



RFCB - Call for papers

‘One Nation Conservatism from Disraeli to Johnson’

Deadline for abstracts: January 10, 2022

Catherine Marshall and Stéphane Porion, guest editors of a special issue on ‘One Nation Conservatism from Disraeli to Johnson’, are soliciting contributions for this issue of the *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* (French journal of British Studies, <https://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/>), an international online peer-reviewed journal published by the Centre de Recherches et d’Etudes en Civilisation Britannique (centre for research in British Studies, <https://crecib.org/>).

Rationale

The expression ‘One Nation Conservatism’ has taken on a mythical signification ever since Conservative PM Stanley Baldwin used it in a speech on 4 December 1924 at the Albert Hall. Baldwin was taking on the mantle of one of the great former Conservative Prime Ministers, Benjamin Disraeli, who had expressed the need to “bridge the gap between the rich and the poor” and “elevate the condition of the people” in order to achieve social unity in one of his novels, *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845). The cradle of Conservatism can be found in Disraeli’s desire to bring together the ‘two nations’ at the heart of the United Kingdom but also the two types of Victorian Conservative thinking from the industrial North and the rural South. It was in this context that the phrase “One Nation” became a “familiar formula, which was used especially to signpost a Conservative concern with ‘social reform’” (Walton, 1990, 4).

Baldwin declared the Conservative Party stood “for the union of those two nations of which Disraeli spoke two generations ago: union among our own people to make one nation of our own people at home which, if secured, nothing else matters in the world.” (Some extracts from the speech may be found at: <http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/161/2012/10/1-of-2.jpg>). Baldwin’s use of the term took on a symbolic nature because he was channeling in the expression what had made the greatness of the Conservative party but he was also trying to make sense of what the Conservative Party stood for in the context of the 1920s.

The Disraelian legacy was given life afresh in the aftermath of the Second World War and Labour’s landslide victory in 1945. Some in the Conservative Party were very concerned about the need to adapt Conservative ideas and policies to post-war Britain, and more particularly to cope with the Welfare State set up by Attlee’s Labour Party. This was the time of the “reiteration of Disraelian commitments to social reform” and the emergence of the One Nation Group (Walsha, 2000 & 2003). These ideas “sought to reconcile an industrial democracy with economic and social inequalities”, moving away from a laissez-faire approach and vindicating a Tory approach of government rooted in earlier Tory thinking expressed in the time of Disraeli, which blended Conservatism and democracy altogether (Walton, 1990, 65). The words ‘One Nation’ had thus kept their “incantatory power”, even though, as John K. Walton puts it, “it was not quite what Disraeli had meant by ‘One Nation’” (*Ibid*). According to Norton and Aughey,

“the formula of One Nation did strike a chord in the minds of Conservatives. If it was a myth that Disraeli had something of practical significance to say to post-war Britain it was an effective myth. It established Conservative credentials to manage the new mixed economy and it represented the fashioning of an electorally successful image of Conservative compassion as well as competence” (Norton & Aughey, 1981, 78).

The Conservative Party and what it stands for are easier to define by referring to Edmund Burke or, today, to a philosopher such as Michael Oakeshott for whom Conservatives prefer “the familiar to the unknown, the tried to the untried, fact to mystery” (“On Being Conservative”, 1956). Therefore, ‘One Nation Conservatism’ is used, often, by Conservative politicians to keep alive a sort of ‘sacred flame’, a convenient impressionist idea, linked to the past of the UK (Jenkins, 1996, 141-145), mostly against the dangerous consequences of the 1789 French Revolution and its misplaced demands for rational rights. It carries with it a resistance to radical change as well as a willingness to adapt to organic change in an empirical way.

The remarkable ability of British Conservatism to move away from the legacy of Disraelian Conservative paternalism, believing in the Monarchy, the Church and the Empire, to a ‘One Nation Conservatism’ defending the institutions whilst seeking to promote the welfare of the citizens post-WWII, is part of the story.

Later, it was also used by Thatcher in the 1980s to defend her own brand of Conservatism (Green, 2006, Evans, 2009) resting on monetarism, patriotism, and moral expressions of individual responsibility. For example, she declared at the annual Conference of the Conservative Party in 1986:

“We Conservatives believe in popular capitalism – believe in a property-owning democracy. And it works! [...] The great political reform of the last century was to enable more people to have a vote. Now the great Tory reform of this century is to enable people more and more people to own property. Popular capitalism is nothing less than a crusade to enfranchise the many in the economic life of the nation. We Conservatives are returning power to the people. That is the way to one nation, one people” (Thatcher, 1986 quoted in Ball, 1998, 179).

However, the ‘Wets’ managed to survive throughout the Thatcher years and did their utmost in the 1980s and even in the 1990s to continue to spread the genuine gospel of ‘One Nation Conservatism’ couched in Disraelian terms.

Years later, in the aftermath of Cameron’s victory at the leadership election, he attempted to regain the political centre in 2006-2007 by advocating the One Nation tradition of Conservatism, before gradually moving back to a neo-Thatcherite stance of Conservatism embodied by his Big Society ideological project (Hayton, 2012, Alexandre-Collier, 2010). Nevertheless, in May 2015, in another context, he also resorted to the use of the moniker to describe the Queen’s speech written by his government as a “One Nation Queen’s Speech for a progressive, One Nation, Conservative Government” (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/queens-speech-2015>).

When Theresa May became Prime Minister in July 2016, she too succumbed to the need to ground her ideas in the mythical expression and gave a speech on the steps of 10 Downing street which was once again an echo to the Disraelian brand (Hickson, Page & Williams, 2020). She pledged to “make Britain a country that works not for a privileged few, but for every one of us” (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may>). It is not surprising then that the debates regarding the Johnsonian “levelling-up” agenda today are also part of the same rhetoric and Johnson himself has made his own use of the idea (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-in-downing-street-13-december-2019>),

In the end, it comes as no surprise that the expression has been abused by all types of politicians from all sides of the political spectrum (Ed Milliband’s “One Nation Labour” in 2013 for example) precisely because it can be opportunistically used for the essence it incarnates and for the genuine suspicion that

the lower classes may suffer from the changes pushed upon them by an elite cut away from them, both geographically, socially and financially.

The problem remains that the term seems to adapt to the politicians using it, within different contexts and means something in rhetoric but often not in deed. Its elasticity is what makes it the essence of British Conservatism but what does it really stand for, for whom and how? Is its flexibility not also its demise?

Looking at the secondary literature, there are practically not full-length studies of ‘One Nation Conservatism’ but that of David Seawright, entitled *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics*, published before Cameron’s victory in 2010, which was prefigured in a chapter published in 2005 in Kevin Hickson (ed.), *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945* (Seawright, 2005 & 2010). Although there is a range of academic papers on the subject, they usually address this specific brand of Conservatism by studying a specific Conservative Premiership or a group of One Nation Conservatives, such as the One Nation Group (Walsha, 2000 & 2003). Therefore, this Special Issue of the *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* will aim to bridge a gap in historiographical debates and focus on the wider meaning of the expression ‘One Nation Conservatism’, since the 19th century, as the soul of the Conservative Party’s ideas but also as an expression of British politics in a wider sense.

Call for papers

The papers may focus on:

- The expression ‘One Nation Conservatism’ and its use in the history of political ideas;
- The use of the expression by successive PMs and politicians since the 19th century;
- The political culture it is supposed to express;
- Social and economic initiatives designed to promote ‘One Nation Conservatism’;
- The representation of the expression in cartoons, pictures and art;
- Literary representations of ‘One Nation Conservatism’ (for example, Disraeli’s *Sybil*);
- Initiatives to improve its meaning (for example Nick Timothy’s *Remaking One Nation*, Polity, 2020)
- The interaction between ‘One Nation Conservatism’ and other types of Conservatism
- Challenges to ‘One Nation Conservatism’;
- The use of the expression by other political parties, women and actors in the UK and abroad;
- The international impact or lack of it if might have had over the years
- Other, any related topics to the subject.

Selective bibliography

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Call for reviews

The Special issue will publish reviews on books related to the subject and published in the last 2/3 years (for example: Edmund Neill, *Conservatism*, Polity Press, 2021; Edmund Fawcett, *Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition*, Princeton University Press, 2020).

The editors welcome proposals by advanced PhD students.



Submission guidelines

Please send a 300 to 500 word abstract, a short bibliography and a 5 line biography to both Catherine Marshall (catherine.marshall@cyu.fr) and Stéphane Porion (stephane.porion@univ-tours.fr) by 10 January 2022.

Full proposals will need to be submitted by May 1, 2022.

Instructions for authors (for authors proposing articles in English) can be found at:

<https://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/344>

The issue is scheduled for publication in December 2022.

About the guest editors

Catherine Marshall is full Professor of British Studies at CY Cergy Paris Université in France (formerly the Université of Cergy-Pontoise), Director of the AGORA research centre and of the MA Political Ideas in a Digital Age. Her research focuses on Victorian intellectual history. She also works on the development of political ideas in Victorian Britain and on their legacy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She is the co-editor, with Bernard Lightman and Richard England, of a 3-volume critical edition of *The papers of The Metaphysical Society (1869-1880)* (OUP, 2015) and *The Metaphysical Society. Intellectual Life in Mid-Victorian England* (OUP, 2019). She also co-edited, with Jean-Paul Rosaye, an issue of the journal *Philosophical Enquiries* on British Idealism (Editions Matériologiques, 2018). She has just published a monograph entitled *Political Deference in a Democratic Age. British Politics and the Constitution from the Eighteenth Century to Brexit with Palgrave* (2021). Her next project is on the role and the invisibility of classical Liberal women as well as their impact on mid and late Victorian Britain.

Stéphane Porion is Senior Lecturer in British studies at Tours Université in France. His PhD thesis was a study of Enoch Powell's political and economic ideas (1946–1968). His key research interests focus on post-war Conservatism and Britain's radical right parties. His latest publications include « Diana Spearman's Role within the Post-War Conservative Party and in the 'Battle of Ideas' (1945-1965) », in *Considering Conservative Women in the Gendering of Modern British Politics*, Clarisse Berthezène & Julie Gottlieb (eds.), London & New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 257-276; « Non, non, non ! Le Combat tory d'Enoch Powell contre les réformes ou tentatives de réformes de la Chambre des Lords [1958 et 1969] », *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, hiver 2019, <https://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/5114>; and he coedited a book with Olivier Esteves entitled *The Lives and Afterlives of Enoch Powell: The Undying Political Animal*, London & New York, Routledge, 2019. His next research project is to work on the Wets in the Thatcher years.