

Will One Nation Conservatism save the government?

I see debate about disagreements within the Conservative party. It is true there have been important debates in recent years over lockdowns, money printing, migration levels, Brexit wins, ways of controlling small boats, tax levels and other issues of great interest to voters.

It is also the case that over the last year those who wanted changes to economic and borders policies and to Brexit implementation did not challenge the leadership, put in letters or seek to undermine Ministers. There were discussions with Ministers who decided it was best to run a largely One Nation policy. Ministers argued that the threat to the Conservative party came from Labour and Lib Dems to the left so it was important to move in their direction. They wanted to improve relations with the EU, follow international law as interpreted by internationalists, follow Bank and OBR orthodoxy and regulate more against possible harms. Critics of these views accepted they had lost the internal argument and supported the leadership going into an election.

Self styled One Nation Conservatives have been very vocal in recent years, arguing that the Conservative party and government was correct to shift to the left to command more support. George Osborne from outside Parliament joined with Michael Gove inside to promote this.

In government both the current Lord Chancellor and Attorney General have been insistent in taking an international lawyer's view of Treaties based often on a very debatable view of their impact. This has led to impediments to controlling borders and sorting out the EU's role in Northern Ireland. Counter proposals by former Attorney Stella Braverman and past Migration Minister Robert Jenrick were turned down. The Home Secretary rejected the idea of strengthening the law against legal challenges, favouring the One Nation approach.

The One Nation Chancellor has preserved the EU originated debt control, trusting OBR 5 year out numbers that are likely to be wrong to constrain the tax cuts needed for faster growth. He has implemented a conventional programme of fiscal consolidation claiming this is necessary to create stability. He rejected ideas of asking the Bank to control its bond losses, to speed restoring lost public sector productivity, and to cut nationalised industries losses. These spending cuts would have allowed cuts in small business, self employed and income tax.

The One Nation Foreign Secretary has sought to please more overseas countries and international quangos. The U.K. has continued to negotiate at the World Health Organisation which is wanting to take powers over the NHS, when there was considerable opposition to ceding power. He has shifted to the EU/Spanish view on Gibraltar and has cosied up to the EU and Ireland by building on the Windsor framework.

The government put through various regulatory new laws which were supported by Labour. It abandoned wider ranging repeal and amendment of inherited EU law.

It means we will have a good test of the argument that the way for the Conservatives to win elections is to have plenty of One Nation representation around the Cabinet table and to follow consensus and internationalist policies on the economy, taxation, migration, regulation and our international relations. In a week's time we will see if this approach did win more votes for Conservatives, or whether it left the Conservative vote too vulnerable to the Reform challenge based on their tougher approach to border control and based on a lower tax growth model.