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Review of *Conservative Revival: Blueprint for a Better Britain*, edited by Chris Philp, Politicos, London, 2006.

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As Lord Saatchi notes in his prologue, Conservatives have struggled for some time to find an answer to the question, ‘who needs the Tories?’ (p. viii). This short book attempts to provide an answer. It is a blueprint for a Conservative electoral revival, which for the authors is axiomatic with a better Britain. The collection contains contributions from six recent (unsuccessful) Conservative parliamentary candidates, and is edited by the Camden Councillor and former chairman of the Bow Group, Chris Philp. The authors share a desire to modernise the Conservative party, and support their case with previously unpublished polling data, gathered by Populus in the aftermath of the 2005 general election.

The first chapter discusses the electoral problem, in terms of poor party image, an aging support-base, the loss of the traditional Conservative lead amongst the professional classes, and the relatively low level of support for the party outside of southern and eastern England. Later chapters consider how the Conservative ‘brand’ can be reinvigorated. Two key themes emerge. Firstly, the importance of the electorate’s perception of a party’s ‘vision and values’ is highlighted (p. 44). Secondly, the authors stress the need for Conservative MPs to be more representative of the general population, a message that has been advocated strongly by David Cameron. However, like Cameron, the authors retain a traditional Conservative suspicion of all-women shortlists, advocating instead limited reform of the candidate selection process.

The most insightful commentary is provided in Chapter 5, ‘The New Labour legacy’. This reverses the tendency that has characterised much recent Conservative thinking, namely introspective musing about the causes of defeat. Rather the importance of New Labour, both in accounting for the party’s electoral problems, and in terms of the formation of the current political context, is acknowledged. The emerging New Labour settlement, with the battleground of public service delivery at its heart, presents a challenge to which the Conservatives have been slow to respond. This book begins to meet that challenge, but the ‘vision’ it offers lacks depth or inspiration. It is constituted of a call for a ‘compassionate society’ (p. 150), by which the authors appear to mean little more than the retention of the public services; slightly lower taxes; and ‘opportunity for all’ (p. 154); with doses of Euro-scepticism and modish environmentalism thrown in. The authors’ recognition of the electoral need for a positive vision is perhaps more significant than the vision they present. Nonetheless, this book is useful to researchers interested in Conservative party strategy, providing as it does a clear statement of the modernisation agenda that is currently in vogue.