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Prime Ministerial Powers of Patronage: Ministerial Appointments and Dismissals under Edward Heath

Abstract:

This paper examines how Edward Heath utilised the Prime Ministerial power of ministerial appointment between 1970 and 1974. It does so within the context of the difficulties that Heath experienced in managing the ideological tensions within his party during his leadership tenure and his subsequent removal from the leadership of the Conservative Party in early 1975. Critically, by utilising Cabinet Office papers (PREM 5), the paper demonstrates how his Chief Whip, Francis Pym, made a series of recommendations on how ministerial allocation could be used to aid party management and address backbench criticism about his leadership, and how Heath disregarded much of this advice.

Keywords

The Conservative Party; Edward Heath; Heath Government 1970-1974; Ministerial Selection; Cabinet Ministers.

Introduction

Edward Heath's Prime Ministerial tenure (1970 to 1974) coincided with a period of profound ideological turbulence within the Conservative Party. He would have to manage the conflict between progressives in the one-nation mould who wanted to remain situated on the centre ground, and those on the right who wanted to pursue a more free market strategy. He struggled to manage this divide effectively and as a consequence his political reputation was damaged.¹ His premiership would provoke a number of controversies that would come to dominate the academic literature: how should we interpret his objectives when entering office (was 'Selsdon Man' a myth?); how significant were the policy U-turns that his administration implemented (or were they acts of pragmatism?); why was the General Election of early 1974 called; and what explains Heath's removal from the leadership in 1975 (was it simply that Margaret Thatcher was the only alternative to Heath – i.e. 'anyone but Ted' or was it an ideological conversion?).² The most visceral criticism of Heath has actually come from Thatcherite sympathisers. In their eyes the 'failure' of the 1970 to 1974 government was a by-product of his poor leadership and the supposed U-turn away from the right wing agenda agreed in opposition.³ His unwillingness to adhere to the correct remedial policies meant that by 1974 the Conservatives 'had no firm principles' and 'no record to defend'.⁴ Or rather, their record did not justify re-election. They had presided 'over record levels of inflation and balance of payments deficits; public spending had increased by nearly 50 per cent in real terms; and a record number of days had been lost due to strikes'.⁵ To Thatcherites condemnation of Heath was justified: he won only one General Election out of four, and the loss of office in March 1974 was unnecessary as Heath could have remained in power until the summer of 1975.

Heath would find dealing with the parliamentary Conservative Party (PCP) problematic. Rebellion rates escalated, primarily over entry into the EEC. Parliamentary cohesion had been the norm within the PCP in the 1950s, where rebellion rates were 0.85 percent (1950-51); 1.4 percent (1951-55); 1.4 percent (1955-59), before increasing significantly (up to 11.8 percent) between 1959 and 1964.⁶ The further upsurge in the 1970 to 1974 Parliament (to a rebellion rate of 18.5 percent, including a rate of 29 percent in the 1971-72 session), was widely attributed to the inflexible leadership methods that Heath adopted.⁷ At the end of the rebellious year that was 1972 there was a 'growing conviction' amongst Conservative parliamentarians that they were 'regarded as servants of a leader who has little regard for their affection, or their principles, and who considers them as cattle to be driven through the gates of the lobby'.⁸ This situation was said to flow from Heath's determination to avoid the 'embarrassment' of 'compromises' and

‘concessions’, and his desire to get his legislation through ‘unchanged’.⁹ The consequence was that Conservative backbenchers were left unable to influence policy through informal meetings with ministers (designed to secure compromises and then support), and thus if they disagreed with government policy the only ‘available outlet for their frustration’ was parliamentary rebellion.¹⁰

This paper examines one of the chief means through which Prime Ministers can effectively manage their parliamentary party – i.e. through their power of ministerial appointments and dismissals. Did Heath use this power effectively or did he mismanage these powers and contribute to the escalation of internal party dissent, as implied by amongst others Norton, Crowe and Franklin *et al*.¹¹ The paper acknowledges that there is a significant academic literature on ministerial selection within British Government.¹² The focus of these studies varies but include the balances and constraints regarding Cabinet and ministerial formation¹³; the power of Prime Ministerial dismissal¹⁴; length of ministerial tenure and resignations¹⁵; ministerial turnover and reshuffles¹⁶; and junior ministerial office and the career trajectories of ministers.¹⁷ However, a recurring theme within these analyses is the relative neglect of ministerial selection within the Heath government when compared to other post war governments. This paper attempts to address this gap in the literature and in doing so it aims to consider three key questions with regard to the Heath era:

1. Did Heath intensify his party management difficulties by not reshuffling his ministerial team frequently enough? This question is asked to assess the validity of the claim by Stuart Ball (writing in 1996) that Heath’s ‘problems were exacerbated by his refusal to use the lubrication of patronage on the expected scale’ and ‘the infrequency of reshuffles and promotions’.¹⁸
2. When Heath made his ministerial appointments what was the dominant consideration – rewarding those who were loyal to him, or identifying those most talented and thus suitable to the demands of ministerial office? This question is asked to obtain a deeper insight into the claim by Norton (writing in 1978), that Heath was driven by loyalty rather than ability.¹⁹
3. To what extent did Heath benefit from the insights of his Chief Whip in making ministerial appointments, dismissals and promotions? Is Campbell correct when he claims that Heath ‘did not listen enough to what the Chief Whip was telling him’?²⁰ If advice was offered, what was it, and did Heath act upon it, or dismiss it. In addressing these questions, most notably the last one, the paper will analyse a series of

memorandums from Francis Pym to Heath, between early 1971 and late 1973, on government reshuffles released by the Cabinet Office (PREM 5), in order to identify and interpret the guidance that was offered by Pym. The emphasis on the importance of the Chief Whip's advice is justified on the following grounds. It is the Chief Whip who knows the 'temper of the party and the character of its members' and they normally 'encourage or warn the Prime Minister as to particular appointments'.²¹ As former Conservative Chief Whip, Martin Redmayne, once remarked 'I'm not called the *patronage secretary* for nothing'.²²

Part of our motivation for examining these questions stems from the fact that no former Chief Whip has risen to the leadership of either the Conservative or Labour parties before or since.²³ In this sense Heath is the anomaly amongst Prime Ministers and his career also creates an interesting paradox. For whilst he has been widely criticised as an ineffective leader of the parliamentary Conservative Party between 1965 and 1975²⁴, he had been a widely respected Chief Whip (between 1955 and 1959). Anthony Eden wrote that he had 'never known a better-equipped Chief Whip'²⁵, and he greatly appreciated Heath's 'patience, adroitness and dependability'.²⁶ Harold Macmillan also acknowledged that Heath was 'an excellent Chief Whip'²⁷, operating in at times difficult circumstances such as the aftermath of the Suez Crisis and the 1958 Treasury resignations.²⁸ Indeed, when we consider our third question – on the influence of Pym upon the appointments made by Heath – it is worth reflecting on Macmillan's reliance upon Heath when reshuffling in the 1957-1959 period. Macmillan recognised the validity of Heath's claim that 'some new blood had to be introduced', and because Macmillan found reshuffling to be 'a most difficult and exhausting task', he was dependent upon Heath for assistance. Macmillan reflected that 'without the help of Heath, who was quite admirable, we couldn't have done it'.²⁹ Indeed, Heath's influence upon ministerial advancement was so significant that 'by 1964 there were few below the highest levels of government who did not owe their start in office to Heath'.³⁰ Thus, the article will shed light onto the Prime Minister-Chief Whip relationship that existed between Heath and Pym by identifying from the archives the advice provided by Pym, and the relationship between this and the actions of Heath.

The Traditional Variables Influencing Ministerial Selection

Before attempting to assess these three questions, however, it is necessary to consider the traditional academic explanations on how and why ministers are selected. The literature

emphasises how Prime Ministers face a number of constraints that will influence who can be appointed; at what level; and in which department. The first criteria that a Prime Minister will consider relates to their suitability for political office. The dominant consideration here will be political competence. Potential ministers need to be administratively competent, and establish confidence that they have the ability to implement policy effectively within their department. Aspiring ministers also need to have established a reputation in Parliament, and demonstrate that they have the ability to defend their department effectively during parliamentary debate.³¹ The growing influence of television would increase the need for ministers to be proficient at explaining departmental policy in set piece interviews.³² Questions of competence also relate to the suitability of parliamentarians to the demands of ministerial office. Suitability can also embrace other aspects. The Chief Whip will inform the Prime Minister of parliamentarians known for engaging in inappropriate personal conduct, such as excessive drinking or sexually inappropriate behaviour, and this can lead to a parliamentarian being discounted as a potential minister.³³

Beyond suitability the Prime Minister also needs to consider a range of balances. First, Prime Ministers need to be sensitive to regional balance, and given the limited parliamentary representative of the Conservatives from Wales, Scotland and northern England, Conservative Prime Ministers need to think carefully before creating a ministerial team that seems to be overly dominated by south east England.³⁴ Although not such a central consideration for Heath as it has become for David Cameron³⁵ gender considerations need to be taken into account, although the literature on the Heath era refers to Thatcher as the 'token' female Cabinet minister.³⁶ Balance will also embrace age and experience: some parliamentarians will be discounted on the grounds of being too old, whereas new parliamentarians are not usually considered for ministerial preferment because they are seen as being too inexperienced and in many cases are too young.³⁷

Prime Ministers also need to utilise ministerial preferment as a means of facilitating effective party management. For example, leading figures within the party who could be viewed as 'veto players', (because they possess influence and provide gravitas), need to be accommodated.³⁸ Upon entering government from opposition, new Prime Ministers usually incorporate into their Cabinet their principal opponents for the party leadership and those who have substantive followings within the parliamentary party and beyond.³⁹ Prime Ministers also need to be sensitive to the assumption that the ministerial team should be broadly representative of the strands of opinion within the parliamentary party.⁴⁰ However, while showing sensitivity to this assumption the incumbent leader will need to ensure that the faction to which s/he is associated secures sufficient ministerial preferment. This is a balancing act. With regard to how

to achieve it Rose notes that whilst some Prime Ministers might 'err on the side of caution' and appoint the 'maximum level of personally loyal colleagues', this needs to be 'counterbalanced' by the appointment of some 'potentially disloyal' colleagues in order to '*gain silence*'.⁴¹

Having considered all of the factors when forming a ministerial team, Prime Ministers then have to grapple with the necessity of reshuffles.⁴² Reshuffles are required for a variety of reasons. First, to ensure the overall effectiveness of the Government it is necessary to 'remove' those identified as 'inadequate'.⁴³ Second, reshuffles are undertaken for the longer term development of the party. For example, they provide junior level ministerial experience opportunities for those identified as talented so that in a decade or two the future Cabinet ministers for the party have received a proper preparation for high office. This process of advancing new and talented parliamentarians, demands that fading ministers are removed.⁴⁴ Third, Prime Ministers can use reshuffles to renew their administrations and regain public confidence, which may have been undermined by perceived policy failure or scandal.⁴⁵ Finally, reshuffles can also be seen as mechanisms through which Prime Ministers can attempt to reassert their authority over their party. Dismissing ministers or moving them sideways (to less appealing portfolios), limits the capacity for senior ministers to challenge the authority of the Prime Minister. Thus reshuffles can be viewed as 'strategic devices' designed to 'fend off intraparty rivals', who may be motivated to use ministerial office and their departmental positions, to serve their own interests. This might mean promotion to a more senior and prestigious portfolio, or it might mean the party leadership itself.⁴⁶ Therefore, Prime Ministers can use reshuffles to 'undercut' the incentives for ministers to 'engage in self-interested behaviour'.⁴⁷ There is also a tradition that reshuffles should happen each year and as such they have become annual events of huge intra-party significance in British politics.⁴⁸ They are seen as the means by which the Prime Minister uses the prospect of ministerial advancement to retain the loyalty of ambitious backbench parliamentarians. Should the Prime Minister reshuffle too infrequently, or simply use reshuffles to swap existing ministers around rather than dismiss, then rumblings of discontent and talk of 'thwarted ambition' on the backbenchers will intensify.⁴⁹

Therefore, although Prime Ministerial powers of appointment might appear to be about 'command' and 'obedience', they are actually characterised by 'bargaining' given the constraints identified. However, this may not have been how Heath interpreted the situation. His memoirs reveal that on entering power he felt that: 'my hands were certainly not tied in allocating posts in the new government...(as)...I made no promises of any positions to anybody'.⁵⁰

The ‘Lubrication’ of Ministerial Reshuffles

Ball has argued that Heath is open to criticism for the infrequency of his reshuffles – is this a valid critique?⁵¹ Heath entered power with a determination to be the antithesis of Wilson, who ‘shoved people around as part of a political game’.⁵² Heath felt that reshuffles should not be driven by narrow party calculation. He subscribed to the view that constant ministerial tinkering prevented ministers from ‘developing the expertise and acumen needed to control a complex modern bureaucracy’ and thus ‘reshuffles destroy the informational gains that prolonged ministerial tenure can bring’.⁵³ Heath’s instincts were towards ‘professionalism’, and thus between 1965 and 1970 he appointed shadow spokesmen ‘who had specialised in their subjects’, and then he wanted ‘continuity between opposition and government’, and limits to the ‘restless game of musical chairs’.⁵⁴ This emphasis on demonstrating ‘knowledge’ and ‘specialism’, combined with his intentions towards longevity within departments would enable ministers to see policy through and overcome Civil Service dominance.⁵⁵

Numerically, despite his intentions Heath would reshuffle at a rate not that dissimilar to his predecessors.⁵⁶ However, there are explanations for some of the ministerial changes that occurred. For example, the death of his Chancellor, Iain Macleod just six weeks after they entered office (in July 1970), necessitated a mini reshuffle. The escalation of the troubles in Northern Ireland and the imposition of direct rule from Westminster necessitated the formation of the Northern Ireland Office, on a par with the Scottish and Welsh Offices. This plus the decision to construct a new Department of Energy in January 1974, in response to the 1973 oil crisis, all contributed to a further reshuffling of ministerial positions and personnel.⁵⁷ The machinery of government changes that occurred, notably over Energy, slightly undermined the claims made by Heath when entering office. In 1970 Heath had aimed to promote a clearer strategic view based on reducing the number of smaller departments, and establishing larger federal ones to offset the dangers of departmentalism. Upon their creation in late 1970, Heath promoted the ‘sustainable structures’ that were his giant or super ministries — notably Environment, which pulled together Housing and Local Government, Public Buildings and Works and Transport; and Trade and Industry, which brought together the Ministry of Technology and the Board of Trade, whilst Overseas Development was subsumed within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.⁵⁸ The political embarrassment surrounding the hiving off of Energy from within the super-ministry that was Trade and Industry was compounded by the delay in its establishment as Peter Walker (the incumbent Secretary of State at Trade and Industry) objected to removing Energy from his ministry.⁵⁹

Whilst numerically a relatively normal rate of reshuffling occurred, it is perhaps the type of reshuffling that caused resentment on the Conservative backbenchers. The rate of dismissals from ministerial ranks was low, and thus the rate of promotion into ministerial ranks was also low. Reshuffles were characterised by a high rate of sideways movement among existing ministers. Portfolios changed more than personnel and overall the Heath ministerial team displayed 'unusual stability'.⁶⁰ Of the 338 Conservative MPs elected in 1970, only 96 would hold office at any time between June 1970 and March 1974. Only 14 would leave the ministerial ranks, and a total of 28 would be promoted to ministerial office. Campbell concludes that:

Once in, you generally stayed in; and more important, once overlooked your chances of advancement were small...[but]... the trouble was that Heath's refusal to play musical chairs left a dangerously high proportion of his MPs disappointed⁶¹.

The fact that the gap between ministers dismissed (14) and appointed (28) exists stems from the fact that the number of ministers overall increased during the Heath government. However, this was not the intention when Heath came to power. When Wilson came to power in October 1964 he had a total of 77 ministers, 23 in the Cabinet and 54 as junior ministers. Upon entering power Heath reduced the overall ministerial number to 56 (18 Cabinet minister and 38 junior ministers) as part of his reorganisation of the machinery of government. However, even though this was increased to 70 overall (21 Cabinet ministers and 49 junior ministers) by the time they left office, it remained lower than the ministerial offices that Wilson utilised.⁶² Theakston concludes that by 'cutting the number of ministerial posts, as Heath did in 1970, [he] may simply have made the job of managing the parliamentary party more difficult'⁶³.

'Reward or Punishment': How Important was Loyalty to Appointments and Dismissals?

In his excellent examination of backbench rebellion in the Heath era, Philip Norton noted the view of a Conservative parliamentarian who failed to secure ministerial preferment under Heath (but was later a minister in the Thatcher era), who 'felt a certain resentment at seeing men, whom he considered to be less able than himself, being given ministerial office'⁶⁴). Two related perceptions became established: a). that loyalty rather than ability was the dominant concern with Heath⁶⁵, and b). that the ministerial ranks were not ideologically representative of the PCP⁶⁶ (thus, the right appear to assume that their faction was awash with competent candidates for

ministerial office: our concern here is their *perception* not the reality). So, who did Heath appoint and why, and were there any outstanding candidates for ministerial office on the right who were overlooked and if so why?

Upon entering office the allocation of senior portfolios were predictable. Alec Douglas-Home went to the Foreign Office; Reginald Maudling to the Home Office and Macleod to the Treasury. Douglas-Home would no longer be seen as an alternative Prime Minister, but Maudling and Macleod could have been seen (either by themselves, their supporters, or the media) as threats to Heath. However, these two heavyweights were to be removed from the equation. As mentioned above, Macleod died in July 1970. Maudling, meanwhile, became engulfed in scandal and had to resign from the Home Office in 1972, despite protesting his innocence.⁶⁷

When Macleod died Heath appointed Anthony Barber to the Treasury (a 'promotion too far' according to Fry⁶⁸), and when Maudling was forced to resign he appointed Robert Carr to the Home Office. Barber, Carr, Walker, John Davies and James Prior were Cabinet ministers who could be described as 'Heath's protégés if not creations'.⁶⁹ For example, Walker was only 38 years old and had no ministerial experience, but he had been the mastermind behind Heath's campaign for the Conservative Party leadership in 1965.⁷⁰ Similarly, Prior had no previous ministerial experience but was propelled into the Cabinet in 1970 (as Agriculture Minister), because he had been 'excellent' as Heath's Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) in opposition, and because Heath felt he was 'ready for a senior post'.⁷¹ To Heath protégés went the key ministerial portfolios relating on the 'economic, industrial and European fronts'. To those less ideologically and personally aligned to him – e.g. Keith Joseph and Thatcher – went the welfare departments. Thatcher would remain at Education throughout and this was due to Heath's 'determination to keep her corralled in a department removed from the central business of the Government'.⁷²

Roth offers a critical appraisal. He noted that the Heathmen 'seemed chosen favourites rather than obvious choices', and that their promotions indicated that Heath was keen to surround himself with those whose positions 'depended more on loyalty to him than to proven ability'.⁷³ That Heath had used the opposition era, and the transition to government, to advance younger and inexperienced Conservatives aroused 'dissatisfaction among more seasoned representatives who thought that they had been overlooked'.⁷⁴ As a consequence the 'Heathmen' became seen 'as a specific faction within the party'. This accusation was compounded by the perception that Heath himself 'habitually treated Conservatives outside the new magic circle in a dismissive fashion'.⁷⁵

The most obvious senior Conservative who was overlooked was Enoch Powell. His supporters argued that his exclusion was because Heath feared being outshone by Powell.⁷⁶ Despite not being a member of the shadow Cabinet, (Heath having dismissed him in 1968 in the aftermath of his notorious ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech), Powell was a dominant personality in the lead up to the 1970 General Election and the campaign itself. Indeed, the press association assigned two reporters to him as opposed to one for Heath, Wilson and Jeremy Thorpe, thus creating an impression that it was a virtual four party campaign, as Powell (or reaction to Powell) took up about 20 percent of all election coverage on television.⁷⁷ Powell would later claim that his interventions on immigration contributed to the election victory, but whether he wanted the Conservatives to win was another question.⁷⁸ Powell admitted that victory ‘sealed my exile’⁷⁹, as:

Although Powell undoubtedly had a substantial following in the Conservative Party, and although Heath was well aware that he had one, Heath as party leader in opposition had already sacked him.... To have nevertheless appointed him to the new Conservative Cabinet in 1970 would have made the new Prime Minister look inconsistent, feeble and ridiculous and would also have incurred the ire of most of his senior colleagues....[and]... some senior Conservatives, including Iain Macleod, would probably have refused to sit round the cabinet table with him. Fortunately for Heath, the strength of his position as the man who had just led the Conservative Party to victory in a general election meant that he could afford to exclude Powell at virtually no cost to himself.⁸⁰

Other figures bypassed included three senior Conservative ministers from the Douglas-Home government, even though they were all under 60 and retained ambitions: Duncan Sandys, Ernest Marples and John Boyd-Carpenter. All of them were removed from Heath’s shadow Cabinet in 1966, but all were keen to serve post 1970.⁸¹ For example, when they entered power Sandys expected ministerial office. After overlooking him Whitelaw warned Heath that ‘as the months go by he will probably become increasingly more difficult’.⁸² However, it was the exclusion of the former party chair, Edward du Cann, which had longer term implications. du Cann was also identifiable with the right, even though he had backed Maudling in the 1965 leadership election. It was known that Heath and du Cann disliked each other.⁸³ However, when Heath removed him from the chairmanship of the Party in 1967, du Cann was left with the impression that he would be offered a Cabinet post when they returned to power. When bypassed for ministerial office he felt that he was being ‘made to pay the price for [an] ancient quarrel’ over the Common Market.⁸⁴ Yet, du Cann was not the first on the right to incur the wrath of Heath during opposition. Shortly after he acquired the party leadership in July 1965, Angus Maude (at that time

Conservative spokesman on Colonial Affairs) wrote in the *Spectator* that the Conservatives needed to stop ‘pussy footing on the trade unions’; that they should ‘condemn high taxation’ and they should ‘specify radical changes in the welfare state’.⁸⁵ Maude was sacked by Heath. To some (i.e. the right) the treatment of Maude and du Cann suggested that Heath was a man who nursed grudges.⁸⁶

King felt that the consequence of this was that Heath had a ‘weak Cabinet’ because he liked to be ‘surrounded by his friends rather than the most able members of the party’.⁸⁷ The other excluded bloc was those with known anti-EEC sentiments. This ‘undermined morale within the parliamentary party’ and left Heath without ‘any means of communication between the pro and anti marketeers’, leaving them feeling ‘dispossessed’.⁸⁸ Piper has noted that Heath’s ‘personality led him to systematically exclude dissidents’ and led to a ‘punitive’ and ‘intolerant’ mentality towards dissent.⁸⁹ (Pym had informed Heath in early 1971 that 33 Conservative MPs - around 10 percent - were opposed to EEC membership, and a further 75 - around 22 percent - were in doubt. These figures correspond reasonably well to the 92 Conservatives who rebelled over EEC entry in the 1971-72 parliamentary session).⁹⁰ Therefore, there does appear to be some validity to the claim that Heath was influenced by evidence of loyalty to his leadership. Of the 14 who were promoted into the ministerial ranks *after* the original formation of the Government in June 1970, all but three had never rebelled against Heath’s leadership. Of the three who had two had only rebelled once.⁹¹

Open to Advice? Recommendations from the Chief Whip

The Chief Whip is traditionally central to the decision-making process when making ministerial appointments. The Chief Whip provides ‘vital intelligence’ to the Prime Minister, as they are ‘aware of the talents, specialism, representative quality and nuisance value of MPs’, and as such ‘their recommendation or disapproval’ should be viewed as significant.⁹² However, Campbell argues that Heath ‘did not listen enough to what Pym was telling him’, and while Pym was said to be doing his ‘best to represent to Heath the views’ of the PCP the ‘impression came back very strongly that Heath did not want to know’.⁹³ By viewing Cabinet Office documents on government appointments (PREM 5), and identifying Pym’s recommendations and Heath’s responses, we can potentially offer greater substance to these arguments.

The following clear trends emerge from the archives. First, that Heath did not often act upon the advice offered and that Pym was sensitive to Heath's known reluctance to reshuffle. Second, that the treatment of parliamentarians identified with the centre or left of the Conservative spectrum was sometimes different to the treatment of parliamentarians identifiable with the right. Third, that Heath did not respond to advice relating to Conservative Central Office and the importance of electioneering. Each trend warrants further insights.

First, the letters demonstrate that Pym made frequent critical comments about the performance of certain ministers. Writing in October 1971 Pym suggests that it would be 'highly desirable' to 'promote a few backbenchers', but 'I know you do not wish any general reorganisation at present'.⁹⁴ Later in September 1972 he wrote to Heath with a set of proposed ministerial changes but acknowledges that 'you may feel this is too radical'.⁹⁵ Some Conservative ministers would repeatedly be recommended for dismissal and yet would survive throughout the whole of his administration. For example, Michael Allison would serve as Parliamentary under Secretary of State in the Department of Health and Social Security throughout, but Pym repeatedly raised concerns about him. In September 1971 he describes his performance as 'weak' and that he has done 'nothing to commend his retention', before concluding that if he were to be dismissed 'I am not sure anyone would notice'. By June 1973 the criticism remains - 'no sign of political spark' - and the recommendation of removal remained. The same applies for Dudley Smith, Parliamentary under Secretary of State in the Department of Employment. In October 1971 Pym describes him as 'disappointing', and such sentiments remain in letters to Heath in June and September 1973, where Pym notes that it 'might be hard to drop him' (as his marriage was in trouble), but that he needs to be 'dropped on the basis of making room'.⁹⁶ Heath's response was to move him sideways to the Ministry of Defence at the same ministerial rank (in January 1974). Pym was particularly scathing of Graham Page, who was Minister of State for Local Government throughout the Heath era. He informs Heath that Page 'remains a problem' and that 'I have no confidence in him' as early as 1971, and Pym continues to advocate his removal throughout 1972 and 1973.⁹⁷

Two high profile Cabinet ministers who Pym recommended for dismissal were Rippon and Davies, but both of whom survived as Cabinet ministers until their removal from office. Heath found Rippon to be 'reliable'⁹⁸ and thus retained him despite being informed by Pym that he was an 'embarrassing figure' whose 'reputation has ebbed away since 1970'. Pym warned Heath that Rippon was 'unlikely to make any runs for you ever' and that 'many in our Party would like to see him go now'.⁹⁹ Heath not only kept Rippon in Cabinet as Secretary of State for Environment, but promoted him to shadow Foreign Secretary in March 1974 when they entered

opposition and Douglas-Home stepped down. Davies was recommended for dismissal on the basis that he was a 'lightweight' who 'adds no apparent strength to your team', but was retained by Heath.¹⁰⁰ A less high profile candidate for dismissal was the Scottish Secretary, Gordon Campbell. Despite Pym describing him as a 'liability' who Heath should 'retire', and despite arguing that both of his junior ministers, Alick Buchannan-Smith and George Younger, were 'promotable' within the Scottish Office itself, this advice was also ignored.¹⁰¹

Within each letter Pym highlights the age of each minister (and selected backbenchers) and ends with a summary of recommendations under headings, including 'to be considered (pre-1970)'; 'to be considered (1970 intake)'; 'to be promoted'; and 'for retirement'. The use of the term 'retirement' only partly reflected a desire to remove older ministers and replenish the ministerial stock with younger and fresher faces. At Cabinet level, Davies and Campbell, as they were both in their fifties should be 'retired', and that advice was not taken.¹⁰² Maurice Macmillan, whom Pym dismissed as 'inarticulate' and 'disappointing', was retained within the Cabinet, albeit that he was shunted from Employment to Paymaster General.¹⁰³ Below Cabinet level, 'retirement' was recommended for two ministers in their 60s – Graham Page and Paul Hawkins – and was not acted upon. Similarly, Pym identified a group in their 50s worthy of 'retirement' including Peter Rawlinson and Richard Wood, and again Heath discounted these recommendations.¹⁰⁴

Heath was clearly reluctant to engage in the brutal business of dismissing ministers. Boyd, writing in 1973, felt that Heath was 'not by nature a reshuffler' as 'he prefers to think he chose well in the first place'.¹⁰⁵ This meant that younger talent was held back. Pym advocated bringing Michael Heseltine into the Cabinet (to lead the DTI twenty years earlier than he eventually did in the Major Government), on the basis that he was 'so good' and 'very much the professional'.¹⁰⁶ The recommendation that Walker should become Chancellor, made in September 1972, and the later comment that the incumbent Barber needs to 'move now' (to become Leader of the House of Commons, rather than leave the Cabinet altogether), was not followed through.¹⁰⁷

Second, it is worth noting that Heath *did* ignore advice by Pym to dismiss ministers who were identifiable with the right of the PCP. For example, in June 1973 Pym argued that 'spaces have to be found' and recommended the dismissal of John Peyton and John Eden (nephew of the former Prime Minister).¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Heath failed to act upon a series of negative comments by Pym about Julian Amery. Amery (whose father in law was Harold Macmillan) was criticised for his performance as a Minister of State in the Department of Environment in 1971, with Pym claiming that 'he carries no conviction' and 'he is a real anxiety'. Heath's response was to retain

him as a Minister of State in the more prestigious Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Yet two years later Pym informed Heath that: 'he will always be a problem', but the 'right wing want him as a champion'.¹⁰⁹

Nonetheless, the sense that the right was insufficiently represented at ministerial level would remain (In part this was not helped by some of their own – Jasper More resigned from the Whips' Office, and Teddy Taylor from the Scottish Office, in opposition to the passage of the European Communities Act).¹¹⁰ The perception that Heath was not running a balanced administration was not aided by the fact that when he did circulate ministerial office, the youngsters being advanced seemed to be those identifiable with the moderate wing of the party – for example, Nicholas Scott, Timothy Raison and Kenneth Clarke. While the right were no friends of Julian Critchley, they would have sympathised with his interpretation of the PCP under Heath as comprising three parts: moderate; traditional right and Powellite right and that it is the moderate wing 'from whom in the main the government is recruited'.¹¹¹

The Pym letters give some credence to the assertion that Heath was more antagonistic towards parliamentarians associated with the right, but more accommodating towards centrist or left ward leaning parliamentarians. For example, when Pym writes in October 1971 to confirm a negative view of Nicholas Ridley (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department of Trade and Industry) this is acted upon, (but Heath had already grown tired of Ridley and fellow right winger Frederick Cornfield, both of whom were removed).¹¹² However, in recommending Ridley's dismissal for 'weak' performance, he does warn Heath that 'Ridley will be bitter about this and will say he has been sacrificed at the altar of orthodox Conservative doctrine....he is likely to join the Powell clique'.¹¹³ As part of the reshuffle, and presumably to retain some sense of ideological balance, Pym recommended appointing du Cann to the Department of Trade and Industry at Minister of State level. Pym's advice placed the recommendation within the context of the parliamentary arithmetic surrounding the crucial vote to approve entry into the EEC on the terms Heath had negotiated (scheduled for 28th October 1971):

He has warned me he is a possible abstainer on the 28th, but of course if you decided to bring him back and invited him in time, and he accepted it, he would be an extra vote...it would strengthen your government to bring him back and would be well received in the party.¹¹⁴

However, the advice on du Cann was ignored, and the same would apply when Pym suggested that Maude should be 'considered for inclusion'¹¹⁵. To replace the soon to be dismissed Ridley,

Pym recommends Peter Emery, a ‘keen European’¹¹⁶, who had campaigned for Heath in the 1965 leadership election, a recommendation that Heath accepted. A clearer illustration of Heath advancing known sympathisers was the case of Ian Gilmour. In the summer of 1973, when Gilmour was a Minister of State with the Ministry of Defence, Pym informed Heath that there is ‘uncertainty as to his political weight’, and yet shortly thereafter he is promoted to Secretary of State for Defence, when Carrington moved to the newly formed Department for Energy.¹¹⁷ The appointment of Gilmour caused consternation on the right. Patrick Wall, the founder of the 92 Group, criticised his appointment ‘not only is he of the left’, but he ‘lacks the stature to stand up’ to Heath.¹¹⁸ Pym also informs Heath that Thatcher is ‘held in high esteem by the party’. Pym advocates that she is worthy of promotion, and would be keen to be considered in a forthcoming reshuffle, but that she does not want to be moved to the Department of Health and Social Security.¹¹⁹ The failure to advance figures associated with the right led to Wall informing Pym that he had ‘never known such a degree of anger and discontent’¹²⁰ within the parliamentary party. Pym would later inform Heath that this was ‘what a wide section of the party is feeling’¹²¹ only for Heath to respond that he was ‘sorry that the Chief Whip should believe such arrant nonsense written by an extreme right winger’.¹²²

The Pym letters also identify a concern about some ministers who excelled administratively but were weak at public communication. In praising Joseph, Pym noted that whilst he was ‘excellent’ administratively ‘he does not like the presentational side’.¹²³ This relates to the third clear theme within the advice offered to Heath. Pym was clearly concerned about how to use portfolio allocation to improve how the party communicated with the electorate and set about campaigning. Most notably this related to the lead provided by the chairmanship of the party, but more generally Pym urged Heath to address the ‘paramount need to strengthen our public relations capability’.¹²⁴ Here Heath is open to criticism. Upon entering office Heath appointed Peter Thomas to chair the party alongside serving as Secretary of State for Wales. Thomas proved to be an ‘uninspiring’ chair.¹²⁵ In late 1971 Heath is informed that until Thomas is removed ‘there will be rumblings’. Pym notes that while William Whitelaw would be an ideal appointment, it was his ‘strong opinion that to add the party chairmanship to his responsibilities, (at that time he was Leader of the House of Commons), would weaken our position in an even more important area’.¹²⁶ As a consequence Pym advocated that Heath should appoint Alan Lennox-Boyd, (a Cabinet minister from the Macmillan era, but a prominent right winger), as he had the necessary ‘authority’ and ‘respect within the party’ to ‘shake up the organisation and impose his will upon it’.¹²⁷ In the event, Heath appointed Lord Carrington, who would admit that the appointment was not successful.¹²⁸ Ignoring Pym’s advice Carrington was both chair of the

party and Secretary of State for Defence, which created practical difficulties as his portfolio demanded that he was overseas regularly. Campbell also criticised the appointment on the grounds that as a peer, Carrington 'had no first-hand experience of the democratic process or the party battle he was not expected to direct'.¹²⁹

Thus researching the archives identifies that considerable efforts were made by Pym to aid party management by more extensive ministerial reshuffles. It is significant that there is little evidence of written responses from Heath to Pym on his recommendations that can be identified within the archives. The archival research identifies the dysfunctional relationship that Heath had with Pym, which was in marked contrast to the treatment that he received from Eden and especially Macmillan, when his was Chief Whip.¹³⁰ Heath's responses to these recommendations is evident from his action (or inaction) rather than from documentary evidence.

Analysis and Conclusion

This paper has examined three key issues with regard to how Heath utilised his powers of patronage: the frequency of his reshuffles; what motivated appointments (loyalty or competence); and the extent to which he exploited the advice of his Chief Whip. Criticism based on the number of reshuffles misses the point. The problem was not so much the frequency but the type of reshuffles that were conducted. Heath showed himself to be a Prime Minister with a deep reluctance to dismiss ministers, and reshuffles were characterised by churning existing ministers around, mostly at Minister of State and Parliamentary under Secretary of State level. Those who were appointed into ministerial office tended to have strong disciplinary records within a party whose rebellions rates were intensifying under Heath's leadership. Moderate loyalists tended to be candidates for ministerial office, and critics of Heath tended to be located on the right. This did not appear to concern Heath as much as it appeared to concern Pym as Chief Whip.

Julian Critchley commented in 1973 in the *Political Quarterly* that it was 'inconceivable' that a Prime Minister would discount the views of their Chief Whip when making ministerial appointments.¹³¹ Pym, although identifiable with the moderate wing of the PCP, made repeated attempts to encourage Heath to reshuffle his ministerial team. His recommendations involved some clear attempts to unify the PCP by creating a clearer ideological balance within the ministerial ranks. His advice was driven by the need to aid the performance within departments and across the whole of the government both in administrative and communication terms. However, such advice was more often than not ignored. This was most evident in terms of

Pym's desire to ease out ageing ministers and to get Heath to realise the importance of a new approach to the chairmanship of the party.

Does this matter? The above analysis provides an insight into two key issues relating to Conservative politics between their election to power in June 1970, and the forced eviction of Heath from the party leadership in February 1975. It helps us to understand how Heath's choices contributed to the mobilisation of dissent against his leadership in two ways: first, increased backbench rebellion when in office; and second, the pulling together of his critics who would orchestrate his downfall once out of office.¹³² Heath's reluctance to inject new talent into the ministerial ranks and his attitude to towards dissent made Pym's job as Chief Whip harder. There was a clear perception among those on the right that prior rebellions (be that over Rhodesian sanctions, immigration or the EEC), were held against them and impeded their future ministerial prospects.¹³³ However, once they felt that 'no one who had ever voted against the Government received promotion', so they came to think that they 'had nothing to lose by doing so again'.¹³⁴

Heath's reluctance to act upon many of the recommendations made to him by Pym showed political naivety, as 'office silences critics; at the same time the sense that the *possibility* of office was *open to all* would have made for a happier and more biddable parliamentary party'.¹³⁵ Pym tried to persuade Heath of this but with minimal success. Heath was unwilling to stoop and engage in such 'low political calculations'.¹³⁶ Heath preferred to take the moral high ground, noting that he could have 'bought support by giving places to potential trouble makers', but that is 'not the purpose of a modern government'.¹³⁷ This self-confidence can be attributed to two factors that made him the most dominant premier of the post war era and the one who judged that he was impregnable.¹³⁸ First, Heath was leading a Cabinet devoid of political heavyweights and serious rivals to him. Second, even if there was a rival there was no mechanism for the Conservatives to forcibly evict him from the leadership. Heath was thus 'secure in the knowledge that [as] *he* had led his party to victory in the previous election, that he would almost certainly lead [them] into the next election'.¹³⁹ As such, the notion that reshuffles should be used to outmanoeuvre intra party rivals, (deemed by Kam and Indriðason to be a standard motivation for Prime Ministers), did not apply to Heath.¹⁴⁰

The consequence of how Heath used or misused his powers of appointment was the mobilisation of intra party rivals on the backbenchers, and 'it is easy in retrospect to trace the parliamentary party's rejection of Heath back to well before 1974-5'.¹⁴¹ This was evident within the Heath papers. For example, one backbencher John Wells wrote to Heath's PPS, Tim Kitson (in December 1972) and observes that Heath is: 'no doubt completely indifferent to what I think

and he is unlikely to mend his ways. All I can do is to play as active a part as I can in any moves to get rid of him'.¹⁴² Heath is also being warned about this by those more loyal to him. David Mudd, a junior minister (who nonetheless happened to have doubts about the EEC), wrote to Heath in September 1973 to warn him that he had been asked to join up with a group of 20 plus Conservative backbenchers who wanted to 'initiate moves for a change of leadership'.¹⁴³ These letters coincide with other 'warning signs', as known critics of Heath were elected to positions of significance.¹⁴⁴ Having left his junior ministerial role within the Department of Trade, Ridley was elected as chair of the backbench finance committee. Another critic of the economic policy reversals, John Biffen, was elected as chair of the backbench industry committee¹⁴⁵. Pym attempted to warn Heath about the 'crisis of confidence' surrounding his 'communication' and 'leadership' being engineered by his critics. He wrote to Heath after their rejection from office and noted that 'I have indicated my anxieties about the way the party is being run...I know from what others have said that I am not alone in this view'.¹⁴⁶

When still in office the election of du Cann as the new Chair of the 1922 Executive Committee was another significant development. Upon his election du Cann wrote to Heath: 'you will have my full support, and I want you to know that I mean it'.¹⁴⁷ However, in October 1974, and after the Conservatives second electoral defeat of the year, du Cann informed Heath that the view of the 1922 Committee was that Heath should resign. If he did not do so then the rules governing the leadership of the Conservative Party should be changed to permit a challenge to him. (At this juncture du Cann refused Heath's belated offer to 'neutralise me'¹⁴⁸ by offering him a place in the shadow Cabinet and Heath condemned him in his memoirs for 'undermining my attempt to unify the party').¹⁴⁹ The subsequent rule changes permitting an annual challenge provided the opportunity for Thatcher to challenge Heath. Her success in removing him after the first ballot (130-119 with Hugh Fraser on 19 and 10 abstentions) which created a vacancy that she subsequently won 146-79 over William Whitelaw (with 51 other votes spread across James Prior, Geoffrey Howe and John Peyton), has been said to have an ideological explanation. The right 'strongly supported' Thatcher and the left 'supported Heath and then Whitelaw'.¹⁵⁰ Whilst valid this explanation maps onto a frontbench and backbench distinction. The Thatcher campaign had strong links to the backbench powerbase that du Cann had cultivated.¹⁵¹ Those whom Heath had appointed to ministerial office tended to back him, and those denied office formed the core of the Thatcher voting bloc.¹⁵²

Heath's own career was forged through being Chief Whip and the importance attached to this role by both Eden and Macmillan. As Chief Whip in the 1950s Heath had been aware of the need to introduce 'new blood'¹⁵³, but this awareness abandoned him in office. His refusal to

utilise the ‘political arts he practiced in Macmillan’s service’ created the tragic irony that a vaunted former Chief Whip failed to understand or appreciate that he was losing the support of his own party¹⁵⁴. His failure to utilise his powers of patronage – and counterbalance loyalists with critics - flowed from his failure to act upon the advice provided to him by Pym. Had Heath listened to Pym in the way that Macmillan had listened to him then the mobilisation of critics that would unseat him could have been stalled¹⁵⁵. The removal of Heath represents a critical juncture in Conservative politics, and Heath’s weak grasp of how to use patronage as a method of effective party management was a contributing factor.

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¹⁰⁷ Frances Pym, Chief Whip Letter to Prime Minister, PREM Patronage Papers, National Archives, Kew, 5/530, 25th September 1972; 5/541, 22nd June 1973.

¹⁰⁸ Critchley, 'Stresses and Strains in the Conservative Party', 402.

¹⁰⁹ Frances Pym, Chief Whip Letter to Prime Minister, PREM Patronage Papers, National Archives, Kew, 5/529, 22nd October 1971; 5/541, 22nd June 1973.

¹¹⁰ Seyd, 'Factionalism in the Conservative Party', 471.

¹¹¹ Critchley, 'Stresses and Strains in the Conservative Party', 403.

¹¹² Heath, *The Course of My Life*, 399-400.

¹¹³ Frances Pym, Chief Whip Letter to Prime Minister, PREM Patronage Papers, National Archives, Kew, 5/529, 22nd October 1971.

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- ¹²⁶ Frances Pym, Chief Whip Letter to Prime Minister, PREM Patronage Papers, National Archives, Kew, 5/529, 22nd October 1971.
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- ¹²⁹ Campbell, *Edward Heath*, 511.
- ¹³⁰ Or Ibid, 514-5.
- ¹³¹ Critchley, 'Stresses and Strains in the Conservative Party', 406.
- ¹³² Norton, 'The Changing Face on the British House of Commons in the 1970s', 339.
- ¹³³ Stuart, 'A Party in Three Pieces', 61.
- ¹³⁴ Campbell, *Edward Heath*, 519.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid, 519.
- ¹³⁶ Ibid, 519.
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- ¹³⁸ King and Allen, 'Off with their Heads', 266.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid., 266.
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¹⁴⁹ Heath, *The Course of My Life*, 529.

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¹⁵³ Ziegler, *Edward Heath*, 106.

¹⁵⁴ Campbell, *Edward Heath*, 103-4.

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