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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The Role of the Annual Conference in the Conservative Party

The Conservative Party Conference originally developed in the nineteenth century as the governing body of a working class grass roots party organisation which was largely promoted by the parliamentary leadership. Despite a gradual increase in middle class influence within the National Union and the efforts of Lord Randolph Churchill to turn the Conference into an instrument of grass roots control, the parliamentary party was able to retain a firmly independent position over policy making which has continued up to the present day and has strongly influenced the relationship between the grass roots party organisation and the parliamentary leadership.

Both the composition of the modern Conference, which is largely dominated by self-selected middle class activists, and its size make it an unsuitable body for detailed policy making and this has tended to reinforce the leadership's traditional independence over the formulation of policy although the Conference has been able to directly influence a number of (mostly minor) matters and on a number of other issues it may well have had a more indirect effect.

While the Conference has no real influence over the choice of party leader it provides him with a useful opportunity to communicate with the party's supporters. The increased media coverage of the Conference has developed its importance as a part of the party's communications structure and although there is little evidence that the Conference has any very direct effect on voting behaviour it provides a valuable opportunity for the party to publicise its policies and its image to the electorate at large as distinct from the narrower audience of party activists inside the Conference Hall.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although all three of the major British parties stress the importance of their annual conferences as an opportunity for the ordinary party worker to influence party policy, the constitutional position of the conference varies considerably.

In the case of the Labour Party the conference is ostensibly the final authority for almost everything in the party. Historically the mass party preceded parliamentary representation and "since its purpose was to bring into being a party in Parliament it would have been natural enough if¹ the outside party had asserted its control over the party in Parliament ... The party's constitution makes it quite clear that both the general management of the party and its political programme are to be under the direction of the conference.² Furthermore, the Conference is the source of its own authority as it alone is empowered to change the constitution and standing orders of the party³ and it also chooses the major figures of the mass party leadership⁴ including most of the "Shadow Cabinet" when the party is not in power.

While this apparently gives the conference a high degree of control over the management and policies of the party, in practice this control has been limited by a number of factors. The most important of these have been the obvious need for the Parliamentary Labour Party to retain the flexibility to respond to day-to-day political issues and the limitations which parliamentary privilege imposes on efforts to control the parliamentary party through an outside body and the constitutional freedoms enjoyed by a government in power.

In general the Parliamentary Labour Party and the mass party have carefully tried to avoid confrontation but there have been occasions when the two bodies have differed and in such cases the Parliamentary party has invariably been able to follow an independent line.⁵ The most important examples have been Attlee's decision to disregard a resolution passed at the 1933 conference demanding that, when forming a Labour Government the Labour Prime Minister should consult with the Parliamentary Committee, and when deciding to ask for a dissolution of Parliament he should consult with the PLP and with the Cabinet⁶; Gaitskell's decision to defy the Conference's policy on nuclear disarmament in 1960; and Wilson's decision to continue with the Labour Government's prices and incomes policy despite a five-to-one defeat at the 1968 conference.

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- 1) P. Gordon-Walker 'The Cabinet' (Jonathan Cape: London; 1970) p.23
 - 2) Labour Party Constitution 1966 - Clauses V(1) and VI(1)
 - 3) Labour Party Constitution 1966 - Clause XIII
 - 4) In practice however many of its decisions are pre-empted by the Parliamentary Party's power to choose its own leadership separately
 - 5) For objections) P. Sedgwick 'The End of Laborism' (New Politics Vol VIII No. 3 to this see) 1969/70) pp 79-81
F. Alloun 'British Labor after the Elections' (New Politics Vol VIII No. 3 1969/70) pp. 92-93
 - 6) R. M. Punnett 'British Government & Politics' (Heinemann 1970) p. 120

Such exceptional instances do not however prove that the Labour Conference is impotent. Generally the two sections of the party either have agreed to compromise or to respect each others views¹ and although in theory the Parliamentary Labour Party might operate entirely independently of the wishes of the conference, in the unlikely event of it trying to do so persistently in the face of repeated opposition its political position would eventually become untenable - if only because conference delegates ultimately exercise a high degree of control over the readoption of parliamentary candidates.

The Liberal Party's Assembly occupies a position broadly similar to that of the Labour Party Conference. It is a sovereign body in the sense that:

"Rules forming a part of the Constitution of the Party can only be made, amended, or rescinded by a resolution of the Assembly, carried by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting"²

and most of the party's major offices are filled through elections held at the Annual Conference, although somewhat unusually the standing orders for the Assembly are in fact made by the Party Council.

On policy the Assembly's position is slightly less clear than that of the Labour Party Conference because although the party constitution provides that:

"It shall be the duty of the Assembly and the Council working in free co-operation with the Scottish Liberal Party to define the general objectives of the party"³

the precise roles of the various participants are not spelt out in detail and in practice the Parliamentary Party has had a fairly free hand although its members are expected to avoid directly contradicting policies adopted by the Assembly⁴

Relations between the Assembly and the Parliamentary party have been less of a problem however, partly because of the small size of the Parliamentary Party and partly because the prospect of power has been sufficiently remote to prevent the issue becoming critical.

The position of the Conservative Party Conference is very different. Under the rules of the National Union the conference has no powers to control its own constitution and standing orders which are made by the Central Council⁵ and although it can and does discuss resolutions on policy there is no suggestion that its resolutions are binding on the parliamentary party. Furthermore the conference plays no formal part in elections to party office.

The reasons for this difference are partly historical. The Conservative Party was a fully developed parliamentary grouping well before the mass party was put onto an organised footing and the mass party was in many respects created at the behest of the parliamentary leadership. As a result the two bodies have always been clearly independent and consequently the parliamentary party's right to settle policy has not been seriously questioned since the turn of the century.

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- 1) W. D. Muller 'Trade Union Sponsored Members of Parliament in the Defence Dispute of 1960-61' (Parliamentary Affairs Vol XXIII 1970) pp258-276
 - 2) Liberal Party Constitution 1962 Clause 31
 - 3) Liberal Party Constitution 1962 Clause 4
 - 4) J. S. Rasmussen 'The Liberal Party' (Constable 1965) pp 62-69
 - 5) Rules of the National Union - Rules XXII and XXIII

Although the historical origins of the conference do much to explain its constitutional position in the party structure the party is generally much more deferential to leadership in its ethos¹ and while the conference's formal strength may be less than that of its Labour and Liberal equivalents, it has had the great compensating benefit in the eyes of many Conservative supporters that embarrassing confrontations between the parliamentary and grass roots parties have been largely avoided.

1) G. K. Roberts 'Political Parties and Pressure Groups in Britain' (Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1970) p 129. Also H V Wiseman 'Politics in Everyday Life (Blackwell 1966) p 131

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Some examination of the historical background to the growth of the Conservative Party organisation and the Annual Conference is essential to a full understanding of the functions and importance of the Conference as it is today.

When the political parties developed in the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth century they were orientated around Parliament and the franchise was small enough to be easily managed through 'influence'.¹

With the Reform Act of 1832 the franchise was greatly extended and although there was still considerable scope for managing elections, the enlarged electorate and the increased importance of voter registration stimulated the rapid development of an embryonic mass-party structure - mostly based on Registration Associations,² the importance of which was stressed by Peel as early as the 1837 Tamworth Dinner:-

"It may be disagreeable, and indeed, inconvenient, to attend to the registration of voters which annually takes place throughout the country. All this may be revolting; but you may depend upon it that it is better you should take that trouble than you should allow the Constitution to become the victim of false friends, or that you should be trampled under the hoofs of a ruthless democracy. The advice which has been given by some persons was, "Agitate, agitate, agitate!" The advice which I give you is this - "Register, register, register!"³

The origins of the registration associations were largely spontaneous and voluntary but they received considerable support from the party leadership although not without some qualms about the desirability of creating a mass party outside Parliament.⁴

Between the 1832 Reform Act and its successor in 1867, the registration associations developed considerably, often under the auspices of a local solicitor or similar person acting as the part-time agent of the magnate who exercised a decisive influence in the elections of the area.

Inevitably, however, the members began to demand the right to have some say in the selection of the officers of the associations and a degree of control over their activities. It was not long before the functions of the associations extended beyond electoral registration and an example of this was the Liverpool Registration Association originally formed in 1832 but reorganised on a largely representative basis after pressure from members in 1848. The new associations had much in common with present-day constituency associations⁵ but their growth was only gradual and by 1867:-

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- 1) H J Hanham 'Elections & Party Management' (Longmans 1959). Also N. Gash 'Politics in the Age of Peel' (Longmans 1953) and C O'Leary 'The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections 1868-1911' (OUP 1962)
 - 2) For details of such associations (with a Liberal bias) see J. Vincent 'The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-1868' (Constable 1966) pp 82-96
 - 3) J. R. White 'The Conservative Tradition' (Black 1964) p 161
 - 4) P. Smith 'Disraelian Conservatism & Social Reform' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1967) pp 116-127
 - 5) I. Bulmer Thomas 'The Party System in Great Britain' (Phoenix 1953) pp 18-19

"the total number of Conservative Associations of all types in England and Wales was reckoned to be nearly 800. At that date they were still mainly unrepresentative in character, but the size of the membership differentiated them from the old registration societies and made it only a matter of time before a representative character was bound to be conceded."¹

The next major development came with the 1867 Reform Act. Although it was passed by a Conservative Government, the enfranchisement of the artisan had been a major element of Liberal policy and Disraeli's move was in some respects little more than an attempt to steal his opponents' clothes. It was therefore by no means certain that the Conservatives would win the working-class vote and this, together with the size of the new electorate, forced the party to adapt its machinery so that it established more contact with the new voters.²

As a result the function of the associations increasingly expanded beyond the registration of voters, to include actively seeking their support. Clearly a more broadly based constituency organisation was necessary and the elimination of the old self-perpetuating committees which ran them was hastened.

At the same time, the increased working-class vote began to reflect in the establishment of new political outlets such as working-men's associations and party clubs, which, although primarily social clubs, also served political objects.

In 1867 however the Conservative Party outside Parliament was still not really a national organisation at all but a number of independent political associations calling themselves by a variety of names such as Conservative Associations, Constitutional Associations, and Conservative or Constitutional Working Men's Associations. In the North there had been attempts to co-ordinate activity and a Yorkshire Federation existed on a very nebulous level, but during the early part of 1867 a number of conferences, mainly attended by representatives from the northern associations, were held to discuss forming a central organisation which would operate on a national basis. These led to the first annual conference/inaugural meeting of the National Union, held on 12th November 1867 in the Freemason's Tavern in London.

Although there had been spontaneous pressure for the meeting the organising spirit was an MP, John Gorst;³ who made it clear that the new organisation was aimed at the artisan:-

"We all of us believe that we Conservatives are the natural leaders of the people, and we all of us intend, I believe, from this day forward as in former times to pursue a popular but at the same time perfectly constitutional course in the government of this country. I for one do not believe that the true interests of the people, the populace if you like to call it so, of this country are really at variance with good constitutional government."⁴

- 1) I. Bulmer Thomas 'The Party System in Great Britain' (Phoenix: 1953) p.19
- 2) F. B. Smith 'The Making of the Second Reform Bill' (CUP: 1966) pp 5-6
- 3) Another major figure at the opening conference was H. C. Raikes who was also closely associated with the Parliamentary Party.
- 4) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867 pp3-4

Initially the National Union was essentially a working man's organisation encouraged by the parliamentary leadership. The importance of the working class vote was a central issue for the party and remained so for many years but the party leadership was determined to remain in control. As Disraeli had told the House of Commons in 1848:-

"Why are the people of England forced to find leaders among these persons? The proper leaders of the people are the gentlemen of England. If they are not the leaders of the people, I do not see why there should be gentlemen."¹

The background to the Conference was outlined by Gorst:-

"The working classes of England some time back commenced forming themselves into associations to support the present Government upon the question of reform, and to maintain the fundamental principles of our ancient constitution. It was felt that their position would be strengthened and their influence augmented by the foundation of a central union On the present occasion it is proposed to finally settle the name, rules and constitution of this society, and to appoint the first officers. This association will afford a centre of communication and action between local associations supporting constitutional views."²

He also made it clear that the relationship between the new organisation and the local associations would continue to be a federal one:-

"There is of course no intention to interfere in any way with local action; the object of the union is to strengthen the hands of local associations, where existing in their respective districts, and to encourage the establishment of associations in districts where they are wanting, and further to organise associations by the holding of meetings for the general expression and diffusion of constitutional principles, and the dissemination of sound information upon topics of general political interest, and to secure the combined action of all constitutional association."¹

and the independence of the local associations has remained a significant feature in the Conservative party structure.³

Equally important the conference, it was made clear from the beginning, had no pretensions to deciding policy:-

"It is not a meeting for the discussion of Conservative principles on which we are all agreed; it is only a meeting to consider by what particular organisation we may make those Conservative principles more effective among the masses "⁴

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- 1) J. R. White 'The Conservative Tradition' (Black: 1964) p. 164
 - 2) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867 pp 5-6
 - 3) See for example the treatment of the "Interim Report on the Party Organisation" at the 1948 Conference - NUCUA Conference Minutes 1948, pp 35-44
 - 4) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867 p 4

The difficulties which the Conference encountered in such a comparatively simple task as choosing a name for the new organisation reflected both its working class composition and its inadequacy as a body for taking detailed decisions. Proposals to call it 'The Conservative Union' were stoutly opposed by a Northern delegate who:-

"was afraid that if the word 'Conservative' was used in the Union, the association with which he was connected could not join. In a Radical town like Newcastle, and a Radical district like North-umberland, they would be unable to get men in to their unions by using the word 'Conservative'. He was not a Conservative, he never pretended to be one, and never should be"¹

and undeterred by "hisses and confusion" which the chairman blandly described as a "very unparliamentary proceeding" he continued that:

"he was quite sure they in his district would be unable to get working men into their association if the word 'Conservative' were used. He had mixed with working men for years, being the son of a working man, and was sure that if they adopted the word 'Conservative' they might just as well never form the Union."²

As a result, only after extended argument, was the title "National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations" eventually settled.³

Membership was also an area of controversy. A Birmingham delegate pointed out that if branches rather than associations were allowed to join the Union, associations would be encouraged to break down into as many branches as possible enabling associations such as his own to send between 24 and 30 members to the conference instead of one. Eventually however his suggestion that all the branches in any one town should be regarded as one association with only one or two delegates at the annual conference,⁴ was overruled and it was agreed that branches would be able to join subject to a lower limit of 100 members.⁵

Even the term 'conference' itself caused dispute. It had originally been intended that the new national association's governing body would be called the 'Council' but after a lengthy exchange, including the following arguments, it was agreed that it should be called the 'Conference':-

"Mr. Dibb said he would press for the adoption of the rule as it now stood, altering the word 'Council' to 'Conference':- 'That each Association shall be entitled to send two representatives to attend and vote at the Conference of the Union

Dr. Royle would second that Resolution and on this ground, that on the 15th Rule they had a Committee elected by the Conference. Now that Committee would properly be the Council because they had all the work to do. It would therefore make the thing more correct to change the word 'Council' wherever it occurred in the rules to 'Conference'. Then the deputies would be sent to a 'Conference' to be held in London every year, and the rules as

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- 1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867 p 16
 - 2) " " " 1867 p 17
 - 3) " " " 1867 pp 7-19; 14
 - 4) " " " 1867 pp 22-25; 31
 - 5) " " " 1867 p 34

provided by the Committee were that that National Conference should elect an Executive Committee or Council

Mr. Charnley said the word 'Council' was adopted because it gave rather more of an idea of prominence than 'Conference' did ..."

Mr. Raikes had no very great objection to the substitution of the word 'Conference' for 'Council'. He preferred the latter word as pointing to the importance and dignity of that which was to be the governing body of the Union. It would be its function to alter and rescind the rules and to elect officers. 'Conference' gave the idea of gentlemen being brought together haphazard from time to time while 'Council' was more expressive of stability."¹

It was however eventually decided that:-

"Each Association shall be entitled to send two representatives to attend and vote at any Conference of the Union"¹

and that

"The regulation and control of affairs of the Union shall be vested in a Conference to consist of:- (1) The President, Vice-Presidents and Trustees of the Union; (2) The representatives of Subscribing Associations; (3) and such Honorary Members as shall also be members of the Committee."²

The outcome of this discussion was that the formal powers of the Conference were considerably greater than they are today. It was originally set up as a representative body to control the overall management of the National Union and the current situation under which the Council is the ultimate source of power within the party only developed at a later date.

The arrangements for calling meetings of the Conference also drew criticism. Although Raikes and the organising committee recommended that they should decide when Conferences were to be held, delegates felt that a certain number of Associations should be able to demand a meeting and after considerable argument it was eventually agreed that an extraordinary meeting would be held if twenty Associations demanded one.³ The powers of the committee to settle the venue of future Conferences were also challenged and the provincial character of the new union reflected in considerable pressure for the Annual Conference to move around the country but a compromise was eventually reached that:-

"An Annual Meeting of the Conference shall be held at such time and place as the next preceding Annual Meeting shall have appointed; but the Conference may vary, and in the absence of any appointment fix, the time and place of any meeting, providing every third year the Conference shall be held in London."⁴

The arrangements for convening the Conference were generally acceptable and provided that:-

"Notice of the time and place of any meeting of the Conference shall be given by the Committee by a circular letter to be despatched by post not less than seven days previously, and to be addressed to the Subscribing Associations, or their Secretaries or other

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- 1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867 pp 37-40
 - 2) " " " 1867 pp 41-42
 - 3) " " " 1867 p 46
 - 4) " " " 1867 p 49

responsible officers respectively and by advertisement to be published at least seven days previously in two London daily newspapers."¹

In the light of subsequent developments it is significant that the rules also specified that the Union's main officers should be elected by the conference:-

"The President and Vice-President shall be elected at the Annual Meeting of the Conference and retain office until the close of the next Annual Meeting after election. Any person who has served the office of president of the Union shall, if willing, remain without further election a vice-president of the Union."¹

The appointment of the union's treasurer and trustees however reopened the dispute about the role of the committee.¹ Raikes was anxious to ensure that the selection of the financial officers was left in the hands of the committee on the grounds that:-

"the Conference might be disposed to believe the Committee would use its best endeavours to procure the most distinguished names it possibly could."²

but delegates were equally anxious to avoid leaving such a vital area in the committee's hands:-

"In order to leave the Union as free and independent as possible the rule should be left as it stood, that the officers be re-appointed or appointed annually by the Conference. It would leave the government of the Union in the hands of the Conference where it ought to be."³

and the choice was finally left in the hands of the conference. The election of the committee was also in the hands of the conference under Rule 15:-

"The management and direction of the affairs of the Union shall, subject to the regulation and control of the conference be vested in a committee, to consist of:- (1) The President, Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and Trustees; (2) Twenty-four persons to be selected at the annual meeting of the Conference from the representatives and Honorary Members of the Union, and to hold office until the next succeeding Annual Meeting; (3) The Honorary Secretaries, not exceeding two, whom the Committee may appoint."⁴

The discussion around this subject sheds further light on the aspirations of the men setting up the new union:-

".... on the Committee might be some of the most distinguished men of the Conservative Party. Unless the Union was managed by the leaders of the Conservative Party it would have no force and no effect whatever. They ought to have on the Council men of leading position, men in whom they had confidence and who could communicate to them the views of the Government."⁵

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- 1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867 p 50
 - 2) " " " 1867 p 53
 - 3) " " " 1867 p 53
 - 4) " " " 1867 p 56
 - 5) " " " 1867 p 57-58

Although delegates were anxious that the parliamentary notables should participate in the new union and be influenced by it they were clearly determined to ensure that the local associations retained control. A further restraint was placed on the Committee by providing that:-

"The Committee¹ shall submit, at the Annual Conference, a Report of the Proceedings, and a statement, certified by two Auditors to be elected by the Conference, of the Receipts and Expenditure of the Union for the previous year The Statement of Account, as audited, shall be printed, and be open for inspection of all representatives and Honorary Members at the offices of the Union for ten days at least before the Annual Meeting of the Conference, and a copy of the same shall be sent to each subscribing Association."²

This openness about finance distinguished the National Union from the machinery controlled by the parliamentary leadership and was based on the premise that as it was a voluntary body all members should be entitled to know the state of its finances. Although this relative candour was subsequently used as a weapon, by Randolph Churchill, to attack the more secretive organisations maintained by the Parliamentary Party, subsequently the Union itself became highly secretive.³

The sovereign position of the conference was put beyond doubt by Rule 19:-

"These Rules may be altered at any Conference by a majority of two-thirds present and entitled to vote, provided that notice of the proposed alteration be given with the notice of the meeting by circular"⁴

and it is clear that although basically an annual conference was envisaged, delegates foresaw the possibility of holding them more often.⁵ It was then agreed that the 'Committee' should be re-named the 'Council'⁶ with the rather curious result that the body intended to be the executive committee of the Union became known as the Council and only at a much later date when the Council itself became too large and unwieldy was a proper Executive Committee established.⁷

Proposals that the next conference be held in Leeds and that Lord Feversham be elected President raised further controversy.⁸

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- 1) Amended to 'Council' in Gorst's own corrections to printed draft rules, NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867, p 97
 - 2) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1863, p 63
 - 3) See NUCUA Conference Rep. 1948; also J. D. Hoffman 'The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51' (MacGibbon & Kee 1964) p 100
 - 4) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867, p 68
 - 5) " " " 1867, p 65
 - 6) " " " 1867, pp 68; 76
 - 7) " " " 1910
 - 8) " " " 1867, pp 78-81

Rivalry between the Yorkshire and the Birmingham associations became acrimonious¹ and eventually it was agreed to delegate the decision to the Council:-

"..... the first meeting of the Conference be held at Birmingham at such time as the Council shall appoint."²

and Lord Dartmouth was elected President.³ To some extent the latter decision seems to have reflected delegates' unwillingness to be pressurised by the party hierarchy in the shape of Raikes and his committee. Paradoxically, however, the delegates knew it was essential to involve the parliamentary party and of the twenty-seven vice-presidents elected unanimously, including Gorst, Raikes, W. H. Smith and Sampson Lloyd, just under half were peers and a further eight were MPs.⁴ The election of the Council proved more difficult however and again reflected the working class character of the Union as the following exchanges show:-

"Mr. Cotter said they did not wish to have second-rate names on the committee. His own name was there, and he was very sorry to hear it read out. He had objected to it very strongly. The committee was not the place for a working man, but should be composed of the best men they could possibly obtain
Mr. Smith (of Rotherhithe) said their leaders should make the Council heard. What could working men do there? They required men of influence and men of money. He hoped the twenty-four gentlemen whose names were read over by Dr. Royle would be elected. They were some of the best names in the country. He was a working man and would stick up for the working men, but still he had no business at that board. His business was at his own locality."⁵

while another delegate felt that:-

"..... the committee should be of a mixed character comprising both the upper and the working classes"

The meeting then closed after the formal votes of thanks to the organising committee and the London and Westminster Working Men's Association.⁶

The exact functions of the Union were not clearly laid down, but in practice they were mostly concerned with printed propaganda,⁷ and meeting demands for lecturers and travelling agents.⁸ It is significant that the inaugural Conference did not discuss policy at all and Gorst's view⁹ that support for Conservative policy could be taken for granted appears to have been well-founded, judging from the proceedings of the early conferences.

1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867, pp 81-86

2) " " " 1867, p 87

3) " " " 1867, pp 87-88

4) " " " 1867, pp 89-91

5) " " " 1867, pp 89-93

6) The London Associations, and particularly the London & Westminster Working Men's Association, appear to have been a key element in most of the early conferences.

7) See Council Report, NUCUA Conference Minutes, 1873

8) See NUCUA Conference Minutes 1869 and NUCUA Conference Minutes 1873 (Council Report)

9) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1867, p 4

Such conferences were almost exclusively concerned with organisational questions and there was a fairly general acceptance that policy was something to be settled by the parliamentary leadership. This reflected the National Union's origins. Although the local associations were mostly working class organisations the parliamentary leadership had taken the lead in crystallising the demand for establishing a national organisation, and as Blake points out in comparing the Conservative Party with the Liberal Caucus:

"The Caucus was a grass roots affair which grew up in the provinces without any fostering or encouragement from the Liberal leadership at the centre the National union began the other way round; it grew under the aegis of Central Office, and it was the leadership which encouraged the associations to send delegates to the annual conference¹

This set the pattern for the future relationship between the National Union and the parliamentary party as one of cordial independence with the parliamentary party free to follow its own policy lines.

Initially the National Union was only one of a number of similar bodies and its influence in the parliamentary party which was dominated by the landed gentry was small² but in 1868 the Conservatives lost the election and Gorst was entrusted by Disraeli with the job of reorganising the party structure. Disraeli appears to have regarded the subsequent election success in 1874 as being largely due to his efforts³ and as the National Union had figured effectively in his reorganisation its position also prospered.

The 1868 Conference however was far from successful. Held in Birmingham only a few days after Christmas it seems to have been attended by only seven delegates. The reasons for this are not clear and although it has been suggested that the date was responsible⁴ it is possible that the minutes are inaccurate. In any event, Raikes persuaded the Conference to remove the requirement that every third conference should be held in London⁵ and the council was also allowed to fill for itself any vacancies which might occur in its ranks during the course of the year⁶ This latter development resulted in the Council eventually becoming a self-elective body for all practical purposes.

The 1869 Conference, held in Liverpool, was better attended (by sixteen associations) and proceeded to elect Lord Derby as Patron, reflecting the Union's improved standing in the eyes of the leadership. The emphasis on organisation continued with renewed demands from the constituencies for travelling agents and lecturers.⁷ The procedure which was used at the 1867 and 1868 meetings for nominating Council Members was used again - namely that an influential member of the conference proposed a block list while delegates continued to emphasise the importance of the working class vote on the grounds that:-

- 1) R. Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre & Spottiswoode:1970) p 155
- 2) E. J. Feuchtwanger 'Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party' (Clarendon: 1968) pp 79, 105, 123-131
- 3) W. S. Churchill 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Odhams 1951) p 114. See also R Blake 'Disraeli' (Eyre & Spottiswoode 1966) pp 536-537
- 4) R. Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre & Spottiswoode: 1970) p 114
- 5) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1868
- 6) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1868
- 7) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1869

".... it was necessary to show the Conservative Party leaders that they must rely upon the Conservative Democracy which had been enfranchised by Mr. Disraeli."¹

There were increasing signs that the Council was beginning to develop a powerful position in the structure of the Union.

The conference did however make its first attempt to discuss policy - on the Irish Church issue - and at the end of the meeting it was unanimously resolved:-

"... that a Petition against the Irish Church Bill from the Conference should be signed on its behalf by the Hon. Edward Douglas."¹

By 1871 the Council had strengthened its position to a point where the venue of the next Conference and the choice of President was left in its hands. Membership of the National Union continued to grow and at the 1873 Conference the Council was able to report:-

"The accession of many important Associations, some of which are among the most influential in the country, affords the most satisfactory assurance, not only of the steady growth of Conservative principles throughout the Kingdom, but also of increased confidence in and appreciation of, the services the National Union is in a position to offer."²

This reflected in growing prestige with the parliamentary party and in Disraeli's decision in 1872 to use the conference as an opportunity to make a major policy speech. The services provided now included the appointment of a travelling agent and the emphasis continued to be organisational. There was considerable concern about parliamentary candidates and the 1873 Conference passed the following resolution:-

"..... that this Union, being fully convinced of the steady growth of Conservatism since the last Parliamentary election in many districts hitherto looked upon as favourable to Radical principles, and also of the increasing unpopularity of the present Ministry, would most strongly urge upon all constituencies throughout the Kingdom the necessity for considering their prospects of successfully bringing forward Conservative candidates at the next election, and for their being prepared with suitable candidates where it may be deemed necessary, and that the honorary secretaries of this Union be afforded every information on the subject, and allowed facilities for reporting as to the exact positions of the constituencies throughout the country."³

This reflected a growing role for the Associations which were beginning to expand their activities considerably and undertake the adoption of candidates⁴ as well as merely getting out the vote.

The class problem continued to exercise the Union as the following extracts from the Council's Reports to the 1875 and 1876 Conferences show:-

- 1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1869
- 2) " " " 1873
- 3) " " " 1873
- 4) T. Lloyd 'The General Election of 1880' (OUP 1968) pp 61-89

"..... the fact that a very considerable number of these Associations are composed almost entirely of the artisan class appears to be the refutation, if, after the last general election, any were wanting, of the statement so often made by Radical speakers in and out of Parliament, that the Conservative working man was a fiction."¹

"..... it would be impossible to omit mention of the enormous development of Conservative feeling in the ranks of the working man, which has led to the establishment in all parts of the country, of vigorous organisations formed and conducted by artisans, and which have rendered service to the party of the highest importance in times of danger and difficulty. Prior to 1867 these societies were few in number and weak in influence, and had few facilities for mutual intercourse, and no central organisation through which their wishes might be made known to the chiefs of the party. The latter disadvantages have now in great measure been removed."²

It is important to note however that these wishes were still almost entirely confined to organisational issues although increased interest in policy was becoming apparent and reflected in a resolution on the Eastern Question which was passed at the 1876 Conference:-

".... that this Conference condemns as unpatriotic the conduct of the Radical section of the Liberal Party in stimulating Russian aggression and arresting the revival of British influence in foreign affairs, and records its entire adhesion to the foreign policy of Her Majesty's Government."³

The main business of the 1876 Conference however was a proposal submitted by Gorst that the Council should be elected on a more representative basis. This was designed to remedy the Council's tendency to become a self-elective and self-perpetuating body but it was a touchy issue and the Conference went 'in camera' for the first time before eventually accepting Gorst's suggestion in principle³. His specific proposals for reform, put forward the following year, suggested that:-

"The Executive powers of the Union shall be vested in a Council to consist of:

1. The President, Trustees and Honorary Treasurer of the Union;
2. Twenty-four elected members to be elected by the Conference at its Annual Meeting from the officers and delegates of Subscribing Associations and the Vice-Presidents and Honorary Members of the National Union."⁴

The intention was that the composition of the Council should change annually but the Council members, led by Raikes, put up a determined effort to protect their position and Gorst had to accept a compromise formula which provided that:-

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- 1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1875
 - 2) " " " 1876
 - 3) " " " 1876
 - 4) " " " 1877

"The retiring members of the Council shall be capable of being re-elected; but not more than two-thirds of such members shall be proposed for re-election by the Council itself."¹

In the same year it was suggested that the Union should set up an area structure¹ and the Conference's determination to control the Council also reflected in a new procedure for calling meetings:-

"The ordinary meetings of the Conference shall be held annually at such time and place as the Council shall appoint. The Council may, and if required by not less than ten subscribing Associations shall, at any time, summon a Special Meeting of the Conference to be held at such time and place as the Council shall think fit. The Conference at any Ordinary or Special Meeting may vary, and in the absence of an appointment, fix the time and place of any Annual Meeting."¹

In the same year the Council's report to Conference responded to the success of the Birmingham Caucus and accused the Liberals of copying the National Union:-

"Appreciating the value of an organisation of this kind, the Liberal party has lately endeavoured to set on foot a similar machinery having Birmingham for its centre, and it is believed that every endeavour will be made by them to wrest from the Conservative party some of the fruits of their hardly-earned victory in 1874."¹

Although accusing the Liberals of imitation the Conservatives were sensitive to their efficiency. The main membership of the National Union had tended to consist of urban working men's associations and it became necessary to cast the net further afield by instructing the Council to "..... take measures for extending the formation of Conservative and Constitutional Associations in the rural districts of England and Wales."¹

The National Union had originally grown up very much as a propaganda device rather than as a machinery for communication between the parliamentary party and the grass roots² but the Caucus now also intensified pressure to give the grass roots a more active share in the management of the party.³ This trend was accelerated by the activities of Lord Randolph Churchill,⁴ who was highly critical of the conventional Tory leadership under Sir Stafford Northcote and Lord Salisbury. It is not always easy to distinguish Lord Randolph's genuine belief that the established party leadership had not come to terms with the widened franchise of the 1867 Reform Act⁵ from his personal political ambition,⁶ but whatever his motives he quickly became identified as the leader of the 'Tory democracy' movement.

- 1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1877
- 2) E. J. Feuchtwanger 'Disraeli Democracy and the Tory Party' (Clarendon: 1968) pp 128, 130.
- 3) I. Bulmer-Thomas 'The Party System in Great Britain' (Phoenix: 1953) pp 20-21
- 4) W. S. Churchill 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Odhams 1951)
Lord Roseberry 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Humphreys 1906)
R. S. Churchill 'Lord Randolph Churchill' in 'Great Conservatives' (CPC 1953)
R. Rhodes James 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1959)
- 5) Lord Chilston 'Chief Whip' (Routledge 1961)
- 6) A. J. Balfour 'Chapters of Autobiography' (Cassell 1930) pp 159; 160-170
Also R. T. McKenzie 'British Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) p 167
R. Rhodes James 'Churchill - A Study in Failure' 1900-1939 (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970) p 11

The National Union, with its roots in the working class political organisation was closely associated with 'Tory democracy',¹ and was a natural vehicle for Lord Randolph to use. The movement had been given some apparent support by Disraeli at the 1872 Conference when he re-emphasised the importance of working-class votes:-

"The Tory Party, unless it is a national party, is nothing. It is not a confederacy of nobles, it is not a democratic multitude; it is a party formed from all the numerous classes in the realm - classes alike and equal before the law, but whose different conditions and different aims give vigour and variety to our national life."²

Although Disraeli was sharply aware of the need to capture the working-class vote it is doubtful whether he supported a "democratic" party structure in the sense that we think of "democracy" and indeed he is on record as having said that:-

".... we do not live - and I trust it will never be the fate of this country to live - under a democracy."³

but some members of the party interpreted his opposition to a party dominated by the gentry as support for a working class dominated "democratic" movement⁴

The main protagonists of the importance of the working class vote were the "Fourth Party".⁵ The key figures in this parliamentary group were Churchill, Gorst, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff and (for a relatively brief period) Arthur Balfour. Their professed objective was to reform the Conservative Party so that it was established on a soundly representative basis reflecting working-class views and in some respects competing with the Liberal 'Caucus' concept.⁶ They publicised their views by conducting a campaign of obstruction against the established party leadership in Parliament but although they had some success they did not succeed in influencing most of the old-guard Conservatives and it was logical for them to turn to the National Union for support.⁷ Lord Randolph Churchill was "an adroit manipulator of the party machine"⁸ and appreciated that the National Union was a possible means of bringing pressure to bear on the party leadership which was increasingly dependent on the National Union after the Corrupt Practices Act.⁹

- 1) R. Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre & Spottiswoode 1970) pp 151-152
- 2) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1872
- 3) H. C. Deb, 18th March 1867; also Lord Chilston 'Chief Whip' (Routledge 1961) p 19; R. Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre & Spottiswoode 1970) pp 100, 123; Sir G. Butler 'The Tory Tradition' (CPC 1957) pp 48-72 and F. B. Smith 'The Making of the Second Reform Bill' (CUP 1966) p 235
- 4) T. E. Kebbell 'Lord Beaconsfield' (Mitchell Kennerley; 1907) pp 254-260
Also T. E. Utley in 'Tradition & Change' (CPC 1954) p 23
cf Lord Chilston 'Chief Whip' (Routledge 1961) pp 24-26
- 5) Sir I. Jennings 'Party Politics' (CUP 1961) Vol II pp 143-158
- 6) Earl of Oxford & Asquith 'Fifty Years in Parliament' (Cassell 1926) Vol I p61
- 7) Sir I. Jennings 'Party Politics' (CUP 1961) pp 143-158; also
E. J. Feuchtwanger 'Disraeli Democracy and the Tory Party' (Clarendon 1968) pp 167-189
- 8) R. B. McDowell 'British Conservatism 1832-1914' (Faber 1959) p 138
- 9) P. Thompson 'Socialists, Liberals and Labour' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1967)
p 74

The decision to rely on popular support as a means of pressurising the party hierarchy¹ is summed up by Lord Chilston:

"Lord Randolph had become fully aware that ... all the most influential Conservatives in the House of Commons and the Carlton Club were united in their dislike, distrust and jealousy of him. Therefore, having made the formal gesture of inviting Salisbury to come forward and head the 'Tory Democratic Movement', he turned away from the leaders in Parliament and began to base his political power on his undoubted popularity in the country.

It was in conformity with this policy that Lord Randolph deliberately set to work to capture as much as he could of the Conservative Party organisation."²

At the 1883 Conference, Gorst and Churchill concentrated their efforts on getting the latter elected Chairman of the Council instead of Lord Percy. This would put them in a position to "weld the Council into a powerful political organisation strong enough to set the 'front-bench men' at defiance."³ Their efforts were successful and Churchill was elected Chairman with an adequate majority on the Council.

The attack on the party hierarchy was launched at the same Conference. Lord Randolph wrote to Sir Henry Wolff on 28th September 1883:-

"I have seen Gorst and arranged with him that at the meeting of the delegates at Birmingham I am to declare war against the Central Committee."⁴

The Central Committee established by Disraeli after the 1880 election failures was the precursor of the modern Central Office and was controlled entirely by the Party Leader and the Chief Whip. Despite Gorst's attempted reform during the 1870's the National Union's Council had become largely co-optative and was dominated by the Central Committee.⁵ Both organisations symbolised the hierarchy and Randolph Churchill centred his attack on them⁶ enabling him to claim that he was only trying to make the party's machinery more efficient, rather than attacking the leadership.⁷

The Council was heavily criticised in a resolution passed by the Conference:-

"That the Conference of the National Union while thanking the Council for the past year for their services directs the Council for the ensuing year to take such steps as may be requisite for securing to the National Union its legitimate influence in the party organisation."⁸

- 1) F. H. Herrick 'Lord Randolph Churchill and the Popular Organisation of the Conservative Party' (Pacific Historical Review Vol XV 1946) pp 178-191
- 2) Lord Chilston 'Chief Whip' (Routledge 1961) p 32; Also W. S. Churchill 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Odhams 1951) p 237
- 3) J. M. Maclean 'Recollections of Westminster and India' (Sherratt & Hughes 1902) p 59
- 4) H. E. Gorst 'The Fourth Party' (Smith Elder 1906) p 252
- 5) R. Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre & Spottiswoode 1970) pp 151-152
- 6) H. Pelling 'Modern Britain 1885-1955' (Nelson 1960) pp 7-8
- 7) L. J. Jennings (Editor) 'Speeches of the Rt. Hon. Lord Randolph Churchill, MP 1880-88' (Longman's 1889) 2 Vols.
- 8) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1883

which Churchill also interpreted as a direct invitation to diminish the power of the Central Committee¹:-

"They (the Central Committee) decided to centre in their hands all the powers and the available financial resources of the Conservative Party it was necessary that all rival bodies should be stifled I should like to see the control of the party organisation taken out of the hands of a self-elected body, and placed in the hands of an elected body. I should like to see the management of party funds taken out of the hands of an irresponsible body. The Central Committee is a self-elected and irresponsible body, while the Council is a responsible and elected body."²

It is a curious paradox, however, that although Churchill constantly upheld the importance of the working classes and was popular with them,³ it was in fact their diminishing influence within the National Union and the rising influence of middle class participation in the organisation which was making it less pliable to the wishes of the parliamentary leadership.⁴

Having obtained a key position in the National Union and launched his attack, Churchill spent the following year in trying to secure the abolition of the Central Committee. This involved negotiations with Salisbury who held firm views about the relationship between the National Union and the Parliamentary Party:-

"It appears to us that the organisation [the National Union] is, and must remain, in all its essential features local. But there is still much work which a central body like the Council of the National Union can perform with great advantage to the party. It is the representative of many Associations on whom, in their respective constituencies, the work of the party greatly depends. It can superintend and stimulate their exertions; furnish them with advice; and in some measure with funds; provide them with lecturers; aid them in the improvement and development of the local press; and help them in perfecting the machinery by which the registration is conducted and the arrangements for providing volunteer agency at election times. It will have special opportunity of pressing upon the local associations which it represents the paramount duty of selecting in time, the candidates who are to come forward at the dissolution."⁵

Churchill seems to have misunderstood this letter as a promise to make considerable changes in the party structure⁶ but any illusions which he had were firmly dispelled by a subsequent letter from Salisbury making it quite clear that he intended to retain the Central Committee⁶. Although Salisbury and Northcote subsequently had the National Union evicted from the offices which it shared with the Central Committee it was generally accepted that continued guerilla warfare would not do either section of the party any good and a compromise was negotiated which resulted in a slight increase in the funds given to the National Union by the Central Committee but little else.⁷

- 1) L. J. Jennings (Editor) 'Speeches of the Rt. Hon. Lord Randolph Churchill, MP 1880-88' (Longman's 1889) 2 Vols.
- 2) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1883
- 3) Lord Chilston 'Chief Whip' (Routledge 1961) p 28;
W. S. Churchill 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Odhams 1951) pp 214-215
- 4) R. Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre & Spottiswoode 1970) p 151
- 5) W. S. Churchill 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Odhams 1951) p 314
- 6) " " " " " " " p 316;
R. T. McKenzie 'British Political Parties (Mercury 1964) p 172
- 7) " " " " " " " p.173

Northcote and Salisbury were uneasy as the 1884 Conference approached. They were afraid that Churchill would take the opportunity to raise the National Union's grievances again. After consulting Akers-Douglas, the Chief Whip, Northcote wrote to Churchill trying to dissuade him from anything which might encourage disunity but in general the parliamentary leadership decided that the best policy was to ignore the Conference altogether and 'loyal' members of the Council were informed that Northcote did not wish to tender any advice about the agenda.¹ This neutralism became characteristic of the party leadership's relationship with the Conference - as Lowell was to write later that "The action of the Conference was [not] fettered: it [was] ignored."²

In the event the Conference was quiet: Churchill had already resigned as Chairman of Council as a tactical move and supported the nomination of Hicks Beach as his successor. The discontent began to wane shortly afterwards. The Central Committee liquidated itself³ but was replaced by the Central Office which retained substantially the same character and little concession was made by the party hierarchy. The reasons why the pressure for 'Tory Democracy' petered out have been the subject of some controversy. Certainly a major factor was loss of interest on Lord Randolph's part. Chilston takes the view that it was the strong pro-hierarchy element on the Council which caused this⁴ whereas Balfour⁵ whose view is tacitly approved by McKenzie,⁶ thought that Churchill realised that the leadership of the Parliamentary party was potentially within his grasp, and appreciated more sharply how unwise it would be to have his power circumscribed by the National Union.⁷

Irrespective of Churchill's motives, the outcome was clear:-

"The point at issue was whether the rank and file in the constituencies, on whom the parties now depended for electoral victory in a way they never did before 1867, were to have a decisive voice in policy-making the issue was settled early and it was settled against the rank and file."⁸

The 1884 Conference was largely notable for the introduction, after considerable debate, of some 'Tory Democracy' into the National Union's own structure; the Council was enlarged to 36 members, all of them elected by Conference,⁹ and by 1885 the object of discussing (as distinct from deciding)

- 1) Lord Chilston 'Chief Whip' (Routledge 1961) p 36
- 2) A. L. Lowell 'The Government of England' (Macmillan 1908) p 563
- 3) See McKenzie 'Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) p 173; also R. Rhodes James 'Lord Randolph Churchill' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1959) pp 150-153
- 4) Lord Chilston 'Chief Whip' (Routledge 1961) p 37
- 5) A. J. Balfour 'Chapters of Autobiography' (Cassell 1930) pp 107-70; also K. Young 'Arthur James Balfour' (Bell 1963) pp 87-88
- 6) R. T. McKenzie 'British Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) p 167
- 7) See also R. Blake 'A Century of Achievement' (Conservative Central Office 1967) p 22
- 8) 'The Party Conference - Reality & Illusion of Popular Control' - Times 29th September 1952
- 9) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1884

policy had been accepted as being a suitable one for the Conference¹ and increasingly the Conference became^a policy discussion body. Although this potentially contained the seeds of further dispute with the parliamentary party, in practice relationships remained cordial - largely it has been suggested, due to the astute management of Captain Middleton who combined the offices of Chief Agent and Secretary of the National Union.² Thereafter there were few major developments in the role of the Conference:-

"The general structure of English parties in the country had been established by the 1880's, and in the period 1906-31 arrangements were amended and extended but not fundamentally changed....."³

and its functions remained much as they had been in 1885.

The 1905 Conference was the scene of a highly publicised internal split over tariffs⁴ which resulted in the resignation of some of the more convinced protectionists from the government and after the 1906 election defeat a Special Conference was called to discuss the reasons for the defeat. Although the Conference began to play a slightly more forceful part in the party's structure, generally speaking relations between the Conference and the parliamentary party reflected the elitist tradition which is still characteristic of the party as a whole.⁵ The National Union:-

".... represented local democracy and held conferences to foster the spirit and express the mood of the party; and the Central Office acted as an administrative arm and to some extent an advisory arm of the parliamentary leaders. From that day to the present the National Union has been concerned mainly with arousing and sustaining activity at the local level, encouraging workers and ordinary folk to participate, and disseminating information to local units and members. It determines tactics rather than strategy, which is left to the parliamentary chiefs assisted by the Central Office"⁶

and despite very sharp controversy over the 'Irish Treaty' in 1921⁷ and attempts to use the Conferences in the early 1930's to pressurise the leadership⁸ over the Indian issue, this remained the basis of the relationship until after the Second World War.

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- 1) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1885
 - 2) R. T. McKenzie 'British Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) p 177
 - 3) A. Beattie (Editor) 'English Party Politics' Vol II 1906-1970 (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1970) p 235
 - 4) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1905
 - 5) E. A. Nordlinger 'The Working Class Tories' (MacGibbon & Kee 1967) pp 13-45
 - 6) A. Brady 'The British Two Party System' (Political Science: Vol 8 No. 1; March 1956) p 12
 - 8) S. C. Ghosh 'Decision-Making and the Conservative Party: A Case Study of the Indian Problem 1929-34' (Political Studies Vol Xiii 1965) pp 198-212
 - 7) NUCUA Conference Minutes 1921

CONFERENCE COMPOSITION

Although history played an important part in settling the framework within which the Conference operates, its current operation is clearly influenced by the sort of people who attend. There tends to be a general assumption that all of the party conferences are dominated by 'party militants' and although detailed examination of the sort of resolutions submitted to both the Labour and Conservative conferences has shown that the constituencies are surprisingly non-partisan¹ the fact remains that party members who make the effort to attend the Conferences must be more firmly committed to the party's objectives than the average voter.

In parties where the Conference exercises direct power over the leadership or policies of the parliamentary party, the composition of the conference can become a subject of active debate - as in the case of the Labour Party's trade union representation² - or even in some cases, as in the United States, of radical reform. In the Conservative Party, however, the absence of any direct control over the parliamentary party has meant that delegate selection has not been an important issue and although delegates have always been anxious to ensure that the numbers entitled to attend the Conference are not reduced,³ the method by which they are chosen has not caused any real controversy. Nevertheless, attendance at the Conference is often prized by constituency workers on social grounds:-

"Trivial as it may seem to the outsider, perhaps the most significant prize that can be offered to the hard-working constituency worker is attendance at the various party conferences and particularly at the Annual Party Conference. The privilege of attending the Conference is the most common reward for constituency work of course there is comparatively little political function attached to attending the Party Conference....."⁴

As a result the selection of delegates is treated in a relaxed way. The Conference Standing Orders do not lay down any procedure for choosing delegates and selection arrangements are left entirely in the hands of individual constituencies. Significant indicators of their attitudes are the fact that the writer was accredited by one constituency although he had no connection with the Conservative Party at all, and the number of delegates' wives who attend in a purely social capacity although they are fully accredited delegates in their own right.⁵

- 1) R. Rose 'The Political Ideas of English Party Activists' (American Political Science Review Vol LVI 1962) p 360-371 and R. Rose (Editor) 'Studies in British Politics' (Macmillan 1966) p 307
- 2) e.g. The Economist, 26th September 1970; R. Rose 'Between Miami Beach and Blackpool' (Political Quarterly Vol 43 1972) p 421; 'Socialism or Social Democracy' J. P. Mackintosh (Political Quarterly Vol 43 1972) p 482; G. Cynax 'Labour and the Unions' (Political Quarterly Vol 31 1960)
- 3) NUCUA Conference Report 1950 p 72 ff
- 4) J. Biffen 'The Conservative Opportunity' (Batsford & CPC 1965) p 187
- 5) See also R. T. McKenzie 'British Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) pp 194-5 for information on this problem prior to 1945

The number of delegates¹ which each constituency can send to the Conference is laid down in the National Union's Rules as follows:-

- (a) Two representatives (one of each sex) including, if possible, the Chairman of the Association and the Chairman of the Women's Divisional Advisory Committee
- (b) The Honorary Treasurer (or a deputy) of the Association;
- (c) The Chairman (or a deputy) of the Young Conservative and Unionist Divisional Committee
- (d) The Chairman (or a member) of the Trade Unionist Advisory Committee. The representative must be a bona fide member of a trade union
- (e) Two additional representatives appointed by each Constituency Association. One of these representatives shall be a Young Conservative nominated by the Young Conservative Constituency Committee. Where only one Young Conservative Branch exists, this Branch, for the purposes of this Rule shall have the same powers as a Constituency Committee. Where no Young Conservative organisation exists one of the two additional representatives appointed by the Constituency Association shall be a member of the Association who is not more than thirty years of age.²

All full-time agents and certificated organisers are also entitled to attend and each area can send its President, Chairman, Treasurer and one member of the Area Council together with the Chairman and one member of each of the following Area Committees:-

Young Conservatives Committee
Women's Committee
Trades Unionists' Advisory Committee
CPC Committee³
Education Advisory Committee
Clubs Committee

Certain national organisations such as the Young Conservatives, the Association of Conservative Students and the Primrose League are entitled to send representatives and all Conservative MPs, candidates and peers receiving the whip are also entitled to attend.

As a result the composition of the Conference is dominated by office-holders within the party, many of whom can be expected to be either activists or local notables. A conscious effort is made to ensure that all sections of the party are represented by specifying that delegates must be drawn from various groups but in practice it is impossible to enforce such restrictions and constituencies frequently nominate other delegates if for example they do not have the requisite number of Young Conservatives who wish to attend. Furthermore there has never been any effort to relate Conference representation to criteria such as constituency membership or electoral success as in the German or US Conferences⁴ and each constituency is entitled to be represented equally irrespective of its size or level of activity.

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- 1) Although the term 'delegates' is used in this study for convenience, those attending the Conference are strictly speaking 'representatives' of their constituencies and there are no formal arrangements for mandating them.
 - 2) NUCUA Rules - Rule No. XVII
 - 3) The Conservative Political Centre (CPC) is the party's political education organisation.
 - 4) c.f. S. Henig and J. Pinder (Editors) 'European Political Parties' (Allen & Unwin 1969) pp 35, 47, 55 for German parties

The only aspect of conference membership which has drawn strong feelings from delegates is the question of numbers.¹ The present composition of the Conference gives a total potential attendance of rather over 5,500:-

7 representatives from each constituency	3,878
Constituency Agents	554
MPs and candidates	625
Peers	100
Representatives from areas and central organisations	320
Ex-officio and co-opted members	70
Representatives from Scotland and Northern Ireland	43
	<u>5,590</u>

The numbers actually attending are more difficult to assess as there is no check at the conference itself and many constituencies apply for credentials but do not use them. Some of the post-war conferences were reputedly attended by over 4,000 delegates but a count of the numbers actually attending debates at the 1967 Conference showed that the attendance was about 2,900 (at the opening session) and this was broadly corroborated by the vote in the same year on a major education debate in which 2,300 votes were cast (after allowing for abstentions etc.).

Little information is available about those who attend and a small-scale questionnaire survey was therefore carried out among delegates from the party's Northern Area attending the 1967 Conference. Interviews were carried out in November and December immediately following the Conference.² Delegates are often replaced by last-minute substitutes or drop out altogether for personal reasons unknown even to their constituencies and as a result it was impossible to arrive at a definitive figure for the numbers who attended from the Northern Area but the best available estimate was 76. Successful interviews were conducted with 31 of these; of the remainder, 5 refused to be interviewed, 6 were wives attending purely in a social capacity, and the rest could not be contacted for various reasons.

Although the actual numbers interviewed were small they represented almost half of those who attended from the Northern Area and the survey results probably reflect the Area's representation accurately.

Caution must be used, however, in applying them to the Conference as a whole. The estimated attendance from the Northern Area was almost exactly a third of those entitled to attend (76 out of 226) whereas the national figure seems to have been over half (2,900 out of 5,590). In this context it is significant that the number of Labour dominated seats in the Northern Area is comparatively high and as a result some of the constituency organisations are in poor health. Attendances from Northern constituencies was probably also depressed because the 1967 Conference was at Brighton which was comparatively inaccessible.

The sample also becomes less reliable statistically when applied to the Conference as a whole. Although it covered about 42% of the representation from the Northern Area it only formed about 1% of the total conference attendance. It was however sufficient to give some insight into one region's contribution to the Conference and does give a broad guide to the background and attitudes of delegates generally.

- 1) Interim and Final Reports of the Committee on Party Organisation (NUCUA 1949 pp 47-50)
- 2) For questionnaire see Appendix. For comparison with Canadian experience see C R Santos 'Some Collective Characteristics of the Delegates to the 1968 Liberal Party Leadership Convention' (Canadian Journal of Political Science Vol III 1970) pp 299-308

58% of those interviewed were men and 42% were women¹ and although not directly representative of the national sex distribution it does reflect the much larger part which women play in constituency politics than in parliamentary politics.² They provide an important nucleus for certain types of party work - particularly fund-raising - and the party's structure gives them a sizeable independent role with their own national machinery including a Women's National Advisory Committee and their own annual Conference.³ It would therefore be logical to expect them to play a substantial role in the conference and further factors which favour a high female attendance are the fact that much of the Conference falls during the working week and the number of wives who accompany husbands to the Conferences as accredited delegates. The number of female speakers in debates during the period 1947-1966 shows that their participation is considerably smaller than their overall numbers at the Conference would suggest. Although women have never formed less than 9% of all speakers, the high of 18% is still well below the overall percentage of female delegates at the Conference:-

Table 2.1

PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN SPEAKERS 1947-70

<u>Conference Date</u>	<u>No. of women speakers</u>	<u>Total speakers</u>	<u>Percentage of women speakers</u>
1947	11	97	11.3
1948	27	150	18.0
1949	12	98	12.2
1950	12	95	12.6
1951	No Conference		
1952	10	75	13.3
1953	10	75	13.3
1954	11	79	13.9
1955	15	90	16.6
1956	13	86	15.1
1957	10	78	12.8
1958	14	120	11.6
1959	No Conference		
1960	15	114	13.2
1961	15	118	12.7
1962	16	114	14.0
1963	22	122	18.0
1964	No Conference		
1965	18	115	15.7
1966	14	117	12.0
1967	15	98	15.3
1968	10	105	9.5
1969	17	118	14.4
1970	16	124	12.9
	<u>303</u>	<u>2,188</u>	<u>13.9</u>

- 1) Counts carried out during the 1967 Conference showed that approximately 35% of the delegates attending debates were women.
- 2) For information on sex distribution of party militants see A. Kornberg, J. Smith, M. J. Clarke and H. D. Clarke 'Participation in Local Party Organisations in the US and Canada' (American Journal of Political Science Vol XVII 1973) pp 23-47
- 3) F. Bealey, J. Blondel, W. P. McCann 'Constituency Politics' (Faber 1965) pp 111, 117

FEMALE SPEAKERS - POLICY ISSUES - 1947-70

	1947	1948	1949	1950	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1960	1961	1962	1963	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	<u>Total</u>
Foreign Policy				1	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	2				1	1	25
The Economy	2	2	4	1			1	3	1	2		4	2	4	1		2	3	3		2	37
Industrial Relations												1			1		1					3
Transport						1																1
Planning			1		2					1											1	5
Local Government						1						1			2	1		2		1	1	10
Women	4		8																	4		16
Party Organisation	3	9	3	3	1			2	2	1	2			4	5	5	3	1	2		1	44
Constitution		2			1		3				2				1				1	2	1	13
Social Services		1		1		4	1	4	1	1	1	3	2	1	4	3	1	3	3	1	1	36
Housing	1	1	1	4	2	2	2	1	1	1	2			2		2		1	1	1	1	26
Agriculture	1	1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	2	1				1	1	15
Crime								1			2	1	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	23
Education					1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2		3	1	3	2	2	2	4	29
Miscellaneous	1	3	2	1		2	2	1	3			1	1			1	2	1	1			20
TOTAL	<u>11</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>303</u>

(Formal Seconding Speeches eliminated)

and although some allowance must be made for the random distribution of opportunities to speak there are grounds for thinking that many of the women delegates attend purely to hear the leadership or accompany their husbands rather than to participate actively in the proceedings.

Female delegates are sometimes caricatured as being preoccupied with the crime problem and the press often pictures the party managers as terrified "lest the television cameras should catch rows of middle-aged women screaming for the cat for sexual offenders...."¹ but analysis of the issues on which women delegates spoke during the period 1947-65 shows that the majority were in fact concerned about the economy, the social services, housing, education, or party organisational questions (see Table 2.2) and although the low numbers taking an interest in subjects such as industrial relations or transport are hardly surprising, the larger numbers participating in foreign affairs debates are perhaps more unusual.

There does not appear to have been any significance in the marital status of interviewees (32% single; 68% married/widowed) but the age distribution is of considerable interest. 26% of those interviewed were under 30 and almost 60% were over 50 (including 23% who were over 60) whereas only 16% fell into the 30-50 age group.

Heavy emphasis on the party's youth movement is an aspect of the Conference's composition. Young Conservatives should fill at least three of each constituency's seven Conference seats and the figure could be larger if some of the constituency officers happened to be Young Conservatives.

Although the significance of this is somewhat tempered by the fact that members can remain 'Young' Conservatives until they are 30, the high representation given to them reflects the comparatively harmonious relationship which the party's youth movement has enjoyed with the leadership,² in contrast with both the Labour and Liberal parties which have been acutely embarrassed at times by their younger supporters.³ In addition to being well represented at the Conference they play an active part in its proceedings and a conscious effort is made by the Chair to ensure a proportion of younger speakers. During the period 1962-66 the number of Young Conservative speakers was:⁴

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Young Conservative Speakers</u>	<u>Table 2.3</u>
1962	16	
1963	13	
1965	15	
1966	25	

The lack of participation by voters in the 30-50 age group generally - not just at the Conference - has been a subject of some concern to the party. While it reflects the inevitable pressures which work and domestic commitments place on people in this age group it also means that the party is deprived of the services of a particularly energetic and capable section of its supporters. In this the Conference contrasts significantly with the experience of the US parties (whose conventions are admittedly less often)

- 1) The Economist Oct/Dec 1958 Vol 189 p 211
- 2) Z. Layton-Henry 'The Young Conservatives 1945-70' (Journal of Contemporary History Vol 8 1973) pp 143-156
- 3) See for example 'The Economist' 26th September 1970
- 4) NUCUA Conference Report 1966 p 117

where about 60% of the delegates fall into the 30-50 age group:-

Table 2.4

Age Distribution at 1968 US National Conventions¹

	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Republican</u>
Age 30 and under	18%	9%
31 - 40	30%	27%
41 - 50	31%	32%
Over 50	21%	32%

It also has the effect of giving older people a disproportionate share of influence in the affairs of the party which can be embarrassing when it is trying to appeal to younger voters.

The range of occupations from which interviewees came varied considerably from company directors to lorry drivers. The distribution by categories using the Market Research Society's classification² was as follows:

Table 2.5

<u>Class</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	35
B	29
C1	23
C2	6
D	3
E	3

and the fact that 64% of delegates interviewed fell into the AB class which may be broadly described as middle class appears to suggest that the activists in the party are far from representative of the social background of a large proportion of the party's voters.³ This was also illustrated by the educational background of the delegates. All had attended both primary and secondary schooling and 19% had gone on to university whilst a substantial proportion (over 25%) had attended other types of further education or some form of professional training. Equally significantly, only a third of those interviewed had attended normal state schools whilst over half had attended private schools and the remainder had been educated at direct grant schools.⁴

This heavy concentration of Conference representation amongst middle class supporters to some extent reflects the strength which the Conservative party enjoys in that area but it does mean that the Conference is largely dominated by a middle class ethos which is not part of the lives of many who vote for the party at elections⁵ and is certainly far removed from the working-class origins of the Conference.

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- 1) J. H. Parris 'The Convention Problem' (Brookings 1972) p 59
 - 2) See D. Butler and D. Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) pp 95-96 for discussion of different methods of classification.
 - 3) See D. Berry 'The Sociology of Grass Roots Politics' (Macmillan 1970) pp 28, 42-43 for relationship between class and activism. Also c.f. J. W. Davis 'National Convention' (Barron's 1972) pp 13-28 and P. T. David, R. M. Goldman, R. C. Bain 'Politics of National Party Conventions' (Brookings 1960) for comparison with US Convention delegates.
 - 4) c.f. J. Blondel 'Voters Parties and Leaders' (Penguin 1966) pp 37-42
 - 5) c.f. J. Blondel 'Voters Parties and Leaders' (Penguin 1966) pp 32-33; 56-58
- A.J. Allen 'The English Voter' (English Universities Press 1964) p 94;
 D. Butler & D. Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) pp 171-189

A number of questions were included in the questionnaire to try and assess the level of political activity amongst delegates.

Almost half of those interviewed claimed to have been active party members for more than 15 years; over three-quarters were attending at least their second Conference and half had attended five Conferences or more. This suggests high continuity between the membership of the Conference in one year and another which has been the subject of criticism within the party on the grounds that it tends to encourage stereotyped attitudes and the Maxwell Fyfe Committee in fact recommended that specific steps should be taken to ensure regular changes in representation¹ although they do not appear to have been very effective.

Clearly this long-term support was partly a function of the age group into which the majority of delegates fell and also reflected in the fact that over 70% were office-holders of some kind with their local parties.

Delegates were asked about the range of organisations to which they belonged. Membership of the Young Conservatives and its immediate predecessor, the Junior Imperialist League were the most common - 55% of those interviewed had belonged to one or other of these organisations at some time, and almost half were current members. The next most common, surprisingly perhaps, was the Primrose League of which 23% were either current or former members. 13% were current or former members of the Universities Conservative Association and other bodies with national representation were Trades Union Advisory Councils and the Association of Conservative Teachers, but the party's 'intellectual' organisations were poorly represented - only one delegate belonged to the Bow Group and none had any connection with either the Monday Club or PEST. This may to some extent reflect the fact that both bodies tend to be London orientated.

Just under a third of the delegates had been to at least one of the peripheral meetings held at the Conference. Those which were attended by most delegates were the CPC Meeting and the joint Young Conservative/Conservative Students Association meeting and over 80% of those interviewed had also attended a conference other than the national one during the previous five years.

Interviewees were also asked about their activities during the previous general election. All had been involved in some way including one delegate who had been a candidate himself. The range of activities is shown below:-

Table 2.6

Canvassing	81%
Car driving	26%
Car loan	23%
Addressing circulars	55%
Secretarial help	29%
Polling Booth Clerk	26%
Escorting candidates	36%
Addressing meetings	19%
Committee room work	13%
Speaking on loudspeaker	16%

1) Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (NUCUA 1949) p 58

Other activities mentioned included organising cars, addressing polling cards, ward agent, scrutineer, aide to agent, loan of loudspeakers, knocking up voters, sub-agent and loan of committee rooms.

Although the level of involvement in campaigning activity was fairly predictable the level of involvement in local politics was perhaps more surprising. Almost 70% of those interviewed had contested seats on a local council and more than a quarter had in fact held such seats.

There is therefore a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that Conference delegates are "activists" in the sense that they participate actively in the organisational activities of the party although it does not necessarily follow of course that they are militant in their views.

In view of the predominantly middle class circumstances of the delegates it was perhaps surprising that almost 30% were either current or former members of a trade union.¹

While, with this exception, the background of Conference delegates largely matches the sort of pattern which one might anticipate from subjective observation, possibly the most remarkable thing about the delegates was the extent to which they were self-selected. On the basis that attendance at the Conference is a sought-after prize one tends to assume that there must be heavy competition to attend which is resolved through elections at constituency level. In practice nothing is further from the truth and although this situation can arise in very active constituencies the majority of delegates attend simply because they offer to do so and their offer is accepted by the association, or else by virtue of their office. Thus of those interviewed in 1967, over a third attended ex officio and of the remainder only 20% were asked to go by their constituencies, the others being volunteers. In no case was the competition so intense that an election was necessary.

This absence of competition partly reflects a general acceptance that the Conference's role is purely advisory (supported by three-quarters of the delegates - only a handful felt that the Conference should be able to mandate the leadership) but it is also based to some extent on cost. The expense is not inconsiderable, particularly since the Conference was extended by a day in 1958.

Of the delegates interviewed, only 10% had received some form of financial assistance from their associations and while a further 20% believed that help would have been available if required, the remainder were quite clear that no help would have been available.² Interviews with 20 constituency associations chosen from random in the Northern Area revealed only 6 which helped with expenses. Where help was given its scope varied considerably:-

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- 1) c.f. D. Berry 'Party Membership and Social Participation' (Political Studies Vol XVII No. 2 1969) pp 196-207 for low level of Trade Union participation generally amongst Conservative Party members.
 - 2) See also The Economist Vol. 181 October/December 1956, p 216. For effects of finance on Labour Conference delegates see E Janosik 'Constituency Labour Parties in England' (Pall Mall 1968) pp 156-181

Table 2.7

Constituency 'A' paid 2nd Class rail fare plus reasonable subsistence expenses for all delegates if requested.

Constituency 'B': Chairman's expenses paid.

Constituency 'C': Association gave 'financial assistance' if requested - amount and scope unspecified.

Constituency 'D': Two 'scholarships' covering rail travel and hotel expenses available. Branches invited to send in nominations which were then drawn from a hat.

Constituency 'E': grant of £25 available to be shared between four delegates.

In addition the women's branch delegate was helped by her branch which held fund-raising events for that purpose.

Two further delegates were assisted by the Conservative Club.

Constituency 'F': Expenses of two delegates paid.

Such financial support as there was appeared to come exclusively from the constituency associations or related bodies and there was no evidence of the sort of private financial patronage which has been responsible for allegations of undue pressure on delegates to the US Conventions.

While the absence of financial assistance for Northern Area delegates was not necessarily fully typical of the national situation - many Northern associations operate in heavily Labour areas and find fund-raising difficult whilst at the same time they tend to have a substantial number of lower middle and working class supporters who would need financial help to go to the Conference.- there can be little doubt that cost is a factor which tends to reduce representation from lower income party members¹ and as a result the Conference is inevitably far from typical of a cross-section of Conservative voters in its composition.²

There is also some evidence that Conference delegates are considerably better informed about policy than the electorate at large.³ A series of questions were put to delegates on a wide range of policy issues to assess their level of knowledge of party policy. In each case the issue had been covered at the 1967 Conference by a major platform speaker. The policies covered were:-

Education

Delegates were asked whether it was party policy that all schools should be made into comprehensives. This had been a major issue at the 1967 Conference and had been the subject of a ballot.

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- 1) See Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (NUCUA 1949) p 59 for recommendations on pool fare system and Area assistance with expenses.
 - 2) E. A. Nordlinger 'The Working Class Tories' (MacGibbon & Kee 1967); R. T. McKenzie and A. Silver 'Angels in Marble' (Heinemann 1968)
 - 3) c.f. J. G. Blumler and D. McQuail 'Television in Politics - Its Uses and Influences' (Faber 1968) pp 158-161

Housing

Delegates were asked whether it was party policy that Council house tenants with high incomes should pay the same rents as those with low incomes. Differential council house rents were in fact a major platform of Conservative policy. They were also asked whether the party would abolish the Land Commission (to which it was firmly committed) and whether the party supported option mortgages (which it did although it was committed to improving them).

Transport

Delegates were asked two questions. The first was on a major issue, namely whether the party supported a National Freight Authority. The second was on a more obscure issue - whether the party believed that bus services should be supported by investment allowances. In fact the party leadership was strongly opposed to the concept of a National Freight Authority but favoured the re-introduction of investment allowances for bus companies.

Social Security

Delegates were asked whether it was party policy that National Insurance benefits should be selective. The principle of selectivity in the social services was a major issue and the party leadership was strongly in favour of it.

Taxation

On taxation policy three questions were put. Two were on major issues, and one on a minor issue. The two major questions were whether the party would abolish Selective Employment Tax completely (to which it was in fact firmly committed) and whether the party would reduce indirect taxation. In fact, although the party had a commitment to reduce taxation generally the emphasis was almost entirely on the reduction of direct personal taxation. There was no commitment to reduce indirect taxation and in fact an amendment to the motion on the subject at the Conference specifically made reference to the fact that higher indirect taxation might be inevitable, in order to provide for reduced direct taxation. The minor issue was on the question of special tax allowances for working wives which Macleod had specifically promised to introduce.

Agriculture

Delegates were asked whether it was party policy that agricultural subsidies were preferable to import controls as a means of agricultural support. The party was firmly committed to a policy of replacing subsidies by import controls.

Industrial Relations

Delegates were asked whether it was party policy that employers should be legally obliged to recognise and negotiate with trade unions if more than 50% of their employees so wished and also whether the party supported industrial courts. Both policies were supported by the party leadership.

Foreign Affairs

Delegates were asked whether it was party policy that a solution to the Rhodesian question must be based on the '5 Principles' - Sir Alec Douglas Home had made it clear that this would be the basis of any settlement negotiated by a Conservative Government.

The replies were as follows:-

Table 2.8

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Delegates' Replies which were:</u>		
	<u>Correct</u>	<u>Incorrect</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Comprehensive schools	84	10	6
Council house rents	90	10	-
Land Commission	48	26	26
Option Mortgages	52	3	45
National Freight Authority ⁸	45	-	55
Investment allowances for bus services	10	6	84
Selective National Insurance benefits	68	19	13
Abolition of SET	90	-	10
Reduced indirect taxation	26	71	3
Tax relief for working wives	39	13	48
Agricultural subsidies	39	36	25
Recognition of Trade Unions	61	13	26
Industrial Courts	74	7	19
Rhodesia	68	6	26

It is clear from the results that most delegates were well-informed on the major issues - comprehensive schools, selective council house rents and social security benefits, abolition of SET, Rhodesia and industrial relations policy. It was also apparent that the party's policy on taxation had been widely misinterpreted and the general commitment to reduce taxation and particularly direct personal taxation had been construed as including a commitment to reduce indirect taxation. On less important policy issues the delegates' knowledge was much less comprehensive although in most cases they simply did not know the party's policy as distinct from having misunderstood it.

Although the majority of delegates appear to be middle class 'activists' the level of activity varies considerably between constituencies as the level of conference participation shows.

Since the War the average Conference has discussed about seventeen motions¹ and provided an opportunity for approximately 100 delegates other than Ministers to speak. In practice, however, at least 17 of these floor speakers have been chosen before the Conference opens because the choice of agenda motions pre-determines the opening speaker.

1) A conscious decision to reduce the number of motions debated was taken in 1957 in order to provide fuller debate. See NUCUA Conference Report 1957 p 31

The selection of the remaining floor speakers does not take place until shortly before the motion is debated and the scope for 'screening' speakers is fairly limited. Representatives who wish to speak obtain a duplicated form from the stewards which asks for:-

- (a) the speaker's name;
- (b) the motion he wishes to speak on;
- (c) whether the speaker supports or opposes the motion;
- (d) any organisation which the speaker represents;
- (e) the speaker's occupation;
- (f) any office held in the party;
- (g) whether the speaker is an MP, candidate, trade unionist, Young Conservative, or student.

The completed forms are collated by the stewards who pass them to the Chairman of the Executive Committee and the Secretary of the National Union for the actual selection of speakers to be called. The Conference Chairman could alter their decision but in practice relies on their advice.

From interviews with the Secretary of the National Union it is apparent that general guidelines are applied in selecting speakers. A conscious effort is made to maintain a balance between different groups within the party, e.g. MPs, candidates and Young Conservatives. Some effort is also made to relate a speaker's occupation to the subject matter of the debate - for example the majority of speakers in agriculture debates are nearly always farmers. A speaker's position on the motion can also have a bearing on his chances of being called. There is nearly always a shortage of speakers to oppose the established party viewpoint and consequently a speaker wishing to oppose the motion has a better chance of being called.¹

Although the number of genuine floor speakers at any Conference is fairly small, particularly in relation to the numbers who apply to speak, and even they are to some extent screened by the process outlined above, the extent to which constituencies participate in the Conference does give some indication of their level of activity.

During the period 1947-1966 there were 1,435 floor speakers from the constituencies after excluding those from Liberal seats. Analysis of the number of speakers per constituency and the division of the constituencies by party allegiance (using the results of the 1955 General Election as a fairly arbitrary criterion) shows wide variations in participation between constituencies ranging from almost 25% of all constituencies which did not have a single speaker at any of the 17 Conferences to one which had 21 speakers over the same period:-

1) This sometimes leads to speakers spuriously claiming that they intend to oppose a resolution simply in order to improve their chances of being called to speak - see The Economist October/December 1955 Vol. 177 p 184

Table 2.9

		<u>1947-66</u>		<u>Total Seats</u>	<u>Total Speakers</u>
		<u>Party Allegiance at 1955 General Election</u>			
		<u>Conservative Seats</u>	<u>Labour Seats</u>		
Number of delegates	0	66	59	125	-
per constituency	1	54	48	102	102
speaking at all	2	43	40	83	166
Conferences 1947-66	3	52	40	92	276
	4	22	19	41	164
	5	16	6	22	110
	6	18	6	24	144
	7	10	8	18	126
	8	6	2	8	64
	9	3	3	6	54
	10	3	1	4	40
	11	1	1	2	22
	12	5		5	60
	13	3		3	39
	14		1	1	14
	15			-	-
	16		1	1	16
	17	1		1	17
	18			-	-
	19			-	-
	20			-	-
	21	1		1	21
		<u>304</u>	<u>235</u>	<u>539¹</u>	<u>1,435</u>

Note:- 1) does not add up to full number of seats because of Liberal seats and allowances for seats which were eliminated or fundamentally altered by boundary revisions.

Because of the heavy pressure for opportunities to speak, chance inevitably plays a part in determining the number of speakers selected from any one constituency but if a constituency is active and has a large number of delegates regularly applying to speak, its chances of having some of them selected are inevitably higher than those of inactive constituencies.

During the period under consideration only 96 associations (18% of the total) produced over half of the floor speakers at the Conference (727 speakers). None of these associations produced less than five speakers and on average they produced 7.5 speakers each - or roughly one floor speaker every other year. During the same period the remaining 443 associations only produced an average of 1.6 speakers or roughly one speaker every ten years.

A more detailed look at the 96 constituencies which produced five floor speakers or over shows that more than twice as many were 'Labour' seats as 'Conservative' (2.3 : 1) although the overall ration of seats was 304 Conservative to 235 Labour (i.e. 1.3 : 1). This might indicate that operating against strong Labour opposition stimulates more activity amongst associations but there does not appear to be much other evidence to support this. The average number of speakers produced by all constituencies was 2.6 whereas the overall average for Labour-held seats was 2.3. Furthermore a look at the figures for two typical heavily Labour-dominated areas - the county seats in Durham and Wales, shows that the average number of speakers

produced from those areas was well below the average for Labour-held seats generally, with figures of 1.8 and 0.75 speakers respectively.

The most likely explanation of this lies in marginality. Constituencies which are heavily dominated by Labour majorities are unlikely to be very active while those which are marginal are likely to be stimulated into a high level of political activity which reflects in their Conference participation. If the level of participation in terms of numbers of speakers per constituency is plotted against a range of election margins¹ the relative marginality between constituencies producing more than four speakers and those producing four speakers or less was as shown in Tables, 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12.

1) Adapted from A. J. Allen 'The English Voter' (English Universities Press 1964) p 138. For relationship between efficiency of party machine and seat 'safety' see J C Brown 'Local Party Efficiency as a Factor in the Outcome of British Elections' (Political Studies Vol VI June 1958) pp 174-178

SPEAKERS AND MARGINALITY 1947-66 : Conservative seats*

Number of Delegates Speaking per constituency	Margins at 1955 General Election (%)													Total	Total Delegates Speaking		
	0-1	1.1-2	2.1-3	3.1-4	4.1-5	5.1-6	6.1-7	7.1-8	8.1-9	9.1-10	10.1-12.5	12.6-15	15.1-20			Over 20	
0	3	2	-	1	2	3	-	2	2	2	1	2	9	6	33	66	-
1	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	2	5	1	2	2	10	26	54	54
2	1	2	1	3	2	-	2	2	1	-	1	4	4	6	23	43	86
3	1	-	4	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	4	26	52	156
4	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	10	22	88
5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	9	16	80
6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	7	18	108
7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	10	10	70
8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	6	48
9	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	27
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	30
11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	60
13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	39
14	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
15	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
17	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
18	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
20	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
21	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21
	5	10	5	7	8	8	9	8	8	7	17	29	35	148	304	895	

*at 1955 General Election

SPEAKERS AND MARGINALITY 1947-66 : Labour seats*

Number of Delegates speaking per constituency	Margins at 1955 General Election (%)													Total Delegates Speaking	
	Total														
	0-1	1.1-2	2.1-3	3.1-4	4.1-5	5.1-6	6.1-7	7.1-8	8.1-9	9.1-10	10.1-12.5	12.6-15	15.1-20		Over 20
0	-	2	-	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	9	36	59	-
1	-	2	1	1	-	2	1	2	-	3	4	4	27	48	48
2	1	1	1	3	-	1	1	1	2	3	1	3	17	40	80
3	3	3	5	1	1	2	-	2	-	5	2	5	14	40	120
4	2	1	-	3	-	4	-	-	-	1	1	1	5	19	76
5	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	6	30
6	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	6	36
7	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	3	-	8	56
8	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	16
9	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	27
10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	10
11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	11
12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	14
15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
16	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	16
	9	7	8	11	9	5	10	5	8	6	15	29	102	235	540

*at 1955 General Election

	NUMBER OF SEATS (Percentages in brackets)		Total
	MARGIN RANGE		
<u>'Conservative' seats</u>	0-20%	Over 20%	
Associations producing 4 speakers or less	119 (50.2)	118	237
" " more than 4 speakers	37 (55.2)	30	67
	<u>156</u>	<u>148</u>	<u>304</u>
<u>'Labour' seats</u>	0-20%	Over 20%	
Associations producing 4 speakers or less	108 (52.2)	99	207
" " more than 4 speakers	25 (89.3)	3	28
	<u>133</u>	<u>102</u>	<u>235</u>

A comparison of the figures shows that in the 'Conservative' seats, associations with margins of under 20% formed 55% of the associations producing more than 4 speakers, whereas they only formed 50% of the associations producing 4 speakers or less. The significance of a 5% variation needs to be treated cautiously when such small numbers are involved and allowances must be made for the chance factors in the selection of speakers but in the 'Labour' seats the situation is much more clear cut. Associations producing more than 4 speakers were almost entirely in the under 20% marginality range whereas only just over 50% of the associations producing 4 speakers or less fell into this range.

Consequently it appears that not only is Conference participation concentrated heavily in a relatively small number of constituencies which may reasonably be inferred to be 'activist' but it is also fairly clear that the Conference accurately reflects the lack of activity which is often apparent in seats which are heavily dominated by massive Labour majorities.

Back Bench Participation

It is fairly common for political parties to include extensive representation from the parliamentary party in the composition of their annual Conferences,¹ and such participation is usually intended to ensure that the both sections of the party are jointly committed to policy decisions taken at the Conference. Although the Conference does not usually feature in the more commonly recognised sources of MPs' information² it provides a useful opportunity for dialogue with the party's grass roots supporters who can voice their aspirations and frustrations while the parliamentarians can put across the practical difficulties of implementing militants' demands.

While the control which the Conservative Conference exercises over policy is comparatively small and its role in leadership selection is negligible the parliamentary party plays a significant part in the proceedings. All Conservative MPs and Peers are automatically entitled to attend, but before the War comparatively few of them bothered to do so³ and the Conference tended to be the National Union's event as distinct from a general party occasion. However after 1946 Woolton actively encouraged MPs to attend and the majority now do so although many only come for part of the proceedings.

- 1) See for example J. A. Storing 'Norwegian Democracy' (Allen & Unwin 1963) p 127
- 2) P. G. Richards 'Honourable Members' (Faber 1964); D. G. Crockett 'The MP and his Constituents' (Parliamentary Affairs Vol XX No. 3 1967) pp 281-284
- 3) J. Biffen 'The Conservative Opportunity' (Batsford & CPC 1965) p 189

Although attendance by MPs has increased, their primary role is to make contact with their constituents and support the platform and it is generally recognised that they should not dominate the Conference.¹ It is quite common for MPs to apologise for speaking at all and in some cases the Chairman has made it clear that the number of MPs called to speak has been restricted intentionally in order to prevent such domination.²

Nevertheless back-bench MPs form a high percentage of all speakers at the Conference:-

BACK-BENCH MPs' CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION 1949-70 TABLE 2.13

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of back-bench speakers</u>	<u>Total Speakers</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1949	19	98	19.1
1950	25	95	26.3
1952	14	75	26.3
1953	10	75	13.3
1954	7	79	8.8
1955	10	90	11.1
1956	7	86	8.1
1957	10	78	12.7
1958	13	120	10.8
1960	12	114	10.5
1961	16	118	13.5
1962	18	114	15.7
1963	16	122	13.1
1965	18	115	15.6
1966	11	117	9.4
1967	11	98	11.2
1968	7	105	6.6
1969	9	118	7.6
1970	9	124	7.3
Average:	242	1,941	8.1

although the figures appear to have been falling in recent years - possibly because of a greater sensitivity on the part of MPs. This participation has in fact been concentrated amongst a relatively small number of MPs who have been particularly active - almost 65% of the 242 speeches made at Conferences between 1949 and 1970 were made by only 46 MPs.

Number of MPs	<u>Number of Speeches 1949-70</u>							<u>Total</u>
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	
	87	16	14	6	6	1	3	242

- 1) NUCUA Conference Report 1965 p 129
- 2) NUCUA Conference Report 1952 p 76; NUCUA Conference Report 1956 p 78; NUCUA Conference Report 1958 p 55; NUCUA Conference Report 1962 p 20; NUCUA Conference Report 1962 p 46

This reflects the fact that certain MPs - for example Enoch Powell, Duncan Sandys, Selwyn Lloyd, John Boyd-Carpenter, William Deedes, Patrick Wall and Angus Maude, have been highly 'Conference-minded' whilst the remainder have played a more passive role.

Although MPs play a surprisingly large part in the Conference there is little evidence to suggest that they occupy a particularly influential role in the proceedings. While senior back-bench MPs are more or less guaranteed an opportunity to speak and are usually listened to attentively, they do not control the Conference in the same way as delegation leaders at the US National Conventions but in some cases MPs have been instrumental in crystallising opposition to the party leadership's policies at the Conference. Typical examples have been an attempt in 1963 to get the Government to set a housing target of 500,000 houses a year;¹ Sir Derek Walker-Smith's and Robin Turton's parts in leading the opposition to Common Market entry in 1961 and 1962;² and Angus Maude's role in the debate on comprehensive schools in 1968.³ Generally, however, the same group pressures which prevent MPs from rebelling openly in Parliament⁴ operate to curb their more rebellious views at the Conference but on those occasions when overt opposition surfaces it can be highly embarrassing and if the party leadership knows that it is likely to occur steps may well be taken to forestall it. For example the whips tried to dissuade back-benchers from putting forward a critical resolution on Suez⁵ and Sir Alec Douglas Home is known to have exerted pressure on Enoch Powell at the 1966 Conference to modify his speech on Britain's interests east of Suez.⁶

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- 1) NUCUA Conference Report 1963 pp 26-33
 - 2) NUCUA Conference Report 1961 pp 47-49; also NUCUA Conference Report 1962 pp 46-66
 - 3) NUCUA Conference Report 1968 p 42
 - 4) R. J. Jackson 'Rebels and Whips' (Macmillan 1968) pp 306-307
 - 5) M. Laing 'Edward Heath - Prime Minister' (Sidgwick and Jackson 1972) p 115
 - 6) A. Alexander and A. Watkins 'The Making of the Prime Minister 1970' (Macdonald 1970) p 86

4. TWO CASE STUDIES IN DECISION MAKING

The size of the Conference has already been noted and this, together with its composition clearly has a bearing on its capacity to make decisions. The difficulties of taking detailed decisions through such an unwieldy body are sharply illustrated by the way in which the Conference dealt with two organisational questions - the so-called Maxwell-Fyfe reforms and the Conference venue.

Party finance was an important question which had to be settled after the Conservative Party's post war election defeat. Previously constituencies had only been responsible for their own expenditure and expenditure at national level had originally been covered by circularising known wealthy supporters of the party and the peers¹ and latterly by approaches to large companies.

After the war the situation changed. Woolton's plans to revitalise the party involved a substantial expansion of staff and expenditure at Central Office. He also wanted to subsidise the weaker constituencies which needed heavy expenditure particularly on full-time agents - if they were to improve their electoral position. He believed that fund-raising would improve party morale by increasing party members' activity² and this combination of sheer financial necessity and confidence in the morale-boosting value of fund-raising lay behind two developments at the 1947 Conference.

The first was an appeal for the then enormous sum of £1 million to provide a basic fund launched by Woolton personally:

' With the approval of the Area Chairmen, which I have obtained, and I hope with the support and approval of this great Conference representing, as it does, the rank and file of the movement throughout the country, I now turn my attention to securing the financial stability at the centre ... In the past the Party has been shy of asking for money, and it has collected for its Central Fund from a few hundred people. Well, it is not so easy to do that now - and I do not want to do it. We are not a class party. I want the support of every section of society - a broad democratic response from people who are prepared to pay, according to their means, for their political beliefs. I therefore appeal to every Conservative in the country to join in this national fund³.. '

The second move, designed to provide a more continuous source of income, took the form of a motion put forward by a delegate from Bedford:

' This Conference considers that constituency associations should be asked to accept some responsibility for contributing towards the Central Funds of the Party⁴ '

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1. For the origins of this practice see W B Gwyn 'Democracy and the Cost of Politics in Britain' (Athlone; 1962) pp 107-9
 2. Lord Woolton 'Memoirs' (Cassell 1959)
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1947 pp 76-77. Similar funds were launched by DuCann and Lord Carrington after the 1964 and 1966 General Election defeats.
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1947 p 78

The principle of contributing to the Party's Central Funds was new and it was clear that the onus would fall on the associations:-

' From now on we must rely more largely on our income being obtained from several million adherents to our cause. Obviously the Local Associations are the only possible means of collecting that money, and it must be the responsibility of each one of us to see that in the future a certain proportion of our income flows through to the centre¹ '

The motion which was not specific in its proposal was carried unanimously and shortly after the Conference the National Union Executive Committee set up a sub-committee under Henry Brooke :

' To consider how effect can be given to the proposal that constituency associations should be asked to accept some responsibility for contributing towards the Central Funds of the Party. '

Party finance and candidate selection were closely connected issues. Prior to the Second World War MPs and candidates had often been expected to bear their own election expenses and most of the day-to-day running costs of their constituency association. A candidate's capacity to meet this expenditure had consequently become one of the criteria of selection and there were signs that associations were sometimes choosing candidates on the strength of their wealth rather than their intrinsic quality.

This practice tended to perpetuate the Party's image as the party of wealthy classes and encouraged a complacent attitude in constituency associations. It had been a subject of concern as early as 1924 when Baldwin was urging constituency associations "to be less chary of choosing candidates who could not afford heavy subscriptions to Party Funds²", and in the 1930's it became an increasingly important issue³, culminating in a motion passed at the 1934 Conference:-

' that every effort ought to be made to broaden the representative and financial basis of the Party organisations in constituencies in order that they may be able to avail themselves of the best and where possible local candidates and that every effort ought to be made to avoid dependence upon the personal resources of members and candidates⁴ .

The subject was of little importance during the war but the very large number of new candidates required in 1945 brought it back into prominence and the 1947 Conference passed a resolution that:-

' This Conference reaffirms the policy of the Party in refusing recognition to candidates who do not conform to the strict financial limits laid down by the Central Council; warmly commends the large number of constituency associations which have entirely relieved candidates of all financial obligations; urges other constituencies, when adopting candidates, to follow this excellent example; and asks the Executive Committee to examine

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1947 p 78
 2. R. Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 1970) p 224
 3. A Ranney 'Pathways to Parliament' (Macmillan 1965) p 20 ff
 4. NUCUA Conference Minutes 1934. See also R Rhodes James 'Memoirs of a Conservative' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1969) pp 268-269

' the possibility of reducing still further the maximum contribution which candidates may make towards election expenses, and the maximum subscriptions which MPs and candidates may pay to their constituency associations¹ '

The sequel to this was that the Executive Committee set up a second sub-committee² chaired by W Robson Browne:-

' To examine the possibility of reducing still further the maximum contribution which candidates may make towards election expenses and the maximum subscription which MPs and candidates may pay to their constituency associations. '

At the same time a third sub-committee³ was established under Arthur Colegate to tackle another pressing problem which affected the Party's organisation:-

' To report on the status of Agents within the Party, the method of their appointment and the system of their employment; to make urgent recommendations in consultation with all interested parties, with a view to improvements and increasing the efficiency of the Party organisation in the country. '

In June 1948 all three committees reported back to the National Executive but by that time it had been decided that a more comprehensive and far-reaching assessment of the Party's entire organisational structure was required.

' One regularly observed consequence of an election defeat is to attract blame on to the organisation of the losing party⁴ '

and the new Co-ordinating Committee set up under David Maxwell-Fyfe was a typical example of a well established process which both of the major parties go through after an election failure⁵. Its terms of reference were:-

' To study the reports of the Committee on Party Finance, Financial Arrangements for Candidates and Employment of Agents, and to suggest how their proposals can best be implemented.

To examine the Constitution of the National Union and the relationships between the Constituencies, the Provincial Areas, the National Union and the Party as a whole.

To report on the above matters to the Chairman of the Party Organisation and to the Executive Committee of the National Union as soon as possible. In view of the wide range of issues involved, the Committee is authorised, if necessary, to present an interim report. '

The Committee's Interim Report⁶ was published shortly before the 1948 Annual Conference. The amount of time available was very limited, but the Committee was under pressure to respond to the demands at previous Conferences and they were able to draw on much of the work already done by

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1947
2. The Sub-Committee on the Financial Arrangements of Candidates
3. The Sub-Committee on the Employment of Agents
4. Lord Windlesham 'The Communication of Conservative Policy 1963-64' (Political Quarterly Vol 36 No 2 1965) pp 164-180
5. R T McKenzie 'British Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) pp 180-185 Also Socialist Commentary May 1967 p 19 and 'Interim Report of the Sub-Committee on Party Organisation' (The Wilson Committee)(Labour Party 1955)
6. Interim Report of the Committee on Party Organisation - NUCUA 1948

the Sub-Committees. The Interim Report was, however, confined solely to reconsidering the suggestions made by those Sub-Committees and the broader issues were not considered until the following year.

The general effects of the Committee's recommendations on the Party have already been thoroughly analysed but the Conference discussion of the proposals is of interest because the subjects under discussion were within the direct prerogative of the individual associations. The associations are jealous of their independence², particularly on finance, and the recommendations could only be enforced if they obtained voluntary support from a substantial number of constituencies. Consequently it provides an unusual example of constituency representatives being able to take decisions in the knowledge that they would have to enforce specific changes in their own organisations.

The finance proposals were essentially that a quota system should be established under which every constituency would agree a contribution towards Central Funds with the Party Treasurer based on its membership and its fund-raising capacity. As a result, many wealthy constituencies would find themselves committed to fairly substantial contributions and whereas it was one thing to raise funds for use within the constituency, raising additional funds which would be directed into an anonymous fund in Smith Square would be much more difficult.

The recommendations on financial arrangements of candidates also involved painful decisions for many constituencies with wealthy candidates who were carrying the association's expenses. Permissible contributions from MPs and candidates were to be drastically reduced³ and this meant that some constituencies would have to take on an entirely unaccustomed fund-raising function.

The direct effects which the decisions on both questions would have on the day-to-day running of constituencies focussed attention on the role of the delegates.

The traditional role of the constituency members attending the Conference was that of a representative and their sole duty was to participate as individuals. Inevitably they were expected to reflect the views of their associations up to a point but there had never been any question of mandating delegates and the 1947 Conference illustrated the difficulties of trying to take detailed organisational decisions when the Conference machinery was not really equipped to do so.

The Interim Report was considered at the Conference session held on 6 October 1948 but as it was not published until 22 September many of those attending had not even had an opportunity to discuss it informally with their associations and their position was put by a delegate from Eccles:

' I want to make it quite clear that I am not speaking against the Report at all ... I have had no opportunity of discussing this matter with my Executive, my Treasurer, or other Party officials. This document contains far-reaching matters, matters

1. J D Hoffman 'The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51' (MacGibbon & Kee 1964)
2. D J Wilson 'Constituency Party Autonomy and Central Control' (Political Studies Vol XXI 1973) pp 167-174
M Pinto - Duschinsky 'Central Office and 'Power' in the Conservative Party' (Political Studies Vol XX 1972) pp 1-16
3. Woolton was firmly behind this recommendation, see Lord Woolton 'Memoirs' (Cassell: 1959) p 346 'This change was revolutionary and, in my view, did more than any other single factor to save the Conservative Party .. Here was Tory democracy in action.'

of paramount importance. I have no mandate to vote on this matter from my constituency ... I therefore beg to move that this Conference refers back the Interim Report of the Committee on Party Organisation for general referendum to all constituency associations, on the ground that this Report was received so late as to preclude any opportunity for discussion by the Executive Committees of constituency associations, and considers that this Report should be brought before the Central Council of the National Union at its next meeting¹.'

This view was strongly backed by the Chairman of Yorkshire Area who reported that his Area Executive Committee had passed the following resolution:

'That this Executive Committee ... strongly urges that when the Interim Report of the Special Committee on Party Organisation is presented to the Conference, it shall be for discussion only, and no decision shall be taken thereon until the final report is presented to the Central Council².'

and he brought home the difficulty facing the average party member attending the Conference:

'If you approve of this document, you would be approving detailed schemes, and it would be your entire responsibility to convince all your own constituency association executives of every detail of this document.'³

The reactions of rank and file party workers at home were a further consideration. As one representative pointed out, it might antagonise them if the Conference took a decision committing them to heavy fund-raising without consultation⁴.

The opposite point of view was put pungently by Miss Pat Hornsby-Smith:-

'I was under the impression that this great Conference was attended by 4,000 elected delegates from the Associations, charged to give a lead to the Party and to pass their views on the policy of the Party; charged to make a positive decision and not waffle ... may I remind you that you were the delegates who passed the Resolutions upon which is based this Report'⁵...

The proposals on constituency finance included an undertaking that there would be no sanctions against constituencies which failed to meet their quota, and it was argued that this meant that even if delegates approved the report, they were not formally committing their constituencies to positive action:

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 39
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 40
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 40
4. For analysis of effects in one constituency party see A H Birch 'Small Town Politics' (OUP 1959) pp 46-47
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 42

' ... the thing I do want to emphasise, because it deals with the question of how far you people are entitled to commit your constituencies, is that there is not one word in that Report which binds any constituencies to find the money which is recommended... You are not committing your constituencies to anything which they cannot do. You are taking no obligation other than to convey to the Maxwell-Fyfe Committee that the constituencies are going to do their best ... Now you people are not stooges, I hope. You are not sent here by your constituencies to sit here and listen to what is said, go back and get their instructions ... for heaven's sake take your courage in both hands ... '

Although theoretically the commitment was very small, it was quite clear that if the general principle of quotas was accepted, most constituencies would be under strong moral pressure. Henry Brooke, who was presenting the Report in the absence of Maxwell-Fyfe, showed a ready appreciation of the problem facing delegates but tried to reassure them by emphasising how small the real commitment was:

'I understand completely - because I have long constituency experience myself - the doubts and hesitations of those who feel they would like to go back to their Executive Committees .. if this reference back motion is not carried ... I shall then ask leave of the Chair to move that this Conference approves the Interim Report in principle, on the understanding that no constituency is committed to the quota system until it has been directly consulted²... '

This was enough to reassure the delegates and when a vote was taken separately on the reference back of each of the three main sections of the Report - Party Finance, Financial Arrangements of Candidates, and Employment of Agents - it was defeated each time³. The Chairman then proposed that the Report should be adopted as a whole and this was done but, owing to a procedural oversight, the compromise rider which Brooke had promised was not raised and had to be put rather hurriedly the following morning (7 October 1948) when it was unanimously accepted⁴.

The reactions of delegates to the Interim Report clearly illustrated the limitations of the "representative" system. In theory representatives should have been in a position to take decisions without prior consultation with their associations but it was apparent that although this could work satisfactorily if general policy issues were concerned, it was quite inadequate where matters directly affecting the day-to-day management of associations were involved.

As a result, the Conference's rather loose basis of representation is probably satisfactory as long as it confines itself to general policy questions on an advisory basis, but if detailed policy or organisational decisions were to be taken regularly by the Conference some fairly radical changes in the methods of mandating delegates would probably become necessary.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 41
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 44
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 44
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 45

In some ways the venue of the Conference is a trivial matter but it provides some insight into the Conference's capacity to take decisions on matters of detail.

Since the Second World War numbers have been a major organiser's problem at the Conference. The Central Council's Report for 1947 noted that:-

' The attendance at last year's Conference was double that at any pre-war Conference, and the [Executive] Committee has given much thought to the arrangements for Brighton, in view of the obvious fact that increased interest and better organisation in the Constituencies may result in an even larger attendance. It may well be that for the first time in the history of the Conference the largest hall available will be too small to accommodate the representatives. Arrangements have, therefore, been made to relay the proceedings to the Dolphin Theatre which is close to The Dome. The Leader's speech at the Mass Meeting will be relayed to the Imperial Theatre¹. '

Although both Churchill and Eden went to the Imperial Theatre after their initial appearances at The Dome², the experiment of using several halls simultaneously was not a success. Delegates in the overflow halls felt deprived of direct contact with the leaders and the basis for admission to the main hall (restricted to members of the Central Council) caused controversy. Difficulties also arose over voting. Most votes at Conservative Conferences are taken on a show of hands but the Chairman in the main hall found it hard to assess the results in the other halls and the problem became even more complicated when one hall carried the motion but the other did not³.

A similar situation in 1952 with a show of hands giving conflicting results in different halls just when the party leader's final speech was imminent was only solved by persuading the Conference merely to record that it had expressed "a division of opinion"⁴, while in 1956 the television link between the halls broke down and as a result only the votes in the main hall were counted⁵.

In 1947 the Central Council had suggested that:-

' The only alternative to using two halls would have been to reduce Constituency representation⁶. '

but both the Central Council and the Conference were most reluctant to take such a step because of deep-rooted prejudices in favour of broad representation and the following year the Conference Arrangements Sub-Committee decided firmly in favour of splitting the Conference again:

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 15
2. This was designed to give the delegates in the other hall the feeling of 'personal contact' with leadership.
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 106
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 105
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, p 76
6. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 15

' The Committee is fully aware that it is unsatisfactory if all the representatives cannot be accommodated in one hall, but believes it is meeting the wishes of the Party in not suggesting any reduction in Constituency representation at any rate before the General Election¹ '

The Committee's assessment of delegate reaction to the prospect of reduced numbers was correct but the split Conference was an unsatisfactory compromise, and no solution would fully satisfy the delegates short of larger halls - which were not available. For many delegates the opportunity to meet and mix with the party leaders in the flesh was an important aspect of the Conference, particularly in the period immediately after the War when television coverage did not exist.

Accepting that a split Conference, although unpopular, was the lesser of two evils, the Conference Arrangements Sub-Committee tried to meet some of the complaints which had arisen in 1947 over the allocation of accommodation in the main Conference Hall. The revised arrangements were that

' in order to ensure that at every Session each Constituency is represented, every Constituency should have the same number of admission vouchers for the main Conference Hall, with vouchers for the overflow² for the remainder - the allocation to be made by the constituency associations. '

and ' instead of the members of the Central Council having seats for the main mass meeting as at Brighton, and the remainder having tickets for the overflow, the allocation of tickets between the main and the overflow meetings for constituency² representatives should be made by the constituency associations. '

The number of delegates actually attending the 1948 Conference was estimated at 4,000³, 1,500 of these were accommodated in the overflow hall and the problems were raised at an early stage by the Chairman of the Executive Committee who drew the Conference's attention to an invitation from Yorkshire Area to hold the 1949 Conference in Scarborough⁴: He was quite blunt about the difficulties:-

' I submit to you tonight in all seriousness that unless the Central Council at its next meeting - which is to be held in March - amends or alters the Rules in such manner as to provide for greatly reduced representation, it would be hardly practical, and certainly imprudent, in view of our experience here, to hold our Annual Conference next year at Scarborough ... If we are to hold the Conference in one building, there honestly is no alternative next year but to hold it in London⁵... '

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1948
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1948
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 32-33
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 23
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 34

and effectively forestalling criticism from the floor¹ he proposed that the Executive Committee's original proposal to go to Scarborough should be rescinded, leaving the Committee free to arrange the 1949 Conference in London. This was accepted on the basis that it was the only feasible solution although London was not a popular venue as most delegates preferred the holiday atmosphere of the seaside resorts and a Conference in London meant that contact with the Party leadership was reduced.

Before the 1950 Conference was held the Final Report of the Maxwell Fyfe Committee containing a detailed analysis of the Conference's size and venue problem was approved by the Central Council² :-

'The present rules of the National Union provide for representation at the Conference of approximately 5,600. The numbers present at the three post-war Conferences have been approximately:

Blackpool	....	2,900
Brighton	....	3,360 ₃
Llandudno	....	3,600 ³

To some the idea of so large an assembly is attractive. It is a demonstration of strength and enthusiasm. Many of the keenest Party workers are brought into contact with the most prominent figures in the Party, and gather encouragement from the experience. Others, who desire the more intimate circumstances necessary to thoughtful debate, regret a Conference of this magnitude. '

Three possible changes were considered. The Conference could alternate between Blackpool and London which meant that it could be fitted under one roof or it could include other venues, accepting that when they were used the Conference would have to be split between two or more halls - opening up the possibility of running separate debates in the different halls and allowing some degree of specialisation.

Although possible procedural difficulties could have arisen as a result of half the Conference, committing the remainder to a policy without an opportunity to participate, the proposal would have allowed more detailed discussion of policy, but the Committee did not favour it on the grounds that delegates ought to have a complete view of the Party's proposals.

The third alternative was to reduce constituency representation from seven delegates to two, bringing the Conference down to a size which could fit into halls in a variety of conference centres.

Assuming that the composition of the Conference would remain the same apart from the reduced constituency representation, the Committee estimated that the total numbers would be:

Two representatives per constituency in England, Wales & Northern Ireland	.....	1,108
Constituency Agents from England, Wales and Northern Ireland	.....	554

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 34
2. 'Interim & Final Reports of the Committee on Party Organisation' (NUCUA 1949) pp 47-50 - approved on 15 July 1949
3. Note discrepancy with figures given in 1948 NUCUA Conference Report (NUCUA Conference Report) pp 32-33

Members of Parliament and Candidates (United Kingdom)	625
Representatives of Areas, Central Associations and other organisations ..	320
Ex Officio & Co-opted members	70
Representatives from Scotland and Northern Ireland	43
	<hr/>
	2,820
	<hr/>

After allowing for the fact that not all of those entitled to do so would ever be able to attend the Committee estimated that the actual attendance would be below 2,300 which would enable the Conference to fit into a wider range of halls.

After pointing out that the balance of representation from various party groups such as Young Conservatives, Trade Unionists and Women's Organisations could be affected, and emphasising the strength of constituency feeling and the need for careful consultation, the Committee avoided making a definite recommendation but merely suggested that the whole problem should be discussed at the 1950 Conference which should "make to the Executive such recommendations as seem good".¹

The recommendation was vague and led to confusion on the Conference floor.

At the 1950 Conference, in an effort to obtain a positive result Maxwell-Fyfe himself proposed a formal resolution on behalf of the Executive Committee:-

' That in the opinion of this Conference it is desirable that the Annual Conference of the Party should be held each year in a different Provincial Area.

That this Conference accordingly requests the Central Council to make such reductions in the numbers entitled to attend the Annual Conference as would make such a course possible, on the understanding that Constituency representation should be increased in any year in which the Conference² is held in a place that could accommodate a larger number.² '

Pointing to the increased number of delegates which was restricting the Conference to Blackpool and London; the disadvantages of London as a Conference base; and the advantages of visiting the various Areas, he made it clear that if the Conference was going to take place in different areas, it either had to split or reduce in size. As splitting the Conference had already proved unsatisfactory the only alternative was to reduce its size³ although some concession to constituency feeling.

1. Interim and Final Reports of the Committee on Party Organisation (NUCUA 1949) p 50
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, p 72
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, pp 72-76

could be made by providing for re-enlargement of the Conference whenever the accommodation available permitted. After reviewing the arithmetic of Conference attendance a further concession was also offered. Whereas the original Report had recommended a representation of the delegates per constituency, plus the MP or candidate and the agent, the Executive Committee now calculated that in practice it would be necessary to reduce the number of delegates to only four whilst retaining the membership of the MP/candidate and the agent.¹

In a rather confused debate the resolution was supported by the Chairman of the Young Conservatives but strongly opposed by a back-bench MP and arguments centred around claims that a large Conference was more representative while a reduction in size could upset the balance between the various groups in the Party.

Although many delegates recognised the advantages of a smaller Conference which could visit different areas, there was an underlying feeling that if numbers were reduced this would prevent Party supporters from having an opportunity to attend. Significantly, however, little mention was made of the effects which the Conference's size had on its capacity for efficient decision-making although a delegate from Leeds did make the point that it was

' ... not an efficient Conference. This Party is renowned for efficient government ... I say we cannot do our work properly with 4,500 people in one hall². '

In the face of protests Maxwell-Fyfe's resolution was split into two parts to separate the question of holding the Conference at different venues from that of a reduction in numbers. A ballot was held on the first issue and the proposal to move the Conference regularly was defeated by the relatively close margin of 1,552 votes to 1,859. This meant that a reduction in numbers was unnecessary and the second proposal was defeated by a very large majority on a show of hands.

This might have been a satisfactory solution if the Conference had accepted the consequence of its decision - namely, that future Conferences could only be held in London and Blackpool. The situation was, however, totally confused by the fact that later in the Conference a resolution was approved nominating Scarborough as the venue for the next Conference, despite controversy over whether or not the rejection of the motion to hold the Conference 'each year in a different Provincial Area' precluded the use of any venue other than London or Blackpool³.

The 1950 Conference illustrated the Conference's inability to take detailed practical decisions on even quite minor matters. This was highlighted by the fact that at one stage the Chairman had to threaten that the decision would be taken out of the Conference's hands altogether and settled by the Central Council if it could not make up its mind⁴. It proved quite unable to decide between deep-rooted conflicting interests. On the one hand delegates were determined to maintain maximum opportunity for Party supporters to attend, but at the same time they were equally determined not to accept the natural consequences which were that the Conference would have to alternate between London and Blackpool.

1. This was based on the knowledge that although there was heavy pressure for Conference places in some constituencies, there were always others which did not take up their full quota of places.
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, p 75
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, pp 81-83
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, p 83

The overall situation was well summed up by Woolton in some good natured avuncular chaff in his closing speech:-

' I gather that you all liked one another so much that you insisted that ... the more we are together the merrier we will be. So you decided to remain just the same size in the future as you are now, and you also decided that you would go around the country regardless of whether there were places to accommodate you or not. ¹ '

In 1951 the Conference was cancelled because of the General Election, but in 1952 the issue immediately arose again. The Conference was held at Scarborough - the venue originally approved by the 1950 Conference, with the effect that it was automatically split between three halls. Although the disadvantages were freely recognised by the Chairman as soon as the Conference began, the venue was the Conference's own choice and it did not have much room for rational complaint. There was, however, very strong delegate feeling about an Executive Committee recommendation that the following year's Conference should be held in Margate² which would again mean a split. On the other hand, the only real alternative, reducing the size of the Conference, was even more unpopular. Sir Eric Errington, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, explained the problems:-

' A resolution was moved at Blackpool two years ago suggesting that owing to the difficulty of accommodation there should be a reduction in numbers of the representatives from each constituency coming to this Conference. Now, to put it quite bluntly, that was turned down flat. In those circumstances the Executive thought it proper to revert³ to the position that existed before that resolution was moved. ³ '

Normally a strong lead from the Executive such as this would have carried the Conference quite easily and the matter would have dropped. It is therefore an indication of the strength of feeling that a delegate not only objected to the Executive's recommendation but actually succeeded in moving the reference back of the relevant section of the Executive's report:

' I would particularly draw your attention to the decisions made at the Blackpool Conference two years ago. It was decided that in future the Conference would be held under one roof⁴ ... '

in the process voicing the feelings of those who objected so strongly to the idea of a split Conference:

' I know we are faced with a most difficult problem but we should, if we are to organise our Conference successfully, all be together so that we can have everyone under one roof, knowing exactly what is happening and not feeling they are cut off from the main body of the Conference and that they are something temporarily left over ... '

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, p 10⁴
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 21
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 27
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 28

After the 1952 Conference had put such strong emphasis on the importance of staying under one roof, it was to be expected that the Executive would move the 1953 Conference to one of the venues which could provide this facility - London or Blackpool. It is all the more remarkable, therefore that the 1953 Conference met at Margate as originally proposed but by now the somewhat frustrated Executive Committee offered a full explanation in its Annual Report:

' Following the reference back for further consideration of its recommendations made to the Scarborough Conference, the Executive Committee decided after the fullest consideration that the 1953 Conference should be held at Margate.

The Committee, however, fully appreciated that there were divergent opinions on the general question of where Conferences should be held and therefore circulated a referendum to obtain the views of Central and Constituency Associations.

As the replies, a summary of which was circulated to associations, were of such a character that action could not be taken on them, the Committee has decided that a decision shall be reached by ballot of the Conference representatives to determine the venue of the Conference in the following year. ¹

The solution finally adopted by the Executive was the only practical one under the circumstances - it avoided asking the Conference to formulate a general proposition and instead, simply provided all delegates with a ballot slip listing the available venues, including both those which could accommodate all delegates under one roof and those which would involve more than one hall.

This step was at last effective in achieving a clear answer and Errington was able to announce that there was a substantial majority in favour of holding the 1954 Conference at Blackpool.

This might well have been the start of an annual ballot to decide the venue of the following year's Conference, but towards the end of the 1953 Conference the East Midlands Area proposed that the choice of venue be left entirely in the hands of the Executive.

The confused situation which the Conference had built up was put succinctly:

' We have discussed this matter, as you know, ad nauseam at every Party Conference since the war, and we have got literally nowhere ... Firstly, there was an overwhelming majority against any reduction in the size of this Conference. There was an equally overwhelming majority that this Conference be held in one hall; and unfortunately there was a substantial majority in favour of this Conference going about the country from place to place ... points two and three are completely incompatible ²

In effect the motion was an open admission that the Conference was not equipped to take detailed decisions and should revert to accepting the Executive's recommendation automatically on the basis that it could not do any better itself.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 15
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 94-95

The resolution was carried 'by a very large majority'¹ and thereafter the issue was for all practical purposes closed. Since then the Executive has invariably specified the venue of the next Conference without question. Although in practice the decision has always been to keep the Conference large and under one roof even if it involves a restricted choice of venue.

The question was raised again briefly in the Selwyn Lloyd Report in 1963 which dealt tersely with suggestions that the size of the Conference should be reduced:

' I recommend that the size of the Conference should be left as at present.² '

While the Maxwell Fyfe reforms and the venue question were comparatively inconsequential in their own right, the difficulties experienced by the Conference in handling them gives some indication of its inadequacy as a machinery for taking detailed policy decisions. On the one hand the Conference's size precluded it from thorough analysis of competing options and their consequences whilst on the other hand the nebulous character of the delegate's responsibility to his association made it difficult to be sure that Conference decisions represented the scientifically determined views of even the Party activists far less the mass of Conservative voters.

In view of this it is perhaps inevitable that the Conference's role in relation to policy should be one of commenting on and influencing it rather than actually deciding specific policy objectives.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 96
2. Selwyn Lloyd Report (NUCUA 1963) p 10

5. THE CONFERENCE AND PARTY POLICY

The determination of party policy is clearly a key area in any political party's activities and although there is some evidence that the mass media have enhanced the importance of the leader's image in influencing voting behaviour, the party's policies remain an important factor in determining its electoral image¹.

Furthermore, there can be a considerable divergence between the powers which a party theoretically assigns to Conferences under its constitution and the amount of influence which they in fact exercise. The Labour Party's experience is a good illustration. The constitution unequivocally puts the Conference in control of the Party:-

' ... The Party Conference shall decide from time to time what specific proposals of legislative, financial or administrative reform shall be included in the Party Programme. No proposal shall be included in the Party Programme unless it has been adopted by a majority of not less than two thirds of the votes recorded on a card vote² ... '

In practice, however, the relationship has been more elastic.

Although during the Laski episode Attlee implied that there were some definite limitations on the freedom of the Parliamentary Party:-

' Within the Programme adopted by the annual Party Conference the Parliamentary Labour Party has complete discretion in its conduct of Parliamentary business and in the attitude it should adopt to legislation tabled by other parties³ ... '

The Parliamentary Party, particularly when in power, has been able to go well beyond those limits. The doctrine of parliamentary privilege and the 'conscience clause' have tended to blur the precise division of responsibility between the Parliamentary Party and the grass roots on policy formulation and, as a result, the Parliamentary Party has acquired a fairly high degree of independence⁴ which has in turn generated friction and disputes about alleged attempts by one section or the other to exceed its proper role⁵.

In the Conservative Party the relationship between the parliamentary party and the grass roots on policy was clearly established before the turn of the century with the former firmly in command. The present day position is little different to that set out by Maxwell-Fyfe in 1949:-

' Policy is the basis upon which practice and programme are founded. It relates Conservative principles to the national and international problems of the day, usually in general terms.

1. D Butler & D Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) p 448-467
2. Labour Party Constitution 1966, Clause V(1)
3. Times, 3 July 1945
4. See for example - H Wilson 'The Relevance of British Socialism' (Weidenfeld & Nicholson; 1964) p 4-5. Also S Rose 'Policy Decision in Opposition' (Political Studies Vol IV 1956) p 128-138
5. See The Times, 23 July 1973 for a summary of some of the more recent difficulties. Also article by A Wedgwood Benn 'Labour Weekly' 15 October 1971. For earlier period see for example S Rose 'Policy Decision in Opposition' (Political Studies Vol IV No2 1956) pp 128-138 and L D Epstein 'Political Parties in Western Democracies' (Pall Mall 1967) pp 294-305

The specific plans for the application of policy are contained in the party programme. Endorsements and pronouncements on party policy are the prerogative and responsibility of the leader, who is served by various policy committees. These in turn are influenced by the views of the party as revealed in the various resolutions at the Party Conference¹ ...¹

The absence of formal powers to impose policy on the leadership can be seen as symptomatic of a complete lack of real power on the part of the Conference and the Parliamentary Party's persistent refusal to implement reform of the House of Lords, despite a series of Conference demands to do so has, for example, been cited as evidence of this².

This does not, however, take full account of the Conference's informal influence on policy-making.

After the Second World War the party leadership made a conscious effort to develop the Conference's role in the party organisation. Initially Churchill was lukewarm about such developments. He had regarded the suspension of political activity during the war as almost complete and was reluctant to accept the fact that consensus politics were not applicable in a peace time situation³. At the 1945 Conference he made no secret of his preference for an all-party government, and his reluctance to get involved in inter-party rivalry reflected in a general unwillingness to spell out party policy in detail which was reinforced by the somewhat autocratic⁴ style of decision making which he had developed during war time.

As a result, Churchill's attitude towards the Conference immediately after the war was one of studied correctness emphasising the mutual independence which had characterised relations between the Nation Union and the Parliamentary Party before the war. The Executive Committee's annual reports recorded faithfully how the previous year's resolutions had been relayed to the leader, together with his sometimes almost patronising comments, but the leadership made little conscious effort to 'manage' or participate in the Conference. The main point of contact was the leader's traditional speech to the mass rally after the Conference officially ended and at the 1947 Conference, for example, only 9 of the 20 motions debated received a front bench reply.

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1. Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (NUCUA 1949)
 2. See L D Epstein 'British Mass Parties in Comparison with American Parties' (Political Science Quarterly Vol 71, 1956) p 106 and R T McKenzie 'British Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) p 226
 3. H Macmillan 'Memoirs - Tides of Fortune' Vol III (Macmillan 1969)
 4. NUCUA Conference Minutes 1945 - Also R B McCallum & A Readman 'The British General Election of 1945' (OUP 1947) p 5-14;
NUCUA Conference Minutes 1943;
R A Butler 'The Art of the Possible' (Hamilton 1971) p 132-133;
The Observer, 12 August 1973;
H G Nicholas 'The British General Election of 1950' (Macmillan 1951) p 70 ff;
R Blake 'The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill' (Eyre & Spottiswoode 1970) p 258

Although this relationship was congenial to Churchill, there was a large number of new faces in the party immediately after the war who were much more sceptical about the traditional division of functions between the mass party (which got out the vote) and the parliamentary party (which decided and implemented policy). As a result there was increasing pressure for a more integrated party structure which would involve the grass roots in policy formulation and orientate the parliamentary party towards the aspirations of the electorate at large¹. Inevitably there were also demands for new policies which would stress the difference between the parties. This pressure reflected particularly in a resolution at the 1946 Conference calling for a comprehensive statement of party policy².

The leadership's somewhat hesitant response³ was to produce the Industrial Charter, drawn up under Butler's supervision and it was quickly followed by demands for a series of charters covering other policy fields. The Conference's increased militancy also showed at the 1947 Conference in demands that the party leadership should commit itself to implementing Conference calls for a 'Charter of Liberties', a critical amendment on the party's economic policy, and vociferous pressure for an unscheduled debate on subversive activities⁴.

While Churchill was reluctant to come to terms with such pressures, both Butler and Woolton encouraged party members to think that they were being actively consulted in the policy making process⁵. The culmination of this trend was the Conference's success in forcing the leadership to accept a 300,000 houses a year target at the 1950 Conference, but once the party got back into power in 1951 there was a gradual rundown in the party's efforts to involve the grass roots in policy formulation until the party lost power again in 1964.

After 1964 a major effort was made to reorientate the party back to the grass roots and a series of measures were taken, many of them very similar to those⁶ of the 1945-51 period, to involve party workers in policy formulation⁶. This reflected in renewed emphasis on the Conference which was highlighted by Heath's decision to attend the whole of the 1965 Conference⁷ and the sharp increase in the number of Conference ballots after 1967.

1. GDM Block 'About the Conservative Party' (CPC 1965) p 29
2. S H Beer 'Modern British Politics' (Faber 1965) p 314-316
3. Lord Kilmuir 'Political Adventure' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1964) p 157-164. Also S Neumann (ed) 'Modern Political Parties' (Chicago UP 1956) p 32
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 37, 61, 69 and 92
5. J D Hoffman 'Conservative Policy in Opposition 1945-51' (MacGibbon & Kee 1964) 1965
6. See NUCUA Conference Report/p 11, 13, 24 and 133. Also D E Butler & M Pinto - Duschinsky 'The British General Election of 1970' (Macmillan 1971) p 94-110; DE Butler & A King 'The British General Election of 1966' (Macmillan 1966), p 44-73 and R Rhodes James 'Ambitions and Realities. British Politics 1964-1970' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1972) p 98-145
7. NUCUA Conference Report 1965, pp 23 and 140. See also 'Economist' 11 March 1967

It is debatable whether the leadership ever seriously wished to give the rank and file any decisive role in policy formulation but it was clearly important to morale that party workers should think that they were involved and the success of their efforts can be seen from the fact that 80% of the Northern Area delegates interviewed in 1967 were satisfied that the Conference had a definite effect on party policy¹.

Agenda Selection

Conference resolutions usually originate at branch level and are then taken to a meeting of the constituency association's Executive Committee where they are introduced by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the branch concerned; voted on if necessary; and forwarded by the constituency agent to area or national headquarters. There is no limit on the number of resolutions which can be submitted by each constituency².

In theory this sounds like a careful democratic procedure reflecting the deep-felt views of many party members and in some cases this can be so. It is important, however, to remember how small the nucleus of activists in many constituencies really is³. Furthermore, resolutions may represent the strongly-held views of only one or two individuals backed by little more than the inertia of the remaining members. Thus, for example, two of the resolutions from Northern Area constituencies which were debated at the 1967 Conference covering defence and drugs respectively were direct personal interests of important individuals in the constituencies concerned - a retired brigadier and a doctor respectively - but support from within their associations took the form of acquiescence rather than active interest⁴. As a result resolutions can sometimes be rather eccentric and after emphasising the importance of the Conference as

' a great opportunity for showing to the nation what the Party is thinking and doing. For these reasons it is of the utmost importance that the Conference Agenda should be of the highest quality.'⁵

the Maxwell-Fyfe Committee suggested that some 'vetting' should be carried out at Area level to try and improve drafting. This was not compulsory and constituencies "retain the unfettered right to submit resolutions direct to the General Purposes Sub-Committee" but motions which had been cleared in this way were supposed to receive priority when the Agenda was drawn up⁶ and in practice most resolutions appear to be submitted through areas. In 1966 for example, the Northern Area vetted 18 of the 23 motions submitted by local associations.

1. cf M Parkinson 'Central - Local Relations in British Parties - A Local View' (Political Studies Vol XIX No 4 1971) p 440-446. Also NUCUA Conference Report 1957, p 31
2. For discussion of the significance of this see J Blondel 'Voters, Parties & Leaders' (Penguin 1966) p 104-106
3. M Benney, AP Gray, RH Pear 'How People Vote' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1956) p 38-63. Also F Bealey, J Blondel, W P McCann 'Constituency Politics' (Faber 1965) p 106-122
4. For low level of interest in policy as distinct from organisation in some constituencies see RT Holt and JE Turner 'Political Parties in Action' (The Free Press; 1968). Also TEM McKitterick 'The Membership of the Party' (Political Quarterly Vol 31 1960) for similar experience in the Labour Party.
5. Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (NUCUA 1949) p 48
6. Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (NUCUA 1949) p 48-50

Motions forwarded to area level are nominally considered by a sub-committee of the Area Executive Committee but they are often dealt with informally by the Area Chairman, his agent and one or two of the more important members of the Committee. Changes at this stage are generally designed to eliminate ambiguity as attempts to water down hostile resolutions would antagonise constituencies and in any case, control over the final agenda is so complete that efforts to alter resolutions at area level are unnecessary.

Agents do not appear to try and encourage resolutions or lobby to ensure that their constituencies' resolutions are chosen for the final agenda, but they do seem to make some effort to ensure that their constituencies do not submit embarrassing resolutions¹.

In addition to vetting constituency resolutions Areas sometimes originate resolutions themselves although there are rarely more than two or three a year from each Area, partly because lack of time prevents detailed policy discussions at Area meetings. Organisations such as the Young Conservatives are also entitled to submit resolutions.

Once resolutions have been forwarded to the National Union the Conference agenda is chosen by the General Purposes Committee which carries out what has been described as "delicate preliminary work on the selection of motions" to ensure that they are "both acceptable to the Government and capable of gathering all likely variations of opinion into the same corral"².

The membership of the Committee is largely dominated by major party officials and consists of:-

- (a) The Officers of the National Union including the immediate past President.
- (b) The Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Vice-Chairman of the Party Organisation (i.e. Central Office) and the Treasurers of the Party.
- (c) The Chief Whip in each House.
- (d) The Chairman of the Party Advisory Committee on Policy.
- (e) The Senior Officers of the Organisation and Publicity Departments of Central Office.
- (f) The Chairman of each of the National Advisory Committees.
- (g) The Chairman of each Area Council.
- (h) Three Men, three Women, three Young Conservatives and three Trade Unionists elected by the Executive Committee.
- (i) The Chairman of the 1922 Committee.
- (j) The Chairman of the Association of Conservative Clubs.
- (k) The President and Chairman of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.
- (l) One Representative of the Ulster Unionist Council.
- (m) Up to five coopted members.

In practice the detailed work is usually done by a sub-committee which then presents the results to the main Committee for approval³.

1. A. Roth "Heath and the Heathmen" (Routledge Kegan Paul; 1972) p 75
2. Economist October-December 1958, Vol 189 p 211
3. W J Biffen "Party Conferences and Party Policy" (Political Quarterly 1961) p 257-266

The composition of the Committee invites allegations that it carefully avoids choosing critical or controversial motions and there has been extensive criticism of the agenda make-up within the party - particularly from Young Conservatives¹.

While most of the agenda is settled by the General Purposes Committee, a certain number of motions are chosen by ballot. This practice started shortly after the Second World War. At the March 1948 Central Council meeting it was proposed that:

' The Agenda for at least one session of the Conference should consist of resolutions, not selected by the Agenda Committee, but included in the supplementary list, receiving the greatest number of votes in a ballot of representatives entitled to attend.² '

and ever since that year part of the agenda has been chosen by ballot. The number of balloted resolutions has altered periodically but has averaged about three at each Conference.

This method of selecting part of the agenda is one of the party managers' apparent concessions to party 'democracy'³. It is not without some risks because not only is it possible that an embarrassing motion may be chosen but the party managers also have no control over the quality of the speaker who will propose the resolution.

The introduction of balloted resolutions was a response to delegate demands but only⁴ a quarter of the delegates at the 1948 Conference actually bothered to vote, suggesting that the demands were more vociferous than they were widespread.

National Union officials refuse to reveal the results of ballots at present-day Conferences but the survey of Northern Area delegates in 1967 showed that just over 60% participated. Of the delegates interviewed, only 10% reported that motions for which they had voted were in fact chosen for debate but as there were 167 motions to choose from and each delegate had three votes, a broad dispersion of votes was possible. Most of the delegates who did not take part in the ballot simply "did not get round to it" although in a significant number of cases delegates were only chosen at the last minute and did not have time to send in the ballot papers. This suggests that the right to participate in agenda selection, although valued, is clearly not regarded as vital.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1962, p 134
NUCUA Conference Report 1965, p 31; Conservative Political Centre Monthly Report (November 1967) and 'An open letter to the Chairman of the Conservative Party' (Bow Group 1967). See also recommendations of 'The Macleod Report' (Conservative Central Office 1965) in relation to more controversial agenda at Young Conservative Conference.
 2. Central Council Minutes, March 1948
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1967, p 11
 4. NUCUA Conference Report, 1948, p 32

Traditionally the Conference motions are debated as submitted and no arrangements exist for compositing resolutions as at the Labour Conference. The mechanics of producing an agenda for so large a conference involve a fairly long time scale and the Fuel and Power debate in 1952 illustrated one of the difficulties when the motion originally selected for debate was found to demand a policy which had in fact been adopted by the Government by the time the Conference assembled with the result that the proposer had to hastily replace it with one congratulating the Government on its new policy¹.

Although resolutions have to come from constituencies, areas or some organised national body such as the Young Conservatives - any individual delegate can enter an amendment. These only have to be submitted shortly before the Conference opens and the amendments chosen for discussion are not announced until the Conference opens. The Standing Orders give the Chairman unfettered discretion to select amendments for debate and the number called has varied quite considerably over the years. During the early post-war debates, amendments were called regularly. In 1947, for example, amendments were debated for 10 out of the total of 20 motions covered at the Conference. As the leadership's control over the Conference has extended the number of amendments taken has tended to decrease and emphasis has been placed on a wide-ranging debate around a single broadly framed resolution.

Most amendments are comparatively minor and parliamentary-type amendments which are so total that they convert a hostile resolution into a friendly one are rare although there have been isolated examples such as an amendment to the Presentation of Government Policy resolution in 1952². As a result, most amendments are either accepted by the proposer of the substantive resolution or merely ratified by the Conference, and there is little serious effort to define detailed policy through a systematic amendment process.

Although the drafting and submission of resolutions is largely in the hands of constituency associations the powers vested in the General Purposes Committee and its composition ensure that the leadership has effective control over the choice of items to be debated. As a result, even if the leadership is slightly embarrassed by the number of hostile resolutions submitted for inclusion in the agenda, it can ensure that none of the more awkward ones are chosen for debate.

In theory the balloted resolutions remove some of this control but in practice all resolutions are grouped together under subject headings and the ballot is confined to those subject groups not already covered by the agenda items selected by the General Purposes Committee. As most hostile motions fall into the same subject headings covered by the General Purposes Committee's agenda, such items are effectively excluded from the ballot. Furthermore, the Executive Committee has the right to put forward emergency motions and as they usually displace balloted resolutions this procedure could if necessary be used to exclude a particularly embarrassing balloted motion³.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 96
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 75-80
 3. See 'Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation' (NUCUA 1949) for criticism of this.

While control over the agenda is a useful asset for the leadership, it does not necessarily ensure that the Conference will be docile as the 1950 housing debate showed.

Clearly it is not possible to examine every aspect of Conference policy but analysis of a few selected areas can show how the Conference has approached a range of different issues during the period since the last War.

Taxation¹

Reduced taxation - particularly aimed at the middle classes² - has been the most persistent theme running through the economic policy debates since the War.

The philosophical justification for this policy is that high taxation is inconsistent with basic Conservative objectives of encouraging individual enterprise and self-reliance. Although the Party accepts that some services such as defence and foreign affairs must be provided by the State through taxation, its general attitude has been that a larger share of national expenditure should be transferred to the individual.

The obvious electoral advantage of a policy which would put more money in the voter's pocket was reinforced in the eyes of many party workers by the fact that it simultaneously highlighted the high cost of the Labour Party's extensive social programme. Immediately after the War the pressure to cut taxes was also associated with a widespread demand for reduced government controls and the reintroduction of a free economy.

Although the Conferences have often called for reduced taxation, they have been reluctant to face up to the difficulties. Speakers often call for tax cuts on the basis that they will generate so much extra productivity that the increased yield will eliminate any need to reduce government expenditure and the Conference has often been reluctant to accept that lower taxes will require reduced public expenditure. Generally speaking, Ministers have encouraged the Conference to pursue the general aim of reducing taxes whilst uttering warnings about the difficulty of achieving it. A notable exception was Enoch Powell, then Financial Secretary to the Treasury; in a hard hitting speech at the 1957 Conference:-

1. For general works on post-war economy and Conservative policy, see:
JCR Dow 'The Management of the British Economy 1945-1960' (CUP 1964)
GDN Worswick (ed) 'The British Economy 1945-1950' (OUP 1952)
GDN Worswick & PH Ady (eds) 'The British Economy in the Nineteen Fifties' (OUP 1962)
A Shonfield 'British Economic Policy Since the War' (Penguin 1958)
S Brittan 'The Treasury under the Tories' (Penguin 1964)
2. SH Beer 'Modern British Politics' (Faber 1965) p 373-374;
NUCIA Conference Report 1957, p 34 and 40

' There are two ways, and only two, in which a Government can reduce taxation - by borrowing more or by spending less. More people than you would suppose, and more people that are aware that they are doing so, advocate the former plan, namely to increase the National Debt and hang the consequences, though they usually do not put it so crudely ... To vote ourselves remissions of taxation by running up debts is easy and, in the short run, pleasant, but like most easy and pleasant courses in public finance, it has to be paid for, and the penalty is heavy. So I leave it there and turn to what is the only true means of reducing taxation - to spend less.

Some people imagine that that too, is easy - that nothing could be more pleasant or simple than the reduction of public expenditure by 5 per cent, 10 per cent or any figure you like to choose. Truly the capacity of mankind for self-deception is unlimited. In reality, so hard a discipline is it for a country to reduce its public outlay substantially that, without a clear comprehension of what is involved and steady and determined support on the part of those wide sections of the public of which this Conference is the sounding board, I would venture to describe it as impossible.

All Government expenditure is a payment to somebody. In every branch of Government expenditure there is a vested interest. Every form of Government expenditure has its devotees and its defenders. Incidentally on the order paper of this Conference there are no fewer than 80 resolutions asking for extra Government expenditure. The minority, whom a limitation of expenditure affects, are always more vocal than the majority who will ultimately benefit. Hence it comes about that economy is popular in the abstract but has few defenders in the concrete ...

Many of the resolutions on the order paper and many of those who have spoken in this debate, have mentioned specific directions in which relief is specially desirable. They are a wide selection covering practically the whole range of taxation, direct and indirect - Income Tax, Estate Duty, Petrol Duty, Purchase Tax and the rest. In almost every instance the arguments that can be adduced in favour are weighty. Indeed, a Chancellor seldom lacks for advice and help on choosing what taxes to remit ... but that is the easy part; the hard part is to win the right to make remissions by means which will strengthen instead of damaging the economy ...¹

Tax cuts are always easier to advocate when in opposition. The ruling party may ask how cuts would be financed but the opposition can usually be vague about the overall effects of its proposals on the grounds that detailed decisions must wait until it has full access to budgetary data. Simultaneously the party in power finds it harder to promise tax cuts because it is more sharply aware of the effects of reduced public expenditure and when an election is impending promises to reduce² taxes in the future beg the question why it did not implement them earlier.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1957, p 44
2. S Hogg 'Election 1970' (Economist; 1970) p 9

As a result the Conference's calls for tax cuts have been loudest when the party has been out of office. Once in power, the leadership's policy has usually been to carry out unpopular public expenditure cuts early and at the same time announce tax reductions although the real effect of both usually come long after the announcements.

Thereafter the Conference has continued to press demands for reduced taxation but the party leadership has found that once it had been in power for some time it is committed to existing levels of public expenditure and electoral prudence has discouraged it from implementing unpopular economies except at the start of a new period of office. As a result, Conference calls for tax cuts during the period 1951-1964 were often met by government assurances that although the leadership agreed with and had already done much to achieve the overall objective, there were serious practical difficulties in finding new areas in which suitable economies could be made.

The Conference's enthusiasm for tax cuts was often matched by a reluctance to urge specific cuts in public expenditure and Powell's criticism that economy was popular in the abstract but rarely in the concrete was generally borne out whilst such economies as the Conference did support were in peripheral areas such as the number of civil servants or the efficiency of the nationalised industries.

After the loss of office in 1964, however, the Conference made a more serious effort to identify specific savings, particularly through selectivity in social services. Although the Labour Party was divided over the issue, the Conservatives committed themselves to selectivity at an early stage on the grounds that those who were able to pay for social services should do so. The principle was applied amongst other things to subsidies for council housing, the National Health scheme and pensions ¹.

A major justification for tax cuts advanced at Conferences was the stimulus which additional disposable income should give to savings, simultaneously encouraging economic growth and the Party's objective of a property owning democracy. Industrial shareholding was particularly favoured as a form of saving and the Conference tried several times to persuade the party leadership to encourage share purchase - usually by reducing stamp duty on transfers². The response was rather cautious but the post-1970 Government eventually abolished stamp duty on small transactions.

The cost of living was also debated regularly at Conferences and the Conference supported a variety of different schemes put forward by both Macmillan's government and Heath's Opposition team to try and control inflation. Conference support for price controls reflected a traditional sympathy for those on fixed incomes which is partly based on the composition of the Conference itself and it is therefore rather surprising that the Conference so strongly supported more emphasis on indirect taxation³ and disregarded the effects which a tax like VAT would have on the fixed incomes groups.

1. For evidence of support for Conservative view see Political Index No 90 (Gallup Poll October 1967) p 162
2. See also 'Everyman a Capitalist' (CPC 1959) and 'Owning Capital' (CPC 1963)
3. See also 'Britain's Taxes' (Conservative Research Department 1967)

The Conference's value to the party leadership as a useful platform to publicise its tax proposals was illustrated by SET. SET was condemned by the Conservative parliamentary leadership as soon as it was announced in May 1966 and their pledge to abolish it was a major feature at every conference until the party got back into power.

Similarly, the Conference was used to ventilate the leadership's VAT proposals. The Conference was very critical of purchase¹ tax and a number of MPs used the Conference to publicise its anomalies². Pressure to replace it with a more broadly based tax on expenditure increased as the prospects of EEC entry grew stronger and the 1962 Conference showed considerable support for a value added tax although the leadership hesitated as long as the party was in power. Once in opposition, it decided that a value added tax was probably inevitable and the Conferences between 1964 and 1970 were used to float the idea - initially in general terms, but subsequently in detail including references to the sort of activities which would be exempted³. Although the leadership was careful to avoid firm commitments to introduce VAT the Conferences provided a useful opportunity to sell the idea and by the time the decision to introduce the tax was announced the Conference was sufficiently attuned to the idea to actually pass a resolution welcoming it⁴.

The party leadership also used the Conference to publicise plans for a number of other tax changes such as the repeal of the Labour Party's legislation on close companies, alterations to the tax liability of working wives and the reorganisation of the personal tax system by introducing an amalgamated income and surtax with a lower maximum rate.

The Conferences have included many suggestions for specific tax cuts but there is little evidence that conference pressure has had much direct effect on the party's policy. Although its views have formed one of the considerations and pressures taken into account by the leadership, the leadership has more often used the Conference as an opportunity to sell its own views.

There are at least three areas however where the Conference may have had a more immediate effect on the party's policy and although in each case the issue was comparatively minor, it does illustrate that under certain circumstances the Conference's influence can be fairly direct.

Special increases in income tax were levied between 1941 and 1946 to finance the war effort and by 1946 about 14 million people held post-war credits of about £750 million. Although the maximum individual holding was about £325 in practice the average individual holding was about £55-60. It had originally been intended that the credits would be repaid after the war to provide extra purchasing power but in practice the post-war economy suffered from too much purchasing power and immediate repayment would have been highly inflationary.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1949, p 110-111
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1961, p 94. See also GF Whitman 'The Reform of Purchase Tax' (CPC 1959)
 3. D McKie & C Cook 'The Decade of Disillusion - British Politics in the Sixties' (Macmillan; 1972) p 63
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1972, p 80-84

As a result the post-war governments delayed repayments, withholding money to which the holders felt entitled as of right. This generated considerable resentment which reflected at the party conferences. The 1953 Conference narrowly passed a resolution calling for a reduction in the repayment age despite the efforts of the Government spokesman¹ and the Government subsequently introduced some measures to speed up repayments. They did not fully meet the Conference's wishes and two years later, whilst acknowledging the improvements which had taken place the Conference urged still faster repayments². Probably appreciating the strength of Conference feeling the Government avoided a direct confrontation and did not produce a front-bench speaker.

In 1958 a balloted resolution again urged faster repayments but the front bench speaker was able to persuade the Conference that the cost of the repayments would exceed the Government's financial capacity and the motion was defeated³. Although further debates were not held specifically on the subject subsequent conferences included references to the issue and in 1959 the Government lowered the qualifying ages. In 1962 they were reduced still further - to the levels asked for at the 1953 Conference and in 1962 the Government agreed to pay interest on outstanding repayments and as late as the 1972 Conference the issue was still of sufficient importance for the Chancellor to feel it was worth boasting that the vast majority of the credits had been repaid⁴.

In the nineteen fifties Schedule A Tax was heavily criticised by the Conference as discriminating unfairly against property owners. This culminated in a resolution at the 1961 Conference calling on the Government to repeal the tax despite advice from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. In the following year's Budget a broad decision to eliminate the tax was announced and it was abolished for owner-occupied property in 1963 and for rented property in 1965.

At the 1969 Conference a recently-widowed delegate made a personal plea for the exclusion of matrimonial homes from estate duty on the grounds that the appreciated value of a house could not be realised by the widow without selling her home⁵. In his reply Macleod⁶ gave a general indication that he was sympathetic to the problem.

Two years later the same delegate spoke again and pointed out that although some help had been given to younger widows and the exemption limit for estate duty had been raised slightly the matrimonial home was still not exempt⁷. In his reply the new Chancellor Mr Barber, gave an assurance that he would consider the problem very seriously between the Conference and the next budget⁸ and at the 1972 Conference he was able to announce with some satisfaction that the estate duty burden on widows had indeed been eased at the Budget⁹.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 103-106. For press support of Conference view see Times, 12 Oct 1953.
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1955, p 111-115. See also 1954 Budget HC Deb 7 April 1954
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1958, p 141-145
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1972, p 53
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1969, p 61
 6. NUCUA Conference Report 1969, p 69. For a similar incident involving public service pensioners at the 1965 Conference see NUCUA Conference Report 1965, p 117-119
 7. NUCUA Conference Report 1971, pp 50-51
 8. NUCUA Conference Report 1971, p 54
 9. NUCUA Conference Report 1972, p 53

The influence of the Conference appears to have been different in each case. On post-war credits the Government specifically denied that the Conference had any effect on its decision to ease the repayment criteria in 1954¹ and it has even been suggested that the question illustrates the leadership's independence of the Conference². On the other hand the Conference was clearly instrumental in constantly reminding the Government of public feeling on the issue and although it may not have stimulated any specific Government action, it may well have played some part in ensuring that the Government did eventually act rather than bury the issue, although the Government's choice of timing was probably not affected by the Conference.

In the case of Schedule 'A' Taxation the effect was more direct and although the Government did not feel obliged to meet the Conference's wishes it clearly thought that it would be prudent to meet public pressure on the issue, of which the Conference formed a part.

On the estate duty issue the Conference's influence was even more direct. Clearly it can be argued that the party leadership might have intended to implement the changes anyway, and certainly it is true to say that the leadership gave way because it wished to do so and not because it felt itself subject to irresistible pressure, but at the same time there is every evidence that the leadership might have taken no action at all had it not been for the publicity given to the issue at the Conference.

LAW AND ORDER

Law and order has been a subject on which the Conference's views have differed sharply from those of the leadership.

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The Conference is often/full of little old ladies urging the reintroduction of the birch and hanging³ but although some extreme individual views have been expressed, the record of the Conference as a whole has in fact been comparatively moderate.

Prior to the mid-1950s the issue was hardly ever considered and during the period 1950-1954 the number of indictable offences in England and Wales actually fell. Subsequently, however, the figures began to rise sharply and by 1968 they had almost trebled. As this upward trend became apparent a number of Conservative supporters were disturbed by a campaign in Parliament to abolish capital punishment. In 1956 the Death Penalty (Abolition) Bill was passed on a free vote in the Commons but rejected by the Lords shortly before Parliament rose for the summer recess⁴.

The issue was widely publicised and drew a large number of resolutions for the 1956 Conference⁵. The one selected for debate accepted that some modification of the death penalty was desirable but strongly opposed its abolition. Emotional views were expressed in the

1. 526 H C Deb 218-20 (6 April 1954)
2. L D Epstein 'British Man Parties in Comparison with American Parties' (Political Science Quarterly Vol 71, 1956) p 97
3. See for example - Economist Oct-Dec 1958, Vol 189 ; p 211
4. See J B Christoph 'Capital Punishment and British Politics' (Allen & Unwin; 1962)
5. See also resolution passed at Conservative Women's Conference, 12 June 1956.

debate and one of the speakers opposing the motion was heavily barracked. In his reply to the debate the Home Secretary made it clear that although he personally favoured retention of the death penalty, in view of the split in Parliament he hoped that some compromise might be found between total abolition and total retention. The motion was carried by an overwhelming majority¹ and later in the same Conference a motion calling for much heavier penalties for cruelty to children was also carried although by a much smaller majority².

The compromise mentioned by the Home Secretary finally took the form of the 1957 Homicide Act which introduced a distinction between capital and non-capital murder, reserving the death penalty for certain 'premeditated' murders although abolishing it in other cases and closely coincided with the Conference's views although it is most unlikely that the Conference influenced the final outcome.

By 1958 the general rise in the level of crime was increasing.³ This reflected in a conference motion criticising the increase in crime and calling for research into its causes. Although the original motion mainly reflected the establishment of a Home Office Research Unit and demands for more effective counter-measures against crime generally, six of the eight floor speakers took the opportunity to advocate the re-introduction of corporal punishment as a means of dealing with juvenile crime. In his reply, however, Butler made it quite clear that although he supported the motion as framed he could not support such a step⁴ and the Conference broadly accepted his views.

Juvenile crime and corporal punishment were issues again in 1960. The Conference took place against the background of a White Paper - "Penal Practice in a Changing Society" published in the previous year and a major enquiry into the effectiveness of the police which had been set up in December 1959⁵. New detention methods for young offenders and methods of improving the effectiveness of the police consequently featured prominently in the debate, but there were also persistent calls for corporal punishment. The delegates were however satisfied by Government assurances that a Home Office Committee had been set up to review the question⁶. Although Butler had made it quite clear to the 1958 Conference that he was not prepared to reintroduce corporal punishment, he had in fact referred the question to the Home Office's Advisory Committee on the Treatment of Offenders for re-examination. Their report,⁷ published shortly after the 1960 Conference reinforced his decision⁷ but many conference delegates were not satisfied and the motion debated at the 1961 Conference unequivocally called for both the reintroduction of corporal punishment and the extension of capital punishment to cover almost all types of murder. An amendment was introduced which deleted all mention of capital and corporal punishment

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 92-97
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 116-118
 3. See D Price 'Crime and Punishment' (CPC 1961)
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1958, pp 95-102
 5. Royal Commission on the Police - set up 16 Dec 1959; Interim Report (Cmind: 1222) Nov 1960; Final Report (Cmind 1728) May 1962
 6. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, pp 45-47
 7. (Cmind: 1213) Nov 1960

and instead called for implementation of the prison building programme, stricter enforcement of sentences and the introduction of a scheme for compensating victims of violent crime. In his reply Butler again made it quite clear that he would not support the reintroduction of corporal punishment or any modification to the principles of the 1957 Homicide Act although he was prepared to review its operation. The Conference endorsed Butler's view and the amendment was passed by a very large majority¹.

Although Butler's views on penal practice were fixed, it seems more likely that he was influenced by the Conference on compensation for victims of violent crime². The subject was raised at the 1960 Conference and in June 1961 the Government published a White Paper outlining two possible schemes for compensating victims³ which were reviewed by an internal party committee set up by Butler after further discussion at the 1961 Conference. The Committee reported in mid-1962 advocating a Common Law damages system⁴ and at the 1962 and 1963 Conferences the Government came under heavy pressure to implement a scheme. Finally at the 1963 Conference Brooke, the new Home Secretary, gave a firm commitment that it would go ahead,⁵ legislative proposals were included in the Queen's Speech on 12th November 1963, and the final scheme was put to Parliament for approval in June 1964⁶.

The capital and corporal punishment issues were dormant between 1961 and 1966. The 1962 Conference, in addition to pressing for compensation for victims, concentrated on the need for quick implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Police⁷ which was met through the 1963 Police Act.

The problems of young offenders caused increasing concern and the 1962 Conference included numerous references to the need for more detention centres while the 1965 debate was almost entirely concentrated on methods of dealing with juvenile crime⁸. Although a motion calling for corporal punishment was specifically raised at the 1963 Conference⁹, it was soundly defeated and the capital punishment issue also remained quiet apart from an isolated outburst at the 1965 Conference¹⁰.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1961, pp 64-77. See also R A Butler 'The Art of the Possible' (Hamilton 1971) p 201
 2. For other internal party pressures see for example D Price, MP 'Crime and Punishment' (CPC 1961)
 3. 'Compensation for Victims of Crimes of Violence' (Cmnd 1406; 1961)
 4. 'Victims of Violence' (CPC; 1962)
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1963, p 126
 6. See Cmnd 2323 (1964) for details
 7. NUCUA Conference Report 1962, pp 81-87. Also B P Cooper & G Nicholas 'Crime in the Sixties' (Bow Group; 1963)
 8. NUCUA Conference Report 1965, pp 119-123
 9. NUCUA Conference Report 1963, pp 121-128
 10. NUCUA Conference Report 1965, p 123. See also 'Law Liberty and Licence' (CPC 1964), pp 26-27

Shortly after the 1965 Conference, however, Sidney Silverman's Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Bill was passed and as a result the issue came back into prominence at the 1966 Conference.

The main resolution was moderate, calling for "a practical programme of stern and resolute action to maintain law and order and to bring criminals to justice¹ but an amendment, introduced with high-powered support from two former ministers - Deedes and Duncan Sandys, called for capital punishment in cases involving the murder of police and prison officers².

Hogg, the Shadow Chancellor, was in a stronger position than Butler because although he opposed the amendment it was known that he was personally sympathetic towards capital punishment and had in fact voted against Silverman's Bill. The Conference followed his advice and rejected the amendment³ and during 1967 and 1968 the issue became dormant again⁴. The 1967 debate was the first indication of the Conference's awareness of the drug problem⁵ and in 1968 resolutions were passed on the need for both stronger deterrent sentences⁶ and firmer control of student demonstrations⁷ - the latter being a reaction to a series of violent student demonstrations during the previous year but in 1969 capital punishment again came up at the conference. The Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1965 had abolished capital punishment for only five years unless extended by a Parliamentary resolution. A review of the position was therefore imminent in 1970. The original motion was on broad law and order questions but it was debated in conjunction with an amendment specifically asking for the reintroduction of the death penalty. Sir Peter Rawlinson's front-bench reply was non-committal but Heath made it clear elsewhere during the conference that he personally favoured abolition although he felt that a final decision should be made only after a further review of the whole problem. In the event the amendment went to a ballot and was carried⁸ by a very narrow majority, committing the conference to such a policy⁹ for the first time since it had cropped up in 1956. Despite this, in December that year Parliament decided to make abolition permanent on a free vote and although the Conservatives were highly critical of the statistics provided by the Labour Government, the timing of the decision (which should really have been taken the following year) many of them supported the move.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1966, p 74
2. For support for this view from the Young Conservatives see "Law, Liberty & Licence" (CPC 1964) p 26
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1966, pp 74-81
4. Efforts were however made by a group headed by Duncan Sandys, a former front-bencher, to bring up the issue at the 1967 Conference through a series of letters sent to the press on 20 October 1967
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1967, pp 102-108
6. NUCUA Conference Report 1968, pp 110-115
7. NUCUA Conference Report 1968, pp 115-121
8. NUCUA Conference Report 1969, pp 71-79
9. HC Deb 16 December 1969

This temporarily closed the issue and the 1970 debate centred on the need for firmer law enforcement - particularly to suppress vandalism but the following year the cold-blooded murder of a Blackpool police officer brought a renewed call for the introduction of the death penalty for killing police and prison officers and an amendment to that effect was passed despite a firm statement from the Home Secretary that he saw no hope of changing the position¹.

Against the broad range of national issues it may seem surprising that the conference has devoted so much attention to law and order and particularly to capital and corporal punishment. Although this could confirm impressions that the conference is dominated by reactionary militants, there is considerable evidence that the conference delegates reflected a majority of public opinion and their persistent calls for strong measures to deal with crime generally showed a sharp awareness of public opinion.

This is illustrated by the fact that surveys carried out in 1963 and 1966 showed that 71% and 77%² of those questioned favoured the retention of capital punishment².

As a result it may well be that on this issue at least the conflict was really between the conference (which reflected the views of the majority of the electorate) and the parliamentary party (whose liberal views were well ahead of those of the electorate). Generally the parliamentary party persuaded the conference to respect its views but on a few occasions it was unsuccessful. The divisions of opinion both in the Conference and in Parliament make it quite clear however that the conflict was not between a firmly committed parliamentary party and the grass roots party but between an internally divided parliamentary party and a grass roots party which included a substantial element which was willing to allow the parliamentary party to exercise its discretion as it saw fit.

Nevertheless, it is more significant that despite strong pressure from the conference the parliamentary party remained fully in control of policy and although its outlook may have been conditioned by attitudes expressed at the conference it never felt under any obligation to accede to the conference's demands.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1971, pp 11-19
 2. D Butler & D Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) pp 560; 597

ELECTORAL REFORM

Electoral reform policy has reflected the Conference's tendency to hold strong views on issues within the immediate experience of delegates.

The major aspects were election transport and postal votes. Section 88 of the Representation of the People Act 1949 imposed strict limits on the use of cars to carry electors to the polls but in practice evasion was quite widespread - particularly in rural areas - and although the number of prosecutions was extremely small¹, most Conservative party workers felt that the law was out-dated and did not reflect increased car-ownership. A series of resolutions advocating changes in the law were passed at the conferences in 1948, 1952, 1955 and 1956, culminated in a resolution at the 1958 Conference which was highly critical of the Government's failure to implement the decisions of previous conferences². Although the party leadership argued throughout that all-party support for constitutional changes was desirable it eventually met the Conference's views. Butler gave the 1958 Conference a broad hint that the necessary legislation would be introduced³ and the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act 1958⁴ was introduced shortly afterwards despite opposition from the Labour Party.

Almost as soon as the Government had satisfied the Conference on cars, postal votes became an issue. Delegates felt strongly that they should be more freely available and motions urging that they should be given to voters away on holiday or business were debated in 1960 and 1961. The strength of delegate feeling was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the Conservatives were traditionally more successful in collecting postal votes but on this issue the Government was less flexible. It opposed unrestricted postal votes on the grounds of cost and the difficulties of devising an enforceable means of distinguishing between voters on holiday and those who were too lazy to vote in person. The issue was temporarily killed in 1961 when the front-bench reply to the Conference debate made it quite clear that the Government was not prepared to accommodate the conference⁵ but it was resurrected in 1970.

The new Government again made it clear that there was no prospect of change and this view was accepted by the Conference albeit rather reluctantly.⁶

The way in which the leadership handled both issues illustrates the difference between the Conference's power and its influence. The Government did not feel strongly about election transport and although changes might antagonise the Opposition no Exchequer costs were involved. As a result the party leadership was prepared to give way to the Conference. On postal voting, on the other hand, the Government held firm views and the Conference's inability to force a change of policy in such circumstances is significant.

1. H C Deb - 5 November 1958
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1958, p 139
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1958, p 141
4. Second Reading - 5 November 1958
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1961, p 100/101
6. NUCUA Conference Report 1970, p 24

EDUCATION

Another area where the direct experience of delegates influenced the attitude of the Conference was education.

It is often a key issue in local politics and as it directly or indirectly affects almost every voter, government actions have a direct tangible effect on individual welfare.

It is also one of the areas where the party can continue to exercise influence even when out of power. The educational structure puts a high level of control in the hands of local authorities which may still be Conservative-controlled when the national party is in opposition and the significance of this was clearly shown at the 1968 Conference when an influential Conservative MP used the Conference as an opportunity to openly encourage Conservative-controlled councils to defy the Labour Government's education policy¹.

In view of this and the far-reaching and controversial changes introduced by Butler's 1944 Education Act, it is possibly surprising that Conferences immediately after the War did not devote much time to education but a debate was introduced in 1950 and has featured on the agenda at every subsequent conference. Discussion has tended to centre around four main themes - teachers, technical/higher education, primary education and comprehensive schools.

The debates during the early 1950s concentrated on the teacher problem reflecting post-war shortages and the effects of the birth-rate bulge on demand for schooling. Improved pay was generally seen as the best way of attracting more teachers and comparatively little attention was devoted to other aspects of 'status' such as the three-year training college course or the desirability of trying to achieve an all-graduate profession.

In the 1960s, however, as the inadequacy of the Burnham Committee machinery became more apparent and teachers became more militant, the Conference moved towards a harder line. Criticism of the teachers became more common and the 1961 Conference was used by the Education Minister as a sympathetic platform to publicise his reasons for rejecting the Burnham Committee's recommendations and imposing a new pay structure by statute².

Technical and higher education caused increasing concern after the mid-1950s as the Conferences frequently called for expansion of technical colleges and the universities. Delegates felt that Britain was behind the major powers in technology and this was heightened by the heavy publicity given to the space race and the 'brain drain'³. Policy also began to reflect the effects of two influential reports by the University Grants Committee (1950) and the National Advisory Committee on Scientific Policy (1954) and this culminated in an important White Paper 'Technical Education' (Cmd 9703) in February 1956. On higher education the Conference strongly backed expansion⁴ and in some cases went beyond the

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1968, p 42
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1961, pp 102-109
 3. See for example - Q Hogg 'The Brain Drain' (CPC 1967) and P Haskeil 'Technical Education' (CPC 1956)
 4. See also Lord Boyle in 'The Politics of Education' (Penguin 1971) pp89-90
This work also includes comparatively rare direct evidence of a former Minister's reaction to Conference pressures.

Government. In 1960 a resolution was passed urging implementation of the Anderson Report despite Ministerial qualms over the expense of removing the means test and the possible implications for other areas of higher education¹. The Government's response was to implement some of the Report's recommendations but it only amended the means test for student grants.

After 1960 the Conference began to criticise the inadequacy of primary (and latterly, nursery) education. The following year Boyle only managed to dissuade the delegates from passing a critical motion on this with some difficulty² and in 1963 he gave a specific commitment that after 1964 the Government³ would start to allocate money for the replacement of primary schools³. During the latter half of the 1960s when the party was out of power this became an increasingly important issue and the Conference frequently criticised the Labour Government for devoting inadequate resources to developing primary education. Once the party returned to office in 1970 increased emphasis was put on primary education and in 1971 the Conference passed a resolution endorsing the⁴ Government's decision to give primary schools a high level of priority.

Comprehensive schooling and the related issue of the independent schools were live issues during the entire post-war period. The Labour Party had committed itself at an early stage to comprehensive schooling and abolition of the independent schools in order to provide equality of educational opportunity for all children⁵. Many Conservative supporters were strongly attached both to the old-established direct grant and grammar schools which were often associated with their middle class background⁶ and to the principle of freedom of choice in education⁷. Local autonomy was also involved because Local Authorities had wide powers under the 1944 Education Act to decide the educational systems in their areas and many Conservative supporters opposed efforts by the Central Government to erode this.

Quite apart from the social and moral aspects many Conservatives regarded comprehensive schools as an important electoral issue. Their views were summarised by Angus Maude at the 1968 Conference:-

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, pp 28-36. See also 'The Rising Tide' (CPC 1961)
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1961, pp 102-109
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1963, pp 12-20
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1971, pp 64-72
 5. R Barker 'Education & Politics 1900-1951. A Study of the Labour Party' (OUP 1972) pp 81-98. Also W O Lester Smith 'Government of Education' (Penguin 1965)
 6. W O Lester Smith 'Government of Education' (Penguin 1965) pp 8-9. See also NUCUA Conference Report 1965, pp 51-57
 7. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 98-101. See also T Raison 'Why Conservative' (Penguin 1964) p 102

' There are no Socialist or floating votes to be won by destroying grammar schools. There are a lot of Conservative and floating votes to be lost¹... '

Although there was unanimity over the general principle of choice, the Conference and the front-bench often had different views on details. When the party was in power the problem was not serious. The Conference contented itself with urging the Government to restrain Labour-controlled Local Authorities which were trying to introduce comprehensive schemes in the face of local opposition. Whilst the Government took the view that some experimentation was desirable but it should not involve dismemberment of the established secondary school system.

In opposition, however, the problem became more acute. The Labour Government actively tried to press Local Authorities into going comprehensive. Initial efforts to do this by administrative means were criticised by the Conference and when a bill was introduced in 1969² to coerce the Local Authorities the Conference strongly opposed it. Throughout, however, the Conference suspected that the party's front bench spokesman Sir Edward Boyle was more sympathetic to comprehensive schools than he was prepared to admit publicly. Generally delegates were satisfied with assurances that a Conservative Government would reverse attempts to force Local Authorities to go comprehensive but this did not meet the demands of some who thought that Local Authorities should be expressly forbidden to introduce comprehensive schemes and the 1968 Conference passed a resolution unequivocally opposing comprehensive schools which was tantamount to a defeat for the front bench's policy of leaving the decision to the Local Authorities.

Although the Conference defeat and the party rank and file's antipathy to his views clearly were not the only factors in Sir Edward Boyle's subsequent withdrawal from₃ politics, they must have been a significant factor in his decision³ and the leadership's awareness of the strong feeling within the Conference certainly appears to have been a factor in persuading it to take a tougher line on comprehensive schooling subsequently.⁴

Like capital punishment education is an area where it has been suggested that the reactionary militants of the Conference have been at odds with the more enlightened views of their own front bench. The blatantly elitist arguments put forward by some delegates were clearly embarrassing to the party but there was strong support from many voters for the retention of grammar schools⁵ and it seems likely that the Conference was representative of at least a broad cross-section of public opinion if not a majority of it.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1968, p 42
 2. Education Bill - 2nd Reading, 12 Feb 1970
 3. A Alexander & A Watkins 'The Making of the Prime Minister 1970' (Macdonald 1970) p 97. M Pinto-Duschinsky 'Power in the Conservative Party' (Political Studies Vol XX 1972) p 15
 4. G K Roberts 'Political Parties and Pressure Groups in Britain' (Weidenfeld & Nicholson; 1970) pp 32-33
 5. J J B Dempster 'Selection for Secondary Education' (Methuen 1954)

NATIONALISATION

Nationalisation was one of the major areas of conflict between the parties¹ during the post-War period and as a result it featured at numerous conferences, particularly as most Conservatives were confident that they had public support on the issue and were therefore determined to exploit it as far as possible.

After the war Conference criticism of Labour's nationalisation programme centred on the inefficiency and over-centralisation of state industry linked with general Conservative attacks on excessive post-War bureaucracy and controls². The Conference also tried to use nationalisation as part of a general effort to associate the Labour Party with Communists in the public mind and even front-bench speakers such as Oliver Lyttleton used something close to smear tactics:-

' these are the steps down the road to the State ownership of all the means of production, distribution and exchange, and these are the measures by which the Socialist Government and³ Socialist Ministers are preparing the seed bed for Communism³.. '

The issue was vigorously exploited by the Conservatives during the period immediately after the War and the 1949 Conference for example contained three debates on different aspects of nationalisation - one on the general issue and two on⁴ specific Labour Party proposals covering insurance and iron and steel⁴.

Once the party was in office, however, the emphasis inevitably changed. Initially the party's denationalisation measures were stressed and the first conference after the 1951 election strongly supported the new Government's plans to return the road transport and iron and steel industries to private ownership but it accepted somewhat reluctantly that there was really no alternative to keeping the railways and the domestic utilities in public ownership⁵.

Once the main election promises of the new Government had been fulfilled the issue lay dormant until the mid-1950s when the Conference began to show increasing concern about the low level of efficiency and the need for more efficient control over capital expenditure in those industries still in public ownership⁶.

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1. See E E Barry - 'Nationalisation in British Politics' (Cape 1965)
R Kelf-Cohen 'Nationalisation in Britain' (Macmillan 1958)
W A Robson 'Nationalised Industry & Public Ownership' (Allen & Unwin 1960)
 2. See also 'A New Approach' (Conservative Political Centre 1951)
 3. NUCUA Conference 1949, pp 51/52. See also NUCUA Conference Report 1957, p 32
 4. NUCUA Conference 1949, pp 45/52
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, pp 69/74 and 96/99
 6. NUCUA Conference Report 1955, pp 100/103. See also 'Change in Our Ally' (CPC 1954)
NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 118/120
NUCUA Conference Report 1957, pp 32/ 39

There was in fact some reaction to this pressure. In a well publicised speech to the Conservative Political Centre meeting at the 1956 Conference Butler promised to review the accountability of the nationalised industries and subsequently the Government¹ made some efforts to introduce more commercial management techniques¹.

The party's view of nationalisation as a major vote-catching issue was again illustrated in the 1960s. As soon as the party lost power in 1964 nationalisation which had become a fairly dormant issue in the late 1950s², featured in major conference debates in four successive years², yet once the party returned to power in 1970 it³ practically vanished again. Opinion polls taken during this period³ show that the Conference had a shrewd awareness of public opinion on the issue as the following results illustrate:-

	<u>1963</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>Table 5.1</u>
a. A lot more industries should be nationalised	10%	8%	8%	
b. Only a few more industries such as steel should be nationalised	14%	17%	17%	
c. No more industries should be nationalised, but the industries that are nationalised now should stay nationalised	36%	45%	42%	
d. Some of the industries that are nationalised now should be denationalised	26%	18%	19%	
e. No opinion/don't know	18%	12%	14%	

1. Times - 12 October 1956. Also NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 118 and 121
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1965, pp 64-68
 NUCUA Conference Report 1966, pp 44-46
 NUCUA Conference Report 1967, pp 117-121
 NUCUA Conference Report 1968, pp 95 -101
3. D Butler & D Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) pp 560, 580 and 596

Over 60% of those interviewed were opposed to further nationalisation and although the public did not share the Conference's enthusiasm for denationalisation the Conference was clearly in tune with public opinion in stressing the party's opposition to proposals for taking further industries into public ownership.

IMMIGRATION

Although the entry of alien immigrants from foreign countries had been controlled ever since 1905 the controls were not applied to Commonwealth immigrants. Under the British Nationality Act 1948 Commonwealth citizens were 'British subjects' and did not fall under the definition of aliens.

During the late 1950s a combination of cheap air travel, high availability of jobs in Britain and high unemployment in some Commonwealth countries was responsible for a rapid rise in the number of Commonwealth immigrants and immigration became a political issue¹. This was reflected in the 1958 Party Conference which passed a resolution² urging tighter immigration controls. Although the resolution averred that such controls should operate irrespective of race, the immigration question inevitably acquired strong racial undertones because a high proportion of the immigrants came from the West Indies, India and Pakistan. The 1958 Conference also reflected strong feeling within the party that there should be powers to deport aliens who were convicted of criminal offences. Butler, as Home Secretary, was anxious to avoid antagonising Commonwealth Governments and although he hinted that the Government would take deportation powers for criminals he insisted that voluntary co-operation between governments would control numbers better than a quota system.

By 1961, however, the issue had become more serious. Pressure increased from delegates representing areas which had absorbed large numbers of immigrants with resulting social problems and over 40 resolutions calling for immigration control were on the agenda. The resolution chosen for debate repeated the 1958 demands for control of all immigrants, irrespective of race, but Butler stressed the Government's reluctance to impose statutory controls, enumerating the disadvantages of each type of restriction.

Although the Government was strongly committed to voluntary controls it became increasingly apparent that they were ineffective and later in the same year Butler introduced the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, imposing an annual quota of employment certificates. There is no evidence that the Party Conference was directly responsible for the decision, but it must have been one of the influences on the Government and the Conference's demands were largely met although the 1965 Conference passed a resolution urging higher restrictions on new entrants, matched by additional financial help for areas with high immigrant concentrations³.

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1. See for example P Foot 'Immigration & Race in British Politics' (Penguin 1965) and D McKie & C Cook (ed) 'The Decade of Disillusion' (Macmillan; St Martin's Press 1972) pp 182-196 for article by Ray Hattersley on Immigration Policy
 2. See also references at 1956 Conference - NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 107-108
 3. See also 'Immigration & The Commonwealth' (PEST; 1965) and C Brocklebank-Fowler, C Bland & T Farmer 'Commonwealth Immigration' (Bow Group 1965) Lord Windlesham 'Communication & Political Power' (Cape 1966) p 256 suggests that constituency pressure was instrumental in the decision to introduce the 1962 Immigrants Act.

In 1967, however, while Labour was in power a serious gap in the Commonwealth Immigrants Act became apparent. A Court of Appeal decision ruled that people holding passports showing them as 'citizens of the UK and Colonies' were not subject to the controls of the 1962 Act. This coincided with a campaign by the Kenyan Government to drive out non-Kenyans and a growing number of Kenyan Asians arrived in Britain. In February 1968 the Labour Government introduced a second Commonwealth Immigrants Act but the Conservatives did not regard it as tough enough and the 1968 Conference's reaction was to pass a resolution supporting Heath's policy of insisting on firmer controls which would match the rate of immigration to available facilities and social conditions. The Conference was notable however for a speech by Powell emphasising his view that even if immigration were severely restricted there would still be major problems which could only be solved by a programme of repatriation and resettlement. Repatriation in itself was not very drastic and indeed was official party policy¹ but its presentation carried strong overtones of harrising immigrants in order to force them out of the country and the extremism of some delegate support for Powell's view was embarrassing for the party's image.

The strength of delegate feeling showed again in 1969 when the Conference backed the party leadership's policy but only after a ballot in which the vote - 1,394 to 954 - showed that Powell's tough repatriation policy had considerable support.

Once the party was back in power the 1971 Immigration Act was passed and the issue remained quiescent until 1972² when it was brought back into the limelight by General Amin's expulsion of large numbers of Ugandan Asians and although the Conference again endorsed the Government's policy the ballot³ revealed another embarrassing minority which opposed the leadership³.

Like education and capital punishment, immigration was a field where the Conference consistently took a less liberal view than the leadership and tried to pressurise the parliamentary party into more drastic action. Surveys carried out during the period 1963-66 show that there was strong public support for immigration control⁴:-

Table 5.2

	<u>1963</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1966</u>
Too many immigrants	83%	81%	81%
Not too many immigrants	12%	13%	14%
Don't know	5%	6%	5%

and although the only differences between the leadership and the Conference were over the degree of control it seems likely that the Conference was closer to public opinion than the leadership.

1. See 'Action Not Words (Conservative Central Office 1966)
2. H Ross 'The Immigration Act 1971: A case study in the Work of Parliament' (Parliamentary Affairs 1972/73 Vol XXVI No.1) pp 69-91
3. The vote was 1,721 to 736
4. D Butler & D Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) pp 561, 581, 598. See also 'Political Index' No.90 (Gallup Poll; October 1967) for similar information for 1967

Despite this it is unlikely that the Conference had any very direct effect on the leadership's policies and indeed it is possible that because of Powell's association with the issue the leadership actually continued to take a more liberal line than it might otherwise have done. Nevertheless, the Conference was probably instrumental in reinforcing the leadership's existing views.

AGRICULTURE

Although there is some doubt about the real value of the agricultural vote¹ the Party has always taken a strong interest in agriculture². As Blake points out:

' The party retained a vaguely landed outlook even in the 1950s. Conservative managers continued to pay a degree of attention to the agricultural vote scarcely warranted by its strength³... '

and this sort of view was illustrated by a speaker at the 1947 Conference who, after pointing to the party's loss of 8 seats in East Anglia, proceeded to state his firm belief that:-

' we cannot win a General Election unless we have the whole support of the agricultural community behind us⁴... '

This deep-rooted commitment to the value of the agricultural vote has been partly responsible for the very close relationship between the Conservative party and the agricultural industry.

In the years immediately after the Second World War, agricultural policy was mostly concerned with the problems of increasing production. During the War major efforts had been put into increasing production but once it was over increased production remained equally essential⁴ because normal suppliers abroad were not available and because of the foreign exchange shortage⁵ distribution problems remained comparatively unimportant as long as the Government was still buying all produce at fixed prices through the Ministry of Supply. As a result, the 1947 Conference at Brighton was dominated by a production orientated approach to agriculture and issues such as the shortages of machinery and spares and the need to increase home production of animal feedstuffs to keep down the foreign exchange cost of imports were considered important enough to feature in Eden's speech as Deputy Leader⁶.

1. R W Howarth 'The Political Strength of British Agriculture' (Political Studies Vol XVII No 4 1969) pp 458-469
2. See V H Beynon & J E Harrison 'The Political Significance of the British Agricultural Vote' (University of Exeter 1962)
J R Pennock 'The Political Power of British Agriculture' (Political Studies October 1959)
J Morgan 'The Farmer's Lot is Not a Happy One' (Crossbow Oct/Dec 1967) pp 27-29
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, pp 71-74. See also NUCUA Conference Report 1967, p 49
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 74
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, pp 41, 74
6. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, pp 71-74; 41

An important factor inhibiting increased production was lack of suitable agricultural labour. During the War many former agricultural workers changed their work patterns as a result of service in the forces and never returned to the land, accentuating the long term drift from rural to urban employment. The withdrawal of the P O W Labour and the relatively slow pace of demobilisation exacerbated the situation.

The unwillingness of labour to enter agriculture was attributed by the Conservatives largely to the lack of amenities in rural areas and demands for improved facilities featured strongly at post-War Conferences¹ with considerable stress on the need for improved rural housing, electrification², transport and roads³.

Against this background of continuing emphasis on increased production there was some feeling amongst farmers that they were not receiving the share of national resources required to achieve the level of production being asked for, and Eden's concept that it was 'not fair to ask farmers to produce the goods unless they were given the tools'⁴ found ready support. The Agriculture Act passed by the Labour Government in the autumn of 1947 was designed to meet this demand and provided the main legislative framework for agricultural support for over a decade.

Although the Bill was little mentioned at the 1947 Conference it had a fair degree of Conservative support. It followed lines laid down by the Coalition Government and was similar to many proposals in the 1945 Conservative Manifesto. A major feature of the 1947 Act was its acceptance of price support as an essential feature of British agriculture. The war-time system of annual price reviews, fixed prices, and a wide range of production subsidies was institutionalised as the general pattern of agricultural support. At the same time the Ministry of Agriculture retained wide powers of control and in cases where the standard of production was unsatisfactory, it could even take over land and administer it directly.

Such wide powers were inevitably criticised by the Conservatives⁵ who also opposed the absence of explicit preference for home and Commonwealth producers and measures to improve rural amenities. Another, less valid criticism was the absence of quantitative targets for the industry⁶.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 71
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1958, p 88
 3. See also P Bremridge & E Briggs 'Agriculture and Politics' (CPC 1955) and R Bennett 'The Farm Worker' (CPC 1957)
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 41, 73-75
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, p 72
 6. For detailed criticisms see for example 'Campaign Guide' (Conservative Central Office 1950) pp 213-214

Probably the most persistent demand however was for a long-term policy which would assure stable markets for agricultural produce. In the period after the War this was closely associated with the general feeling that clarification of the party's policy was required and there were calls at the 1947 Conference for an agricultural version of the Industrial Charter¹.

The demand for long-term planning stemmed from the character of the industry. The scale of investment, its concentration on the individual farmer, and the time-lag between the decisions to change a product and its maturity meant that farmers wanted to be sure that if they decided to concentrate say on milk, they would have an assured market when the full level of production was achieved several years later. Furthermore, during the War farmers had become used to guaranteed markets and had been able to sell everything they could produce at guaranteed prices. The Agricultural Charter, published at the 1948 Conference was the Conservative Party's reply to the 1947 Act and the debate at the Conference was largely devoted to it. In common² with other policies of the period, it was strongly production orientated² setting specific 50% increase in production targets and guaranteeing prices and markets for all food up to that level. It also proposed extending the guaranteed price system to wool and oats, reduced death duties on agricultural land and withdrawal of direct subsidies on animal feedstuffs on the basis that they would be incorporated in the guaranteed price fixed at the Annual Review. An important indication of future policy was the promise to restore a free market by discontinuing the Ministry of Food's central buying machinery. Other features were promises to support horticulture through import controls, an Agricultural Worker's Charter mainly covering improved rural amenities, and promises to restrict the power of the County Agricultural Executive Committees. The Labour Party's land nationalisation plans were heavily criticised in line with the Conservative Party's general anti-nationalisation campaign.

The Conference reception for the Charter was generally favourable and although there was some criticism of the absence of reference to fertiliser subsidies³ and the inadequate treatment of hill farming⁴, a number of delegates went out of their way to defend the 50% production target which had been subject to press criticism⁵.

1. For an analysis of the demands for policy clarification around this period, see J D Hoffman 'The Conservative Party in Opposition' (MacGibbon & Kee 1964) p 140
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 46
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 49
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, pp 47-49, 52. Butler promised the Conference a policy on hill farming and it has been suggested that 'The Right Road for Britain' published in July 1949 'shows definite influence of the suggestions made at the 1948 Conference' (J D Hoffman - 'The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51' MacGibbon & Kee 1964, p 178)
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, pp 46-47

The Charter was supposedly the product of the Two Way Movement¹ but its acceptance within the party probably stemmed less from grass roots participation than the fact that it made a firm attempt to meet demands for a clear-cut policy at a time when the scent of victory was in the air and although Woolton's determination to make the party rank and file feel involved in policy making was illustrated by his comments on the Charter at the end of the Conference:-

' You have ratified the Agricultural Charter ... I beg you to see that this Charter is talked₂ about. See that the farm workers know what our policy is. '

The suggestion that the Conference had 'ratified' the Charter clearly had no foundation in fact. Subsequent conferences continued to emphasise production. The original motion at the 1949 Conference, concerned solely with rural amenities, was subject to no less than three amendments, all of which were accepted, two of these were specifically concerned with production.

One delegate sounded a warning note:-

' I think there is a danger of our going in for wild schemes for increased production. During the War nothing mattered so long as we got the food. The cost did not matter; but ye shall in future years have to have some relation to cost³ '

but most of the speakers stressed the need for increased production irrespective of demand and Dugdale in his Ministerial reply firmly echoed the thoughts of most delegates when he said that:-

' In the future our programme as a party must stress the maximum production in every section of the industry, so that we can feed from the soil of Britain the greatest number of people that it is possible to do⁴ '

By 1950 the food shortage was beginning to ease and although agriculture still remained a seller's market⁵, farmers were worried about the marketing and pricing mechanism. The price support system established under the 1947 Agriculture Act gave farmers a guaranteed return based on the price level in the previous year so normal demand and supply behaviour affected prices up to a point and as imported supplies increased, producers gave increasing thought to marketing problems.

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1. J D Hoffman 'The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51' (MacGibbon & Kee 1964) p 153. Also NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 52.
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 144
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1949, p 73
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1949, p 74
 5. Shortages still remained acute. Thus, Food Subsidies featured in 61% of Conservative and 65% of Labour Manifestoes analysed by H G Nicholas 'The British General Election 1950' (Macmillan 1951)

Many Conservative farmers advocated more producer-controlled marketing boards to iron out inconsistencies of supply and ensure stable market prices with a guaranteed level of return. The advantages of such boards were widely canvassed at the 1950 Conference and influenced the thinking of the party pamphlet on 'Agricultural Marketing' published the following year which claimed that:-

' ... Experience has shown that these boards can make a valuable contribution to improving commodities concerned. With the existing statutory safeguards the consumer's interest is adequately protected and the responsibility for improving marketing is placed where it naturally belongs - on the shoulders of the producers, who have a natural incentive to bring about improvement' ... '

Once in power the party leadership responded to the pressure, although not immediately, and in 1954 a comprehensive marketing structure based on producer boards was eventually established².

Two other major themes of the 1950 agriculture debate were closely tied to the party's broader General Election platform. One was the land nationalisation issue; the other was criticism of bulk buying and the agricultural bureaucracy inherited from the war years which had been institutionalised under the 1947 Agriculture Act³. In both cases the Conference was convinced that the Labour Government's policies involved excessive direct interference with the management of the economy and that the scale of government intervention was directly responsible for serious inefficiencies and waste.

The 1950 Conference was also influenced by the Torquay Conference and the depressed state of the horticultural industry⁴ which stimulated a successful amendment to the Agriculture Motion calling for tariffs to protect horticultural produce⁵. As a result the party leadership was somewhat embarrassed when it got into power the following year because the Conference resolution was strictly speaking only a re-affirmation of established Conservative policy set out in the Agricultural Charter but in practice the new Government found that international trading agreements made it extremely difficult to introduce protective tariffs.

The marketing problems of the industry became more pronounced after the Conservatives took office in 1951. They were committed to removing controls of all kinds and particularly those on food. The commitment to discontinue bulk buying through the Ministry of Food was largely inevitable as the economy would not go on accepting war-time restraints and the unavoidable inefficiencies of the system and this meant that a new system of subsidies would have to be brought into operation.

The new support system took the form of deficiency payments covering the difference between prevailing market prices and guaranteed price levels negotiated between the Government and agricultural industry representatives. Although the guaranteed return remained, the new system meant a change in emphasis for farmers because all produce had to be disposed of through normal marketing channels direct to the consumer. This focussed even more attention on the problems of managing supply and

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1. G R H Nugent MP 'Agricultural Marketing' (CPC Sept 1951). For arguments against the Marketing Boards see Times 8 Oct 1953
 2. Cmnd 9104 March 1954. See also 'United for Peace & Progress' (Conservative Central Office April 1955)
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, pp 69 and 71
 4. GRH Nugent MP 'Agricultural Marketing' (CPC Sept 1951)
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, p 70

demand and although the 1952 Conference still emphasised expanded production, increasingly the real stress lay on the need for an orderly marketing system managed by producer controlled marketing boards.

The main alternative, import control, was a controversial issue. Britain's membership of G A T T imposed certain limits on Imperial Preference which were strongly opposed by an influential section of the party. As a result there were acrimonious debates on the subject at both the 1952² and the 1953 Conferences³. Although the Government's definitive White Paper finally decontrolling agriculture⁴ was not published until after the 1953 Conference its intentions were clear well before hand and although many farmers supported freedom in the abstract the prospect of losing guaranteed state price levels caused increasing worries. The 1953 Conference paid ritual tribute to the valiant efforts of farmers during the War and the need for even greater production. But it was generally realised that the comfortable guaranteed markets of the War years were disappearing and there were growing calls for Government steps to ensure a stable return on capital through control of the market.

One of the problems of the guaranteed price system was that farmers still had little incentive to ensure that they were meeting a demand. Large quantities of certain foods, such as milk were produced, even though demand was limited and the resulting disparity between market price and guaranteed price imposed heavy costs on the Exchequer which constantly pressed the Government to reduce the level of guaranteed prices⁵. As a result the mood of the farmers was 'restive and apprehensive' at the 1953 Annual Conference and there was sharp criticism even from MPs:-

' Our Government owes it to the agricultural community to make it clear once and for all that, our concentration on agriculture is not a temporary expediency '

The world supply situation had moved from deficiency into surplus - particularly in cereals, and the Government's refusal to grant the NFU a Special Price Review was heavily criticised⁶ as was the delay in establishing producer controlled marketing boards.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 87
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, pp 50-55
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, pp 63
4. 'Decontrol of Food & Marketing of Agricultural Produce' (Cmd 8989; 1953)
5. Times - 19 Oct 1953
6. Times - 8 Oct 1953
7. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 81. See also pp 83-85
8. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 84
9. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, pp 83-84. See also D E Butler 'The British General Election of 1955' (Macmillan 1955) p 11

The horticultural industry was another difficult topic. It was outside the scope of the 1947 Agriculture Act and relied on protective tariffs and quotas for price support but Britain's membership of G A T T prevented the Government from raising tariffs unless a corresponding increase was applied to Commonwealth produce. This situation was strongly criticised at the Conference by L S Amery,¹ the party's main Commonwealth advocate, and it has been suggested that this was directly responsible for the Board of Trade's decision to apply to G A T T later that year for special permission to raise tariffs against non-Commonwealth countries only².

The Minister of Agriculture faced much of the criticism squarely. He advised the Conference to accept a critical amendment to the resolution, probably in order to avoid the embarrassment of defeat, but stoutly defended the slowness in setting up the marketing boards explaining the need to consult with the parties involved and ensure that there are adequate safeguards for consumers.

The party's election manifesto, published in April 1955³, promised to uphold the principles of the 1947 Act, encourage marketing boards, and improve rural amenities and by the time the Conference met again in 1955 the party had won a new General Election.

The 1955 Conference again stressed the problems of the horticultural industry asking the Government 'to take all possible measures to provide greater stability in the future'⁴ and although cost increases absorbed by growers featured prominently in the debate their main demands were for a stable market which would provide guaranteed returns. The Government, however, categorically refused to offer direct price support and continued to insist that tariffs were the best way to protect the industry.

Marketing problems were a major issue the following year. The Conference re-emphasised the need for long term planning although it expressed confidence in the general⁵ framework of the 1947 Agriculture Act and the Agricultural Marketing Acts. While the Government's refusal to grant a Special Price Review to meet agricultural workers' wage increases was strongly criticised the 1956 Conference also provided a good example of how a carefully timed Government announcement could effectively forestall conference criticism when the Ministry of Agriculture announced on the day before the debate that it would renegotiate the agreed price for fat cattle with the NFU.

The Government began to respond to pressure for long-term planning and although the Minister of Agriculture promised no drastic alterations in the price support system he expressed interest in replacing the annual price reviews with a more long-term approach:-

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 63
 2. S Beer in 'Legislative Behaviour' (J C Wahlke & H Eulan (eds) (Glencoe 1959)
 3. 'United for Peace & Progress' (Conservative Central Office 1955)
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1955, p 83
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, p 86

' One word about longer-term assurances. Since I have been Minister I have become more and more conscious that the annual price review as provided for in the Agriculture Acts has defects ... Everyone wants a long-term policy, but there is very little unanimity as to what people want me to put into that long-term policy. I can only say that with goodwill I feel confident that something worthwhile is going to come out of these discussions'

Although delegates still wanted a long-term policy they were increasingly disillusioned by the producer controlled marketing boards which had proved too bureaucratic for producers and too expensive for consumers and references by the Minister to the Egg Marketing Board which was then being set up were met with noisy cries of dissent from the floor.²

The outcome of the demands for long-term guarantees was the White Paper 'Longer Term Assurances for Agriculture'³ subsequently implemented as the 1957 Agriculture Act. The new Act did not alter the essential pattern of agricultural price support established under the 1947 Act and guaranteed prices and deficiency payments remained the basis of the system. The Government did, however, commit itself to limit reductions in guaranteed prices so that after allowing for any cost increases or decreases the level for the industry generally would not drop below 97½% of the previous year's figure while adjustments for individual commodities would be limited to ensure that they would not fall below 96% of the previous year's figure. Production subsidies - particularly for buildings and fixed equipment were also extended to try and make farms more efficient and a Pig Industry Development Association was established to improve the quality of pork and bacon and combat competition from Danish producers.

The 1957 Act was partly responsible for a more optimistic atmosphere at the 1957 Conference which congratulated the Government on the success of its agricultural expansion policy. The demands for a long-term policy were largely met but delegates were increasingly aware that British agricultural productivity was being matched abroad where costs were often lower than at home where subsidies were keeping large areas of marginal land in cultivation. As competition from abroad loomed larger and the Conference showed a clearly discernable tendency to look to overt protectionism to control it⁴.

Imports aggravated the marketing problem but it became clear that the domestic industry's increasing productivity was bringing problems of its own. About 1956 the industry had exceeded the 50% target set in the Agricultural Charter and it was becoming even more apparent that increased production was no longer an end in itself.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, p 91
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, p 90. See also Economist Vol 181 Oct-Dec 1956, p 211
3. Cmd 23 (1956)
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1957, pp 51-52

When over-production had developed in certain areas, the producers had looked firstly to producer controlled marketing boards and subsequently to import controls as a solution but throughout agricultural management expertise lay in techniques for increasing production. The success of new production methods and the recovery of agricultural production abroad now began to place more emphasis on expertise in predicting and meeting market requirements - both in terms of product and quality. A delegate to the 1961 Conference put the problem succinctly:-

' It will have to be customer orientated marketing. If the housewife wants an 8 inch cabbage or a brown egg we will have to supply it, if not, somebody across the Channel will¹ '

While the industry was coming to terms with the changing situation the Government began to question the farmers' assumption that the industry should expect to enjoy the same growth as the private sector of industry in terms of income and return on capital. It took the view that the stability given by the 1957 Act was tantamount to providing a guaranteed revenue and in return the industry would have to accept a lower rate of return on capital than the rest of private industry. As a result the Government was not very sympathetic to demands at the 1957 Conference for steps to improve the industry's overall return on capital.

Another problem which figured at the 1957 Conference was the small farmer and EFTA. Small farmers enjoyed considerable sympathy amongst Conference delegates who regarded them as an important source of electoral support and as a good example of entrepreneurial effort. Although conference pressure for measures to help small farmers got a sympathetic hearing from the Government there was no promise of positive action and it became a major issue at the 1958 Conference.

The effects of EFTA entry were not much discussed by delegates except in the general context of imports but the Minister of Agriculture used the opportunity to make a categorical statement that the Government would not join EFTA if free trade in foodstuffs was a pre-condition of entry. This was designed to reassure the horticultural industry, for which continued tariff protection was promised, and also to meet the objections of the party's Commonwealth enthusiasts².

The 1958 Conference debate centred on small farmers and a number of speakers stressed the very capital intensive operations which were necessary to make small farms viable. The Government clearly shared the Conference's view that increased capital was needed for small farms, promising more assistance which was detailed in a White Paper published shortly after the Conference³ ended, but emphasised that the objective should be to make small farmers independent within a few years - helping them in the interim by redistributing resources rather than increasing the overall level of agricultural support⁴. The debate was also remarkable for a rare attempt by a delegate to forcefully oppose the mainstream of Conference opinion by arguing that small farmers were inefficient and should be discouraged rather than supported⁵. Predictably he drew a noisy reaction from the crowd.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1961, p 34
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1957, p 56
3. 'Assistance to Small Farmers' (Cmnd 553; 30 Oct 1958 - implemented in Agriculture (Small Farmers) Act 1959)
4. Economist Oct-Dec 1958, Vol 189, p 215
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1958, p 86

Surprisingly the 1958 agriculture debate contained no reference to the 1958 Agriculture Act, which curbed the powers of the County Agricultural Executive Committees¹. On the recommendations of the Franks Report² which had criticised their powers to act as 'detective, judge and jurty'.

Another surprising omission was the absence of any reference to the 1958 Price Review³ which had considerably reduced price support, although within the limits of the 1957 Agriculture Act.

The 'return on capital' issue was a major feature of the 1960 Agriculture Debate⁴. Although by 1960 Exchequer support for agriculture was running at around 5% of the national budget, many farmers were irritated by the fact that produce in the shops was costing the consumer more while Government control appeared to keep the farmer's return static:-

' We do not want continental prices here, but if the Government are going to settle our wages and the prices we have to pay, they must see that we have the support we need in exchange⁵. '

Despite the 1957 Agriculture Act many farmers suspected that the Government was 'shaving' the subsidies⁶ whilst at the same time allowing wage awards for agricultural workers and substantial increases in animal feedstuffs.

These problems highlighted the disadvantages of the deficiency payments system. Although it was intended originally to cushion farmers against fluctuations in the market, leaving normal market prices above the guaranteed price, in practice, the market price for many commodities was usually well below the guaranteed price and as a result the Annual Price Review was the only way in which farmers could recover increased costs.

The debate at the 1960 Conference included the first significant references to the effects of EEC entry⁷ on agriculture. Few delegates appreciated its importance and it is significant that it was MPs and the Minister rather than ordinary delegates who dealt with the question but by the following Conference delegates had grasped the extent to which EEC entry⁸ could affect the industry and the agriculture debate was almost entirely devoted to the issue. Entry would involve removal of

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1. For Conference criticism of these committees as far back as 1948. See NUCUA Conference Report 1948, p 48
 2. Cmnd 218 (1958)
 3. Cmnd 390 (1958)
 4. See also 'Agriculture and the Nation' (CPC; 1959)
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, p 108
 6. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, p 109
 7. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, p 109
 8. The Government's decision to apply for entry had been announced in the House of Commons on 31 July 1961.

Government price support and many producers were uneasy about being exposed to open competition. At the same time producers had experienced several minor crises as a result of sudden gluts caused by imports and their mood was strongly protectionist¹. In his reply the Minister pointed out that production surpluses throughout the developed countries made some 'dumping' unavoidable but he made it clear that the Government generally did not favour tariff protection as a solution and considered that the existing Anti-Dumping Act² was adequate although it accepted that its operation could be rather slow. On the broader aspects of EEC entry Soames hastened to assure farmers that the enlarged market provided by the EEC would compensate for reductions in Government support:-

' Let me assure you that the broad case presented to the Six by the Lord Privy Seal yesterday on behalf of the Government is such as would in our view give the industry equal opportunities to those now open to it.³ '

and the existing support system would continue until the EEC entry question was settled.

Although the 1962 Conference continued to stress the need for Government help, particularly for the small and middle sized farmer⁴, the effects of competition from imported produce were clearly worrying delegates most. The Conference revealed a marked turn towards protectionism and a strongly worded amendment⁵ advocating direct import controls was introduced and accepted. The increased support for import controls from producers was largely based on a desire for higher market prices which were becoming much more attractive than the modest but guaranteed returns of the deficiency payments system.

This change in emphasis was encouraged by the Government which was becoming seriously concerned about the increasing cost of deficiency payments as the gap between guaranteed and market prices widened⁶, and Soames in his reply to the debate made it clear that irrespective of EEC entry the support system would have to be overhauled:-

' While the industry is earning a net income of around £400 million, £300 million and more - about £330 million this year - is money being provided by the Exchequer. This situation is bound to make many people, and, surely, many farmers themselves, wonder whether this system which suited us so well in the middle fifties is still the right one in the circumstances of to-day.⁷ '

1. For details of Conservative Party attitudes to EEC entry and agriculture see M Camps 'Britain and the European Community 1955-1963', (Princeton UP 1964) p 462 ff
2. Customs Duties (Dumping and Subsidies Act) 1957
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1961, p 38
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1962, p 75
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1962, p 76
6. M Butterwick & E Neville-Rolfe 'Agricultural Marketing and the EEC' (Hutchinson; 1971) p 21
7. NUCUA Conference Report 1962, p 79

By 1965 the Conservatives were in opposition. One of the main developments was a firm decision that the party would go over to a system of import levies. The factors which contributed to the decision were numerous but some of the more important ones were:-

- (a) the Common Market - under EEC regulations deficiency payments were not permitted and as the party was firmly committed to negotiating entry into the EEC it was inevitable that the old system would have to be discarded
- (b) the cost of Exchequer support, and
- (c) pressure from farmers who were convinced that higher market prices would benefit them more than subsidies.

The main problem with the change in policy would be the inevitable rise in the cost of food which, although representing an increase in income for the producers, was unlikely to appeal to the housewife. As a result a series of debates in 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1970 and 1972 were almost entirely devoted to expounding the advantages of import levies to farmers whilst at the same time reassuring housewives that the transition would be very gradual with only a small effect on the price of food¹.

One other significant development during this period was the decision not to hold agriculture debates in 1968, 1971 and 1973. It is not clear whether this reflected a reassessment of the importance of the agricultural vote or the declining importance of agriculture as part of the national economy but there may have been an element of both. The agriculture debate had always attracted a somewhat specialised interest group as its audience and the small numbers attending the debates, together with the somewhat blatant self-interest of many of the agricultural speakers may well have been instrumental in persuading the leadership to stop holding a regular annual debate.

PARTY ORGANISATION

The part played by the Conference in discussing party domestic matters such as organisation and propaganda is surprisingly small in view of the direct interest which most delegates have in such matters.

Although constitutionally the Conference has no more power to settle organisational questions than policy its power to influence them is potentially considerable both because the membership of the Conference and the Council overlap and because many organisational decisions depend on constituency action for implementation.

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1965, pp 42-50
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1966, pp 104-110
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1967, pp 49- 55
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1969, pp 128-133
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1970, pp 87- 93
6. NUCUA Conference Report 1972, pp 55- 58

Generally speaking, however, the Conference has not devoted a great deal of attention to this area. Conservatives are conscious that too much public discussion of the mechanism of party politics might damage their image and are reluctant to appear as a party which is more concerned with the tactics than the strategy of politics. The Conference has, however, on occasions provided a forum where party workers can tell the leadership about their views on such issues.

Party workers often blame their party's poor electoral performance on failure to communicate policy successfully - particularly through failure to produce the right sort of literature or use the mass media correctly¹. These attitudes have frequently reflected in Conference debates:-

' No annual conference would be considered complete without the ritual of an attack upon the chairman or the deputy chairman for letting the party's case go by default for putting pen to paper and sending the script to the printer².. '

and emphasis on the party's communications problems has always tended to increase when the party is in difficulty. It is inevitable that:-

' During a difficult time for a party its organisation is bound to come under fire ... '

and these problems became increasingly acute as the party's tenure in office lengthened:-

' For a party which has been in office for over eleven years there are bound to be difficulties over the presentation of particular Government policies and actions. Our political opponents naturally criticise everything; for the commentators and journalists, attack is obviously more fun than defence. In spite of the large improvements in the standards of living of most people in the country, the Administration cannot avoid from time to time offending particular interests or sections of the community³... '

Immediately after the War the conference concentrated on what it regarded as unreasonable restrictions imposed by the Labour Government on the availability of newsprint for the press and although discussion ostensibly centred on the limits which this placed on freedom of speech generally, as most of the press was Conservative, it carried strong implications that the restrictions were intended to prevent the party putting its policy over to the electorate⁴. At the 1948 Conference a motion specifically on party propaganda reflected dissatisfaction with Churchill's reluctance to get involved in party politics⁵ and the following year resolutions were passed urging the party leadership to exploit political broadcasts effectively - rally the nation with a 'People's Call to the Conservative Way of Life', and make it clear to the electorate that the party rejected class warfare.⁶

1. The Selwyn Lloyd Report (Conservative Central Office 1963) pp 4-5
2. Times - 25 September 1958
3. The Selwyn Lloyd Report (Conservative Central Office 1963) pp 30-32
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1947, pp 99-103
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1948, pp 123-126
6. NUCUA Conference Report 1949, pp 104-108 & 112-113

By 1952 the Conservatives had been in power for over a year. The euphoria of victory had worn off, party workers felt that the party's increasing electoral difficulties were due to failures in explaining party policy to the electorate and the Conference passed a resolution urging the Government to time unpopular announcements carefully particularly in relation to local government elections whilst reference was made again to effective use of the media. The leadership recognised the problem and by the time the Conference met Lord Swinton had been appointed to co-ordinate Government public relations¹.

This malaise was largely reduced by Eden's appointment as leader and the party's 1955 election victory and although there was some criticism of Government public relation at the 1956 Conference it was confined to the presentation of Britain to overseas countries².

By 1957 however the party's electoral position was again causing concern and the Conference called for clearer and simpler policy explanations aimed at the ordinary voter. Delegates felt that Government Ministers were becoming bogged down in administrative detail, losing touch with the grass roots and failure to appreciate the importance of frequent appearances to explain Government policy. Particular complaints were raised over the Government's failure to counter criticisms of the new Rent Act³.

The following year a similar motion was carried urging the Central Office to come up with an imaginative publicity programme selling the Government's achievements to the electorate⁴ but the 1959 election success reduced the pressure until 1962 when electoral difficulties were again responsible for a resolution urging the Government to provide a simple explanation of its policies although its critical tone was dulled by an amendment emphasising the obligation of party workers to play their part in spreading the message.

One of the continuing problems throughout this period referred to by both Lord Swinton in 1952 and Deedes in 1962 lay in distinguishing the Government's general obligation to inform the country from straightforward political propaganda - most party workers felt that the two were essentially the same thing and that the Government's official public relations machinery should be used to explain party policy, while the Government, anxious to avoid reprisals if it lost office, was much more cautious.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, pp 75-81 and 85-87
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 112-114
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1957, pp 56- 63
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1958, pp 133-139

After 1964 this problem was removed but the party's election failure was inevitably attributed to inadequate communication of the party's policies and achievements. The 1966 Conference urged the party to attack the Labour Government ruthlessly and welcomed the overhaul of Central Office while criticism of the leadership was balanced by stressing the importance of overhauling local constituency associations¹. The following year resolutions were also passed backing Lord Carrington's fund-raising drive and urging greater efforts to put the party's message over to the public².

The 1968 Conference passed a fairly routine resolution asking for a more forthright declaration of party policy but it also debated a motion urging constituencies to adopt a primary election system for choosing parliamentary candidates which was eventually defeated after a somewhat non-committal reply from the vice-chairman of the party organisation in charge of candidates³ and in 1969 the debate was calculated to build up Heath's 'honest' politician image by urging the leadership to 're-establish the integrity of and respect for democratic government.'⁴

History repeated itself after the party's election victory in 1970. Initially the Conference was not much concerned about organisation and propaganda but by 1972 the party's electoral position was again causing concern and the Conference was urging the party to modernise its image and attract young voters⁵.

While such debates have provided party workers with a useful opportunity to express their views there is little evidence that they have had any very marked effect on the way in which the party organisation has in fact been managed.

The post war period can be seen as falling into three distinct phases as far as party organisation is concerned. 1945-51 was a period when the organisation was being built up under Woolton and Butler; 1951-1964 was a period of gradual decline during which the leadership became increasingly insensitive to the grass roots⁶; and 1964-1970 was a further period of rebuilding. Closely following the pattern of 1945-51, supervised by du Cann and Barber.

Throughout the two innovative periods, 1945-51 and 1964-70 the impetus came almost entirely from the top of the party whilst during the middle period the leadership appears to have become progressively less interested in organisational questions and the party chairmanship tended to become a cross to be carried by a member of the front bench rather than a key position of influence within the party.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1966, pp 27-37 and 67-74
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1967, pp 36-38 and 121-127
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1968, pp 18-27 and 73-78
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1969, pp 105-111
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1972, pp 34-39
 6. See Lord Windlesham 'Communication and Political Power' (Jonathan Cape; 1966)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Although domestic policy has dominated the post-War Conferences the Conservatives have traditionally devoted a substantial part of the proceedings to discussing foreign affairs. The table below illustrates the number of resolutions on overseas affairs and defence which have been debated since 1947:-

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of resolutions on foreign affairs/defence</u>	<u>Total resolutions</u>
1947	1	20
1948	3	28
1949	3	19
1950	3	21
1952	4	20
1953	2	16
1954	3	17
1955	1	18
1956	3	20
1957	3	15
1958	3	20
1960	4	18
1961	3	14+
1962	3	15+
1963	3	15+
1965	3	17
1966	3	18
1967	3	17
1968	2	16
1969	2	16
1970	4	16
1971	2	13
1972	2	15

+ = plus questions

The slight drop in the number of resolutions since 1967 partly reflects the declining number of resolutions being debated overall but it may also reflect a declining preoccupation with foreign affairs as an issue. To some extent this may have been associated with Heath's interests but it seems more likely that national politics generally became more preoccupied with domestic issues.

In the period immediately after the War, Churchill was as anxious to avoid specific policy commitments on foreign affairs as on domestic issues, and conference debates consisted mainly of generalised motions on the importance of the Empire and the Atlantic Alliance although the 1946 Conference came out clearly in favour of Indian independence subject to adequate protection for minorities.

As a result a highly critical motion was submitted to the 1948 Conference criticising the leadership for failure to spell out the party's position clearly and calling for an equivalent of the 'Charters' in foreign affairs. The resolution was successful in its object and Eden used the Conference to make a major foreign policy statement and the resolution was then withdrawn without a vote. Throughout, the

importance of relationships between the US, Europe and the Commonwealth were stressed.

The Conference's attitude towards the United States was generally sympathetic and there were frequent references to American help - both during the War itself and during the reconstruction. There were however occasional examples of hostility from delegates mostly occasioned by suspicion that America was helping to restructure world trade in order to improve its own trade at the expense of Britain's Empire preference and it was generally recognised that Empire relations were of paramount importance.

Much of the value of the Empire prior to the Second World War lay in its economic strength based on protectionism and Imperial Preference had been an important Conference issue in 1928¹. Although after the War there were constant efforts, often reflected at the Conference, to justify the Empire's value in philosophical terms as a political grouping transcending creed and colour, most Conference delegates saw its main value in economic terms², reinforced by the defence aspect - the Empire's war contribution was frequently quoted.

As a result, much discussion centred on the need to build up the Empire economically. So long as the debates revolved around traditionally acceptable policies such as the provision of technical and financial assistance there was little controversy but it became increasingly apparent that Britain's position as an international trading power could conflict with Imperial Preference.

The pre-War protectionist system established under the Ottawa Agreement was incompatible with the new international trade arrangements which were developed after the War, largely under the influence of the United States. The structure established through the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference and developed through the Geneva Trade Conference's General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs and the Havana Charter was designed to remove protectionist barriers wherever possible. Although Britain tried to safeguard the position of Empire producers, particularly through reservations to the GATT Agreement, Imperial Preference was fundamentally counter to the general trend of international trade arrangements.

While they emphasised that the Commonwealth was more than a trade preference system, many Conservative supporters felt that the new arrangements betrayed the Empire's and hence Britain's own interests. As a result there was strong pressure at a series of conferences shortly after the War to amend the GATT Agreement⁴.

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1. L S Amery 'My Political Life' (Hutchinson 1955) p 496-497. See also 'Conservatives and the Colonies' (CPC 1952)
 2. I M Drummond 'British Economic Policy and the Empire' (Allen & Unwin 1972); Times - 23 September 1952 and L D Epstein 'British Politics in the Suez Crisis' (Pall Mall 1964) pp 11-20
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1962, p 67
 4. See F Boyd 'British Politics in Transition 1945-63' (Praeger 1964) pp 168-170

The 1946 Conference only pressed in a general sort of way for the retention of Imperial Preference but the Conference the following year took place during the GATT talks at Geneva and passed a resolution strongly opposing any arrangements which would weaken Imperial Preference. The reservations made to protect the Empire did not satisfy delegates and the 1948 Conference passed a resolution calling for the denunciation of the Geneva Trade Treaty and the Havana Charter to the extent that they limited Imperial Preference and while the following year's resolution was more restrained it reiterated the Conference's belief that Imperial Preference should not be modified.

By 1952 the position had altered significantly because the Conference was no longer urging the policy on the Labour Party but upon its own Government. There continued to be strong pressure within the party, largely led by L S Amery, for changes to GATT¹ and the conferences in 1952, 1953 and 1954 all carried resolutions urging the new Government to amend those parts of the GATT Agreement which limited Imperial Preference. When the party had been in opposition the leadership had backed the demands for amendments to GATT. Once they were in power, however, they appreciated that modification of the Agreement might improve trade with the Commonwealth at the expense of disastrous effects on the rest of Britain's international trade relations. As a result the Government's policy in the face of the Conference was to agree that changes would be desirable but would be difficult to achieve and could not be introduced unilaterally.

Although the Government's decision to apply to GATT in 1953 for permission to raise tariffs against non-Commonwealth countries may have been influenced by Conference pressure it took no steps to achieve a general modification of Britain's GATT obligations and by 1955 the Conference, led by Peter Walker, was highly critical of the lack of any results². Nevertheless the Government continued to follow its established policy and although there was further criticism in 1956³ it began to die out as the Conference's attention turned to the effects of EEC entry on the Commonwealth⁴.

As Europe recovered from the War and a new European political structure evolved it was inevitable that conflict between Britain's role in the Commonwealth and her role in Europe would grow. The Conference's position had been established as early as 1949 in a resolution proposed by Duncan Sandys:-

' this Conference welcomes the creation of the Council of Europe and promises its support for all practical measures to promote closer European unity, consistent with the full maintenance of the unity of the British Empire⁵ '

1. Times - 23 September 1952
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1955, pp 27-33
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, p 75
4. But see 'Expanding Obligation' (CPC 1961) 'The Expanding Commonwealth' (CPC 1956) 'Wind of Change' (CPC 1960)
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1949, p 60

Although Oliver Stanley in his reply to the same debate, stressed that the Empire would have to be very different in a post-War environment both the Government and the Conference were as reluctant to back European unity at the expense of the Commonwealth as they were to accept that Britain's future role was unlikely to be that of a major world power¹.

By the mid-nineteen fifties it was becoming increasingly apparent that Britain had missed out in failing to become a founder member of the EEC and active consideration had to be given to the alternatives. The 1957 Conference welcomed the introduction of the Partial European Free Trade Area and an amendment reaffirming the importance of Commonwealth links and the need to keep agriculture outside the scope of the Area was defeated on Government advice although it received considerable support.

The Conference remained deeply committed to the Commonwealth and the following year it congratulated the Government on its efforts at the Montreal Conference to develop its economic importance, but by 1960 it was becoming increasingly clear that an error of judgement had been made in deciding to stay outside the EEC. The Conference welcomed closer connections between EFTA and the EEC and the following year it again passed a resolution urging the Government to forge closer links with the EEC. By 1962 application for entry had been made and the Conference was welcoming the progress made in the negotiations². Throughout, much debate centred on the effects of EEC entry on Britain's relationships with the Commonwealth and particularly on Commonwealth produce and although the Conference loyally supported the Government's views there was a strong current of feeling amongst party supporters that EEC entry would damage British agriculture and Commonwealth trade³.

Once the Labour Government was in power in 1964 the main aspect of foreign policy which had implications both for the Commonwealth and for Britain's role as a world power was the East of Suez question. Both factors weighed heavily with the Conference and featured strongly in the arguments in favour of retaining an East of Suez policy at the 1965 and 1966 Conferences.

In 1969 the Common Market question was resurrected as a result of the Labour Government's decision to apply for entry. The leadership remained firmly committed to EEC entry but found that opposition within the party had hardened since the early nineteen-sixties:-

' The Conservative leadership, thoroughly committed to the European idea, was embarrassed by the facts that the public at large had lost interest in the subject, that many Tories, including Enoch Powell - had reneged on their former faith, and that the Socialist Government had also espoused the European cause⁴ !

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1. For Conservative Government attitude to EEC over this period see speech by Sir Anthony Eden at the 1952 Conference - NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p 36
 2. See also 'Britain into Europe' (Bow Group; 1962)
 3. See 'A Europe of Nations' (Monday Club 1965)
 4. K Young 'Sir Alec Douglas-Home' (J M Dent & Sons; 1970) p 253

and the Conference only endorsed EEC entry after a ballot. Although vociferous opponents remained, the issue subsequently became less heated and both the 1969 and 1970 Conferences backed entry.

The Conference's sympathy with the United States came to an abrupt end in 1956 with the Suez crisis¹. The 1956 foreign affairs debate was almost entirely devoted to Suez and clearly showed the Conference's disenchantment with both the United States and the United Nations which opposed what the Conference considered to be Britain's vital interests². The same debate was also notable for a strongly critical speech from a foreign affairs expert, William Yates MP, who publicly attacked the Government's Suez and Cyprus policies³ and two years later Cyprus was also the subject of a major foreign affairs 'gaffe' at the Conference when Lennox-Boyd inadvertently referred to Cyprus as 'Turkey's off-shore island' and infuriated the Greeks⁴.

After Suez nuclear weapons policy became an important issue. This was largely a response to the Labour Party's own internal difficulties over unilateral disarmament which the Conservatives tried to exploit by re-emphasising their policy of retaining a nuclear deterrent although at the same time the Conference had its own pronounced views on the need for an adequate conventional weapons capability. Despite initial chagrine the Conference's attitude towards the US and the United Nations mellowed rapidly once the Suez confrontation was over while the Conference's view of Britain as a major world power was sustained by Macmillan's roles in connection with the Disarmament and Summit Conferences. Britain's place in world affairs became a major issue once the Labour Party took office with a much⁵ more restricted concept of Britain's role, particularly East of Suez⁵.

Powell shared the view that Britain should limit her commitments and at the 1965 Conference he made a speech which implied that Britain should reconsider her position. In fact the Shadow Cabinet took a different view and there is some evidence that⁶ this was a significant factor in the estrangement of Heath and Powell⁶. In any event Powell's remarks were promptly disowned by Heath although once back in office the party had to accept a fairly limited role east of Suez.

1. See P Goodhart 'The Moderate Alliance' (CPC 1957)
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 29-38
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, pp 29-38. See also LD Epstein 'British Politics in the Suez Crisis' (Pall Mall 1964)
4. Economist Oct-Dec 1958, Vol 189, p 216
5. See for example E Griffiths, D Hurd, P Tapsell, D Walters 'The Middle East and Britain' (CPC 1967)
6. A Alexander and A Watkins 'The Making of the Prime Minister 1970' (Macdonald 1970) p 81. Also A Roth 'Heath and the Heathmen' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1972), p 203

Another major foreign issue was Rhodesia which presented a number of difficult problems for the leadership involving both the internal unity of the party and its electoral image.

There was strong support within the party for the white Rhodesian settlers and although the party had rarely been overtly racist many party workers sympathised with their predicament. Furthermore, many party supporters had family and business ties with Rhodesia or felt debts of gratitude for Rhodesia's war-time help to Britain.

While recognising this formidable body of opinion within the party the leadership had to be extremely careful of its public image both because of the convention that foreign policy is largely conducted on a non-party basis and because the blatantly unconstitutional character of UDI left the party open to allegations that it was condoning illegal activities. On the other hand it was also essential that the party should appear to have an independent and positive view on what ought to be done on such a major issue¹.

The first conference debate on Rhodesia was in 1965 when the Rhodesian Government was known to be actively considering UDI although no firm decision had been taken. Selwyn Lloyd, on behalf of the Executive Committee, proposed a resolution expressing the hope that there would be no UDI and a resolution could be found which would incorporate the Five Principles, using the 1961 Constitution and a phased educational programme as its basis.

Lord Salisbury and Patrick Wall MP were the leaders of a substantial body of opinion which favoured taking a 'soft' line with Rhodesia. They proposed an amendment deploring any imposition of sanctions and although the wording in itself would probably have been acceptable to the party leadership (and in fact a similarly worded resolution was supported by the leadership at a subsequent conference) the attitudes underlying it were not. Reiterating his belief in a negotiated settlement based on the 1961 Constitution Sir Alec Douglas-Home argued that a vote against sanctions would be misunderstood as overt support for the Rhodesians and recommended successfully that the Conference should not vote on the amendment at all². Even so the Conference's decision was cited by some Labour MPs as one of the factors which encouraged the Rhodesians to declare UDI³. He was however largely successful in ensuring that the conflict within the party was temporarily patched up although fundamentally different approaches to the issue were apparent⁴.

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1. See article extracted from H Wilson's Memoirs published in Sunday Times 25 April 1971 for a summary of the party's dilemma as seen from the Labour view point.
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1965, pp 123-132
 3. K Young 'Sir Alec Douglas-Home' (J M Dent & Sons ; 1970) p 236
 4. See also J Biggs-Davison 'Facing the Facts on Rhodesia' (Monday Club 1965) and 'Rhodesia - A Minority View' (Monday Club 1966)

During the following year UDI was declared and at the 1966 Conference the Executive Committee proposed another resolution supporting a negotiated solution based on the Five Principles but quite specifically opposing any involvement by the United Nations on the grounds that the dispute was a domestic matter between Britain and Rhodesia¹. Lord Salisbury again submitted an amendment unequivocally opposing sanctions which was not chosen for debate but he was given the chance to speak strongly against sanctions. The leadership did not consider that sanctions would be effective but it was unwilling to categorically oppose them and secured the Conference's support for the policy put forward by Heath earlier in the Conference based on a negotiated settlement incorporating the Five Principles².

By 1967 mandatory sanctions had been imposed. The balloted motion chosen for debate urged their removal and negotiation of a settlement based on the Five Principles although it was vague about the exact timing of the removal of sanctions. This time Lord Salisbury advocated the immediate lifting of sanctions as a prelude to negotiations. Heath replied to the debate personally and made it clear that while he was totally opposed to the use of force, sanctions or the imposition of direct rule, he was not prepared to commit himself to remove sanctions before negotiations began. His main theme continued however to be the importance of achieving a negotiated settlement and he reiterated the suggestion which he had made ten days earlier at Bradford that the 'Tiger' constitution should be used as a basis for negotiations³. The Conference again supported the leadership as it did the following year.

The 1968 Conference coincided⁴ with the opening of the 'Fearless' round of negotiations and as Home was anxious to avoid anything which might appear to prejudice the talks the Conference was persuaded to cancel the debate and substitute a general statement of policy from Sir Alec who continued to emphasise the need for a negotiated settlement whilst taking some credit for his own part in getting the 'Fearless' talks started although he was extremely cautious about forecasting their outcome⁵.

Until the 1970 Conference the party was in the comparatively happy position of being able to propose its solutions to the Rhodesia problem without having to implement them although in some respects it found the impotence irksome⁶, but once the party was in power the position was different. The leadership was under pressure to implement its policy rapidly and the Rhodesian issue at the 1970 Conference provided a good example of internal pressure group politics.

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1. For same theme see also NUCUA Conference Report 1966, p 111
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1966, pp 81-88 and 35
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1967, pp 82-88
 4. There were suggestions that the timing was in fact carefully planned by Wilson - see A Alexander and A Watkins 'The Making of the Prime Minister 1970' (Macdonald 1970) pp 50-51 but this was denied by both Home in his speech and by Wilson - see Sunday Times 25 April 1971
 5. NUCUA Conference Report 1968, pp 82-84
 6. NUCUA Conference Report 1966, pp 86

No motion on Rhodesia was included in the original agenda prepared by the General Purposes Committee but a motion was selected by ballot. It was apparently fairly innocuous:-

' That this Conference calls for the immediate withdrawal of sanctions against Rhodesia and supports the policy of Her Majesty's Government of negotiating with the Rhodesian regime to normalise relations. '

but it would have obliged the Government to discontinue sanctions before reopening negotiations and the proposer of the motion, Councillor George Pole of South Kensington was also Chairman of the Monday Club. The Club lobbied actively for the resolution and released a pamphlet on the issue by one of their members, Mr Tim Keigwin, a former prospective candidate, which was sharply critical of 'the Five Principles.'

The Bow Group on the other hand, campaigned equally actively to see the motion defeated. They ran a parallel conference outside the Conference Hall urging the Government not to sell arms to South Africa and made strenuous efforts to persuade the conference delegates that Rhodesian sanctions should not be withdrawn unless a satisfactory settlement on the basis of the 'Five Principles' could be negotiated.

In his reply to the debate Sir Alec Douglas-Home made it clear that the Government's policy would be to lift sanctions at the end of successful negotiations. He did however use the opportunity to announce the lifting of some minor but irksome aspects of the sanctions involving postal surcharges and the recognition of divorce proceedings. Efforts to persuade delegates to withdraw the critical motion were unsuccessful but the Conference followed his advice in rejecting the motion by an overwhelming majority¹.

Although he had avoided being too specific at the 1970 Conference, Sir Alec had dropped a broad hint that the Government would re-open negotiations shortly and these led eventually to the draft settlement which was put to the Rhodesian people by the Pearce Commission who found that it was not generally acceptable. Although a settlement was not achieved much of the heat was taken out of the issue as most party workers felt that the Government had made a genuine attempt to achieve one. Although the agenda for the 1972 Conference included 36 motions² advocating removal of sanctions or implementation of the Pearce settlement² no debate was held while at the 1973 Conference a motion calling for immediate removal of sanctions was again comfortably defeated³.

On foreign affairs the Conference's overall record has been one of strong support for the leadership reflecting the delegates' deferential attitudes towards the leadership in an area outside their own immediate experience. It is significant therefore that the four issues over which there was sharp controversy at the Conference - GATT, Suez, the Common Market, and Rhodesia, were all ones where there were sharp divisions within the parliamentary party and to a large extent the controversy at the Conferences was generated by members of the parliamentary party who were

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1970, pp 61-66
2. NUCUA Conference Agenda 1972, pp 158-163
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1973, pp 82-88

clearly hoping to enlist grass roots support in their efforts to apply pressure to the leadership. Equally significantly, however, in every case the Conference's loyalty to the leadership was sufficiently strong to prevent it defeating the leadership's policy although the substantial minority which opposed some policies was sufficient to embarrass the leaders.

General

While the Conference's broad record on all issues has been one of strong support for the leadership it will be apparent that the Conference has often held strong views of its own - particularly on domestic matters within the direct experience of delegates - and although suggestions that the Conference's views should be binding on the parliamentary party have been rare, the possibility of defeat or even of narrow victory, can be sufficiently embarrassing to ensure that the leadership goes out of its way to be conciliatory.

In such circumstances one common expedient is for a Minister to put his own interpretation on a resolution and then accept the resolution in the light of that interpretation. One example of this was the motion on the health service at the 1960 Conference:-

' That this Conference is not satisfied with the Government's assurance that the cost of allowing foreign visitors to participate in the benefits of the National Health Service is insignificant; that it is acutely conscious of the injustice of a system under which medical services are available free of charge to foreign visitors, who come here from countries with no reciprocal arrangements for British tourists, and who make no contribution whatsoever towards paying for these services, either by way of National Insurance or Taxation, while British taxpayers who choose to consult their doctors privately are denied the benefit of National Health prescriptions. It urges the Minister to put an end to this inequitable situation ' 1

The tone of the resolution and the accompanying speeches clearly advocated legislation to prevent foreign visitors from benefiting under the National Health Service but the Minister merely took the opportunity to emphasise the Government's position which was based on extending reciprocal arrangements with other countries and then concluded that 'I shall gladly accept this resolution as an invitation to make progress' 2,

Replying to the resolution on electoral reform at the same conference the Minister made it quite clear that he would give no undertaking to legislate but concluded that:-

' If the wish of the mover of the Resolution is that we should review the machinery of the electoral law with particular reference to those five points, I gladly accept the resolution ' 3

and the Chairman made it clear that the Minister 'accepted the spirit of the resolution so long as it did not restrict the Government to legislation on those points but embraced a whole review of the electoral law' 4...

1. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, p 130
2. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, p 130
3. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, p 139
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1960, p 139

Similarly in 1963 in accepting a hostile motion on pensions and allowances the Minister qualified his acceptance by saying:-

' I would urge the Conference to accept this motion and, in doing so, I would suggest that the Conference is accepting the spirit and principle of the motion rather, perhaps, than the actual wording¹ '

Although the leadership may avoid direct confrontation with the Conference through such devices an increasing number of issues have gone to a ballot in recent years.

Unlike the Labour Conference where the block voting arrangements have come under considerable criticism² the Conservative conference has placed little emphasis on formal votes and its arrangements for them have even been described as so primitive as to cast doubt on whether they are seriously intended to be used³. The majority one way or the other is usually so overwhelming that most questions can be decided easily on a show of hands and speakers calling for a formal ballot often feel obliged to apologise to the Conference for causing inconvenience⁴.

Until 1971 the standing orders provided that all decisions would be reached on a show of hands and a vote would only be taken if 100 delegates called for one⁵ or the Chairman decided it⁶ was necessary. Up to 1967 there had only been one ballot on a policy issue⁶ but thereafter the number of formal votes increased sharply. Even so, only eight motions were decided by ballot between 1946 and 1973. The motions on which votes took place varied considerably:-

- (a) 1953: a resolution urging more rapid repayment of Post-War Credits was carried by 945 votes to 913
- (b) 1967: a resolution on education was carried by 1,302 votes to 816
- (c) 1969: three resolutions ended in votes. The first was on capital punishment and an amendment calling for its reintroduction was carried by 1,117 votes to 958. The second was on the Common Market and a resolution endorsing entry was carried by 1,452 votes to 475. The third was on immigration and a resolution supporting the party's official policy was carried by 1,349 votes to 954.

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1. NUCUA Conference Report 1963, p 39
 2. See for example R Rose 'Between Miami Beach and Blackpool' (Political Quarterly Oct/Dec 1972 Vol 43 No.4) pp 419-421
 3. L D Epstein 'British Mass Parties in Comparison with American Parties' (Political Science Quarterly Vol 71 1956) p 105
 4. See for example NUCUA Conference Report 1969, p 92
 5. Standing Orders approved by Central Council March 1948 - SO No 11
 6. A ballot was also held in 1950 on a procedural matter - the venue of the next Conference

- (d) 1971: a second debate on the Common Market also ended in a ballot and a motion supporting entry was again carried - by 2,474 votes to 324.
- (e) 1972: a resolution on immigration was carried by 1,721 votes to 736
- (f) 1973: an amendment on capital punishment was carried by 1,404 votes to 1,228

Only three of these votes, those on Post-War Credits and capital punishment represented direct defeats for the party leadership. Three others - those on education and immigration represented partial defeats for the leadership to the extent that the vote against was sufficiently large to be a substantial embarrassment although the final result endorsed the official policy. In the two debates on the Common Market the leadership's victory was fairly unequivocal and the votes were taken more to quantify the extent of the decision than to establish the result of the debate.

It is significant that seven of the eight votes took place after 1967. To some extent this may have reflected dissatisfaction with the leadership but it also probably reflected a higher degree of activity amongst delegates. The increased number of ballots and an unsuccessful attempt by a delegate to call for a ballot at the 1970 Conference prompted the Central Council to change the Standing Orders in 1971 to require support from 250 delegates instead of 100 before a ballot must be called¹. Even so, a ballot has been held in every subsequent year.

While examples of motions which are hostile but acceptable to the leadership subject to qualification are not uncommon, outright defeat of the leadership has been rare although not perhaps as unusual as sometimes supposed.

Outright ballot defeats on Post-War Credits and capital punishment have already been noted as well as partial defeats on education and immigration but there have also been a number of cases where opposition to the leadership's policy has been so strong that the issue has not even resulted in a ballot.

The most spectacular example was the widely publicised 1950 Housing debate which pressurised the leadership into accepting a target of 300,000 houses a year² despite widespread doubts amongst the leaders, including Woolton³ that it could be achieved. Probably the most significant feature of this debate was not the defeat imposed on the leadership but the fact that the Conference's decision was allowed to influence their parliamentary policies. Significantly, however, attempts in 1956 and 1963 to impose targets of 300 miles of motorway and 500,000 homes a year respectively were conspicuously unsuccessful because the leadership was resolutely opposed to them⁴.

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1. Standing Orders adopted by the Central Council April 1971 (SO No 11)
 2. NUCUA Conference Report 1950, pp 56-65. Also Times, 15, 16, 17 Oct 1950
 3. Lord Woolton 'Memoirs' (Cassell 1959) See also S H Beer & A B Ulam 'Patterns of Government' (Random 1967) p 195. For suggestions that the target was only achieved through manipulation of standards see D V Donnison 'The Government of Housing' (Penguin 1967) pp 166-169
 4. NUCUA Conference Report 1956, p 105
NUCUA Conference Report 1963, pp 26-33. A 500,000 homes a year target was however eventually adopted by the leadership - see 'Action Not Words' (Conservative Central Office 1966)

The 1950 Housing Debate is the only example of the leadership taking a conference defeat on a major issue in modern times but Macmillan appears to have accepted that if the Conference had voted against Common Market entry while he was Prime Minister it would probably have been impossible for the parliamentary party to go on¹.

Defeats on minor issues without even a ballot have however been more common and it has even been suggested that 'no annual conference is complete without an outburst of feeling on some lesser non-party question'².

At the 1948 Conference the front-bench's views on Policy for Women were rejected. The Liberties of the Subject debate at the 1955 Conference was strongly influenced by the Crichton Down case and urged the Government to reform the administrative tribunals. Although the Attorney General pointed out that the Government had already announced that an enquiry would be set up to look at the tribunals and suggested that in view of this the motion might be withdrawn the Conference went on to pass it with a very large majority³.

In 1961 the leadership's policies on both education and Schedule 'A' taxation were defeated and another defeat on the health services was only narrowly avoided because the proposer withdrew his resolution rather than press it to a ballot. Another near miss occurred in 1953 when the Government was lucky to avoid an embarrassing confrontation with the grass roots party supporters over the university seats⁴. The Government was pledged to reintroduce them and the conference agenda included a resolution restating that objective. It was fortunate for the Government that the previous debate dragged on so long that there was not enough time to cover the subject⁵ because only a few days later on 20 October the Prime Minister had to answer in the Commons that the Government had decided regretfully that despite their election pledge the seats could not be restored⁶.

On a number of other occasions the conference has come close to a ballot but has been dissuaded from holding one as in 1952 when the conference was clearly split over a resolution on new towns. As it was the last item of business the Chairman persuaded the delegates to register 'a division of opinion' rather than hold a vote which would reduce the amount of time available for speeches from the party leadership. In 1955 the Chairman refused to hold a ballot at the end of the Social and Health Services debate and in 1965 on the advice of the front bench, the Conference itself decided not to vote on the Rhodesian issue while the Chairman again refused a ballot at the end of the Common Market debate in 1970.

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1. Times - 23 April 1971
 2. Times - 12 October 1953
 3. NUCUA Conference Report 1955, pp 50-54
 4. For previous history of this question see T L Humberstone 'University Representation' (Hutchinson 1951)
 5. Times - 12 October 1953
 6. Times - 21 October 1953

Although the low number of formal votes at the Conference can be seen as a sign of impotence it is probably more accurate to regard it as an illustration of its role as a deliberative rather than a decision-making forum. This probably explains why many delegates are reluctant to press issues to a vote and are often content only to speak against resolutions or applaud speakers who oppose the leadership's policy.

As a result the voting arrangements have never been seriously questioned and there has been no pressure to weight the voting power of constituent parts of the party so that certain sections have heavier representation than others .

Even if the Conference has not succeeded in dictating major policy issues to the parliamentary leadership, on a wide range of subjects it has been far from supine. The fact that the Conference cannot impose its views on the leadership does not mean that it is without influence and many Conservatives would prefer to avoid a conference which had unchallenged powers to make policy.

One of the immediate effects would be to sharpen controversy and hence the adverse effect which heavily publicised divisions of opinion can have on the image of the party. The party is anxious to avoid what has been described as 'the disarmingly imprudent forthrightness with which so many of the Labour Party seem willing to dissect their party in public.' Another difficulty is the slow, ponderous and rather vague way in which any conference inevitably operates because of its size. Even some Labour Party supporters have begun to doubt the value of the conference as a policy-making body:-

' The policy of the Conservative Party descends from on high through the mouth of the Leader himself, and the annual conference of the party can do no more than comment on it. This may be centralism carried too far, but it works. What the Labour Party needs is a much smaller policy-making body than Conference, preferably the Parliamentary Committee supported by the Parliamentary Labour Party, with Conference in a role of critic and adviser, but not master ... this is in fact the traditional relationship of Conference to the Parliamentary Party, the idea of Conference dominance having crept in only quite recently. Nothing short of an overwhelming defeat on a vital issue need then shake the Leader's position; only the Parliamentary Party, which appoints him, would be empowered to throw him out. He would, with his colleagues of the Parliamentary Committee, be freed from much of the need to placate the warring factions. Decisions could be arrived at with reasonable speed and reasonable clarity, with the result that, on many important matters, the public would have the inestimable benefit of knowing what Labour Party policy is ... if the change were to be made (or rather if the traditional

1. For practice in other parties see for example - S Henig and J Pinder (eds) 'European Political Parties' (Allen & Unwin 1969) pp 35, 47, 55
P T David, R M Goldman, R C Bain 'The Politics of National Party Conventions' (Brookings 1960) pp 164-192. Also see :-
J A Storing 'Norwegian Democracy' (Allen & Unwin 1963) p 127
2. D Houghton 'Making MPs Accountable' (Political Quarterly; Vol 43 No 4 - Oct 1972) pp 375-379
R Hornby 'Parties in Parliament 1959-1963 The Labour Party' (Political Quarterly, Vol 34; 1963) p 240

relationship of Conference to leadership were to be re-stated) there would be an awful row, with protests, possible resignations and recriminations and it would take all the nerve of the Leadership to ride out the storm. But unless some means can be found of enabling quick and clear decision to be made, there is only the prospect of further decline and defeat¹... '

and the Canadian parties have also experienced the deadening effect which Conference policy-making can have on the parties' capacity to react to changing political situations².

The temperament of the Conservative Party is such that it finds a fairly autocratic style of policy-making acceptable and so long as this remains the case there are clearly strong practical advantages in keeping the relationship between the Conference and the Parliamentary Party as one in which the Conference confines its role to one of providing:-

' an opportunity for examining the mood of the party - and the Parliamentary members will not be insensitive to any clear expression of that mood ... the Conferences are not, however, instruments of popular control over policy or over leaders³ '

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1. 'Let's Face the Future' (Anon) (Political Quarterly Vol 31) 1960
See also G Williams & B Réed 'Dennis Healey' (Sidgwick & Jackson 1971) p 268
 2. J R Williams 'The Conservative Party of Canada' (Duke UP 1956) p 107
 3. 'The Party Conferences - Reality and Illusion of Popular Control'
Times - 29 September 1952. See also A.H.Hanson & M.Walles 'Governing Britain' (Fontana 1970) pp 52-53

6. THE CONFERENCE AND THE PARTY LEADERSHIP

Elections for office can play an important part in party conferences¹ and usually this is because the Conference is the final constitutional authority in the party or in order to ensure that the successful candidate is fully identified with the policies of the party and enjoys its unquestioned support. Thus, although the roles of leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party and leader of the extra-parliamentary party are theoretically separate the position of a leader of the PLP who could not command the support of the Conference at the extra parliamentary party's leadership election would probably be untenable because he would have been cut off from the final source of party authority².

The U.S. National Nominating Conventions are typical of the second kind of conference. Their only important function is to select the Presidential candidate and identify him firmly in the public's mind with the party label and although some discussion of the party platform does take place its importance is entirely secondary to that of choosing and publicising the party's presidential candidate³.

It is therefore a significant indication of the Conference's place in the Conservative Party's structure that it plays no part in the selection of the party leadership. The Party Leader himself is traditionally chosen by the parliamentary party and although their decision is presented for ratification at a meeting which is attended by representatives of the National Union's Executive Committee neither the National Union nor the Conference play any significant part in the selection process. Appointments to the Shadow Cabinet are the personal prerogative of the Party Leader as is the choice of Chairman of the Party Organisation and even the President and Chairman of the National Union who were elected by the Conference until the Second World War are now chosen by the Central Council rather than the Conference itself⁴.

Although Churchill used the 1954 Conference as an opportunity to confirm Eden's position as his successor he made it quite clear that he was telling the Conference rather than asking for its approval :

" You may be quite sure that we shall settle our affairs in the future between ourselves, governed only by what we believe to be the greatest interest of the public service and also the fortunes of our party...⁵."

1. See for example G.K. Roberts' "West German Politics" (Macmillan 1972) pp 53-54 & L. LeDuc 'Party Decision-Making: Some Empirical Observations on the Leadership Selection Process' (Canadian Journal of Political Science Vol IV 1971) pp 97-118
2. See E. Heffer M.P. "Labour's Future" (Political Quarterly Vol 43 1972) p 382
3. For (somewhat dated but still relevant) criticism of excessive preoccupation of U.S. Conventions with filling offices rather than discussing policy, See J.K. Pollock "The British Party Conference" (American Political Science Review June 1938) p 525 ff.
4. See J.D. Hoffman "The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51" (MacGibbon & Kee 1964) p 123.
5. Times 11th October 1954

As a result the 1963 Conference provides the only example in modern times of a Conference which may have had some identifiable influence on the choice of party leader.

During 1963 Macmillan was under heavy attack and there was considerable speculation that he would resign as a leader¹ although it seems almost certain that he had in fact decided to carry on and intended to use the Conference as an opportunity to announce a firm decision to lead the party into the next General Election in 1964². Fortuitously his illness became critical just before the Conference opened and consequently much of the in-fighting between his potential successors took place during the Conference. The spectacle was not altogether edifying³. The atmosphere was emotional and a number of observers were highly critical including the Times :-

" It is hoped the decision can be moved away from Blackpool. The atmosphere there is unhealthy. With all the hob-nobbing in hotel rooms, the gossip and the rumours, the Conference is resembling an American nominating convention." The Cabinet is said to have one candidate, the Parliamentary Party another, and the constituency associations a third. However undemocratic it may be to say so, the less the constituency associations have to do with the matter the better. They are politically naive, hopelessly inexperienced in the art of government, and not to be trusted with anything so serious....."⁴

The Times' reservations were shared by many senior members of the party including Lord Poole:-

" If only we had had the sense to hold the news up until Saturday, the whole thing would never have got out of control. I should never have allowed Home to read that letter out on the Thursday; the trouble was we'd both promised Macmillan that we'd do it then. But keeping that promise was probably the biggest blunder I ever made in politics..."⁵

The Conference did not have any formal part in choosing Macmillan's successor but it happened to be the stage on which a good deal of the manoeuvring between rival candidates took place⁶.

1. A. Howard "The Making of the Prime Minister" (Cape : 1965) pp 50-61
2. See for example Lord Swinton "Sixty Years of Power" (Hutchinson 1966 pp 188-189 But c.f G. Hutchinson "Edward Heath" (Longman 1970) p 123
3. J. Biffen "The Conservative Opportunity" (Babford and Conservative Party Conference : 1965) pp189-190.
4. Times 11th October 1965.
5. A. Howard "The Making of the Prime Minister" (Cape : 1965) p. 72
6. For suggestions the Conference should have chosen the leader see H. Berkeley "Crossing the Floor" (Allen & Unwin 1972) p. 29

This could have given Hailsham some initial advantage over the other candidates because of his popularity with the constituencies¹ but in fact it may well have prejudiced his chances in the subsequent polling of the Parliamentary Party because there is some evidence to suggest that the vulgarity of his peerage disclaimer and the excesses of his constituency supporters actually antagonised the Parliamentary Party². Although blatant support from the constituencies probably damaged Hailsham, lack of enthusiasm from them may have been equally damaging for Butler and Maudling.³ The Conference probably also played a significant part in Home's success. Through sheer chance his position as President of the National Union enabled him to make a limited number of dignified public appearances without appearing to be promoting his own interests, which contrasted favourably with Hailsham's blatant campaigning.

As a result, although Home was not chosen by the Conference his selection can be said to have:-

" begun at the Conservative conference in Blackpool, at least to the extent that his candidacy was successfully launched while certain other aspirants had been rather definitely eliminated by the time the centre of activity shifted back to London..."⁴

Clearly it was unlikely that the choice of a new leader would coincide with the Conference again in the foreseeable future but the unwelcome publicity which the Conference had attracted to the intrigue which almost inevitably went with the traditional process of 'emergence' was a significant factor in both Home's and the parliamentary party's subsequent decision to introduce a conventional election to choose the next leader.⁵

It is significant however that neither the National Union nor the Conference were to play any part in the new procedure and it was generally accepted that the choice should remain vested in the parliamentary party - only the mechanics of selection were altered and not the distribution of power.

While there may be a natural presumption that it would be more 'democratic' if the leader of the Conservative party were to be elected by the Conference a case can be made that it would actually be less so. One aspect was articulated by the Times in its criticisms of the 1963 Conference when it suggested that the Conference was unable to assess candidates on adequate criteria. This view is shared to some extent by Professor Williams based on Canadian experience :

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1. Hailsham was also widely assumed to be Macmillan's own preference - see K. Young 'Sir Alec Douglas-Home' (Dent : 1970) p. 165 and R. Bevins 'The Greasy Pole' (Hodder & Stoughton:1965) p.142
 2. R. S. Churchill 'The Fight for the Tory Leadership' (Heinemann 1964) pp 100 109
A. Roth 'Heath and the Heathmen' (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972) pp 171-174
D. McKie and C. Cook 'The Decade of Disillusion - British Politics in the Sixties' (Macmillan : 1972) p 22-23
I. Macleod 'The Tory Leadership' Spectator 17th January 1964
 3. A. Howard 'The Making of the Prime Minister' (Cape 1965) p. 69
R. S. Churchill 'The Fight for the Tory Leadership' (Heinemann 1964) p. 120
 4. E. Janosik 'The American Nominating Convention' (Parliamentary Affairs Vol 17 1963-64) p. 325
 5. P. Goodhart 'The 1922' (Macmillan 1973)
Times 23rd July 1973
G. Sparrow 'R.A.B. Study of a Statesman' (Odhams 1965) p. 216

" There are a number of cogent reasons for believing that the parliamentary party is better qualified than the rank and file membership of the party to select a national leader. Foremost among these are that the caucus is more likely to be impressed by parliamentary competence and experience and less by national notoriety; more by young men with a future than by old men with a past; and more by the prospect of strengthening the party for the long pull and less by considerations of immediate electoral appeal. Moreover, delegates to conventions are more inclined to be fickle in the face of defeat and to demand the head of a leader who is unable to pull victory out of the bag on the first draw.." ¹

Such elitist arguments clearly beg questions about the validity of a wider range of 'democratic' procedures - if for example the relatively well-informed members of a party conference are judged to be incapable of making a valid choice between party leaders, are the even more ill-informed members of the electorate at large really to be trusted with choosing the President of the United States or participating in a British General Election which to a large extent is now a choice between rival Prime Ministers? On the other hand it can be argued that the party conference is intrinsically unrepresentative of the electorate at large as distinct from being unfitted to choose at all on the grounds that indirect assemblies are particularly amenable to control by the existing party hierarchy. ²

Irrespective of whether the Conference has, or indeed ought to have, any significant influence over the choice of leader, it plays an important part in the on-going relationship between the leadership and the grass roots party. It provides a valuable opportunity for the leader to communicate his views and his general image both to party supporters and to the electorate at large. The effect of the Conference on party workers in this area can be gauged from the fact that 70% of the delegates interviewed after the 1967 Conference at a time when Heath was under heavy criticism thought that the Conference had improved their opinion of Heath.

The dominant position occupied by the party leadership remains a noticeable feature of the Conference ³ and is not only conceptual but also physical - the platform speakers even occupy a rostrum which is set apart from, and higher than, that used by the floor speakers, unlike the U.S. nominating conventions the leadership operates from the Convention floor ⁴.

To some extent this reflects the general tone of British political life. As Christoph has noted :

" Despite its basically democratic content, British political society is suffused with aristocratic habits of mind, so that the conduct of government is still regarded with a degree of awe by the populace who are less inclined than Americans to demand full exposure of the activities of ruling groups." ⁵

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1. J. R. Williams "The Conservative Party of Canada" (Duke UP 1956) p 107
 2. M. Duverger "Political Parties" (Methuen 1964) pp 135-40
 3. E. A. Nordlinger "The Working Clan Tories" (MacGibbon & Kee 1967) p 20
 4. For comment on these aspects see M. Shaw "An-American Looks at the Party Conferences" (Parliamentary Affairs ; Vol 15 ; 1961/2) p 203
 5. J. B. Christoph "The Press & Politics in Britain and America" (Political Quarterly; Vol 34; 1963) p 144

Its origins are largely historical:-

" The three major political parties are the children of the nation's political history. The Conservative and Liberal Parties alike still show characteristics of the politics of the early 19th, and indeed, the 18th century, when Party allegiance sat more lightly on the legislators..."¹

and stem from the fact that the party was orientated towards Parliament long before any mass party organisation had developed:-

" In the Conservative Party the leader preceded the Conference... There was a Tory Party in Parliament for more than 150 years before there was any Conservative organisation in the country and for about 200 years before there was a party conference. The party in the House of Commons or the House of Lords necessarily had to have a leader, and the leader was often called upon to take quick decisions on the floor of the house. Sometimes he was able to sound his followers at leisure, but frequently he would not be able to obtain more guidance than could be obtained from whispered consultations on the front bench, and occasionally he might be called upon to take quick decisions on his own responsibility while standing on his feet in debate. Even during the recesses, when communication with other members was slow and uncertain, he might find himself called upon to take decisions on policy with little opportunity of consultation. In such circumstances it was inevitable that the leaders of the Whig and Tory parties should be invested with great responsibility in the formulation of policy."²

This natural strength of the leadership's position has been reinforced by a number of factors including the continuity of the leadership,³ and the fact that the leader has never been beholden to the Conference for electing him to his position. As a result the position until 1964 was as described by Finer:-

"..although the Leader does not normally attend the annual conferences of the National Union, he customarily addresses a mass meeting of the delegates immediately after the conference has adjourned. The Leader on these occasions frequently refers to the deliberations and resolutions of the conference and may, indeed, indicate that he approves of some or all of their decisions. But he is, of course, in no way bound by these decisions; they are merely "conveyed" to him so that he may be kept constantly aware of the mood and opinions of his followers..."⁴

and although from 1965 onwards Heath did in fact attend the conferences throughout, in other respects the situation has changed very little. The Conference can however embarrass the leadership as the succeeding chapter on the mass media shows while equally it can provide him with valuable support⁵ and even critical conference debates "can be to the leader's advantage in that he can face and overcome his critics"⁶.

1. D. Clarke "The Organisation of Political Parties" (Political Quarterly; Vol. 34; 1963) p 144
2. I. Bulmer-Thomas "How Conservative Policy is Formed" (Political Quarterly; Vol. 24; 1953) p 190
3. M. Shaw "An American Looks at the Party Conferences" (Parliamentary Affairs Vol. 15 1961/62) p 204
4. S.E. Finer et al "Back Bench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59" (Pergamon 1961) c.f. also H.W. Ehrmann "Politics in France" (Little Brown 1971) p 233
5. see for example Lord Avon "Full Circle-The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden" (Canells 1960) p 508 on the 1955 Llandudno Conference also C. King "The Cecil King Diary 1965-1970" (Cape 1972) pp 160,213,292
6. R. M. Punnett "British Government and Politics" (Heinemann 1970) p 118

Furthermore there is a good case for arguing that:

" It is wrong, however, to assume the existence of near absolute leadership control because outright defeat or veto are rare. It is precisely because they can occur that, before taking action party leaders try to secure that they have or can gain majority support for their proposals"¹

and although the leadership's right to follow a different policy is broadly recognised, an irreconcilable split on a major issue could eventually make the leadership's position untenable. It is a significant indicator of the party's general approach to politics however that neither side has ever pressed an issue to this point since the War.

1. P. Y. Medding "A Framework for the Analysis of Power in Political Parties" (Political Studies Vol. XVIII No. 1 1970) pp 1-17

7. MASS MEDIA AND THE CONFERENCE

While the Conference plays an important part in relations between party activists and the parliamentary leadership, heavy media coverage of the Conference has also given it a role to play in influencing the relationship between the party and the electorate at large.

The Conference has become a major public relations exercise for the party and although the British party conferences have never attracted the same saturation coverage as the US Nominating Conventions they provide an important opportunity for the party to put its image and policies over to the electorate. While the opportunity is attractive it is not without problems - media coverage may exaggerate internal divisions in the party, recalcitrant minorities may publicise views which embarrass the leadership, and reactionary floor speakers may tend to give the party an image which it would rather avoid. Nevertheless the party leadership has actively encouraged media coverage of the conference² and although there does not appear to be much evidence that it has increased the conference's responsiveness to public opinion as it appears to have done in the US³, party managers have certainly become more thoughtful about the image which it projects and make positive efforts to try and control the sort of events which might embarrass the party in the eyes of the public.

Television

Television is probably the most important single source of political information for the average member of the electorate and a survey conducted by the Opinion Research Centre in 1970 showed that 56% of the population thought that television 'did most to help them understand what is going on in Britain' with news bulletins and current affairs programmes as the most favoured types of programme⁴ :-

	%
News bulletins	58
Current affairs programmes	34
Party political broadcasts	4
Don't know	4

- the poor rating attached to party political broadcasts confirms the low value placed on them during election studies and is probably attributable to their boring presentation and public distrust of overt propaganda⁵.

1. For analysis of time/space given by media to conference coverage see J Trenaman & D McQuail 'Television and the Political Image', (Methuen 1961) p 59
2. Heath's decision to attend the 1965 and subsequent conferences was reputedly influenced by the prospect of additional television exposure - see A Roth 'Heath and the Heathmen' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1972) p 191
3. See PT David, RM Goldman, RC Bain 'The Politics of National Party Conventions' (Vintage 1964) pp 24-28
4. Sunday Times - 10 May 1970. See also E W Chester 'Radio & Television in American Politics' (Sheed and Ward 1969). Also D Butler & D Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) pp 269-271 and J Day and D Fisher 'British Life and Institutions' (Dobson 1973) pp 23-46
5. See for example D Butler & M Pinto-Duschinsky 'The British General Election of 1970' (Macmillan 1971) pp 109 and 199-230. See also N Swallow 'Factual Television' (Focal Press 1966) p 116 and JG Blumler and D McQuail 'Television in Politics - Its Uses and Influence' (Faber 1968)

Conference coverage involves an element of all three types of presentation . Whilst the conference is taking place it usually occupies a fair proportion of most news programmes; there are also a number of current affairs-type programmes containing conference excerpts plus discussion; and in recent years the entire conference proceedings have been broadcast^{live} although strictly speaking they do not rate as party political broadcasts.

Since 1954 the conferences have received detailed television coverage in some form. Although this is now well-established, its introduction caused some controversy. In July 1953 the BBC offered to cover both the Conservative and Labour Conferences but the Labour Party refused to give facilities and was strongly supported by a Times leader which argued that live coverage of the whole conference would bore the public while partial coverage would encourage parties to juggle business to make the most of the available time and edited versions would place an unacceptable editorial burden on the BBC. It was also suggested that television coverage would devalue the role of the delegates:-

' the delegates in the hall would no longer matter. It would be the potential spectators outside to whom everything would be addressed ... '

An active correspondence ensued in which Sir Edward Errington, the Chairman of the National Union's Executive Committee alleged that the BBC's decision to withdraw all coverage in view of the Labour Party's refusal meant that the Labour Party was being allowed to 'veto' coverage of the Conservative Conference². Morgan Phillips, the General Secretary of the Labour Party replied that the offer had been turned down 'for that year only' because there had been no opportunity to consult the conference itself³, while Lord Hailsham claimed that the BBC's obligation to give the parties 'equal time' would have been met by offering coverage to both parties irrespective of whether they decided to accept or not⁴.

In any event the BBC withdrew its offer and at the 1953 Conference Errington reiterated his criticism of the Labour Party 'veto' and suggested that:-

' we should not discuss this matter except when it is certain that a decision by this conference can in fact be carried out⁵... '

By the following year, however, the Labour Party had agreed and there was some restricted coverage. Detailed coverage began in 1955 and now runs at a substantial level.

1. Times - 25 September 1953. Many of the arguments against televising the conference are identical to those against televising Parliament. For a summary see R Day 'The Case for Televising Parliament' (Hansard Society 1963). Also R Day 'Television: A Personal Report' (Hutchinson 1961)
2. Times, 6 October 1953 and Times, 9 October 1953
3. Times, 8 October 1953
4. Times, 8 October 1953
5. NUCUA Conference Report 1953, p 28

TABLE 7.1

BBC TELEVISION AUDIENCE

	Date	Time	% of UK Population ¹	UK B I Public ²	UK B III Public ³
1955	6 Oct	2130 hrs	8.3 ⁴		
	7	2130	11.2 ⁴		
	8	1930	9.5 ⁴		
1956	11 Oct	2250	8		
	12	2245	6		
	13	2245	10		
1957	10 Oct	2245	6	13	7
	11	2245	6	15	7
	12	2245	9	24	9
1958	8 Oct	2245	6	14	6
	9	2245	7	17	8
	10	2245	4	13	4
	11	2245	10	25	11
1960	12 Oct	2245	2	7	2
	13	2245	4	12	3
	14	2245	3	11	3
	15	1515	5	8	6
		2245	7	14	7
1961	11 Oct	2245	3	10	3
	12	2245	3	5	3
	13	2245	5	12	5
	14	2245	5	17	5
1962	10 Oct	2245	3	7	3
	11	1445	3		
		1545	2		
		2245	5	12	6
	12	2245	3	8	4
13	2245	5	14	6	
1963	9 Oct	2245	5		
	10	1425	1		
		2310	7		
		2250	6		
	11	1610	1		
12	2205	11			
1964	13 Oct	0930 ⁵	. ⁶		
		1030 ⁵	.		
		1125 ⁵	.		
		1430 ⁵	.		
		1530 ⁵	.		
		1630 ⁵	.		
		2255	5.8		

TABLE 7.1 (contd)

	Date	Time		% of UK Population ¹	UK B I Public ²	UK B III Public ³
1965	14 Oct	0930	5	hrs	0.1	
		1030	5		0.1	
		1125	5		.	
		1430	5		0.1	
		1530	5		0.2	
		1630	5		0.1	
		2255			3.1	
	15 Oct	0930	5	.		
		1030	5	.		
		1125	5	.		
		1430	5	0.1		
		1530	5	0.1 ₆		
		1630	5	.		
		2255		3.8		
	16 Oct	1015	5	.		
		1130	5	.		
		2145		6.3		
1966	12 Oct	0930	5	.		
		1125	5	0.1		
		1430	5	0.1		
		2215		11.6		
	13 Oct	0930	5	.		
		1125	5	.		
		1430	5	.		
		1530	5	0.1		
		1630	5	0.2		
		2230		9.0		
	14 Oct	0930	5	.		
		1030	5	.		
		1125	5	.		
		1430	5	.		
		1530	5	.		
		1630	5	.		
		2220		9.6		
	15 Oct	1015	5	.		
		1100	5	.		
		2340		2.7		
1967	18 Oct	0930	5	.		
		1125	5	0.1		
		1430	5	.		
		2050		16.7		
		2255		21.5		

TABLE 7.1 (contd)

	Date	Time	% of UK Population ¹	UK B I Public ²	UK B III Public ³
1967	19 Oct	0930 ⁵ hrs	0.1		
		1130 ⁵	.		
		1430 ⁵	0.1		
		2050	22.5		
		2320	3.4		
	20 Oct	0930 ⁵	.		
		1125 ⁵	.		
		1430 ⁵	.		
		2050	15.4		
		2325	1.4		
	21 Oct	1100 ⁵	0.1		
		2205	22.2		
		2330	2.4		

1. Until 1959, number of persons over 16 years viewing the programme, expressed as a percentage of total UK population over 16. In 1960 the basis was changed to viewers over 5 years, expressed as a percentage of total UK population over 5.
2. Number of persons viewing the programme who could receive BBC only, expressed as a percentage of the UK population able to receive BBC only.
3. Number of persons viewing the programme who could receive BBC and ITV, expressed as a percentage of the UK population able to receive BBC and ITV.
4. Programme available in London area only. Total audience expressed as a percentage of the total population in London region.
5. BBC2. All other programmes are BBC1 or equivalent.
6. . = less than 0.1%

(Source: BBC Audience Research Department)

TABLE 7.2

ITV TELEVISION AUDIENCE

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>% of UK Population</u> ¹	
1957	10 Oct	2245 hrs	4	
	11	2245	4	
	12	2200	7	
1958	8 Oct	2300	3	
	9	2300	4	
	10	2300	4	
	11	2300	5	
1960	12 Oct	2305	4	
	13	2310	3	
	14	2300	5	
	15	2230	6	
1961	11 Oct	2305	3	
	12	2305	3	
	13	2300	4	
	14	2305	6	
1962	10 Oct	0930	.	
		1410	.	
		1545	.	
		1640	.	
		1845	.	
		2315	2	
	11 Oct	0925	.	
		1410	.	
		1640	.	
		1845	.	
		2245	.	
		2300	2	
		2325	.	
	12 Oct	0930	.	
		1405	.	
		1525	.	
		1540	.	
		1830	.	
		2315	3	
	13 Oct	1355	.	
		2305	7	
	1963	9 Oct	0915	.
			1415	.
1645			.	
2300			1	
10 Oct		2310	3	
		0915	.	
		1415	.	
		1645	.	
		2300	3	
		2310	.	

²

TABLE 7.2 (contd)

	Date	Time	% of UK Population ¹		
1963	11 Oct	1400 hrs	.		
		1415	.		
		1545	.		
		2245	6		
		12 Oct	2325	.	
			2330	2	
1965	13 Oct	1000	.		
		1150	.		
		1500	.		
		1625	.		
		1815	0.8		
		1835	.		
		2330	2.4		
		14 Oct	1000	0.1	
	1155		0.1		
	1500		0.1		
	1600		0.1		
	1630		.		
	2310		1.6		
	15 Oct	0930	.		
		1145	.		
		1455	0.1		
		1600	.		
		1630	.		
		2325	1.4		
		2340	1.5		
		16 Oct	1130	.	
	1230		.		
	2325		1.2		
	2340		1.1		
	1966		12 Oct	0930	0.2
				1030	0.3
		1155		0.3	
		1500		0.6	
1600		0.5			
2315		0.1			
2350		0.7			
13 Oct		0930		0.1	
		1030	.		
		1155	0.2		
		1455	0.4		
		1600	0.5		
		2310	3.5		
		2355	0.6		
		14 Oct	0930	0.1	
1030			0.2		
1145	0.1				
1500	0.4				
2315	1.4				
2335	.				
2350	0.4				
2359	.				

TABLE 7.2 (contd)

	Date	Time	% of UK Population ¹
1966	15 Oct	1015 hrs	.
		1115	.
		2100	4.9
		2340	1.0
1967	18 Oct	0930	0.1
		1030	0.1
		1130	0.3
		1455	.
		1610	.
	19 Oct	0930	0.2
		1030	0.2
		1200	0.2
		1500	0.5
	20 Oct	1545	0.6
0930		0.1	
1145		0.3	
21 Oct	1430	0.2	
	1100	11.2	

1. Until 1954 number of persons over 16 years viewing the programme expressed as a percentage of the total UK population of 16, In 1960 the basis was changed to viewers over 5 years as a percentage of total UK population over 5.

2. . = less than 0.1%

(Source: BBC Audience Research Department)

TABLE 7.3

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS WATCHING ITV COVERAGE OF CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCE ('000)

DATE	TIME	A R E A								TOTAL
		London	Midland	North	Scotland	South West and Wales	South	North East	East Anglia	
1958 8 October 9 10 11	2300 hrs	258	207	498	53	86	373			1,139
	2300	258	306	540	123	94	37			1,368
	2300	337	240	602	105	113	30			1,427
	2300	655	404	706	176	144	39			2,124
1960 15 October	2230	1,080	820	1,164	352	214	192	280	98	4,200
1961 14 October	2300	809	579	1,072	527	280	57	243	86	3,653
1962 10 October	0930		*	33		*	*			38
	1200		*			*	17	6	5	11
	1400		35			24	33	32	9	117
	1530		18				42	52	14	99
	1600		18				33	45	23	135
	1630		18							96
	1845		175				50	116	5	354
	2330	151	175		354	79	8	6		706
	0930		*		130	*	8	6	*	47
	1200		*	229	33		8	6	*	14
11 October	1400		35	131		16	8	32	18	338
	1530		140	196			25	58	23	237
	1600		140	196			42	65	37	480
	1630		123	196			91	52		462
	2315	301	263	392	140	71	8	123	18	1,308
	0930		*	33		8	8	*	5	54
	1200		*	33		8	8	*	67	116
	1400		18	65		8	17	*	42	150
	1530		70	131		*	17	19	46	283
	1830		386	382		382				382
2315	361	65	719	121	190	83	123	100	2,083	
1400	90	65	164	93	48	33	45	23	561	
2300	632	14	1,046	540	190	149	265	73	2,909	
1963 9 October	0915		*	34	19	8	*	7		68
	1200		*	34	19	8	*	7		68
	1415		39	170	77	18	26	60		389
	1645		135	204	86	17	73			498
	0915		*	68	10	*	*	*		78
10 October	1200		*	68	10	*	*	*		78
	1415		77	34	58	25	44	27		265
	1645		96	509	86			73		764
	0915		*	102	10	*	*	*		127
	1200		*	102	10	*	8	7		135
11 October	0915		*	102	10	8	9	7		309
	1200		*	102	10	8	9	13		309
12 October	1545		39	102	38	8	9	13		309
	1400	98	58	305	77	50	53	40	14	695

DATE	TIME	A R E A								TOTAL	
		London	Midland	North	Scotland	South West and Wales	South	North East	East Anglia		
1965 13 October	0930 hrs										5
	1100										*
	1200			40							45
	1600			70		30					150
	1800	660									660
	2330	150			390	125	45		70		5
14 October	1000		130								5
	1200			40							40
	1500			70		20		30		*	120
	1630		70								90
	2330	400	160	610	30	115	90		160		1,600
	0930										5
15 October	1200			70							*
	1500										85
	1630										50
	2330	180	250	310	355	95	50		110		1,350
	1200	330	220	610	285	105	60		105		1,745
	2330										
1966 12 October	1200		20	*	10						50
	1500	40	50	40	10	97	20	20			257
	2330	490	100	801	45	100	75				1,611
	1200	*		40	10						70
13 October	1500	80	50	110	10	35	45				330
	2300	450	190	740	150	155	140				1,825
14 October	1200	*	*	*	10						20
	1500	40	20	40	*	45	20	20			165
	2330	830	240	990	185	175	185				2,605
	1200	*	20	40	35	20	20				135
15 October	2330	380	190	510	325	65	85				1,555

* = under 5
(Source: Television Audience Measurement Ltd)

REACTION INDICES

Table 7.4

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Reaction Index</u>
1956	11 October	2250 hrs	65
	12 October	2245	65
	13 October	2245	66
1957	10 October	2245	59
	11 October	2245	56
	12 October	2245	61
1958	8 October	2245	60
	9 October	2245	64
	10 October	2245	64
	11 October	2245	59
1960	12 October	2245	57
	13 October	2245	63
	14 October	2245	61
	15 October	2245	62
1961	11 October	2245	63
	12 October	2245	65
	13 October	2245	62
	14 October	2245	61
1962	10 October	2245	60
	11 October	1445	62
		1545	62
		2245	60
	12 October	2245	57
	13 October	2245	61
1963	9 October	2245	60
	10 October	2310	65
	11 October	2250	67
	12 October	2205	62
1965	13 October	2255	59
	15 October	2255	61
	16 October	2145	57
1966	12 October	2215	65
	13 October	2230	66
	14 October	2220	66
	15 October	2240	56
1967	18 October	2050	56
		2255	55
	19 October	2050	59
		2320	54
	20 October	2050	55
	21 October	2205	55

Audience size is clearly an important indicator of the influence of conference television coverage. The available data is not comparable as between the BBC and ITV¹ audiences but study of samples of the material for the period 1955-1967 does give a fairly good indication of public interest in the conference (See Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3)

Between 1954 and 1962 television coverage was mostly restricted to evening summaries of the proceedings although after 1960 there were occasional afternoon programmes. In 1962 and 1965 ITV and the BBC respectively started intensive day time live coverage. The audience figures show that the demand for this is very restricted, largely reflecting the effects of day time employment and the more restricted availability of the programmes - the BBC coverage is on BBC2 and the ITV coverage is not taken by all of the network. Even so, the numbers watching day time programmes are quite substantial in absolute terms and low coverage at this time is more than compensated for by the very large audience which watches the evening programmes and the closing speech on Saturday. There are also some indications that interest both in day time and evening programmes is increasing.

Although detailed qualitative information on the effects of Conference programmes on the political opinions of viewers is not available and was beyond the scope of this study because of the large sampling frame required² some information on viewers' attitudes to the conference coverage is available from the BBC's 'Reaction Index'³. It is based on questionnaire returns from a panel who are asked 'to sum up their reactions' about programmes in terms of 'enjoyment or interest' using a five-point scale - A+, A, B, C, C- with A+ covering programmes 'of exceptional enjoyment or interest' and C- covering 'extreme distaste, dislike or boredom'.

While the survey gives no indication of the effect of programmes on the political views of viewers it does reflect their interest in the conferences although audience reaction is highly subjective and one has to be cautious about reading undue significance into minor fluctuations in the figures.

The reaction indices for the BBC programmes during the period 1956-1967 were remarkably consistent and show that the programmes were regarded as slightly above average by viewers (see Table 7.4). The distribution of 'scores' was also consistent as the following figures for the evening television programmes in 1963⁴ show:-

1. For assessments of methods, see 'Audience Research in the United Kingdom' (BBC 1966); A Mitchell 'The Decline of Current Affairs Television' (Political Quarterly Vol 44 1973) pp 127-136; and D Butler and M Pinto - Duschinsky 'The British General Election of 1970' (Macmillan 1971) p 227
2. For information on size of sampling frames etc see J Trenaman & D McQuail 'Television and the Political Image' (Methuen 1961) and N Swallow 'Factual Television' (Focal Press; 1966)
3. For details of methods used in compiling the index see 'Audience Research in the United Kingdom' (BBC; 2nd Edition 1966)
4. Audience Research Report T VR/63/576 (4 Nov 1963)

Reaction Index Distribution 1963 (%)

Table 7.5

	<u>A+</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>C-</u>
9 October	9	31	49	11	-
10 October	12	44	36	7	1
11 October	16	43	34	7	-
12 October	8	37	49	6	-
<u>Average</u>	<u>11.25</u>	<u>38.75</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>7.75</u>	<u>0.25</u>

The level of interest appears to remain broadly constant as comparison with the figures for 1965 illustrate :-

Reaction Index Distribution 1965 (%)

	<u>A+</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>C-</u>
<u>Average</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>

Comparisons with the conferences of the other parties show that although the level of interest in the Conservative Conference is if anything slightly higher than that in the Labour Party's, the Liberal Conference is noticeably less well regarded than that of either of the other major parties:²

Reaction Index (by parties) 1963 (%)

Table 7.6

	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Liberal</u>
Wednesday	60	63	57
Thursday	65	61	52
Friday	67	61	52
Saturday	62	64	58

1. Audience Research Report T VR/65/574 (17 November 1965)

2. Audience Research Report T VR/63/576 (4 November 1963)

The relatively high level of interest in the conferences contrasts with the low level of listening and comprehension which has been found amongst the electorate in relation to party political broadcasts¹. It is difficult to account for this because the programmes usually have much in common but the explanation probably lies in the additional choice available to viewers and the fact that the propaganda is slightly less blatant.

The Press

Although most newspapers rely on advertising revenue and allocate a high proportion of their available space to advertisements a surprisingly large share of the remaining space is allocated to news as distinct from other types of coverage² :-

	Mean Average No of pages	% Space		% Editorial Space Given To :					
		Editorial	Advertisements	News	Features	Leaders	Letters	Pictures	Miscellaneous
Daily Telegraph	26	48	52	64	18	2	2	12	1
Guardian	19	62	38	61	23	3	2	9	2
Times	21	66	34	69	17	2	2	8	1
D Mirror	26	64	36	46	18	1	3	23	9
D Express	18	60	40	53	22	1	1	15	8
D Mail	17	61	39	52	26	1	1	14	6
Sun	14	75	25	53	22	1	2	17	5
D Sketch	20	81	19	43	22	1	1	23	10
D Worker	4	92	8	54	23	2	2	16	3

1. N Swallow 'Factual Television' (Focal Press 1966) and The Observer, 11 October 1964

2. C Seymour-Ure 'The Press, Politics & The Public' (Methuen 1966)

The amount of this space which is devoted to any particular type of news is not necessarily a scientific indication of its importance but in general it reflects the weight which the paper's editorial staff think that their readers will attach to the subject and although occasionally events receive coverage which runs well beyond their 'true' value - particularly if a human interest or scandal story is involved - broadly speaking the allocation gives a fair guide to the relative level of public interest in different news items¹.

The space allocated by newspapers to conference coverage differs considerably as Tables 7.8 and 7.9, based on a random selection of the major national and regional papers during 1966-69, show.

Broadly speaking the 'serious' papers such as the 'Times', 'Telegraph' and 'Guardian' cover the conference much more heavily than the 'popular' papers which seems to indicate that interest in the conference is considerably higher amongst middle class voters but conference news still occupies between 5 and 10 per cent of the available news space in most of the popular papers and in some cases the figures are higher than this.

Although the amount of space given to conference coverage is a guide to its importance in the eyes of the media the overall impact on the public depends not only on the quantitative coverage but also on the way in which the information is presented. The importance of this has been illustrated by recall checks. A specific front page news item on the Conservative Conference published in the Sunday Telegraph on 17 October 1965 which was the subject of a recall check run by Seymour-Ure showed that while 90% of readers remembered the headline and 80% could recall the accompanying picture, only 66% could remember reading some of the text. By contrast another article on the conference in the same paper which was located off the front page showed that only 40% could remember the headline and 25% the article which accompanied it.²

While the method of presentation clearly affects the impact of conference news on the reader, it is still significant that a surprisingly high proportion of readers had been sufficiently impressed to be able to recall even quite minor items of coverage some time later and the conference coverage clearly makes a considerable impact on the leadership.

Although the party leadership is always anxious to exploit the news value of the conference as an opportunity to project a favourable party image, it does so in the constant knowledge that controversy is infinitely more newsworthy than unity and as a result the media have a natural tendency to sniff out and exaggerate dissension which may in turn damage the party image.

1. C Seymour-Ure 'The Press, Politics and the Public' (Methuen 1966) pp 60-65
J K Cunningham 'City Newspapers and the 1957 Election' (Political Science Vol 11 No 2 1959) p 23
A D Robinson and A H Ashenden 'Mass Communications and the 1963 Election' (Political Science Vol 16 No 2 1964) p 7
J Trenaman & D McQuail 'Television and the Political Image' (Methuen 1961) pp 74-79
2. C Seymour-Ure 'The Press, Politics and the Public' (Methuen 1966)

CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCE NEWS AS A PERCENTAGE OF SPACE (AFTER DEDUCTION OF ADVERTISING) 1966-69 - DAILY PAPERS

TABLE 7.8

	DAILY SKETCH	TIMES	SUN	DAILY MAIL	GUARDIAN	DAILY MIRROR	DAILY EXPRESS	DAILY TELEGRAPH	FINANCIAL TIMES	JOURNAL	SCOTSMAN	NORTHERN ECHO	YORKSHIRE POST
<u>1966</u>													
12 October	4.9	2.3	n/s	5.7	5.3	n/s	3.2	3.3	nil	1.6	n/s	2.0	3.2
13 October	12.9	10.8	9.9	6.5	14.0	11.1	5.9	10.2	3.9	3.3	12.7	6.2	14.1
14 October	10.1	10.3	6.8	13.2	11.4	8.4	7.7	11.7	6.4	6.5	9.8	4.7	13.4
15 October	5.6	6.7	5.1	11.8	14.9	5.1	3.6	4.8	3.0	3.7	20.0	4.1	10.4
<u>1967</u>													
19 October	3.7	13.8	n/s	5.4	10.9	7.6	7.1	12.9	3.3	n/s	n/s	n/s	13.9
20 October	5.8	12.8	4.8	4.7	12.4	4.6	5.4	8.9	4.7	2.4	3.0	3.0	11.6
21 October	4.4	1.4	4.3	3.8	8.2	8.0	4.5	7.1	2.0	0.0	4.7	4.7	10.4
23 October	nil	n/s	n/s	3.6	6.4	n/s	n/s	1.7	1.0	0.0	3.8	3.8	6.6
<u>1968</u>													
10 October	n/s	17.8	10.6	6.1	10.9	9.0	7.4	7.9	nil			5.8	8.9
11 October	5.0	12.5	14.6	7.2	16.4	10.4	8.5	9.7	5.5			4.1	9.5
12 October	11.0	12.1	7.0	5.9	10.2	6.5	n/s	8.0	3.8			n/s	12.3
14 October	0.4	3.7	2.3	2.2		3.9	2.8		2.1			4.3	6.2
<u>1969</u>													
9 October	5.6	15.1	4.1	8.2	10.1	7.4	10.6	10.1		5.5	10.9	3.9	10.7
10 October	7.1	14.6	9.2	8.4	12.1	9.0	9.0	8.7		5.6	8.3	2.2	13.4
11 October	7.6	17.6	5.1	4.7	10.7	7.5	3.9	5.7		4.7	6.4	2.0	10.8
13 October	nil	5.8	nil	2.2	6.1	1.3	1.5	2.6		0.4	n/s	1.7	4.0

(n/s = not sampled)

TABLE 7.9

CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCE NEWS AS A PERCENTAGE
OF SPACE (AFTER DEDUCTION OF ADVERTISING)
1966-69 - SUNDAY PAPERS

	1967	1968	1969
	<u>22 October</u>	<u>13 October</u>	<u>12 October</u>
Sunday Telegraph	4.7	3.9	6.8
People	1.9	2.7	1.9
Sunday Express	2.2	2.8	3.5
Observer	2.2	5.8	8.8
Sunday Times	7.9	4.8	9.8
Sunday Sun	0.3	0.5	0.4
News of the World	4.5	1.4	0.8
Sunday Mirror	1.6	3.0	6.6
Sunday Post	1.8	3.2	2.6

The problems which this may produce can be illustrated by a brief summary of the press coverage of the leadership issue at the conferences during the period 1966-69.

After his election as leader Heath lacked authority in the eyes of the media and as a result the party conferences during this period were almost invariably reported against a background of controversy and speculation.

In 1966 pre-conference press coverage concentrated heavily on alleged dissatisfaction with the leadership:-

' The Conservatives ... meet in Blackpool on Wednesday in the shadow of strong criticism of the leader of the party, Mr Edward Heath. He will be seeking to establish his authority on the party ... ¹ '

and the controversy had been sharpened by the Gallup Poll results published on 6th October² showing Heath well behind Wilson despite a Conservative lead over Labour in voting intention. Much of the criticism was reported to stem from alleged lack of vigour by the Parliamentary party in opposition and an article by Angus Maude MP published in the Spectator articulated the views of many party workers:-

' What they (the party's supporters) want their leaders to do is quite simply to make an impression on the country³ '

The leadership's difficulties were outlined in the Statist⁴ :-

' The dilemma is between the hell-raisers who want a blood-curdling and exciting struggle with the Wilson Government on every conceivable issue and non-issue, and the long-haulers, who counsel a more cautious long-term strategy with an eye on creating a slow build-up as the alternative responsible government of the future. '

which also pointed out that Heath suffered from an additional personal disadvantage in being the first Conservative leader in recent times to have been chosen in opposition without the natural authority automatically conferred on a former Prime Minister⁵.

Then on 12th October all papers reported a rumour that Heath planned to replace du Cann as Chairman of the Party alongside detailed reports of a press conference at which Sir Clyde Hewlett, Sir Dan Mason and du Cann himself had hastily repudiated any such intention:-

'Reports that Mr du Cann might be replaced as Chairman alarmed senior officials of the party so much that they took the unusual course to-night of calling a news conference.⁶ '

1. Daily Sketch- 8th October 1966
2. Daily Telegraph - 6th October 1966
3. Spectator - 7th October 1966
4. Statist - 7th October 1966
5. See also D Butler and M Pinto-Duschinsky 'The British General Election of 1970' (Macmillan 1971) pp 62-66
6. Yorkshire Post - 12th October 1966

Most correspondents viewed the press conference as an attempt by the grass roots to thwart the Leader:- 'The mass party, still a little sore at having been excluded from the election of the party leader, has made a pre-emptive strike to show that they have a view about the party chairmanship'¹ and it was generally thought that Heath had planned to replace du Cann but had hastily backed down under pressure from the National Union.

A slight variation, reported by the Express, suggested that the real reason for opposition to the change was not affection for du Cann but distaste for his replacement - reputedly Marples:- 'So deep is the hostility to Mr Marples ... that if Mr Heath insisted on appointing him, he would immediately create a formidable block of opposition to his own leadership'²

There was little hard evidence to show whether there was a serious proposal to replace Du Cann or not. Both in a speech to the agents³ and at the first session of the Conference Heath went out of his way to express confidence in Du Cann but quite irrespective of the true facts the press coverage was damaging to his image. The appointment of the Party Chairman was the Leader's clear prerogative and suggestions that he had to surrender to pressure from the grass roots party were bound to reflect on his position⁴.

Even considered assessments of Heath's position, predicting that the party was unlikely to unseat its leader so soon after Home's retirement and the loss of an election, inevitably emphasised criticism of Heath in the process of discounting it⁵. So too did frequent references to the difficulties involved in maintaining a delicate balance between competing pressure groups within the party:-

' They [the party's supporters] call for a more 'aggressive' stance by the party, and above all, demand that the Conservatives should not only oppose but also be seen and heard to oppose. In short, the electorate at large is not seriously aware of the identity of the modernised Conservative party ... By the end of this week it is to be hoped that the Conservatives will emerge with a clear reaffirmation of their principles, stressing the party's basic standards of individual freedom, initiative and self reliance'⁶

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1. Times - 12 October 1966. See also Daily Telegraph 12 October 1966
 2. Daily Express - 12 October 1966. See also Daily Express 23 October 1966
 3. See Daily Mail - 12 October 1966 and 'Yorkshire Post' 12 October 1966
 4. See also A Alexander and A Watkins 'The Making of the Prime Minister 1970' (Macdonald 1970) p 85
 5. Daily Telegraph - 12 October 1966 and Guardian - 12 October 1966
 6. Journal - 12 October 1966

Despite the rather gloomy pre-conference coverage and publication of an NOP Poll which showed that 55% of voters felt that the Opposition had been ineffective over the previous twelve months, once the conference began almost all papers reported a popular reception for Heath at the opening sessions:-

' Heath: He's In Command - Mr Edward Heath finally emerged to-day as leader of the Tory Party. For the first time he took firm possession of the office to which he was elected more than a year ago.'²

' Fighting Heath gets a firm grip on Tories - all criticisms of himself and his high command melted in the white heat of his appeal for a policy based on freedom and honesty.'³

' Tories Cheer as Heath Takes a Grip - What had promised to be a grand inquest on the election defeat last spring and the conduct of the Opposition since turned into a succession of eulogies for the leader and his policies.'⁴

' Mr Heath has no challenger for the leadership ' (Guardian)⁵

' Mr Heath's day of triumph - leadership secure and Tories shown the way ahead - At his first party conference as leader at Brighton last October Mr Heath was given a cordial reception. To-day there was genuine enthusiasm and a general feeling that at last his leadership has been thoroughly consolidated.'⁶

His speech, using an up-dated version of 'Set the People Free' as its theme, found particular favour with the Express:-

' Pride and Freedom - Mr Edward Heath goes to the heart of Britain's problems to-day. On this simple inspiring theme the Leader of the Opposition has made the speech of his life at Blackpool.'⁷

and also got support from the Sketch:-

' A Breath of fresh air blew through the stuffy corridors of British politics yesterday. Freedom was the theme of Ted Heath's send-off to the Party Conference at Blackpool. And never was there a more timely reminder.'⁸

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1. Daily Mail = 13 October 1966
 2. Daily Express = 13 October 1966
 3. Daily Mirror - 13 October 1966
 4. Northern Echo - 13 October 1966
 5. Guardian - 13 October 1966
 6. Yorkshire Post - 13 October 1966
 7. Daily Express = 13 October 1966
 8. Daily Sketch - 13 October 1966

There was even broad, although admittedly somewhat cynical support from the Guardian: ' Mr Heath was effective as well as moderate. He spoke mainly about liberty and everyone votes for liberty. Everyone also votes for Santa Claus... ' and only the Star was, predictably, unimpressed - viewing the speech as a 'soggy performance' under a headline 'Heath neatly side-steps his critics' with almost as much distaste as Wilson who it alleged 'has turned his back on Socialist policies and is operating measures similar to those of the Tories.'²

Heath's success was partly attributed by the press to the fact that he had 'learnt the art of Conference oratory'³ but in fact it probably also owed much to the critical pre-conference media coverage which pressured delegates into closing their ranks and reacting with an effusive display of loyalty.

The chain of events which was summed up in the Scotsman's headlines: ' Mr Heath Triumphs In Revolt That Never Was'⁴ was to be repeated several times in subsequent years.

While Heath's position had seemed firmly established at the 1966 Conference the following year there was again intense press speculation about the leadership. Du Cann's resignation on 11th September 1967 was preceded by leaks in the 'Express'⁵ reminiscent of the previous year's campaign to 'save' him⁶, alleging that Heath and Du Cann had quarrelled and a change of Chairman was being considered. Heath denied any disagreement and his 'a lot of damned lies' rebuttal received wide coverage, but commentators noted that the possibility of a replacement was not specifically rejected. Consequently the press was not surprised when Du Cann's departure was formally announced and the subsequent coverage was largely factual.

Ostensibly Du Cann's resignation was for personal reasons and this was given some credibility by Heath's implicit offer of front bench status in his letter accepting Du Cann's resignation but most of the press was frankly sceptical, suspecting that Du Cann had lost an internal power struggle.

Sir Gerald Nabarro, speaking in his Worcestershire constituency on 23rd September, touched off renewed controversy by commenting publicly on the elusive gap between Heath's personal popularity and that of the party: ' Wilson is now so widely mistrusted that I reckon his party may chopper him this winter. Paradoxically Heath goes down and down in public estimation while Tory stock rises. '

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1. Guardian - 13 October 1966
 2. Star - 13 October 1966
 3. Times - 13 October 1966
 4. Scotsman - 12 October 1966
 5. Daily Express - 9 September 1967
 6. Observer - 10 September 1967
 7. Sunday Times - 24 September 1967. See also Sunday Express and People - 24 September 1967.

In normal circumstances Nabarro's remarks might have been seen as an example of his amiable eccentricity but the press interpreted them as articulating MPs' growing dissatisfaction with Heath's leadership:-

' Until now all comments in the Tory Party on Mr Heath's handling of the leadership have been made 'off the record'. It remains to be seen if Mr Heath can resist the pressure for a full discussion of the leadership issue when Parliament reassembles. And the outlook for him enjoying a good party conference, at Brighton next month has suddenly become much stormier.. '

Further adverse publicity came when Lewes Constituency Association cancelled an invitation for Nabarro to speak to them during the conference as even such gestures of support tended to highlight Heath's difficulties². Nabarro's protestations that he was merely trying to encourage party workers to redouble their efforts on Heath's behalf received sarcastic treatment:-

' Sir Gerald Nabarro, who has made himself known on the subject of the Conservative leadership, now says that his views represent his affection for Mr Heath and his loyalty to the Conservative Party. It is a comfort that the ancient British profession of humbug should still have qualified modern practitioners ' '

Speculation was kept alive by a very hostile TV interview with Heath immediately before the Conference opened⁴. The tone of questioning was extremely aggressive and Heath had to suffer the indignity of watching filmed excerpts of 'men in the street' criticising him but he was able to turn the interview to advantage. His dignified response drew a generally sympathetic response from the press,:-

' Mr Heath made an impressive reply to criticisms of his leadership of the Conservative Party when he was interviewed on TV last night.⁵ '

' Mr Heath survived this barrage with dignity and it may be that the publicity given to criticism of his leadership by the press and television will have guaranteed⁶ him an easy passage through the Conservative Party Conference ' '

' There is a limit to what ought to be allowed on the telly and in our view it was reached in Panorama's interview with Mr Edward Heath on Monday⁷... ' '

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1. Sunday Express - 24 September 1967
 2. Sunday Mirror - 8 October 1967; People - 8 October 1967;
Sunday Express - 8 October 1967; Sunday Telegraph - 8 October 1967
Times - 9 October 1967
 3. Times - 17 October 1967
 4. BBC TV - 16 October 1967
 5. Yorkshire Post - 17 October 1967
 6. Guardian - 17 October 1967
 7. News of the World - 22 October 1967

° Mr Heath is generally held to have extricated himself with dignity from the brew stewed up for him by BBC 'Panorama' on Monday evening¹ ,

The press also carried a lively exchange of readers' letters - mostly sympathising with Heath² but even the impressive Conservative bye-election victories at Walthamstow and Cambridge were seen as reflecting lack of confidence in Heath because of the coverage given to Du Cann's remarks that the results showed disenchantment with the Government rather than confidence in the Opposition³ .

Most of the press did not seriously think that he would resign as leader and the 'Times' leader on 17 October⁴ was fairly typical when it pointed out that although Heath lacked charisma changes were highly unlikely before the next election.

Strong support also came from the Mail:-

' Now the Knocking has to Stop - One overriding duty faces the Conservative conference which opens to-day. It is to re-establish Mr Edward Heath in public and party esteem by giving him the support he has earned and well deserved⁵ '

Even so, the very fact that his position was being publicly debated in the press must have been damaging to Heath's image and enhanced the impression of insecurity.

The Conference debates on Rhodesia and education both had implications for the leadership. The Rhodesia debate was generally seen as a success for Heath:-

' Mr Heath succeeded to-night in uniting all sections of Conservative opinion on a new and urgent approach to the Rhodesian problem. Scarcely a hand was raised against a resolution which called for 'utmost pressure' upon the Government to resume negotiations with Mr Smith⁶ '

'Heath outflanks the Rhodesia diehards - Lord Salisbury and his supporters were outmanoeuvred by a very firm Mr Heath. He overrode their demands for de facto recognition of the Smith regime and the immediate end of sanctions⁷ '

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1. Telegraph - 18 October 1967
 2. Daily Telegraph - 19 October 1967; Daily Mail - 18 October 1967
Times - 19, 20, 21 October 1967
 3. People - 24 September 1967
 4. Times - 17 October 1967. See also Telegraph 18 Oct 1967
 5. Daily Mail - 18 October 1967
 6. Daily Telegraph - 20 October 1967
 7. Northern Echo - 20 October 1967

The Times, however, took a more sceptical view, suggesting that the Conference had only 'neatly patched over the split on Rhodesian policies' while the Express argued that Heath was wrong to hold out against demands for the abolition of sanctions although it took the view that 'on the whole the speech represented a definite shift towards the Right Wing Tory position on the Rhodesian question but so delicately accomplished that the Tory Left scarcely noticed it'. The Express leader was even more flattering about Heath's performance: 'In his handling of the Rhodesian issue at Brighton Mr Heath wins more than the plaudits of the loyalists. He gains the respect of the public by a demonstration of statesmanship' and statesmanship was also the theme of the Yorkshire Post's coverage: 'Mr Heath seems at last to have found a concensus which all can support' and described it as 'a serious and responsible speech which avoided polemics and the tricks of oratory.'

But there was some doubt amongst the papers whether a new initiative, although desirable, would in fact succeed on the grounds that the Conservative premise that the 'Tiger' talks only failed over the arrangements for the return to legality was not well founded.

Heath's personal success on Rhodesia was however rather tarnished by the education debate where even the loyal Telegraph had to admit in its leader:-

' It would be idle to deny that yesterday's comprehensive schooling vote at the Conservative Party Conference at Brighton was a rebuff for the party leadership. It is true that the official resolution was approved by a ballot. That resolution, however, was couched in terms which would have made it possible for anyone not firmly convinced of the Operation's education policy to support it'

And both the Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror took a more dramatic line:-

' School vote splits Tories - Sir Edward (Boyle) and his supporters won, but it was by no means an overwhelming majority...'

' A shock rebellion against the Tory leadership by angry hard core opponents of comprehensive schools exploded the Tory Party Conference into life at Brighton...'

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1. Times - 20 October 1967
 2. Daily Express - 20 October 1967
 3. Yorkshire Post - 20 October 1967
 4. See for example Sunday Times - 22 October 1967
 5. Daily Telegraph - 20 October 1967
 6. Daily Mail - 20 October 1967
 7. Daily Mirror - 20 October 1967

Despite the education setback the press generally saw Heath's position as secure. His final speech received favourable comment - particularly on the industrial relations proposals - and there was extensive comment on the confidence of his approach and his relaxed delivery¹. He had even introduced a few successful jokes and the audience reaction to the speech was generally reported as one of 'genuine warmth'². The Telegraph³ reported that 'the Conference was of a mind to give Mr Heath proof of its affection as well as its loyalty'⁴ and papers as diverse in their editorial styles as the Observer⁴ and the News of the World⁵ both chose the words 'wild enthusiasm' to describe the applause at the end of Heath's speech.

Heath's reception was regarded as something more than the predictable cheers of party followers for their leader and it was recognised that the party rank and file were giving expression to a strong reaction. There were suggestions that it was designed to impress doubters within the party:-

' It was more than their appreciation for his closing speech. It was a calculated blast of loyalty to blow away the fears of those within the party who doubt Mr Heath's qualities of leadership.⁶'

but as in 1966 however it seems likely that much of the delegates' enthusiasm was prompted by a reaction against the media coverage (particularly the 'Panorama' interview)⁷ and the Yorkshire Post echoed the Scotsman's view from the previous year when it wrote that 'for nearly five fervent minutes the Conservative Party rank and file demonstrated that the pseudo 'crisis' over the party leadership was ended⁸'

If the exceptional warmth of Heath's reception was a gesture by the Conference delegates intended to convince the Press that there was no foundation in the reports that the grass roots party had lost confidence in Heath's leadership it was largely successful.

1. Sunday Express)
News of the World)
Sunday Times) 22 October 1967
People)
Sunday Post)
2. Sunday Times - 22 October 1967
3. Daily Telegraph - 23 October 1967
4. Observer - 22 October 1967
5. News of the World - 22 October 1967
6. Sunday Sun - 22 October 1967
7. News of the World - 22 October 1967
Financial Times - 23 October 1967
8. Yorkshire Post - 23 October 1967

Press comment on Heath's position made it quite clear that there were few doubts about his immediate future as leader. Some of the comments were fairly sober:-

' Tories rally round the Heath banner' ¹

' Mr Heath's immediate troubles with the Conservative Party are over ' ²

' Mr Heath yesterday confidently applied for and received from the Tory party conference here endorsement of his leadership ' ³

while others were perhaps less accurate:-

' To-day a new chapter opens in the history of the Conservative Party. No longer can anyone doubt that Mr Heath is the boss ' ⁴

' The Tory party purged itself of the leadership issue ' ⁵

' Mr Heath is in the strongest position of any Tory leader since Harold Macmillan in his prime ' ⁶

but overall there were indications that a better relationship between Heath and the party supporters was being developed⁷.

In 1968 two major issues which attracted extensive press attention and reflected on Heath's position were the education debate and Powell's leadership 'threat'.

As in 1967 the education debate was seen as a reverse for the party leadership:

' Mr Angus Maude, MP for Stratford, was allowed to add a tough amendment to the conference's official resolution on education. If he hadn't been, Mr Maude would have called for the official motion to be thrown out - and might have succeeded ... ⁸

' Constituency representatives forced the platform to accept an addendum to a motion which condemned the Government's record on education ... ⁹

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1. Sunday Mirror - 22 October 1967
 2. Financial Times - 23 October 1967
 3. Sunday Express - 22 October 1967
 4. Daily Mail - 23 October 1967
 5. Sunday Mirror - 22 October 1967
 6. People - 22 October 1967
 7. Sunday Times - 22 October 1967
 8. Daily Mirror - 10 October 1968
 9. Times - 10 October 1968

' A mass revolt over comprehensive schools shook the Conservative Party Conference here to-night and embarrassed Sir Edward Boyle, their education spokesman ... ¹ '

It was significant, however, that the debate was seen as an embarrassment for the leadership rather than a crushing defeat and this to some extent reflected the press's general belief that Heath's position was increasingly secure as a general election approached.

There was some strong criticism of the Conference's line:

' The delegates from the suburbs love their grammar schools and hate to think of nicely brought up children having to mix with those common and un-clever kids for whom the secondary modern schools were made ... ² '

but equally there was strong support for the Conference delegates from the Yorkshire Post:

'(Boyle's defeat) is all to the good. What the Opposition should be offering is not watered-down Socialism but robust Conservatism ³ '

while the Telegraph leader commented that on certain issues the delegates could 'think more clearly than the party leaders'.

While the education debate implied some criticism of the leadership the press devoted considerably more attention to the 'threat' which was presented by Powell⁴. Ostensibly the division between Powell and the party leadership centred around immigration policy but it was generally recognised that there was a much more fundamental difference of philosophy and that the leadership were opposing Powell:

' ... not so much because of his views on immigration which they know are widely shared, but because so much of what he says looks like a call to return to a harsh 19th century market economy. And that, they know, the electorate won't take ... ⁵ '

1. Sun)
2. Daily Mirror) 10th October 1968
3. Yorkshire Post)
4. For assessments of Powell's role see
 - R Rhodes James 'Ambitions and Realities - British Politics 1964-1970' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1972) pp 149-214
 - J Wood (ed) 'Powell and the 1970 Election' (Elliott 1970)
 - Smithies W & Fiddick P 'Enoch Powell on Immigration: An Analysis' (Sphere 1969)
 - P Foot 'The Rise of Enoch Powell' (Penguin 1969)
 - A Roth 'Enoch Powell - Tory Tribune' (Macdonald 1970)
5. Sun - 10th October 1968

Although Powell's criticisms of the leadership were widely covered there was little evidence that he would dislodge Heath but the real challenge was whether the leadership would be strong enough to prevent the party's policy from being edged towards the extreme right wing by pressure from Powell's supporters.¹

Barber's speech with its savage criticism of those who wanted to denationalise the mines and the railways and withdraw from East of Suez was seen as a very thinly veiled attack on Powell. It was not merely the fact that Powell was being counter-attacked but also the fact that it was a member of the Shadow Cabinet who was doing it which was seen as significant:

' A big 'rally round Heath' drive opened this year's Tory party conference ... for the first time since Edward Heath became leader three years ago, his chief lieutenants came into the open to drum up support for him ...² '

although it hardly rated the importance which the Express attributed to it:

' Even the most savage critic of the Tory party could not deny that here in Blackpool to-day the event that took place was not so much a political get-together as a moment of political history. It was a moment of rebirth of a great party rediscovering its sense of direction and purpose ... the party showed itself to be in no mood for any break-away movement such as might be encouraged by Mr Powell³ '

Coverage of the immigration debate the following day generally saw the outcome as a defeat for Powell although opinion varied over its completeness - the Northern Echo saw Powell as 'down but not out'⁴ whereas other papers saw the result as much more final:

' Enoch Powell has lost the immigration battle. More than that, he is being isolated remorselessly from the whole leadership of the Conservative Party. He is too dangerous, too intense, too unyielding for a party concerned with winning power and so necessarily ready for compromises which Powell rejects ...⁵ '

Powell got considerable support from the Telegraph however:

' In opposition, senior politicians can justly claim more latitude in opinion than when bound by collective responsibility in office. Mr Powell may seem to be a thorn in Mr Heath's side; he could be a tower of strength. His proper place is in the Shadow Cabinet.⁶ '

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1. Times |) | 10 October 1968 |
| 2. Daily Mirror | | |
| 3. Daily Express | | |
| 4. Northern Echo |) | 11 October 1968 |
| 5. Sun | | |
| 6. Daily Telegraph | | |

and the following day he succeeded in attracting major coverage for his views on the economy by making a highly controversial speech at Morecambe advocating extensive public expenditure cuts:

' The Morecambe speech was cleverly timed and placed. Because of the limitations of five minutes to all rostrum speakers at the conference this week, he could not have made it at the conference. It had to be outside the hall, and yet he wanted to receive maximum publicity just before the party leader Mr Heath makes his speech of the week to-morrow ...¹ '

His views also received considerable press support:

' The importance of Mr Powell's speech lies in its enlargement of the bounds of political possibility which have become far too narrowly drawn for the public good or comfort ... It might have a great liberating effect, thus releasing energies capable of making good far more well-being than was initially lost...² '

although they were also criticised as advocating a reactionary return to laissezfaire economics:

' His 'budget' is, of course, a caricature designed to illustrate his argument - which the modern world has long rejected - that the Government has no business interfering with the operation of the free market ...³ '

' ... a challenge to all Conservatives to choose between the middle-of-the-road traditions that they created for themselves in the 1950s and the older, fiercer traditions of the nineteenth century ...⁴ '

' Enoch rides again... with a breath-taking plunge into the early nineteenth Century Mr Enoch Powell last night proclaimed a policy to halve income tax and Surtax and cut public spending by £2,855 million a year. It would be an achievement comparable to the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes ...⁵ '

While Powell's views received heavy coverage, Heath's crushing reply on television that 'no responsible politician could make specific proposals about rates of taxation' was widely publicised⁶ and the media's broad assessment of the Conference was that the leadership had successfully defeated Powell's challenge:

' If Mr Heath has suffered any nightmares over the challenge of Mr Enoch Powell, he should have slept peacefully last night⁷ '

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- 1. Financial Times)
 - 2. Daily Telegraph)
 - 3. Sun) 12 October 1968
 - 4. Guardian)
 - 5. Sun)
 - 6. Guardian)
 - Times)
 - 7. Sun - 14 October 1968

More significantly, however, there was fairly general agreement that the leadership had also successfully resisted any pressure to force party policy to the right:

' The big question at Blackpool this week has been whether the party leaders could keep their grip on Tory policy ... what matters is not so much the balance of opinion on any issue: to assume that would be to give the Conservative Conference too great a significance. It is rather that the leaders have retained the freedom to act responsibly ¹ '

and it was recognised that the party had

' succeeded in satisfying much of the demand for a set of coherent policies which were plainly distinctive from the Labour Party. There was always a danger that this demand which had been growing rapidly since last year's conference, might, under Mr Powell's skilful exploitation, stampede the party into a fatuous right wing policy ... ² '

By 1969 the general election was clearly imminent and the press was generally convinced that there was no likelihood of Heath giving up the leadership but doubts about the Conservatives' capacity to win the election³ inevitably generated speculation:

' they [the Conservatives] have a leader in Mr Heath who commands their loyalty more than their affections. There is no leadership crisis. There is no possibility of the party fighting the next election under anyone else, and no attempt to supplant him. But the bond is one of calculation rather than identity of view. So long as the Tories seem to be marching confidently back to office there is not so much difficulty in muffling the difference of approach between the leaders and the rank and file. But as the journey becomes harder so the real conflicts of conviction become apparent ⁴ '

The Conference itself included at least four issues which the press saw as potentially reflecting on the leadership - immigration, capital punishment, the Common Market and education.

On immigration the press was generally sympathetic to the leadership's moderate line and although Hogg's impassioned closing speech was subject to some criticism⁵, on the whole the leadership was thought to have controlled the Conference successfully. The capital punishment debate brought an outright defeat for the leadership's policy despite a widely publicised speech by Heath to the party agents before the Conference opened in which he made his own views clear. While most of the press saw the defeat as a set-back for the leadership there was widespread support for Heath:

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1. Times - 14 October 1968
 2. Economist - 13 October 1968
 3. Observer - 12 October 1969
 - Sunday Express - 12 October 1969
 - Financial Times) 8 October 1969
 - Daily Telegraph)
 4. Times - 11 October 1969
 5. See for example Daily Mail - 11 October 1969

' It [the decision] cannot bind the Tory MPs and Mr Heath will be well advised to forget it ... 1 '

and there was a general view that it should not be allowed to become a general election issue.

The Conference vote on the Common Market showed strong backing for the leadership's policy and there was some press support for the leadership's unequivocal stand on entry which was contrasted with the Labour Conference's 'fence-sitting attitude' :

' It is to their credit that the issue was confronted squarely² ' although the Express was predictably critical of the decision:

' All the Tories proclaimed last week that the Labour Party 'fudged' the Common Market issue. The Tories for their part resorted to the old stratagem of saying one thing and immediately announcing that it meant something else ... 3 '

On education the press continued to support Boyle and the overall verdict was that he had at last succeeded in persuading the party workers to accept moderate and fairly liberal policies.

Despite the leadership's success on all of the issues except capital punishment, which was largely regarded as a minor issue, there was widespread coverage of the disagreements within the party and the constant emphasis given to controversial issues enhanced the impression of the leadership's somewhat precarious character. This was enhanced by the party's poor showing in the opinion polls which was heavily carried, and intense publicity for Powell's activities including a speech at Preston strongly opposing Common Market entry⁴ and a full page advertisement in a Brighton evening paper placed by an anonymous Sussex businessman urging support for Powell⁵.

As a result, although Heath's position at the end of the Conference was portrayed as temporarily secure, there was widespread doubt about his capacity to survive an election defeat⁶ and this in turn cast doubt on the true strength of his position.

The press coverage of the leadership question highlights the party manager's dilemma over the relationships between the Conference and the media.

On the one hand the Conference provided an important opportunity for Heath to project his image and policies and the success of the efforts to publicise him as a 'man of principle' reflected in the results of a survey run by the Gallup Poll after the 1967 Conference in which voters were asked 'If Mr Heath makes a statement about an

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1. Sun)
 2. Sun) 10 October 1969
 3. Daily Express)
 4. Sunday Time - 5 October 1969
 5. Evening Argus - 10 October 1969
 6. Sunday Express - 12 October 1969
 - Daily Telegraph- 13 October 1969

important issue and Mr Wilson makes a statement which flatly contradicts Mr Heath, who would you be most inclined to believe ? ¹

%

Mr Wilson	.....	31
Mr Heath	.....	36
Neither	.....	17
Don't Know	.....	16

On the other hand, however, every conference was surrounded by speculation about Heath's position as leader. Although most of the papers claimed to discount any real threat the constant emphasis on minor 'challenges' was clearly damaging to the party's image at a time when cohesion was one of its most important assets. Coverage of each of the conferences went through a predictable pattern of the press emphasising party divisions and controversy during the build-up period only to conclude at the end of the conference that the party was once again united behind its leader. While it was inevitable that the press should emphasise the party's tensions because they were more newsworthy than its unity, in some cases there was almost an air of the press actually trying to foment criticism of the leadership in order to create good 'copy'.

Such pressures were reinforced by the demands for more genuinely controversial debates at the conference both from party members (who felt that democratic discussion was being stifled) and from the media (who claimed that they wanted to promote democratic disunion but were probably equally interested in the additional newsworthiness of more controversy).

As a result, while the party managers were under constant pressure to allow more genuine controversy and debate at the conference in order to sustain the media interest² they were equally conscious of the very damaging effects of excessive media emphasis on controversy and were anxious to keep the conference as:

' This annual display of unity [which] has done so much, especially with the televising of the party conferences to enhance the image (however accurate an image) of the Conservative Party as a united and responsible body ⁴ '

Although they generally avoided steps to overtly manipulate the business of the conference in order to prevent publicity for unwelcome proposals⁵

1. Political Index No 90 (Gallup Poll October 1967)
2. See I Gilmour 'The Body Politic' (Hutchinson 1969) pp 80-81 on the competing demands for controversy and unity. Also Observer - 5 October 1969
3. For very damaging effects of adverse media coverage on Liberal Conferences see 'A Watkins 'The Liberal Dilemma' (MacGibbon and Kee 1966) pp 91-92; 107-108
4. R M Punnett 'British Government and Politics' (Heinemann 1970) p 123
5. cf US experience in JH Farris 'The Convention Problem' (Brookings 1972) p 150. For suggestions that media coverage may intensify efforts to 'manage' British party conferences see U W Kitzinger 'Listener' 18 November 1965

careful agenda selection and quiet behind-the-scenes compromises with dissident supporters¹ have generally been successful in preventing controversy crystallising in an embarrassing form.

While it has been suggested that the heavy media coverage of the conferences has been² responsible for generating above normal interest in by-elections² there is not much evidence of any dramatic effects on voting intention³.

A survey carried out by the Gallup Poll in 1961 showed that most voters' views were not significantly affected by the conferences. Interviewees were asked 'Has your attitude to the Labour Party been affected in any way by the recent Labour Party Conference? If so, in what way?' and 'Has your attitude to the Conservative Party been affected in any way by the recent Conservative Party Conference? If so, in what way?' The replies were⁴:

Table 7.10

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Rest</u>
<u>Attitudes to Labour Party</u>				
Affected: Favourably	14	10	22	9
Unfavourably	5	6	3	5
Not affected	81	84	75	86
<u>Attitudes to Conservative Party</u>				
Affected: Favourably	7	13	2	5
Unfavourably	9	4	15	7
Not affected	84	83	83	88

1. But see Economist Oct/Dec 1958 Vol 189, p 211 for suggestions that the 1958 Crime Debate was deliberately timed to avoid embarrassing media coverage.
2. Times - 12 October 1954
3. But for effects of media generally on voting intention see
 R S Milne & H C Mackenzie 'Marginal Seat 1955' (Hansard Society 1955)
 J G Blumler & D McQuail 'Television in Politics: Its Uses and Influence' (Faber 1968)
 J Tunstall (ed) 'Media Sociology' (Constable 1970)
 The Gallup Poll has been used as the main source of information in this study. For details of other polls and their methods see :-
 R Hodder-Williams 'Public Opinion Polls & British Politics' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1970) pp 9-31
4. 'Political Index' No 22 - 12-16 October 1961; (Gallup Poll)

TABLE 7.11

GALLUP POLL - VOTING INTENTION 1960-1970

	1960		1961		1962		1963		1965		1966		1967		1968		1969		1970	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Conservative	40	40½	34	37	31	31	29	30	36½	37	37½	36½	38½	38½	39	40	38	38½	38½	37
Labour	34	30	36	37	37½	36	39	40½	41	40½	34	39	33½	29½	39½	32½	29½	37	36½	36½
Liberal	9	10	9½	10½	19	16	12	8½	8½	6	10½	7	9	10	6	7	9½	4½	6	5
Others	1	½	½	1	1½	1	1½	-	½	-	1	1	2½	2½	3	4	2½	1½	1½	½
Don't Know	16	9	20	14½	11	13	18½	21	13½	16½	17	16½	16½	19½	19½	16½	20½	19½	17	21

(Source: Gallup Poll)

It is significant, however, that in the case of each conference the majority of those who claimed that their attitudes had been affected were supporters of the party in question and their views had been strengthened. This appears to correlate with the experience of observers who have studied the effects of political broadcasts and found that:

' most people irrespective of their politics or the performers, said that the broadcasts had no effect on their voting intentions - they had merely been reinforced¹ '

but generally speaking voting intention has tended to move slightly towards the Conservatives during the Conference month² although as Table 7.11 shows this has not invariably been so.

Elimination of Don't Know replies can sometimes reveal a more distinct change in voting intention after the Conference as the following example from 1967 shows:-

Table 7.12

Gallup Poll - Voting Intention - 1967

	<u>Pre Conference</u> <u>(12 October)</u>	<u>Post Conference</u> <u>(26 October)</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Conservative	43½	46½
Labour	40½	35½
Liberal	13	14½
Others	3	3½

(Source: Gallup Poll)

and the effects of the Conference on assessments of the party leadership appear to be more marked than on voting intention (see Table 7.13). There is little evidence however that the Conference has any immediate decisive impact in determining voter attitudes as the National Conventions apparently do in the United States³ and although voter assessments of the leader have sometimes improved after the Conference, this has not been a lasting effect as the figures in Table 7.14 show. It does seem possible

1. N Swallow 'Factual Television' (Focal Press; 1966) p 114
2. For Labour Party experience see R Hodder-Williams 'Public Opinion Polls and British Politics' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1970) pp 41-42
3. A Campbell, G Gurin, W E Miller 'The Voter Decides' (Evanston 1954) pp 14-18; 150

TABLE 7.13

GALLUP POLL - PARTY LEADERSHIP 1960-1970

Reply to question 'Do you think Mr Macmillan/
Sir Alec Douglas Home/Mr Heath is proving
a good Prime Minister/Leader of the Conservative
Party ? '

		<u>Is</u> (%)	<u>Is Not</u> (%)	<u>Don't Know</u> (%)
1960	September	74	16	10
	October	72	14	14
	November	69	19	12
1961	September	43	44	13
	October	55	33	12
	November	54	34	12
1962	September	42	50	8
	October	49	41	10
	November	47	48	8
1963	September	40	48	12
	October	41	48	11
	November	42	36	22
1965	September	49	44	7
	October	47	38	15
	November	48	34	18
1966	September	34	44	22
	October	46	35	19
	November	34	41	25
1967	September	31	43	26
	October	43	34	23
	November	44	41	15
1968	September	27	52	21
	October	27	50	23
	November	37	40	23
1969	September	32	46	22
	October	33	44	23
	November	33	43	24
1970	September	35	27	38
	October	42	27	31
	November	39	45	16

TABLE 7.14

VOTING INTENTION (%) 1960-1968

		<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>Others</u>
1960	September	47½	40½	11	1½
	October	50	37	12½	*
	November	46	40½	13½	
	December	47½	37½	14	1
1961	September	40	45½	13½	1
	October	43½	43½	12	1
	November	41½	43	14½	1
	December	38½	43	17½	1
1962	September	34	45	20	1
	October	34½	43½	20	2
	November	39	47	13	1
	December	37	46	16	1
1963	September	33½	49	16½	1
	October	36½	48	14½	1
	November	37½	49½	12	1
	December	39	47	13	½
1965	September	42	48½	8½	1½
	October	41½	49	9	½
	November	42	48½	8½	1
	December	40½	48½	10	1
1966	September	42½	45	11½	1
	October	43	44½	11½	1
	November	44	42	12½	1½
	December	42	46	10½	1½
1967	September	45	41½	10½	3
	October	45	38	14	3
	November	46½	36	11½	6
	December	49½	32	12	6½
1968	September	47	37	11½	4½
	October	47	39	9½	4½
	November	50½	32	14	3½
	December	55	29½	11	4½

(Source: Gallup Poll)

that the sheer volume of media coverage associated with the Conference may on occasions attract temporary support for the party¹ but the closeness of the three party conferences and their dissociation from the General Election places them in a very different position to the American National Conventions and it seems likely that the effect of heavy media coverage of the Conferences is more likely to confirm existing political convictions and colour the long-term attitudes of voters rather than effect any direct change in their views².

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1. Daily Telegraph - 20 October 1966. Also R Hodder-Williams 'Public Opinion Polls and British Politics' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1970) p 92 and D Graber 'The Press on Opinion Resource in the 1968 Presidential Campaign' (Public Opinion Quarterly Vol XXXV 1971) pp 168-182
 2. D Butler and D Stokes 'Political Change in Britain' (Penguin 1971) pp 265-300

8. CONCLUSION

The external appearances of the modern conference differ greatly from those of the original conferences in the nineteenth Century - middle class delegates now predominate whereas the conference's original composition was largely working class; discussion centres around policy rather than organisational matters; the numbers attending and the leadership's participation are both much higher; and the conference is now subordinated to the Central Council as the National Union's governing body. It can be argued however that such changes are purely cosmetic and that the really important features which were established at the early conferences - the independence of the Parliamentary Party over policy, and the absence of any participation in leadership selection - have passed down unchanged to the present day despite the efforts of Lord Randolph Churchill.

While the conference's negligible influence over leadership selection is self-apparent (with the possible exception of some influence in 1963) its role in relation to policy is more controversial. There have been suggestions that 'in the main parties to-day the Parliamentary Party is virtually independent of the rank and file outside Parliament'¹ and a number of commentators have taken the view that the Annual Conferences² are increasingly ineffective in making any genuine impact on party policy. In the case of the Conservative Party this is certainly true to the extent that 'no observer suggests that the mass organisation, in annual meeting, could compel the Conservative Members of Parliament to adopt and carry³ out a policy which was definitely opposed by the Parliamentary Leadership'³ but it does not necessarily follow that it is totally ineffectual.

The conference does not pretend to make party policy across the whole spectrum of issues. Its main role was put very bluntly by the Chairman of the 1952 Conference when he said that:

' We are met here to-day, not to form policy but to review the progress of the nation and the Empire under our Conservative Party, and to consider the affairs of our party. You will have an opportunity of expressing your opinions, of hearing the views⁴ of the Ministers concerned, and of recording your decisions⁴ ... '

1. 'Party Conferences - Reality and Illusion of Popular Control' Times 29 September 1952. See also 'The Dubious Role of Party Conferences' Times, 18 September 1967
2. See for example H Morrison 'Government & Parliament' (OUP 1954) p 138. Also R T McKenzie 'Policy Decision in Opposition: A Rejoinder' (Political Studies June 1957) pp 176-182; S Rose 'Policy Decision in Opposition' (Political Studies June 1956) pp 128-138; R Miliband 'Party Democracy & Parliamentary Government' (Political Studies 1958) pp 170-174
3. L D Epstein 'British Man Parties in Comparison with American Parties' (Political Science Quarterly Vol 71 1956) p 97
4. NUCUA Conference Report 1952, p26

but Conference pressure appears to have had a fairly direct effect on the Parliamentary Party's policy on a number of questions including housing, electoral reform, taxation and agriculture whilst more indirect pressure appears to have had some effect on the leadership's attitude to issues such as immigration, education and Rhodesia.

The Conference is primarily a forum for communication - both for the grass roots to put across their fears to the leadership¹ and for the leadership to sell its policies to the grass roots and in the process it provides an important opportunity for delegates to build up morale and enthusiasm.

Leaving aside the question of whether the Conference does in fact exercise influence there is considerable scope for argument whether it ought to influence or even in certain circumstances dictate policy. It can be argued that the real power of the constituency associations lies in the choice of candidates² and that the Conference is not really equipped to take policy decisions. The case for limiting the power of the Conference was clearly put by Bagehot (although admittedly in a slightly different context):-

' A representative public meeting is subject to a defect over and above those of other public meetings. It may not be independent. The constituencies may not let it alone. But if they do not, all the checks which have been enumerated upon the evils of a party organisation would be futile. The feeling of a constituency is the feeling of a dominant party, and that feeling is elicited, stimulated, sometimes even manufactured by the local political agent. Such an opinion could not be moderate; could not be subject to effectual discussion; could not be in close contact with pressing facts; could not be framed under a chastening sense of near responsibility; could not be formed as those form their opinions who have to act upon them. Constituency government is the precise opposite of Parliamentary government. It is the government of immoderate persons far from the scene of action, instead of the government of moderate persons close to the scene of action; it is the judgement of persons judging in the last resort and without a penalty, in lieu of persons judging in fear of a dissolution, and ever conscious that they are subject to an appeal³... '

1. For potential effects see J C Wahlke, W Buchanan, H Eulan and L C Ferguson 'American State Legislators' Role - Orientation Towards Pressure Groups' (Journal of Politics Vol 22 1960) pp 202-207 and JW Kingdom 'Politicians' Beliefs about Voters' (American Political Science Review March 1967) p 139. For value of Conference as a sounding board for opinion see D Clarke 'The Organisation of Political Parties' (Political Quarterly Vol 21 1950) p 79
2. See J Biffen 'The Conservative Opportunity' (Batsford 1965) p 187. Also A Ranney 'Pathways to Parliament' (Macmillan 1965) and EA Nordlinger 'The Working Class Tories' (MacGibbon and Kee 1967) pp 39-40
3. W Bagehot 'The English Constitution' (Fontana 1963) p 161. See also L S Amery 'Thoughts on the Constitution' (OUP 1947) pp 43-47

The party leadership almost inevitably has a sharper awareness of the practical constraints on policy than the grass roots:-

' Too often the ordinary member does not consider the situation in which a demand is made. In moving a resolution he is not concerned so much with its practicability as with its desirability. A pressure group moves in a world of restraints, and the member does not always realise this so readily as the leaders. He comes to the conference with a list of demands. In his view it is the task of the group to satisfy these demands. Often he merely receives explanations of the difficulties involved because the demands are not adjusted to the capacity of the group ... '

and in any case there is the very real difficulty that although criticisms of the Conference's lack of 'power' carry an implicit suggestion that Conference policy making must somehow be 'democratic' there is no real assurance that the Conference is more representative of the electorate at large than a thoughtful leadership trying to anticipate the voters' aspirations. The Times in particular has been highly critical of the Conference's character:

' A political leader who commits himself to a line dictated by a party conference binds himself to the decision of a body other than the sovereign people ... In no conceivable way can the party conferences be considered representative of the electors - if only because they are composed of the politically active while the vast majority of the electors are politically indolent ... Constituency parties are among the most narrowly exclusive concentrations of power in this country, and the delegates to annual conferences represent only those pockets of power and not the mass of the people who provide the bulk of electoral support for the two main parties ... The danger of the exaggerated prestige of the party conferences is that it will make the true policy-makers at the top more and more responsive to an unrepresentative minority and less and less responsive to the nation² '

and a number of American commentators have shared the more general concern about the extent to which party assemblies can really succeed in interpreting the demands of the electorate³. In Britain there have also been sharp differences of opinion about the extent to which party activists are typical of the electorate. In 'The Paradox of Party Difference'⁴ Butler has suggested that the conferences are largely dominated by militants demanding socially divisive policies as the price for keeping the political machinery in working order

1. J D Stewart 'British Pressure Groups' (OUP 1958) p 40
2. Times - 25 September 1954. See also J D B Miller 'The Nature of Politics' (Penguin 1969) pp 210-217
3. See for example E E Schattschneider et al. 'Towards a More Responsible Two-Party System' (American Political Science Review Vol XLIV 1950) and L D Epstein 'British Man Parties in Comparison with American Parties' (Political Science Quarterly Vol 71 1956) pp 97, 118 and A Leiserson 'Parties & Politics' (Knopf 1958) pp 204-208
4. D E Butler 'The Paradox of Party Difference' (American Behavioral Scientist Vol IV 1960) pp 3-5

while there is other evidence that the grass roots party workers are by no means as militant as has been supposed and it may well be that party leaders do not really face a situation where:

' their most loyal and devoted followers tend to have more extreme views than they have themselves, and to be still further removed from the mass of those who actually vote ... Differences in policy exist within parties, and conflict is sometimes great but this is not conflict between a monolithic 'bloc' of activists and a monolithic leadership. Rather it would seem that factional disputes divide parties vertically, joining some Privy Councillors, MPs, lobbyists, activists and voters into a faction which is in conflict with another, which also contains members drawn from all ranks of the party '

Certainly even in a party like the Labour Party which purports to give its conference extensive powers it is significant that the leadership has retained a high degree of control over policy making through careful use of the trade union block vote and overlapping membership between the Parliamentary Party and the NEC². Quite apart from the conference's capacity to represent the electorate's views faithfully there are severe practical problems in giving the conference an active role in deciding as distinct from influencing policy. Its size makes it too large to consider questions in any detail and its experience in handling such comparatively minor matters of detail as the Maxwell Fyfe Report and its own venue illustrate how unsuitable it would be as a mechanism for taking detailed policy decisions in its present form.

At the same time, however, the conference does provide the party's closest supporters with an opportunity to 'let off steam' and:

' ... the truth is that these annual sessions by the sea now provide the only large forum to which thousands of dedicated party workers who labour unrewarded in the constituencies and who speak for grass-roots democracy still have access. Party activists who go unheard during the rest of the year have this one opportunity to say what they really think to the politicians who represent them at Westminster and to be seen and heard doing so on the television screens. Without the conferences party managers would have things all their own way and British democracy would become a system of alternating party oligarchies in which the citizen's only surviving right would be to express a preference at election time for a government managed by one of the two party machines³.!

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1. R Rose (ed) 'Studies in British Politics' (Macmillan 1966) p 307
 2. I Yates 'Power in the Labour Party' (Political Quarterly Vol 31 1960) p 300
 3. New Statesman - 8 October 1971

While the conference's capacity to represent public opinion may be open to some question, it almost certainly plays some part in creating that opinion as part of the process which Beer notes:

' The role of party in shaping public opinion has often been noted. It has been said, for instance, that a principal function of a major party is to aggregate the demands of a large number of groups in the electorate. Where party government is highly developed ... party does not merely aggregate the opinions of groups, it goes a long way towards creating those opinions by fixing the framework of public thinking about policy and the voters' sense of the alternatives and the possibilities. In turn, of course, the party may find itself under pressure from such opinion ... the parties ... have themselves in great part framed and elicited the very demand to which they then respond¹ '

and while the conference continues to perform an important function in providing a means of communication between party workers and the leadership the heavy media coverage which it attracts is also responsible for giving it an increasing role as a means of communication with the electorate at large² '

This may be partly responsible for the tendency which some observers have detected for the conference 'increasingly ... to serve primarily as a demonstration of party solidarity and of enthusiasm for its own leaders³...' but a much more important aspect is the conference's function in communicating policy - the conferences during the period 1945-1950 and 1965-1969 were extensively used to publicise the work of the party's policy study groups and also reflects in the way in which the conference is regularly used by Ministers as an opportunity to announce policy decisions within the limits allowed by Parliamentary courtesy⁴.

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1. S H Beer 'Modern British Politics' (Faber 1965) pp 347-348
 2. See for example S H Beer 'The Future of British Politics : An American View' (Political Quarterly Vol 26 1955) p 37
 3. R T McKenzie 'British Political Parties' (Mercury 1964) p 189
Also Spectator 4 October 1969 and Observer 26 November 1961
 4. See for example Sir Alex Douglas Home's announcement of lifting of Rhodesian restrictions - NUCUA Conference Report 1970, pp 61-66.
Also announcement of Road Transport Bill and Environmental Protection Bill by Geoffrey Rippon - NUCUA Conference Report 1973, pp 18-21

Against such a background it is probably unrealistic to see the conference as a policy formulating body. Its main role is as a communications medium and as a forum for discussion. Although in a sense this may limit its value the conference still has a valuable function to perform in the party's structure:

' Representative assemblies are often taunted by their enemies with being mere places of talk and 'bavardage'. There has seldom been more displaced derision. I know not how a representative assembly can more usefully employ itself than in talk, when the subject of talk is the great public interests of the country ... A place where every interest and shade of opinion in the country can have its cause passionately pleaded, in the face of the government and of all other interests and opinions, can compel them to listen, and either comply or state clearly why they do not, is in itself, if it answered no other purpose, one of the most important political institutions that can exist anywhere, and one of the foremost benefits of free government. Such 'talking' would never be looked upon with disparagement if it were not allowed to stop 'doing'; which it never would, if assemblies knew and acknowledged that talking and discussion are their proper business, while 'doing', as the result of discussion, is the task not of a miscellaneous body, but of individuals specially trained to it¹... '

1. J S Mill 'Considerations on Representative Government'
(Dent 1910) p 240

NORTHERN AREA SURVEY - 1967

Date of Interview Name

Constituency/Orgn Sex .. M / F

Occupation

Type of Rep: Chman / Treas / Womens Chman / TUAC Chman / YC Chman /
Agent / Other / Elected

Age Marital Status .. S / M / W

Are there any matters which were not on the agenda at this year's
Conference which you felt should have been on ?

.. Y / N / DK (Details:
.....)

What do you feel was the most important topic debated at the
Conference ?

(SHOW CARD):

Do you think that the Conference ought to be able to mandate the Party
to follow a particular policy ?

.. Y / N / DK

How were you chosen as a Conference delegate ?

.. EX-OFFICIO / OFFERED & RATIFIED / NOMINATED & RATIFIED / ELECTION /
OTHER (.....)

RESPONSE TO 'DELEGATE' : NIL / POSITIVE

Do you hold any office with your Association ?

.. Y / N / DK (Details:)

Do you feel that a Constituency Chairman should attend the Conference
whenever possible ?

.. Y / N / DK

Do you feel that a Constituency Treasurer should attend the Conference
whenever possible ?

.. Y / N / DK

Do you feel that the Conference has a definite effect on Party policy ?

.. Y / N / DK

Did you vote in the ballot at the Conference ?

.. Y / N / DK

Did you apply to speak at the Conference ?

.. Y / N / DK

If Y : (A) How many times did you apply ?

(B) On what issues ?

(C) Why did you wish to speak ?

.....

Did you send in a vote for balloted resolutions ?

.. Y / N / DK

If Y : How many of the items which you voted for came up ?

.. 1 / 2 / 3

If N : Why were you unable to participate ?

.....

Did your Association give you any financial assistance with the cost of attending the Conference ?

.. Y / N / DK

If N : Would such assistance have been available if requested ?

.. Y / N / DK

Are you a current or former member of:

(A) YCs - C/F (B) TUAC - C/F (C) Cons Teachers - C/F

(D) FUCUA - C/F (E) PEST - C/F (F) Primrose L - C/F

(H) TU - C/F (I) Bow Gp - C/F

(J) Monday Club C/F (K) Local Public Body - C/F

(G) Professional or Employers Association - C/F

Have you participated in the CONTACT 67 Programme ?

.. Y / N / DK

If Y : Were you a Group leader ? .. Y / N / DK

Have you reported/will you report back to your Branch/Association on the proceedings at Brighton ?

.. Y / N / DK

If Y : Will this be Oral / Written

Did you attend any meetings at Brighton other than the actual Conference sessions ?

.. Y / N / DK (Details:
.....)

Did you know your Association's views on any resolutions before going to Brighton ?

.. Y / N / DK

If Y :

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>SOURCE OF INFORMATION</u>
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Could you give me an indication of your activities during the last Parliamentary Election ?

CANVASSED / CAR DRIVER / CAR LOAN / ADDRESS CIRCULARS / SECRETARIAL HELP / POLLING BOOTH CLERK / OTHER

Have you addressed any public meeting/s organised by your Association ?

.. Y / N / DK

How long have you been an active party member ? years

How many annual conferences have you attended ?

Have you attended any conferences other than annual national ones during the last 5 years ?

.. Y / N / DK

If Y : How many ?

Do you personally support Common Market entry ? .. Y / N / DK

By and large, does your Association support Common Market entry ?

.. Y / N / 50-50 / DK

Do you personally believe that Capital Punishment should be brought back ?

.. Y - unqualified / Y - after 5 years / Y = for certain offences only / N / DK

Do you believe that by and large, your Association holds the same view as yourself ?

.. Y / N / SPLIT / DK

Does Party policy believe that all schools should be made into comprehensive ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does Party policy believe that Council house tenants with high incomes should pay the same rents as those with low incomes ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party support a National Freight Authority ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party believe that bus services should be supported by investment allowances ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party believe that the payment of National Insurance benefits should be selective ?

.. Y / N / DK

Would a Conservative Government reduce indirect taxation ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party support a Mortgage Option scheme ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party believe that agricultural subsidies are preferable to import control as a means of agricultural support ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party believe in special tax allowances for working wives ?

.. Y / N / DK

Would the Conservative Party retain the Land Commission ?

.. Y / N / DK

Would the Conservative Party abolish S E T completely ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party believe that employers should be legally obliged to recognise and negotiate with trade unions if more than 50% of their employees so desire ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party support Industrial Courts ?

.. Y / N / DK

Does the Conservative Party believe that a solution to the Rhodesian question must be based on the 5 Principles ?

.. Y / N / DK

Do you personally feel that Trade Unions are damaging the economy ?

.. Y / N - but some individuals / N - but insufficient control / N

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The party itself has published a wide range of policy material, mainly in the form of pamphlets, through the Conservative Political Centre (referred to as 'CPC'). Additional material, mainly on organisational questions, has been published by both the National Union and the Conservative Central Office. Other useful sources of information are the party manifestoes and the 'Campaign Guide' published by Conservative Central Office, and the pamphlets published by bodies such as the Bow Group, the Monday Club, Pressure for Economic and Social Toryism ('PEST'), and the Young Conservatives.

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