**Chapter One**

**The Heath Premiership: Existing Academic Perspectives**

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In post-war British politics, there have been four periods of Labour Party governance – 1945 to 1951 under the leadership of Clement Attlee; 1964 to 1970 under the leadership of Harold Wilson; 1974 to 1979 under the leadership of Wilson again and then James Callaghan; and the 1997 to 2010 period under the leadership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. There have also been four periods of Conservative governance, and three of those periods have lasted a decade or more: 1951 to 1964 under the leadership of Winston Churchill; Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home; 1979 to 1997 under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher and John Major; and the period since 2010 under the leadership of David Cameron, Theresa May and Boris Johnson. The fourth period of Conservative governance was the 1970 to 1974 premiership led by Edward Heath and it holds an unwarranted distinction – it is the only post-war premiership to be removed by the voters at the first opportunity.

All of the aforementioned eras involved some form of re-election for the governing party. The Attlee premiership that entered office in 1945 (majority 145) did secure re-election in 1950 (majority six) before losing office in 1951; the Wilson premiership of 1964 (majority four) secured re-election in 1966 (majority 99) before being defeated in 1970; and the second Wilson era entered office as a minority premiership in March 1974 and secured a small majority (of three) at the General Election of October 1974. The Blair era would involve three successive election victories involving majorities of 179 (in 1997); 167 (in 2001) and 66 (in 2005). The three long serving eras of Conservative governance involved the party securing stronger parliamentary performances when seeking their first re-election. They re-entered office in 1951 with a parliamentary majority of 17 and their majority increased to 59 in 1955 (and increased again to 100 in 1959). The victory that the Conservatives secured at the General Election of 1979, with a majority of 44, was followed by three further victories – in 1983 with a majority of 144; in 1987 with a majority of 102; and then a majority of 21 in 1992. Their return to office in 2010 as a coalition with the Liberal Democrats was followed by three further General Elections in the next decade, all of which resulted in the Conservatives holding onto power – in 2015 they secured a majority of 12 under Cameron; in 2017 they failed to secure a majority but held onto office as a minority premiership (under May); and finally they held a majority of 80 under the leadership of Johnson in late 2019 (see Cowley and Kavanagh, 2018 and Ford and Jennings, 2020).

What must have been distressing for Heath personally was the performance of the Conservatives while he was their party leader, relative to their performances before and after his party leadership tenure. As table 1.1 demonstrates, he led the Conservatives into four successive General Elections between March 1966 and October 1974, and he led them to three defeats alongside one victory at the General Election of June 1970. The four General Elections prior to him being leader of the Conservative Party (1951 to 1964) involved them winning three out of four; and the four General Elections after he was leader of the Conservative Party involved them winning all four (1979 to 1992). The 1951 to 1959 era saw the Conservative vote base oscillate between 13.1 to 13.7 million. Between 1979 and 1992, their vote base peaked at 14.0 million (in 1992) and was at its lowest in 1983 on 13.0 million, when ironically they secured a landslide parliamentary majority of 144 caused by the nature of the fragmentation of the Labour (27 percent) and SDP/Liberal Alliance vote (25 percent) (Butler and Kavanagh, 1984). When the Conservatives lost power at the General Election of 1964, their vote fell to 12.0 million (down by 1.7 million from the 13.7 million secured five years earlier), but that decline did occur at the end of a thirteen-year period in office. Their vote base when losing office in 1964 (at 12.0 million) was larger than the vote base that the Conservatives secured in February 1974 after only three and half years in office – 11.8 million – and the vote share in 1964 was significantly larger (at 43.4 percent) than the vote share in February 1974 (at 37.9 percent). That the electorate was sceptical of the merits of the Heath premiership was confirmed by their performance in the second General Election of 1974, when their vote share fell further (to 35.8 percent) at a vote base of 10.4 million (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, 1975). Between the General Election of 1970 and October 1974, the Conservatives lost 2.7 million votes and a vote share reduction of 10.6 percent. That was the Heath effect and, much to his chagrin, the Thatcher effect was just as pronounced but in the opposite direction. Between the October 1974 and May 1979 General Elections, the Conservatives gained 3.2 million votes and increased their vote share by 7.9 percent (Butler and Kavanagh, 1980). That the Heath era seems a failed era for the Conservatives – the so-called self-proclaimed party of government – is evident from the fact that the General Election victory of 2019 was their eighth General Election victory out of eleven General Elections since his era.

**Table 1.1:**

**The Electoral Record of the Conservative Party 1945-2019**

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Election Elected Percentage Total Government

Conservatives Share of Votes and

Vote Received Majority

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1945 213 39.8 9, 577,667 Labour 146

1950 299 43.5 12, 502,567 Labour 5

1951 321 48.0 13, 717,538 Conservative 17

1955 345 49.7 13, 311,936 Conservative 59

1959 365 49.4 13, 749,830 Conservative 100

1964 304 43.4 12, 001,396 Labour 4

Heath Era

1966 253 41.9 11, 418,433 Labour 97

**1970 330 46.4 13, 145,123 Conservative 31**

**1974 F 297 37.9 11, 872,180 Labour Minority**

1974 O 277 35.8 10, 464,817 Labour 3

1979 339 43.9 13, 697,923 Conservative 44

1983 397 42.4 13, 012,315 Conservative 144

1987 376 42.3 13, 763,066 Conservative 101

1992 336 41.9 14, 092,891 Conservative 21

1997 165 30.7 9, 602,957 Labour 179

2001 166 31.8 8, 357,622 Labour 167

2005 198 32.4 8, 772,473 Labour 66

2010 307 36.1 10, 726,555 Conservative-Lib Dem Coalition

2015 330 36.9 11, 334,226 Conservative 12

2017 317 42.4 13, 636,684 Conservative Minority

2019 365 43.6 13, 966,565 Conservative 80

*Source:* adapted from Cowley and Kavanagh, 2018 and Ford and Jennings, 2020

The re-election of the Johnson premiership, in what became known as the Brexit General Election of 2019, has ensured that the United Kingdom will leave the European Union. That the year of exiting will occur on the fiftieth anniversary of the General Election of 1970 and the beginning of the Heath premiership carries a certain irony. That is because the greatest policy achievement and thereby governmental legacy of the Heath premiership was securing entry into what was then known as the European Community[[1]](#footnote-1) (Kitzinger, 1973; Lord, 1993; see also Crowson, 2007; Wall, 2013). As such, we see these developments as a reason for political historians to reassess the Heath premiership for the following reason: If the most significant legacy of that era is now being reversed, as voters reject the benefits of integration within Europe, then does that impact upon how we interpret the Heath premiership? Or to put it another way, do we need to reassess the validity of the two rival perspectives that exist *vis-à-vis* the Heath premiership – i.e. the critical perspective and the contingencies or circumstances-based perspective?

**The Critical Perspective of the Heath Premiership**

The critique of the Heath premiership is multifaceted. The dominant critique is the view expressed by those on the free market or economically liberal wing of the Conservative Party (who would later become defined as the Thatcherite dries). They argue that the policy review process that was conducted in the opposition era under Heath (between 1965 to 1970), and which informed the construction of their 1970 manifesto, had established what an incoming Conservative administration for the 1970s (and beyond) should be seeking to achieve[[2]](#footnote-2). That programme appeared to be a challenge to the consensus politics of the post-war era (Kavanagh and Morris, 1994; Dutton, 1997).

Heath wanted to modernise the British economy. His strategy for promoting economic growth involved reducing state intervention in the economy[[3]](#footnote-3); making the case for lowering both taxation and public expenditure; advancing competition and promoting efficiency. To initiate this plan for economic modernisation required entry into the European Economic Community and trade union reform, increasing selectivity in terms of the allocation of welfare entitlements and the rejection of formal prices and incomes policies (Kavanagh, 1996: 366). Furthermore, his commitment to this new approach seemed to be clear from the language used in the Conservative Party manifesto of 1970, as Heath argued that:

I want to see a fresh approach to the taking of decisions. The Government should seek the best advice and listen carefully to it. It should not rush into decisions, it should use up to date techniques for assessing the situation, it should be deliberate and thorough ... *once a decision is made, once a policy is established, the Prime Minister and his colleagues should have the courage to stick to it* ... courage and intellectual honesty are essential qualities in politics, and in the interests of our country it is high time we saw them again (quoted in Campbell, 1993: 271).

That commitment seemed to be reaffirmed in the speech that Heath gave to the Conservative Party Annual Conference of late 1970, just a few months after entering Downing Street after the General Election of June that year. Dubbed the ‘quiet revolution’ speech, Heath argued that:

This then is the task to which your Government is dedicated: to give to all our people both freedom and responsibility. That is the challenge and from it will come opportunity. Opportunity to take our destiny, the destiny of the nation, once again in our own hands. *If we are to achieve this task we will have to embark on a change so radical, a revolution so quiet and yet so total, that it will go far beyond the programme for a Parliament to which we are committed and on which we have already embarked; far beyond this decade and way into the 1980s*. For it is the task of building something of style, of substance, and worth; something so important to the life and the future of this country of ours. We can only hope to begin now what future Conservative Governments will continue and complete. We are laying the foundations, but they are the foundations for a generation (Heath, 1970).

The rhetoric used appeared to be long term and left little room for ambiguity. After an initial attempt to begin the process of implementing their agenda, the evidence that it could work was not immediately evident. Not only was inflation increasing, but what was more problematic was the increases in unemployment, which hit the one million mark in the winter of 1971-72, a figure that Heath feared was political unacceptable (i.e. re-election would not be possible at this level) (Kavanagh, 1996: 373). As a consequence, Heath engaged in a process of policy reappraisal that he thought represented pragmatic adjustments, but his right-wing critics thought smacked of betrayal (Bruce-Gardyne, 1974; Holmes, 1982, 1997). The belief in a hands-off approach to industry and to not bail-out failing companies was backtracked on as they intervened to nationalise Rolls Royce and then rescued Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. They were forced to accept that their attempt at trade union reform, via the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, had failed – their new approach proved to be inoperable after the Trade Union Congress decided that they would expel any trade union that registered under the act. Having previously committed to cuts in public expenditure, they did the exact opposite in 1972. They attempted to boost output and stimulate growth by reflationary methods, in what became known as the ‘Barber boom’, after the Chancellor, Anthony Barber, which in itself was said to be cause of the inflationary pressures the developed thereafter. They also contravened their initial claims by intervening by introducing an incomes policy (Bruce-Gardyne, 1974; Holmes, 1982, 1997). However, what did remain consistent was their focus in securing entry into the European Economic Community (Lord, 1993).

To his critics on the free-market/economically liberal wing of the Conservative Party, Heath backed away from this agenda – in what Thatcher said led to a ‘poisoned legacy of our U-turns’ – in an abject failure of leadership, stemming from the fact that he had ‘no firm principles’ (Thatcher, 1995: 240). A similar view was expressed by Norman Tebbit, later a key ally of Thatcher, who described the abandonment of the free market agenda that they had agreed in opposition, as a ‘retreat into corporatism’ and a ‘climbdown’ that was characterised by a ‘mish-mash of ill-considered centralist and socialist hand to mouth devices with no intellectual nor political cohesion’ (Tebbit, 1988: 105, 124). Bruce-Gardyne concluded that the U-turn led to a fatal combination of (a) a statutory incomes policy that created conflict with the trade unions; alongside (b) an expansionary financial policy, which served to increase inflation (Bruce-Gardyne, 1974; see also Holmes, 1982, 1997). The right-wing critique, or betrayal thesis, would thereby ‘precipitate the birth of Thatcherism’ (Gamble, 1988: 69).

However, the critique of the Heath premiership is not solely limited to the disappointment of economic liberals who berate him for abandoning their agenda due to his lack of ideological backbone. The U-turns provoked considerable disquiet within Conservative parliamentary ranks and a clear critique would emerge of Heath as a party manager (see Critchley, 1973; Norton, 1978; Franklin, Baxter and Jordan, 1986). Parliamentary rebellion rates were significantly higher than in previous Conservative governments of the post-war era. The overall parliamentary rebellion rate was 18 percent across the 1970 to 1974 Parliament (including 29 percent in the 1970 to 1971 parliamentary session), as compared to the following rebellion rates across the 1951 to 1964 period: 0.8 percent in the 1951 to 1955 Parliament; 1.4 percent in the 1955 to 1959 Parliament; and 11.8 percent in the 1959 to 1964 Parliament (Norton, 1978: 208). Despite being a former Chief Whip with experience of the challenges of ensuring discipline, Heath adopted an inflexible approach to party management. That reluctance to compromise and offer concessions flowed from his determination to secure his legislative objectives ‘unchanged’ and left little outlet for backbenchers to exert influence upon policy, thus fuelling dissent (Seldon and Sanklecha, 2004: 55; see also Heppell and Hill, 2015).

Alongside the critiques of Heath for his policy U-turns and his difficulties in terms of party management, it is important to identify problems that his administration had in terms of demonstrating governing competence. In a damning verdict, Kavanagh identified how the Heath era was associated with a ‘record number of work days lost due to strikes, some of which severely dislocated life for millions of ordinary people, states of emergency, double digit inflation, a three-day working week, blank television screens, lawlessness and vandalism’ (Kavanagh, 1996: 360). In economic terms, Heath was left bemused as ‘inflation and unemployment continued to defy the textbook by rising together’ (Heath, 1998: 343). These difficulties in terms of economic performance, which ran parallel to their legislative efforts to improve industrial relations failing (Moran, 1977), contributed to the image of the decade as ‘disconnected, quarrelsome, unsteady, ineffective and self-defeating’ (Beer, 1982: 1; see also Whitehead, 1985; Fry, 2005; Beckett, 2009; Sandbrook, 2010; Black and Pemberton, 2013).

Ultimately, the cumulative effect of perceptions of leadership failure and ideological inconsistency, internal party disunity and governing incompetence was to be electoral rejection – their vote base collapsed from 13,145,123 to 11,872,180 between the General Elections of 1970 and 1974; and their vote share fell from 46.4 to 37.9 percent (Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, 1971; Butler and Kavanagh, 1974). It is also the case that all accounts of the history of the Conservative Party make reference to some or all of the themes identified above (see, for example, Ramsden, 1996, 1998; Evans and Taylor, 1996; Blake, 1998; Charmley, 2007; Bale, 2012; Heppell, 2014).

**The Contingencies or Circumstances Perspective of the Heath Premiership**

Alongside the critique of the Heath premiership, there is the revisionist perspective. This is based primarily on identifying the difficult circumstances that the Heath premiership faced, with Seldon arguing that this contingencies-based view ‘provides the fairest judgement’ (Seldon, 1996: 19). In this context, Seldon asks political historians to acknowledge the constraints that Heath was forced to operate under.

The economic circumstances of the times would create challenges for any political party or Prime Minister, being as it was an era associated with notions of economic decline and the ungovernability or overload thesis[[4]](#footnote-4) (see King, 1975; Tomlinson, 2000). Concerns about increases in inflation and unemployment predominated and it is worth noting that both the preceding and successor Labour administrations would also struggle to overcome the same issues (see Ponting, 1990; Coopey, Fielding and Tiratsoo, 1993; Dorey, 2006, 2019; O’Hara and Parr, 2006 on the 1964 to 1970 era; and Holmes, 1985; Harmon, 1997; Hickson and Seldon, 2004; Hickson, 2005a and Shepherd, 2013 on the 1974 to 1979 era). Linked to the difficulties in terms of economic performance was the perception of increasing trade union power. It is evident that the dysfunctional relationship between government and the trade unions was a contributing factor in the downfall of the Heath administration – i.e. the non-viability of the 1971 Industrial Relations Act; the 1972 Miners’ Strike; the 1973-74 Miners’ Strike and the imposition of the three-day week leading to the ‘Who Governs’ General Election of February 1974 (see Seldon, 1988; Taylor, 1996; Butler and Kavanagh, 1974; see also Moran, 1977, Dorey, 1995, chapter five, Phillips, 2006, 2007). However, Taylor suggests that given that Trade Union movement was structurally and ideologically incapable of securing an agreement with the Heath premiership, and working with them to create the modern European social market economy that Heath envisaged (Taylor, 1993: 218). Moreover, as Barnes and Reid (1980) observed, trade union power and influence had been a significant factor in the fall of three successive Prime Ministers, as either side of Heath, Wilson had been undermined by the failure of *In Place of Strife*, and Callaghan was undermined by the Winter of Discontent (Shepherd, 2013; Dorey, 2019). Furthermore, the constraints that Heath was operating under were not limited to those associated with the economy and industrial relations. He was also constrained by the escalating conflict within Northern Ireland, the suspension of the Stormont Parliament and the imposition of direct rule from Westminster (Arthur, 1996; Smith, 2007; McDaid, 2013).

Political historians who adopt the contingencies or circumstances perspective on the Heath Premiership argue that, once the difficult operating environment is acknowledged, more nuanced arguments can emerge.

First, given that the Heath premiership possessed a health parliamentary majority (at 31) it did manage to deliver – in a legislative sense – what they claimed were their main objectives when entering office, even if some of these were reversed by the successor Labour administrations of 1974 to 1979. For example, they did secure their primary objective of negotiating their entry into the European Economic Community and they gained parliamentary approval for this. They also delivered in legislative form in relation to reforming taxation, housing finance, industrial relations as well reorganising central and local government, health care and ending mandatory comprehensive education (Kavanagh, 1996: 362). Second, when acknowledging the difficult economic environment policy changes should be seen as being pragmatically driven change rather than the abandoning of principles. As such, the betrayal thesis perpetuated by the Thatcherite right *vis-à-vis* the U-turns was an ‘exaggeration’ (Seldon, 1996: 13). Seldon argues that the significance of the Selsdon agenda and the Conservative Party manifesto of 1970 was overstated, because Heath was ‘never a believer in laissez faire, but was a traditional Tory who saw the state as an essential deliverer of economic and social policy’ and thus ‘while some policies advocated at the 1970 General Election’, for example, the rejection of an incomes policy and tax and spending cuts, ‘the motives for the policies were *instrumentalism* and *opportunism*, not *ideology*’ (Seldon, 1996: 14). Kavanagh endorses this scepticism arguing that Heath was ‘consistent about ends, flexible about means: he was a pragmatist, concerned with pursuing the best means to achieving economic growth and greater personal freedom’ (Kavanagh, 1996: 367).

**Between Critique and Contingencies/Circumstances: The Heath Premiership and a Transitional Perspective**

Having identified the two existing perspectives on the Heath premiership – the critical and the contingencies/circumstances perspectives – the aim of this book is to advance an alternative perspective. This perspective involves acknowledging the failures and difficulties that the Heath premiership experienced and thus accepting that there is validity to both existing perspectives. But rather than subscribing to one perspective or the other, it is credible to see the Heath premiership as a transitional government. By that we mean that although the ability of the Heath premiership to pursue a new policy agenda was compromised by difficult circumstances - which creates the evidence of policy failure - their policy legacy and political impacts were more pronounced than might be initially assumed.

To help us in our reassessment of the Heath premiership, we will structure the book around the dimensions of the statecraft model. The statecraft model is associated with the work of Jim Bulpitt (1986)[[5]](#footnote-5) and it represents a useful analytical framework[[6]](#footnote-6) for us when examining the only post war government that failed to secure re-election.

That is because statecraft refers to the method(s) by which the political parties attempt to win office (the politics of support), and then govern competently (the politics of power). When assessing its value to our understanding of Conservative Party politics, Hickson has argued that ‘statecraft should be viewed as an examination of how the Conservative Party has sought when in power to *insulate* itself from social, economic and international pressures’ and then ‘how it has sought to *manipulate* them in order to maintain some degree of governing competence’ (Hickson 2005b: 182). Statecraft has the following interconnected dimensions (which should be seen as cyclical ending in re-election if pursued effectively, with the determinant of effectiveness being relative to the Labour Party):

(1). *A Winning Electoral Strategy*

Whatever policy platform the leadership decide to construct, it has been perceived to be viable (i.e. achievable) so that it can secure a sufficient level of voter support to provide the basis for a parliamentary support. That process may involve compromises in order to maximise their potential vote base, but those compromises have to be tempered by the need to retain the support of their own activist base (Bulpitt, 1986; Stevens, 2002; Hickson, 2005b; Taylor, 2005; Buller and James, 2012)

(2). *Evidence of governing competence*

Flowing from the policy platform that was (a) constructed in opposition and then (b) secured enough electoral support to secure power, the (new) governing party now have to demonstrate that their policy choices show that they can provide governing competence; especially in the sphere of economic management (Bulpitt, 1986; Stevens, 2002; Hickson, 2005b; Taylor, 2005; Buller and James, 2012)

(3) *Political argument hegemony*

Linked to the above theme on governing competence, the governing party use power to (a) *deflect* *blame* on any policy failings onto the predecessor government; and (b) by doing so they seek to *delegitimise* the views of their Labour opponents so as to establish that it would be a *risk* to return to a Labour government at the next General Election. Bulpitt describes this as being a conflict about gaining dominance in terms of political argument hegemony or elite debate. This involves making sure that they are able to emphasise their core values onto the political agenda, whilst simultaneously forcing the core values of the Labour Party lower down the political agenda, thus mobilising bias in their favour (Bulpitt, 1986; Stevens, 2002; Hickson, 2005b; Taylor, 2005; Buller and James, 2012).

(4) *Effective party management*

This acknowledges the importance of internal cohesion in terms of how voters perceive the Conservative Party relative to their Labour opponents[[7]](#footnote-7). Historians of the Conservative Party have often emphasised how, in the pre-Heath era, the Conservatives were known for their emphasis on parliamentary behavioural unity in the division lobbies; their emphasis on loyalty to their leader; and their rejection of ideological dogmatism in preference for political pragmatism/flexibility or adaptability (Ball, 1998; Blake, 1998; Charmley, 1996; Davies, 1996; Evans and Taylor, 1996; Gilmour and Garnett, 1998; Ramsden, 1995, 1996, 1998).

By considering the Conservative Party in the Heath era of 1965 to 1975, with a particular emphasis on the Heath premiership of 1970 to 1974, within the context of the statecraft dimensions identified above, the book will be able to work towards a concluding chapter that makes the case for viewing the Heath premiership from a transitional perspective.

To do this, we split the book into three parts. Part one of the book – entitled *from opposition to office -* will be devoted to the first dimension of the statecraft model – the construction of a winning electoral strategy – and will offer an assessment on the key developments within the Conservatives in the opposition era of 1964 to 1970. In chapter two, Thomas McMeeking will identify how and why Heath won the Conservative Party leadership election of 1965, which was the first democratic leadership election in the history of the party. In chapter three, Mark Garnett will examine how and why the Conservative Party’s policy agenda was amended in the opposition era. In chapter four, Martin Farr will analyse the General Election campaign of 1970, where the Conservatives secured what was seen to be at the time an unexpected victory.

For the second dimension of the statecraft model, governing competence, part two of the book – entitled *policy implementation* - will re-examine the central policy objectives of the Heath premiership. Part two will consider the coherence, contradictions, failings and impact of their policies. In chapter five, James Silverwood reconsiders the economic performance of the Heath premiership. In chapter six, Samuel Warner reappraises the record of the Heath premiership *vis-à-vis* industrial relations, via a case study analysis of the failure of the Industrial Relations Act of 1971. In chapter seven, Ruth Davidson evaluates the approach of the Heath premiership towards social security reform. In chapter eight, David Jeffery examines the significance of the local government reforms of the Heath premiership. Chapter nine sees Catherine McGlynn and Shaun McDaid re-examine the difficulties that the Heath premiership experienced in relation to the politics of Northern Ireland. In our final policy-based chapter (chapter 10), Peter Dorey examines the primary policy success of the Heath premiership – seeking and securing entry into the European Economic Community. Via these six policy-based chapters, we will gain an insight into the evidence of competence *vis-à-vis* the Heath premiership, and we will be able to identify their longer-term significance.

The third and fourth dimensions of the statecraft model – political argument hegemony and party management – are considered within part three of the book – entitled *political debates.* In this section on wider political debates, we consider the following. In chapter 11, Philip Norton reconsiders how effective Heath was at managing relations within the Conservative Party in terms of the wider organisation and the parliamentary party. Chapter 12 sees Gillian Peele examine the scale of the difficulty for the Heath premiership caused by Enoch Powell and the politics of Powellism. Chapter 13 sees Timothy Heppell place the Heath era within the context of wider party politics by re-examining the developments of the Labour Party in opposition. Following on from this, chapter 14 sees Chris Byrne, Nick Randall and Kevin Theakston offer a new leadership interpretation on the performance of Heath as Prime Minister.

Ultimately an effective statecraft strategy will see the governing party being re-elected and, as such, Bulpitt sees his model as being cyclical – i.e. the fifth and final dimension involves securing re-election and then starting the cycle again. As such, as we set about reaching conclusions for our assessment of the Heath premiership. In chapter 15, Andrew Roe-Crines reassesses the fateful decision to call the General Election of February 1974. Then, in chapter 16, Emily Stacey charts how and why, when in opposition, Heath was removed from the leadership of the Conservative Party. In chapter 17, Antony Mullen locates the Heath premiership within the context of consensus politics and how it has been interpreted (and exploited) by Thatcher and the post-1979 Conservative premierships.

By structuring the book around the statecraft model, this provides us with a new way of assessing the Heath premiership. In chapter 18, Andrew Roe-Crines and Timothy Heppell argue the case for moving beyond the prevailing perspectives on the Heath premiership – i.e. the critique or the contingencies/circumstances perspective – as they make the case for the Heath premiership being seen as a transitional era in British politics.

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1. The European Communities were comprised of three entities: the European Economic Community, European Coal and Steel Community, and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). It was the first of these that was most prominent – often referred to as the ‘Common Market’– and the main focus of the UK application to join. However, for the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, we will refer to it as the European Community (or EC) throughout this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In an overt piece of pre-election campaigning, Prime Minister Harold Wilson contributed to the impression of Heath as a hard-faced economically liberal and social authoritarian Conservative. Naming Heath as ‘Selsdon Man’ - after the Selsdon Park Hotel where the Conservatives held a policy review session in January 1970, Wilson argued that Heath had ‘an atavistic desire to reverse the course of 25 years of social revolution; what they are planning is a wanton, calculated and deliberate return to greater inequality’ (Campbell 1993: 265). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This commitment to reducing intervention in the economy was reinforced by the intervention of John Davies, President of the Board of Trade, in November 1970. He said that the Heath premiership was determined to make ‘industry stand on its own two feet or go to the wall’, and that the ‘consequence of treating the whole country as lame ducks was national decadence’ (HC Debates, Vol. 805, Col. 1211-8, 4th November 1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Heath premiership also coincided with destabilising international economic circumstances. The ending of the Bretton Wood system of fixed exchange rates intensified the uncertainty and the weakened British economy of the early 1970s was ill prepared to deal with the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War between Israel and Arab states (October 1973), which ‘led to the quadrupling of oil prices by OPEC countries’ (Kavanagh, 1996: 380). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For academic discussions on the strengths and limitations of the statecraft approach, see Stevens, 2002: 119-150; Buller, 1999: 691-712; and Buller, 2000: 319-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marsh has acknowledged that statecraft theory is a key approach through to understanding British government and politics (Marsh, 2012: 48-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Writing in 1964, Richard Rose concluded that the Labour Party were a party of factions – i.e. involving stable, cohesive and organised groups that sought to advance specific policies and leaders. The Conservative Party, in contrast, were a party of non-aligned tendencies, based on fluctuating alignments amongst parliamentarians, but these were transient alignments that lacked the cohesiveness of the more factional Labour Party (Rose, 1964: 33-46) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)