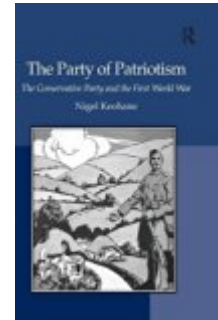


Nigel Keohane. *The Party of Patriotism.* Farnham: Ashgate, 2010. 260 pp. \$114.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7546-6324-9.



Reviewed by Leanna Fong

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Commissioned by Thomas Hajkowski (Misericordia University)

Nigel Keohane's *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* is an engaging study on the impact of the First World War on the party's electoral fortunes, as well as long-term developments in its ideas and attitudes. Prior to 1914, the Conservatives were bitterly divided over the question of Irish Unionism, and reeling from three consecutive general election defeats. For Keohane, the European conflict rejuvenated party principles and made it a more cohesive political unit because it allowed the Conservatives to appropriate the theme of patriotism and exploit patriotic language in their rhetoric, party doctrine, and outlook. However, none of these efforts would have benefited the party without their commitment to working within the Liberal-led National Government. Only within this political truce could the party influence (albeit subtly) war policy and the direction of reform measures that would be implemented after 1918. Only as a member of the coalition could the party, using wartime propaganda, differentiate Conservatism from the spent force of Liberalism and the

threat of Socialism and the Labour party. The intervention of war, according to Keohane, did not "save" the Conservative Party but began a gradual process through which the party adapted Conservatism to meet the demands of a post-First World War British society.

In six thematic chapters, Keohane examines Conservative war policy, the relationship between the coalition government and party leadership, Ireland, anti-Socialism, electoral reform, and the evolving role of state intervention. In each of these cases, the author shows that wartime patriotism was at the forefront of the party's thinking and rhetoric.

This study is well situated within the current historiography on political parties, (especially recent work on the Conservative Party), which stresses the active role they play in shaping social change.[1] In Keohane's analysis, the party was not merely a passive beneficiary to political circumstances. Indeed, the circumstances were such that the party could not idly expect the pendulum

of popular support to swing back in their favor. The Conservatives understood that it could not stop the expansion of the electorate. Thus the party chose to support a definition of citizenship which was informed by the party's conception of patriotism, based on service during the war (a point first made by Nicoletta Gullace). In this way, the party controlled the composition of "mass electorate" (for a little while longer at least) so that it could consider the most practical ways to integrate working-class men as well as women into party organizations. Similarly, the party used patriotic images to elevate the profile of the agricultural industry in war and the future success of the nation. When the time came to debate the redistribution of parliamentary seats, the party easily made the claim that agricultural areas required greater representation in the House, which paid off in electoral dividends. The party also aggressively forged a connection between what they understood as patriotism and anti-Socialism in an effort to curb the rise of the Labour party. Thus, we see a party actively shaping its own fortunes as well as the environment in which it worked. In this study, Keohane bolsters an image of the Conservative Party (one that has appeared in other portraits) as extremely adaptable, pragmatic, and certainly the most opportunistic of British political parties.

This volume is also noteworthy in that the author balances his portrayal of the party as flexible and adaptable with a recognition that there was a "coherent ideological framework," complete with "social goals and ethical principles," that guided party actions (p. 10). With respect to the wartime collectivism, for example, the party consistently fought for free enterprise (as illustrated in episode involving Lloyd George's attempt to regulate the brewing industry) and did what they could to protect property rights and limit the growth of bureaucracy. According to Keohane, the party accepted "government intervention in the name of industrial and national efficiency," but this attitude did not apply equally to social reform

(p. 185). Measures were always intended to be temporary, to ensure stability (especially during the process of demobilization), and to restore confidence to the British economy. The party never embraced wholesale the enlarged and empowered state as it existed during wartime. In redefining the question of Ireland and the Union to include the wider empire as another example, the party maintained prewar understandings of Britain's imperialist role. Wartime patriotism gave these ideas greater potency and served to unite dissident backbenchers, the radical right wing, and local habitations of the party to their leader Andrew Bonar Law.

Keohane's study is unique because it draws on a wide range of local papers, including records from ninety-two Conservative constituency associations. As Stuart Ball has emphasized, it is essential for scholars in this area to integrate the voices at the local level in order to understand the shape and reach of party doctrine.[2] In this respect, the study falls short. Keohane adopts the approach of eminent historians on the subject such as John Ramsden (his supervisor), which tends to focus on high-level discussions. There are glimpses of support and discontent at the local level but it is not apparent that there was any real conversation between members and party leaders on the direction of Conservative policy. In the party's response to democratic reform, for instance, it would have been beneficial (especially as it relates to developments in how the party understands class and gender after the Second World War) to see how the local habitations discussed the subject of and actually integrated women and working-class men into the constituency association and other parts of the party.

This work is a thorough and focused study that will no doubt offer new insights even to those who specialize in both the period and the party. *The Party of Patriotism* is useful in that it will encourage scholars to reconsider the shape and nature of twentieth-century British Conservatism

and, more importantly, interrogate the processes that forge political ideologies.

Notes

[1]. See David Jarvis, "Mrs. Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s," *Twentieth-Century British History* 5, no. 2 (1992): 129- 152; Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1868-1906* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007); and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[2]. Stuart Ball, "National Politics and Local History: The Regional and Local Archives of the Conservative Party, 1867-1945," *Archives* 22 (1996): 27-59.

As such,

(a point first made by Nicoletta Gullace)

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