

Britain's conservative majority

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP

December 2004

THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Hawkstone Hall
1a Kennington Road
London SE1 7QP

0207 620 1120 (t)

www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk

THE CSJ ADVISORY COUNCIL

Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart
Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP (Chairman)
Mark Florman
Rt Hon William Hague MP
Robert H Halfon
Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP
David Willetts MP

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this paper are the views of the individual author. The CSJ does not present corporate opinions in its publications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Iain Duncan Smith would like to acknowledge the help of John Hayes MP, Charlotte Leslie, Tim Montgomerie and Cameron Watt in the preparation of this paper.

Britain's conservative majority - summary

In the wake of the re-election of George W Bush many British commentators have tended to demonise, rather than attempt to understand, the 'values voters' that were a decisive influence on America's election result. This inclination to caricature has been a particular problem when faith-inspired voters are discussed.

Another tendency within the commentariat has been the suggestion that the values voter is another example of US exceptionalism. In fact values issues, albeit with less of a religious flavour, helped re-elect the world's other most successful conservative – Australia's John Howard.

Some specific issues may have litmus test status for a minority of 'values voters' but most will be motivated by a desire to support a political party that radiates genuine commitment to their values.

Voters motivated by specific moral issues may not become a dominant force in British politics but they have the potential to provide winning margins in tightly fought contests and, because of their disproportionate enthusiasm, might help to revive grassroots political activism.

Commitments to the protection of children, a fair deal for the poor and moderate social conservatism are the main characteristics of Britain's 'values voters'. They have the instinctive wisdom to know that social injustice is caused by experimentation with drugs, abandonment of family structure and weakness in the face of crime.

A belief in fairness – that quintessentially British virtue – is, perhaps, the core characteristic of this country's conservative majority. The British people's sense of fair play embodies a fairness to both people in need of help and fairness to those expected to provide that help.

The socially conservative values of Labour's working class will cause that party's electoral coalition to fracture in the years ahead if its metropolitan leadership continues to advance positions that offend them. Tony Blair has dazzled Britain's conservative majority with his combination of 'conservative rhetoric' and 'metropolitan action' but that deception is being exposed and it is a trick that will not outlast him.

Conservative policies to confront drug addiction, educational choice (reflecting parental values and expectations of discipline) and decent pension provision are clear signals of a potential convergence of Conservative politics

and Britain's small 'c' conservative majority.

Overall, Britain's conservative majority:

- is most committed to the protection of children;
- is as committed to social justice issues – as to personal responsibility issues;
- understands that social justice needs social conservatism;
- holds moderate views on the most controversial issues of our time;
- isn't dependent on American rates of churchgoing;
- is spread across all of the political parties;
- looks more kindly on certain issues when they are given moral purpose;
- increasingly interprets whole political platforms through values systems;
- could re-energise the political system;
- has been sustained despite the lack of a communications infrastructure.

Britain's conservative majority - context

Metropolitan propaganda versus Britain's conservative majority

Most of the British establishment did not want George W Bush to be re-elected earlier this month. His victory was greeted with an equal measure of dismay and disbelief. The Guardian's G2 section chose a funereal black front cover to illustrate the dismay of the liberal-left. The Daily Mirror's "How can 59,054,087 people be so dumb?" headline revealed its disbelief¹.

The dismay and disbelief grew when it became apparent that President Bush's re-election owed much to the fact that "moral issues" were the top concern of a fifth of voters. To be fair to British liberals much of the American commentariat have also reacted with an outpouring of extraordinary vitriol. The New York Times' left-leaning columnist Maureen Dowd accused George W Bush of leading America into "another dark age" and promoting "a jihad in America so that he can fight one in Iraq". Professor Garry Wills, a regular contributor to the New York Review of Books, compared the "fundamentalist zeal", "rage" and "hatred for modernity" of America's evangelicals with al-Qaeda. America is more like the theocracies of the Middle East than Western Europe, Wills concluded. Perhaps Dowd and Wills were taking a lead from Al Gore. The former Vice President, who was once known as a champion of moderate opinion within the Democratic Party, compared George W Bush's Christianity to the "fundamentalist impulse that we see in Saudi Arabia, in Kashmir, and in all religions around the world."

Taking a cue from their friends in New York, Britain's commentariat – generally unsupportive of pre-emptive strikes against murderous dictators – have launched a pre-emptive attack on Britain's churchgoers. In the commentariat's propaganda there is the clear proposition that any moral views are religious. Religious people are then smeared as "irrational", "alien" and "bigoted". And thirdly by force of logic there is a warning that any 'pandering' to such voters would be "political suicide" for any British political party.

Britain's metropolitan commentariat and Britain's faith communities

During l'affaire Buttiglione the usually generous Matthew Parris declared²: "I say: enough of tolerance. I do not tolerate religious superstition, not when it refuses to tolerate me. Sweep it from the corridors of power." Tom Baldwin writing in the

¹ The Daily Mirror will be shocked to know that the number of George W Bush voters has now grown to more than 61.1 million.

² 23rd October 2004.

same newspaper a couple of weeks later³ warned that discussion of issues should not be “polluted by religion” – nor by “lobbying from ‘faith groups’”. He was proud of Britain for its tolerance of people “taking drugs, having gay sex and abortions,” but would his no-Christian lobbying ideal prevent a Government Minister discussing homeless policy with the Mother’s Union?

In an article for *The Guardian*⁴, Jackie Ashley rightly pointed to the moral importance of environmental conservation and international development but she couldn’t resist worrying about a “contagion” effect from American religiosity. “Nothing scares me as much as religious fundamentalism and the irrationality it brings,” she concluded. This theme of religious people being irrational comes up again and again. Justin Webb, the BBC’s Washington correspondent, delivering a ‘From Our Own Correspondent’ pre-election sermon for Radio 4 listeners stated: “In politics when the facts change, you are free to change your view, change your strategy, if necessary. In matters of faith, when the facts change you are comforted by the knowledge that the rational world need not touch the engine that drives you forward.” *The New Statesman* suggested that “the Americans who voted for George W Bush” were “as alien as the followers of Iranian ayatollahs”⁵.

The Chief Professor of *The Secular Priesthood* is Richard Dawkins. Four days after the September 11th tragedy he used a column in *The Guardian* to say that a world filled “with religion, or religions of the Abrahamic kind, is like littering the streets with loaded guns.” Polly Toynbee decided that America’s ‘values voters’ stood for “bigotry, fear and prejudice” and any British politician who pursued their interests would face “certain political death”.

Some of this frenzied commentary can be explained by the commentators’ initial shock at the result of the US election, so certain were they that George W Bush would lose. Yet their continuing harsh commentary cannot be explained away by their initial surprise. A search for truth has given way to demonisation. It makes for colourful prose but doesn’t teach us anything – except, perhaps, about its authors. It may be that Britain’s secular elite has so little contact with people of faith or people with socially conservative views that they are genuinely scared of them. Fear of the unknown and a desperate desire to pull up the drawbridge against an unknown enemy drives their passion.

The labeling of people with orthodox religious views as right-wing is particularly silly. Within Britain, huge numbers of ‘heartland’ Labour voters

3 18th November 2004.

4 11th November 2004.

5 15th November 2004.

are socially conservative. Christian socialists like Professors A H Halsey and Bob Holman hold traditional views on the family and gambling. The old pre-cold war labels of right and left are used lazily by metropolitan commentators and are of little use in trying to understand values-motivated voters.

After reading so many of the metropolitan commentators I felt that a cooler and more rational look at the American result was required. This paper is an invitation to stand back from the language of 'culture wars' that has been so destructive on the other side of the Atlantic. It is an opportunity to take a closer and fairer look at the beliefs, temperament and political potential of what I call Britain's small 'c' conservative majority.

This paper attempts to answer two main questions:

- What happened in the American and Australian elections?
- Could British politics learn anything from those elections and could anything similar happen here?

George W Bush and John Howard both courted 'values voters'

To crudely import Bible Belt politics would not work in Britain. But we would be equally unwise to ignore the power of moral purpose in politics. George W Bush is not the only politician to have emphasised values in a recently successful re-election effort. Importantly, and almost unnoticed, a similar phenomenon took place in another English-speaking country.

John Howard, Australia's Prime Minister, is arguably the world's most successful serving politician and he's an authentic conservative. John Howard does not have Hollywood charisma or even, as I read recently, 'Hollywood hair'. This hasn't stopped Australian voters warming to their Prime Minister's gritty, straight-talking manner. He has successfully campaigned on issues that have motivated voters outside of his party's familiar constituencies. Because of Australia's parallels with Britain it's harder to dismiss lessons from 'down under' - in the way that American experience is rubbished. Australia's parliamentary system and its history make it particularly close to the British system. Once you strip away the differences in style there are a remarkable number of shared values.

One of John Howard's first acts as Prime Minister was to oppose the republican proposition in the 1999 referendum. Metropolitan voters gave strong support for severing Australian ties with the monarchy but many Labor

and poorer constituencies voted with John Howard and 'no' to change⁶. Prime Minister Howard also gave parliamentary time for the repeal of pro-euthanasia legislation passed in Australia's Northern Territory. He has expanded faith-based education so that Australia now has the second biggest proportion of religious schools in the world. This year his government introduced legislation to protect the common law definition of marriage – as essentially between a man and a woman. During his latest (and fourth) successful election campaign he promised an Aus\$1.1bn programme for stay-at-home mums. Compared to George W Bush there is much less religiosity to Howard's politics but his party is still conscious of religious voters. During the last election campaign Peter Costello, John Howard's finance minister, led an outreach programme to Christian voters. Costello told an audience of 16,000 worshippers at Sydney's Hillsong Evangelical Church that "we need a return to faith and the values which have made our country strong." John Howard's lead has begun to influence other parties. The Labor leader, Mark Latham, focused on father absence during the last campaign and the traditionalist Family First party won between 4% and 8% in the most recent elections to the Australian Senate. An analysis by former Labour Senator John Black and John Lockwood of the University of South Australia suggests that half of Family First's vote came from otherwise natural Labor voters⁷.

The strong values of John Howard and George W Bush are beginning to fracture their opponents' coalitions. In the USA the Catholic voters of Michigan and Ohio do not share the moral outlook of the Boston liberals that surrounded John Kerry. A fissure between much of the Democrats' Catholic working class base and its East and West Coast elites is opening up. In Australia, working class 'battlers' in Labor strongholds – people who couldn't afford the Labor opposition's tax, environmental and regulatory policies – swung to John Howard in disproportionate numbers. This caused Bill Shorten⁸ of the Australian Workers Union to attack the strategically disastrous preoccupations of what he dismissed as the Labor Party's metropolitan "latte" set. He wrote that John Howard understood "how many people will vote to support certain values even against their own economic interests."

Winning elections with Britain's 'values voters'

It is clear that John Howard's economic record and George W Bush's leadership of the war on terror were defining issues for both men. They both displayed the kind of moral courage and honesty that voters want in

6 For a full analysis of voting patterns in the referendum visit <http://www.samuelgriffith.org.au/papers/html/volume%2012/v12chap10.htm>

7 Their analysis was quoted by Glenn Milne in *The Australian* of 29th November 2004.

8 Quoted by Glenn Milne in *The Australian*, 22nd November 2004

their political leaders – particularly in these insecure times. ‘Values voters’ were undoubtedly part of their winning coalitions and Britain’s political parties would be unwise to ignore the concerns of this country’s ‘values voters’. I do not expect that they will become the biggest block of voters but they have the potential to be the difference between winning and losing. Not only could the number of ‘values voters’ account for the winning margin in close contests but, most significantly, they could also be the foot soldiers and fundraisers of future campaigns.

***National security, economic opportunity, social conservatism and social justice
- The four strands of Britain’s conservative majority***

The majority of the British people, particularly those who live beyond the metropolitan centres where the liberal elite meet, eat and sleep together, are small ‘c’ conservative. They are conservative in their attitude to national security, economic policy, moral outlook and in their compassion towards the least fortunate.

Intellectually and practically these four strands of conservatism are inseparable. For example, our long-term national security depends upon the promotion of prosperity and justice within developing nations. Britain’s prosperity depends upon the values of hard work, thrift and honesty that are taught in the home. An ability to afford to care for vulnerable people depends, in large part, upon the strength of the economy. Our civilisation – built on time-honoured moral foundations - needs to be defended from terrorist and other looming threats.

Tony Blair’s whole New Labour project has been based on an acceptance of the British people’s views on denationalisation, fiscal conservatism and national security. I do not intend this paper to discuss the extent to which he has – or has not - delivered on these issues but it is obvious that the New Labour coalition is beginning to fracture. Once Tony Blair worried about the decline of the two parent family but his government has increased the penalties that face married couples. Once he vowed to keep taxes down but the increases in council tax that his government has necessitated have most burdened poorest families and pensioners.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to focus on the other features of Britain’s conservative majority: social justice and social conservatism.

Social justice, social conservatism and Britain's conservative majority – ten features

Britain's conservative majority...

- is most committed to the protection of children;
- is as committed to social justice issues – as to personal responsibility issues;
- understands that social justice needs social conservatism;
- holds moderate views on the most controversial issues of our time;
- isn't dependent on American rates of churchgoing;
- is spread across all of the political parties;
- looks more kindly on certain issues when they are given moral purpose;
- increasingly interprets whole political platforms through values systems;
- could re-energise the political system;
- has been sustained despite the lack of a communications infrastructure.

(1) Britain's conservative majority... is most committed to the protection of children

93% believe in increased penalties for those that sell tobacco to children⁹.

77% support prosecution of parents who allow their children to drink excessively¹⁰.

70% think that sex education in schools should promote the concept of marriage¹¹.

68% think that young people carry out many street muggings because parents don't care enough about what their children get up to¹².

80% think it is sometimes necessary for parents to smack a naughty child¹³.

⁹ ICM for the BBC, 20-22 August 2004

¹⁰ ICM for the BBC, 20-22 August 2004

¹¹ ICM for The Guardian, February 2000

¹² ICM for a 'BBC Crimeday', 9th-12th September, 2002

¹³ Communicate Research for the Christian Institute, 27th-28th October 2004

82% believe that children under 18 should not be allowed to play fruit machines¹⁴.

65% think that many street muggings are carried out by young people because there is too much violence on TV¹⁵.

86% support government imposing tougher restrictions on sexual imagery on children's TV and in magazines targeted on the youth market¹⁶.

76% support the banning of junk food ads from children's TV¹⁷.

Central to the ethical code of Britain's conservative majority is the welfare of children. This was powerfully demonstrated by a poll carried out for the BBC by pollster ICM. The survey found the British people were often evenly split on whether government should try to restrict the choices of adults in such areas as smoking, drinking and the consumption of unhealthy foods. But the BBC's overall conclusion was that people were "strongly supportive of tough measures in relation to children"¹⁸. Other surveys have shown similar degrees of public protectiveness towards children – particularly on media standards and sex. The British people tend to respect the choices of consenting adults but they are unhappy about raising the sexual awareness of children at too early an age.

(2) Britain's conservative majority... is as committed to social justice issues – as to personal responsibility issues

32% of British people think that pensioners are society's most vulnerable group. 22% think children are the most vulnerable followed by the mentally ill (14%), people living in high crime areas (8%) and the homeless (6%)¹⁹.

International aid agencies – receiving £486m of voluntary income in 2001/02 – were Britain's most popular charities. Next came charities concerned with cancer (£442m), children (£255m), animal protection (£244m), general and social welfare (£192m), physical disabilities (£178m), religious/ international (£144m), chest and heart (£133m), and tenth blindness and visual impairment (£127m)²⁰.

14 NOP survey, 28th-30th November 2003

15 ICM for a 'BBC Crimeday', 9th-12th September, 2002

16 ICM for the BBC, 20-22 August 2004

17 ICM for the BBC, 20-22 August 2004.

18 Simon Blake, BBC Analysis and Research, 3rd September 2004

19 YouGov for The Centre for Social Justice, 7th-9th September 2004

20 Charity Trends, Charities Aid Foundation, June 2003

My visits across the country have led me to believe that British 'values voters' are at least as interested in social justice issues as they are interested in questions of personal morality. They are as likely to respond to a campaign on third world debt or homelessness as they are to one for family values. The British people want a government to be fair to them and their families but they also expect it to provide a fair deal for their neighbours.

An examination of the British people's patterns of charitable giving provides an important insight into their values. Top of people's list of priorities are the poorest people of the world and their third most important cause is the welfare of children.

The American 'values voter' is caricatured as being much uninterested in social justice issues. This cartoon image was always unfair and remains so. The Economist has acknowledged that American evangelicals are showing an increasing interest in a wide range of issues. In a special report on 'The triumph of the religious right'²¹ the periodical found that within all of America's religious groups substantial majorities agreed that the disadvantaged need government help "to obtain their rightful place in America." The Economist continued: "All favour increasing anti-poverty programmes, even if it means higher taxes. All support stricter environmental regulation. Large majorities say that America should give a high priority to fighting HIV/AIDS abroad. Religious conservatives have been among the strongest backers of intervening in Sudan and increasing AIDS spending in poor countries. If the Bush administration wanted to, it could find plenty of religious support for increased welfare programmes, tougher environmental standards and more foreign aid."

George W Bush hasn't only championed the established interests of America's Bible Belt. He has also rejected the failed status quo on homelessness and drug addiction and he has led international opinion on human trafficking and HIV/AIDS. U2's Bono has acknowledged that some of America's most conservative congressmen are the most enthusiastic supporters of his campaigns on behalf of the world's poorest people.

When a CSJ/ Centre for Social Justice survey asked the British people who were the most vulnerable people in Britain both men and women across all age groups and regions consistently responded that pensioners, children and people with disabilities were society's most vulnerable people. Although 'gay people' was a survey option it was chosen by less than 1% of people. I don't believe that this can be interpreted as indicating homophobia, not least

21 13th November 2004 quoting research from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life – carried out from March to May 2004

because the likely number of homosexual respondents to the survey was much greater than the number identifying gay people as society's most vulnerable group. I believe that the average values voter despairs of the metropolitan elite's obsessions. What the YouGov survey for the CSJ reveals is that the British people want their political leaders to direct their energy towards the challenges facing the poor, the very old and those with severe disabilities.

(3) Britain's conservative majority... understands that social justice needs social conservatism

Most British people are more likely to trust their own judgment or the judgment of a local charity or church than government in the relief of poverty. If given £200 that had to be spent on a good cause 31% of people would give it directly to a person in need or to a local charity or a church working with needy people. Barely 1% would give the money to a government poverty-fighting programme²².

When asked what kind of family they would choose – in their absence - to adopt their children the overwhelming preference (87% to 13%) - across all regions, age groups and both genders - was for a values-rich family. 87% chose "Two parents who were never going to earn a great deal of money but, every month, they put a small amount aside for a rainy day; the father worked in a factory and the mother stayed at home with the children; they believed that your children should be brought up to avoid cigarettes, alcohol and any kind of sexual relationship until they were at least 17 or 18". Only 13% chose "Two parents who owned their own home and car; who always had enough money to buy your children the latest clothes and pay for interesting after-school activities; who were able to afford a nanny to look after the children when they had to go out and regularly work late or go on business trips; who thought that all children experiment with sex and drugs and that your children would go through that phase, too, and not much could be done about it". Young, richer Londoners were more likely to choose the wealthier family but not much more likely.

90% believe that drug addiction puts young people on a conveyor belt to crime and poverty²³.

The marriage of socially conservative views with a commitment to social justice is, perhaps, the most intellectually interesting characteristic of Britain's conservative majority and like all good marriages it is strongest when it comes to the welfare of children. It also shows that there is more wisdom in the

22 YouGov for The Centre for Social Justice, 7th-9th September 2004

23 YouGov for The Centre for Social Justice, 7th-9th September 2004

uncomplicated instincts of the British people than in the 'sophistication' of the ideas class.

Labour presents itself as the party of social justice but it does not, or will not, see the connection between social justice and social conservatism. Some Conservative politicians question the compatibility of market liberalism and social conservatism but it is the obligations, constraints and duties stimulated by a conservative culture that give a market economy its humanity. Without laws of contract a market economy couldn't function. Government regulation is particularly important to ensure that firms bear the cost of what economists call 'externalities' like environmental pollution. Those who believe in the market economy should re-read Adam Smith. Smith's writings assume strong ethical underpinnings to free enterprise and contain many warnings about monopolistic businesses conspiring against the public interest.

Private behaviour also creates 'externalities'. Taxpayers bear the cost of NHS care for people who have chosen to smoke all their lives. Similarly when a father walks away from his daughter and her mother the state has to pay for the extra welfare that that man's 'liberty' will invariably cause.

Britain's conservative majority understands that laissez-faire social policies often cause social injustice. The breakdown of a relationship or fallout with parents explains most homelessness. Children suffer most when families fracture²⁴ – something often pointed out to me by the leaders of poverty-fighting projects I have visited. Drug or alcohol abuse can cripple a student's education and put many young people onto the conveyor belt to crime. An inadequately regulated gambling industry will expose vulnerable people to debt. People suspect that a media industry obsessed with breaking taboos has contributed to the coarsening of everyday life. The CSJ's YouGov poll did not ask people about debt but they revealed their concern about record levels of borrowing in an open question within the survey. Huge numbers of respondents wrote that debt and a 'living for today' ethos was a main driver of poverty.

The same marriage of social conservatism with compassion is evident in the extraordinary diversity of the most successful poverty-fighters I have met as I have toured Britain. It is certainly true that they partly succeed because of their ability to deliver personal care in a way that one-size-fits-all government programmes never can. But they are also succeeding because of their values. I think of the volunteers supporting women facing crisis pregnancies or mentors helping chronic alcoholics dry out. I think of people who won't

²⁴ See Jill Kirby's 2002 paper for the Centre for Policy Studies – entitled 'Broken Hearts' – for a review of the effects of family fragmentation on children.

agree to surrender their neighbourhood's community to 'safe' experimentation with sex or drugs. A couple of months ago Michael Howard and I visited the Maxie Richards Foundation in Glasgow. Maxie is an inspirational campaigner against the prevailing harm reduction approach that dominates Scotland's drugs strategy. Because, for many years, Maxie has cared for drug addicts in her own home she has the experience and moral authority to expose the failure of that policy. She stands with the majority of the British people who hold conservative views on drugs – opposing the downgraded status of cannabis and overwhelmingly opposed to the decriminalisation of hard drugs²⁵. Michael and I found her to be a powerful ambassador for Britain's conservative majority on this subject.

The CSJ is putting together an 'Alliance' of these values-rich poverty-fighters. This 'Alliance' of 'compassion entrepreneurs' and many like them could transform Britain's values debate. Their work gives them a moral authority unmatched by The Liberator's Olympian commentators and the architects of expensive, ineffective government programmes. Architects that still unacceptably control the funding maze that Britain's successful charities have to navigate.

(4) Britain's conservative majority... holds moderate views on the most controversial issues of our times

68% either strongly support or tend to support a lowering of the 24-week limit for abortion as against 24% opposing²⁶.

91% say that if gay couples get new house sharing rights, then a daughter who has lived with her mother for 12 years or more should have the same rights²⁷.

84% say that if gay couples get new house sharing rights, then a two sisters who have lived together for 12 years or more should have the same rights²⁸.

Although, as we have observed, abortion and homosexuality are not the preoccupations of Britain's 'values voters', they are two issues that arouse most passion in moral debate. When they are discussed there is a tendency for a lot of heat and little light to be generated. Much of the responsibility for this lies, again, in the hands of the metropolitan elite. The Mets are attempting to hide their immoderate views – remember Tom Baldwin's "proud" tolerance of people "taking drugs" - behind a fog of attacks on

25 A YouGov survey for The Daily Telegraph of 26th January 2004.

26 This same YouGov survey found that 36% believed that abortion was murder. The moderate majority did, however, support more restrictive laws.

27 Communicate Research for the Christian Institute, 22nd-24th October 2004

28 Communicate Research for the Christian Institute, 22nd-24th October 2004

Britain's conservative majority. The caricatured conservative majority is dismissed as anti-women whenever it expresses concerns about abortion laws. It is homophobic or old-fashioned when it worries about what teachers might tell their children about underage sex. It is racist when it worries about rising levels of immigration. If you don't want abortion on demand, sex legalised for fourteen year-olds and open borders you're in trouble with the thunderous commentators recently described by David Blunkett as 'The Liberati'. Ironically 'The Liberati' has become the intolerant extremists in this debate. It is Britain's conservative majority that is the voice of moderation:

- Britain's conservative majority have seen the extraordinary images of mature fetuses – of the kind produced by Professor Stuart Campbell²⁹ – and they worry that recognisably human beings are being aborted in our nation's hospitals. Most don't want abortion outlawed but they are shocked by late-term abortions and most think it wrong that under sixteen year-old girls can have an abortion without their parents' knowledge. Two-thirds of 'young people' also think that there are too many abortions³⁰.
- They see the government willing to spend hundreds of millions of pounds on creating civil partnerships for homosexual couples. Whilst they appreciate the injustices that those partnerships are seeking to correct they wonder why siblings – perhaps committed to each other's care for many years - are denied the same inheritance and other rights contained in the bill?
- Britain's conservative majority are consistently ready to open their cheque books when it comes to international poverty relief but they do not believe that a small island like Britain can afford weak immigration and asylum policies.

We had a tragic-comic illustration of the determination of the metropolitan elite to ignore the British people's views at the turn of the year. BBC Radio 4 ran a listeners' poll to find a law that Stephen Pound, a Labour MP who had topped the list for private members' bills, had promised to champion. Unfortunately for Mr Pound a right to use "any means" to defend one's house from burglars was the first choice of listeners³¹. I suspect that many at the BBC were also horrified at the 'unsophisticated' views of their listeners. Mr Pound, one of Parliament's most clubbable members, reneged on his

29 According to a YouGov survey this made 10% of people more likely to oppose abortion – compared to just 1% of people who were less likely to oppose abortion as a result of these images.

30 A survey for Bliss magazine – 'young people' referring to people with an average age of 15 - quoted in The Daily Telegraph of 11th March 2004.

31 1st January 2004.

pledge to champion the listeners' chosen cause – describing it as a "ludicrous, brutal, unworkable blood-stained piece of legislation". A recent poll for The Sunday Telegraph found that 71% still support householders receiving an "unqualified right to use force, including deadly force if necessary" - against burglars³². The elected do not have to enact every belief of electors and there may be serious practical difficulties with particular proposals. However, they – and the commentariat – have a duty to understand the electorate and not to assume that their views are "ludicrous" or "brutal". When mainstream parties ignore mainstream views it is extremist movements that benefit most.

(5) Britain's conservative majority... isn't dependent on American rates of churchgoing

According to a recent poll in The Times³³ approximately 17% of Britons attend church at least once a month. It is unclear as to whether The Times' survey captured observant Muslims and other religious worshippers. Most people of a non-Christian faith probably told The Times that they did not go to "church". The figure for religious observance may be three to six points higher, therefore, given the census data on religious affiliation. Because this UK number is about a third to half of America's rate of church attendance, some commentators have unthinkingly seized upon numbers like this to try and validate the assertion that Britain does not have an American-style block of 'values voters'. Britain is undeniably not such an overtly religious society as America but lower levels of churchgoing do not necessarily mean that the British people are less serious about values. Although only 17% to 23% of Britons attend a place of worship (at least once a month) clear majorities of the overall population still support the range of moral positions already outlined in this paper.

Neither do I believe that levels of 'churchgoing' tell the whole story about people's sympathy towards Christianity and when, by the way, was it decreed that non-churchgoers were not allowed to have strong and what-might-be-called 'traditional values'³⁴? The fact that people do not go to church or to an alternative place of worship does not make them irreligious. Numerous surveys point to the fact that a clear majority of Britons continue to believe in

32 ICM for The Sunday Telegraph, 7th November 2004

33 Conducted by Populus, 2nd November 2004

34 Charles Moore, writing for The Daily Telegraph shortly after Bush's re-election (Saturday 6th November), spoke to four people he called 'values voters'. Three of the four were concerned about schooling – another mainly focused on crime. Two were discernibly religious. Two were not. From his conversations Charles Moore concluded: "What most concerns [values voters] is a set of issues that are certainly affected by money but are not, at root, financial. They are issues about culture and morality, and how people - particularly people dear and close to them - can live fulfilled lives... Issues such as marriage... standards in school, crime, incivility, respect for Christian ideas, love of country all come together. There is a feeling that life is quite tough for people who try to behave properly and quite easy for those who don't. There is a linked feeling that the public authorities are often actively hostile to good values, particularly in state schools."

God and they turn to the church to mark births, weddings and deaths. Many parents of all faiths and none try to get their children into church schools because they believe in the values that Christianity embodies. Some of Britain's most-supported charities are Christian-led or Christian-inspired. The same applies to many of the most effective inner city charities I have visited.

The defining moment of the Jubilee 2000 debt relief campaign occurred when 70,000 largely Christian activists formed a human chain around 1998's G8 Summit in Birmingham. Within almost every major British town and city we are seeing the growth of 'super churches'. These 'super churches' are usually evangelical in theology and are full of hundreds of worshippers on Sunday and in midweek services. They are of a size that means that they can provide a range of social action projects. As these churches grow they could become a major social and political force in the years to come.

I am sure that if this happens there will be attempts to demonise them and their members. In the wake of the "excommunication" of Rocco Buttiglione the Catholic Church has become very worried that secularism has ceased to provide neutral space for religion and has mutated into a militant ideology. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of the Vatican told *la Repubblica*³⁵: "It concedes no public space to the Catholic and Christian vision, which as a result runs the risk of turning into a purely private matter, so that deep down it is no longer the same. In this sense a struggle exists and so we must defend religious freedom against an ideology which is held up as if it were the only voice of rationality, when instead it is only an expression of a 'certain' rationalism". Reflecting on what has happened in the US, where there is an enormous gap between the commentariat and the commented-upon, Mort Kondracke of the bipartisan *Roll Call* newspaper wrote³⁶:

"I have the distinct impression that many secular Democrats believe that hidden away in most Evangelical Protestant churches is a secret room filled with white Klan sheets or maybe even Swastika armbands... If fair-minded secular Democrats went to church - they are open to the public, by the way - here's some of what they'd learn: Lesson No. 1: Far more than abortion, evolution or homosexuality, Evangelical Christianity is about love, redemption, forgiveness, charity, humility, hope and self-sacrifice. The best Evangelicals I know truly change lives - they turn around people who are addicted to drugs and pornography. They give the despairing and the guilt-ridden reason to persevere. They restore marriages.

35 19th November 2004

36 8th November 2004.

They transform criminals in prison. They try to follow Jesus, who, if they studied him a little, no Democrat could possibly be scared of.”

As a Catholic I can only echo Mort Kondracke's praise of evangelicals. Projects run by Steve Chalke's Oasis Trust, Manchester's Message Trust, Rob Parsons' Care for the Family and thousands of small-scale ministries all embody a life-changing solidarity with needy people. Perhaps the best way for Britain to avoid a US-style breakdown between religious people and the commentariat is for Mort Kondracke's experience to be more widely shared. If more commentators visited churches and Christian projects they would discover that churchgoers account for a disproportionate amount of this nation's volunteering and charitable work. They deserve a much fairer press.

(6) Britain's conservative majority... is spread across all of the political parties

Four-fifths of America's 'values voters' supported George W Bush. Britain's small 'c' conservative majority is not so attached to big 'C' Conservatives – or to any political party.

A Populus poll for The Times³⁷ showed that opponents of gay marriage and abortion were spread across the political parties. A Communicate Research survey for the Christian Institute³⁸ found that supporters of all parties believed that siblings as well as gay couples should enjoy civil partnerships. A YouGov poll for The Spectator³⁹ found that 45% of Conservative-inclined voters wanted John Kerry to win November 2nd's US election and 19% supported George W Bush. Labour voters were fractionally less supportive of John Kerry by 43% (for the Democrat) to 21% (for President Bush). The Labour support for the Republican candidate may reflect the perceived closeness of Tony Blair to George W Bush but Blair-supporters certainly were not particularly offended by George W Bush's straight-talking moral positions. Perhaps, they may have even been attracted to those positions.

If social conservative views are spread evenly across the supporters of Britain's political parties they are not spread evenly within the parliamentary parties. Over recent months Communicate Research⁴⁰ has been surveying MPs about their views on contentious moral issues. Communicate Research offers us a number of findings which may interest voters who believe that all

37 Populus for the Times, 5-7 November 2004

38 22-24 October 2004. The survey found that Tory voters (at 79%) were slightly least likely to support the extension of rights to committed siblings compared with Labour voters (86%) and Liberal Democrat voters (91%).

39 22nd October 2004.

40 Communicate Research did not give separate figures for the Liberal Democrat MPs – grouping them within an 'other' category. The socially libertarian character of this 'other' group points, however, to the probable closeness of Liberal Democrat MPs' worldviews to those of Labour MPs.

political parties are the same. The findings show that the balance of opinion within the parliamentary parties remains very different:

- Ten times as many Conservative MPs oppose the legalisation of cannabis as support it (87% to 8%). Labour MPs oppose legalisation by a much smaller margin (64% to 31%).
- 98% of Conservatives oppose a ban on smacking that is supported by 40% of Tony Blair's MPs.
- Exactly half of Tory MPs sampled think the 24-week limit on abortion should be stricter (the other 50% think it about right). Under a quarter - 23% - of Labour MPs want a stricter time limit. 4% want it increased. Over two-thirds (69%) of Conservative MPs underestimated the number of pregnancy terminations (186,200) that were performed in 2001.
- 78% of Tory MPs support exemptions for religious bodies from the Gender Recognition Bill - an opinion shared by only a third (33%) of Labour MPs.
- Opinion on voluntary euthanasia was the least split on party lines. 82% of Conservative MPs opposed it - only marginally more than the 80% of Labour MPs opposed. Within these numbers, however, Tory MPs indicated a much stronger level of opposition.
- A majority (57%) of Tory MPs opposes the disestablishment of the Church of England whilst a bigger majority (67%) of Labour MPs supports it.

(7) Britain's conservative majority... looks more kindly on certain issues when they are given moral purpose

Britain's 'values voters' don't think of some issues as values issues and other issues as values-free. Many regard Iraq and investment in Britain's public services as moral issues.

Labour's skill at making tax cuts appear unethical has been a huge victory for believers in the big state. All of the evidence is that much of the revenue generated by Gordon Brown's 66 tax rises has been wasted. By moral contrast lower tax economies are reliable generators of the jobs and the wealth that vulnerable groups, in particular, depend upon. A tax cutting agenda might be more popular if it is focused on the support of popular ethical goals. Tax relief for good causes or reductions in forms of taxation

that disproportionately penalise low-income groups might be particularly well supported. YouGov found that tax breaks for marriage and the family were supported by more than a quarter of swing voters⁴¹.

(8) Britain's conservative majority... increasingly interprets whole political platforms through values systems

Closer examination of the exit polls that led to the recent renewed interest in America's 'moral majority' has cooled enthusiasm for the belief in the power of the 'values voter'. Undefined 'moral issues' may have been the top issue for a fifth of voters but more than 60% of America's voters were more motivated by economic issues, the war on terror and the situation in Iraq. Although it is possible to say that President Bush could not have won without the support of those voters who prioritised 'moral issues' I do not believe that they were enough on their own. Although the voters of Ohio 'voted their values' - despite that state's loss of jobs - most 'values voters' enjoy relatively higher incomes. As Britain's electorate becomes wealthier it may regard values issues as increasingly important. Something of this happened in 1997, of course. Prosperous middle Britain found itself able to afford to vote for New Labour and did so because they rejected the apparent sleaze of the Tory years and welcomed Tony Blair's oft-stated moral purpose.

Helen Fielding's 'Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason' amusingly captured the perceived clarity of Labour's moral outlook at that time. Slightly before the 1997 election a horrified Bridget Jones discovers that her boyfriend is thinking of voting Tory. He lists the policies that predispose him to the Conservatives. She replies:

“The point is you are supposed to vote for the principle of the thing, not the itsy-bitsy detail about this per cent and that per cent.”

New Labour – at least in 1997 – passed Bridget Jones' test. She couldn't list New Labour's policies but she understood what kind of values the Labour Party tried to represent.

The Conservative Party should be able to articulate its own purpose and values. Its policies should flow from those clearly understood values. The values should encapsulate where the Conservative Party stands on national security, prosperity, one nation and the centrality of the family. Fairness could be the Conservative Party's organising value – fairness to those in need of help and fairness for those expected to provide that help. Every

41 A YouGov survey for The Daily Telegraph, 4th October 2004. Tax breaks for the family were the sixth most popular option.

Conservative policy initiative should have to pass our own equivalent of the 'Bridget Jones Test'. Our test should communicate an outlook as decent and as compassionate as Britain's conservative majority. I would call it the 'good for my neighbour' test. Launching the Centre for Social Justice in June I discussed my 'good for me, good for my neighbour' analysis:

"The Conservative Party is at its best when it reaches beyond the safety of familiar constituencies. When Margaret Thatcher extended home ownership to millions of council house tenants she didn't just do the right thing morally she did the right thing politically, too. As leader of the Conservative Party I put forward policies that were designed to help people who haven't expected help from the Conservative Party – or any political party – for a very long time. Policies like visible, neighbourhood policing of Britain's toughest estates...The right to choose for parents of children trapped in failing, inner city schools... Support for a more innovative voluntary sector...I'm glad that Michael Howard is keeping and developing these and similar policies. They're right for people in need and they're right for the Conservative Party... Voters want a political party to be good for them and good for their neighbour. They want a Conservative Party that makes the nation stronger and brings it together."

(9) Britain's conservative majority... could re-energise the political system

America has shown that 'values voters' have the potential to revitalise local political organisations. America's Republicans believe that "the most important thing in political communications is 'personal contact from a credible source'"⁴². With this powerful idea in their heads they have succeeded in creating the broadest and most powerful get-out-the-vote operation in American political history. More than sixty million people voted for George W Bush – the biggest ever number in US elections. This number was undoubtedly spurred by the nail-biting tightness of President Bush's race with John Kerry and the importance of national security issues but much also was due to huge grassroots efforts on voter registration and education.

The Republicans identified groups of people who were likely to be most passionate about certain issues. 'Values voters' came top of their lists and large sections of the campaign website were dedicated to informing Catholic, evangelical Protestant and other 'moral issue' voters about the President's positions on matters of importance to them. Over the last four years

42 Taken from Rick Lowry's 'Bush's Well-Mapped Road To Victory', National Review, 29th November 2004.

consumer profiling was used to identify 'values voters'. Who subscribed to 'Christianity Today' magazine? Who gave to 'Samaritan's Purse' development charity? These people were mailed and invited to events. Once inspired they were each asked to recruit five people in their church, workplace or neighbourhood. These new recruits were then asked to recruit five more people and became an essential fundraising tool. This volunteer army was kept up-to-date with policy and campaign news and in the final 72 hours of the campaign they were the infantry that got out George W Bush's vote. On Sunday they talked to fellow churchgoers. In work on Monday morning they worked on last minute undecideds. On Tuesday – Election Day - they were going house-to-house in their neighbourhoods checking that committed supporters had voted.

The Bush campaign had 1.4 million volunteers in the battleground states for this 72-hour push. The Kerry campaign, in contrast, was relying on a lot of paid temps. The Bush campaign concluded: "Lots of volunteers will beat a paid army of people who don't have skin in the game."

(10) Britain's conservative majority... has been sustained despite the lack of a communications infrastructure

The potential of a broader conservative coalition and the energisation of Britain's 'values voters' depend upon the emergence of suitably supportive infrastructure. Both party and independent efforts energised America's 'values voters'. The emergence of Fox News, the popularity of conservative talk radio, syndicated Christian columnists, a multitude of well-financed think tanks and, latterly, a host of bloggers have ensured that the East Coast's liberal establishment – that, for years, have skewed the worldview of ABC, CBS and NBC – no longer dominate the national conversation⁴³.

It is noteworthy – even remarkable - that Britain's conservative majority has persisted in the face of a largely hostile broadcast media and hesitant churchleaders.

43 The emergence of the USA's right-leaning new media has been catalogued in 'Richard A Viguerie and David Franke's America's Right Turn: How Conservatives Used New And Alternative Media To Take Power', Bonus Books 2004

Britain's conservative majority – conclusion

Not all commentators are the same

In this paper I have been critical of the way some commentators have traduced the beliefs of 'values voters' on both sides of the Atlantic. Lest I be accused of disdaining all commentators it is only fair that this paper ends by highlighting some of the people who have been more understanding of the conservative majority's moral outlook. Leader writers and columnists at The Daily Mail have been reliably protective of the conservative majority but other, perhaps more unlikely, writers have also offered real insights into their views.

Sarah Baxter, in The Sunday Times⁴⁴, wrote that most American 'values voters' were not "zealots" but "ordinary people who care". "They are anti-abortion, but will rally around a girl who gets pregnant. They believe marriage is between a man and a woman, but have gay friends and relatives." She continued with an insight that I would say is also true of British people: "Middle Americans are not embarrassed to say aloud they would rather their children grew up heterosexual, married a member of the opposite sex and had children within wedlock. If it's not the way things turn out; they'll cope with it."

In a piece for the New Statesman⁴⁵ Cristina Odone analysed the "secularist fervour" that was offending "moral traditionalists". She then listed some of the features of this fervour: "every marketing outlet from television to billboards push[ing]... children into a precocious sexualisation"; a Muslim's anger at Labour politicians promoting his daughter's 'right' to get the morning-after pill over the counter; the banning of religious messages on Christmas cards; and the suggestion that the name of Islington's St Mary Magdalene school was divisive in a multicultural society. Ms Odone concluded that "in a post-communist world, where the market is accepted by all, conventional political divisions over taxes, government spending and big business are giving way to more deeply felt differences on issues such as when life begins, the make-up of the family unit and the boundaries of medical science."

Rachel Sylvester, in The Daily Telegraph⁴⁶ also painted a fair portrait of Britain's 'values voters'. "God is not the vote winner that he is in the United

44 7th November 2004

45 15th November 2004

46 8th November 2004

States," she wrote, "but that does not mean that politicians cannot talk about values. Here, the battle will not be about gay marriage or abortion or gun control, but it might be about the way in which parents bring up their children."

The Conservative Party and Britain's conservative majority

This paper has painted a picture of a moderate and intellectually coherent conservative majority. Echoing Sarah Baxter's portrait of America's 'values voters', Britain's conservative majority has strong values and a compassion for those who fall on hard times. It is moderate in its thinking on abortion, homosexuality and some of the other more controversial moral issues of our time. It is overwhelmingly committed to the protection of children from drugs, gambling, poor parenting and sexually suggestive influences – particularly from the media. It is particularly concerned about the care of pensioners and people with serious disabilities. It supports a generous commitment to the poorest countries of the world. Britain's conservative majority has a far better understanding of the link between poverty and self-destructive personal behaviours than the metropolitan elite.

I foresee cracks appearing throughout the Labour coalition as economic issues become of declining importance and cultural issues take their place. Because of their socially-conservative beliefs Britain's working and middle classes will become increasingly unhappy with the libertarian outlook of the rainbow coalition of interest groups that run the Labour Party and sit on its parliamentary benches. Tony Blair has kept the Labour coalition together by simultaneously 'talking conservative' but 'acting metropolitan'. That cannot be sustained for much longer and it certainly won't outlast him. George W Bush and John Howard have both succeeded because of their ability to understand both the beliefs and the temperament of their countries' conservative majorities. A one nation Conservative Party that builds social justice on a sustainable set of values would also be in tune with the overwhelming majority of the British people.