

Britain's Conservative Party issues extreme right-wing manifesto

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Britain's Conservative Party this week issued its “mini-manifesto” for the general election, expected to be held in May next year.

“Believing in Britain” is an extreme right-wing document, even by Tory party standards. It confirms the political refashioning of Britain's traditional party of big business along the line of Europe's far right and neo-fascist formations such as Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria.

The mini-manifesto focuses on opposition to Britain adopting the single European currency, the euro, and what it terms the “Sterling guarantee” to retain the pound for the lifetime of the next parliament—usually five years. Party leader William Hague issued his document the day after an announcement that the two main anti-euro campaigning organisations, “Business for Sterling” and “New Europe”, were launching a joint attack on the euro under the imaginative campaign slogan, “No”. Both are cross-party bodies, but have a strong Conservative presence.

The Tories believe the issue will be a vote-winner as it has proved for its political allies throughout Europe. The promise to keep the pound is an attempt to whip up nationalist chauvinism, and is founded on a pledge to make Britain a low tax, deregulated centre for international business investors. The document states that in the new global economy, “Our freedom to set our own taxes and social policy will matter more when businesses can trade anywhere they wish.... So we will defend the independence and integrity of our nation state.”

Opposing what they term the danger of an “integrated superstate”, they advocate preservation of the “national interest” and Britain's right of veto over European legislation. The Tories explicitly oppose a Charter of Fundamental Rights enforceable by the European Court of Justice. They advocate vetoing further transfers of power from Westminster to Brussels and come out firmly against

the advanced plans to create an autonomous European Union (EU) defence identity outside NATO.

Only in the “core elements of an open, free-trading and competitive EU”, i.e., when economic measures serve the interests of business, is integration welcomed.

Several paragraphs rail against bureaucratic regulation of the market by Brussels and promise reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and Fishing to restore national control.

Advancing a closer relationship with the United States, they call for “an alliance between the EU and the North Atlantic Free Trade Area (NAFTA), to extend the free-trade zone across the Atlantic.”

Their nationalist, anti-European rhetoric finds its natural accompaniment in anti-immigrant measures directed against asylum seekers. The Tories baldly assert that the “great majority of asylum claims are unfounded” and must be deterred. They pledge that a Conservative government would house all incoming asylum seekers in secure reception centres, speed up the decision making process and create a new Removal Agency responsible for deportations. They will also ensure that asylum applications from what are deemed “safe countries will not normally be accepted”.

Other anti-foreigner measures included are the introduction of a “BRIT disc” scheme, to charge overseas hauliers to use Britain's roads. The Tories demand that all food products are labelled with the country of origin and that food imports that fall below “domestic quality standards” are halted. With the establishment of the Scottish Assembly in Edinburgh, Scottish MPs will not be allowed to vote in Westminster on “English laws”.

The economic and social policies promoted by Hague build on those implemented by his predecessor Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and seek to overtake the Blair Labour government on the right. His introduction rants against “central government intervention”, “political

interference” and those who “regard the level of public spending as an index of compassion.” The invocations of “free trade”, “tradition”, “independence”, “nation” and the “rule of law” are so frequent they take on the character of a mantra. A typical passage, reads, “stop undermining families and marriage and the values of the mainstream majority; support those who work hard and save hard; make sure our homes and our streets and our children are safe from the criminals; make sure government is on the side of the law abiding; preserve the stability and traditions of British democracy.”

What the Tories define as a “Common Sense Revolution” is a “low tax, low regulation enterprise economy, able to compete with other countries as they cut taxes to attract new businesses.” They state that this is “morally right” in a “free society”.

Amongst the measures of deregulation they advance is to give the Bank of England’s Monetary Policy Committee “real independence” in setting interest rates to achieve low inflation. Public spending would only rise in line with the expected 2.5 percent growth in the economy, as compared with the 3.3 percent increase planned by Labour. This is estimated to involve public spending cuts of £16 billion a year.

The Conservatives pledge to encourage the growth of private health care and the spread of private pensions. What remains of Britain’s public housing will also be privatised.

By far their most radical privatisation measures are in the sphere of education. Local Education Authorities will have no say in school management. Instead head teachers and governors will be given complete responsibility in setting admissions, discipline, uniforms and pay policies. Private companies, voluntary groups or groups of parents will be able to set up what are called Partner Schools—private institutions that are provided with state funding. There will be no limit to how many pupils can be excluded for what is deemed disruptive behaviour, and those so excluded will be removed from mainstream schools into special “Progress Centres”.

Hague proposes a major step towards the privatisation of universities and the creation of a multi-tier higher education system through endowment funding that ends the present system of state finance. Proceeds from the auction of television and radio frequencies, future privatisation proceeds and asset sales would be given to selected universities to create elite establishments that can compete in the “top league of world academic institutions”. The sum involved is expected to be up to

£50 billion and would replace money given by the higher education funding council averaging £50 million for each university.

Top universities like Oxford and Cambridge already benefit from sizeable endowments and would be best placed to secure the richest pickings under the new scheme, to the detriment of less prestigious institutions.

Local councils that excel at imposing spending cuts would be deemed “Free Councils”, and made exempt from central government intervention and regulation.

The unemployed will be forced to sign a “Can Work Must Work Guarantee”, pledging to accept any job available or lose their benefits. Lone parents with children at secondary school will be expected to work and there will be an “unprecedented and sustained attack” on suspected benefit fraud by a new National Benefit Fraud Squad.

Tory anti-welfare measures include encouraging service provision by charities and “faith based institutions”. Other measures to spread the influence of religion are the provision of public grants to religious bodies and allowing religious broadcasting organisations to apply to set up TV stations.

On law and order, the Tories claim that the “mainstream majority thinks government is too often on the side of the criminal rather than the victim. They are right.” They pledge increases in police numbers, an overhaul of the law regarding self-defence against those allegedly involved in criminal activity and the double jeopardy rule, that a defendant cannot be tried twice for the same crime. They would largely abolish the remission of prison sentences, extend the “three strikes and you’re out” mandatory sentencing brought in by Labour and will imprison young offenders in secure training centres.



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