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Edward Heath and the challenge of the 'impossible leadership situation'

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Introduction

Edward Heath's performance as Prime Minister has rarely been celebrated. Gallup's polling during his premiership revealed persistent public dissatisfaction with his performance (King and Wybrow, 2001; Denver and Garnett, 2012). After Heath's dismissal by the electorate, most of his former Cabinet colleagues issued hostile or at best equivocal assessments of his leadership. Among the former was his successor as Conservative leader: 'wrong, not just once but repeatedly' was her verdict (Thatcher, 1995: 195). Others who might have been expected to be more generous, such as his Chancellor, found it best to avoid any appraisal of Heath's leadership (Barber, 1996). The minority who undertook to defend his reputation were either terse — 'I like Ted Heath. I think he was a good Prime Minister' (Pym, 1984: 21) — or reliant upon counterfactuals. 'Ted Heath would have been seen to be an outstanding Prime Minister', wrote one faithful ally, 'if he remained in power' (Walker, 1991: 121).

The general assessment of those in the academy has also been negative. Surveys of academics (Theakston and Gill, 2006; Theakston and Gill, 2011) have ranked Heath amongst the worst of Britain's post-war Prime Ministers. Those who have studied Heath in depth rarely demur from this judgment but they do seek to account for Heath's failures. Here three key themes emerge — that Heath's personality contributed to his difficulties, that he made a number of tactical and strategic errors in office, and that he was attempting to govern in challenging circumstances. However, such assessments have usually been arrived at without reference to any framework for evaluating leadership performance.

Greenstein's (2001) leadership style/skills model, has been applied to Heath as part of a broader comparative analysis of UK prime ministers (Theakston, 2007) and more recently, both Heppell (2014) and Garnett (2015) have applied Bulpitt's statecraft model to the Heath premiership. These recent systematic assessments of Heath are welcome and this chapter seeks to contribute to this emerging, theoretically informed debate both on Heath's premiership, and the performance of UK prime ministers in general.

We approach Heath's premiership via a critical reading of Stephen Skowronek's historical institutionalist account of leadership in 'political time' (1993; 2011). For Skowronek, political time is defined by the rise and fall of 'regimes'. A regime is understood as a set of ideas, values, policy paradigms and programmes which are supported by a coalition of political interests and are associated with particular institutional supports. Each regime is defined by a cycle in which, as political support and authority for a regime accumulates or dissipates, the regime is established, maintained, encounters crisis and is eventually replaced. For Skowronek, the challenges of leadership differ according to where the regime is in this cycle of resilience and vulnerability. In addition, the attitudes of each leader towards the regime — whether they are affiliated or opposed — establishes a broad pattern of opportunities and

constraints. These two dimensions allow Skowronek to distinguish between four distinct types of leaders (Table 1). Affiliated leaders of a resilient regime pursue a politics of articulation. They are regime managers who aim to ensure that the regime continues to function well in changing times. Pre-emptive leaders aim to replace established commitments but in doing so galvanise political support for the status quo that frustrates their objectives. Disjunctive leaders are those who are affiliated to a failing regime and so encounter the challenges of trying to govern an increasingly dysfunctional system. Finally, reconstructive leaders are those who, by building a new coalition around a new governing framework, are able to administer the coup de grace to a failing regime.

As we have shown elsewhere (Byrne et al, 2017) this model can, with sensible adaptations, be applied to the UK premiership. It is also a model that, we have argued, can address some of the shortcomings of other approaches to the assessment of political leadership in the UK. Viewing prime ministers in political time allows us, unlike Greenstein's focus on the personal qualities of leaders, to account for how the demands of political circumstances affect leadership effectiveness. Statecraft approaches, on the other hand, have recently been adapted to take better account of structural factors in the performance of statecraft tasks (Buller and James, 2014). However, the political time approach invokes within and between category comparisons of the four types of leadership. This permits us to more systematically specify the structural constraints and the opportunities for agency characteristic of each type of leadership. The result, we submit, is an analysis, comparison and explanation of leadership performance that is better attuned to the interaction between structure and agency (Byrne and Theakston, 2018).

The chapter proceeds by the following sequence of steps. Firstly, we classify Heath according to Skowronek's typology. We examine Heath's attitude towards the regime and show that Heath was a regime affiliate. We then examine the character of the regime. Here we argue that Heath took office at a time in which the regime was facing increasing enervation. It is on this basis that we classify Heath as a disjunctive prime minister. In the third section of the chapter we examine how Heath responded to the dilemmas of disjunctive leadership through expectation management, the valorisation of technique and policy experimentation. We conclude by evaluating the state of the regime which Heath left behind, both in terms of the immediate scenario facing Harold Wilson in February 1974 and the longer-term path dependencies propelled by decisions taken by Heath in government.

Edward Heath: opponent or affiliate of the regime?

Our first task is to establish Heath's attitude towards the regime. Here we need to exercise caution. The objectives of politicians are frequently and easily misread. It often serves the interests of their opponents, inside and outside their own party, to misrepresent their position. Equally, members of the commentariat and academia are apt to arrive at conclusions by selective quotation from a limited range of public statements. Heath has frequently been misread, particularly in respect of the Selsdon Park meeting of the Shadow Cabinet in January 1970. Harold Wilson used reports of this conference to identify Heath with 'Selsdon Man': 'a socio-political cave-dweller whose

appearance marked a major shift in the political zeitgeist' (Christie, 2004: 135). Heath's Conservative critics after 1972 recalled Selsdon Park as evidence of Heath's betrayal of a challenge to the post-war consensus (see, for example, Tebbit, 1989). Yet, in our research we have been able to identify only three occasions between 1970 and 1974 where Heath actually referred to Selsdon Park in speeches or interviews (Conservative Central Office, 1970b; Conservative Research Department 1970; National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, 1973), and on each occasion Heath's anodyne comments fail to warrant the mythology.

This example serves to demonstrate the necessity of reviewing a wide range of Heath's public statements to establish his position in relation to the regime. After all, Heath spent nearly five years and fought two general elections in opposition before entering Downing Street. He was then prime minister for nearly four years. Our analysis therefore proceeds on the basis of a review of 627 speeches, interviews, statements, press conferences and party political broadcasts delivered by Heath between 28 July 1965 and 4 March 1974 which are found in the Conservative Party archive at the Bodleian Library. These, taken together with the party's principal policy statements and election manifestos during the same period, comprise 1.18 million words of text.

Our starting point is to consider Heath's stance as it emerged in opposition. This is summarised in Table 2. At this point in his career, Heath was fond of highlighting what he described in his 1966 conference speech as the 'great divide' between the parties. Accordingly, his public statements articulate a series of value commitments presented as intrinsic to his, and his party's stance. Commitments to free enterprise and competition enjoy a high priority:

I was trained in private enterprise and I've had to earn my living in it. And so, as a party our objective, when we are the government, is to enable private enterprise to work and to work effectively. As a government we will encourage it, we want it to be both free and enterprising, and above all we want it to be competitive. Because we know that competition brings the best out of every one of us (Conservative Research Department, 1967a).

Heath also believed a recovery in national fortunes would depend principally on the efforts of individuals. Accordingly, he promoted opportunity, incentives and choice for individuals. As 'the party of free choice' (Conservative Central Office, 1970c), 'the whole purpose of the style of Government on which we shall embark is to give the people of this country greater opportunities which they can use for themselves' (Conservative Central Office, 1970d).

Heath not only also possessed an occasional tendency to outbursts of 'Leninist' rhetoric (King, 1975: 7). Some of his policy goals were also open to interpretation as radical departures from post-war practice. One example is his commitment to cut individual and corporate taxation and to reduce the size and responsibilities of the British state. Another is his promotion of a 'property-owning democracy' by sale of council houses and extension of occupational pensions. Taken together these might lend themselves to identifying Heath as an agent of regime reconstruction. However, such commitments must be placed in their proper context.

Firstly, had Heath been intent on regime reconstruction, we would have expected him to repudiate post-war governing practices. On the contrary, Heath repeatedly and proudly revisited his achievements as a member of the Eden, Macmillan and Home governments. Moreover, he advised fellow partisans to recall the record of the 1951-64 governments as testimony of Conservative competence and credibility. He told Conservative candidates:

We can point to our record in the past. We can show how in the years of Conservative prosperity we reduced taxes and increased spending on the social services at the same time. Not by magic, but by managing the economy so that people saved and greater wealth was created (Conservative Central Office, 1970e).

Secondly, Heath's value commitments must be seen in the context of his governing strategy and the wider ensemble of his policy objectives and policy means. Between 1964 and 1970 Heath did not identify fundamental and structural defects of the regime. Rather, he assigned primary responsibility for the nation's difficulties to the quality of leadership provided by Wilson and the Labour Government. On Heath's account Wilson's perennial and chief concern was the partisan advantage of the Labour Party. Wilson's addiction to gimmickry, such as the National Plan, delivered inertia and trivial government. The implications were clear. Had the Conservatives been in government, the nation would have been spared its travails. Furthermore, if the 'lack of integrity and determination... that has gravely weakened our national life' (Conservative Central Office, 1970a) could be replaced by a new style of firm and frank leadership there was every prospect of reinvigorating the regime.

Thirdly, to read Heath as an advocate of regime transformation demands we wilfully ignore the detail of his public statements. Despite Heath's commitments to free enterprise he maintained that 'The Tory Party has never been laissez-faire, and isn't laissez-faire at the moment' (National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, 1965). While Heath dismissed Wilson's National Plan he saw continued value in the planning apparatus established under Macmillan and did not foresee it as an impediment to liberation of the forces of competition (see, for example, Conservative Research Department, 1965). Rather, 'Planning will take its proper place as an aid to the sound management of the economy and not as a substitute for it' (Conservative Party, 1968). Heath remained committed to the maintenance of full employment (see, for example, Conservative Central Office, 1969a) and accepted the government's responsibility to maintain economic demand (see, for example, National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, 1965). While hostile to the state propping up declining industries he believed it had to 'enable private enterprise to adapt itself more quickly to changes in demand and methods of production' (Conservative Research Department, 1967b) by policies to promote redeployment and retraining. Government would also remain responsible for ensuring prosperity was shared by all parts of the nation:

We cannot tolerate the waste of human and economic resources which are brought about by their uneven use in different parts of the country. We refuse to condemn large parts of the United Kingdom to slow decline and decay, to dereliction and to persistent unemployment in pursuit of old fangled 19th

century doctrines of laissez faire, and so we shall act (Conservative Central Office, 1969b).

Nor did Heath envisage any significant redrawing of the boundaries of the mixed economy. He rejected the proposals for extensive privatisation presented by Nicholas Ridley's policy group in 1968. Cuts in taxation and reductions in state responsibilities would not need any political anaesthetic since Heath had 'a slimming pill to give Whitehall' (Conservative Central Office, 1966b). That Labour had allowed the state to grow corpulent with excess taxation and public spending demonstrated the scope for straightforward economies. Reform of Whitehall and modern management techniques would free further resources painlessly. If increased prescription charges and the withdrawal of housing subsidies were necessary, they were nonetheless tolerable for the beneficiaries of post-war affluence. Indeed, Heath considered such policies an embodiment of the party's 'One Nation' tradition. Better targeting of resources to those most in need would liberate those who continued to experience hardship and poverty.

Such commitments were in the service of a governing strategy that sought to modernise rather than reconstruct the existing regime. Britain had become, 'A society dedicated to the prevention of progress and the preservation of the status quo' (Conservative Central Office, 1969c). It is in this context that two of Heath's most ambitious and controversial commitments should be understood. Industrial relations law had gone unreformed for sixty years and was the legacy of an epoch of mass unemployment, weak unions and victimisation in the workplace. Now it was imperative to 'stop looking over our shoulders to Jarrow and the thirties' (Conservative Central Office, 1966a). Modernisation of the law would strengthen the responsible union leaders whom Heath had encountered as Minister of Labour and who would then act as a vanguard for efficiency. If management modernised its techniques too, then restrictive practices could be challenged, productivity increased and the trajectory set for a high-wage, low cost economy.

EEC membership also featured as part of this broader strategy of modernisation. This would restore a sense of national purpose and provide Europe with its rightful voice in world affairs. However, the primary benefit was that membership would foster the competition and dynamism necessary to deliver accelerating economic growth. British firms would gain access to larger export markets and new opportunities for cooperation across high-technology sectors. It is unfair to accuse Heath of misleading the nation over the implications that would follow for British sovereignty (see for example: Conservative Central Office, 1968; 1969b). However, the reconstructive potential of membership was certainly downplayed in favour of stressing its revivifying material impacts.

On the threshold of the premiership, the limit of Heath's radicalism was, to use Peter Hall's terminology (1993), second order change. Heath was committed to broadly the same policy goals as his predecessors in Number 10. Where Heath differed was in the policy instruments he proposed for their realisation. Comparison with other voices in the Conservative Party serves to reinforce this conclusion. Where Heath was confident of reinvigorating the regime, Angus Maude, an early critic, believed the Conservatives were failing to recognise the extent of Britain's malaise (Maude, 1966). Where Heath's ambitions focused on reversing Wilson's reforms, others, like Lord Coleraine, inveighed

against 'the horrid hagiology of government by interferences and incantation' represented by institutions like the NEDC (Lord Coleraine, 1970: 113). But the contrast with Enoch Powell is the most revealing. Powell held a more pessimistic outlook than Heath. For example, during the 1970 election Powell foresaw civil strife of 'appalling dimensions' as a consequence of mass immigration (Powell, 1970a) and identified a series of enemies within intent on subverting the UK state and destroying its society (Powell, 1970b). If Powell lacked a fully developed platform he had nevertheless associated himself with a series of reconstructive commitments during the years of opposition. These included proposals to cut income tax in half by cuts in public expenditure of the order of £2855 million (Powell, 1968). Powell endorsed denationalisation of the airlines, docks and telephone system and questioned the wisdom of government subsidies for socially deprived areas. Powell also doubted whether military commitments outside Europe and Britain's overseas aid programme should be maintained.

Regime vulnerability or resilience 1970–74?

No prime minister since the war, it has been argued, 'has confronted such a combination of malign events' as did Heath between 1970 and 1974 (Patten, 2017: 135). As Campbell (1993: xix) put it:

International and domestic factors in the fevered 1970s conspired to derail his Government. He was confronted by the collapse of the international financial system and massive global inflation, culminating in the 1973 'oil shock'; an irresponsible trade union movement at the height of its power, backed by an unscrupulously opportunist Opposition; Northern Ireland on the edge of civil war; plus a social climate disturbed by a whole range of fears and dislocations, from terrorism and rising crime through student revolt and violent demonstrations to coloured immigration, sexual permissiveness and decimalisation of the currency.

Similarly, Sandbrook (2010: 13) has described the period 1970–1974 as 'caught between past and present,' with its political consensus 'fragmenting under the pressure of social change, its economy struggling to cope with overseas competitors, [and] its culture torn between the comforts of nostalgia and the excitement of change.' In this confused and unsettled environment, Heath aimed to stabilise and rehabilitate a set of governing commitments rendered vulnerable by a structural crisis of the international economy and claims of overload and ungovernability (King, 1976).

In Skowronek's model disjunctive leaders face the challenge of trying to manage, maintain or rescue a failing regime in the context of mounting problems, policy failures, deteriorating government performance, and diminishing support and authority. Do the regime's 'governing commitments', as Skowronek (1993: 36) describes them, still 'claim formidable political, organizational, and ideological support? Do they offer credible solutions or guides to the problems of the day? Or have they in the course of events become open to attack as failed and irrelevant responses to the nation's problems?' For Nichols and Myers (2010: 813–14) indicators of an 'enervated' or weakened regime include: the emergence of 'new cleaving issues and problems', growing tensions within

and the decreased cohesion of the regime's governing coalition, the rise of 'opposition elements' calling into question and beginning a national debate about the regime's established policies and its governing philosophy and competence, and the 'advent of a crisis atmosphere'.

In trying to make sense of the vulnerability or resilience of the 'regime' in a broad sense, the relatively short Heath government cannot be seen in isolation. Thus in terms of the periodisation of British policy regimes and of regime crisis and change, Middlemas (1979: 430, 459) talks about a 'crisis of the state' and symptoms of breakdown and instability in the system over the period 1964–75, in a later study referring to a 'mid-1970s crisis' and 'time of disjunctions... [and] disintegration' (Middlemas 1991: 4–5). Beer (1982) traced the breakdown of 'hubristic Keynesianism', the problem of 'pluralistic stagnation' and the 'political contradictions of collectivism' back into the mid-1960s, setting the scene for the failures and 'self-defeating politics' of the 1970s. Studlar (2007: 8–12) describes 1970–1979 as a 'transitional period of turmoil and confusion' in the shift of postwar Britain's political eras and orders from the collectivist consensus period of 1945–70 to the neoliberal order after 1979 (though noting that several of the problems marking the 'transitional era' of the 1970s were already evident in the later 1960s). Bogdanor (1994: 359) dates the 'paradigm change in which one dispensation gradually came to be succeeded by something quite different' to the years following 1974 and the fall of Heath. In contrast Matthijs (2011: 31, 99) appears to date the tilting point between regime resilience and vulnerability more exactly to 1972 and the Heath 'U-turn', describing Conservative policy after 1972 as 'crisis containment' and dating the final disintegration of the postwar consensus to the period of the 1974–79 Labour government.

However, we would argue, with Campbell (1993: xix), that it is probably best to say that Heath was 'caught at a moment of transition . . . when the earth moved under his feet.' Similarly Arthur (1996: 257–8) describes the UK as 'going through a very difficult period of transition' in the Heath years, with the government 'overwhelmed by one damned problem after another – industrial relations, inflation, immigration and Ireland.' Events between 1970 and 1974 can perhaps be likened in that sense to a series of what seismologists label 'foreshocks' that may reflect a general increase in underlying stress in a region or cause stress changes resulting eventually in the 'mainshock' or major earthquake. Put another way, it was not that 1970 itself marked 'a major break in British history' (Harrison, 2010: xv). Regime decomposition and failure was, rather, a process traceable in many respects from the late 1960s through to the end of the 1970s. This was a turbulent period of challenge, change, crisis and adjustment across a number of fronts (economic, political, social, cultural, ideological), affecting not just Britain but on a global scale (Black et al, 2013; Ferguson et al, 2010).

Regime vulnerabilities manifested themselves in a number of ways in the Heath years. Public support for the Heath government was not particularly robust. Heath personally was not a popular leader – he was never an electoral asset to his party and his approval ratings as prime minister (averaging 37 per cent) were the lowest of any postwar prime minister until John Major. After a brief political honeymoon in 1970, for most of the period opinion polls showed a Labour lead over the Conservatives and voter dissatisfaction with the government's record (Kavanagh, 1996: 377–378). By-elections and local council elections gave evidence of the Liberal Party revival that proved so

damaging to the Conservatives in February 1974, an election that marked a crack in the established two-party domination of the political system – the Labour/Conservative share of the vote falling from 89.4 per cent in 1970 to 74.9 per cent, with the Liberals increasing from 7.5 to 19.3 per cent (gaining nearly 4 million more votes) and also a significant increase in the nationalists' vote in Scotland. All this was expressive of growing disillusion with the two main governing parties during the 1970s. Exploiting popular anxieties over immigration (including the expulsion of the Ugandan Asians) as an insurgent party of the extreme right, the National Front saw membership growth and patchy electoral success in this period, particularly in some local contests (Taylor, 1982). At the same time changes in the social and electoral underpinnings of the wider party system were starting to become apparent, with evidence of a weakening of party identities and of the class/party nexus, the emergence of a more dealigned electorate, and a shift in public attitudes on economic and welfare issues, and on attitudes towards the trade unions, over the course of the 1970s (Norris, 1997).

At a deeper level there seemed also to be a decline in the stabilising and supportive elements of the traditional 'civic culture': as Kavanagh (1980: 370) put it, 'the traditional bonds of social class, party, and common nationality are waning, and with them the old restraints of hierarchy and deference.' Schoen (1977: 232–239) also noted a growing 'general political disillusionment' in Britain, starting in the late 1960s, including evidence of dissatisfaction with the political system, the failure of government to solve the problems facing the country, popular discontent with politicians and the major parties, falling confidence in party leaders, a growing gap between mass and elite opinion, and increasing public fears of the breakdown of traditional values and standards. The existing system and political machinery seemed increasingly remote, irrelevant and/or incompetent. Beer (1982: 119) suggested that the failure or inability of the political system to adapt to new expectations and attitudes undermined the legitimacy and effectiveness of government and the wider collectivist regime. Public concerns over law and order, rising crime and student protests fed into this general sense of social malaise and disarray, together with the seemingly out-of-control violence in Northern Ireland (with 480 deaths in 1972 alone, the highest figure in any year of the Troubles) and wider incidents of international terrorism.

In disjunctive conditions, populist and maverick figures often serve as a focus for disaffection with the established regime and in the Heath years, as noted earlier, it was Enoch Powell who articulated an alternative Toryism and the need for a reconstructive solution to national malaise. However, he remained a divisive figure and isolated at the parliamentary level, more a 'voice' and a regular backbench dissenter than a factional leader, though all the same something of a magnet for the disaffected at party grassroots level and in the wider electorate (Shepherd, 1996: 406). But analysing Powell's public appeal in this period, Schoen (1977: 40–41) found that the widespread support for his stance on immigration did not translate into support for his views on other key issues such as denationalisation or prices and incomes policy.

The wider climate of intellectual opinion in the early 1970s was still supportive of the Keynesian consensus, backing high public spending and state intervention, even as the limitations and the problems with that policy paradigm were becoming apparent in practice. There was, however, no credible alternative available at that time, and a major shift in opinion had not yet occurred, unlike in the Thatcherite decade of the 1980s. By

the late 1960s and early 1970s press commentators like Peter Jay and Samuel Brittan were popularizing monetarist ideas, but the free-market economic counter-revolution was still in its infancy in the years of the Heath government (Thompson, 1996: 64–65). Whitehall and Treasury policy thinking remained broadly Keynesian (Kandiah, 1995: 197). Apart from the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and some followers of Enoch Powell, there was little interest in monetarist economics and explanations of inflation (Kavanagh, 1996: 361). As Cairncross (1996: 125) put it, ‘monetarism’s time had not yet come.’ Only a small minority of Conservatives were seriously interested in ‘consensus-busting’ at this time (Garnett, 1994: 279) with political figures like Jock Bruce Gardyne and Nicholas Ridley, and economists like Alan Walters, talking about monetarism. Although they were to later dominate policymaking, in 1970 the ideas of the IEA ‘remained on the political fringe’ (Harrison, 2010: 290), though the creation of the Selsdon Group in 1973 to call for a change of direction and to champion economic liberalism was a sign of growing dissatisfaction in Conservative circles not just with particular decisions of the Heath government but the whole politics of consensus, corporatism and Keynesian economics (Cockett, 1995: 212–213). There were other signs too that opponents of and campaigners against the policies and values of the collectivist Keynesian welfare state consensus were becoming more organised and influential. There was, for example, the appearance (from 1969 onwards) of the ‘Black Papers’ on education. Coinciding with the advent of the Heath government, Rhodes Boyson joined with Ralph Harris and Ross McWhirter to set up the ‘Constitutional Book Club’ in 1970, publishing pamphlets challenging ‘progressive thinking’ and making the case for capitalism and free enterprise and against the welfare state, nationalisation and the ‘socialistic’ approaches adopted by both main parties over the postwar period (Boyson, 1970; Cockett, 1995: 176–177). The failures and the fall of the Heath government, together with the course of events under the Labour government after 1974, seemed to vindicate these alternative ideas and to finally open the door to a politics of reconstruction under Margaret Thatcher.

Trade union shop-floor militancy and strikes had been increasing since the late 1960s but the ‘pitched battles’ (Taylor, 1996: 170) and ‘open warfare’ (Porter, 1996: 39) with the trade unions between 1970 and 1974 put a serious question mark against the postwar settlement between government, labour and capital (Middlemas, 1990). A record number of working days were lost due to strikes and industrial action: in 1972 alone over 23 million days were lost in stoppages and strikes, the highest figure since the 1926 General Strike. The government’s Industrial Relations Act aimed to stabilize industrial relations and reduce union conflict and strikes but instead had the opposite effect, provoking a confrontation with the TUC and even more union strife and stoppages. The unions rendered the Act unworkable, and it was in the context of the confrontations and disorder over its implementation and enforceability that media commentators started to ask whether Britain was becoming ‘ungovernable’ and to talk of ‘a major attack upon its constitutional principles and freedoms’ (*Economist*, 1972; *Sunday Times*, 1972). On a different front, the actions and defiance of councillors in Clay Cross (on housing finance and other issues) constituted the most sustained challenge by a local council to the authority of central government, parliament and the law for half a century (Mitchell, 1974).

In Opposition the Conservatives had condemned Labour’s incomes policy, promising to restore free collective bargaining, but in the face of rising inflation and strikes and

industrial action by the unions – and particularly after the bitter miners’ strike in early 1972, which led to a state of emergency, power cuts and a three-day week – the government was driven to introduce a statutory incomes policy. Through all the industrial conflict, however, Heath persistently and genuinely sought agreement with the unions and with business, to try and make a ‘corporate’ or ‘tripartite’ system of economic management work. But the problem was the ‘social partners’ — the TUC and the union leadership on the one hand, the CBI representing business on the other — were unable or unwilling fully to cooperate, share responsibility and ‘deliver’. The second clash with the miners in 1973–74 then dealt a final fatal blow to the government’s authority in the ‘who governs?’ election of February 1974

The international economic scene could hardly have been more difficult or volatile, with the breakdown of the stable international currency and financial system, based on fixed exchange rates, put together at Bretton Woods after the war; world-wide inflation and dramatically rising world commodity prices; and then the massively disruptive shock of the 1973–74 oil crisis, when OPEC action following the Arab-Israeli war resulted in a quadrupling in the price of oil and cutbacks in production, further accelerating inflation and deepening recession. In this context, Britain was not uniquely challenged in the 1970s. Other countries also experienced a severe deterioration in economic performance, with a slow-down in growth rates and higher inflation and unemployment, signalling an end to the ‘golden years’ of the postwar boom (Coopery and Woodward, 1996: 3). Inevitably, in many states this led to a major rethink of domestic policy regimes developed in the postwar period (Gamble, 1988: 3). In Britain, the emergence of stagflation — simultaneously increasing unemployment and inflation — was the moment when ‘the traditional macro-economic methods stopped working’ and the established Keynesian ‘conventional wisdom’ was fundamentally challenged (Bogdanor, 1994: 359).

The growing sense of regime crisis can also be seen in the tone and tenor of internal government deliberations on economic problems and policy. In the run up to the 1972 U-turn there was the view that unemployment topping one million for the first time in 25 years was politically and socially unacceptable, and an impatient sense of the need for a major modernisation and reconstruction of British industry and what Heath called ‘our whole economic structure’ to tackle long-term problems of decline and meet the challenge of entry into Europe (Theakston and Connelly, 2018: 205–206). By early 1974 — against the background of the oil crisis and the pay policy struggle with the miners — the Whitehall language was of ‘economic life as we know it . . . transformed’, ‘permanent damage of the most serious kind to the economy’, and ‘an unmanageable wage/price spiral’. Heath chaired a Number 10 meeting where it was agreed there were two possible scenarios: ‘one in which it was possible to deal with the developing economic situation in a reasonably orderly manner, and another in which there was a major collapse of confidence which called for immediate and drastic action’ (Theakston and Connelly, 2018: 233–234). There have been claims there was in fact something like a ‘collective nervous breakdown in the official machine.’ From the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS), Lord Rothschild minuted the prime minister with apocalyptic warnings about the dangers of ‘chaos, riots and anarchy’ and the ‘downfall of democracy’ (Hughes, 2012: 199, 216). Meanwhile senior Treasury officials warned that ‘the country may face collapse’ and ‘economic and social disaster’ (McIntosh, 2006: 62, 68). The sense of ‘loss of control’ at the centre helped open the way to later ‘fundamental changes in economic

management' (Cairncross, 1996: 137).

Heath and the disjunctive dilemma

Heath's response to the disjunctive dilemma with which he was presented was *sui generis*, which is to be expected given the *sui generis* nature of every instance of political disjunction. However, Heath relied on some tried and tested means of resolving crises and there are, therefore, parallels between the strategies and tactics he used, and those used by other disjunctive leaders before and since. These included: the discursive articulation of crisis conditions, so as to reduce expectations surrounding his government; attempting to achieve otherwise incompatible policy objectives by valorising governing technique; and, adopting a highly pragmatic policy stance, which accounts for his government's reputation as a frantically U-turning administration, even if Heath did start out with a coherent policy vision centred on winning EEC membership.

Crisis narratives and expectation management in Heath's political discourse

The ontological status of crises, as Hay and Smith (2016) have argued, is equivocal. Although it is possible to formulate objective measures of crises, perhaps referring to key economic indicators such as gross domestic product growth and rates of unemployment and inflation, or public opinion polling exploring 'anti-political' sentiment, the crucial fact is that crises are always discursively mediated or even constructed. Similarly, Jessop (2002) has noted in his analysis of the collapse of Keynesian welfarism and the emergence of the Schumpeterian competition state that the ultimate consequences of crisis tendencies appearing within a particular political regime are determined by whether they are discursively articulated as a crisis *within* or *of* that regime.

For this reason political leaders naturally attempt to promulgate an understanding of the present that best serves their own interests and/or accords with their pre-existing worldview. Disjunctive leaders in particular commonly display a tendency to discursively articulate a crisis *within* the existing political regime, partly as a way of explaining political disjunction, but also as a way of handling the central disjunctive dilemma that necessarily demands most of their attention. The 'impossible leadership situation' of being affiliated to and therefore having to defend a failing political regime can be made less onerous if this framing becomes the dominant framing of the present, because it provides a ready-made excuse for any policy failures that happen in government (which are inevitable in disjunctive periods) and affords the government scope for 'exceptional measures'.

Although the crisis narrative in Heathite discourse was multi-faceted, at its core was an image of an economic malaise which, in the early years, was discursively articulated as part of the outgoing Labour government's legacy, stemming as it did from tax rises and the devaluation of sterling. This passage from Heath's speech to the 1970 Conservative Party conference sketches its broad outlines:

We have found in government, as I warned the country we would, that at every turn we find limitations — limitations imposed on the nation in part by past

events and in part by the failures of our predecessors: limitations of the economy, of heavy international indebtedness, of enormous and increasing public expenditure, of a high and damaging level of taxation: limitations of outmoded industrial relations and increasing losses through strikes: limitations of wildly excessive wage demands encouraged deliberately by the last Administration for its own political purposes: limitations of a stagnant economy and roaring inflation.

Later on, with Heath installed as Prime Minister and with the ready-made excuse of an outgoing Labour government no longer at hand, the focus shifted onto underlying reasons for Britain's long-term relative economic decline — mainly that other European countries and Japan had the 'opportunity' to redesign their industrial base from scratch after World War Two, and that Britain was outside the new engine of European economic growth that was the ECSC. This was framed as being particularly damaging due to the growing interconnectedness of countries and intensified global economic competition consequent upon the rise of major new economic powers such as West Germany, Japan and China. Then in the final few years of the Heath premiership, worsening international economic conditions beyond the government's control came to the fore. This included a recognition that the US was proving increasingly incapable of performing the role of global hegemon (which Heath recognised the destabilising potential of at least as early as mid-1971) and the disastrous inflationary consequences of the 1973 Oil Shock (Kavanagh, 1996). Heath used this image of a deteriorating world economy to dampen down expectations on his government and to buy time, plainly stating in the February 1974 Conservative Party manifesto that the new developments 'will make us poorer as a nation', but only until the panacea of North Sea Oil came on stream (Conservative Party, 1974).

However, the economy was just one facet of the crisis narrative running through Heathite discourse. Closely linked was a crisis centred round recalcitrant trade unions, with Heath making much of the fact that the outgoing Labour government had presided over an annual record of strikes in 1969 (which, as was mentioned above, was a dubious record the Heath government itself would go on to break), while other more distant facets of this crisis narrative included the threat to the territorial integrity of the UK in the form of Scottish nationalism and the growing Troubles in Northern Ireland, and an image of a breakdown of law and order, which Heath saw largely as a consequence of the profligate, over-extended and 'antiquated' Keynesian welfare state (Heath, 1968). These separate strands coalesced in Heathite discourse into an overarching crisis of governmental 'overload', referring to the fundamental inability of government to achieve even its most basic objectives of economic expansion and social peace due to the over-encumbrancing of the state by Labour governments and Conservative ones reacting to Labour's political advances, which badly undermined the Conservative Party's hard-earned reputation for governing competence (Kavanagh, 1987).

Analysis of Heath's speeches throughout this period using concordancing software serves to illustrate this point (Table 3). A comparison of two corpora — one containing all of Heath's speeches and election broadcasts as Prime Minister and the other all of his speeches and election broadcasts as Leader of the Opposition — revealed that keywords (and their synonyms) appearing much more frequently in the former when

compared to the latter included 'inflation', 'Ireland', 'oil', 'miners', 'world', 'Europe' and 'community', which reflects the various crises Heath encountered in government and his attempts to diffuse them either by articulating them as beyond the control of national governments or by advocating membership of the EEC. Conversely, 'Labour' and 'Mr Wilson' were keywords that appeared much less frequently in the former when compared to the latter, reflecting the fact that it became more difficult to blame the previous Wilson government for the crisis the further away from the 1970 general election Heath got.

'Less government, and of a better quality': Heath's valorisation of technique

The framing of crises by political leaders invariably also entails the discursive articulation of a *way out* of the crisis. For reconstructive leaders such as Attlee and Thatcher this can involve the repudiation of the existing political regime as a whole. For disjunctive leaders this is not an option, so another way out of the crisis needs to be found. In Heath's case this was provided in the first instance by a new approach to the administration of government, that painted him as a dynamic and modernising statesman closer in kind to a British Roosevelt or de Gaulle than any of the 'caretaker' Conservative Prime Ministers of the post-war period (Bogdanor, 1996: 387). In some of Heath's earlier speeches as Leader of the Opposition this took the form of an emphasis on the unique ability of the Conservatives to understand how to govern the 'free enterprise system' and Labour's inability to, due to not knowing what 'what makes it tick' (Heath, 1966).

Meanwhile, the need for a more conciliatory approach from all of the industrial partners was a key theme for Heath from the outset, but became increasingly important after he took over the reins of power, as Britain's economic and political malaise worsened. Heath urged the industrial partners to put aside partisan or sectional interests and act responsibly, and although there was a willingness evident early on during the Heath government to take 'tough decisions', this faded quickly. In particular, after the 1972 miners' strike Heath petitioned much more vociferously for 'a more sensible way to settle our differences' (Conservative Research Department, 1972) involving a great deal more consultation and cooperation between government, unions and employers, all of which was discursively framed in terms of the exigencies of a traditional 'One Nation' Conservatism. In broader perspective, this can be seen as part of a shift from 'mechanical' to 'moral' reform (Clarke, 1978) under Heath: faced with the failure of his top-down governing strategies to deliver the expected economic, political and social changes, Heath increasingly defaulted to attempts at fostering change through exhortations for all parties concerned to adopt the correct values and attitudes in the hope these might prove more effective.

The basic proposition Heath put to the electorate was that what was needed in order to lift Britain out of its ongoing malaise was a more competent, less doctrinaire government willing to decentralise power where needed. The following passage closing the 1970 Conservative manifesto is emblematic of this way of thinking, and also illustrates the ripple effects of crisis narratives (in this instance, the crisis of governmental overload) throughout Heathite discourse:

[The election] is a choice between another five years of the kind of incompetent, doctrinaire Government we have had for nearly six years and a new and better

style of Government. Faced with any problem, the instinctive Socialist reaction is to control, to restrict, and to tax. We aim to reduce the burden of taxation, and to extend individual choice, freedom and responsibility... government today is trying to do too much, managing too much, bringing too much to the centre for decision. We plan to clear away from Whitehall a great load of tasks which has accumulated under Socialism; to hand back responsibilities wherever we can to the individual, to the family, to private initiative, to the local authority, to the people.

Heath's presentation of himself as a 'somersaulting moderniser' (Hennessy, 2000: 331) also led to a number of significant machinery of government changes. Far from being public relations gimmicks, these were rooted in a period of serious policy development while in opposition, and not only was the 1970 Conservative Party manifesto the most detailed one ever up until that point, there was also almost complete continuity of Cabinet portfolios between opposition and government, making the incoming Heath government perhaps the best prepared of any since the end of the Second World War (Hennessy, 2000: 336). Heath's Whitehall priorities upon entering government were three-fold: to rationalise the departmental structure of government, creating a system of larger, 'federal' departments; to minimise the number of 'lowest common denominator' compromises between departments, which he thought undermined the government's strategic vision; and, to make the civil service more dynamic and efficient (Theakston, 1996: 77). Unlike some of the Thatcherites making up the next Conservative government, Heath did not view the civil service as an enemy, seeing it instead as a crucial component of his programme for a modernised governmental structure and an instrument of his technocratic will. Nevertheless, his reforms to the civil service proved in the event to be rather modest. However, he achieved the first of these objectives by creating the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Environment, and the second by creating the aforementioned CPRS and Programme Analysis and Review (PAR).

The thinking behind Heath's machinery of government reorganisation was that it would eliminate unnecessary duplication across departments (and so economise on the cost of government), make it easier to develop effective strategies for implementing policies that had previously cut across several different departments, and help resolve policy conflicts within a single unified line of management (Theakston, 1996: 91). Heath's approach to Cabinet has been described as 'the traditional collective approach, but a sharpened version' on the basis of his reforms to the Cabinet committee system and others such as the CPRS (Hennessy, 2000: 337). He was diligent when it came to consulting Cabinet colleagues on issues of importance, even in fast-moving circumstances, but in the words of William Waldegrave (cited in Hennessy, 2000: 344) he intended the Cabinet to be 'a rational process for policy formation and analysis,' and hoped that it would 'fulfil its textbook role as a hierarchy of rational decision' so that some of the seemingly intractable problems facing government could be rationally solved.

The purpose of the CPRS was to deal with the long-standing lack of strategic thinking within government and the Cabinet's preoccupation with 'day-to-day' matters. To this end, it provided policy advice from an 'outsider' perspective (Blackstone and Plowden, 1988). Collective briefs produced by the CPRS were designed to offer ministers a

'synoptic digest' of the most pressing issues facing the government, pointing out drawbacks or weak spots in solutions arrived at using the traditional Whitehall machinery. Other policy reports focused on long-term, cross-cutting problems likely to affect the government's ability to implement its policy vision, presenting ministers with studiously non-partisan and sometimes unwelcome takes on crucially important but 'slow-burning' issues such as Concorde, the emergence of information and communications technologies, London's future as a hub for international finance and energy policy (Blackstone and Plowden, 1988: 221). There is evidence that the CPRS performed a useful strategic function for the government, advising against certain ill-fated decisions and anticipating some of the major new governing challenges arising in the Heath years and after. For example, it advised against the 1972 bailout of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders on the grounds that to do so in the absence of significant improvements in managerial practice would badly undermine the government's industrial strategy, and it successfully anticipated a major rise in oil prices and the chaos that would inevitably ensue for the economy and the public finances. It also advised Heath against the course of action he pursued in relation to the 1974 miners' strike, arguing that the events in the Middle East made it legitimate for the government to grant a higher pay award than its incomes policy technically allowed (Campbell, 1993: 324). However, the actual influence of the CPRS was tempered by a combination of a lack of resources, Whitehall recalcitrance and Heath's own unwillingness to heed the advice of the body he created.

PAR, meanwhile, can be seen as a complement to the CPRS in that its purpose was to help tackle the problem of governmental overload and to bring public spending down by identifying and eliminating unnecessary governmental functions (Theakston, 1996: 92). But it failed to have a noticeable impact due a combination of Treasury and civil service suspicion and the effects of the short-lived 'Barber Boom' of 1972-3, which in taking fiscal policy in a radically expansionary new direction undermined PAR's entire rationale (Campbell, 1993: 316).

Rearranging deckchairs: Policy experimentation under Heath

Edward Heath's reputation as the 'undisputed king of the U-turn' (Bale, 2011) is undoubtedly partly due to the Thatcherites' self-serving rhetoric on the postwar consensus designed to bolster the narrative of a drastic post-1979 caesura in British politics, at which point the flaws of the Keynesian welfarist political regime Heath had signed-up to had been laid bare and a new 'free market' regime was instituted (Hay, 2010). However, the policy record of the Heath government illustrates that such portrayals of governmental disarray were far from unfounded. What is significant about the series of U-turns performed by the Heath government, for present purposes, is that they were a response to the disjunctive dilemma it faced.

It is fair to say that upon becoming Prime Minister, Heath did have a coherent policy vision. The machinery of government changes sketched above were a crucial part of this, because — it was argued — they would reduce the cost of government and, more importantly, help deal with the problem of governmental overload, but more important still was Britain's entry into the EEC. Heath saw EEC entry, combined with some proto-Thatcherite reforms to industrial relations, taxation and social policy, as a way not only of resolving Britain's increasingly dire economic problems, but also of finding Britain a new role in the world after empire. In economic terms, the main benefit of EEC

membership would be to expose British industry to intensified competition — providing it with the incentive to modernise — and to facilitate that modernisation by means of technological cooperation through EU institutions and the opening-up of European markets, which would enable greater economies of scale for British firms (Young, 1996: 259).

In terms of Britain's place in the world, Heath was an advocate of EEC entry not just because of a deep-seated Europhilia on his part, rooted in his time spent on the continent prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, or his desire to avoid a repeat of the latter, but primarily because of the utility of EEC membership for the British national interest (Young, 1996: 259). Heath thought of post-war and post-empire Britain as a 'middle power' (Heath, 1973), but one that could continue to play an important role in a world of superpower rivalry through the EEC, partly because an economically resurgent UK would strengthen old ties to the Commonwealth and cement the Atlantic alliance, but also because of incipient moves towards a common European foreign and defence policy.

However, EEC membership failed to produce any of the intended benefits, at least in the short term. For the first several years of membership, higher food prices under the CAP, the hit to the public finances because of the loss of earnings from external tariffs, and the failure of British industry to adapt quickly to intensified competition from Europe — not to mention a major downturn in the world economy after 1973 — meant that Europe failed to alleviate any of Heath's most pressing domestic problems (Young, 1996: 281). It is in this context that Heath's policy experimentation, and all that entailed in terms of contradicting many of his earlier public pronouncements and much of what was in the 1970 Conservative Party manifesto, has to be considered.

Heath performed a series of major U-turns in response to events. Firstly, the 'lame ducks' of Rolls-Royce and Upper Clyde Shipbuilders were rescued despite Heath warning at the 1970 Conservative Party conference that:

If [private sector firms] go their own way and accede to irresponsible wage demands which damage their own firms and create a loss of jobs for those who work in them, then the Government are certainly not going to step in and rescue them from the consequences of their own actions.

Secondly, Heath reversed his earlier objections to state-directed economic planning and regional development with the creation in March 1972 of the Industrial Development Executive and the 1972 Industry Act. Thirdly, he abandoned his initial 'hands-off' approach to industrial relations by adopting a policy of tripartism following defeat at the hands of the striking miners in 1972. Fourthly, his government adopted a statutory prices and incomes policy following the failure of tripartism — this was perhaps the starkest of all the U-turns, with the 1970 Conservative manifesto stating that 'Labour's compulsory wage control was a failure and we will not repeat it.' Then, fifthly, the Heath government U-turned on its stated intention to reduce public expenditure with the 'Barber Boom' (which fell victim to another U-turn in late 1973) (Ball, 1996: 328).

The most important consequence of the series of U-turns — which stood in such stark contrast to Heath's approach to opposition, characterised by careful thought and

meticulous planning — was that it put paid to any semblance of a coherent policy vision undergirding the Heath government. However, what neither it nor Heath's Europe policy did was turn Heath into an opponent of the existing political regime. Heath's overriding objectives were always full employment and social peace, and although he had ambitious designs in Europe and was willing to U-turn when under pressure, he never went beyond being an advocate of a 'better consensus' (Hennessy, 2000: 336). After the miners rejected the November 1973 pay offer Heath began to articulate the scale of the difficulties facing the nation, with the Conservatives' February 1974 manifesto describing the situation as the gravest crisis since the war. Sacrifices would be needed and no party could be expected to deliver improved standards of living (Conservative Research Department, 1974), but despite such foreboding, Heath never endorsed 'third order' change — that is, while he did countenance significant change in terms of policy instruments, he at no point indicated that he thought the prevailing policy paradigm had become obsolete (Hall, 1993).

Evaluating Heath's prime ministerial performance

If we are to assess Heath's performance as a disjunctive leader it is important to not only evaluate the state of the political regime as Heath left it in 1974, but also to look beyond the electoral horizon to which statecraft assessments are typically fixed and also consider the medium and long-term implications of Heath's actions for the regime, identifying the path dependent processes he set in motion and which his successors, both disjunctive and reconstructive, would be forced to contend with.

One key lesson of the Heath premiership is clearly that appeals to governing technique as a way out of crises can only get political leaders so far, and in some instances can be actively counter-productive. Heath's technocratic approach to government not only invited ridicule (for example, in the form of *Private Eye's* regular 'HeathCo' series, depicting Heath as a grumpy managing director of a small firm prone to management-speak) (Sandbrook, 2011), it also drew the ire of major intra-party rivals such as Powell (Hennessy, 2000: 349), and singularly failed to solve any of the major governing challenges of the time. Although the CPRS, with its remit to 'think the unthinkable' did identify some of the threats to the regime, it proved rather better at scaring ministers than promoting policies capable of effecting meaningful change (Davis, 2007: 127), and straightforward appeals for key interests to act responsibly in a context of major economic and political upheaval amounted to little more than wishful thinking.

Meanwhile, poor self-promotion and lack of political capital with the party and the media cost Heath particularly dearly because of the character of his U-turns and his poor management of expectations. Where Heath's U-turns are concerned, it is easy to overlook that in several cases resistance to changing course was anticipated at the time to have the potential to destabilise the regime even further. For example, the bailout of UCS had followed warnings from the Chief Constable of Glasgow that he could not guarantee public order in the event of closure of the yards, and capitulation to the miners in 1972 had come after the West Midlands police had feared serious injuries or even deaths with the mass picketing at Saltley Gate. Doubtless, these reversals would have been difficult to sell to his party and the public in any circumstance, but they were made considerably more so because Heath had so clearly and trenchantly set out his

positions before reversing course completely. A more successful disjunctive leader would have been more guarded in the commitments he made and the expectations he encouraged.

A successful disjunctive leader also frustrates reconstructive appeals emerging within their own or other parties. Here, Heath's record was mixed. It should be noted first of all that, despite the difficulties encountered by his government, many shared his understanding of this as a crisis within, rather than of the regime. Neo-corporatism, incomes policies and Keynesian demand management continued to have their adherents after February 1974. Indeed, on their return to government the leadership of the Labour Party made its own attempt to stabilise and rehabilitate the regime despite the misgivings of the left of the party. When necessary, Heath could be adept at anticipating and by-passing opposition. For example, opposition to the 1972 Industry Act was forestalled by preparing it in secret and then dismissing the DTI's free-market junior ministers. As noted above, reconstructive ideas did gain some ground in the Conservative Party. But, despite the efforts of Powell, the IEA, and some intra-party groups (Grant, 2010: 135) this diagnosis did not gain a breakthrough before the Conservatives left office. Reconstructive ideas were not voiced in Heath's Cabinet. Although Heath was a dominant prime minister the silence of Thatcher and Joseph in this respect owed more to their own agency than to Heath's. Many backbench neo-liberals also chose not to publicly mobilise against Heath's U-turns. For example, many persuaded themselves that the introduction of an incomes policy would be 'a breathing space, during which the money supply could be dealt with, to be succeeded by a return to "the market"' (Dorey, 1995: 80).

Heath's actions in office, however, ultimately undermined support for the regime in the Conservative Party. The circumstances in which the Heath government fell validated those who had expressed misgivings about incomes policies and neo-corporatism and encouraged reassessment amongst those who had not. Skowronek notes that disjunctive leaders tend to become 'the foils for reconstructive leadership, the indispensable premise upon which traditional regime opponents generate the authority to repudiate the establishment wholesale.' This was to be Heath's fate. As Cowley and Bailey (2000) have shown, ideological hostility to Heath's position played a significant role in the outcome of the party's 1975 leadership election. Although Thatcher was circumspect in her promotion of reconstructive politics while Leader of the Opposition, the way was open to construct a narrative in which the failures of office were traced back to Heath's 'betrayal' of the Selsdon manifesto and used to mobilise support for the anti-statist, free-market reconstructive politics pursued by his successor (see, for example, Kerr, 2005).

Having come to power and encountered a regime manifesting increasing signs of enervation, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, in February 1974, Heath left a regime that had been further destabilised. As we saw above, even Heath himself acknowledged the bleak prospects the nation faced in early 1974. As Jeffreys (2002) notes the atmosphere of crisis anticipated by many was absent during both the three-day week and the February 1974 election. Nevertheless, the nation's mood had clearly shifted since 1970. The belief that Britain was drifting toward ungovernability that had emerged in the late 1960s had gained further ground by the end of Heath's premiership. Under the headline 'Is everybody going mad?' one national newspaper detected 'the

anxious feeling that this country is drifting — and drifting fast — towards national breakdown. And that nobody is doing a blind bit about it. Except to make it worse' (*Daily Mirror*, 1973).

Popular attitudes and political behaviour confirm this sense of malaise. For example, opinion polling conducted for the Royal Commission on the Constitution revealed that 49 per cent of those questioned felt that the British political system needed major improvements (Royal Commission on the Constitution, 1973: 14). As noted above, faith in both the established political parties collapsed in February 1974, to the electoral benefit of the Liberals and the nationalist parties. Furthermore, Heath's mounting fears about the threat of subversion (Aldrich and Cormac, 2016) came to be shared more widely. 'Patriotic' vigilante groups like 'Unison Committee for Action' and 'Great Britain 75' formed in the later stages of the Heath Government to maintain civil order (see, BBC, 2012; Bloom, 2010: 383). Some even entertained the possibility that the nation's trajectory would eventually deliver it into the hands of military (see, Cosgrave, 1973). However, significant as this burgeoning sense of crisis was, we must also consider the status of specific regime vulnerabilities. Heath was closely involved in developing responses in virtually all of these areas and it is here that a more complex picture of Heath's performance emerges.

In the economic sphere, Heath left the nation in recession with inflation, borrowing, the money supply and public expenditure all at higher levels than he inherited. Only unemployment remained (by later standards) low. Many of the government's economic difficulties originated in a structural crisis in the wider international economy. As Hall records, Heath's premiership coincided with the beginning of the end of the Keynesian era in which such 'policies proved increasingly inadequate to the economic challenges facing the nation and more productive of political problems than solutions' (Hall, 1986: 93–4). However, even allowing for these constraints, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Heath's actions frequently exacerbated these problems. For example, the relaxation of monetary policy during Heath's 'dash for growth' saw lending funnelled into property speculation. When this property bubble burst at the end of 1973 it in turn triggered a crisis in the secondary banking sector, leading to Britain's first bank crisis since 1866. Such developments also drew attention to an increasing number of cases, including Vehicle and General and Lonrho, where rapacious members of the political and economic elite were seen to have mismanaged their businesses (see Clarke, 1981). Having argued that business should be 'free and enterprising', Heath was then forced to appeal to business to present its more acceptable face. If anything, Heath was fortunate to escape some of the economic consequences of his actions. His successors were often not so lucky. For example, the threshold clause in Stage III of Heath's incomes policy contributed to further substantial wage inflation in the first year of the Wilson government. Similarly, the decision to float the pound initially delivered an 'Indian Summer' (Hirowatari, 2015: 77). However, a floating rate regime diminished the capacity of the Treasury to defend sterling and enhanced the power of market sentiment, as Denis Healey was to discover during the 1976 IMF crisis.

EEC membership has been seen by some as Heath's greatest achievement in a noticeably narrow field (Hurd, 1980: 64; Ziegler, 2010), although the 2016 referendum result must now qualify even that assessment. Heath cannot be blamed for the subsequent trajectory of integration that led to Britain's departure. However, he bears

some responsibility for helping entrench the British political elite's preference for assuming, rather than testing, the existence of a pro-integration 'permissive consensus' among the public. It is certainly the case that the EEC was a source of dissatisfaction with Heath. In the February 1974 British Election Study, 53.9 per cent of respondents were sorry that Britain had joined the EEC and only 11.5 per cent endorsed staying in on the terms which Heath had negotiated.

Yet, as we noted above, Heath regarded EEC membership as essential to modernisation of the British economy and the resilience of the regime. Arguably, he secured the former prize, but not speedily enough to bolster the latter. As the 1971 White Paper acknowledged, 'entry would not, of course, of itself bring about some automatic improvement in our performance' (HMSO, 1971: 12). Having only been a member for a year, and with transitional arrangements that would not expire until the end of 1977, membership could scarcely be expected to have had any significant impact, benign or malign, on the regime by February 1974. Nevertheless, recent studies have suggested that EEC membership did have a positive economic impact and laid the basis for improvements in Britain's relative economic performance. One study has calculated that by 1978 membership had generated a 4.8 per cent increase in GDP per capita (Campos et al, 2014: 36). However, such benefits were not of an order that could prevent the dysfunctions of the regime from economic collapse under Heath's successors. Rather, the principal beneficiary proved to be Heath's reconstructive successor since, 'without EU membership, Mrs Thatcher's reforms would have been much less effective' (Campos and Coricelli, 2017: 69).

Heath's responses to the territorial vulnerabilities of the regime also defy a simplistic assessment. Heath inherited a deteriorating situation in Northern Ireland that was exacerbated by the introduction of internment. Soon, the government was literally staring into the abyss. As the minutes of a meeting held at Downing Street days after Bloody Sunday record, 'there seemed to be a real possibility of a major Civil War, affecting both North and South' (CAB/9/R/238/7). In the context of this crisis, a number of regime-changing options were actively considered. In April 1971 Heath and his senior civil servants had considered withdrawal from Northern Ireland, 'in effect leaving Northern Ireland to work out its own destiny either in independence or in fusion with the rest of Ireland' (National Archives, PREM 15/611). Alec Douglas-Home proposed that the government should 'start to push' the Unionist community towards reunification (Theakston, 2010: 172). The Cabinet contemplated repartition of the border. However, the Heath government instead used the introduction of direct rule to buy time. This breathing space was then used to negotiate a deal to establish a power-sharing administration in Belfast and recognise the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic. As Bulpitt (2008) argues, this was an attempt to re-establish the old regime of the 'dual polity' by broadening the local elites in government at Stormont.

That the 1998 Good Friday Agreement was recognised as 'Sunningdale for slow learners' shows that Heath's general approach was a reasonable one. Yet if Heath was in possession of a workable solution he was a prime minister, once again, at the wrong point in political time. Much attention has focused on Heath's pressure on Faulkner to accept a Council of Ireland, withdrawing Whitelaw to Westminster, and the decision to call an early election. But the fundamental obstacle to the prospects of Sunningdale was

one that Heath could do little to address. As Hennessey (2015) recognises, it was the Republicans' refusal to accept the principle of consent and their commitment to the armed struggle that stymied the prospects of a stable settlement for the next two decades. The more immediate cost for Heath of Sunningdale was a further fragmentation in the coalition supporting the regime. Anti-Sunningdale Unionists won all but one of the Northern Irish seats in February 1974 and refused the Conservative whip. Had Heath been able to rely on their support, the Conservatives would have constituted the largest party in the new Parliament.

If Heath's agency in Northern Ireland served to buy time for the established territorial regime, he was less successful elsewhere in the Celtic periphery. Bulpitt notes how, Northern Ireland aside, peripheral nationalism presented little threat while Heath was in office. The SNP had advanced at the 1970 election, winning its first parliamentary seat outside a by-election. However, its performance fell below the expectations that had been generated at the time of the Hamilton by-election. This perceived SNP under-performance, combined with the evident lack of enthusiasm within the Conservative Party (Mitchell: 1990) had allowed Heath to ignore proposals for Scottish devolution. However, Heath's inability to stabilise vulnerabilities elsewhere in the regime served to promote Scottish nationalism. In particular, in a context where North Sea oil was to play a greater role in the UK's economic fortunes, the SNP were delivered a potent basis for electoral mobilisation. They exploited this in February 1974 by gaining six seats followed by further gains in October, leaving the union less resilient than when Heath had taken office.

Yet within this overall picture it is easy to overlook that Heath managed with credibility some sources of regime vulnerability. This, we would argue, is the case with immigration. It was 'a period in which anti-immigration sentiment reached near-hysterical levels, and the government faced restrictionist pressure more intense than that faced by any British Prime Minister, before or since' (Hansen, 2000: 179). Yet, unlike some of his disjunctive counterparts, Heath never adopted the policies recommended to him by his populist critics. Similarly, where other disjunctive leaders have brought the same populist critics into government, there was to be no way back for Powell under Heath once he had been cast into the wilderness. Although the 1971 Immigration Act tightened immigration controls, Heath succeeded in maintaining the bi-partisan operational code that had underpinned policy in this area (Bulpitt, 1986). He maintained the consensus that such controls on immigration must be accompanied by efforts to reduce racism and deprivation. Finally, Heath eschewed the temptations of playing the race card for electoral advantage. In particular, he ensured that Britain fulfilled its moral obligations to British passport holders expelled from Uganda, and the boost which the far-right gained in the aftermath of the crisis was small and temporary.

In the end, Heath's attempts to resolve the disjunctive dilemma of 1970s Britain failed. Fundamentally, this was a result of the 'impossible leadership situation' — being an affiliate of an exceptionally vulnerable political regime. However, political leaders enjoy considerable scope for agency and action, even in periods of disjunction. The preceding analysis has highlighted some of the ways in which Heath mishandled the disjunctive dilemma, but Heath did also enjoy some successes in managing the regime he inherited. Some of his decisions had benefits his successors were able to reap, and Heath was also able to identify solutions that would prosper in better political times. Furthermore,

although he left a regime substantially weakened in many respects, it was Callaghan who was to have the misfortune of governing when, as it were, the music stopped and the political regime of Keynesian welfarism reached its highest degree of entropy.

Table 1. Skowronek's typology of leaders, regimes and patterns of politics

	Affiliated leader	Opposed leader
Resilient regime	Articulation	Pre-emption
Vulnerable regime	Disjunction	Reconstruction

Table 2: Heath's attitude towards the regime, 1965-70

Governing Strategy	Values	Policy Goals	Policy Means
Return to honesty, courage and integrity in political leadership	Competition	Greater prosperity, resting upon a high wage, low cost economy; Increased productivity; control of inflation	Removal of restrictive practices; trade union reform; improvement of quality of management; redeployment and retraining; reduction of tariffs where industries are inefficient; access to larger market and sectoral cooperation provided by EEC
Modernisation	Enterprise	Promotion of incentives	Reduction of individual and corporate taxation
Harnessing academic, business and scientific expertise in government	Individualism	Wider ownership	Measures to assist home ownership including council house sales, capital grants for first time buyers; promotion of occupational pensions
	Efficiency	Reduction of waste in public sector	Administrative reform of Whitehall; systems analysis; value engineering; critical path control
'One Nation'	Opportunity	End to hardship and poverty	Improve social services by directing resources to those most in need
	Equality	Racial harmony; prevention of discrimination against ethnic minorities	Control of Commonwealth immigration; additional funding for areas where civic infrastructure is under pressure due to immigration
	Nationalism	Preservation of Union; protection of British interests overseas, particularly against instability	Scottish devolution; support for reformists at Stormont; maintenance of UK defence commitments East of Suez as part of five-power force.

Table 3: Twenty most frequent word-stems in Heath speeches, by period

<i>Leader of the opposition</i>		<i>Prime Minister</i>	
<i>Word</i>	<i>Weighted %</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Weighted %</i>
government	1.50	government	1.04
people	0.74	people	0.78
now	0.62	now	0.69
country	0.60	Community	0.55
Labour	0.58	one	0.55
Britain	0.56	country	0.54
must	0.54	new	0.53
party	0.48	time	0.46
one	0.48	must	0.45
new	0.45	world	0.45
time	0.42	Britain	0.42
want	0.41	years	0.41
years	0.40	Europe	0.38
Conservative	0.40	last	0.38
well	0.38	prices	0.36
make	0.36	believe	0.36
British	0.35	British	0.34
last	0.35	policy	0.34
believe	0.33	way	0.34
policy	0.32	many	0.34

Note: Data generated in Nvivo using a word stop-list.

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