

*The*  
**Salisbury**  
**Review**

*The quarterly magazine of conservative thought*



The Third Marquess of Salisbury  
1830-1903

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his self-respect. Besides, if France becomes a subsidiary of Algeria or Mali, the latter will lose a prosperous and friendly partner. The dissolution of identity is a lose-lose game. The preservation of identity is a fundamental human right. The peoples of the North are entitled to it just as much as the peoples of the South.

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# Is British Conservatism Dead?

## A Scrutonian Elegy for England from Central Europe

Ferenc Hörcher

**S**ir Roger Scruton always had a keen interest and a deep knowledge of politics and history in Central Europe. He had a special relationship to this part of the world. Yet he was even more an old-fashioned patriot, 'a born Englishman' he called himself, engaged in the affairs of his country, Britain, and even more, England. However, he was not very optimistic about the present – even less about the future. His pessimism was expressed in *England: An Elegy* (2001), and more recently in *Where We Are: The State of Britain Now* (2018). In the prelude to the latter, we read: 'This short book is a personal response to the Brexit decision, but not an argument for it ... the question that I address is how our national sovereignty should be conceived in order to bring the 'leavers' and the 'remainers' together.' We can suppose, therefore, that Scruton would be profoundly concerned about the fall of the Tory party following an ugly period of futile struggle and inevitable failure. What follows is a Scrutonian enquiry into the state of the Conservative movement in Britain from a perspective that is both Central European and Anglophile.

If we want to make sense of what is happening in British politics, we must start with Brexit, an historic event with profound consequences, both for Britain and Europe. From the British perspective, the country's lost sovereignty was restored at a

stroke. To be sure, it was also an indictment of the European political elite, which is why it was so difficult for the two sides to agree the terms of the separation. But from a Central European perspective, and especially a Central European Conservative perspective, Britain's departure was a great loss, as earlier it was an important counterbalance to the leftist, woke and centralising agenda of the Brussels elites.

Of course, the Tory party also had to pay the price of separation, and it did so in two ways.

First, it led to the immediate fall of the prime minister David Cameron, who made the tactical mistake of calling a referendum. Whereas Cameron saw the referendum as a means of reaffirming his own political agenda, the electorate saw it as a means of winning back autonomy. And because Brexit was realised against the will of the incumbent Tory prime minister along with most of his government and party, subsequent Tory governments, including four consecutive prime ministers, were unable to capitalize on it. Second, subsequent Tory governments struggled exclusively, and largely in vain, to pacify the markets, appease the losers, or Remainers, and generally soften the immediate consequences of Brexit for the public. To be sure, history did not make it easy for them: the financial crisis, the Covid pandemic, and Russia's attack on

Ukraine all worked against them. But they failed to implement the austerity measures necessary to balance the budget, and they forgot about their own conservative agenda, instead seeking to placate the ever more strident left-liberal demands of political correctness. True, the American Republican leadership and elite had also lost its way until Trump's stormy arrival. Yet the British Tories' failure to capitalize on Brexit destroyed any possibility of maintaining their broad voter base, and most importantly, of satisfying the traditionalists who form the core of their support.

The Tories, then, have paid a heavy price for Brexit, not least in the form of the rise of their alter-ego, Nigel Farage, and his parties – first UKIP, then Reform. Farage, a self-made man who was able to turn the tables on his opponents, challenges the whole of the British political establishment. He introduced a new style of politics – single issue, and single personality – that is only possible in the digital age of social media. Farage belongs to a new breed of politicians whose main advantage is that they are sensitive to public opinion as transmitted by social media and can shape public discourse by stirring up scandal. His skills are drawn from the world of commercial marketing, and from market gurus and image makers who utilise the tricks and techniques made possible by the new technologies to service the needs of cultural heroes, film stars and pop icons. Key to his success is the ability to capture the attention of the media and set the agenda. However, there is a price to pay for this brand of popular politics. If one is driven by every abrupt change in the public's perception of reality, little can remain of a principle-driven political credo. Farage had to choose the single issue he was to pursue with great care to maintain his popular appeal, and colour his palette with rhetoric, uncivil behaviour and buffoonery.

It was in this spirit that Boris Johnson, the Tory party's daredevil, took Farage on. Johnson had all the education and experience, the skills and

preparation, to set serious political goals and work towards achieving them. Instead, he chose to win the popularity contest. And this required him to turn his back on traditional Tory priorities, even a Tory agenda, and instead to position himself in the middle, and appropriate the agenda of his rivals. The result of this careless political edginess was that he soon fell out of favour with his own party, and that Farage is now playing to win the Conservative vote, bolstered by the support of growing numbers of Tory deserters.

To be sure, the populist takeover on the right is a European, even a global phenomenon. Everywhere, the same populist advance threatens the elites of the mainstream parties, together with the ideology mongers and their friends in the mainstream media. There can be no doubt: they are so successful because woke ideology mongers overstepped the mark.

The purpose of ideology ought to be to unite the camp behind the front line of politics. However, the cultural cold war has separated the elite from the mass of the voting public to such an extent that no representative of the incumbent elite can emerge victorious. This is the moment when the populist leader can seize political power, which is precisely what happened in the United States with the election of President Trump for a second term. The question was not really whether Biden, Harris or Trump was the better candidate – though, of course, the question was on the agenda. The decisive issue was that the Biden administration substituted politics with woke ideology and culture war battles, which resulted in a dramatic loss of support even among core Democratic voters.

In Britain, the Tory defeat is certainly an opportunity to change its player line-up for the democratic reality show. But more importantly, it is an opportunity to recharge intellectual batteries: specifically, to develop a strategy that meets the urgent needs of the wider political community



without alienating its own electorate, by encouraging citizens to identify with at least some of its objectives while making the necessary sacrifices in other areas. In what follows, I shall identify some key guiding principles for a conservative party in the late modern Western world, by drawing on the rich tapestry of political and intellectual thought bequeathed by Scruton.

Populism plays on the gut reaction of the electorate against its elites – mostly, but not exclusively, against the political leaders of the respective regimes and their weapon bearers. However, the result could all too easily be another elite ‘sitting on the necks of the electorate’, who also need to be fattened up. That is why the conservatism that Scruton advocates is aimed not at helping into power a better elite but at fostering local autonomy. It is localist, not nationalist. This is captured in one of Scruton’s most original ideas, the concept of oikophilia, according to which man is a being who cannot live without attachments. But how do we define what are healthy human attachments? For Scruton, our major affinity is for the place we call home, which includes its natural and architectural environment, as well as those who live there, including family and neighbours. However, the area a person can emotionally connect to cannot be too large: it is *your* farm, *your* village, the district where *you* live. The circle of people that you are emotionally attached to is necessarily also limited: beyond your family and neighbours, this might include school, church, pub, club, working place or sports team.

Scruton also emphasises that the locality to which we belong was there before us and will remain there after we die. Our relationship to our locality is therefore also one of stewardship or trust, not merely of Lockean property: we must take care of it so that we can pass it on in full bloom to the next generation. Here, Scruton’s conservatism becomes more explicit, building as it does on Burke. For Scruton, the ‘core of conservative thinking’ rests on three principles or ideas: ‘respect for the dead, the ‘little platoon’, and the voice of tradition’. There can be no conservative revival in Britain today without a return to these core conservative ideas.

The reason that Edmund Burke and Roger Scruton were among the most widely known

conservative intellectuals of their age, and remain influential today, is, I would suggest, that they possessed an almost instinctive awareness of the political situation and what it requires. The name for this awareness is ‘practical wisdom’, or more specifically, ‘political wisdom’, which, in the form of the cardinal virtue *prudentia*, played a crucial role in Edmund Burke’s thinking. Practical wisdom (also termed ‘practical judgement’, ‘prudence’ or ‘*phronesis*’) is a cardinal virtue, in part intellectual, in part moral – which is why intellectuals who want to comment on, or participate in, politics first need to acquire the necessary experience and practice. For without experience, the virtue cannot be exercised. So, while Burke sharpened his political judgement in parliamentary debates and in his publications, Scruton gained first-hand experience in Central Europe of the reality of totalitarian rule, and he tried his hand at practical politics by serving as the founding editor of *The Salisbury Review*. He also arranged in-person platforms where intellectuals could meet and discuss the pressing issues of the day, which is how the Salisbury Group and the Conservative Philosophy Group emerged.

Taken together, Burke and Scruton provide an exemplary model of what a conservative intellectual should be like. Without the work done by conservative intellectuals, there can be no conservatism. The one thing that can be said in favour of liberal, socialist and nationalist intellectuals is that they ‘did their homework’. For politics is more than mere technology: it requires vision and ideas – ideas that can excite people’s imaginations and fuel their passions. On the other hand, conservative intellectuals must remain loyal to traditions and be personally modest in their political ambitions. They must be active in civil society and support political debate from the outside, but never trespass on, or demand participation in, decision-making processes. This was the theme of Nigel Biggar’s recent Peter Toon Memorial Lecture entitled *The Spirit of Truth: The Call to Intellectual Public Service* – namely, that British conservatism needs some public service from conservative intellectuals and thinkers. And this, we might say, is the message of Scruton – himself an unwanted British conservative intellectual. That conservative intellectuals must do their homework

if conservatism is to survive, let alone flourish.

But there is more to it than that. The problem is this: culture is upstream from politics, and religion is upstream from culture. The truth of these claims was exemplified in Scruton's own life. First, he tried his hand at thinking about politics, then he climbed to the heights of aesthetics, and finally he set off, steeply upwards, on the path towards God. This would be a powerful strategy for British conservatism, but it would require the Tory party to engage in deep introspection, starting with political ideas, but going on to reflect on the fundamental cultural issues of the day. Moreover, the practical wisdom needed to face the great challenges of the twenty-first century can only be developed, I would argue, if founded on an appreciation of the cultural heritage and moral foundations of Christianity. The challenges posed by demography,

migration, climate change and the technological paradigm shift can only be met by conservatives who have regained their intellectual confidence by reappropriating their own cultural heritage and religious traditions. For if we give up celebrating the cultural and religious achievements of earlier generations, all in the name of multiculturalism, we give up the social cohesion and solidarity essential for the survival of any political community.

Without this soul searching, and the spiritual renewal that could follow from it, British conservatism is dead.

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## Anti-colonial Ideology - the Real Driver of the Chagos Capitulation

William Clouston

**W**hy would the British government cede its sovereign territory to a foreign state just because that foreign state claimed it? And why would it agree to give away billions of pounds for doing so? These are the perplexing questions facing us after Keir Starmer's Labour government agreed to pass the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) – which contains the Chagos Islands and the UK/US military base at Diego Garcia – to Mauritius. The government has justified its capitulation on the supposedly high ground of international law. This is false. The real reason is Labour's anti-colonial ideology.

British sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago was established in 1814 and has continued uninterrupted until the present day. The government of Mauritius, a state some 1,200 miles to the southwest, has laid claim to the territory,

partly on the grounds of its previous connection as a component of a unified imperial department under both French and British control. After gaining its independence from Britain in 1968, Mauritius ramped up its claims to the Chagos Islands in the 1980s. After much agitation in February 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion calling for the islands to be given to Mauritius, and later that year the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a similar decision.

In 2022, the Tories foolishly started to negotiate details of the transfer of the territory and Labour has now finalised it. Those defending this course of action will say it was inevitable. In fact, all the British government needed to do was to resist, retain possession of the BIOT, and carry on. In international relations, the reality of power is decisive. Weakness, on the other hand, will be