

Dr James VITALI

Research Fellow
Policy Exchange

Constructive Conservatism: the intellectual origins of the property owning democracy.

This year marks the centenary of Noel Skelton's essays on Constructive Conservatism in which he coined the term "property owning democracy". Most often associated with Thatcher and her programme for the privatisation of the nationalised industries, the property owning democracy was actually first devised in the 1920s, and its progenitors were less concerned with reducing the size of the state so much as stabilising British democracy in a period of great social tumult.

This talk will look at the grouping of post-war MPs pejoratively labelled the "YMCA", and in particular, three of its most important members: Noel Skelton, Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan. Between these three men, an intellectual framework which would come to have an enormous bearing not just on the Conservative Party but British politics more generally was conceived, refined and weaponised.

Curiously, the principles and arguments of these YMCA conservatives have greater relevance for contemporary communitarian, or "national" conservatives than they do for the liberal-individualist sect of the party with which the idea of the property owning democracy has come to be associated.

Keywords: Property Owning Democracy, Capitalism, Democracy, Skelton, Constructive Conservatism