, as well as the culture of voluntary organizations. McCarthy disputes McKibbin's claim that clubs and volunteer organizations maintained social stability by reinforcing pre-existing class and gender hierarchies. In contrast, voluntary organizations and activities served "as a strategy for

²⁶ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 170.

bridging partisan and sectarian divides in civil society.”²⁷ She shows that associational life created a new kind of secular civic organization for non-partisan and pluralistic expressions of citizenship.²⁸ She argues that this period was especially ripe for such an endeavour because of the Fourth Reform Act of 1918, which increased the size of the electorate, and the emerging threat of totalitarian ideologies abroad.²⁹ The project of creating newly enfranchised men and women as well-informed and responsible citizens was not only a question of making sure that democracy, with its many components both new and old, functioned well. For many contemporary political commentators and theorists, it was important that democracy succeed in Britain because it was viewed as a defining characteristic of “Britishness.”³⁰ McCarthy argues that associations such as the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, Rotary International, the British Legion, and

²⁷ Helen McCarthy, “Whose Democracy? Histories of British Political Culture Between the Wars.” *The Historical Journal* 55(1) (2012), 230 and Helen McCarthy, “Associational voluntarism in interwar Britain.” in Matthew Hilton and James McKay, eds., *The Ages of Voluntarism: How we got to the Big Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 53.

²⁸ McCarthy, “Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain,” 892. As well, see Peter Shapely, “Civil Society, class and locality: Tenant groups in postwar Britain,” in Hilton and McKay, eds., *The Ages of Voluntarism: How we got to the Big Society*, chapter 5. Specifically, Shapely studies tenant groups that emerged in the 1960s in response to unfair rents as well as poor living conditions. These groups were adapted versions of 19th century charity and reform societies that campaigned for a broad range of issues related to the improvement of living standards and social justice in form and method. In the 1960s, these groups were community based and led by educated middle-class individuals. Those from “humble working class backgrounds” did participate and many of their appeals to local authorities or the national government would not have been effective without them. In this way, Shapely considers these organizations as “partially democratic” and certainly, like their predecessors, “made a contribution to participatory democracy and civil engagement.” These tenant groups, however, were unlike earlier voluntary organizations because they had a much narrower scope tended to emerge and disappear as circumstance necessitated. These groups did not create sustained social movements. As well, the vocabulary that tenant groups used to appeal to the government was based on post-material language that emphasized the rights of citizens.

²⁹ See “Associational Volunteerism in Interwar Britain” in Hilton and McKay, eds., *The Ages of Voluntarism*, chapter 3 and “Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain” *The Historical Journal*, 50(4) (2007), 891-912.

³⁰ McCarthy, “Associational Voluntarism in Interwar Britain,” 54.

the League of Nations Union were successful in nurturing democracy because of their historical presence in British communities.

McCarthy's observations on democracy and active citizenship as markers of "Britishness" prompt consideration of the wider context within which local associations worked. It is inaccurate to dismiss social activities as evidence of "inactivity" or signs of decay at the Conservative Party's local levels. CAs relied on dances, dinners, and casual gatherings as a part of their calendar because they were familiar to community members and, as such, were not only valuable in establishing relationships that could lead to votes but also were part of the varied associational culture that typified British life. This environment, as McCarthy suggests, not only helped British democracy thrive but "anchor[ed] British politics ideologically to the center-ground, therefore provid[ed] important insulation against the currents of political extremism ..." through a politics of pressure.³¹ The work of these civic organizations, of which CAs were one type, then also included maintaining a certain status quo in British politics and society that prevented perceived disruptive elements like the British Union of Fascist and Communists from establishing significant roots.³² In the same way, the work carried out by Conservative CAs and their underlying conservative values prevented extreme elements within the Party from organizing and mobilizing members against the established leadership.

³¹ McCarthy, "Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain," 893. Also, McCarthy, "Whose Democracy? Histories of British Political Culture Between the War," 228.

³² McCarthy, "Associational Volunteerism in Interwar Britain," 48.

Studies on volunteer associations are especially relevant in the last half-decade of British politics and have received renewed attentions from scholars as well as policy makers. One of the central tenants, for example, of the Conservative-Liberal coalition government elected in 2010 has been the idea of a “Big Society” rather than big government playing a role in everyday lives.³³ This rhetoric lauding the efforts of individuals and local communities is not new. In fact, as Matthew Hilton and James McKay’s research shows, even David Cameron’s Big Society initiative and rhetoric has roots in the a rich history of voluntarism in Britain.

The history of voluntarism in Britain has, according to Hilton and McKay, always been a story told in quantitative terms. Specifically, scholarship tends to chart overall decline and partial resurgence of voluntary activity following the First World War. The view of a perpetual general decline following the First World War has been revised. Scholars note that voluntarism did not disappear but rather changed in appearance and methods. The 1960s, for example, saw the proliferation of volunteer associations emerge to support Feminist, Environmentalist, and Peace movements. The reason for the predominant interpretative trajectory of voluntarism in decline is highly politicized. Firstly, scholars see the decline of voluntary activity as symptomatic of Britain’s overall decline on the world stage. More specifically, the decline of voluntarism in Britain is evidence of a changed public sphere. The First World War required the state to expand in size and scope and this growth meant that the impetus for volunteer activity supported by individuals and local communities was displaced by efforts in the public, private and

³³ Hilton and McKay, eds., “An Introduction” in *The Ages of Voluntarism*, vii, 1.

commercial sectors. The State, for example, took over the responsibility of social services and welfare provision and dwarfed the efforts of individual British citizens and local community organizations.³⁴

Neo-liberal thinkers and politicians of the New Right, who sought to undermine the idea of a large and interventionist state apparatus, have appropriated an interpretation that emphasizes decline. The position of the New Right is that a big state has adversely affected the level of political engagement and generally stifled democracy in Britain. However, Hilton and McKay remark, New Right commentators have had to construct a “golden age” of voluntarism in order to portray the role of the state in the twentieth century as menacing in order to rally support around reducing its size. Hilton and McKay’s project builds on McKibbin’s work by examining a different site of associational culture in which the middle and working classes might have taken part. This research is pertinent to this chapter because it helps identify and explain characteristics of CA work outside the confines of a rigid “political” and “non-political” definition. It is this more inclusive perspective that allows Hilton and McKay to see the “constant renewal and adaptation” in this sector.³⁵

Green’s analysis of Conservative ideas on the role of the state shows that the local rituals and traditions of CA activity were not incongruent with emergent and competing versions of Conservatism after 1945. The One Nation group of Tories, for example, advocated for a balance of state intervention along with a *laissez-faire* approach to the

³⁴ Hilton and McKay, eds., “An Introduction” in *The Ages of Voluntarism*, 5.

³⁵ Hilton and McKay, eds., “An Introduction” in *The Ages of Voluntarism*, 8.

economy. These Tories, ascendant in party thinking throughout the 1950s and 1960s, would have valued CA work as it was as an example of thriving individual initiative but also as representative of how branches of the national government structures could be incorporated into local communities without being oppressive. Alternatively, emerging libertarians like Enoch Powell similarly would have found the independence of CA activities and financial self-sufficiency as successful examples rooted in the history of individual initiative. The content of CA activity could be appropriated as an expression of different strains of Conservative thinking and, as such, did not have to change drastically.³⁶

CAs shared characteristics with the volunteer organizations that served to promote participatory democracy and civic engagement but they only appealed to the traditional sections of the middle classes. McKibbin's findings on associational culture in the interwar period and the subsequent body of literature that has emerged on voluntarism in Britain illustrates the central role such organizations played in British society. The relationships forged here informed wider social interactions and politics. Local Conservatives maintained activities like canvassing, card tournaments, dinners and dances and demanded a personal face-to-face experience of politics all of which continually reinforced established social hierarchies and outlooks that were elsewhere undergoing changes. Conservatives at the local level, therefore, operated in a way that

³⁶ E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 247.

undermined the Party's rhetorical attempts to transcend class-based rivalries and, most importantly, make all sections of the middle classes feel included and important.

The Conservative Party Local Organization

The CA's work in planning and organization serves the Party's efforts in rallying support around the Conservatives. These local associations have been called the "backbone" or the "life and soul" of the Party.³⁷ These lofty labels are perhaps examples of the upper levels of the Party paying lip service to rank-and-file members. It would be a mistake, however, to disregard the powerful position CAs occupied because the relative proximity of these local branches to supporters and voters granted them direct and frequent access. CAs, in theory, could potentially catch wind of discontent or problems before the upper levels of the Party and could diffuse potentially volatile situations more effectively. A report submitted by the Executive Committee of the National Union to the Central Council in 1973 discussed ways that different levels of the Conservative Party could be made "more democratic" outside of Parliament. The conclusions of this report affirmed the essential role that local CAs played the Party's success at national elections and did not propose significant reforms. The report stated, "the Constituency Association is a vital unit in the organisation within the Party and that any alteration to its structure should only be undertaken if clearly to the advantage of the Party in achieving that objective."³⁸ The report suggested streamlining local branch business with the creation of

³⁷ David Hennessy, "The Communication of Conservative policy, 1957-1959," in *Political Quarterly*, 32(3), July 1961, 240.

³⁸ "Report of the Executive Committee of the National Union to the Central Council – Draft Submitted by the Subcommittee appointed by the Executive Committee, after examination of

two committees: “Finance and Management” and “Political Organisation and Activities.”

The responsibilities of the latter committee included, “disseminating of political information both inside and outside the Party,” and “exploiting the consequent political stimulation and for gaining further active support for the Party.” The report urged that “participation in political activity should not be confined to members of the committees” since they would be preoccupied with the business of organizing and running events.³⁹

For the most part, the Party appeared to be satisfied with their work though it did feel that it needed to expand their appeal and recruit from the community more widely. This feeling was consistent with the Party’s wider aims to avoid “sectional division” in the Party and amongst the electorate.⁴⁰

In the period before the First World War, the franchise was contingent upon property ownership and agents helped the Party navigate electoral law and maintain electoral registers.⁴¹ The legal component of CA activity ended with the introduction of the mass franchise in 1918 and party workers transitioned their focus to fundraising, canvassing, distributing leaflets, and staging public speeches.⁴² Equally significant to CA

comments received on the Report of the Review Committee,” 1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive (CPA): NUA 4/1/10.

³⁹ “Report of the Executive Committee of the National Union to the Central Council – Draft Submitted by the Subcommittee appointed by the Executive Committee, after examination of comments received on the Report of the Review Committee,” 3. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 4/1/10.

⁴⁰ “Report of the Executive Committee of the National Union to the Central Council – Draft Submitted by the Subcommittee appointed by the Executive Committee, after examination of comments received on the Report of the Review Committee,” 2. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NUA 4/1/10.

⁴¹ Stuart Ball, “Local Conservatism and party Organization,” in *Conservative Century*, 264.

⁴² I draw on Lawrence’s careful reading of ‘electioneering’ practices and the processes by which they change from the 19th – 20th century in Britain in my reconsideration of activity on

life were social activities like dinners, dances, raffles, and whist tournaments, which were largely left in the hands of local members. This latter group of activity helped establish and maintain informal social connections with members of the local community, which the local Party hoped would translate into electoral support. The work at this level has not been cast in a glamorous light thanks in part to accounts like that provided in senior backbench M.P. Julian Critchley's memoirs. As a Young Conservative (YC) in the early-1950s as well as an M.P. in the 1960s, he remembers that he and his peers attended meetings occasionally in "dingy" rooms and "politely" endured a painless indoctrination.⁴³ As an M.P., Critchley describes CA activity as "mainly social." He writes, "life proceeds at a stately pace from one 'draw' to the next, the prizes allocated by raffle, a ceremony which has taken on an almost religious significance."⁴⁴

Social activities helped maintain enthusiasm and interest in the Conservative Party in between elections.⁴⁵ Critics have dismissed these less obviously partisan activities as

Conservative constituency associations (CAs). See Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Critchley served as M.P. from 1959 – 1964 (Rochester and Chatham) as well as 1970-1997 (Aldershot). This image of dingy meeting spaces is similar to Lawrence's Black's description of "gloomy," "spartan," and "utilitarian" Labour branches, which critics saw as a poor reflection of the Labour and its ideas. Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-1964* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 42-44.

⁴⁴ As a YC, his job was to be a foot-soldier for the local party during elections. Otherwise, Most of his memories as a YC involved courting young women, dancing, and drinking. Stories such as these helped create the image of the YCs as a "marriage bureau for the middle classes." See Julian Critchley, *A Handful of Boiled Sweets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), 32 – 34 and *Palace of Varieties: An Insider's View of Westminster* (London: John Murray, 1989), chapter 2.

⁴⁵ Camberwell Conservatives declared: "one of our most important tasks is to engender continuous enthusiasm among the rank and file of our organization between parliamentary elections – more so perhaps when our Party is in Office at Westminster." "Annual Report – 1954/55." Camberwell, Dulwich, Dept 1953 – 1955. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 1/10/5. This was also the case for the Labour Party, especially when the Party's political fortunes looked bleak. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-1964*, 60.

evidence that these local branches were little more than the playground of the idle and ridiculous middle classes rather than a place for serious political discussion.⁴⁶ Certainly, these activities would have held less appeal for working-class women, whose networks of sociability remained close to home and within their immediate neighbourhood.⁴⁷

Working-class men, on the other hand, socialized at workingmen's clubs and the pub.⁴⁸ CA activity, therefore, not only appealed specifically to the tastes and social conventions of particularly the traditional middle classes who occupied the suburbs and provincial England, they were difficult to access in a practical sense. The local culture, moreover, stayed largely unchanged, which is striking given that the introduction of mass franchise following the First World War made it necessary for the Conservatives to appeal widely to the electorate.

The work of marshalling support for the Conservative Party fell to a small group of volunteers drawn from party members in a local community. Conservative CA leadership consisted of a president, chairman, agent and an executive committee that included a secretary as well as a treasurer. The president and chairman were usually drawn from the community in which the CA operated. The president occupied a ceremonial role and a local individual of note (often an aristocrat) or an individual who had contributed with many years of distinguished service often held this position. Their main role was to lend CA activities "prestige."⁴⁹ The chairman, in contrast, ran the day-

⁴⁶ The Communists, in contrast, used the local setting as a space for "explicitly political" discussions. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-1964*, 55.

⁴⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918 – 1951*, 180 – 181.

⁴⁸ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918 – 1951*, 183 – 184.

⁴⁹ Ball, "Local Conservatism and Party Organization," 268.

to-day business of the local association. The norm, according to Ball, was for local leaders to serve in their positions for great lengths of time with little change in personnel but this practice had diminished by the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁰ In the examples studied here, it was not unusual for one individual to serve in these upper level positions for decades at a time. Mr. S.H. Stanley, for example, had served Kennington (Vauxhall) for fifteen years as Chairman when he asked to be relieved of his position in 1950. Members of his executive committee then asked him to continue his work as the president and he remained in that post until 1955.⁵¹ In Tiverton, Mrs. Lumley served as the chairman from 1956 – 1967. Boundary restrictions for holding office mandated by the 1970 Representation of the People Act meant that her replacement, J.B. Martin, had to resign so she returned to her role and served Tiverton until 1972.⁵² Continuity at the level of leadership was often the result of necessity rather than an indication of leaders unwilling to relinquish power or an incumbent's extreme popularity. A low turnover rate at the upper echelons of Conservative CAs helps explain, to a certain extent, the lack of innovation or experimentation in campaigning strategies or overall character of

⁵⁰ Ball, "Local Conservatism and Party Organization," 269-270.

⁵¹ The minutes recount, "Mr. Stanley expressed a desire to relinquish the Office of Chairman. He had held the office for a number of years and no person should consider any office freehold. There were younger men now in the party who should have the opportunity to hold office. After a discussion the matter was carried. But it was pointed out that the Office of President was vacant in which he would be [illegible] happy in an advising capacity if elected." "Executive Committee – April 1950." LSE/ Kennington Conservative Association/ COLL MISC 463.

⁵² Tiverton Committee Minutes (1956 – 1989) – Tiverton Divisions Conservative Association. Devon Record Office (DRO) 6887.

constituency activity.⁵³ The relatively small circle of insiders was more conducive to the impulse to conserve local traditions rather than rock the boat.

Leadership roles were also generally occupied by local elites with “upper and upper-middle-class” backgrounds as well as “aristocratic elements.”⁵⁴ According to Johnson, such individuals acted as “opinion leaders in the wider local community,” and helped “promulgate traditional Conservative values.”⁵⁵ In Peckham, for example, George Evan Cook served as branch chairman from 1952 – 1960.⁵⁶ Outside of his political work, he was the chairman and senior director of a family packing, shipping and storage firm.⁵⁷ He was a Freemason and a founding member of the local Rotary Club. His home was described as “large enough for him to indulge in his hobbies of pottering in the workshop,

⁵³ Generally, CA minute books identify the names of those who controlled CA Executive Committees. The political science survey data shows that CAs were typically dominated by a small group of committed party members that were usually middle class professionals or women that were married to middle class professionals. However, attendance rolls and minute books cannot provide the conclusive information necessary to prove class bias in leadership ranks. For members without professional or honorific titles, we can only speculate on their socio-economic background. It may not be surprising that titled Tories had influence, or symbolic value at least, at the local level. It is significant that this tradition persisted across all of the constituencies studied in this chapter even as the Party endeavoured to cultivate mass appeal. In fact, there is no sense that the desire for distinguished (titled) party members to serve in leadership positions diminished or was being reined in for appearances.

⁵⁴ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 162.

⁵⁵ Johnson, “Did Organization Really matter?” 410.

⁵⁶ In 1960, George Evan Cook took on the position of Vice-Chairman. Bruce Jorden held the position of chairman until 1963 when Florence Tristram became the first woman to Chair a Conservative Party branch in the area. “Annual General Meeting – 9 March 1960” and “Annual General Meeting - 28 March 1963.” Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967) Southwark Local History Library, A675/1.

⁵⁷ George Evan Cook became Chairman upon his father’s death in 1947 and was named chairman and senior director in 1952. He retired from the position of chairman in 1964 and was named a consultant director. T.W. “The Men Who Make Transport: George Evan Cook.” *The Commercial Motor* (4 March 1960), 122-123. The Peckham CA minutes reported that George Evan Wood returned from a “good holiday in France.” Finance and General Purposes Meeting (6 July 1954) Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1.

philately and photography.” He even counted a Bentley as one of his three cars and was described as a “prodigious traveller.”⁵⁸ The Banbury division of Oxfordshire Conservative and Unionist Association counted not only the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough as executive committee members but Lord Sandford, elected as local M.P. (1922 – 1945), served as chairman and president until his sudden death in 1959.⁵⁹ Kenneth Winterschlade, Esq. subsequently took on the role of chairman and Lt. Col. J.E.S. Chamberlayne served as president, as did M.P. Douglas Dodds-Parker.⁶⁰ In neighbouring South Oxfordshire, the 8th Earl of Macclesfield served as chairman from 1949 to 1955.⁶¹ A man with many roles in the community, he resigned upon receiving the appointment of Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire.⁶² This branch also benefitted from the service of Sir Algernon Peyton, seventh baronet. Ball observes that these types of individuals also contributed because they were “educated and socially-confident,” and brought with them “traditions of leadership and public service.”⁶³ These examples while not universal across Conservative CAs illustrates a tendency to enlist the services of local elites and highlights that the “prestige” of local leaders continued to matter to branch members. Social elites at the helm of local Conservative branches preserved not only a

⁵⁸ T.W. “The Men Who Make Transport: George Evan Cook.” *The Commercial Motor* (4 March 1960), 122-123. “Evan Cook Merger.” *The Commercial Motor* (12 June 1964), 38.

⁵⁹ “Lord Sandford.” *Times* [London, England] 18 May 1959 and “Lord Sandford.” *Times* [London, England] 11 June 1959. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 23 Feb. 2013. 23 Feb 2013); “Council Meeting – 23 May 1959” Oxford Record Office (ORO). N. Oxon. Con 1/5.

⁶⁰ Kenneth Winterschlade, Esq. served as chairman from 23 May 1959 until his retirement 1 January 1963. Major John Schuster succeeded Winterschlade in this role. “Annual General Meeting – 19 May 1962.” ORO. N. Oxon. Con 1/5.

⁶¹ The Earl also served as chairman for the constituency of Henley from 1946 – 1955. “Executive Committee – 5 February 1955.” ORO. S. Oxon. Con 1/3.

⁶² “Executive Committee – 5 February 1955.” ORO. S. Oxon. Con 1/3.

⁶³ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 162.

particular outlook or ways of conducting business but served to mirror and reinforce social hierarchies rather than reflect the wider social changes taking place in this period. Local Conservative members welcomed the confident leadership of the “social superiors” and were not moved particularly to disrupt or to replace this tradition.

Local constituency work tended to be carried out by a small cadre of devoted members.⁶⁴ Few new people joined the ranks of most constituencies in this period and fewer still volunteered their time and efforts to help run a CA’s day-to-day business or campaigning. Individuals who served on the executive often traded between executive and administrative positions like vice-president, treasurer, and secretary. Positions on the executive committee thus required an investment of personal time on an annual basis as well as over a lifetime to which not just anyone could commit. Some posts, which required more time and skills, like that of treasurer, were held until another interested and, more importantly, qualified candidate emerged.⁶⁵ The limited pool of those volunteering their time and working for the CA meant that the scope of outreach and recruitment was possibly limited to those with personal connections.

Most CAs employed an agent to help with everyday affairs.⁶⁶ As in the interwar period, agents were drawn largely from the “middle and upper strata of the middle

⁶⁴ Julian Critchley remembers, even though membership at a CA might number in the hundreds or even over a thousand, only speaking to the “same handful of people,” on his visits to his constituencies. *Palace of Varieties*, 15.

⁶⁵ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 149.

⁶⁶ The Party agent was employed and paid by the constituency but trained and certified by the National Society of Conservative Agents, which was formed in 1891. Formal links with the National Union were cemented in 1933 when it was resolved that all future agents needed to hold a certificate from the professional body to be considered for employment.

class.”⁶⁷ Agents were not necessarily drawn from the local community; rather, candidates were hired from a national database of certified candidates compiled by Central Office. As such, agents normally commuted between their place of work and residence. Poorer constituencies, like Vauxhall and Peckham, could not afford a full-time agent of their own and had to share with neighbouring constituencies.⁶⁸ Agents, historically, were experts in electoral law but following the simplification of voter registration, after the First World War, agents became responsible for administrative and operational activities. They organized elections, meetings, and helped coordinate volunteers and fundraising efforts. An agent’s main task was to promote activity and cohesion in order to bring about electoral success.⁶⁹ These individuals were the only salaried professionals working at the local level. While central to running constituency activity, local records are not especially forthcoming about the identity of these individuals. Agents appeared in CA minute books to offer detailed reports on, for example, the annual Party conference or to act as a moderator if a dispute emerged within the constituency. Otherwise, the agent operated in the background. In a psephological series for *The Times*, Rose found that in nearly all Conservative constituencies, employing a full-time professional agent counted as an advantage especially as it related to ensuring a high turnout at the polls, which in the mid-1960s could mean the difference between winning and losing a seat.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 176.

⁶⁸ “Executive Committee Meeting – 1 July 1952” LSE/ Kennington Conservative Association/ COLL MISC 463.

⁶⁹ Ball, “Local Conservatism and Party Organization”, 281. For a brief history of Conservative Party Agents, see “Local Conservatism and Party Organization,” 279 – 287.

⁷⁰ Richard Rose, “Turnout Can Be The Decisive Factor.” *Times* [London, England] 7 Oct. 1964. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 3 Sept. 2013.

The officers in each branch could be drawn from “upper- to lower-middle class” and reflected regional variances. The general local membership tended to be Conservatives from lower middle-class backgrounds, especially “clerical workers, teachers, owners of small businesses, and tradesmen.”⁷¹ These officials gave local branch business life by serving on committees, campaigning, and organizing social events for the general membership. The bulk of constituency work was carried out on a voluntary basis and a common complaint amongst many constituencies in this period was a lack of interest amongst the rank-and-file to join in with this work. Whether in the Conservative stronghold of Basingstoke (Hampshire) or Labour-held inner-city seats like Vauxhall (Lambeth) or Peckham (Camberwell), officials grumbled that too few people helped carry the burden of constituency work.⁷² Apathy certainly contributed to the lack of volunteers but the ability to volunteer one’s time in order to carry out extra administrative work or to help canvas households was out of reach to those with demanding work schedules or responsibilities in the home. Even though general membership was drawn from a wide variety of the middle classes, the members who could volunteer time were generally those who enjoyed flexible or steady work hours or complete free time, access to reliable transportation to and from meetings and events, and were not overwhelmed by home or childcare duties.

Web. 3 Sept. 2013.

⁷¹ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 162.

⁷² “Chairman’s Annual Report, 1953,” “Executive Committee 6 July 1955,” and “Annual Report, 1955,” LSE/Kennington Conservative Association/COLL MISC 463; “Finance and General Purposes - 1 June 1955” and “Executive Committee Meeting,” December 1960. Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1; “Executive Committee Meeting,” 14 February 1958 Ilford South Conservative Association – Committee Minutes (1955-69) Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

Typical events that CAs planned and organized for in this period included the annual general meeting (AGM), the Party conference, candidate adoption / selection, as well as local and national elections. CAs supported these efforts with regular business meetings, which occurred typically once a month though some organizations met more or less depending on the size and strength of the Party. There were provisions for extra meetings should an emergency arise like the sudden resignation of an official or candidate.⁷³ Regular meetings provided members with updates on the CA's finances and the opportunity to plan social gatherings. Rarely were policy matters discussed in detail at these meetings though members could put forth resolutions to be discussed if there was concern regarding particular issues and party policy. In Peckham, the branch offered a public meeting called "Any Questions" as well as "Fireside Evenings" for those who wanted to learn about policies and discuss them with fellow members.⁷⁴ Similarly, the Kennington branch offered "Free for All" discussions in addition to their roster of events.⁷⁵ These meetings, while open to all local members, were specialized events that dealt with business operations. Only those involved with planning branch activities and organization would have attended.

⁷³ "Emergency Meeting – 27 January 1964." Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1.

⁷⁴ "Executive Committee – 10 February 1954." Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1.

⁷⁵ "Executive Committee – April 1950." LSE/Kennington Conservative Association/COLL MISC 463.

The general local membership was more likely to participate in the Conservative Party by attending social gatherings.⁷⁶ Compiling aggregate data on attendance to chart the popularity of business meetings and social gatherings is challenging because of inconsistent record keeping.⁷⁷ The main difficulty is that not all CA minute books recorded who or how many members attended regular meetings or organized social events in a consistent manner. Some associations kept a separate book to record the names and signatures of those who were present at each meeting.⁷⁸ In Peckham and Ilford South, for example, the minute books listed members of the executive committee and only indicated the number of general members in attendance at each meeting.⁷⁹ This empirical data is of limited use, moreover, since it does not explain the motivations for attendance, nor does it distinguish between those who participated in politics at the constituency level to advance individual political aspirations, those who attended on ideological grounds, or those who went for “expressive reasons” which were based on “affective or emotional feelings.”⁸⁰ It is also entirely possible that those who attended meetings were passive or reluctant participants not unlike Critchely’s own experience

⁷⁶ According to Black, “the branch, more than the Trade Union, trades council, Co-op, home or work, was at the root of being Socialist.” Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-1964*, 41.

⁷⁷ Successful constituencies, with large and active memberships, tend to have the best records because they generally employed a capable agent as well as an organizer. Johnson, “Did Organization Really matter?” 411.

⁷⁸ In the constituencies I researched, I did not encounter any of the separate attendance records for those minute books that indicated that names and signatures of attendees were kept elsewhere.

⁷⁹ Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1 and Ilford South Conservative Association – Committee Minutes (1955-69) Redbridge Information and Heritage, 90/61.

⁸⁰ Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 113.

described above. It is only clear that these individuals were present and perhaps more active than individuals who only put up posters or just paid their subscription.

CA minute books are similarly vague in recording the turnout at planned social gatherings, which included dinners, dances, and rummage sales. These records show executive members expressing general satisfaction or concern regarding turnout but no concrete data.⁸¹ In some constituencies, it is possible to speculate on the popularity of certain events by what is reported in local papers. Ilford, for example, kept albums of press clippings throughout the 1950s and 1960s in which reports of successful gatherings or the appearance of special guests and speakers were recorded.⁸²

As discussed above, McCarthy makes the case that civic organizations and associational culture more broadly helped promote social mixing in interwar Britain, which helped break down class and gender hierarchies. In contrast, McKibbin has argued that voluntary associations were homosocial spaces as well as the exclusive playground of the middle classes. The working classes were not integrated but had their own separate associational culture in pubs and on street corners that developed alongside those of the middle classes. As such, prevalent class and gender hierarchies were reproduced and

⁸¹ “Executive Committee – 28 Jan 1955.” Ilford South Conservative Association – Committee Minutes. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61; “Executive Committee – 21 June 1957” Ilford Conservative Association – Cranbrook Ward. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61. “Finance and General Purposes Meeting – 8 July 1958.” Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1. “Executive Committee – 1 July 1952”; “Executive Committee – 12 October 1954”; LSE/Kennington Conservative Association/COLL MISC 463.

⁸² “700 at Tory Rally.” 8 October 1958. *Recorder*; “Housewives sweetheart opens Tory bazaar.” 26/11/59. *Pictorial*. Ilford South Conservative Association – General Press Cuttings. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

reinforced. McKibbin's interpretation, according to McCarthy, is too simplistic and ignores the trend towards social equality as well as a "growing recognition of legitimate claims of all social groups" evident in her sample of voluntary associations.⁸³ Within the Conservative CA after the Second World War, it is apparent that local Conservatives continued to eschew class mixing and maintained structures and traditions that appealed narrowly to the traditional middle classes even as the Party courted the expanded middle classes with consumer-based rhetoric.

The most popular social events included whist drives, raffles, fetes, bazaars, dances, and dinners. Each of these occasions served as an opportunity for fundraising but these gatherings were also intended for casual socializing and entertainment. The branch at Kennington introduced "Cinema Meetings," which featured "general and propaganda films" as well as the prospective candidate's attendance for post-viewing discussions.⁸⁴ The committee reported "good and full audiences," but there was no further indication of whether members attended out of an interest in the subject matter of the film, to meet their local candidate, or to socialize generally.⁸⁵ The Peckham branch also offered their members a "Fireside Evening," which included "a talk, film and a discussion" on a predetermined theme.⁸⁶ In Safron Walden (Essex), R.A. Butler's constituency, the branch featured "a series of film shows" that seemed quite popular with members. The summer

⁸³ McCarthy, "Associational Volunteerism in Interwar Britain," 66.

⁸⁴ Executive Committee – 1 July 1952"; "Executive Committee – 12 October 1954"; "Executive Committee – 6 January 1955." LSE/Kennington Conservative Association/COLL MISC 463.

⁸⁵ "Executive Committee – 6 January 1955." LSE/Kennington Conservative Association/COLL MISC 463.

⁸⁶ "Executive Committee – 10 February 1954." Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1.

months in Safron Walden were a flurry of fetes and garden meetings. The committee reported, “[t]he highlight of our activity in this period was the Divisional Rally and Fete at Shortgrove, Newport, addressed by Field Marshall Earl Alexander of Tunis, which was outstandingly successful.” The Annual Report outlined that “[s]ocial and political activities ...despite general political apathy, stimulated interest in our Party and provided the wherewithal for our propaganda work.”⁸⁷ In Ilford South, social activities included an Agent’s ball, a Young Conservative Rally, and a Car Rally.⁸⁸ On one occasion, the orchestra conductor for the BBC, Eric Robinson, attended and signed autographs at the women’s annual bazaar in Ilford.⁸⁹ In response to criticism that “a number of [Ilford] YCs were interested solely in the social side of the organization,” the M.P., Tom Iremonger, responded, “it would be a frightful bore if all YC[s] were tub-thumping politicians.” He continued: “It is quite a strain for many young people to go out into a group of people they don’t know and try to make a go of it.”⁹⁰ There was a practical side to emphasizing the social aspect of YC activity because “nothing is achieved without lots of enthusiastic helpers – and it is the social facilities that attract many new members.”⁹¹ In 1954, Peckham Conservatives made plans for a “Summer Fayre.” The executive committee wanted this event to be more than a jumble sale and so offered more raffles and music to

⁸⁷ “Annual Report for 1953.” Safron Walden (Essex).Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive (CPA) [CCO 1/10/364].

⁸⁸ “Executive Committee – 28 January 1955.” Ilford South Committee Minutes 1955 – 1969. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

⁸⁹ “Housewives sweetheart opens Tory bazaar.” 26/11/59.*Pictorial*. Ilford South Conservative Association – General Press Cuttings. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

⁹⁰ “Don’t rebuff new members, YCs told” *Ilford Pictorial* 29/10/1959.Ilford South Conservative Association – General Press Cuttings, 3/3/66-7/11/68 Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

⁹¹ “There’s more to politics than counting votes.” *Ilford Pictorial* 14/8/66.Ilford South Conservative Association – General Press Cuttings, 3/3/66-7/11/68 Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

encourage greater participation across the wards.⁹² In fact, social events were a consistent feature of activity in this constituency and there were calls for more variety “in order to attract voters from all parts of the constituency.”⁹³

Activities of a social nature, according to Ball, gave the membership a “unity of purpose” between elections. Successfully organized events helped maintain cohesion and also confidence when local branches were not actively courting voters with propaganda or on their doorsteps. These events also helped with recruitment because it “gave the constituency a visible and active profile” in the community.⁹⁴ The question remains, however, whether there were structural or cultural apparatus in place to support the inclusion of new members from different social backgrounds. In Ilford, for example, social occasions were described by executive members as occasions to unite members in far-flung wards and provided opportunities for party workers to coordinate on a larger project together.⁹⁵ The effort to impose unity and cohesion on supporters were only effective on those who attended the events. In the Kennington branch, social activities fell under the purview of the women’s section, which hosted a series of successful outings

⁹² The Committee reported that only 2/10 wards participated in the previous event. “Finance and General Purposes – 10 June 1954.” Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1.

⁹³ The Executive Committee suggested holding a social event every second month. “Tickets would be sold to pay for the band that being the only expense involved. Refreshments would pay for themselves.” In this instance, it would appear that profits were not the driving force behind organizing these events. “Finance and General Purposes – 5 January 1955.” And “Executive Committee – 28 October 1959.” Peckham Conservative Association (1952 – 1967), Southwark Local History Library, A675/1.

⁹⁴ Ball, “Local Conservatism and Party Organization,” 290.

⁹⁵ “Executive Committee Meeting,” 18 November 1964 Ilford South Conservative Association - Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

and whist drives.⁹⁶ According to Ball, the Party expressed concern that social events, as organized by middle-class women, failed to appeal to young people, workers, or men with “managerial or executive jobs.” In an effort to counter the limited appeal of local social events, CAs tried to mimic local clubs and organizations in their surrounding neighbourhood.⁹⁷

Whist tournaments were the most reliable and the most prevalent social activity and fundraising technique amongst local CAs. The persistence of card games, more importantly, signals a pattern of sociability within the CA setting that promoted unity amongst its members rather than wider integration of new members. The nature of card games, as political scientist Robert Putnam observes, is “necessarily social.”⁹⁸ Whist, which shares characteristics with bridge, is a game played in partners. Knowing how to play the card game, sharing that knowledge with others and having regular games to enhance one’s skill offered repeated opportunities to develop and maintain informal social relationships. On the surface, these card tournaments offered opportunities for men and women from a variety of class backgrounds to socialize, which as McCarthy has argued, helped break down social barriers.⁹⁹ After all, there was nothing to prevent an individual, whether members of the young new middle classes or working classes, from learning the rules and joining game. In Stefan Ramsden’s interviews of working-class residents in Beverley (East Yorkshire), he recounts that some women “organiz[ed]

⁹⁶ “Executive Committee – 1 July 1952.” LSE/ Kennington Conservative Association/ COLL MISC 463.

⁹⁷ Ball, “Local Conservatism and Party Organization,” 290.

⁹⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 104.

⁹⁹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 103.

weekly whist-drives to raise funds to take children on trips to the beach.”¹⁰⁰ Conservative whist tournaments, however, were not typically organized outside the association offices, which meant that there was little impetus for those outside of the general membership to seek access to a card game in this setting unless they had a personal connection to the local branch.

The amount of money whist drives brought into local CAs was negligible compared to donations and subscriptions. In the Devon area, for example, CAs in Tiverton and Lustleigh held monthly gatherings that yielded profits that ranged from £2 to £5 on each occasion. Yet, in these record books, whist is mentioned often and there are details pertaining to the organization of these events and the general positive reception of these card games in the local communities. In 1957, whist drives officially become a monthly event in Tiverton owing to their popularity. Members paid an entry fee of £1 in order to take part in an afternoon / evening of progressive games. The fee included drinks, snacks and a raffle ticket. This fee was not insignificant given that the average weekly wage earnings of an adult male in 1955 was £11 7s 10d and in 1962 it was £16 5s 4d.¹⁰¹ In Tiverton, the CA arranged jumble sales and produce stalls to coincide with these

¹⁰⁰ Ramsden, “Remaking Working-Class Community,” 7.

¹⁰¹ “Growth Of British Economy.” *Times* [London, England] 31 Oct. 1963. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 25 Feb. 2015. In 1943, manual workers earned £6 in a 53 hour work week. Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900 – 2000*. 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 209. According to an Office of National Statistics report, the mean weekly earnings for adults are as follows, 1955 - Adult Male (Full Time, Manual), £10.9; Adult Female (Full Time Manual), £5.6; 1962 - Adult Male (Full Time, Manual), £15.6; Adult Female (Full Time Manual), £7.9; 1968 - Adult Male (Full Time, Manual), £22.3; Adult Female (Full Time Manual), £10.9. These figures are based on the British Labour Statistics Historical Abstract 1886 - 1968, converted into decimal money. “Average Gross Weekly Earnings, 1938 – 2011.” Office of National Statistics. 12 December 2012.

gatherings in order to boost funds raised and raffle prizes included pheasants, chickens, and sacks of potatoes.¹⁰² Whist was certainly more popular in rural and suburban constituencies. CAs in London and its surrounding area, for example, identify whist as an activity but it was not nearly as popular. Ilford CA, for instance, reported growing interest and promise of greater support from members at future whist drives but recreational card games were not sell-out occasions.¹⁰³

Card games, like dinners, dances, and fetes, created seemingly apolitical spaces in which informal social connections could be formed and maintained all year long. These relationships reinforced familial as well as community bonds and linked members with the Conservative cause. As Putnam suggests, participation in informal activities was an avenue to draw individuals into formal institutions like political parties.¹⁰⁴ The lack of outreach and promotion beyond the community, or indeed even discussion of it, along with the cost of participation meant that whist was generally an exclusive past time and catered to the tastes of rank-and-file members. In fact, maintaining the same types of social activities even amid wide-reaching social change in the 1950s and 1960s suggests

¹⁰² Tiverton Committee Minutes (1956-1989) – Tiverton Division Conservative Association, 12 November 1956; 8 April 1957; 17 October 1957; 24 November 1958; 4 May 1959; 30 October 1961; 12 February 1962; 17 January 1964 (DRO), 6887.

¹⁰³ “Report 1954” Ilford Conservative Association - Cranbrook Ward 13 January 1954, Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

¹⁰⁴ Putnam’s statistics and conclusions are based on an annual survey that charts civic and social activity from 1975 – 1999 in the United States called DDB Needham Life Style (DDB). These surveys “provide regular barometric readings on scores of social, economic, political, and personal themes, from international affairs and religious beliefs to financial worries and condom usage. With an annual sample of 3,500-4,000, this archive through 1999 contained more than 87,000 respondents over the last quarter of the twentieth century.” Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 93-94 and 420-424.

that not only were local Conservative branches slow in adapting to tastes of the changing electorate but they also expected the electorate to integrate into their established customs and social organization.

Keeping Politics a Personal Experience

Another aspect of political work that reinforced the outlook and social hierarchies with which local Conservatives were familiar was the emphasis on personal face-to-face politics, especially with their candidate or representative in Parliament. Local Conservatives continued to demand personal interactions with their candidate / MP and relied on canvassing as their preferred mode of campaigning even though it clashed with the way many Britons chose to interact with politics and, indeed, spend their leisure time. Local Conservatives imposed an experience of politics on their surrounding communities with which they were familiar and comfortable regardless of whether people found it irrelevant or disruptive to their daily lives.

The candidate was not involved in running the constituency but rather used the time spent there to build personal connections with local members and used the CA as a platform to disseminate ideas and policy. The amount of time MPs spent in their own constituency was, of course, contingent upon the demands of their parliamentary duties (if they had been elected to Parliament), whether they lived near the constituency, and the extent to which their constituents expected/demanded their presence. Many MPs, owing to their workload, were kept away from the constituency for most of the year.

In Basingstoke, CA members complained publically through a circulated resolution that their MP, Patrick Donner, did not participate enough in local activities.¹⁰⁵ The disagreement sparked a contentious debate between the member and his supporters and highlights some of the unwritten expectations voters had of those they selected to represent them. In 1951, tensions erupted over Donner's responsibilities as a candidate in the community. Specifically, members and officials of the Basingstoke Conservative association were not satisfied with their MP because, as outlined in a resolution circulated by constituents in the ward of Andover, they considered him an absentee candidate. According to members, this neglect was detrimental to the Party's relationship with voters and would prove costly at the polls. In response, the M.P. highlighted his many duties in the House of Commons, as mandated by the Prime Minister and, all things considered, his attendance at all scheduled appointments in the community was in fact exemplary.¹⁰⁶

Donner had one member come to his defense stating, "an M.P.'s duties are arduous, and he must spend a lot of time in the House of Commons, with the many Divisions and the International situation being as it is." According to this member, the

¹⁰⁵ "Finance and General Purposes Committee – 6 June 1951," Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NHCA 1/8. Basingstoke (Hampshire) had been a Conservative held constituency since its creation in 1885. Beginning in the 1950s, the London sprawl meant that Basingstoke experienced corresponding industrial and commercial growth. See "London Overspill (vol 850 cc445-6)." Hansard. 16 February 1973.

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1973/feb/16/london-overspill (accessed 8 February 2011) and Shona Crawford Poole, "Basingstoke - Decade of rapid growth from dying market place to industrial and commercial center," *Times* [London, England] 20 May 1972. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 25 Feb. 2015. For information regarding Conservative electoral performance since 1885, see *House of Commons* (London: *The Times*, 1950 – 1974).

¹⁰⁶ "Finance and General Purposes Committee – 6 June 1951," Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NHCA 1/8.

blame should be placed on those in the ward of Andover for not fulfilling their responsibilities and canvassing community members themselves to a greater degree. He continued, “I think M.P.’s cannot be expected to be present at every function. The fact that Mr. Donner attends over 116 meetings a year is extremely good.” This lone voice of support underlines the sentiment that local members had an equal share of work in winning over the electorate and that the M.P.’s role should be complementary.¹⁰⁷

Further discussion revealed that it was not the amount of time Donner spent in the constituency but rather what he did with that time that caused concern. A YC observed that the candidate “does not mix” at events.¹⁰⁸ Another emphasized that constituents would prefer if Donner dealt with local problems in “clinic style meetings” where there was face-to-face contact between constituents and Donner rather than sending their questions to respective Ministries. Constituency Deputy Chairman Lieutenant Colonel Wright declared, “I do not think that perhaps Mr. Donner realizes what we want. We want him to take part in the life of the community, and make arrangements for him to meet the man in the street.” He added, “[h]is name would be a great draw, and that there would be a great number of people who want to meet the Member, who would go if he would be there.” Moreover, Lt. Col. Wright felt that Donner’s enthusiastic participation in

¹⁰⁷ “Finance and General Purposes Committee – 6 June 1951,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NHCA 1/8.

¹⁰⁸ “Finance and General Purposes Committee – 6 June 1951,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NHCA 1/8.

community events would reinvigorate workers who felt demoralized and show voters exactly who represented the Conservative cause in Parliament.¹⁰⁹

In an effort to placate his critics, Donner offered to expand visits to the homes of supporters and “waverers” to include far-flung areas of the constituency. He advised that it was a time-consuming task because “you can only visit 8 houses in an hour. It is possible to hurry, and say you do not want a cup of tea, but you have to stay and sit for a decent period so as not to give the impression of rush.” This idea received enthusiastic support. According to local member, Mr. Locke, visits in the ward of Overton had “caused a stir” and Mr. Shirvell agreed that this approach would give the impression of “friendliness” that formal meetings did not provide.¹¹⁰ This confrontation between constituents and their MP reportedly brought about positive changes. Donner increased his attendance at constituency gatherings and the minutes outline a corresponding increase in activity and the creation of more branches. The emphasis on friendliness as a desirable attribute of personal politics here is a familiar trope that Tories used to differentiate their style from that of Labour and appeal to those polite middle-class sensibilities, which as described above by McKibbin, dominated suburban clubs.

The case of Basingstoke demonstrates that some local party organizers were frustrated that their MP could not personally participate in local activities owing to his Parliamentary duties. Members enjoyed socializing with their candidate / MP and they felt his presence was important in elevating the status of their events. For these

¹⁰⁹ “Finance and General Purposes Committee – 6 June 1951,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NHCA 1/8.

¹¹⁰ “Finance and General Purposes Committee – 6 June 1951,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: NHCA 1/8.

constituents, face-to-face interaction that MPs historically had with their supporters in the 19th century was still integral to the political process and invoking the increasing demands of Westminster politics in defense, as Donner did, was not enough to absolve one of those sacred duties. Their complaints hint at a fundamental belief that politicians needed to continually “humble themselves before electors” in order to merit support and the status of their office.¹¹¹ The visibility of their MP in the community and the rapport that he kept with supporters and potential voters was also consistent with the propensity to prioritize the social aspect of political work and engagement at the local level. Conservatives wanted Donner to “integrate” and “mix” with “the man on the street” even if his schedule made it difficult and, more importantly, regardless of whether this mode of political interaction was suited to all members of the community.

The emphasis on direct and personal contact between the Party and local residents tells us two things about Conservative associational culture. Rituals based on politicians meeting and greeting voters, or as Lawrence calls it “working the constituency,” remained an important campaigning technique.¹¹² Being “TV minded” was a skill the party leader and Conservative candidates had to develop but this new way of thinking did not displace established electioneering.¹¹³ A memo from the Eastern Area Office to the party listed techniques that would improve the popularity of the local candidate and the Conservative

¹¹¹ Jon Lawrence, “The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War,” *Past & Present* No.190 (Feb.2006), 188.

¹¹² Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*, 180.

¹¹³ In 1951, the general election was televised and beginning in 1953, the leaders participated in Q&A-styled interviews. In 1953, the Conservative Publicity Department circulated a memo to the constituencies stating, “Television opens up an enormous new field of political activity ... Members of the Party must be TV minded.” Richard Cockett, “The Party, Publicity and Media,” in Seldon and Ball, eds., *The Conservative Century*, 565.

cause. Constituencies in this area employed, for example, letter writing campaigns whereby MPs would write to people who are mentioned in local papers for special occasions including weddings, birth announcements and accidents. Agents in this area found that this technique was especially beneficial in country districts because it “publiciz[ed] the Member’s interest in his constituents as individuals.”¹¹⁴

Canvassing was another manifestation of the aim to keep politics a personal and face-to-face experience. Constituency associations throughout this period relied on canvassing as the main campaigning strategy during and in-between elections even though television had become the main medium for political communication by the 1960s.¹¹⁵ Black’s research on the “mundane” and everyday activities of Labour party branch workers illustrates that canvassing served as an equally vital task for activists on the left. Labour branch workers saw themselves as “foot soldiers” for democracy.¹¹⁶ Canvassing, however, brought Labour activists face-to-face with a largely uninterested electorate, which reinforced a sense of mistrust of and disappointment with the electorate to which party members and socialist thinkers attributed the movement’s inability to triumph over the Conservative Party’s affluence-friendly political programme. Committed socialists tended to adopt a condescending and paternalistic approach to solving their popularity problem: voters (especially those of working-class backgrounds) needed to be educated and their political sensibilities needed to be actively cultivated and

¹¹⁴ “Eastern – Jan 1955 – 1957” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: CCO 2/4/7.

¹¹⁵ Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*, 170 and Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism, and Participation, 1954 – 1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹¹⁶ Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-1964*, 51.

nurtured by true believers.¹¹⁷ Face-to-face contact was one avenue by which activists could educate voters. Conservative workers were not so affected by the apathetic electorate they encountered, rather they seemed to think that constantly reminding local voters of the Party through the branch's activities and their member would eventually wear people down and convince them to vote for Tories.

The work was not glamorous and often undertaken by only a handful of members. Canvassing meant, "knock[ing] on a thousand doors [and] face[ing] reception varying from the enthusiastic to downright rudeness," but it was "real solid work that [could] make a difference in voting figures." Volunteers, however, were warned to avoid arguments with people on their doorsteps or in their homes.¹¹⁸ Canvassing was used in the weeks coming up to the election to poll community members on how they intended to vote. Intelligence included biographical details of people they met and particular issues that concerned them and for whom they intended to vote and was stored on a database of index cards. This information helped CAs determine other aspects of the political campaign like where to leaflet or what particular policy issues to emphasize in the printed literature. Outside of elections, canvassing was less common, although constituencies with more volunteers would send groups out for educational purposes or to recruit new members.

¹¹⁷ Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-1964*, 51-53.

¹¹⁸ "Evening out with the canvassers," *Pictorial* 24/3/1966. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

Ilford CA offered courses to ensure that canvassing was carried out in a professional manner.¹¹⁹ Advice included that canvassers should consult television program schedules so as not to disturb voters during their leisure time.¹²⁰ At the same time, canvassers were told by Ilford MP Albert Cooper to “knock hard on people’s doors to drag them away from the television” in order to deliver their message.¹²¹ In this respect, Tory canvassers understood, like their Labour counterparts, that television occupied an increasingly central role in the leisure life of voters and that it might be necessary to adjust tactics to reach them.¹²² Similarly, Tiverton Conservatives encouraged all members to attend an instructional seminar on canvassing.¹²³ In Vauxhall, where there were fewer volunteers, there were no formal canvassing courses but those involved met weekly in order to review and discuss strategy.¹²⁴ However, strategies on how to reach

¹¹⁹ “Executive Committee Meeting,” 18 November 1964. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61. Perhaps the push for a professional approach was prompted by an embarrassing episode between a Tory agent and a local housewife in 1959. The local publication, *Pictorial*, reported that while out on a canvassing expedition, the Tory agent could not tell Mrs. Joyce Oakley (a supporter of the Liberals) that there was no Liberal candidate to vote for in the constituency. The agent looked both incompetent and like he deliberately misled the woman. “Tory agent tells housewife – ‘You can vote Liberal,’” *Pictorial* 8/10/1959. Redbridge Information and Heritage 90/61.

¹²⁰ “Taps at TV time can lose votes,” *Empire News* (20 September 1959) RMLSA/Ilford South Conservative Association/90/61.

¹²¹ “Labour have no policy – Cooper,” *Ilford Pictorial* (24 September 1959) RMLSA/Ilford South Conservative Association/90/61.

¹²² Labour viewed the television and commercial television as a symbol for the perversions of consumer society and considered it a “waste of time” and a “distraction” from more important things like politics. Television was also a politically dangerous implement as it served to feed the desire for material goods and bolster Conservatives and “acquisitive values.” These deeply held suspicions and hostilities, according to Black, prevented the Party from using this tool as effectively as the Tories and put them in opposition with popular attitudes. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Britain, 1951-1964*, 52, 97-99, 102, 104.

¹²³ “Committee Meeting,” 13 November, 1966. Tiverton Divisions Conservative Association. DRO 6887.

¹²⁴ “Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 July, 1959. LSE/Kennington Conservative Association/COLL MISC 463.

the most voters in the least amount of time and in a way that utilized the resources well were non-existent. As Lawrence has pointed out, canvassing was not a science and the technique of selective campaigning was not used by choice.¹²⁵

Canvassing, whether between or during elections, was a time consuming and often thankless task. The activity put the constituent in direct contact with local members of a party and the individuals that represented them, or those that might potentially represent them, in Parliament. At the most basic level, canvassing during elections was important because it allowed the party to create recognition by associating a face to the name that appeared on leaflets, thereby, personalizing the act of voting. The Conservative candidate could personally persuade those with undeclared political loyalties and to remind less active Conservatives to express their support at the polling booth. CAs not only relied on these face-to-face meetings to win votes but also used them to gauge the suitability of the individual selected to represent them when selecting candidates. This activity attracted only the most dedicated of local workers but, more importantly, due to its time consuming nature, only allowed those with free time to take part, which limited the pool of participants.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Conservative CAs remained a space in which only an exclusive set of traditional middle classes were interested and could afford to spend time. The selection of social activities did not undergo any great overhaul to attract

¹²⁵ Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*, 148.

and include those voters who, as a result of higher wages and steady employment, considered themselves new members of the middle classes or affluent workers. The story told here has not focused on questions of organizational superiority to explain electoral success. Rather, by engaging with the bodies of literature on activism, civic engagement as well as political participation, we can see that Conservative CAs and their work reflect the ideas that local members held concerning community and, as such, hierarchical authority. CAs were run by the same type of individuals, often for decades at a time, which meant that there was little impetus for changes in tone or activity to welcome a wide range of voters. Conservative CAs sought to integrate themselves into the existing network of civic and apolitical organizations and appealed to voters as an organic element of their social lives rather than aggressively via mass media. The business of local CAs remained cultivating and maintaining relationships between the party and voters by using formal as well as informal social connections. Local CAs only operated on two speeds: electioneering and social gatherings, which meant that this was neither a space that was conducive for the concerns of consumers to take hold nor for a more diverse middle-class to socialize and form strong political alliances. By upholding the same type of activities and business operations during a time of rapid social change, the Conservative Party's local organization acted a barrier to its rhetoric of classlessness and failed to mobilize themes of consumerism and affluence with rank-and-file membership.

Chapter Four

The Bow Group: Conservatives Thinking about the Middle Classes

We accept that we are moving into a middle class society. The old divisions between owning and earning no longer hold good. We recognise that people want their own things whether it be their own house or a share in their work. We uphold these wishes and our policies will realise them.¹

This chapter focuses on how the Bow Group conceptualized the middle classes in their writings, especially their journal *Crossbow*, during the 1950s and 1960s. Of particular interest here are the competing versions of middle-class identity and ideas (old and established middle class versus the “new” middle classes) evident in their writings. Did these younger, self-proclaimed Conservative intellectuals see new possibilities in the expanded middle classes, or did they share the same suspicions that some Conservative Party leaders and rank-and-file members had about the new middle classes and the affluent working classes? The Bow Group’s writings show that the organization did, in contrast to the Conservative Party as a whole, see the middle classes as a distinct section of the electorate that Conservatives needed to embrace and nurture to protect its future electoral prospects.

At the national level, the Conservative Party’s discussions conceptualized the middle classes predominantly as consumers. In the early 1950s, amidst widening experiences of material affluence, the Conservatives emphasized stable employment and higher income levels, which improved standards of living and allowed greater access to

¹ Anthony Nelson, “As Others See Us,” *Crossbow* 16 (64) (October, 1973).

consumer products for the middle classes and the general population. The Conservatives, unlike Labour, adhered to the position that they represented national interests rather than those of one particular section of the population. The Party, therefore, took care to avoid class-centric language whenever possible even though their core supporters wanted to be seen and dealt with as a unique section of the electorate. At the level of the local association, Conservatives borrowed similar themes and language from national discussions but deep thinking about the middle classes, their role and their concerns, was not a priority.

The Bow Group, a self-styled research group, sought to influence and shape political discussions and the direction of Party policy. They actively grappled with the subject of the middle classes, especially their role and their meaning to the Party's ideas and electoral strategy. As the Conservatives faced greater electoral uncertainty entering the 1960s, the Bow Group's interest in the idea of the middle classes and their demands increased. This chapter will establish how the Bow Group defined the middle classes and understood the impact of social change on this section of the population. To what extent did the Bow Group believe that the Party's interests aligned with those with whom they had a strong historical connection? To date, the analysis of this chapter is the only sustained study of the Bow Group's quarterly journal, *Crossbow*, and extends and refines existing scholarship, which focuses on recounting the institutional history of this organization. Studying this publication alongside the national and local discourses on the middle classes reveals that amongst the Party's young thinkers, the middle classes

mattered a great deal, and the Group tried to challenge established ideas and approaches concerning the Conservatives's core supporters.

The first section of this chapter will examine the Bow Group's general ideas about the middle classes and their demands. Discussion emerged in earnest following the episodes of by-election protest in the late 1950s and revealed that members of the Bow Group sympathized with the demands of the middle classes and identified a consistent strain of anti-working-class sentiment as part of their identity. Secondly, this chapter will look at more specific concepts articulated by the Bow Group including how the new middle classes related to the idea of a property owning democracy. For this organization, the new middle classes represented a potential source of new votes for the Conservative Party and the Party needed to capitalize on the sense of alienation that these new middle classes had about their own working-class origins. For the Bow Group, the property owning democracy remained an essential tenet of Conservatism and they urged the Party to continue using the promise of home-ownership as a way to shape the politics of young people in the new middle classes. Finally, this chapter will explore the rivalry between the Bow Group and the Young Conservatives (YCs) to show that the organization wanted to move away from the image projected by the YCs and appeal to the widened middle classes rather than just reflect the idyllic world of the old, propertied middle classes that dominated local politics.

The Bow Group – A Brief History

In February 1951, a group of younger Conservative undergraduates, many of whom were also former leaders of University Conservative Associations, formed an organization with the intention of brightening up intellectual discourse amongst Conservative Party members. The Bow Group, named for the meeting place that they initially shared with the Bow and Bromley Conservative Club in East London, felt that the Party lacked a source of intellectual output akin to the work of the Fabians for the Labour Party.² They were eager to prove that Tories too, especially the younger generation, could be serious thinkers on par with their political rivals on the Left. As David Weeks, advertising executive and Vice-Chairman of the Chelsea Conservative Association, observed, “early members seemed to join because they were tired of the Conservative Party being the stupid party.”³ They sought to accomplish this task through research and writings about policies and issues, like welfare, the international status of Britain, and the economy, among others, with which the Conservative Party grappled in the 1950s and beyond. These younger Conservatives also wanted to create a social setting in which to engage and build relationships with leading frontbench Tories and architects of what was coming to be termed New Conservatism.⁴ The Bow Group’s early successes and influence can be attributed to the fact that their objectives aligned with the reforming

² James Barr, *The Bow Group: A History* (London: Politico’s, 2001), 6-7.

³ David Weeks, “The Future of the Bow Group,” *Crossbow* 14(55) (July 1971). Oxford, Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive (CPA): PUB 195/6.

⁴ The Bow Group was not a pressure group in the sense that it sought to influence one area of Conservative Party policy, as for example, labour or the environment or international affairs. The Bow Group maintained throughout the 1950s and 1960s that it did not hold a corporate view. The group Progressive Conservative Social Toryism (PEST), in contrast, was a pressure group and was formed to represent the Tory-Left and resist the liberal free market Right wing.

zeitgeist that had swept through the Party after 1945. Eager to shed its association with the economic turmoil of the 1930s and its popular image of catering primarily to Britain's elite, the Party welcomed the Bow Group's work as well as their largely centrist/moderate interpretation of Conservatism.

The Bow Group's membership attracted an exclusive set of educated and politically ambitious Conservatives who did not gravitate towards political work at the level of the constituency association. Bow Group members had to be under the age of 35 – but there were special provisions in place for circumventing the age restriction. A university education, or equivalent professional certification, was “encouraged” but not required; those lacking such qualifications were, however, “discouraged” from joining.⁵ London was the geographic center of activity. Branches of the Bow Group spread to provincial cities including, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Edinburgh, but they did not compare to London in terms of size or level of activity. Moreover, relations between London and the other branches were strained due to financial and constitutional issues.⁶ According to political scientist Rose, members were drawn from both the “upper middle class” and the “solidly middle class.” Bow Group members held occupations largely in the professions, with individuals working in business, advertising, and journalism.⁷

⁵ Richard Rose, “The Bow Group's Role in British Politics,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 14(4) (Dec., 1961), 868.

⁶ Barr, *The Bow Group*, 11.

⁷ According to Rose, “A total of 46 per cent of the sample (every third membership form) are in professions (law, science, medicine, teaching); 27 per cent in business (company executive, banking, economic analysis); advertising, public relations and journalism claim 13 per cent; 10

The socio-economic background and occupations of Bow Group members served, at the same time, as an asset and a hindrance to understanding the plight of the middle classes. The Bow Group's emphasis on youth and, especially, on educational credentials, as criteria for membership aligned the organization with the postwar ethos of the meritocracy under which professionals and the upwardly mobile new middle classes thrived. Unlike those who joined local YC branches, the Bow Group offered the Conservative Party knowledge and expertise rather than simply bodies to canvas local neighbourhoods or attend the occasional association meeting. Commentators and contemporary party members saw them as "studious" and the "eggheads" of the Conservative Party, who encouraged "empirical analysis," over grand rhetoric.⁸ These younger Tories could, in this respect, speak to the experience of the professional middle classes who had grown numerically after the war and became considered a significant voting bloc in an economy where intellectual and skills-based contributions displaced labour and industry. But, as Rose outlines above, members were largely of "upper middle-class" and "solidly middle-class" origin, which suggests members enjoyed a level of education, access to occupations, and privilege that remained largely out of reach for the upwardly mobile and newer members of the middle classes. In this respect, members of the Bow Group were outsiders on complaints regarding the lack of economic security, decline in social status and, indeed, the sense of struggle that the discontented middle classes expressed.

per cent have a miscellaneous variety of jobs and 4 per cent of the sample data was not available." Richard Rose, "The Bow Group's Role in British Politics," 869.

⁸ "Divisive Factor?" *The Spectator* (No.6755) (13 December, 1957), 4 and Barr, *The Bow Group*, 16.

The Bow Group's work centered on research and writing essays and pamphlets with the aim of shaping Conservative ideas. The priority placed on "rational analysis" as the basis for policy reform illustrated that the foundation of their Conservative principles was not based on "faith," "tradition," or "emotional appeal." The Bow Group, rather, believed in measured and piece-meal changes based on empirical data. An acceptance that policy change was a necessary part of the political process amid the wider social and economic changes following the war, positioned the Bow Group alongside R.A. Butler's reforming efforts. Beginning in 1954, they published "at least two pamphlets a year." These pamphlets were designed to study one issue or item of Party policy and, if needed, provide ideas for reform. The publications and research subcommittee of the Bow Group executive organized research projects. They selected topics of study and assembled the study groups of "six to twelve persons." Ideas for research projects originated from the organization's executive but also from rank-and-file members and Cabinet ministers. After a period of study, the group drafted a summary of their findings and the Bow Group voted at a general meeting whether to proceed with publication. According to Rose, "about one-third of the projects which are presented to a general meeting fail to secure approval."⁹ In some cases, Conservative observers considered their proposals to be far too left wing to be practicable. The majority of commentators, however, felt that their work was the product of "unprejudiced liberality" and deserved "high commendation."¹⁰ Rose too noted the high quality of research in their pamphlets and the "considerable influence

⁹ Rose, "The Bow Group's Role in British Politics," 867, 868, 872-73.

¹⁰ Christopher Hollis, "Race and Power," *The Spectator* (No.6688) (31 August, 1956), 9. With regard to the Government's policy in Africa, see "Breaking down the bar," *The Spectator* (No.6838) (17 July 1959), 2.

on Tory thought and action” in his brief study.¹¹ By 1966 the Bow Group boasted 52 independent publications. They claimed that their published works were “influential in political circles and widely reviewed in the national press.”¹² Since one of the organization’s major unifying principles was that it had no corporate view, these publications often represented a variety of Conservative thought that ranged from the Party’s emergent Right wing, especially with regards to economic matters, as well as more center-Right ideas.

The organization had little interaction with Conservative Party’s local branches. The Bow Group had little in common with constituency associations that were dominated by retired men, women and Young Conservatives (YCs).¹³ The Bow Group, rather, created an alternative path to Parliament for ambitious university-educated Conservatives interested in more than cutting one’s teeth working for and socializing at branches. In fact, as discussed below, the rivalry between the two groups revealed some of the Bow Group’s assumptions regarding the future role of the middle classes as the Conservative

¹¹ Rose, “The Bow Group’s Role in British Politics,” 865.

¹² Bow Group, “Join the Bowmen,” advertisement, *Crossbow*, (January – March, 1966).

¹³ Secretary of the Bow Group, Richard Bing remarked in 1965 that the Conservatives still struggled to keep the interest of “people in their thirties.” He continued, “One often gets the impression that Association committees are run by old age pensioners and a few Young Conservatives.” The problem with Young Conservatives, he opined, was that “they get married and ha[ve] a family – which leaves little time for anything else.” The local branches were just not suited to stimulate the political fires of young people due to the “preponderance of retired military gentlemen or stockbrokers.” He declared, “Young marrieds wan[t] a brighter atmosphere, and an even spread of age groups would help.” There is one example of the Bow Group’s methods inspiring local initiatives. In the “particularly active constituency” of North Kensington, the CA had a Political Committee as well as a “local variant of the Bow Club, called the Gate Group.” This local manifestation carried out similar research functions and represented a “true example of local initiative and enthusiasm – largely due to the vast personal efforts put in by the candidate, chairman and agent.” Richard Bing, “Where have all the young men gone” *Crossbow* 8 (31) (April – June, 1965), 9.Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

Party's supporters. While the organization seemed novel and refreshing to observers in the 1950s, they became the source of anxiety in the 1970s when the group's influence seemed to plateau. Vice Chairman of the Chelsea CA, David Weeks reflected on the organization's prospects in 1971 amid fears that it was "losing its impact." He argued that the organization's efforts to "preserve the quality of [the Bow Group's] membership" limited their growth and appeal. Weeks remarked, "Entry qualifications combined with geographical limitations of the Group have meant that it recruits from a very tight social and occupational list." The City was over-represented with a "dense concentration of barristers, solicitors, accountants" and there were not enough representatives who worked as educators, journalists, or engineers and managers in industry. Since the Bow Group was localized in major cities, he further observed, "many [CAs] ha[d] never heard of the Bow Group at all." To most rank-and-file members, the Bow Group was, "an effete-left wing organization whose members d[id] academic research on political topics but, who did not like sully[ing] their hands with canvassing." Weeks concluded that the group needed to widen their scope for recruitment and, "abandon their fetish for exclusiveness."¹⁴

In 1956, the organization introduced a quarterly journal called *Crossbow*. The aim of each issue of the journal was to provide "a series of articles on a particular area of policy," which would help "probe the Party's weaknesses, try and fill in some gaps, and

¹⁴ David Weeks, "The Future of the Bow Group," *Crossbow* 14 (55) (July 1971). Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/6.

challenge the basic assumptions.”¹⁵ The journal also contained opinion pieces, letters from readers, interviews and profiles of Tory MPs, and essays as well as reviews on culture. *Crossbow*’s readership included politicians, policy makers and Conservative supporters / voters with experience at various levels of municipal or local politics. The organization distributed the quarterly at Party conferences and in national papers as a supplement.

The Bow Group conducted a survey of its readers in 1963. Only 20 per cent of those forms sent out were completed and returned. The results revealed that readers tended to be male who were either Young Conservatives or had served in public office as local councillors. Readers ranged from 25 to 35 years of age. In terms of occupation, readers tended to be company directors, accountants and teachers. Most of those who replied to the questionnaire also indicated that they read the *Sunday Times* (daily) and the *Economist* (weekly). In the questionnaire, “Bow Group and non-Bow Group” (referring to members and non-members of the Bow group who read *Crossbow*) respondents ranked unemployment and disarmament as the “most pressing political issues.” For Bow Group readers, education and cost of living were ranked third and forth, respectively. Those non-Bow Group readers, in slight contrast, were more concerned about cost of living and taxation. Both groups did not consider the subject of nationalization to be of high priority.¹⁶ To be sure, this survey offers limited insight. It does not indicate the specific views that readers, both Bow Group and non-Bow Group members, held on each of these

¹⁵ Leon Brittan, “Editorial – A Recipe for a New Mandate,” *Crossbow* 9(37) (October – December 1966). Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

¹⁶ Michael White, “Crossbow readers,” *Crossbow* 6(24) (July – September 1963), 18. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

subjects only that they were considered them “pressing political issues.” It is, therefore, challenging to make any concrete statements about the extent to which readers of *Crossbow*, inside and outside of the Bow Group, shared political views. Superficially, at least, *Crossbow* readers’ interests aligned with those subjects that occupied the headlines of the day. In February of 1963, unemployment figures were reported in *The Spectator* as “chilling” with “nearly a million men and women out of work,” which represented the highest number since the war.¹⁷ There was a general air of panic as the Conservatives appeared to have little to offer voters in terms of a solution to the bleak economic outlook, especially in the industrial regions of Britain (Scotland, the North East, Merseyside, and West Wales). Nuclear disarmament also occupied top billing in the news as Britain engaged with negotiations with the United States for independent control of nuclear power and faced resistance from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Both issues were tied to the future power, position and role of Britain on the international stage. How would Britain’s economy thrive if industry became less prominent? Could Britain continue trading on its historic Special Relationship with the United States, and maintain its international status with independent control of nuclear arms? It is not particularly surprising that Bow Group readers were more interested in education than non-Bow Group readers since the premise of the organization’s and, indeed, the identity of the organization’s membership, was based on their level of education and their

¹⁷ “Outlook Uncertain,” *The Spectator*, 4 January 1963, accessed 22 September 2015, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/4th-january-1963/3/outlook-uncertain>; “Out of Work,” *The Spectator*, 1 February, 1963, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/1st-february-1963/4/out-of-work>; Nicholas Davenport, “Is Britain in Industrial Decline?” *The Spectator*, 19 April 1963, accessed 22 September 2015, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/19th-april-1963/28/is-britain-in-industrial-decline>.

scholarly approach to political issues. On the whole, however, readers of *Crossbow*, even as the Conservatives entered uncertain electoral circumstances and greater economic volatility, were more concerned about high politics than issues related to affluence or the barriers to affluence.

Political scientist Rose categorized the subject matter in the first eleven issues of *Crossbow* (up to Spring 1960). He found that of 152 articles, 42 dealt with foreign and colonial affairs; 40 with party politics, governmental organization, and party principles; 31 with economic and industrial problems; 22 with social services, education and housing; 13 with cultural and moral questions; and 4 were unclassifiable.¹⁸ Rose does not explain his process for categorization, which makes it difficult to replicate his model and examine changes to the ideas and opinions held by the Bow Group beyond 1960 when the Conservatives experienced less secure electoral circumstances. His data, however, suggests that in its early years, the organization's was focussed on engaging with high political discussions concerning Conservative principles. Bow Groupers employed this strategy perhaps to demonstrate their intellectual prowess and to gain legitimacy as a trusted source for Conservative thinking. The Bow Group was interested in topics related to social services, education and housing, but early on they garnered relatively less attention than other concerns, like foreign policy. But the subject matter covered in *Crossbow* aligned more closely with the interests of its readers, as shown in their survey of readership, by 1963. The number of articles on social services, education and housing

¹⁸ Rose, "The Bow Group's role in British Politics," 871. Rose only looks at the first eleven issues of the journal and does not indicate the criteria for his process of categorization.

increased during 1960 – 1963, although these did not displace the number of articles on foreign and colonial affairs. This slight shift in focus might suggest that it took a period of time for contributors to align their focus with its readers and the wider electorate.¹⁹ On the surface, the Bow Group did not actively engage in controversial policy issues. They were not interested in provoking, for example, questions on race or industrial relations. As much as they presented themselves as a force for thoughtful discourse and potential source for reforming ideas, the Bow Group did not deviate greatly from the established and conventional political discussions of the time.

Initially, the middle classes as a distinct topic of study did not dominate the attentions of Bow Group contributors or readers. When the Party's electoral fortunes became less stable beginning in the late 1950s, the Bow Group began considering how the middle classes had changed in the years following the war. The middle classes' grievances and what this meant for Conservative electoral fortunes increasingly became a focus of investigation.

¹⁹ Using Rose's categories, and extending the study into 1961 – 1963, social services and education become more interesting to the group than both party politics, government organization, and party principles as well as economic and industrial problems. These issues, incidentally, were those that concerned the electorate more directly and with the Party's electoral position less secure, it makes sense to see the Bow Group shift their attentions from high political discussions. The results are as follows for 1961 - 1963: 28, foreign and colonial affairs; 18, party politics, governmental organization, and party principles; 17 with economic and industrial problems; 21 with social services, education and housing; 5 with cultural and moral questions; and 2 could not be classifiable. I only applied the categories to articles and essays and not short opinion pieces or editorials.

Who are the middle classes & what did they want?

In the late 1950s, contemporary political commentators observed that middle-class discontent centered on issues including inflation, the lack of tax relief and the inability of the Conservatives to curb the power of unions. The Conservative Party conceptualized their complaints as connected mainly to their experience as consumers. The lack of tax relief and the high cost of living had diminished their economic and social position and, more importantly, their ability to enjoy the fruits of postwar affluence. As noted in previous chapters, these frustrations manifested in several poor by-election results, notably Tonbridge (1956) and Orpington (1962). Many Conservative voters defected to the Liberals or abstained in protest against the Conservatives, which were characterized by the press as catastrophic for the Conservatives because they served as evidence that the Party had alienated a significant section of supporters. Leading Conservatives, however, denied that tensions existed with the Party's core supporters and continued to adhere to the classless rhetoric of consumers when dealing with the demands of the middle classes.

The following examples from *Crossbow* will show that, in contrast to the Party's approach, many in the Bow Group were quite sympathetic to the unique plight of the "traditional" established middle classes. Contributors to *Crossbow*, for example, characterized their consumption patterns as prudent and separate from the demands of the newly affluent for material comforts like cars, appliances and holidays abroad. The Bow Group understood that the middle classes were now internally fractured and composed of subsections. The Group argued that the "traditional" middle classes, those historical core

supporters of the Tories, represented an important part of the future success of the Party and counselled the Conservative Party to start listening to them.

The Bow Group did not simply accept and repeat national and mainstream discussions that characterized the source of middle-class discontent with Conservatives as based on their perceived inability to partake in affluence as consumers. In order to craft a response, some Bow Group members evaluated foundational Conservative principles. For *Crossbow* editor David Howell (1962 – 1964), the Conservatives had been “hesitant” in articulating the principles of modern Conservatism.²⁰ According to Howell, individual desires for prosperity and material comforts were not incongruent with “strategic planning.” In Howell’s opinion, the problem centered on the domination of “traditional (liberal) business mentality” and a lack of spiritual commitment (or “solidarity of belief”) to economic and social planning. He argued that, “the decentralization of power and responsibility, providing a fuller life for the individual, can only be achieved within a national planning framework.” There was no denying that economic planning had been responsible for “more industrial equipment, more houses, schools, and roads, better railways,” as well as “improved social security benefits and security.” Yet, when it came to aligning these successes with Conservative ideas on the individual, the Conservatives were lost.²¹ A planned economy did not have to be the antithesis of individualism; rather it was a way to mobilize people and resources in an efficient manner thereby creating

²⁰ David Howell, “Modern Conservatism in search of its principles,” *Crossbow* (July – Sept, 1963), 24. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

²¹ Howell, “Modern Conservatism in search of its principles,” 23, 26. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

opportunities in which the individual could thrive.²² For Howell, “the vast majority of human wills and emotions in modern society [we]re ... almost totally united in their desire for a modest level of material comfort, reasonable security and now, as these become assured, for lives which embrace something more than HP [hire purchase] and TV.” Voters also craved “involvement, participation and group, if not individual, responsibility. Howell argued that Conservatives could leverage such changes into significant reforms. He encouraged a society in which “the consumers gathered strength; professional workers become organised; housing and parent-teacher associations are formed; [and] non-State health and pensions schemes grow.”²³ By encouraging strategic planning, the Conservatives could bring about decentralization in an organic way.

Howell’s observations touched on several issues that had been connected, in public and political discussions, with the plight of the middle classes, including their supposed acquisitive nature. For Howell, all voters shared a desire for material comforts that were associated with a middle-class lifestyle but once achieved their aims and demands would expand beyond the individual. Angus Maude expressed similar warnings in *Crossbow* when he wrote, “[w]e need to remember ... that the kind of people who would like to vote Conservative are worried about other things than their material prosperity. They are concerned about violence, about the standards and quality of education...the destruction of their physical environment [and] about the abuse of power

²² Geoffrey Howe articulated a similar idea in his essay on the rigidity of social services policy, “For society should be able to use the State to ensure the *availability* of certain services without requiring the State itself to *provide* these services.” “Onwards from Paternalism,” *Crossbow* 7(26) (January – March, 1964), 47. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

²³ Howell, “Modern Conservatism in search of its principles,” 23, 26. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

by trade union oligarchs.”²⁴ The Conservative Party, at a fundamental ideological level, supported these goals. This view, influenced by the “business minded” liberal voices in the Party, represented intellectual stagnation (which wrongly conflated planning with Socialism) and failed to recognize the larger potential for “strategic planning.”

The 1964 Conservative manifesto, however, undermined Howell’s belief in a balance between planning and the rights of the individual. Alec Douglas-Home declared plainly in the foreword that a “centralized system of direction cramps the style of the British people. Only by trusting the individual with freedom and responsibility shall we gain the vitality to keep our country great.” Yet, Home also believed that “greatness was not measured in terms of prosperity alone. What counts is the purpose to which we put prosperity.” He continued: “We are using wealth to expand opportunities for the young, to provide more generously for the old and the sick and the handicapped, to aid developing countries ... and to maintain the strength on which national security and our work for peace depend.”²⁵ A great deal more emphasis was placed on Britain’s ability to secure international security and to “retain British power.”²⁶

²⁴ Angus Maude, “What Tories must do now,” *Crossbow* 16(66) (June 1974), 10. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/8.

²⁵ “Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1964: Prosperity with Purpose,” in *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos, 1900 – 1997*, ed., Iain Dale (London: Routledge, 1999), 143.

²⁶ After Alec Douglas-Home’s foreword, the first topic of the manifesto was international security and defence. They attack the Labour Party and argue that if they had been in power, Britain would be “without influence and without voice,” especially on the issue of nuclear arms. This subject was followed, logically, by statements on the Commonwealth as well as international trade and aid provisions. “Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1964: Prosperity with Purpose,” in *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos, 1900 – 1997*, 144 -146.

According to the 1964 election manifesto, “[i]n 13 years of Conservative government the living standards of the British people have improved more than in the whole half of the previous century.” This declaration was based on a higher rate of employment, increased incomes and savings as well as lower taxes, which “made possible a spectacular increase in spending on the essentials, the comforts and what were once regarded as the luxuries of life.” Similar to Howell’s claim, the manifesto proclaimed that Conservatives had “created conditions in which individuals by enterprise and thrift have gained these benefits for themselves.” With regards to planning, the Conservatives envisioned a “partnership” that would “brin[g] together Government, management and unions.” The statement continued, the “argument is not for or against planning. All human activity involves planning. The question is: how is the planning to be done? By consent or compulsion?” In keeping with Tory attacks on Labour, the manifesto stated that the Labour Party’s “policy of extended State ownership and centralised control would be economically disastrous and incompatible with the opportunities and responsibilities of a free society.”²⁷ On the eve of great electoral uncertainty, Howell did not counsel the party to adopt a reactionary approach. The Conservatives had a record of successes “creating conditions” for the individual to thrive and if the Party did a better job of explaining this bigger picture to its core supporters, who no doubt experienced these benefits, they would not be so discontented.

²⁷ “Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1964: Prosperity with Purpose,” in *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos, 1900 – 1997*, 147, 148.

Clearly, for some members of the Bow Group, the middle classes remained vital to the electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party. One contributor conceptualized their concerns not only as consumer issues but also in relation to their perception of the manual working classes. Underlying each complaint was a persistent anti-working-class sentiment that seemed to suggest that the working classes were undeserving of the affluence they experienced. In an article written in 1962 on “What the middle classes want,” Lionel Grouse proclaimed, “[b]y continuing to affront the prejudices of its supporters the Conservative Party is well on its way to losing the next election.”²⁸ Grouse believed that the Tories could not afford to alienate this section of the electorate. Grouse’s advice on how the Conservatives could recover the support of the middle classes, of course, stressed the importance of tax relief and other policies aimed at improving their material standard of living, which was not particularly different from how the Conservatives had been dealing with the middle classes throughout the previous decade. More importantly, Grouse suggests that middle-class resentments were fuelled by a desire to “keep the ‘working class’ at a proper distance.” In other words, Grouse conceived of middle-class identity as not only highly dependent on consumption (on the individual’s standard of living and buying power) but also on the importance of being culturally distinct and seen as different from manual workers. The narrowing economic gap between the two groups, brought about by higher wages and higher levels of employment, threatened the position of those who viewed themselves as “middle class”.

²⁸ Lionel Grouse, “What the middle classes want,” *Crossbow* 5(20) (July – September, 1962), 43. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

“Since the defeat of 1945” Grouse wrote, “it has been increasingly the trend within the party to adopt ‘progressive’ sounding policies in hope of blurring the distinction between the parties ... and so securing a section of the affluent working-class vote.” For Grouse, the Conservatives’ record in maintaining the state-managed social welfare apparatus and the mixed economy, while successful in appealing to the working classes and floating voters, as well as the opinions of the “radically minded weeklies,” had alienated “the hard core of Tory support.” The Conservatives, in other words, were blinded by their pursuit of power and ignored their ideological roots and principles. The Conservatives could not even offer “the palliatives of minor tax reliefs ... for fear of antagonizing the party’s opponents.” Alienating the middle classes was a risky business since the Party’s future success would not be found in “marginal transfers” from their rival parties or “hope that the discontented will return to the fold” in due time. The Party, therefore, needed to make bold concessions to the middle classes and repair the strain in their relationship quickly. Again, here Grouse describes the source of middle-class discontent as based on the perception that their interests had been ignored in favour of creating mass support across class lines.

According to Grouse, the loss of empire and decline in Britain’s international status attracted their fair share of criticism but domestic issues galvanized the middle classes against the Tories.²⁹ Conservative governments, for example, had “failed to

²⁹ The middle classes, for example, lamented the loss of empire, which formed “one of the main pegs on which the political loyalty of the middle class Conservatives hung.” The Conservatives had, “failed to provide a focus of imaginative loyalty and a sense of duty to replace that of the loss of Empire” because the “sense of Imperial power and responsibility ha[d] failed to carry over into

protect the consumer by banning price maintenance by manufacturers,” which meant that they could discriminate against shops that sold their goods at a lower price. The middle classes felt alienated mostly because “the affluent society ... brought great benefits to the masses of organized labour, while leaving the professional classes at best standing where they were; at worst, relatively worse off than before.” The perception that the middle classes were “worse off” was a powerful feeling even though it was “not entirely a true picture, statistically.” As Grouse highlights, “the material standards for all classes had risen over the decade.”³⁰ Deputy Director of the Conservative Political Center, Joan Barnes, also pointed out that this criticism was rather unfair.³¹ In an essay on the costs of social welfare written in the previous year, Barnes noted that the “established middle class are making full use of the social services. State education, for example, is being used most advantageously by middle-class families.”³² The middle classes, however, believed that manual workers had received special attention from both the Labour Party, naturally, and Conservative governments and, as a result, their “cherished standard of differentials from the working class” had disappeared. The middle classes felt that they were forced to subsidize workers’ lavish spending “while the middle classes [we]re unable to emulate this expenditure.” In education, for example, the Conservative-voting middle classes spent their own money to educate their children and “they were also

a new relationship with the Commonwealth concept.” See Grouse, “What the middle classes want,” 40. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

³⁰ The above direct quotes from Lionel Grouse are found in Grouse, “What the middle classes want,” 39, 40, 41, and 42. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

³¹ Joan Barnes also worked at the Home Office and Conservative political education office after reading History at Cambridge.

³² Joan Barnes, “Taxes for Tomorrow: Paying for Welfare,” *Crossbow* 4(15) (Spring 1961). Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

expected to pay for the public education which they [were] not using.” Grouse acknowledges, “it is their own decision to spend their money on private education,” but they felt they deserved tax benefits for withdrawing a significant number of potential students from “public charge.” In this sense, the middle classes not only felt ignored but punished for being self-reliant.

In Grouse’s article, the middle classes were described as jealous individuals. The decline in their economic position and status was exacerbated by an ingrained desire to be a separate and unique group, and, more importantly, be better off than the working classes. “Not only has the gap in material wealth between the classes narrowed,” Grouse observed, “but the cultural gap has remained as wide, though different in form than before the war, so that the resentment of the loss of differentials is multiplied by the evidence of conspicuous spending by workers which few professionals can contemplate.”³³ In other words, the middle classes resented what they felt was an unequal experience of affluence but they also felt that the newly affluent working classes were wasteful with their bounty. This characterization of the working classes was not based on concrete statistics or even examples but reveals that Grouse believed that the core of middle-class sentiment was a deep anti-working-class sentiment.

Grouse’s call to face the concerns of the middle classes head-on was not met with enthusiasm. His article in *Crossbow* received swift reaction and criticism in *The Spectator*. One reader wrote in and expressed shock that Grouse seemed to advocate that

³³ The above direct quotes from Lionel Grouse are found in Grouse, “What the middle classes want,” 40, 41, and 42. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

“it [the Conservative Party] should wipe that reasonable smile off its face and stand forth bold as brass as the party of petty-bourgeois reaction.” The reader continued, “[m]ost thoughtful Conservatives see in the development of a classless society ... the last hope for the future – certainly of the country, and perhaps even of their party.” They concluded, “[m]aybe some of Mr. Grouse’s words may fall sweetly on the ears of those in the disaffected layer ... but I can assure him that they make no kind of sense to those of us who are waiting to see the Tories seize the chance of leading Britain into modernity.”³⁴ Another reader responded in a similar vein writing, “[Grouse] writes as if the past two decades have never been, as if our society is not in the middle of radical change.” The letter continued, the “struggle for the centre – and this is the bit of the battle that matters – is not to be won by retiring smartly to the right flank.” Rather, the Tories needed to be a “progressive force” and adopting the reactionary “attitude as sketched out by Grouse would have the country sleep-walking into the future.”³⁵ Readers of a popular conservative newspaper, however, disagreed with Grouse’s insistence that the future of the Conservative Party lay with the interests of the middle classes.

In his analysis of Conservative pensions policy entering the 1960s, Editorial Director of the free-market think tank, Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Arthur Seldon, painted an image of the middle classes as inward-looking and anti-Welfare State, but virtuous consumers. According to Seldon, the “Welfare State” had created an “increasingly egalitarian society of middle class earners and taxpayers who [would] not as

³⁴ “Spectator’s Notebook,” *The Spectator*, 12 July 1962, 6.

³⁵ “Spectator’s Notebook – Sleep Walking,” *The Spectator*, 12 July 1962, 6.

readily yield a large part of its income and meekly accept it in return in kind or in cash, with a sizable slice soaked up en route by administrative drones.” The middle classes would see “less sense” in relying on the state and local authorities to provide them with social services and prefer “choice from competing suppliers.” These middle classes were not ashamed of their position and would not be “cowed by social critics of snobbery or status symbolism.” He continued, “It will not see the wickedness of putting education, health services, housing and income in sickness, unemployment and retirement before dish-washers, record players or holidays abroad.”³⁶

For Seldon, the commitment to egalitarianism (particularly universality in social policy including pensions), established by the Labour Party and supported by subsequent Conservative governments after 1945, had turned the middle classes against the state because of what they believed to be inefficient administration. Mostly, the middle classes believed that, as earners and taxpayers, they made the most significant monetary contributions to social welfare but they did not receive what they expected or wanted from those social welfare initiatives. The middle classes, therefore, turned away from public institutions and instead looked to private sources, which they believed offered them greater choice and value. If they wanted a higher standard of living or more sickness benefit, for example, they could (and they preferred to) save for it or pursue private options. Seldon characterized the demands of the middle classes as reasonable, justified, and indeed virtuous because they contributed to self and social improvement. They were

³⁶ Arthur Seldon, “Policy for Pensions: A plea for humanity, independence, and freedom from politics”, 37 *Crossbow* 6(23) (April – June, 1963) Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

not simply interested in conspicuous consumption or material evidence of affluence, which ironically, was one of the major themes that the Conservatives had built their postwar success on. The middle classes wanted to enrich their lives rather than just dress them up with new furniture or appliances. Seldon did not attribute the desire for “dishwashers, record players or holidays abroad” with any one section of the electorate but it is clear that the Conservatives missed the mark in thinking that all voters wanted the same as “floating” voters or the newly affluent working classes that they wanted to win over.

Seldon also envisioned a society in which the middle classes had their primary relationship with their employers rather than the Government, which would help rein in Government spending.³⁷ As one of the leaders of IEA, it is not surprising that Seldon encouraged this type of arrangement between employer and employees. But as we have seen, Savage’s studies found that there was a significant fissure within the middle classes, primarily between managers (private sector) and professionals (public sector). The middle-classes’ political allegiances were divided along private and public lines. The former section of the middle classes relied on employers and companies for the accumulation of wealth and establishment of security and, as a result, had less sympathy for the Government’s efforts to intervene in these areas. For Seldon, and others on the Party’s right wing, promoting a stronger relationship between voters and their employers was one strategy that could help secure the middle classes as a base of support for the Conservative Party.

³⁷ Seldon, “Policy for Pensions,” 39. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

Ahead of the 1966 general election, Iain Macleod concluded that the Party's loss at the 1964 general election could be attributed to two "shifts in opinion." The Conservatives, he argued, lost support amongst the "burdened" middle classes, those described by Grouse and Seldon, but they had won the support of the "comfortable working classes." In both cases, the reason for the Party's failures (with middle-class voters) and successes (with working-class voters) centered on its ability to provide the desired level of prosperity. Using his own constituency of Enfield as an example, he found that the middle classes felt "burdened with mortgage payments, depressed with the rise in the price of comforts, and infuriated with the power of the Trade Unions." The middle classes, he assessed, felt "unprotected, threatened and forgotten." Any glimmer of success in 1964 was due to the Party's gains amongst the "prosperous working class" for whom affluence and prosperity had improved their lives enough to shift political allegiances towards the Conservatives. Looking at these results, Macleod argued that the Conservatives could be "moderately cheerful." He stated, "[w]e can recover the lost ground in the centre" to win back the middle-class vote, "without losing the natural expansion of the Tory party."³⁸ Unlike Grouse and Seldon, Macleod maintained that the crux of discontent for the middle classes was tied to their ability to participate in affluence and prosperity as consumers.

For Macleod, the Conservative loss at the 1964 general election was not a cause for alarm. As one of the Party's leading postwar reformers, Macleod, unsurprisingly,

³⁸ Iain Macleod, "In Opposition," *Crossbow* 8(30), January- March 1965, 24. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

counselled the Party to remain focused on winning opinions in the center rather than fleeing to the extreme poles for answers. Macleod, however, acknowledged that sections of the electorate used class terms to express feelings of separateness rather than inclusive terms that aligned with the Party's claims to represent national interests. He was confident that the Conservatives could still count on the "burdened middle classes." Macleod might have accepted the legitimacy of the middle classes complaints, whether they believed they were worse off or were actually worse off, but he was not prepared to submit to their pressures and abandon its achievements in building a wider appeal. He is also careful to remind *Crossbow* readers that the Conservatives' message of prosperity and affluence, which helped propel them to success in the 1950s, should not be abandoned. The key to regaining the support of the disaffected middle classes lay in the "modernization" of their policies and ideas. What "modernization" meant and how it would be executed in policy became the subject matter for the Bow Group to consider in its pamphlets and in *Crossbow*.

Macleod's cautious and hopeful analysis of the 1964 election results calls attention to the blurring class lines that had once informed voting patterns. Workers, who had experienced improved standards of living under the Conservatives in the 1950s, no longer voted for Labour instinctively. Of course, the blurring of class-informed voting also worked against the Conservatives. The Conservatives lost hold of the so-called burdened middle classes because Harold Wilson's Labour Party was no longer a group of "squabbling intellectuals and stuffy Trade Unionists." As Leon Brittan observed after the 1966 general election, without Labour in-fighting, "[w]e can no longer rely on the semi-

automatic support of the middle classes. The values of competition and individualism are by no means as dear to our traditional supporters as we once thought.” The Party had not created “an exciting and constructive set of ideas” with which to win over a “solid section of society” on whom they could rely for loyalty or regular support. If the Party wanted to succeed, they needed to capture the middle classes along with the industrial working classes but not with policies guided by free market principles. In fact, he emphasized the importance of securing support from those who already voted Conservative rather than blindly pursuing those who might vote for the Party. Most importantly, Brittan thought that the Conservatives needed to create “a society which offers a better life for all ... and which can afford to be generously compassionate where necessary.”³⁹ In Brittan’s assessment, the Party had fundamentally misunderstood the middle classes and, most importantly, free market policies were not the key to their votes.

Brittan, as editor of *Crossbow* in 1967, posed the questions in an editorial, “Who are our supporters going to be?” and “What kind of society are we going to offer them?” These questions were especially pertinent in 1967 after Harold Wilson had won a second general election in 1966 and increased his majority from 5 seats in Parliament to 98.⁴⁰ Indeed, what could the Conservatives offer an electorate who had given Wilson and the Labour Party a mandate to govern? He expressed surprise that the Party could “face the

³⁹ Leon Brittan, “Editorial,” *Crossbow* 10(38) (January – March, 1967) Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/5.

⁴⁰ Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Abacus, 2011), 117; Alan Sked and Chris Cook, eds., *Post-War Britain: A Political History*. 4th ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1993), 219.

alienation of some traditional supporters with complacent equanimity.”⁴¹ Specifically, Brittan believed the Conservatives had alienated the “old middle classes,” who had demonstrated loyalty to the Party in the past. He defined their demands as “not excessive,” and “essentially defensive, especially in the field of education.” He saw no reason why the Party could not address their needs in a comprehensive way and regain their support at the polls in the next election. Presumably, the “old middle classes” to which Brittan referred were, in fact, those also known as the established middle classes, who were quite different, for example, than the “new middle classes,” who will be discussed in greater detail below.⁴² Brittan warned against adopting the political buzzwords of the day. “The number of people attracted by strident calls for technology, dogmatic claims for pure economic liberalism and even heartfelt appeals to the spirit of individualism [was] severely limited.” The Conservatives could employ their historic belief in individualism alongside incentives as they contemplated future policies. The society that Conservatives could offer the electorate, especially the “old middle classes,” was one where the individual had opportunities and choices. Where “the individual can have candy floss if he chooses. Millions are ready for it and a bit more.”⁴³

⁴¹ Leon Brittan, “State of the Party,” *Crossbow* 11(41) (Oct. – Dec., 1967) Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/5.

⁴² The established middle class is described as having, “high economic capital, high status social contacts, high highbrow and emerging cultural capital.” These individuals are usually educated as are their parents. They usually own a home and have savings. These individuals are what Goldthorpe called professional and managerial “service classes.” See Mike Savage, Fiona Devine, Niall Cunningham, Mark Taylor, Yaojun Li, Johs Hjellbrekke, Brigitte LeRoux, Sam Friedman and Andrew Miles, “A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC’s Great British Class Survey Experiment,” *Sociology* 47(219) (April 2013): 232, 234.

⁴³ Brittan, “State of the Party,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/5.

These examples show that the Bow Group could be sympathetic to the plight of the discontented segments of the middle classes. Bow Group contributors to *Crossbow* not only believed that the “traditional” middle classes were essential to the future electoral success of the Conservative Party, and therefore worth pursuing with policy measures, but that they had been much maligned by postwar emphasis on social welfare and egalitarianism. Howell’s and Brittan’s essays counselled the Party to adhere to their progressive policies rather than abandon them for reactionary rightwing and free market thinking. But both Howell and Brittan did not think that “consumerism” alone would solve the Party’s problems. Each also advised that the Party needed to consider Conservative traditions and why voters, especially within the middle classes, had voted for them in the past. The authors neither objected to, nor moralized on, the subject of consumption or consumer values but, as Howell stressed, this theme was not the grand solution to all problems for which Conservatives had hoped. In contrast, Seldon understood the middle classes to be a much more self-centered constituency. He concluded that the Welfare State had, in fact, established a basic level of security and equality for most of the population and created a larger middle class. For Seldon, a less interventionist and market-oriented Conservative policy would now attract these voters.

The New Middle Classes

Reflecting on the conditions that helped spur the Labour Party to victory in 1945, Labour M.P. Maurice Edelman (Coventry North) observed the emergence of a “new middle class.” These individuals had working class parents and benefited greatly from “more scholarships” and “greater opportunities of university education.” According to

Edelman, the Labour Party needed to tap into this source of support but “many” within the party “regarded the new middle class with suspicion” in the same way that “miners used to regard one of their number who took a manager’s certificate – the suspicion that he has deserted to the other side.” Edelman concluded that these sentiments, largely held by “Old Believers” within the Labour Party, represented a significant obstacle to future electoral success for the Labour Party. Learning to cultivate support beyond the confines of manual workers and trade union members, including the middle classes, new or old, was not a simple task for the Labour Party. Indeed, the Party endured years of bitter disagreements over how to adapt the Party’s “true faith” to meet the demands of the postwar electorate.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Conservatives did not fully understand the views of new middle classes or their place within their own party. But members of the Bow Group were more ready to accept them into their fold as they felt sure that the new middle classes’ sense of alienation from their working-class roots was a sentiment the Party could exploit.

In 1962, Conservative M.P., Charles Curran, took up the cause of the new middle classes in *Crossbow*. This was not the first time he had dealt with the issue: in 1956, he penned a piece in *The Spectator* on “The Politics of the New Estate.” This “New Estate,” he wrote, comprised of “manual workers who had moved to new jobs and new homes” during the first quarter of the twentieth century. He described the “resettlement” that occurred between 1935-1945 as a process of “political plantation,” whereby the

⁴⁴ Maurice Edelman, “Where is the Left?” *The Spectator* 7 April 1950, accessed 22 September 2015, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/7th-april-1950/7/where-is-the-left->.

introduction of manual workers in Tory dominated constituencies, especially in the south of England, had led to Labour's victory in 1945. The process of "resettlement" continued after 1945 as "[s]ocialist planners injected sterilizing streams of working-class voters, to make Toryism impotent for ever." By 1950, however, the New Estate was a "satisfied electorate" and with the end of rationing and the maintenance of full-employment, this group developed plenty of reasons to vote Tory.⁴⁵

In 1962, Curran reiterated that the Conservatives had "presided over a social and technological revolution" since the war. The Conservatives had succeeded in "removing the grievances that lead people to vote Labour" in 1945 but it also "created a crisis for itself." Increased government investment in public education had, in Curran's opinion, "built an escalator from Coronation Street." He continued, "[u]p the escalator, an army of young men and women have risen out of the working class. They are managers, executives and administrators of our changing society – a parvenu elite, picked for their brains." The "distinguishing characteristic of this new class," according to Curran, was a belief in meritocracy. "They have risen in the world by their own efforts and their own abilities. Success has not come to them from luck, or sharp practice, or exploitation. They have earned it." The new middle class also had such virtues as "foresight, frugality, and abstention from immediate gratifications in order to secure post-dated benefits. They are not fiercely acquisitive, or notably competitive." In these respects, the new middle class shared many of the same virtues as the old and established middle classes and differed

⁴⁵ Charles Curran, "The Politics of the New Estate," *The Spectator* (17 February 1956), 8, accessed 22 September 2015, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/17th-february-1956/8/the-politics-of-the-new-estate>.

from that image of acquisitive consumers cultivated in the national political discourse. According to Curran, those individuals who had shed their working-class origins, in fact, did undergo *embourgeoisement*. Like Edelman, Curran observed that these individuals had no solid political allegiances to either political party. They were “politically homeless” and they fit “uneasily” into the established “social structure, with its inherited institution and ideas.” This group presented a new problem for the Tories because, according to Curran, they had been able to “get their votes at the last three general elections mainly by exploiting their fear of Socialism” but this was not a permanent strategy. For Curran, the Tories could capitalize on the new middle classes because community, familial or traditional factors that informed their parents’ political allegiances to the Labour Party seemed absent.

Curran’s conceptualization of the new middle class did not rest simply on the celebration of a better-educated and newly affluent section of society. New middle class identity was also contingent upon loathing of its own working-class origins. Curran suggested that from the moment they passed their 11-plus examinations and gained entrance to grammar school, these people had cut ties from the world of the working classes. Throughout their education and work lives, they “consciously and deliberately” rejected their origins in “habits, speech, tastes, amusements and living patterns.” For Curran, “the people of the escalator are completely unsentimental about the working class.” They did not like it because “it is composed of residuals; the failures who are left at the bottom because of their innate shortcoming and deficiencies.” Curran believed that the new middle class had created a “new image of the manual worker.” He is not a

“deserving, disinherited toiler, unfairly condemned by an unjust system to a lifetime of poverty, flanked by the pawnshop and the workhouse. They see him as Andy Capp, the eponymous character of a *Daily Mirror* comic-strip who represents a stereotype of the ‘notional British worker.’” He is “a drunken, shiftless wife-beater, who would certainly keep coals in the bath if it were not already full of beers.” The popularity of Capp, according to Curran, showed how far the reverent image of the worker had fallen since 1945 in the British imagination. The new middle class despised Capp and “all that he stands for. To them, he represents the world that they have put behind them.” The new middle class abhorred “Cockney tellytopia, low-grade nirvana of subsidized housing, hire-purchase extravagance, undisciplined children, gaudy domestic squalor, and chips with everything.”⁴⁶ Curran’s reference to “chips with everything” was drawn from Arnold Wesker’s 1962 West End play of the same name.⁴⁷ Within the confines of a R.A.F camp, Wesker uses the relationships and interactions between conscripts and their commanders

⁴⁶ Charles Curran, “The new model bourgeoisie,” *Crossbow* (Oct- Dec 1962), 19, 21, 23, . Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁴⁷ Wesker wrote an introductory note in the 1966 edition of *Chips with Everything* even though it seemed that he would have preferred that his audiences and readers deduce the meaning of the play himself. With great reluctance, he explained, “*Chips* is not a play about the troubles of national servicemen in the R.A.F. It is about the subtle methods employed in this country for debilitating the spirit of rebellion. For instance, in the Christmas party of the N.A.A.F.I, the officers encourage the recruits to expend their energy on rock ‘n’ roll ... because they know this activity will create the illusion of ‘real living’ and activity; and after such activity the boys will have no energy for anything but accepting orders...When a generation stops asking questions about the world it lives in, then a dangerous situation emerges and they can be ruthlessly exploited by any smart salesman, whether he’s a politician or a clothing manufacturer.” In *Chips*, Pip Thompson, the general’s son, sees through the pop music but, as Wesker describes, his superiors “ignore him” and “flatter him so much that he loses the will to attack them” and eventually he’s absorbed by the cadre of Wing Commanders and is used against new recruits. Wesker’s play then served as a “warning” against the “soporifics” and so-called benefits of consumer society. Arnold Wesker, *Chips with Everything* (London: Blackie & Son Limited, 1966), 69 – 70.

to reflect the contemporary “class war.”⁴⁸ The particular phrase “chips with everything” was drawn from Pip Thompson’s first appearance in the play, when he describes his surprise from an unexpected trip through London’s East End. He stopped in a café, where he had “a cup of tea from a thick, white, cracked cup” and ate “a piece of tasteless currant cake.” Pip takes in the shabbiness of the décor (peeling paint and a counter cleaned with a dirty wet rag) only to be even more put off by the menu, which was “stained with tea ... and on top it said ... ‘Chips with everything.’ Chips with every damn thing. You breed babies and you eat chips with everything.”⁴⁹ Pip is the hero who questions his superiors in the R.A.F. (representative of the rebellious British spirit being quashed by conformist “leaders”) but he is taken aback by the grittiness of the East End even though he believes that he did not have a sheltered upbringing and should not have been surprised by these conditions. Curran almost certainly did not pick up on the play’s social critique and anti-establishment message. For him, “chips with everything” was shorthand for what he perceived as the miserable living standards of the working classes that should have appalled the rest of Britain. Curran’s negative characterizations of working-class behaviour, especially with regards to rowdy children and hire-purchase extravagance, are not made in isolation. As we shall see in the next chapter, complaints of a similar nature were repeated by longer-term residents of Herfordshire who were unhappy with the relocation of London working classes onto council housing estates in their neighbourhood. Here, far from preaching classlessness like the national party, Curran concluded that the new middle classes had shed their working-class roots and would only

⁴⁸ Ben Hewitt, “Review” in Wesker, *Chips with Everything*, 76.

⁴⁹ Wesker, *Chips with Everything*, act 1, scene 2.

lend their political support to a party that was equally as unforgiving of what they understood to be the failings of those who had not joined them on the escalator. The Conservative Party, he argued, needed to help the new middle class “differentiate from the world of Andy Capp” through, for example, home ownership.⁵⁰

Curran’s thoughts, in contrast to Goldthorpe’s studies, suggest that those class migrants who had achieved middle-class status gladly shed their working-class origins. Without extensive fieldwork similar to that undertaken by Goldthorpe and his team of surveyors, it is difficult to accept Curran’s thoughts as anything more than personal impressions laden with a heavy dose of class prejudice. If, indeed, those new mobile middle classes resented their origins to such a degree, this setting would have been the seedbed for intense class hostilities. Moreover, the Conservatives would have had to adopt stridently anti-working-class policies to capitalize on this wave of support. Curran’s exaggerated depiction, however, emphasizes his view that the new and lower middle classes aspired to middle-class gentility, which represented an opportunity for the Conservatives.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Curran, “The new model bourgeoisie,” 23. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁵¹ A contemporary example of these sentiments can be found in John Braine’s 1959 novel *Room at the Top*. Joe Lampton, an orphan and demobilized soldier, moves from Dufton (or what he refers to as “Dead Dufton”) to take up a municipal job in Warley. Joe proclaims upon his arrival, “I was going to the Top, into a world that even from my first brief glimpses filled me with excitement: big houses with drives and orchards and manicured hedges, a preparatory school to which boys would return from adventures in Brittany and Brazil and India ... expensive cars ...” Joe also describes his philosophy on dress, “I always wear the best. But sometimes I feel uncomfortably aware that I’m forced to be a living proof of prosperity, a sort of sandwich-board man. I’ve no desire to be ill-dressed; but I hate the knowledge that I daren’t be ill-dressed if I want to.” Joe feels a deep sense of inadequacy when he sees a young man in an Aston-Martin, driving with his fiancé. “I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Riviera suntan – these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy.” Joe is

While Curran was convinced of the new middle classes natural affinities' for the Conservative Party, Rose was much more sceptical of their potential. In the same issue of *Crossbow*, Rose defined the "new middle classes" as not the solid middle classes who were known for their "deep rooted Conservatism" along with their loyalty to the Queen and the "old school."⁵² Rather, these individuals came from families with working-class or lower middle-class (shopkeepers and clerks) backgrounds. The members of this new class worked as managers, junior executives, administrators, sales managers, scientists, pilots, and civil servants.⁵³ They did not generally work in "traditional" professions like "the Navy, the Army, the Church or the Bar."⁵⁴ Rose preferred to call them the "mobile middle classes," which had "no fixed political loyalties." These individuals were "rising in society higher than their parents [had]," and they were even increasing their upward movement in their own lifetime.⁵⁵ Rose attributed the reason for their social mobility to "technological changes" in work and the economy, which accounted for the popularity of

desperate set himself apart from Dufton, a place burdened with "an atmosphere of poverty and insecurity, a hoard of nasty sniveling fears." On politics, Joe's character does not exhibit solid roots with either political tradition. "I wasn't, I may add, bothered about all this [poverty in Dufton] from a political point of view. If I had been in a job where I was allowed to take part in politics I might have tried to clear up this mess – eventually, I suppose, from a place like Hampstead, which, believe it or not, is where Dufton's Labour M.P. lives. (I voted for him in 1945, incidentally, because Mother and Father would have liked me to, and partly because the Tory candidate was a relative of the Torvers, who owned the biggest firm in Dufton, and I wasn't going to help *them* in any way." Joe's working class roots had no real bearing on his politics. He voted Labour for his parents and because of ill-feeling for the Tory candidate's relative. Joe's goal was always to leave Dufton and to forget the misery of his former life. John Braine, *Room at the Top* (London: Arrow Books, 2002), chapter 1 - 2, 4; chapter 3 - 4; and chapter 4 - 3, 4. PDF e-book.

⁵² Richard Rose, "Going up and in between," *Crossbow* 6(21) (Oct.– Dec., 1962), 35. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁵³ David Howell, "An Economy for Professionals," *Crossbow* 7(26) (Jan.– Mar., 1964), 21. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

⁵⁴ Curran, "The new model bourgeoisie," 23. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁵⁵ Rose, "Going up and in between," 35. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

Harold Wilson's science and technology-based platform.⁵⁶ Their working-class origins meant that they had not inherited wealth or capital to pay for houses and education and they did not have emergency savings. These mobile middle classes were educated in grammar school and university, and earned their income based on skills.⁵⁷

Clearly then, some Conservative intellectuals understood the nature of the growth and changing composition of the middle classes, but they were a bit more speculative regarding the implications this had for their politics and how to adjust Conservative policies accordingly. Rose speculated that the Conservative Party stood to benefit from their support but mostly due to the fact that they disliked the political alternatives rather than because they shared Conservative values and attitudes. They might have been beneficiaries of prosperity, social security, and technological revolution under Tory administrations but this experience did not breed political loyalty. These class migrants were self-interested and their political loyalties were instrumental in nature. They did not vote for political parties. They "vote[d] for themselves."⁵⁸ Journalist Auberon Waugh shared Rose's assessment. As a self-proclaimed member of the new middle class, Waugh stated that the "true spirit" of the new middle class was basically "anti-political." There were no "loyalties" for the Conservatives to nurture. These voters, he continued, are "neither Left nor Right Wing, and regar[d] serious, articulate exponents of either with an equal contempt. Their position in each election is disinterested." The distinctions of Left, Right, and Centre were matters for politicians. The key to winning support from this

⁵⁶ Rose, "Going up and in between," 35 and Howell, "An economy for professionals," 21. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁵⁷ Rose, "Going up and in between," 35. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁵⁸ Rose, "Going up and in between," 35. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

group, Waugh argued from personal experience, was to show that “a Conservative government would enable them to trade in the Mini cars for Mini Coopers or that a Socialist government would almost certainly make them lose both.” It is unclear whether Waugh considered these purely acquisitive desires to be negative characteristics but he certainly thought that these voters could be bought. He concluded that the new middle class voted for the Liberals not because they shared their politics but because they believed Labour to have little influence and that “a Conservative government is too much concerned with other things to help them.”⁵⁹ In this view, the new middle classes were neither unreliable nor vindictive, but rather practiced instrumental politics.

While the Conservative Party relied on the classless rhetoric of the consumer when dealing with the middle classes as a whole, Rose did not believe that the mobile middle classes looked to politics “as a means of increasing material satisfactions.” Rose believed that they “retained traditional English respect for [the] social elite” because they “aspired to associate with the old elite.” But they also did not want to be seen as “pushy upstarts.” Their politics, however, were not easily deciphered because the mobile middle classes were also a conflicted group. “Their background, early education, and lack of capital” with which to start their lives, Rose wrote, pushed them away from the Tories. At the same time, their “occupation, later education, earnings and aspirations pushed them towards the Tories.” The Conservative Party could benefit from these attributes.

⁵⁹ Auberon Waugh, “Any old image,” *Crossbow* 6(21) (Oct. – Dec., 1962), 40. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

Education, according to Rose, was the key to social mobility for this group. It became a touchstone issue for the mobile middle classes, because they feared that their children would not have access to the same opportunities if they failed the 11-plus exam. Moreover, they wanted to be able to pay for their children's education, which proved challenging with the burden of taxation along with stagnant incomes.⁶⁰ Inflation, which undermined security of those who earned fixed salaries also proved especially troubling for the mobile middle classes because it "makes nonsense of their prudential ethic."⁶¹

Property Owning Democracy

In 1972, David Howell wrote an article in *The Spectator* proclaiming that, "[p]roperty is a supreme value. It is, after all, only the idea of defensible private property, whether vested in a person's wage-earning capacity or his owned assets, that distinguishes the free man from the slave." Howell believed that the Conservatives had failed to build a true property-owning democracy since 1945 beyond home-ownership and, as such, a confident middle class with a robust bourgeois culture was lacking in Britain. "If there is one single, unwavering aim which the Conservative Party should be ready to serve without any inner doubts or hesitations," he wrote, "it is to achieve the widest possible structure of ownership, whether of capital, land, bricks and mortar or other assets, and to encourage in the most vigorous ways possible the attitudes, values and culture which goes with this pattern of affairs."⁶² The significance of property ownership,

⁶⁰ Rose, "Going up and in between," 36, 37. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁶¹ Curran, "The new model bourgeoisie," 23. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁶² Unionist MP, Noel Skelton coined the term "property-owning democracy" in 1923. The idea came about because Skelton noticed an imbalance between the growing political rights of Britons

or more specifically, home ownership, was not lost on Bow Group contributors to *Crossbow*.

Writing in 1974, Angus Maude observed that the Tories had “encouraged ... all these young couples in the new Wimpey estates to undertake the responsibilities of home-ownership and hire-purchase commitments, with an explicit promise that growth would take care of it all for them.” The problem, according to Maude, was that these voters felt that the Party “left them with frozen incomes, an intolerable burden of mortgage interest and a credit squeeze on hire purchase.”⁶³ The result of these obstacles, along with the ongoing problem of building enough houses to meet demand, meant that home-ownership proved difficult to achieve. Bow Group contributors, however, believed in the centrality of the property-owning democracy to Conservative ideas.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the pursuit of home-ownership was one of the major sources of discontent amongst Party’s core supporters. From 1950 to 1970, the Conservative Party identified the aim of promoting a property-owning democracy in every election manifesto. In 1951, the Conservatives proclaimed home ownership as the key to improving work, family life, health and education. In 1964, the Conservatives

and their “rights to private property.” In order to stay relevant amid such social and political changes and combat the allure of socialist offerings in social welfare, he thought it was important to widen the experience of owning property to more people. This concept became a central tenet of Conservative thinking throughout the twentieth century. In the post-Second World War era, and again during Margaret Thatcher’s administrations, the rhetoric of “property-owning democracy” dominated Conservative campaigning. Matthew Francis, “‘A Crusade to Enfranchise the Many’: Thatcherism and the ‘Property-Owning Democracy,’” *Twentieth Century British History* 23(2), (2012), 276. In an early *Crossbow* article, Geoffrey Howe attributed the concept of “property-owning democracy” to Anthony Eden even though Harold Macmillan, as Minister of Housing, managed the project to build 300,000 houses a year. Geoffrey Howe, “Home Owners All?” *Crossbow* 2(1) (Autumn 1958), 25. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/1.

⁶³ Maude, “What Tories must do now,” 9. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/8.

increased their yearly target of newly built houses to 400,000 to meet the “needs of more prosperous, younger marrying, longer living and fast increasing population.”⁶⁴ They promised to not only build more houses but they also offered to make loans available to purchase older homes (1959) and even to aid with deposit payments on a new house (1966).⁶⁵ Home ownership was a key marker of middle-class respectability for both the Party and members of the traditional middle classes. Indeed, as discussed in the next chapter, home ownership became one of the major qualifiers for belonging in the suburban communities of Hertfordshire where longer-term middle-class residents, mostly Conservative supporters, resisted the influx of renter migrants from London.

In 1958, Geoffrey Howe examined the merits of promoting greater opportunities for home ownership.⁶⁶ This Tory policy, which he pointed out the Labour Party had started to copy in 1955, encouraged “better maintenance of house property,” helped promote a sense of “security and pride,” and, most importantly, instilled the habit of saving over “spending all of their income on consumer goods.” The Tories encouraged home-ownership because it was “the most popular and characteristic manifestation of thrift and industry on which to found an expanding economy and a rising standard of

⁶⁴ F.W.S. Craig, ed., *British General Election Manifestos, 1900 – 1970* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1975), 250-251.

⁶⁵ Craig, *British General Election Manifestos, 1900 – 1970*, 147, 172, 195-96, 218-219, 250-251, 284 – 85, 334-335.

⁶⁶ Howe’s Conservatism was not as evident in this article as in a piece he wrote for *Crossbow* in 1964. With regard to increasing productivity in housing construction, he wrote “For houses, as for other commodities, efficient and economic way of meeting demand is to let the free market have its head. The argument is, indeed, supported by experience in the one free sector of the housing market to have developed since 1951: with the abolition of building licensing and other controls, the production of houses for sale has steadily moved ahead.” Geoffrey Howe, “Where We Stand: The Housing Problem,” *Crossbow* 7(28) (July – September 1964), 25. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/1.

living.” Howe counselled, however, that the Tories should not overly encourage home-buying since it could degrade the meaning and experience of home-ownership. Still, the “actual cost of buying a house could and should be reduced.”⁶⁷ Another contributor, writing in 1958, shared Howe’s views stating, “Every ambitious young man building a career for himself in Great Britain wants to look forward to a time when he will be the owner of his own home. If all they can foresee is year after year of council tenentry our most promising young men will be driven to seek refuge more enlightened parts of the Commonwealth.” He concluded, “[o]wning ... a small piece of land is an essential foundation of a responsible society.”⁶⁸ These two contributions urging for easier access to home-ownership do not appear wildly revolutionary or progressive in their aims. The property-owning democracy was a common trope of post-war Conservative policy. Perhaps, in response to the by-election result in Tonbridge and criticism of lackluster policies (one critique in *The Spectator* branded the 1955 general election manifesto as mainly “drivel about Britain [being] strong and free” and “a property-owning democracy is the prop upon which it leans most heavily”), the Bow Group wanted to see the Tories be more aggressive in promoting this area of policy.⁶⁹ In both examples, home-ownership, unlike cars or holidays abroad, was spoken of in terms of pride, responsibility and thrift rather than as an act of conspicuous consumerism. While neither contributor chose to frame housing policy as a ploy to win votes from the middle classes, the rhetoric

⁶⁷ Howe, “Home Owners All?” *Crossbow* 2(1) (Autumn 1958), 26, 27, 28. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/1.

⁶⁸ John Hemingway, “Housing for the Future,” *Crossbow* 3(9) (Autumn 1959), 23. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/1.

⁶⁹ “Westminster Commentary,” *The Spectator* (14 August 1958), 6, accessed 22 September 2015, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/15th-august-1958/6/westminster-commentary>.

draws on the same terms used frequently to describe the virtues of the “old” propertied middle classes seen in the examples above. In endorsing Conservative Party policy that would bring about more home-ownership, these contributors wanted to connect those groups who aspired to home-ownership (lower middle classes, young married couples and affluent workers) with the established, propertied middle classes that tended to support the Conservative Party. These virtues were certainly those that they most associated with Conservatism and endeavoured to cultivate in their supporters.

Chairman of the Bow Group (1963) and Librarian, John Macgregor, penned an article in a 1964 issue of *Crossbow*, which again urged the Party to make home-ownership a “realistic proposition and not an impossible dream for young marrieds.”⁷⁰ Following a narrow general election defeat, Macgregor’s appeal to the Conservatives to make home-ownership more accessible could be seen as part of an effort to make their stint in Opposition a short one. According to Macgregor, owning a home was economical due to all of the tax benefits offered. More and more people were aware of the economic incentives and, as such, home-ownership had exploded in popularity. Macgregor posited that this was the first time that the “constant Tory theme” of the property owning democracy had “real meaning.” Owning property, Macgregor argued, was, of course, one of the “best ways of promoting self-responsibility, and an incentive to high standards of property maintenance.” Macgregor, like Howe, draws on the themes of pride and responsibility to describe the benefits of home-ownership. For Macgregor, however,

⁷⁰ John Macgregor, “A Roof of One’s Own,” *Crossbow* 8(29) (October – December, 1964), 35. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

home-ownership was not simply a way to bolster Conservative values. He was not interested in promoting this policy to keep the support of the Party's core supporters. He argued that home-ownership was "the best guarantee of individual liberty against an all powerful State." He warned that British society in the 1950s and 1960s was being changed by a high degree of social mobility and the waning ability of religion, family, and community to "discipline" individuals. The ownership of property, Macgregor argued, was one way to "injec[t] attitudes of social responsibility into the fiber of the rootless generations." Educated young people and even "Mods" and "Rockers," Macgregor wrote, would one day be "young marrieds," and he welcomed the "constructive changes" that home-ownership and all of its peripheral activities, including "opening a bank account," and "negotiating over mortgages and insurance, having a plan for rate and maintenance payments" would bring. Such activities induced "a more profound change in attitude and character than exhortation or education ever could."⁷¹

Macgregor's observations, made just as the Swingin' Sixties really came to life, were no doubt in response to the perceived dangers of an emergent adolescent culture that featured pop music, mini-skirts and unruly students.⁷² During the Easter weekend of 1964, prior to the publication of this article, a group of teenagers, both local and from London, wreaked havoc on the seaside resort town of Clacton in Essex. *The Mirror* labeled the young people involved as the "Wild Ones" in their exaggerated reports and ignited fears about unruly youth behaviour. More telling, Macgregor identifies "Mods"

⁷¹ Macgregor, "A Roof of One's Own," 35. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

⁷² Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900 – 2000* 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 190-193 and Sandbrook, *White Heat*, chapter 11 and 13

and “Rockers” as the elements that needed corralling into a more responsible, and respectable, outlook. The Mods were affluent middle-class youths (and those that aspired to join the middle classes) who frequented jazz clubs and cafes, rode around on scooters, and needed amphetamines to power through their social life. Rockers, in contrast, were more often working-class youths who rode motorcycles, preferred the surroundings of “cheap petrol station cafes” and “projected an aggressive masculinity.”⁷³ Both elements, even though they were sworn class enemies, represented a political threat for Conservatives like Macgregor. Home-ownership, the chance to have a stake in the community and nation, would draw those errant middle-class youths and perhaps woo waffling working-class Rockers towards the life and ways, and politics, of “young marrieds.” Macgregor does not explicitly state that the Party faced a threat from so-called mobile middle classes or affluent workers, like those described above, but his descriptions of “rootless generations,” “educated young people,” and the impact of “social mobility” are similar to the descriptions of the new middle classes that so fascinated the Bow Group.

The Bow Group believed in the idea of the property-owning democracy throughout the 1950s and 1960s and supported the Party’s efforts to make home-ownership more accessible to a wider section of the population. The language used to describe the effects of home-ownership was that used to describe the hallowed virtues of the old, propertied middle classes who had, historically, supported the Conservatives solidly. Bow Group contributors to *Crossbow* did not deviate in their belief that owning a

⁷³ Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 203-204, 207, 208.

bit of land and having a stake in the community and nation would help shape attitudes, ideas and politics of young people and the new middle classes in a way that would benefit the Conservative Party.

Young Conservatives

Bow Group members differed from Young Conservatives (YCs) mainly in that members were mostly university-educated individuals who held professional occupations. In an effort to have the organization seen as a serious and scholarly body that was different from the YCs, who they considered insulated, conformist and prisoners of their old middle-class views, the Bow Group challenged conventional modes of political participation within the Party. They dismissed canvassing, campaigning, attending meetings and socializing, and instead privileged intellectual contributions. The Bow Group believed that these activities were not things with which members of the middle classes, with all of its sub-sections – both new and old – should relate to. The YCs represented a relic of the past and appealed to only a sub-section of the Party's core supporters that already voted for the Conservative Party. In contrast, the Bow Group believed it had a greater capacity to speak to the experiences of the new middle classes who earned incomes and status through educational credentials. Aligning themselves and the Party with these new middle classes would help the Party secure their support as well as reshape their own understandings of their middle class identity.

In 1961, Conservative M.P. Julian Critchley observed that the Conservatives in Westminster were no longer just businessmen, barristers or country squires. They were

“young professionals” who either “campaign[ed] among Young Conservatives, or scribbled for the Bow Group.”⁷⁴ There were two distinct paths to Westminster during this period and the Bow Group did not hide the fact that they believed their route, and the corresponding training involved, to be the superior. The Bow Group’s thoughts on the YCs, their role and function, revealed a conflict within the Conservative Party over the type of “middle classness” that would dictate ideas and outlook that was perhaps not as obvious in policy discussions.

Secretary of the Bow Group and Kensington and Chelsea Borough Councillor, Richard Bing reflected on the reasons that the Conservatives failed to capture the interests of younger people. With “old age pensioners and a few Young Conservatives” along with “retired military gentlemen or stockbrokers,” at the helm, the atmosphere at the local constituency level, according to Bing, failed to inspire. He continued “young marrieds want a brighter atmosphere, and an even spread of the age groups would help.” According to Bing, there were few opportunities for ambitious individuals to thrive at the local level. In many cases, “the dead hand of raffles and jumble sales takes over.”⁷⁵ The YCs, as part of this dreary local setting, did not help matters.

The YCs were responsible for “recruit[ing] large numbers of young people, aged fifteen to thirty, to membership in constituency associations to provide a pool of workers

⁷⁴ Julian Critchley, “Westminster Commentary – Principles of Conservatism,” *The Spectator* (1 December 1961), 6, accessed 22 September 2015, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/1st-december-1961/6/westminster-commentary>.

⁷⁵ Richard Bing, “Where have all the young men gone ...” *Crossbow* 8(31) (April-June 1965), 9, 10. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

for organizational activities.”⁷⁶ These young people helped canvass between and during election periods and they attended local CA meetings. They were foot soldiers in an age where meeting voters on their doorstep still had some impact. Negative stereotypes, however, depicted the YCs as little more than a playground for the young, idle and frivolous of the “established” middle classes. With members often leaving before the age of 30, usually due to marriage, the YCs also became known as a marriage market for the middle classes.⁷⁷ Conservative MPs who later shared their experience as YCs contributed to these types of depictions. Conservative MP Julian Critchley, for example, recounted his time as a YC spent on meeting members of the opposite sex rather than political education and indoctrination.⁷⁸ In contrast, the Bow Group recruited members from a pool of university graduates, up to the age of 35, who wanted to engage in political thinking with the hopes of influencing policy. Both groups recruited “young” people, relative to most rank-and-file Conservative members, but each organization utilized their talents in different ways, which represented different sets of values and outlooks. The similarities between the YCs and Bow Group, however, meant that it was easy for contemporary political commentators to draw comparisons and create tensions and resentments by measuring their respective influence or popularity.⁷⁹ Some YCs resented the Bow Group and blamed them for stunting their organization’s growth and

⁷⁶ Rose, “The Bow Group’s role in British Politics,” 874.

⁷⁷ Bing, “Where have all the young men gone ...” 9. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

⁷⁸ Julian Critchley, *Westminster Blues* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1985), 15-18.

⁷⁹ Our Political Correspondent, “Young Blood in Conservative Counsels,” *Times* [London, England] 12 April 1960. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 27 Aug. 2013.

encroaching on their role within the Party.⁸⁰ Rose, however, describes the resentment held by the YCs for the Bow Group, owing to their relative prestige and status, as a feeling held by a minority of members.⁸¹

Throughout the 1960s, the Bow Group wrote a number of articles that evaluated the state of and place of the YCs in the Conservative Party. In these articles, the Bow Group threw subtle jabs at the YCs. Howell, for example, called its members “dull conformists.”⁸² According to Bow Group member Richard Bing, many more Britons now saw themselves as “middle class,” but the Young Conservatives did not represent this growing section of the electorate or their politics.⁸³ YCs’ leaders were “drawn mainly from the established middle class,” and the group included, “too few of the class migrants, the pacemakers, the non-conformists, and the new graduates” amongst their ranks.⁸⁴ The YCs leadership and membership, Bing observed seemed untouched by wider social changes that had already transformed the way people voted in Britain. In short, the YCs was an antiquated organization and out of touch with British voters. This problem was not localized within the YCs but was a larger problem of local political work. Bing did compliment the “tremendous service” the YCs performed for the Conservatives by maintaining a “national network of congenial social clubs.” But, the problem was that YC

⁸⁰ Barr, *The Bow Group*, 66.

⁸¹ Rose, “The Bow Group’s role in British politics,” 874.

⁸² David Howell, “Editor of Crossbow, response to letters,” *Crossbow* 5(19) (Spring, 1962), 53. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

⁸³ Richard Bing, Secretary of the Bow Group and a Kensington and Chelsea Borough Councillor. He served as Chairman of the South Kensington Young Conservatives and Assistant Editor of *Crossbow*.

⁸⁴ Richard Bing, “The YC decline?” *Crossbow* 5(18) (New Year, 1962) Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2.

membership was comprised of those who stayed with the organization for about two years before moving on.⁸⁵ “Members come in at an earlier age – and leave earlier; they go as soon as they are married and they do not produce many fresh ideas.” Bing condescended the YCs especially when he advised them to give greater importance to ideas in their work like the University Conservative Associations did.⁸⁶

Bing’s piece might not have been intended to ridicule the YCs, but his comments regarding its membership and the social nature of the organization’s activity made it seem like a less serious and important organization because it was not directly involved in developing the Party’s ideas and attitudes. Bing concluded that the over-representation of the “established middle classes” in the organization’s membership limited the appeal of their activities, values, attitudes, and politics. The YCs did not represent those voters who newly considered themselves “middle class.” The Conservative Party, as such, could not fully represent the growing middle classes in Britain if it maintained the views and ideas of traditional core supporters who valued, for example, property and hierarchy. The complexities of the so-called new middle classes will be examined further below, but

⁸⁵ Richard Bing, “Where have all the young men gone ...” *Crossbow* 8(31) (April-June 1965) Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA [PUB 195/4].

⁸⁶ Richard Bing, “The YC decline?” *Crossbow* 5(18) (New Year, 1962) Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/2. Bing was not the only one who felt that the constituency association was ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of modern politics. Deputy Chairman of the National CPC Committee wrote, “the reason for the out-datedness of nearly all political associations is simple. Party organisations in the past grew up slowly out of some social need to orbit around Lady Bountiful and her garden parties ... This type of organisation should now be superseded as the increased complexity of politics brings a greater sophistication on the part of the electorate.” Reginald Watts, “Outdated and Stereotyped,” *Crossbow* 9(34) (Jan.– Mar., 1966), 15. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/4.

Bing's article represents an attempt to understand the changes taking places in the middle classes that made them an unreliable source of support.

The most controversial issue of *Crossbow* featured, on its cover, a dark-haired model, wearing a stylish bob-haircut, revealing her lingerie under an unbuttoned white man's shirt. The leading article enclosed asked, "What are Young Conservatives really like?" The image alone conjured up the worst stereotypes that plagued the YCs and it managed, as intended, to capture a great deal of national attention – in the papers as well as on television. People wrote in to *Crossbow* expressing both distaste and support. The journal reported that, "Right up until the last day of the (Annual) Conference, ten days after the first appearance the cover was still being talked about (and being reproduced in newspapers)."⁸⁷ The article inside, by barrister David Walder, proved equally provocative.

Walder's article on the YCs was, in contrast to Bing's, purposely antagonistic. He did not see the point of the YC organization and lambasted their activities. "A great deal of trouble lies in the basic illogicality of having Young Conservatives at all." The Party, after all, did not have sub-groups for "blue-eyed, red-haired or fat Conservatives." Aside

⁸⁷ Barr, *The Bow Group*, 66; "Ladbroke – Covergirl," *Crossbow* 11(42) (Jan.– Mar.1968, 6. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA [PUB 195/5]. In the following issue, Bow Group editors addressed all of the "fuss" about the cover. They described the process, "Inspiration for the cover came late one evening in the office of the Managing Editor. An awful calendar on the wall provided it. A girl on the *Sunday Times Magazine* art staff agreed to pose for the picture, which was taken by a bright young fashion photographer, Rayment Kirby, in his Bayswater Studio ... The girl was wearing tights, and was by modern standards a long way from being unclothed. She was not a Young Conservative either." Most of those who opposed the cover were "disgruntled rank and file Tories" as well as a branch of the Monday Club in the North West Area. The Bow Group remained unrepentant for the risqué cover arguing that it was more important people read the magazine.

from age, which he called an “accident of birth,” these Tories had little in common. As Bing observed, Walder found that the YCs might have worked at their local branch by canvassing or campaigning but the members were not thinkers and did not exert any influence on the development of the Party’s ideas. He wrote, “Politically cerebrally oriented persons can find other outlets, CPC, PEST and even the Bow Group.” Walder was equally flippant concerning the YCs’ general social class make-up, writing, “Young Conservatives en masse are but Old Conservatives in their youth with all their virtues and vices.” Walder concluded that the group’s socially homogenous background bred “conformity” rather than radical thinking. He wrote,

Regrettable though it may be, Conservative activists in a constituency tend to be uppish to lowish middle class. Within the young Conservatives there is not even this breadth of mutation. They are the very essence of the middle middle class. No Etonians, no manual workers.

At the level of national and area leadership, YCs also shared a number of characteristics. YC members were typically, “non-graduates,” and “all have reasonably geographically static professions and occupations” Walder observed that the YC’s “separate class and age composition provides a fairly comfortable insulated structure up which the moderately able can clamber to some degree of renown and responsibility.”⁸⁸

Bing and Walder, like the majority of members in the Bow Group, might have shared a similar social class background as members of the YCs, but they saw themselves and their work as completely different. Bing and Walder both rejected the conventional

⁸⁸ David Walder, “Young Conservative Identikit,” *Crossbow* 11(4) (October–December, 1967), 24, 26, 27. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/5.

experience of local political activity and the air of privilege and insular culture that dominated. Instead, they valued educational credentials and cerebral activity over being the Party's foot soldiers. Both Bing and Walder suggested that they, as members of the Bow Group, had a better understanding of the changes taking place in society, especially within the middle classes, and could better represent the Party to younger voters. Moreover, as Walder asserted, the socially homogenous make-up, the limited education of its members and the narrow range of occupations held meant that the YCs could only contribute to Party thinking in a limited way if at all. Walder's criticisms, like Bing's, represent an effort to consciously redefine the role and meaning of their middle-class backgrounds.

Five years after Walder's inflammatory article, MP Nicholas Scott assessed whether the YCs had made any changes. Scott noted that the YCs continued to experience a decline in membership. Young people had more money in their pockets and alternative sources of entertainment that have "lured [them] away from political organizations." For the estimated 40,000 members in 1973, the "YC social remain[ed] active," especially in rural areas. Scott also remarked that unlike those YCs derided by Walder, this generation was "more radical, more trenchant, more 'hard' in their political attitudes than their political predecessors." He observed that the YCs actively organized around certain issues like housing, for example, and worked with other youth movements. They were "a totally integrated and accepted part of the total youth movement of the country." Scott concluded that the YCs were a much smaller organization than before but that they were, "more aggressive politically and more determined to see that young people [were] aware of the

reality of the contemporary Tory party ...”⁸⁹ Scott adopted a much less hostile tone than Walder. Indeed, it would appear that he was pleasantly surprised with what he found. This was a group that had experienced a significant decline in numbers but had reinvented their work and role within the Party and aligned themselves with parallel youth movements.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Conservative Party was confronted with increasingly vocal and discontented members of middle classes who expected it to govern in their interests. Within political discussions at the national level, the demands of the middle classes were lumped in with those of consumers, who were united and motivated by their economic position. The Bow Group did not accept these discussions or images of the middle classes. Instead, they examined the Party’s existing approach and offered suggestions on how to better craft their message.

As younger university educated Conservatives, the Bow Group offered diverse perspectives on the Conservative Party's problem with the middle classes. The examples above show that they did not merely assume that the middle classes were those traditional propertied professionals, ensconced in their suburban villas, demanding more tax relief though they did affirm that the Conservatives had alienated this section since 1945. They also identified a consistent strain of anti-working-class sentiment that coloured middle-class anxieties. While it worried about the importance of the traditional middle classes in

⁸⁹ Nicholas Scott, “Have the YCs really changed?” *Crossbow* 16(61) (Jan.,1973), 26, 28. Oxford, Bodleian Library, CPA: PUB 195/7.

the 1950s, the Bow Group was increasingly open to the idea of the new middle classes and the role they could play in the future of the Party. These class migrants, with a complicated relationship to their working-class origins, had a combination of education and skills, were upwardly mobile and did not have established political loyalties. The Bow Group believed it would be worth it for the Party to pursue and secure their support. In the examples explored above, Bow Group members believed that postwar centrist / progressive Conservatism, with minor adjustments, rather than liberal free market Right wing ideas was what these voters wanted. Home-ownership remained an important theme as it served to promote responsibility and individualism as well as a marker that distinguished those middle classes from the manual workings classes. Throughout this chapter, the image of the middle classes as the consumer was by no means absent from discussions. Contributors to *Crossbow* acknowledged that the middle classes aspired to buy homes, cars, appliances, and pay for school fees. But acquiring material comforts was not the only thing that influenced their votes, which deviated from the understanding that the Conservatives held at the level of the national party. The Bow Group's rivalry with, and views on, the YCs, revealed a conscious effort to project a different image of middle classness to the political world. The members of the Bow Group placed value on education and expertise and wanted to contribute intellectually to the Party. They saw their contribution as fundamentally different from that of the YCs, which they felt represented privilege and insularity that was dominant at the local level but incongruent with the pattern of social changes since the war. The tensions between the two groups represented efforts to redefine the role and meaning of their own middle-class

backgrounds. The Bow Group might not have solved the Conservative Party's problem with the middle classes but their discussions reveal that the Party's young thinkers were probing conventional definitions and exploring new conceptions of the middle classes.

Chapter Five

The Case of South West Herts, Gilbert Longden and Conservative Discussions on the Middle Classes (1951 – 1974)

There are now more than 7 million salaried workers in Britain. Eleven and a half million people, almost half the work force, earn between £700 - £7,500 a year. For almost all these, indeed for a large part of the whole work force, the conditions of work, as well as the conditions of life away from work, have since 1951 changed beyond recognition. There are the new adjustments to new status to be made; new and shadowy threats to security to be put in perspective; new opportunities but also new anxieties. What ought the Conservatives say to these people?¹

The focus of this chapter is the political activity of the Conservative Party in the county of Hertfordshire with special attention to South West Hertfordshire and their Member of Parliament, Gilbert Longden (1950 – 1974). This particular constituency on the periphery of London was largely suburban and rural in geography and culture. The inhabitants in this area typically identified as members of the established middle classes and voted Conservative. During his career, Longden enjoyed comfortable majorities that fluctuated between 20% (1951) and 13% (1970) with two significant dips into the single digits in 1964 (9.82%) and 1966 (5.14%).² In the 1930s, idyllic Hertfordshire was the site of several Garden City experiments. In the period after 1945, new towns emerged followed by the construction of council estates to house those in London living in war-damaged and decrepit accommodations. In this staunchly Conservative area, rank-and-file members expressed concern regarding their share of affluence but consumer issues did

¹ *Tory Policy for the General Election, A Series of Leading Articles* (Reprinted from the *Daily Telegraph*, August 1964) LSE Library, Longden 3/8.

² F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Results, 1950-1970* (Chichester: Political Reference Publications, 1971), 408.

not dominate their attentions. Constituents, in fact, were acutely sensitive to their class status and perceived local social changes, especially in the form of newcomers from London who lived on council estates, as threats to their dominance and political values. Even though Longden outwardly preached unity and classlessness in this period, he shared his constituents' suspicion of the new sections of the middle classes and newly affluent workers.

After outlining Longden's career as MP for South West Herts, this chapter will establish the range of concerns held by constituents in South West Herts using their correspondence with Longden as well as his own speeches throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This evidence will reveal that the Party's predominant conception of the middle classes as consumers, who were concerned about their experience of prosperity, ignored anxieties concerning a plethora of other issues that exercised the middle classes. These concerns included: Britain's role as a leader on the international stage, the significance of monarchy, preserving high standards of living without substantial taxation or intervention from the Government, and the ability to choose private means of education. In addressing these concerns, Longden's responses adhered mostly to the Party's position that it represented national rather than sectional interests, but his constituents continually engaged with the Party using class-based rhetoric. There was a disconnect, therefore, between Conservative supporters and the Party in this Conservative stronghold constituency.

Given the importance of the Conservatives' rhetoric about a property-owning democracy, the chapter will then explore the Conservatives' actual reactions to the

development of some local housing estates, at both at the level of municipal councils and at the CA level. Class antagonisms erupted over some seemingly minor issues on local councils, while in St. Albans, Conservatives tried to bridge the political divide with trade union members by organizing a District Council of Trade Unionists (DCTU) and factory groups. The effort to create such an organization could be evidence that local Tories were aware of the variations in workers' political allegiances, especially given the belief that the allegiances of "affluent workers" could be won due to *embourgeoisement*. But the strong local mistrust of left-wing political elements and opposition to council estate residents manifest in local municipal politics in 1952, more likely signals an attempt to control perceived political threats rather than simply win the votes of council estate residents. South West Hertfordshire's longer-term residents believed that newcomers from London, who lived on the estate, threatened to change their socially homogenous community. Longer-term residents were concerned about whether new council estate residents "fit" in their community and displayed judgmental preconceptions about their new neighbours' behaviours and family life.³ Even though local Conservatives continually claimed not to be practitioners of sectional class-based politics, they relied on class-based rhetoric to express their suspicions and set themselves apart from estate residents.

³ The ITV sitcom, *George and Mildred* (1976 -1979) depicted, albeit in a comical manner, the type of resistance and barriers to the working classes who moved into more affluent neighbourhoods. The examples discussed in this chapter take place largely in the 1950s and 1960s, but the theme clearly resonated with the TV-viewing audience in the 1970s. See Steven Fielding, *A State of Play: British Politics on Screen, Stage and Page from Anthony Trollope to The Thick of It* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 162 – 166.

South West Hertfordshire & Gilbert Longden

The county of Hertfordshire is located in eastern England surrounded by Greater London to the south, Essex to the east, Bedfordshire to the north, and Buckinghamshire to the west. Following 1885, the county was divided into 4 single member constituencies: St. Albans, Hertford, Hitchin, and Watford. In 1918, Hemel Hempstead county constituency was created in the western region (although it became disestablished in the redistribution of 1983). Political boundaries were once again revised by the Representation of the People Act in 1948, which led to the creation of South West Hertfordshire from a portion of Watford's southwest border. East Hertfordshire was created for the 1955 general election (also abolished in 1983).⁴ Hertfordshire in general had both rural and suburban characteristics and, following the war, experienced population growth due to migration largely from London. The proximity of the county to Greater London made it an ideal location for commuters and the site of postwar L.C.C. housing developments built to accommodate those in crowded and war-damaged lodgings

⁴ F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1914*, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Parliamentary Research Services 1983), 371-376; *British Parliamentary Results, 1950-1970*, 1st ed. (Chichester: Political Reference Publications, 1971), 402-408 and *British Parliamentary Results, 1974-1983* (Chichester: Political Reference Services, 1984), 144-146. Larry Witherell refers to "East Hertfordshire" in his case study on the conflicts between Henry Page Croft and Abel Henry Smith over free trade and tariff reform. Smith, more precisely, represented the constituency of Hertford (1900-1910) in this period. Witherell's study, however, shows that grassroots activities reflected wider national debates and there was, in fact, a robust "radicalized right wing" element working at the constituency level. See Larry Witherell, "Political Cannibalism Among Edwardian Conservatives: Henry Page Croft, the Confederacy and the Campaign for East Hertfordshire, 1906-1910," *Twentieth Century British History* 8(1) (1997), 1-26.

in the northern regions of the city.⁵ The re-housing of London residents to parts of Hertfordshire became a source for tensions, as examples below will illustrate, and residents framed their fear and suspicion regarding newcomers and the perceived changes to the county's social composition in class-based language.

With the exception of brief Labour breakthroughs in Watford and Hitchen, voters in this county voted Conservative.⁶ The Conservative M.P.'s in this area represented a range of the Party's ideas. In St. Albans, for example, two longstanding members represented Conservative voters. John Grimston, who became the 6th Earl of Verulam, was Oxford educated, an RAF pilot, and the director and general manager of the Enfield

⁵ The county's proximity to London has influenced both the people and development of the area. One author described how Hertfordshire was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, "the home of persons of many nations and tongues, and only in smaller villages ... are there left any traits of local character or peculiarities of idiom." Additionally, Hertfordshire boasts of "many fine roads ..." that, "gradually converge toward their common goal – London." The area is abundant in wheat, barley, oats and Swede turnips. "Watercress is extensively cultivated, enormous quantities are sent to London from St. Albans ... and many other districts." Herbert W. Tompkins, *Hertfordshire*, 2nd.ed. (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1922), 49, 52, 55-56.

⁶ Members of Parliament for Hertfordshire are as follows: Barnet – R. Maudling (1950 – 1970), Barnet was transferred to London in 1965; Hertfordshire, East – D.C. Walker-Smith (1955-1974); Hemel Hempstead – Viscountess Davidson (Conservative, 1945-1959), J.H. Allason (Conservative, 1959 – 1970); Hertford – D.C. Walker Smith (1950 – 1955), Lord Balniel (1955 – 1970); Hitchen – N.T.L. Fisher (Conservative, 1950 – 1955), W.F.M. Maddan (Conservative, 1955 – 1964), Mrs.S.V.T.B Williams (Labour, 1964 – 1970); St. Albans – J. Grimston (Conservative, 1950-1959), V.H. Goodhew (Conservative, 1959-1970); South West Hertfordshire – G.J.M. Longden (Conservative, 1950-1970); Watford – J. Freeman (Labour, 1945-1951), F.W. Farey-Jones (Conservative, 1955-1964), R.H. Tuck (Labour, 1964-1970), designated a borough constituency in 1955. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1914*, 3rd ed., 371-376; *British Parliamentary Results, 1950-1970*, 1st ed., 402-408 and *British Parliamentary Results, 1974-1983*, 144-146. Also see *The Times House of Commons 1950* (London: The Times Office, 1950), 186-187; *The Times House of Commons 1951* (London: The Times Office, 1951), 132-134; *The Times House of Commons 1955* (London: The Times Office, 1955), 154-156; *The Times House of Commons 1966* (London: The Times Office, 1950), 31, 114, 116 – 118; *The Times Guide to the House of Commons 1970* (London: Times Newspapers Limited, 1970), 126, 128 – 130, 194; *The Times Guide to the House of Commons 1974* (London: Times Newspapers Limited, 1974), 144, 146-147 150, 220.

Rolling Mills before he began his political life. He was considered to have a “deep understanding and knowledge of industrial affairs” and was remembered for advocating proportional representation in Parliament.⁷ He even suggested that St. Albans consider a “trade unionist candidate” to replace him.⁸ When Grimston withdrew from the Commons, the voters of St. Albans selected Victor Goodhew, a director of his family’s catering company.⁹ Goodhew was an early member of the right-wing Monday Club. He was highly critical of Iain Macleod’s policies in Africa and supported Enoch Powell’s immigration policies. He also advocated capital punishment and supported Ian Smith’s rule in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).¹⁰ According to *The Times*, Goodhew was “never destined for high office because of his extreme views,” but he was a “respected backbencher” and a “standard bearer for unfashionable causes.”¹¹

Gilbert Longden became Conservative M.P. for South West Hertfordshire in the 1950 wave that brought in a crop of younger, progressive-minded Tories who

⁷ “The Earl of Verulam,” *Times* [London, England] 17 April 1973. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 30 Sept. 2014 and “St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association (Annual Report, 1952).” Courtesy of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS) (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/17).

⁸ “Special Executive Meeting,” (21/2/1959) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/11).

⁹ Goodhew received a majority of votes (46 votes) from local members over his competitors including a laboratory technician, E.J. Brown (15 votes); and journalist, William Rees-Mogg (3 votes). Special Executive Committee Minutes (21 February 1959). Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185).

¹⁰ John Barnes, “Sir Victor Goodhew,” *The Independent* 19 October 2006. (accessed 30 September 2014) and Andrew Roth, “Sir Victor Goodhew: Tory Apologist for the Rhodesian regime of UDI leader Ian Smith,” *The Guardian* 27 October 2006 (accessed 30 September 2014).

¹¹ “Sir Victor Goodhew,” *Times* [London, England] 6 November 2006. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 30 Sept. 2014.

spearheaded the Party's renewal.¹² Longden was born in Castle Heath (Durham) and educated at Haileybury, Emmanuel College, Cambridge and the Sorbonne. Before he embarked on his political career at the age of 47, he read law and worked in India as secretary of Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd. He left India because he found the climate disagreeable.¹³ Longden also had a career in the armed forces, where he served with the 36th Division in Burma and earned the rank of Major during the Second World War. He was involved in the Arakan Corridor campaign and the fall of Mandalay. Before he was chosen to represent South West Hertfordshire, he unsuccessfully contested Morpeth (Northumberland) in 1945 though he stayed on in that constituency for some time to help establish two Young Conservative (YC) branches.

Longden was secure in his position as M.P. for South West Hertfordshire. He won the constituency in 1950 with a majority of 8,695, which represented 55.4% of the votes. In 1955, the majority dipped to 6,969, which reflected a lower turnout and gains for the Labour Party.¹⁴ These results were surprising given that at national level, the Conservative Party increased their majority in Parliament while Labour floundered. It should be noted, however, that the Conservative Party's overall vote fell by "almost half a million" but Labour's vote fell by a whopping million and a half. Heading into the general election of 1955, the Tories were riding a wave of confidence: the Party performed well at municipal elections between 1950 and 1955, rationing ended in 1954,

¹² "Class of 1950," South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association (December 1954) LSE Library, Longden 1/3.

¹³ "South West Herts," *Observer* (13/1/1950) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

¹⁴ Craig, *British Parliamentary Results, 1950-1970*, 408.

and Anthony Eden succeeded Churchill in April, 1955. Conservative victory was a “foregone conclusion” and the Party earned an overall majority of 60 seats.¹⁵ With the emergence of a Liberal candidate in 1959, Longden increased his majority to 10, 237 with 50.8% of the votes. In 1964, Longden’s majority was reduced to 6,071 but he managed to capture 45.7 % of the vote. His majority was reduced further still in 1966 to 3,192 (although this also represented 45.7% of the vote), which reflected Labour gains from voters who lived on local estates. Results in 1966 prompted Longden to galvanize his supporters in 1970 with warnings, reported in the *Watford Observer*, that the seat had, in his mind, become marginal.¹⁶ Longden’s threats proved successful as he secured his position once again in 1970 by increasing his majority to 8,447, which represented 50.4% of the vote.¹⁷ Longden’s narrow victory in 1966 mirrored the Party’s national electoral trends that strengthened Wilson’s hold on office, but Longden’s ability to ultimately keep his Labour rival at bay speaks to the strong tradition of Conservatism in this constituency. Longden served as a backbencher until he retired at the age of 72 in 1974. He made no great splashes but served as the chair or member of a number of important committees in Parliament and he was also a founding, and the longest serving, member of the One

¹⁵ Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *A History of British Elections since 1689* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 166-167.

¹⁶ “Marginal seat” *Observer* (16 June 1970) and “150 words on progress of election campaign so far by Mr. Gilbert Longden, Conservative Candidate for South West Herts, 15 June 1970” LSE Library, Longden 3/10.

¹⁷ Craig, *British Parliamentary Results, 1950-1970*, 408. In 1964, the results were: Electorate - 74, 502, Turnout – 83%, C 28,308 (45.7%), Lab 22,237(36.0), Lib 11, 301 (18.3%). In 1966, the results were Electorate - 74, 777, Turnout – 83.1%, C 28,378 (45.7%), Lab 25,186,237 (40.5%), Lib 8,596 (13.8).

Nation Group.¹⁸ He helped author two of the organization's most significant publications, *Change is Our Ally* (1955) and *The Responsible Society* (1959). He is on record as an "enthusiastic European." In contrast, he also advocated legislation to control immigration, stood as one of Powell's supporters following his notorious anti-immigration "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968 and voted against the third reading of the 1968 Race Relations Act.¹⁹ His Obituary in *The Times* described him as an "extreme moderate on the backbenches" and as "typify[ing] all that was best in the Conservative Party of his day."

¹⁸ Also served as Chairman of the Education Committee (1956-1958) and of the Foreign Affairs Committee (1960-1961) of the Party in the House of Commons and as a member of the Executive Committee of the 1922 Committee. He served as Hon. Secretary of the Federation of University Conservative and Unionist Associations from 1959 – 1965 and Hon. Secretary of the National Advisory Committee on Education. He was also the Vice-Chairman of the all-Party Select Committee on Education. His work in foreign relations included, representative to the Council of Europe and Western European Union and as a UK delegate to the 12th and 13th sessions of the United Nations. *Tory: South West Herts Constituency Magazine* (February – March 1969) LSE Library, Longden 3/10.

¹⁹ Longden's position on immigration restriction stood him on the far right wing of Conservative Party opinion. In 1961, he wrote a letter to R.A. Butler stating that, in contrast to the Government, he did not believe that an "open door" immigration policy would "bind the Commonwealth together." With regards to deportation, Longden wrote, "I read: 'Legislation giving power to deport British subjects would involve a departure – although only marginal – from the traditional right of any British citizen to reside here without restriction.' That is one tradition which I feel we could jettison without loss. Let us make the "marginal departure" without further delay." "Letter to R.A. Butler – 14th April, 1961" LSE Library, Longden 2/3. In 1967, he gave a speech at Basildon New Town and he argued that while discrimination based on skin colour was wrong, "discriminating" was a "sensible exercise." The employer or house owner should be able to show "preference" for his own countrymen in hiring and letting property. He concluded, "We are more likely to succeed [in improving one's lot] if we now shut our gates and call a halt to immigration of people whose customs differ so markedly from our own." The audience to whom Longden spoke is unclear though the language suggests that it was comprised of those who shared these views since he is quite open in his support of discriminating practices as "natural" and blamed tensions on open door immigration policy. The Tories, in contrast, resisted restrictive immigration legislation owing to the practical difficulties though they agreed in principle and expressed concern about the impact on industries that relied on immigrant labour. "Mr. Longden at Basildon New Town, 10 April 1967," and "Immigration and Race Relations: A candidate's guide (1970)," South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association (December 1954) LSE Library, Longden 2/3.

He was a Conservative who “would have never felt at home under Mrs. Thatcher.”²⁰ In many ways, Longden represented the youth and progressive mindedness of the new M.P.s who entered the House in 1950 and who infused the Party with new life. And yet, in other ways, he stood as a protector of traditional Conservative values. Longden too preferred to engage with the electorate as Britons rather than through specific class and sub-class categories. Yet, his own constituents continually expressed discontent with the Tories in terms that highlighted their class situation and he could not help but engage with them on those terms.

South West Hertfordshire after the Second World War was a constituency upon which Conservative traditions and social change converged. The activity of party workers and the work of Longden himself provides a strong foundation upon which to examine further how rank-and-file Conservatives understood the meaning of “middle class” in the postwar period. How did these Tories understand their own social position and what shaped those definitions in their community?

The concerns of constituents in South West Hertfordshire

There were many characteristics that made the activity in South West Hertfordshire and its neighbouring constituencies typical of local Conservative political activity. Local papers and CA annual reports described frequent and well-attended garden fetes, dinners, jumble sales, meetings, and even horse shows. The St. Albans division, for example, reported wine and cheese evenings to discuss topics including education,

²⁰ “Sir Gilbert Longden,” *Times* [London, England], 27 October 1997. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 30 Sept. 2014.

railways and the NHS.²¹ Whist drives were their most popular and profitable gatherings. Branch parties seemed to have an endless schedule of social activities to meet a consistent demand. In a period where many CAs reported apathy or the lack of volunteer workers, South West Herts experienced growth and a need for the creation of new branches to support Conservative supporters in peripheral villages.²² Party workers were encouraged to canvas door-to-door and meet voters face to face even as modern electioneering emerged in the form of party political broadcasts on television – first employed in the 1951 general election.²³ The YC branch on the Oxhey Estate even proposed an idea to create a “Baby Sitters Club” that would allow parents to canvass the estate and

²¹ “St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association, 1963 Annual Report,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/17).

²² “Theobald Estate will have their own branch,” *West Herts Advertiser* (5/11/1954) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/18) and “These Leavesden Tories are a keen bunch,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (2/2/1956); “Leavesden Tories Active,” *Watford Observer* (24/2/1956) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/19).

²³ “Longden: TV No Substitute for ‘Face to Face,’” *Watford and West Herts Post* (10/8/64) LSE Library, Longden 3/8. The Party employed professional advertising techniques beginning in 1959 under the leadership of Geoffrey Tucker, Lord Hailsham, Lord Poole, Ronald Simms and Michael Fraser. Richard Cockett, “The Party, Publicity and the Media,” in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, eds., *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 564-566, 568-572. Ian Mikardo, MP for Reading (1945 – 1959), championed “selective campaigning,” whereby the efforts of canvassers were concentrated on neighbourhoods with a majority of voters decidedly “for” as well as those who had not yet decided. The “Reading System,” in theory, would help reduce costs and concentrate on securing votes for Labour rather than antagonizing Tory supporters though, as Lawrence has argued, these efforts were undermined by “blanket news coverage” of the 1959 general election. Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149. Also see Tam Dalyell, “Mikardo, Ian (1908-1993),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/view/article/52289>, accessed 25 March 2015].

surrounding communities freely while YC members minded their children.²⁴ Longden attended local events frequently and often brought along frontbench political stars to speak to his constituents. South West Hertfordshire also boasted of active women's branches and YC branches that seemed to grow annually and contributed to canvassing and campaigning work.

When Longden's constituents wrote to him, they presented an array of issues that ranged from personal problems to the Party and government policies. Personal issues included access to local health care for a child with special needs as well as arranging for personal visits to the House of Commons.²⁵ A constituent who worked for London Wool Brokers Limited asked Longden for help with regard to work stoppages and the negative effect this had on the economy and especially disruptions in his trade in 1961.²⁶ Many of the letters written to Longden were congratulatory in nature and expressed appreciation for his work. One constituent, for example, wrote to congratulate him for his "record of supporting forward-looking policies and objecting to foolishness."²⁷ Longden also received letters from constituents with questions regarding Retirement Pensions and Income Tax Allowances. He also received thanks for standing up for "high moral standards" (in the question of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), standing up for Britain's pursuit

²⁴ "Young Tory Baby Sitters? Its an Idea For Oxhey Estate," (5/2/1953) *West Herts Post* Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

²⁵ "Letter to Gilbert Longden from Harold E. Wright, Radlett," (8/3/1961) and "Letter to Gilbert Longden from Joyce Pollock, Northwood," (12/4/1973). LSE Library, Longden 8/2.

²⁶ "K.M. Ronald to Gilbert Longden, 2 May 1961," LSE Library, Longden 2/7.

²⁷ "Unsolicited Testimonials – Mr. S. James Taylor, Northwood," (26/3/1964) LSE Library, Longden 8/2.

of nuclear independence, and advocating for university education.²⁸ His overall correspondence with local Conservatives reveals a vigorous level of activity though the content itself does not illustrate simmering discontent like that which fuelled “revolt” from the middle classes in Tonbridge (1956) and Orpington (1962).

Looking to local newspapers as well as Longden’s speeches and addresses, constituents in South West Hertfordshire during the 1950s and 1960s were interested in issues including the cost of living, education, as well as support for the Empire and the monarchy. Superficially, the concerns of constituents in South West Herts conformed to those ideas and issues most associated with the members of the Conservative-supporting established middle classes. Chapter Two argued that the discussions at the level of the national Party characterized the middle classes as consumers and voters for whom the promise of affluence was key to winning their support. This general appeal to the middle classes, while seemingly politically expedient, created confusion. Preaching consumerism and consumption as the Party’s main accomplishments might have appealed to some

²⁸ “Letter to Gilbert Longden from E.R. Hoare, Hemel Hempstead,” (28/10/1959); “Letter to Gilbert Longden from W. Bowen, Kings Langley,” (15/11/1960); Letter to Gilbert Longden from Donald H. Morton, Bushey, Watford,” (26/11/60); “Letter to Gilbert Longden from R.O.H. Francombe,” (17/12/1962), LSE Library, Longden 8/2. The British, following the Suez Crisis in 1956, struggled to find an international role and maintain its status as a world leader. The Conservatives, under Harold Macmillan, fought to preserve nuclear independence as a means to assert influence on the international stage but in reality, this effort only served to bolster “national self-esteem” temporarily. After a series of tough negotiations with the United States, the British secured “Polaris missiles, without warheads, to be employed in British submarines” in the 1962 Nassau Agreement. Longden’s position would have played to nationalist sentiment amongst his constituents but stood in stark contrast to anti-nuclear campaigners and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. See Kenneth O. Morgan, *Britain since 1945: The People’s Peace*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 166-69, 215-219.

constituents but it was not, as the discussion below will show, the only, and certainly not the predominant, issue with which Conservatives in South West Herts were concerned.

Conservative supporters in South West Hertfordshire expressed concern with the rising cost of living in the early 1950s but this subject did not dominate their attentions. At a CA meeting in 1951, members of the South West Herts Women's Advisory Council proclaimed that "the high cost of living and housing shortage" were the key reasons that would propel the Tories to a victory at the next general election. "We are led to believe that never before has the man in the street received such a large pay packet, and that the cost of living is not going up." But, they were frustrated because "every morning when we read the newspapers we find something that has increased in price..."²⁹ Over time, however, the topic of stable prices and the rising cost of living received scant mention in their day-to-day lives or at CA meetings. The absence of these discussions might suggest that local members and party workers were relatively well off in financial terms and had weathered initial feelings of shock and outrage over prices. Indeed, as Chapter Three has shown, local political work, in terms of its time commitment, proved difficult for those with childcare duties or fluctuating work hours amongst other barriers to access. It is also possible to speculate that these Tories were relatively affluent judging from their reaction to council housing developments as well as interactions with new residents, which will be explored further below.

²⁹ "Why we shall win the next election," *Observer* (9/3/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

In Longden's maiden speech to the House of Commons, he affirmed his belief that a parent should "be able to choose the education for his child if he wishes not to send him to a State school" and that this choice would be "better for the Chancellor and the taxpayer."³⁰ As outlined in Chapter Two, the middle classes continually complained throughout the 1950s and 1960s of the increasing inability to afford extras, like school fees, without tax relief. In South West Hertfordshire, Longden affirmed his support for Government initiatives to offer "tax concessions to those who pay for their children's education." According to Longden, alleviating the financial burden of education costs would "encourage brains," which would be a benefit to "wage-earners, fixed-income groups, and the nation as a whole."³¹ The members in this constituency supported this idea and submitted a motion to the Party conference in 1956 asking for "tax relief for parents who send their children to independent schools and that State scholarships to universities should no longer be subject to any sort of means test."³² The subject of education and the middle classes in Britain, of course, was inextricably linked. Education served as a way for members of the middle classes to partake in social mobility: for children of the lower middle classes to enter certain professions, and for established members of the middle classes to mingle and form social bonds with the upper middle

³⁰ "'Equal Shares' Plea for Education," *Watford and West Herts Post* (11/5/50) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

³¹ "Encourage Brains, says Mr. Longden," *Watford Observer* (22/2/57) and "Mr. Longden Answers Lone Dissenter," *Watford Observer* (29/3/57) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/19).

³² "S.W. Herts large part in Tory conference," *Watford Observer* (28/9/56) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/19).

classes and aristocracy. Longden's commitment to protecting the right of middle-class parents in this area of Tory policy underlines that other aspects of middle-class life, not just consumption, mattered to his constituents.

Longden also evoked the theme of continued peace and prosperity in the world through a strong relationship with the Commonwealth, a united Europe, and the United States.³³ Longden was often featured in local papers for his speeches in Parliament on foreign policy and his work in delegations sent abroad to Germany, the United States, and Central America. Constituency members did not seem to mind that this work took him away from appearing more regularly at branch events. It did matter that their M.P. was seen actively working to improve the status of Britain in world affairs and that was a source of pride. The theme of Empire and Britain's status was still so prevalent that the YCs of Watford proposed re-establishing Empire Day celebrations targeted especially at children.³⁴ In neighbouring St. Albans, speeches on Europe and the Common Market were also among the most popular of all constituency events into the 1960s.³⁵ Party

³³ "Need for To-day is a United Society," *Watford and West Herts Post* (18/10/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16); "Worst Feature of Our National Life: MP speaks on housing prospects," *West Herts Observer* (18/1/52); "Radlett Young Conservatives," *Herts Advertiser* (18/1/52) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/17). "South-West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association, Topical Commentary – Britain & Europe," (18 March 1957) and (July 1960) LSE Library, Longden 8/3.

³⁴ "They want 'Militant' Tories," *West Herts Observer* (15/4/53) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

³⁵ This particular event was "attended by well over 100 people" and considered a great success. "St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association (Annual Report, 1962)," Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/17). In S.W. Herts, three of the six resolutions submitted to the annual conference were in relation to the Common Market in 1962. "S.W. Herts will be heard at Llandudno," *Watford and West Herts Post* (27/9/62) Courtesy of

members, for good measure, were also vocal advocates of the British monarchy as a force for “unity” and “happiness” in the modern world.³⁶ When a local Labour candidate questioned the relevance of hereditary privilege in British society, Longden dismissed criticisms of the Queen as “disgraceful” and celebrated the coming of a “new Elizabethan era.”³⁷ With regard to the Queen’s private income and taxation, one constituent wrote to Longden in 1971 stating, “What private money she has is related to the money she needs to keep up the position as head of the monarchy.” She concluded, “Let us keep the happy fact that we give our Queen what she needs to keep up the monarchy suitably and in jetting style and let us love the little bit of pride which comes from knowing that we also do not pry into her private means.”³⁸ For these Tories, the Queen was still a significant symbol of British power and prestige, which they wanted strengthened internationally, and they expected their representative to share these sentiments.

As the Conservatives entered choppy political waters in the 1960s, there were certainly instances when constituents articulated their problems drawing on the consumer and affluence-centric language that dominated the national discussion. Underneath declarations of discontent, the middle classes who appealed to Longden revealed a great

HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/22).

³⁶ “Postbag,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (18/6/53) and Everything in the garden was lovely, *Observer* (19/6/53) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/17).

³⁷ “Longden Tilts At Coronation Critics,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (18/6/53) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/17).

³⁸ “Letter to Gilbert Longden from Mrs. Margery Fraser, Bushey,” (26/12/1971) LSE Library, Longden 8/2. Note, the emphasis is in the original letter.

deal of fragmentation. In one letter, Longden responded to a man who was worried about the position of those on “fixed incomes” and felt the Government had “done nothing to help him.” In response to these concerns, Longden affirmed the Party’s commitment to “the pensioner, the retired man, [and] the people on fixed incomes... We have a clear duty to these sections of people who have not shared in this general prosperity.” He outlined that, in order to help fixed income groups, the Party had maintained stable prices, increased Retirement Pensions and National Insurance, reduced direct taxation and even offered age exemptions on taxes.³⁹ In another letter, a constituent criticized the Tories because they had “given no encouragement to the ‘medium-income middle class.’” Specifically, this constituent took issue with the levels of government spending and asked for greater tax incentives aimed at married couples as well as the elimination of “means tests” for university admissions. This particular constituent’s objection to financial support for poorer students applying to university underlines the lack of cohesion amongst the middle classes and a strong perception that they were not quite as well off as others. Longden replied that the Conservatives had never promised to curtail government expenditure and, in fact, pledged to invest in education, hospitals, and roads. He also explained that the Tories had “increased surtax levels” in an effort to relieve some of the tax burden and agreed with his constituent that the means tests for university spots should be abolished.⁴⁰ In both examples, Longden’s constituents were not content to be seen simply as a bloc of voters, Conservatives or even as members of the middle classes in a unified sense; rather, they employed income-based labels and categories to define their

³⁹ “Longden to Mr. Robinson,” (8 July 1960) LSE Library, Longden 3/7.

⁴⁰ “Longden to Mrs. Mottram,” (16 June 1961) LSE Library, Longden 3/7.

position within the middle classes. They were frustrated because they felt other sections of society had made greater economic gains at their expense. Even though Longden, as will be shown below in his national rhetoric, would have preferred not to deal with these groups on a separate basis, they appealed to him as members of distinct social classes that needed the Party's special attentions.

Harold Hewitt, a 46-year-old medical researcher, wrote a particularly disgruntled letter to Longden regarding his experience of affluence after the war.⁴¹ He too seemed dissatisfied with the Party's policies owing to the lack of material goods and comfort in his life. Even though he considered himself a success in his own field, he felt excluded from "affluent Tory society." He described his purchasing power as "relatively low" and that he had "only just succeeded in saving enough money to buy one of the cheaper cars on the market" while others had "an assortment of vehicles at their disposal. His three children enjoyed "free education" though he wished he could have afforded private education, a gardener, "large and expensive parties," and "long holidays abroad." His biggest complaint was that he had to "waste time" that could have been spent on his academic work "in order to deal with chores ... which a minor businessman would be able to pay others to do for him..." In his opinion, the Conservative Party's policies protected the interests of directors, salesmen, and those involved in commerce and

⁴¹ Hewitt wrote, "Since being demobilised from His Majesty's Service in 1946, I have devoted by myself to Medical Research with unremitting zeal and devotion invorking [sic] exceedingly long hours and the sacrifice of most of leisure due to a man ... last year I was awarded a triennial international prize (£250 for my work on the action of x-rays on cancer; I have achieved a considerable international reputation and my work is said to have begun an new era in radiobiology." "Letter to Gilbert Longden from Harold Hewitt," (20 January 1963). LSE Library, Longden 3/7.

finance while ignoring the middle classes engaged in intellectual pursuits. The Pay Pause, Hewitt argued, attacked those in public service. He asked of Longden, “What equally resolute measures were taken to freeze the earnings of that most overpaid section of the community: company directors?” He concluded, “Even with all of my academic accolades, I would never be brought up to the level of a mediocre businessman.”⁴²

On the surface, Hewitt’s anxiety over the lack of material comforts in his life, as compared to affluent workers and company directors who resided in Radlett, points towards consumer based discontent. He believed his plight, and other public employees, had been ignored by the Conservative Party he had supported for more than 26 years. Again, as in previous examples, Hewitt expected a level of comfort in his life that, in his mind, the Tories had failed to deliver to certain sections of the population. Hewitt’s letter highlights the fissure within the middle classes between public and private sectors as discussed in the first two chapters. For Hewitt, the Tories represented the interests of those who worked in the private sector rather than public sector employees who earned incomes using their “brains.” Hewitt’s anger is expressed by drawing on consumer-based rhetoric but the source of this discontent was based on, in his opinion, the Party and Government’s bias towards private sector employees. He wrote, “What your party needs to learn is this: that the conditions of life we enjoy and the success of commerce are not primarily the work of company directors and salesmen.” He argued that the Conservatives

⁴² “Letter to Gilbert Longden from Harold Hewitt,” (20 January 1963). LSE Library, Longden 3/7.

needed to reward those who made intellectual contributions to the economy that others “commercially exploit[ed].”

His frustrations with the Conservative Party were sent to Longden in the lead-up to the by-election defeat at Orpington. He described his discontent as rooted in what he felt was his unfair share of prosperity. His life lacked the material markers of prosperity that he saw others in his community of Radlett enjoy even though he worked hard. Superficially, his concerns aligned with those discontented middle classes who rebelled at the polls in 1962. Contemporary commentators had concluded that Orpington was a sign that the Party had alienated their middle-class supporters in failing to control inflation, reduce taxation, and liberate the consumer. Underneath his thwarted expectations and a strong sense of entitlement, Hewitt’s disappointment was rooted in the lack of opportunities for an individual with “brains” to rise to the top, which Conservatives supposedly encouraged.⁴³ Hewitt did not see himself as part of a unified middle class, whether traditional, established or new; rather he saw himself in competition, and losing out to, those with business or commerce-related occupations.

Longden’s papers do not include a response to Hewitt but he did address the by-election loss at Orpington in the CA’s monthly newsletter. In the lead up to the 1964 general election, local Tories in South West Herts believed that the Party’s record on promoting affluence and consumer freedom should have been sufficient to stand them in good stead with the electorate. They were frustrated to find that the Party’s popularity suffered given that “nearly every working-class home had obtained a washing machine,”

⁴³ Gilbert Longden, *A Conservative Philosophy*, (September 1947) LSE Library, Longden 1/3.

thanks to the Conservatives.⁴⁴ For Longden, the losses suffered at Orpington were temporary and not indicative of the Party's alienation from one specific section of the voting population. He explained to his CA members that implementing the Pay Pause, which many attributed as the source of protest in Orpington, along with "grappling with the Common Market" and pursuing a nuclear deterrent demonstrated the Government's strength and vitality. The Pay Pause and other measures to restrain incomes, for example, were necessary in order to keep the cost of products low and maintain a high standard of living. According to Longden, when employers raised incomes annually, those costs were transferred to the products and services they provided. Longden explained, "This is at once felt by those millions of people who cannot increase their incomes because they have ceased to earn; but very soon it is felt too by those who are still earning, because they find that their increased incomes buy no more than before." The Party had also reduced taxation steadily since 1951, invested in education, and ensured that housing was accessible for those who could buy as well as those who needed subsidies.⁴⁵ For Longden, as in correspondence with his constituents, Orpington did not signal an unbridgeable gap between the Party and any section of the electorate, especially not those "white collared" voters. The Party just needed to show the "white collared" electorate that the provisions were implemented with them in mind as well as the improvement of all Britons. Longden did not consider the loss at Orpington a class-centered issue, but rather he attributed the troubles to the Conservatives having already had a lengthy period in

⁴⁴ "Oxhey Rents Furor," *Watford Observer* (1/3/63) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, (D/EX901/20).

⁴⁵ "South West Herts Conservative and Unionist Association, Topical Commentary by Gilbert Longden: By-election Blues," (April, 1962) LSE Library, Longden 8/3.

office. It is not surprising that Longden encouraged unity given that Tories of his ilk would have eschewed any notion of class conflict in favour of the idea that Conservatives stood for classlessness. However, Longden's explanations would not have satisfied frustrated constituents like Hewitt and others who felt they deserved more affluence and certainly did see inequalities based on class and/or public/private divisions. This struggle serves as one of the chief sources for confusion in the Party's relationship with the middle classes.

Longden, consumerism and the Affluent Society

If the Conservatives best represented the middle classes, it followed that they should benefit electorally from a larger section of the population identifying as middle class. In the 1950s, for the most part, the Party thought the best way to ensure the support of the growing number of middle-class voters was by appealing to their desire for material items. Longden's understanding of affluence and consumerism in relation to Conservatism was more complex than the contemporary national discourse, which emphasized acquisitive consumerism as the middle classes' primary motivation for political participation. In speeches and his writings, Longden emphasized that Britons were not entitled to affluence, but rather they had to earn it through hard work. Those who succeeded would certainly be encouraged to use their disposable income for material goods and comforts that enhanced their enjoyment of life (even though some, like Harold Hewitt, felt their hard work went unrewarded). But, Longden envisioned that improved standards of living would "allo[w] more people to enjoy the countryside," or partake in

culture.⁴⁶ By the 1960s, he worried that the Party's efforts to appeal widely to the electorate had been detrimental to the purity of their ideas.

Longden, as a member of One Nation, was not an advocate of market-driven free enterprise though he did believe in the opportunity to "live a full life." In *A Conservative Philosophy*, a lecture he wrote for Watford YCs in 1947 that explained his general values and principles, Longden stated that he considered property "the birthright of everyman, be he Director, Manager or Wage-earner." Adopting the characteristic inclusive rhetoric of his generation of Tories, he deliberately outlines all of these social categories as potential participants of the property-owning democracy to cultivate a wide electoral appeal. Longden believed it was also the right of all individuals to "derive reasonable profit" from their work ("his capital or his brains or his labour") and "to spend that profit (after he has made reasonable contribution by taxation according to his means) as he chooses whether by buying his own house and gardens of his own motor car; by educating his children; or at the pub or at the club, or at the races." He concluded: "We are not ashamed of 'wealth' nor of acquiring the ability to enjoy the good things which Life has to offer, for we believe we are put into this world to make the best of it."⁴⁷ At his adoption meeting in 1962, Longden's tone did not change a great deal with regard to the right of all Britons to comforts earned through hard work. He proclaimed, "I am tired of being told by moralists – mostly very comfortably off themselves – that we should be ashamed of our affluence. So long as it is honestly earned and so long as we use it rightly, we can be

⁴⁶ "After Affluence," *Times* (4 July 1963) LSE Library, Longden 3/7.

⁴⁷ Gilbert Longden, *A Conservative Philosophy* (September 1947), 8-9. LSE Library, Longden 1/3.

happy that so many people are better off than they were.”⁴⁸ Longden even saw “affluence” as a source for promoting good beyond British borders. Speaking to the Watford Committee of the Industrial Life Offices, he stated, “We should not be ashamed of never having had it so good, otherwise we would not be in a position to meet the ‘white man’s burden.’”⁴⁹ In this speech, Longden urged that general prosperity, as a nation, brought with it a responsibility to service and, specifically, to invest in the welfare of “under-developed countries.”

The purpose of prosperity and how Britons chose to channel their good fortune was another matter. Alongside his triumphant proclamations lauding the Party’s successes in bringing about prosperity, Longden advocated a moral society in which prosperity would be, “more than TV and motor cars and holidays in Spain. It [should] also mea[n] ... we can jointly help those of us here at home who are not so well off.” Longden had long promoted “prosperity with a purpose.”⁵⁰ Longden’s understanding of what he considered to be moral acts of consumerism was clearly biased against working-class activities and pursuits. Even before the Conservatives returned to power in 1951, Longden stated, “In return for the rights and privileges of living a full life as a free Citizen of a property owning Democracy, we look for the performance of Duty and the

⁴⁸ “General Election, 1964 – South West Hertfordshire, Extracts from Gilbert Longden’s Address,” LSE Library, Longden 3/8.

⁴⁹ “Has Self-Help gone by the Board? M.P. Analyses perils of affluence,” *Watford Observer* (11/5/62) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, D/EX901/22).

⁵⁰ “General Election, 1964 – South West Hertfordshire, Extracts from Gilbert Longden’s Address,” LSE Library, Longden 3/8.

acceptance of Responsibility.”⁵¹ In 1959, following the publication of *The Responsible Society*, Longden reiterated his belief, “If our new society is to be happy and prosperous, material welfare is not enough; we must be a responsible society; and make demands on every citizen.” His definition of responsibility centered on the social services. He believed in their existence but that they needed to be supported by individual productivity. Each person needed to feel responsible to “his Union, to his employers and to his nation as a whole.”⁵² The role of the individual, in this instance, is not unlike the model conceived in the Victorian period, whereby “proper enjoyment of wealth and prosperity was taken to imply an unselfish, responsible use of its benefits.” Both the wealthy and “less prosperous” had specific duties. For the “very prosperous this civic mindedness meant, for example, engagement in the proper functioning of local government and philanthropic activity.” Those “less prosperous” individuals were responsible for “pursuing a thrifty life-style which would enable themselves and/or their families to avoid becoming a charge to the community.”⁵³

By 1963, with the novelty of prosperity waning and the Conservatives facing a future on the Opposition benches after 12 years in power, Longden became overtly critical of affluence and of the consumption the Party promoted. He described the “vulgar excesses” of “the pursuit of money for its own sake, the acquisition of wealth with the least effort and by whatever means are handiest, the jealous protection of capital gains...” as wholly inconsistent with Conservative principles, as he understood them, and

⁵¹ Gilbert Longden, *A Conservative Philosophy* (September 1947). LSE Library, Longden 1/3.

⁵² “Speech given by Gilbert Longden (1959),” LSE Library, Longden 11/1.

⁵³ E.H.H. Green, “An Age of Transition: An Introductory Essay,” *Parliamentary History* 16 (1) (Feb., 1997), 4.

indicative of an “effluent society.” According to Longden, “from 1950 onwards there was drawn into the warp of the Conservative Party a strand of people who were cheap, clever, opportunistic and on the make. Unfortunately, they have tinged the picture of the party as a whole.” The problem of ideological “rot” had brought the Party to a crossroads where Conservatism had to “openly cast aside such false values or itself be cast aside.”⁵⁴

For Longden, the corruption of Conservative ideas on prosperity and affluence lay with new elements in the Party whom he described as “clever,” “opportunistic,” and “on the make.” In plain terms, he laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of the lower middle classes and those “affluent workers” who had newly acquired their status and who had expanded the boundaries of the middle classes after the war. These specific descriptors call attention to the patterns of social and economic changes in Britain after the war, which saw increased wages, employment stability and, correspondingly, greater consumer purchasing power. More people were indeed “better off” than they had been previously. Yet, according to Longden, the Party’s pursuit of votes from within the widened section of the middle classes had proven detrimental to their core ideas and party image. Longden’s aversion to the Party’s expanded base of support reflects snobbery, of which local Conservatives in South West Hertfordshire demonstrated plenty, but also reveals a belief that the Party needed to stop appealing to all sections of the middle classes just to win votes.

⁵⁴ “After Affluence,” *The Times* (4 July 1963). LSE Library, Longden 3/7.

Reactions to council house developments in South West Hertfordshire

Tory voters in this constituency did not support excessive consumerism, nor did they want the Conservative Party to expand home ownership and create the “property-owning democracy” at any cost. On the issue of housing, local Tories expressed caution and suspicion of unbridled consumerism and promoted conscious consumption that was mindful of an Individual’s responsibility to their community and society, as described by Longden above, while maintaining a full and comfortable life. Starting with the issue of decontrolling rents, for example, Longden proclaimed to his constituents that his, and the Party’s, priority would be to ensure that subsidies were available only to those in need. He argued, “Many Council houses throughout the land were occupied by tenants who would, if they could, live in houses of their own.” He advocated “a system that differentiates rents” according to household income.⁵⁵ In fact, Longden argued that “paying an economic rent” was one of the “benefits accruing to the middle classes” in their support for the Conservatives.⁵⁶ Local Conservative members agreed “the scheme was fair.”⁵⁷ This idea was part of the Party’s goal to reduce reliance on the State as a source of social services and, as a result, roll back the presence of the State in people’s lives. It is significant, however, that the Tories took pains to convince Britons that rising housing costs and home ownership were necessary, in order to preserve the sustainability

⁵⁵ “Rickmansworth Rents Controversy,” *Watford Observer* (21/3/1952) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, D/EX901/16).

⁵⁶ “Mr. Gilbert Longden and the Rents Bill,” *Herts Advertiser* (15/2/57) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, D/EX901/19).

⁵⁷ “Committee Meeting – 2 June, 1959,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/12).

of the social welfare initiatives; and also a duty to which all good middle-class voters should aspire.

In Hertfordshire, concerns and anxieties regarding housing plans focused on developments, namely the construction of council houses, and the resultant change, and the perceived changes, in social composition within the community. Conservative discussions in the 1950s related to class in this county are highlighted by two episodes that were indicative of local sentiments regarding outsiders and left-wing political threats. These episodes occurred at the level of municipal politics. The first case concerns members of the Watford Rural District Council (R.D.C.) regarding the time of day at which meetings were scheduled. The conflict started when Labour Councillor E.J. Fisher refused to sit on committees that met in the afternoon. “It is obvious,” Fisher stated, “that half of this council are people of independent means or retired. People on this side of the table are working people, and it is obvious they cannot attend more than one afternoon meeting a week.”⁵⁸ Conservative members of the council had little sympathy for such complaints regarding the “privileged” status of their members, arguing that protesting councillors should have ensured that they would be available to serve on the council before taking on the job. For Conservative Councillor Joan Smith, the fault lay with those individuals who did not understand the extent of their duties rather than institutionalized class-based biases. Smith also declared that being “retired” was “a privilege common to all classes,” and that it was a pity that the Labour Party could not “find some retired

⁵⁸ “‘Privileged Class Being Created’ Watford Rural Councilor’s protest,” *Herts Advertiser* (30/5/52) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

people with enough public spirit to allow themselves to be nominated for election.”⁵⁹ In this dispute between representatives on the Watford R.D.C., the theme of class is explicitly attached to political parties, but Fisher’s protest emphasizes some of the hidden obstacles to political participation at the local level. Specifically, individuals who worked shifts or extra hours did not have the same degree of flexibility of those with secure and steady working hours or, indeed, no work schedule at all. Members of the community at large responded to the reported conflict stating that Smith’s letter was an “indefensible expression of personal opinion.” One person wrote into their local paper asking why certain councillors could not “sacrifice leisure hours” to accommodate members of the community.⁶⁰ Another individual wrote to their local paper stating that it was essential to schedule meetings so that more people, including members of the public, could attend. She proclaimed, “Why should they lose a chance of promotion or suffer loss of pay because a lot of retired business men want to get home to evening dinner?”⁶¹ Smith’s flippant remarks regarding the classless nature of retirement suggests that some Conservatives in this area had never really met with or had to interact with people of different social backgrounds until migration diversified the population. As indicated in Chapter Three, many Conservative CAs neither faced external scrutiny and nor had to accommodate to social and political outsiders and, as such, their activities and

⁵⁹ “‘Privileged Class Being Created’ Radlett Resident and Council Meetings,” *Herts Advertiser* (6/6/52) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

⁶⁰ “F.E. Lake, Ainsworth Farm - Correspondence – R.D.C. Storm is Still Blowing,” *West Herts Observer* (13/5/52) Courtesy of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16).

⁶¹ “Mrs. Rowena Barnett, Ramblers - Correspondence – R.D.C. Storm is Still Blowing,” *West Herts Observer* (13/5/52) Courtesy of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16).

organization remained unchanged well into the 1970s. Smith considered these “protests” to simply be the concerns of a “minority” in the community who needed to adopt the established methods and traditions of local civic work. Smith’s opinions did not represent the whole of Watford but certainly served to highlight the gap of awareness in this period regarding the different occupational demands of local residents. Indeed, in response to the influx of individuals with different work schedules, the R.D.C. had to consider changing the way it did things so that more people could participate. Even though there was no public resolution of the matter, this example suggests that a more diversified population and their needs disrupted the way in which municipal politics was always carried out and, at least, forced these local politicians to come to terms with their new reality.

Another episode from the 1950s involved the resignation of J.J. Bateman, Chairman of the Oxhey (L.C.C. Estate) Community Association, over the supposed over-representation and control of the organization by Communists. The situation, according to Bateman, was such that “[o]ut of about 10,000 adults on the estate, the Association only has about 200 members. About 40 people attend the meetings and most of them are Communists.”⁶² Bateman tendered his resignation like the previous chairman who found himself “unable to get cooperation from a bunch of Reds.”⁶³ These criticisms did not go uncontested. Following the resignations of a string of executive members, the Community Association released a statement to the press stating that they were a “non-political”

⁶² “‘Red’ Grip on Oxhey?” *West Herts Advertiser* (13/11/1952) and “He believes Communists rule the roost,” *West Herts Observer* (14/11/52) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

⁶³ “Chairman of Community Center Quits,” *Daily Telegraph* (19/11/1952) Courtesy of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16).

organization and that they refused to engage with the efforts of a minority to attach party politics to their work.⁶⁴ Letters to the editors of local papers derided Bateman's comments as "nonsense" and alleged that they were "crude" attempts to stir up ill feeling in the community. The chairman of the Carpenders Park branch of the Communist Party reported that "only two members of [the] Communist Party," served on the committee of 40 members. Moreover, "at the recent annual meeting there were seven Party members present. Five were nominated for the committee but refused office."⁶⁵ One member of the committee, who described himself as "the longest serving member" of the L.C.C. Community Association, described Bateman's comments as "smear tactics." In fact, he argued that Bateman's attacks were, in fact "an attack on the whole Labour and T.U. movement."⁶⁶ This exchange demonstrates an adversarial atmosphere between Conservatives and politicians on the left at the level of municipal politics, which centered on the Oxhey housing estate. Conservative politicians felt insecure regarding the politics of estate residents and this manifested as an irrational and sweeping anti-Communist and anti-Labour perspective. The Community Association, however, rejected Bateman's allegations as singular and unfounded though the episode did disrupt the organization for a short period of time.

⁶⁴ "'A bunch of Reds? – Bunkum' Oxhey Community Group Hits Back at Critics," (27/11/1952) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

⁶⁵ "Points from Letters: Mr. Bateman and the Communists," *West Herts Observer* (21/11/1952) Courtesy of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

⁶⁶ "Oxhey repudiates that 'Red' label," *Watford and West Herts Post* (20/11/52) and "'We Won't Play Politics,' Says Oxhey Community Association," *West Herts Observer* (28/11/1952) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

These clashes outside of the Conservative CA show that ideas about class and its influences on politics permeated different areas of municipal politics in South West Hertfordshire. In both examples, two different communities, comprised of individuals of different social backgrounds, were brought together by geography and forced to co-exist with one another. The first example exhibited how some Tories failed to comprehend that many people in the community did not share the same flexibility and freedom as people without stable regular work hours or shift work. The organization was not equipped to accommodate “outsiders” who wanted to participate in local politics and, when complaints were made, Conservatives dug in their heels and were deaf to support in the community for a more inclusive organization. In the second example, the language of the Red Scare in the early years of the Cold War informed Bateman’s rhetoric and anti-estate attitudes. The politics of the residents who lived on the estate were actually unknown but were nonetheless perceived as a threat. Bateman suspected that council estate residents were politically unreliable and assumed they held left-wing and even Communist sympathies based solely on their different social backgrounds. The suspicions ran so deep that it proved to be a disruptive force for the Oxhey Community Association. Both episodes serve to highlight the adversarial relationship between longer-term residents and newcomers from London that manifest throughout this period in discussions regarding council estate developments.

In the constituency of St. Albans, the question of changing social composition brought about by new council estate constructions manifested first in an effort to establish a Conservative trade union movement. This effort to win votes from manual workers and

trade unionists was consistent with the Party's attempts to cultivate a wide national appeal amongst the electorate. Earlier conflicts on municipal councils concerning the perceived political threat from residents in these communities and the resistance to wider participation from community members, however, highlights underlying animosities in this community towards newcomers from London. These organizations, therefore, acted as a means to separate the unfamiliar as part of attempts to tame perceived threats in their community rather than simply win their votes.

Longden encouraged Tories in his constituency and its branches to try and establish DCTU branches. For Longden, DCTUs served as outreach and education to a section of the electorate who "were no longer ashamed to own that they were Conservatives." He stated: "We do not ask trade unionists to go to their branch meetings as Conservatives. We simply want them to see that the proper people are elected to office. Politics has nothing whatever to do with trade unionism."⁶⁷ For Longden, "it was encouraging to see the number of young trade unionists who were throwing in their lot with the Conservatives."⁶⁸ In 1951, the Tories had just been returned to office and while there were local tensions regarding council estate residents and the political threat from left, Longden adopted inclusive and optimistic rhetoric, which aligned with the Party's strategy to create national appeal. This effort to capture support in unexpected places persisted even though local Conservatives may have held certain assumptions about

⁶⁷ "Mr. Longden calls for Tory TU branch," *Observer* (6/4/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

⁶⁸ "Conservative Trade Unionists," *Herts Advertiser* (6/4/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

council estate residents. In 1958, a local councillor addressed Conservatives and warned against assuming that New Green Estate was a “100 per cent socialist stronghold.” In fact, he said, the Party “would find a surprising amount of support” from those residents.⁶⁹ Local Conservatives needed coaxing and reminders to pursue supporters in unfamiliar territory. This uncertainty regarding the politics of council estate residents fueled the effort in St. Albans to establish and maintain a District Council of Trade Unionists.⁷⁰

This effort to cultivate support amongst manual workers and trade union members was not unique to South West Hertfordshire although less than half of Conservative CAs after the war tried to establish formal organizations for this purpose. Recall that in Chapter Two, the Banbury (Oxford) Conservatives also attempted to establish such an organization but with only marginal success. For Banbury Conservatives, the effort seemed limited to outreach and education of local workers and Trade Union members so that they would avoid “Party bias” when voting. The activity in St. Albans adopted a somewhat different tone. The St. Albans constituency association (CA) observed that the

⁶⁹ “Committee Meeting – 6 October 1958,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/12). When John Grimston withdrew from the House of Commons, the CA declared that they were in favour of giving a Trade Unionist or Woman candidate “full consideration.” The president stated that “a priority” should be given to the former type of candidate though in the end, they selected a business executive who worked for his family’s catering business. “Special Meeting of Divisional Executive Council – 14 January 1959,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/11).

⁷⁰ DCTUs were initially called Conservative Trade Union Council (CTUC).

“growing” Council of Conservative Trade Unionists required the formation of “factory groups” to support their work.⁷¹

These types of Conservative Trade Union organizations were a postwar novelty. Between 1939 and 1945, the Conservative Party experimented with Labour Advisory Committees (LACs) as an attempt to understand and influence the labour movement. According to Andrew Taylor, the exercise amounted to Tories debating *about* manual workers since members of LACs did not actually belong to trade unions and had no direct channels of influence.⁷² After the war, the party attempted to introduce organizations with the aim of infiltrating organizations and distributing propaganda, gathering intelligence on both the labour movement and the Communist Party, as well as advising the Party “from the workers’ point of view.”⁷³ The major innovation in these Trade Union councils and their corresponding factory groups, which were cells in individual factories, was they attempted to recruit Conservatives who were first and foremost members of trade unions.⁷⁴ According to the Keatinge Committee, convened to study the Conservative trade unionist movement in 1952, “only trade unionists in their natural habitat, the factory” could effectively reach and communicate with other trade unionists.⁷⁵ In constituencies with DCTUs established, and there were not many of them, these

⁷¹ “St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association (Annual Report, 1952),” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative & Unionist Association Acc 4185/17).

⁷² Andrew J. Taylor, “Essays in Labour Statistics – The Conservative trade union movement, 1952 – 1961,” *Labour History Review* 57(1) (Spring 1992), 21.

⁷³ According to Taylor, factory groups maintained contact with the local Conservative Trade Union Council and Central Office. CTCU organizers operated under the authority of Area organizations. “Essays in Labour Statistics – The Conservative trade union movement, 1952 – 1961,” 21.

⁷⁴ Taylor, “Essays in Labour Statistics,” 21.

⁷⁵ Taylor, “Essays in Labour Statistics,” 22.

organizations worked outside and independent of CAs and, as such, did not integrate with the Party's local organization.⁷⁶ In addition to deeply entrenched suspicions of trade unionists and the general lack of interest in trade union matters, the Party's trade union movement, like St. Albans DCTU, never flourished.⁷⁷

Throughout this period, Conservatives in St. Albans entreated their local members to recruit more trade unionists.⁷⁸ In 1952, the DCTU reported 12 factory groups in the area, which represented 100 local Conservative-supporting trade unionists, and by 1962, they had established 42 factory groups although it had proven difficult to meet regularly.⁷⁹ The Conservatives reported "reviving" the local DCTU effort in 1963 though there is no mention again of its activities subsequently.⁸⁰ The 1961 Low Committee studied the status of the trade union movement at the local levels. Only 381 constituencies responded and reported that 219 constituencies did not have any DCTU organization. Of those that responded, 64 constituencies (30.7 per cent) outlined "constituency culture," namely that being a rural or dormitory seat, as the reason for not having an established

⁷⁶ Taylor, "Essays in Labour Statistics," 22.

⁷⁷ Taylor, "Essays in Labour Statistics," 21, 24.

⁷⁸ "Executive Council Minutes – 26 April 1954"; "Executive Council Minutes – 29 September 1954"; "Executive Council Minutes – 21 March 1955"; "Executive Council Minutes – 7 July 1958"; "Executive Council Minutes – 2 Oct 1958"; "Executive Council Minutes – 14 January 1959," Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/11). "Executive Council Minutes – 6 February 1956." and "Executive Council Minutes – 6 October 1958" Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/12); "St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association (Annual Report, 1960)," Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/17).

⁷⁹ "St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association (Annual Report, 1952)," Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative & Unionist Association Acc 4185/17) and "St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association (Annual Report, 1962)," Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/17).

⁸⁰ "Executive Council Minutes – 15 January 1963," Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative and Unionist Association, Acc 4185/11).

DCTU organization.⁸¹ St. Albans, and Hertfordshire as a whole, was a “dormitory” or commuter locale and yet members of this CA continually tried to maintain their DCTU organization. For an organization that experienced “a number of problems,” they were remarkably active throughout the 1950s. The organizers reported “evidence of strong enthusiasm within the Conservative Trade Union movement” following a well-attended Conservative Trade Union Conference, which was a separate gathering that mimicked the annual party conference.⁸² The St. Albans DCTU submitted resolutions to be discussed at Area Conferences and held “weekend schools” for members.⁸³ They even offered scholarships to Swinton College for interested individuals though it is not clear whether any Conservative trade unionist accepted the award.⁸⁴

Support for Conservatives in South West Hertfordshire and its surrounding county was strong and there was no real need to deviate from their established campaigning strategies and cultivate a wider electoral appeal. Yet, local Conservatives put forth efforts to establish a Conservative trade union movement even though gains proved, as in other local experiments, to be small. On the surface, these organizations, of course, aligned with the Party’s strategy to create a national appeal and transcend sectional class interests. The Conservatives represented wage earners, company directors, and managers equally. It was especially important to posture in this direction, even in a staunchly Conservative

⁸¹ Taylor, “Essays in Labour Statistics,” 23.

⁸² “Executive Council Minutes – 11 January 1955” and “Executive Council Minutes - 21 March 1955,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/11).

⁸³ “Annual General Meeting - 29 March 1957,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/11). “St. Albans Division Conservative and Unionist Association (Annual Report, 1966),” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/17).

⁸⁴ “Executive Council Minutes – 7 July 1958,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/11).

setting, and start paving the way for a time when the Party's hold on power was less certain and it could no longer ride the wave of affluence and prosperity. As the Party entered the 1960s, their hold on power did become increasingly less certain and, as such, required that local Conservatives to adopt strategies that appeared inclusive.

In South West Hertfordshire, such efforts could also be interpreted as attempts to confront perceived social changes in the community brought about council housing developments and the introduction of new residents from London. Local Tories saw these new elements in their community as politically unreliable and, as such, potential threats to the social cohesion of their community. By establishing separate organizations, aimed at distributing propaganda and recruiting manual workers and trade union members on their own turf, local Tories marked these newcomers as distinct and separate in their community and sought to tame the threat they represented. Efforts to establish these organizations could be interpreted as evidence that the Conservatives appreciated that trade union members could have fluid politics or that they appreciated the potential of capturing growing affluent workers as their supporters. But, these efforts did not take off in significant numbers and were largely dependent on local conditions. St. Albans Tories did not just extend an invitation to residents of the new council estates to attend their meetings and garden parties, they organized a separate group that would engage with workers in a setting or culture with which they were more familiar. Conservative Party workers mimicked the political culture of the labour movement, most notably in the form of factory groups, in an effort to deliver Party messages. They created organizations that kept these social groups in the same community separate, even though the Tories repeated

the refrain that the Conservative Party was not a “class party” and did not represent a single class of Britons.⁸⁵ And when questioned about social class and politics, local Tory leaders replied in a neutral manner that did not highlight the difference of Britain’s social classes but rather highlighted the bonds of “citizenship” and “Britishness.”⁸⁶ Thus the rhetoric of the Party differed from their actual actions. Local Tories spoke of classless politics, but their political organizing illustrates that Conservative politics still adhered to rigid social categories and ingrained perceptions of social difference.

Opposition to council estate developments

Tories in South West Herts were especially concerned about the political allegiances of new arrivals from London who lived on local council estates and postwar housing development. Since the Second World War, the Party had divided between those eager to establish an “aggressive policy of home ownership,” that would create the idealized “property-owning democracy” prevalent in 1930s rhetoric, and those who preached caution and continuity with the programme started by Ernest Bevin and the Labour Party.⁸⁷ While Tories, including Minister of Housing Harold Macmillan, were largely focused on expanding home ownership and weaning most Britons off social housing, it was a challenge to implement these plans. Macmillan, for example, battled the

⁸⁵ “Lessons of the Election,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (2 March 1950), “Worst Feature of Our National Life: MP speaks on housing prospects,” *Observer* (18/1/52), and “Aldenham Conservative Fete,” *Herts Advertiser* (10/4/53). Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative and Unionist Association, D/EX901/17).

⁸⁶ “Mr. Gilbert Longden Answers Lone Dissenter,” *Watford Observer* (29/3/57); “Mr. Gilbert Longden and the Rents Bill,” *Herts Advertiser* (15/2/57) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative and Unionist Association, D/EX901/17).

⁸⁷ Jones, ““This is Magnificent!”: 300,000 Houses a Year and the Tory Revival after 1945,” 105.

Treasury over the materials needed to build 300,000 houses a year and faced public scrutiny, even from Conservative supporters, over fears about rising rents, security of tenure, and the problem of property speculation by unscrupulous landlords within a market dominated setting.⁸⁸ Instead, to manage public opinion, the Tories had to empower local authorities with the ability to, for example, control the actions of private landlords, to ensure that they maintained their properties and to fund non-profit housing associations.⁸⁹ Harriet Jones has also illustrated, in fact, that in order to achieve their ambitious goal of building 300,000 houses a year, the Conservatives had to rely on local authorities to help private developers in the project. Moreover, the Party could not have proceeded without prioritizing housing as an arm of social welfare and maintaining a commitment to Britons that housing would meet the needs of low-income families.⁹⁰ Only at the end of 1963 did the Tories succeed in their efforts to scale back spending on council housing and local authority constructions and to expand private building, but Harold Wilson and the Labour Party immediately reversed all of this work in 1964 with rent controls and expanded council house building programs.⁹¹ Weiler and Jones suggest that the themes of consumerism and consumption, with all of its free market connotations, were limited in application to housing policy. Voters, even Conservatives, welcomed the

⁸⁸ Peter Weiler, “‘The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives’ ‘Grand Design’ for Housing, 1951 – 1964,” *Contemporary British History* 14(1) (March 2000), 123-124, 134-139.

⁸⁹ Weiler, “‘The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives’ ‘Grand Design’ for Housing, 1951 – 1964,” 140.

⁹⁰ Before 1945, Conservatives only provided government housing subsidies to help with slim clearance and to ease overcrowding. The idea of a pledge to build 300,000 houses was raised by the Gailbraith Committee (1948) organized to draw up a general statement of Conservative housing policy and adopted at the 1950 Annual Party Conference. Jones, “‘This is Magnificent!’: 300,000 Houses a Year and the Tory Revival after 1945,” 100, 105, 109.

⁹¹ Weiler, “‘The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives’ ‘Grand Design’ for Housing, 1951 – 1964,” 143.

prospect of broader home ownership but their fears concerning the material reality of higher rents and profiteering landlords were more pressing. The anxieties concerning the housing market were directly related to the experience of London where the lack of accommodations and rising rents allowed slumlord Peter Rachman to intimidate and exploit tenants and engage in property speculation during the late 1950s, giving birth to a new pop culture term: “Rachmanism.”⁹²

In the early 1950s, Longden celebrated of the Party’s successes in building 300,000 houses following their return to office.⁹³ Conservative supporters, at branch meetings and garden parties joined in the celebrations, but they did not show particular interest in expanding private development nor did they press their M.P. for increased opportunities for homeownership. Rather, constituents were generally focused on the impact of L.C.C. council estates in their community. Council estate projects were designed specifically to move working-class residents out of London, which as illustrated above, disrupted established political certainties and even threatened to change certain aspects of their community culture.

In Watford, immediate tensions centered on the emergence of a more socially diverse group displaced from London who inhabited council-run homes on the periphery of the county. The composition of new residents on the South Oxhey Estate included, according to contemporary residents, many labourers, factory workers, students, clerical

⁹² John Davies, “Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism,” *Twentieth Century British History* 12(1) (2001), 70-72.

⁹³ The Conservatives exceeded the target of 300,000 houses in 1953 and built as many as 354,000 in 1954. Jones, ““This is Magnificent!””109.

workers, and technicians.⁹⁴ To be sure, manual workers and those with lower middle-class occupations were not entirely foreign in this area of the Home Counties, but this sudden influx of a large group of people caught the attention of local residents who felt that wider changes in their community were inevitable. Furthermore, housing development in Hertfordshire was designed for different purposes prior to the Second World War. Hertfordshire was the site of the original Garden City movement, which resulted in the founding of Letchworth Garden City and Welwyn Garden City.⁹⁵ In August 1946, Stevenage was named the first of the new towns.⁹⁶ These new communities were designed to attract “middle class” and “higher working-class populations.” Like the garden cities before them, these new towns were “self-contained” units and had easy access to culture and other modern amenities. These communities had no municipal housing and their rents were high, which resulted in an exclusive and “relatively affluent social composition.”⁹⁷ These types of developments were not considered disruptive to the area and its residents because they assumed that those who would inhabit these homes were familiar and they shared similar values and attitudes.

⁹⁴ “Hooligans? – Oxhey Denies It,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (1/10/1953) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/17).

⁹⁵ Welwyn Garden City was Ebenezer Howard’s second garden city and designated one of the first new towns in 1948.

⁹⁶ For a clear and concise history of the postwar new towns movement and policies see Ikki Suge, “The Nature of Decision-making in the Post-war New Towns Policy: The Case of Basildon, c.1945-1970,” *Twentieth Century British History* 16(2) (2005), 147-149.

⁹⁷ Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London: Routledge, 2001), 82-83.

In contrast, L.C.C. housing in South Oxhey, a suburb of Watford, was conceived of specifically as a “site for working-class housing after the war.”⁹⁸ Oxhey was going to help with the population dispersal of Londoners, specifically East London, from their overcrowded and war-damaged accommodations. Oxhey was not to be a standard bearer for utopian socialized housing like the new town constructions. The L.C.C. planned to develop a “cottage estate” and build over 4,000 houses on 920 acres of land considered one of the “beauty spots” of Hertfordshire.⁹⁹ During the Ministry of Health’s study of the proposed Oxhey housing estate, there were reports that a representative of the Watford Trades Council giving testimony heard “audible exclamations of disgust” when it was suggested that people from Bermondsey and Shoreditch would be brought in to live in the homes.¹⁰⁰ Lord Latham, leader of the L.C.C., strongly suspected that opposition he faced in Oxhey, and in the building of housing estates in general, was not a result of community members banding together to preserve “beauty spots,” but rather, objecting residents were “selfish.” They regarded those from overcrowded areas in London as “untouchables” and

⁹⁸ For a discussion concerning middle class occupation of municipal housing in Brighton, see Ben Jones, “Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: the Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-twentieth-century England,” *Twentieth Century British History* 21(4) (2010), 526 – 536. Basildon also experimented with making their properties accessible to higher income tenants after 1962 as an attempt to introduce social variety as well as fund further development initiatives. Suge, “The Nature of Decision-making in the Post-war New Towns Policy,” 157, 164.

⁹⁹ “L.C.C. Scheme For Oxhey Estate,” *Times* [London, England] 18 Apr. 1944. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 7 Oct. 2014. The term “cottage estate” is used to describe the style of home characterized by a large living room area that dominates the space in the home. In Oxhey, the proposed homes would each have a garden and were “well and spaciouly sited, with tidy streets and roads with grass verges and green spaces...” See “Oxhey Housing Scheme,” *Times* [London, England] 24 Nov. 1943: 2 and “Moor Park Estate,” *Times* [London, England] 7 Apr. 1925. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 7 Oct. 2014.

¹⁰⁰ “‘Snobbery’ Alleged At Oxhey Inquiry,” *Times* [London, England] 19 Apr. 1944. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 7 Oct. 2014.

disliked that the houses would be provisioned for “working people.”¹⁰¹ L.C.C. officials were unsympathetic towards the longer-term residents of Hertfordshire who opposed the scheme and did not mince words in accusing them of class-based prejudice.

The majority of long-time residents were not explicitly anti-worker in their opposition to the housing estates although the language with which they used to articulate their concerns indicates snobbery and anti-working-class sentiment. Conservatives consistently opposed municipal housing developments into the 1960s.¹⁰² They wondered, for example, whether there would be adequate amenities, including parks, community centers, pubs and schools, along with infrastructure, including bus service between Hertfordshire communities, to support the growing population?¹⁰³ For many contemporary observers, concern regarding amenities and social support for newcomers from London was simply veiled resistance to the project. Longer-term residents, knowing only that these Londoners would be predominantly working class, did not think the two communities would have anything in common.

¹⁰¹ “Oxhey Housing Scheme,” *Times* [London, England] 24 Nov. 1943 and “Protest Against L.C.C.’s Proposed New Town,” *Times* [London, England] 18 Nov. 1943. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 7 Oct. 2014.

¹⁰² The executive council minutes reported a defeated motion that opposed City Council plans to “purchase land compulsorily in St. Albans for development,” “Executive Council Minutes - 19 February 1960,” Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, Acc 4185/11).

¹⁰³ “Watford M.P Forecasts an Autumn Election,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (2/8/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15). “Radlett Residents’ Petition for a New School,” *Herts Advertiser* (30/5/52); “The School Building Programme May have Tragic Results in Herts,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (3/7/52); “We are not happy in Boreham Wood,” say L.C.C. Tenants,” and “Turned Down,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (4/7/52) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

The Hertfordshire County Council survey of social conditions, organized to study how the community needed to enhance community services and schooling to accommodate new residents on the Oxhey L.C.C. Estate described the venture as a failed “promised land of Cockney Utopia.” The report stated that residents had “been uprooted from their own background and plunged into wilderness and left to their own devices.” The report also highlighted that these individuals faced “acute economic pressure” owing to the high cost of rail fares for children attending schools. Mothers would have to find work to supplement a family’s income but, in order to find work, they would have to travel a great distance, which ate into any extra income they brought to the family. On top of that, “fifty or 60 children at one school have to be kept until 7 o’clock because their parents have not returned home to look after them.”¹⁰⁴ The report also uncovered that the residents at Oxhey were those most in need of re-housing with “an abnormally large number of children per family and a high proportion of families from ‘broken homes.’” It concluded, “The L.C.C. has dumped them in Oxhey without making provision for ... any social services that are imperative if a community is to settle down quickly and happily in new surroundings. These people did not ask that they should live in Oxhey. They have been sentenced to Oxhey.”¹⁰⁵ In response, the Hertfordshire County Council called upon “voluntary organizations” to rescue Oxhey from its “miserable plight.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ “The promised land!” *West Herts and Watford Observer* (29/6/1951) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

¹⁰⁵ “Watford M.P. Forecasts an Autumn Election,” *West Herts Post* (2/8/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

¹⁰⁶ “The promised land!” *West Herts and Watford Observer* (29/6/1951) Courtesy

Oxhey attracted opposition from longer-term residents because these estates were conceived of and designed for an entirely different purpose and type of resident than the new town developments. Longer-term residents were dismayed by the “‘ring’ of drab green-and-brown walks, coals in the bath and a mild flavor of Public Assistance permeating throughout.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, longer-term residents had judged the meaning of a council estate in their community based on preconceptions regarding the working classes and poverty as well as subsidized housing, and how they themselves lived, rather than seeing the council estate in-person. One resident responded to the report stating, “We wouldn’t want to go back to town. We have got lovely open spaces here – ample room for everything. I don’t know why they want to run it down and make us a lot of ‘dead-end kids.’”¹⁰⁸

Defenders of those who lived on the new estates charged that concern for “proper planning” on the new estates was “just one of the many excuses put forward by some local residents seeking to hide the fact that they always have deplored the building of the estate.” One local resident wrote, in response to the report, “[w]e on the Oxhey Estate are not devoid of soul, are not 100 per cent alcoholics, praying for the early erection of a pub.” He continued: “Contrary to the certain people’s opinion, the majority of people fortunate enough to be residing on the estate are ordinary, British, decent-living folk,

of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

¹⁰⁷ “‘Soulless’? – Oxhey Tenants React” *Watford and West Herts Post* (17/7/1952) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

¹⁰⁸ “‘Soulless’?” *Watford and West Herts Post* (17/7/1952) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

people with sufficient pride within themselves and their environment to make this estate a happy example of communal living.”¹⁰⁹ One resident argued that the opposition to the new estates on the grounds that they did not have ready access to shops, cinemas and pubs, ignored the larger issue of homelessness and the pressing need for housing.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the worries of longer-term residents in Hertfordshire seemed uncaring towards families in dire straits. They also did not consider that the newcomers might not have relished the opportunity to live in Hertfordshire either, being so far from their own family and community networks and especially given the opposition to their presence.¹¹¹ Some newcomers of Boreham Wood, for example, expressed that they did not feel welcome and “would rather be back in London.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ “‘Soulless’?” *Watford and West Herts Post* (17/7/1952) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

¹¹⁰ “Oxhey May be ‘Bad planning’ But It Gave Us The Houses.” *Watford and West Herts Post* (17/7/1952) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

¹¹¹ A subject not discussed in this paper but requiring acknowledgement is the fact that those urban and industrial working classes relocated to suburban council estates of course felt intense isolation and social dislocation in their new communities. These feelings were no doubt exacerbated by the resistance and unease expressed at their arrival by longer-term residents. Lynsey Hanley’s discussion of council estates offers some insight on these experiences. As someone raised in a Birmingham council home and a current resident of a London estate home, she argues passionately that estates have never lived up to their promises and serve as both a physical and “mental block” to social mobility in Britain. Avner Offer also discusses how council houses helped undermine working class identity and culture (based on “the street” and in cohesive neighbourhoods located close to work) by uprooting communities and relocating individual families to far-flung suburbs. Moreover, the sale of council houses turned an “entitlement” into a “market commodity,” which served to take up more of a manual worker’s income leaving them with less purchasing power and a less powerful consumer. See Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate Portrait* (London: Granta, 2008), 46. Also Avner Offer. “British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c.1950 – 2000,” *Contemporary British History* 22(4) (December 2008), 550-555.

¹¹² “‘We’re not happy in Boreham Wood,’ say L.C.C. Tenants,” (4/7/52) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16).

Amid these discussions concerning the changing social composition of the community that the council estates would bring, Longden himself weighed in on the political allegiances of the new residents. He stated that while their politics were largely unknown, these newcomers might have sympathies for the Conservative cause. He advised his local branches that it was important to woo the “20,000 people coming onto the L.C.C. Estate” because, left unattended, they threatened to “entirely reverse the Conservative majority.”¹¹³ As with the New Green estate, mentioned above, the official Party approach to these newcomers was not to accept their support for Labour as a foregone conclusion and that any support gained from these communities was worthwhile. The optimism in Longden’s tone served two purposes. Longden wanted to encourage local Party workers to continue their efforts even though the local Party had yet to fully understand the political allegiance of the new electors. More importantly, Longden’s language could assure his established supporters that he was aware of the dangers the new residents posed without alienating potential supporters on the estate.

The Radlett branch of Conservatives also received the message and ramped up canvassing and campaigning in South Oxhey, adding, “It is beholden to us to help the people of the estate as well as do our own work.”¹¹⁴ At another local event, Longden characterized the L.C.C.’s efforts to solve housing shortage issues by dispersing the population from the city to suburban communities as poorly planned but he noted that it

¹¹³ “Tories to woo Oxhey 20,000,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (3/4/52); “Breath of Fresh Air in White Hall,” *West Herts Advertiser* (4/4/52) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

¹¹⁴ “Radlett Conservatives, Appeal for Renewed Canvas,” *Herts Advertiser* (3/2/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15).

was now their duty to act as good “foster parents” and “cooperat[e] in welcoming new comers.”¹¹⁵ This language suggests that Longden assumed that those who lived on the South Oxhey estate came from less privileged backgrounds and were politically detached, or worse voted Labour without thinking. Local Tories, therefore, needed to exercise paternalistic responsibility for the newcomers’s wellbeing and shepherd estate residents towards making the right choice at the polls. This was consistent with Longden’s thoughts on prosperity and the corresponding responsibility to serve one’s community and society with affluence. Even though Longden used the language of civic duty to rally local Conservatives, the underlying theme was uncertainty and mistrust regarding the political allegiances of new estate residents. Longden’s statements can, therefore, also be read as a call to local party members to help keep the seat safely in Conservative Party hands.

Local Tories certainly felt threatened by the potential disruption to their political domination by council estate residents. At a meeting hosted by the Bushey Conservative Club, one speaker remarked that every family that moved onto the Oxhey Estate represented two votes for the Labour Party. At that same meeting, Longden proclaimed to the Conservative audience that Socialism was the “faith” of people who tended to “lounge, scrounge,” and were generally “mediocre.”¹¹⁶ Longden’s attack capitalized on fears in an early Cold War setting and existing mistrust of political and social outsiders in the community. Unsurprisingly, Longden’s comments offended those who actually lived at the Oxhey estate. One resident wrote into the local paper, “The families here are of a

¹¹⁵ “Bevan is out to sell Bevan,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (18 October 1951) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/15).

¹¹⁶ “Socialism – ‘religion of scroungers and loungers,’” *West Herts Observer* (6/10/50) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/15).

decent hardworking type and Mr. Longden must do better than this if he hopes to convert many of the Socialist working-class voters to his party.”¹¹⁷ Another wrote, “I must congratulate him on his ability to make good play with words, but the insult is deeply resented by a very large number of people.”¹¹⁸ Longden responded to his critics stating, “I did not say that everyone who is a Socialist is therefore also a scrounger, loungeur and a mediocre person... Socialism is a political faith which is naturally acceptable to those sort of people ... and there is a danger that Socialist philosophy is increasing that breed.”¹¹⁹ Longden remained unapologetic despite the backlash and characterized his comments as aimed at Labour’s ideas rather than at any particular group of people. The audience to which he spoke, however, would not have confused Longden’s attempts to connect these ideas with Labour supporters who lived on the estates.

This clash illustrates that Tories in South West Hertfordshire, as in St. Albans, were anxious about changing social composition of their community. Longer-term residents seemed oblivious to the housing needs that local council houses would help address in their own community as well as in London. Indeed, the need was so pressing that in 1952, the L.C.C. had already issued plans for more developments in the neighbouring village of Bushey to accommodate the overspill in Watford. Residents of Bushey, however, described the proposal as “an awful prospect” and were utterly

¹¹⁷ “Mr. Longden Rebuked,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (19/10/50) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

¹¹⁸ “Remarks deeply resented,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (19/10/50) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

¹¹⁹ “Opportunity for Scroungers,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (20/10/50) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

opposed.¹²⁰ They even suggested that London's "excess population" emigrate rather than "bog up the Home Counties."¹²¹ It did not help matters when Longden proclaimed at public meetings, as in speaking to the Hertfordshire Borough and District Council Associations, that "no county in England stood to be more changed in character by town and country planning than Hertfordshire."¹²²

Longer-term residents saw themselves as a community of individuals who shared similar social backgrounds and, more importantly, values and attitudes. Council developments threatened to change things as they were and, therefore, they could not assume that Conservative politics would appeal to all local voters in the same way. Speaking to his supporters, Longden could use deeply partisan rhetoric without much backlash, except from outsiders, because longer-term residents shared these disparaging views of not only newcomers but also political outsiders. This incident shows that, in the 1950s, the Conservative voting middle classes in Longden's constituency saw themselves as directly in opposition to new residents, many of whom were manual workers or clerks, who lived on L.C.C. Estates. While the controversy caused by Longden's inflammatory comments faded, the idea persisted that voters who lived on new estates, like Oxhey, St. Meryl Estate and Theobald Estate at Boreham Wood, were not only politically unreliable but they represented a threat to the order in their community. Local Conservative

¹²⁰ "'The awful prospect' for Bushey – They don't want the Watford Overflow," *Watford and West Herts Post* (24/1/52); "Sorry, But Bushey must take Watford Overspill," *Watford and West Herts Post* (28/2/52) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16).

¹²¹ "Why not emigrate?" *Watford and West Herts Post* (25/2/52) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16).

¹²² "'Be vigilant' Mr. Longden tells Hertfordshire councils," *Observer* (54/7/52) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16).

members were continually encouraged not only to canvass but also to increase their activity to win over “potential Labour votes” on new housing estates.¹²³ The different social character of the estates, political workers were reminded, required campaigning vigilance.¹²⁴

A sense of separation within the community, between those who lived on L.C.C. estates and the rest of the residents in Hertfordshire, was exacerbated by a number of tiny clashes. In one instance, there were “rumours” circulating on the Oxhey Estate, for example, that children from those council-run homes were the victims of discrimination at their schools. Parents reported in the local paper that they were told to enter the school through “other doors.” The school denied the rumours arguing that the school and its teachers were doing their best to welcome newcomers to the community.¹²⁵ There were also reports of vandalism and theft in the adjacent forested areas and private gardens near the Oxhey estate. It was claimed residents had to erect fences to keep people from stealing fruit on their property and bushes and plants were ripped out of the wooded areas and thrown onto the street. Victims of these crimes concluded that the culprits were

¹²³ “Radlett Conservatives: Appeal for Renewed Canvas,” *Herts Advertiser* (3/2/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/15); “Tories woo the Oxhey 20,000,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (3/4/52) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/16); “Radlett Women Conservatives,” *Herts Advertiser* (14/5/54) and “Radlett Conservatives and Boreham Wood Newcomers,” *Herts Advertiser* (3/4/55) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/17).

¹²⁴ “Radlett Conservatives and Boreham Wood Newcomers,” *West Herts Advertiser* (3/4/1955) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/18).

¹²⁵ “No class distinction: Schoolchildren not segregated,” *Watford and West Herts Post* (26/4/51) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

youths from the estates and that “the people who were being rehoused here did not like it and they did not fit.”¹²⁶ Residents were clearly not happy with their new neighbours and continued to believe that manual workers from London and suburban middle classes could not integrate and share a community.

After nearly a decade following their initial settlement, the residents of local estates again caught the attentions of longer-term residents over the issue of “wealthy” council residents. This chapter has, up to this point, shown that longer-term residents and Conservative supporters appealed to their party for a range of issues in addition to consumer issues. Longer-term residents opposed the influx of manual workers from London who lived on council estate residents because they represented potential disruptions to the local culture and politics. As the Party’s national popularity and the gleam of postwar prosperity faded, longer-term residents were less worried about how council estate residents “fit” in their community and more about the benefits they received seemingly at their expense. In 1963 Watford Rural Council brought up the need to raise rents in order to address a £44,000 deficit, which coincided with L.C.C. discussions to increase rents. County Councillor Rene Short opposed rent increases citing that many residents would need subsidies to cope. She stated, “It was fashionable to talk of wealthy people in

¹²⁶ “Vandalism in Hertfordshire ‘A Real Menace’ – New Towns and LCC Estates Residents are Blamed,” *Herts Advertiser* (25/7/52) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/16).

council houses ... but this was nothing but Tory clap-trap.”¹²⁷ For Short, characterizing council residents as “wealthy” was merely a Tory strategy to create divisions within the community in order to justify reducing social services. In her opinion, affluence on the estate was a limited experience and much overblown for political purposes. Talk of rent increases also prompted a strong reaction from the South Oxhey Communist Party. They wrote, “The increase will mean hardship for many Oxhey residents ... Life in Oxhey is not a paradise of overpaid, over-privileged workers; there are many, including elderly folk for whom life is a real battle.”¹²⁸ Yet, the prevailing sentiment amongst community members was resentment that those on council estates seemed relatively better off. One respondent, who described himself “as Labour” and a committed Socialist supporter, wrote,

Take a look round some of the local council estates at the many new cars belonging to some of the no doubt affluent tenants – many within easy walking distance of the local factories where they work. If they can afford these cars then they can either afford to pay extra rent or buy their own houses.¹²⁹

The criticism regarding conspicuous consumption was an issue that Labour and Conservative supporters shared. Most Conservatives, like Longden, celebrated prosperity but not unfettered consumerism. Greater prosperity came with

¹²⁷ “‘Wealth’ Council Tenants? ‘It’s a Tory clap-trap,’ says Mrs. Short” *Watford Observer* (22/2/63) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/21).

¹²⁸ “Oxhey rents furore,” *Watford Observer* (1/3/63) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/21).

¹²⁹ “‘Tory clap-trap’ – and a ‘Naive Socialist’,” *Watford Observer* (1/3/63) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/21).

responsibility and, in this case, if workers found themselves able to afford material extras then they should be less reliant on social welfare and housing benefits. This description, of course, might not have been an accurate portrayal of the experience of residents who lived on local estates. The image, however, was a powerful one especially when so called “middle-income middle classes” or lower middle classes, all of whom were not entitled to subsidies or tax relief in the same way, felt they were not receiving the same attention from the Conservatives and getting a smaller share of prosperity. Another community member felt, for example, it was “unfair” that homeowners be asked to subsidize, through taxes, those who lived in council homes. “They may not be rich in the eyes of the Labour Party ... but they certainly think they are superior to people who have had to buy old property and can’t afford many luxuries they consider to be essential.”¹³⁰ Even though both communities had lived amongst each other for nearly a decade, there remained a definite oppositional relationship based on perceived class differences and the feeling that residents of local estates had benefitted at the expense of longer term residents.

The actions and reactions of Conservatives in St. Albans and South West Hertfordshire indicate that they were predominantly from the established middle classes for whom Conservatism represented Empire, the Queen, and preserving high standards of living without substantial taxation or intervention from the Government.¹³¹ They

¹³⁰ “‘Tory clap-trap’ – and a ‘Naive Socialist’,” *Watford Observer* (1/3/63) Courtesy of HALS (St. Albans Conservative Association, D/EX901/21).

¹³¹ Following Queen Elizabeth’s coronation in 1953, Gilbert Longden proclaimed to the Bushey Conservative Association’s garden fete, “Beautiful in outward person, beautiful in inward character, it would seem that our Queen has been blessed by all the Muses, all the Graces, all the

occupied a political world that was based on polite social activities that doubled as political fundraisers. When new housing estates brought in migrants from London, the local Tories felt that their once socially and culturally homogenous realm was under attack. Their sense of their own middle-class identity was heightened by the presence of a more socially diverse population and their attempts to understand and harness these votes only served to separate and alienate people and strengthen suspicions that they would not “fit” into the community. In both constituencies, Tories believed council estate residents to be politically unreliable and, as a result, threatened the Conservative hold on these Home Counties seats. In St. Albans, they tried to bridge the political divide with trade union members by organizing a DCTU and factory groups. These organizations, on the surface, served as attempts to recruit and win votes from manual workers and trade unionists in the community, which was consistent with the Party’s claims that it did not represent or encourage the interests of one section of the population over another. In practice, however, these organizations physically separated manual workers and trade unionists and treated them as foreign elements in their constituency. Coupled with organizational differences as well as latent suspicion of trade unionists, these efforts resulted in little.

Conclusion

On the surface, there was nothing particularly different, in organization or the content of political activity, about the constituency of South West Hertfordshire. Local

Gods, with every gift to make her exactly right.” “Everything in the Garden was lovely,” *Observer* (19/6/53) Courtesy of HALS (South West Herts Conservative & Unionist Association: Rickmansworth Branch, DE/X901/17).

Conservatives adhered to their established programme of social activities including, dinners, fetes, and jumble sales similar to that described in Chapter Three. South West Hertfordshire had thriving Women's Divisions and YC branches that helped enormously with canvassing and campaigning work. The constituency also enjoyed the uninterrupted representation of Longden, a noted backbencher and founding member of One Nation, who served from 1950 until his retirement in 1974. For the most part, constituents were content with the work of their M.P. and the policies the successive Conservative Governments offered to their supporters. This constituency actively engaged with the Party by participating in annual conferences and inviting leaders to speak to members on the pressing issues of the day.

This seemingly ordinary and politically tranquil setting, however, concealed complex and changing ideas regarding the middle classes and class in general. Throughout Longden's time as M.P. for South West Hertfordshire, the constituency underwent changes in social composition that brought class-based anxieties to the forefront of Conservative politics. Before the war, South West Hertfordshire, and the surrounding county, was largely suburban and rural and its residents' support for the Conservative Party was unquestioned. Following the war, the construction of L.C.C. council estates throughout the county, the Oxhey Estate in particular, called into question social and political certainties and, as a result, led to conflicts at CA branches as well as in other sites of municipal politics. These newcomers did not actually confront their new neighbours, but longer-term residents believed that confrontation or "unhappiness" would be inevitable. The established middle classes of the South West Hertfordshire resisted

newcomers and insisted that the two groups could not and would not get along. Moreover, the middle classes here saw themselves in the role of “foster parents” of council estate residents who were responsible for the social “uplift” of their East London wards.

In this constituency, the middle classes defined themselves against those manual workers and lower-middle-class clerks on council estates. Conceptions of class were clearly a source of tension and alienation between sections of the population and coloured the constituency’s politics even though Longden publically stated, again and again, that the Tories were not a class party and did not believe in class hostilities. The Tories in this area, however, struggled with the growing and diversifying population of the community and the perceived social and cultural changes that might accompany them. There were repeated reports of instances where longer-term residents voiced judgment and negative opinions about their new neighbours based on nothing other than superficial information regarding their social backgrounds or occupations. More importantly, their social backgrounds called their political allegiances into question so much that many Conservatives, from local CA branches to municipal bodies, simply assumed that they supported socialism and Labour. There were some efforts to create space and include trade union members into the Conservative Party, like the DCTU in South West Hertfordshire and in St. Albans, but they were not well integrated and operated mostly in the background. In a constituency like South West Hertfordshire, with its history of Conservative dominance, local Tories were not used to accommodating a different base of support but they did consider different strategies if for nothing other than to gain some votes and secure their majority. On the whole, however, the Conservative Party did not

really know how to engage with workers and trade union members and it did not spend a great deal of time learning about these individuals in their community or how to win them over.

The picture offered here of local political activity in South West Hertfordshire covers a period in which the Party confronted sweeping social and economic change. These changes, however, infiltrated the sheltered world of the suburban and rural Conservative supporting middle classes slowly and it did not go uncontested by local Conservative supporters, voters or indeed Party members. They also maintained a healthy dose of suspicion for those “new” middle classes and working classes, both newly affluent and less so, from London. Correspondence between Longden and his constituents reveals that rank-and-file members were not simply consumers who were enjoying the perks of “never having had it so good.” These local Conservatives were not the same as those rebelling against the Government in the late 1950s and early 1960s over issues like inflation. Rather, Tories here expressed a keen interest in foreign and international affairs and they cared deeply about the position and prestige of Britain on the world stage. They supported the idea of the monarchy and the actual Queen. They believed in responsible government spending and, most of all, providing social welfare for those in need rather than for the entire population. They celebrated their new freedoms as consumers but they, like their M.P., believed that prosperity and affluence should be the product of honest and hard work and, after a reasonable level of taxation, incomes should be spent on improving one’s life. They deplored wastefulness and greed that came with the empty pursuit of money. Like Longden himself, these Tories believed in prosperity with a purpose.

Conclusion

In two separate instances that attracted predictably negative press attention, former Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron evoked the middle classes in public engagements. In both examples, Cameron celebrated the virtues of the middle classes and tried to show how the Conservatives were most in-tune with their interests. As in the 1950s and 1960s, Cameron's view of the middle classes seemed out of sync with the experience of voters and the perceptions held by political commentators regarding his own class position and, correspondingly, the ability to comment on the subject.

The first incident centered on the Prime Minister's claim that he and Samantha Cameron counted themselves as members of the "sharp-elbowed middle classes." Cameron hoped that the declaration, made at a public meeting in Manchester at a Sure Start children's center, would show that he and the Party sympathized with those affected, many of whom were middle-class professional families, by the Government's proposed cuts to universal child subsidies and funding for the Sure Start program.¹ Cameron acknowledged that austerity measures would make life more challenging but that these individuals were resilient, self-sufficient, as well as motivated and, as such, would ultimately triumph over adversity presented without the aid of government intervention. The middle classes described here are akin to those that Thatcher valorized while her Conservatives dismantled consensus and social welfare. As Hanley has observed, when

¹ John Barber, "David Cameron: A middle-class wannabe." *The Globe and Mail* (13 August 2010); Landon Thomas Jr, "In Sharp Change, Britain Will Reduce Child Benefits for the Middle Class." *The New York Times* (4 October 2010); Toby Young, "If David Cameron is 'middle class', what does that make the rest of us?" *The Telegraph* (11 August 2010) (accessed 11 March 2015).

politicians refer to the sharp-elbowed middle classes, they are referring to the “cultural capital” and confidence, acquired over time, to “get their own way.” Hanley writes, “[T]hey ... know how to argue without looking boorish, they know who they need to get on their side.”² This tenacity would help these individuals transcend the challenges before them. But, Cameron’s attempt at empathy backfired. No one, not even a section of the electorate with strong and historic ties to the Conservative Party, welcomed the harsh austerity measures that the Tories have implemented since taking office in 2010. And, the wholly negative reaction speaks to the level of economic insecurity felt by the once secure and confident middle classes since Cameron took the reins from Labour.

Commentators resented Cameron’s blatant attempt to deny his privilege and appropriate the experiences of others to win support. How could a man who had been educated at Eton and Oxford, held membership with an elite dining club and who is also related to members of the gentry proclaim to be anything other than upper class?³ To be sure, Eton, Oxbridge and, as examples in previous chapters have illustrated, the pursuit of private education ranked high on the list of concerns for the middle classes. The traditional established middle classes viewed private education as their entrée into elite circles while middle income and lower middle classes sought to secure their social position with the “right” education for their children. So, Cameron’s educational pedigree might not have been the disqualifier of his claims to understand the plight of the middle

² Lynsey Hanley. *Respectable: The Experience of Class* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 47.

³ David Cameron’s father was a stockbroker and his mother was the daughter of Sir William Mount, 2nd Baronet. Samantha Cameron is the daughter of Sir Reginald Sheffield, 8th Baronet and Annabel Lucy Veronica Jones, Viscountess Astor by her second marriage. Sholto Byrnes. “Who’s posher: Clegg or Cameron?” *The Guardian* (20 April 2010).

classes. He, like Thatcher before him, wanted to motivate voters to *aspire* to be like him and his family. But, owing to timing and the popularly held perception that he and his wife are solid members of the upper class, the Prime Minister failed to properly project the idea of social mobility to his audience, which made his remarks seem disingenuous and uncaring. As one journalist remarked, “one can just picture him wiping his chin after a lunch of chops at his club.”⁴ Yet, Cameron and his team drew from this rhetorical well, proclaiming affinities with the middle classes and celebrating their virtues, like Tories in the 1950s and 1960s.

The second incident occurred when the Prime Minister attempted to share his “supermarket sociology” with John Lewis employees during a Q&A session in 2014. He observed that when he encountered shoppers in Waitrose, they tended to be more “talkative” and “engaged.”⁵ Critics highlighted that Cameron’s remark seemed to suggest that he encountered “a better class of shopper” at Waitrose.⁶ Labour critics predictably pounced on an opportunity to highlight Cameron as “stuck-up and out of touch.”⁷ These observations might have gone unnoticed, except that in Britain where one shops for food, like the way an individual speaks, still denotes class background, values and attitudes.

⁴ Sholto Byrnes. “Who’s posher: Clegg or Cameron?” *The Guardian* (20 April 2010).

⁵ Peter Walker and Richard Adams. “David Cameron’s Waitrose musings spark elitism.” *The Guardian* (3 April 2014) and Zoe Wood. “Cameron’s gushing over Waitrose just poked the class-war embers.” *The Guardian* (5 April 2014) (accessed 11 March 2015)

⁶ Peter Walker and Richard Adams. “David Cameron’s Waitrose musings spark elitism.” *The Guardian* (3 April 2014)) (accessed 11 March 2015).

⁷ Peter Walker and Richard Adams. “David Cameron’s Waitrose musings spark elitism.” *The Guardian* (3 April 2014) (accessed 11 March 2015).

Shopping at Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Tesco, Morrisons or Sainsbury's, for example, denotes clear class connotations in which the British public is well-versed.⁸

As this dissertation has shown, these were not the first instances in Conservative Party history that its leader, or its politicians, invoked the economic aspects of class in their appeals to middle class voters. In these examples, Cameron, and presumably the team of researchers who work for him, failed to consider who the middle classes are and what they want from the government at this particular point in time. Who identified as a member of the middle classes? What are the interests and aims of the middle classes? Did the middle classes share in Conservative ideas on the Big Society? Perhaps, armed with answers to these questions, Cameron would not have appeared so tone deaf to the increasing sense of insecurity and concerns regarding growing social and economic inequality in Britain. But, this task of defining the middle classes has, as this study has shown, proven to be a great challenge for the Conservatives.

Like Cameron, Tories in the 1950s and 1960s too felt that the Conservative Party best represented the interests of the middle classes and its members emphasized this belief in their writings and rhetoric. But then too, clarity about the composition of the middle classes, and what comprised their range of interests, eluded the Tories. These postwar years in Britain witnessed sweeping economic and social changes, brought about by stable and high levels of employment as well as increased income and wages that expanded the boundaries of the middle classes. As this dissertation has shown, the

⁸ Zoe Wood. "Cameron's gushing over Waitrose just poked the class-war embers." *The Guardian* (5 April 2014) (accessed 11 March 2015).

Conservative Party were most engaged with the economic aspects of middle class identity and, as such, engaged with these voters largely as consumers who were concerned about their economic position and interested in acquiring material goods to improve their standard of living. While many who considered themselves middle class, either as long-established or as new members, certainly complained to the Conservatives on these grounds, there were other middle-class concerns that consumer-centric rhetoric did not fully address. Some expressed concern, for example, about Britain's status on the international stage while others voiced suspicions regarding the morality or impact of the affluent society. The Conservative Party's preoccupation with consumers and their ability to buy luxury material goods revealed that it was out of touch with the shape of social change in Britain. Contemporary sociological studies revealed that the only thing of which scholars were certain about the middle classes in this period was that this social group had experienced unprecedented growth. As such, this social group was highly fragmented with no shared traditions, values, political allegiances, or singular outlook. Moreover, as both McKibbin's research and Census data from 1951 – 1971 reveals, individuals with occupations and income from the middle and lower-middle range experienced the highest levels of demographic growth. The problem with appealing to this diverse and dynamic social category as consumers was that it presupposed that those who achieved middle and lower middle-class status in this period only originated from working-class backgrounds. As Goldthorpe and Lockwood have argued, the concept of convergence rather than *embourgeoisement* acknowledges that individuals moved up and down the social structure. The concept of convergence reminds us, as Todd's research

has, that the experience of affluence was not universal. Many people still lived in economically precarious situations and celebrating the Party's achievements in bringing about affluence or the wonders of consumerism was not a solution to continued experience, for example, of poverty or housing shortages. Furthermore, the Conservatives assumed that newly affluent working classes adopted the values, aspirations and politics of the middle classes. Again, Goldthorpe and Lockwood disproved this assumption.⁹ The Conservative view of their supporters from the middle classes in the 1950s and 1960s was, therefore, out of sync with the picture based on Census data and contemporary scholarly discussions and yet the Party persisted in its appeals to consumer sensibilities.

This narrow conception of the middle classes as consumers was tested at the local constituency level. In several key episodes of by-election protest, at Tonbridge and Orpington, commentators reported that the middle classes were frustrated because they felt ignored. The Party appealed to these voters with its record on reducing direct taxation, increasing pensions and controlling inflation. The Conservatives repeatedly tapped into the themes of affluence, prosperity and engaged with the middle classes as acquisitive consumers to curry their favour. In response to these episodes of discord, the Party and its rank-and-file members attributed moments of protest and discord to the new elements within this social category and did not see the episodes as part of wider malaise. In fact, these episodes exhibit the unease with which all level of the Party confronted the impact of social change. Rank-and-file Conservatives labeled those new to the middle

⁹ John H. Goldthorpe, *The affluent worker in the class structure* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 25, 83.

classes as “fair-weather” and their protest threatened the Conservative Party in power as well as its ideas and principles. In this way, when the Party employed consumer-centric rhetoric it helped mask the tensions that existed amongst members concerning how social changes and expanded middle-class boundaries threatened political certainties and electoral stability, as they knew it.

The everyday political activity at the constituency level did not lend itself to attracting a more diverse social constituency or of better understanding the electorate. The Conservative constituency maintained its exclusive organizational structure and continued to use established campaigning strategies, which emphasized the personal relationship between MPs and candidates with local members. Moreover, the activities pursued to nurture support in the constituency never expanded beyond fetes, garden parties, jumble sales and whist drives. Local Conservatives did not actively seek to reinvent the wheel to include younger voters or people from different social backgrounds.

A group of younger self-proclaimed Conservative intellectuals attempted to understand the impact of a larger and transformed middle class on the Party’s electoral prospects and Conservative principles. The Bow Group, in their self-styling as Conservative thinkers, differentiated themselves from established organizations within the Party like the Young Conservatives. They emphasized education and rigorous scholarship as the core of their work, which aligned with the meritocratic principles that resonated with the professional middle classes in Britain. In their writings, the Bow Group maintained that the middle classes were an important constituency to nurture. Unlike rank-and-file members at the local level, the Bow Group was less suspicious of

the expanded middle classes. The so-called unreliable political loyalties of those people only recently perceived as middle class were seen as an opportunity for Conservatives to make their case. According to the Bow Group, home-ownership remained an important theme with which Conservatives would woo these voters because it encouraged responsibility, individualism, and, crucially, a middle-class identity. Of course, even though the Bow Group proved hugely popular, they were ultimately unable to shift the established outlook and approaches to appealing to these voters.

For the Conservatives in South West Hertfordshire, the shifting boundaries of the middle classes manifested in episodes of conflict and animosities towards newcomers from London who came to live in council estate houses built in this area to meet housing shortages and alleviate overcrowding in the capital city. In each of the interactions, long-term residents expressed concern regarding whether council estate residents would “fit” in their community and often cast judgments on their new neighbours’ family life and behaviours. In public, Conservative MP Gilbert Longden proclaimed classlessness but he shared the suspicions held by his constituents regarding the new middle classes. Again, consumerism was not the predominant concern of Conservatives in this example, which calls into question the experience of middle-class discontent as described by the media in the national account of this period of history.

Further Research

The Conservative Party was never classless in its outlook and aims though it proclaimed to be as such beginning in the 19th through to the present day in order to differentiate itself from its political rivals on the left. The Party's conceptions of, discussions about, and its interactions with, the middle classes underline the centrality of class in Conservative politics. More importantly, when the Conservative Party engaged in discussions concerning class, it was not only concerned with understanding the electoral behaviour of the manual working classes or warning against class conflict between workers and white-collar managers and professionals. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Conservatives had to work out the meaning and role of the middle classes too: the Conservatives evoked the middle classes consistently and continually in their rhetoric and writings, but there was no consensus as to the composition of this social category, nor how best to appeal to their interests except with consumer-based rhetoric, which had limited appeal. The way in which the Conservatives approached their middle-class voters helped complicate and exacerbate ideological tensions within the Party as well as tensions that existed between established and newer members of this social category.

The findings in this dissertation remind scholars that investigations of class meaning remain important and helps disrupt established postwar narratives. This research helps reinforce findings by Todd, for example, that show that the experience of affluence was not monolithic or universal. Many members of the middle classes felt dissatisfied with their share of prosperity and entitled to more in postwar Britain. Research into historical perceptions of class and political identities are also relevant for scholars seeking to understand the current political and social climate in which dramatic increases in social

and economic inequality in Britain have become cause for concern. The “explosion of interest” in socio-economic stratification has even prompted Savage to spearhead the BBC’s Great British Class Survey (2013), which is the “largest survey of social class ever conducted in Great Britain.”¹⁰ For Savage, the major class divide has now shifted from “middle” and “working” to the “super-rich” and the “rest of us” and the British Class Survey reveals even greater complexity in categorization than before.¹¹ Understanding how politicians and political parties and politicians have employed class languages and targeted specific groups would help illuminate how class identities are shaped by politics and vice versa. Moreover, further study into how the Conservative Party understood and engaged in class politics will further our understanding of managing voter relationships when class-based allegiances became less significant after the general election in 1966. This type of research could also illuminate Labour Party’s period in political wilderness before and after Harold Wilson. Histories that document the Labour Party’s struggles from the 1950s to 1997 attribute their electoral failures to ideological failings and personal rivalries.¹² To what extent did Conservative conceptions of the middle classes, and their values and interests, have an impact on the Labour Party’s inability to re-think its policies to appeal to a more diversified electorate? Historians have also explored how

¹⁰ Mike Savage, Niall Cunningham, Fiona Devine, Sam Friedman, Daniel Laurison, Lisa McKenzie, Andrew Miles, Helene Snee and Paul Wakerling., eds., *Social Class in the 21st Century: A Pelican Introduction* (London: Pelican, 2015).PDF e-book., Introduction, 3.

¹¹ Mike Savage. “The ‘class ceiling’ and the new class war.” *The Guardian* (22 October, 2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/22/new-class-war-politics-class-just-beginning> (accessed 23 October 2015).

¹² See Martin Pugh. *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), chapter 10 – 13 and Andrew Thorpe. *A History of the British Labour Party*. 4th edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), chapter 7-9.

the Labour Party's increasingly uncomfortable relationship with its working-class supporters contributed to their failure at the polls. How did the Labour Party view / interact with the middle-class electorate?

The Conservatives' confused dealings with the middle classes in the post war period challenges the direct connections of postwar Conservatism with the rise of Thatcherism, especially concerning the hallowed place the middle classes assume in that ideology. Emerging from defeat and enjoying the electoral fruits of affluence in the 1950s – 1960s, the Conservatives had not worked out the role of the middle classes in their policies except for the belief that they were first and foremost individual consumers. It was not clear in the 1950s and 1960s that the middle classes would become heroes of Thatcher's Britain or Conservative ideology.

Under Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Party raised the values, idea and image of the middle classes to its highest point in Party and political discourse and, at the same time, proclaimed that Britain was a classless society. At the core of this paradox was the idea that all Britons were, or at least aspired to be, economically comfortable, inward looking and independent. As such, socio-economic tensions supposedly no longer existed. According to Savage and journalist Jones, by asserting that everyone was middle class, or at least should *aspire to be* middle class, the Conservatives justified ignoring the working classes and removed them from political discussions as well as the larger political and public consciousness.¹³ Jones argues that Thatcher excluded the working

¹³ Savage. "The 'class ceiling' and the new class war." *The Guardian* (22 October, 2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/22/new-class-war-politics-class-just-beginning>

classes by adhering to a rigid outlook whereby anyone who remained working class had clearly failed to “climb the ladder” offered to them by Britain’s meritocracy and, as such, they were to be punished (by unstable working conditions, the lack of housing and, often, poverty), vilified in popular culture and media, and ignored by politicians.¹⁴ This dissertation’s research demonstrates that Thatcherism’s panegyrics to middle-class values and identity had some roots on this earlier period’s muddled and inconsistent thinking about the Conservative Party’s core constituency but that it was not an assured path.

(accessed 23 October 2015) and Owen Jones. *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011), 12.

¹⁴ Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, 48, 98.

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