

Left, Right and Centre

THE Greater London Area Young Conservatives, meeting at Clacton last month, carried a motion urging the party to end "its present escapade into socialism" and to "reject outright the myth of the planned economy." There were 1,500 in attendance.

Proposing the motion, Mr. G. Webb of Richmond, said: "No amount of planning at government level will ever reap prosperity. The market forces are the only real guide to efficiency."

The motion called for the Conservative Party to issue a declaration of intent away from the concept of a planned economy and incomes and prices control.

A complete rejection of this philosophy from another group of young Conservatives followed two weeks later. A university "left wing" ginger group known as PEST (Pressure for Economic and Social Toryism) made a strong attack on Enoch Powell and those Young Conservative Associations that have endorsed his rejection of state planning. Introducing a pamphlet presenting a framework for a new policy, PEST said: "We reject, as subversive rubbish, the sentiments . . . exemplified in the statement that no amount of planning at government level will ever reap prosperity."

The Chairman of PEST, Mr. Michael Spicer, was reported as saying: "This veneration for market forces was out of date fifty years ago."

But the Greater London Young Conservatives not only rejected the planned economy mentality of their elders; they criticised them for failing "to formulate and present a constructive policy on all aspects of housing, town and country planning, and land."

PEST's pro-planning policy includes free places in public schools up to 40 per cent of available places, discriminatory state mort-

gages, a "special form" of taxation on "land profits," regular and stringent means tests for council house dwellers, housing treated as a commodity and not as part of a welfare dole, and an end to blanket distribution of welfare services, using a means test as used for income tax. Not all these policies would be regarded as left-wing.

All this leaves one puzzled as to exactly what "right wing" and "left wing" really means in political ideas. Taking Enoch Powell's political convictions as a starting point, we may note that they are generally regarded as extreme right wing and command little support even from his own colleagues in Parliament.

Enoch Powell, in singing the praises of private enterprise without overtly acknowledging that there is something radically wrong with the distribution of wealth in our society, only helps to dig the grave of private enterprise. And no matter how right he is in his economic analyses and in his defence of freedom in the market place, he cannot complain if his incomplete philosophy is rejected.

For it is not enough to preach the virtues of freedom in the market *while so many have so little to bring to market*. *Laissez faire* will continue to be a dirty word, and will continue to be blamed for our social ills, while the roots of the mal-distribution of wealth (land monopoly, privileges, protection) remain untouched.

The younger generation of Conservatives are not, it seems, content just to conserve. They want social reform. Some want it with private enterprise intact and without government interference with the economy. Others see no way for social reform other than government economic intervention and they move over to what is regarded as the left.

These attitudes are mirrored in the thinking of the older generation of Tories, though perhaps not so openly expressed, and in the battle of ideologies within the party the planned economy supporters have, up till now, more or less had it their own way.

Either an awareness that *laissez faire* in itself is not enough, or a recognition that the electorate does not accept it as a programme, has been responsible for the socialistic policies of the Tory party over the last few decades — and let us face it, they *are* socialistic left-wing policies, however much one may resort to current euphemisms for support.

For some, PEST for instance, the revolution is complete. While retaining a more realistic approach to social problems and rejecting some of the worst abuses of socialistic welfarism, they none the less fall into the prime error of equating *laissez faire* with poverty and exploitation and of regarding private enterprise and market forces as obstacles to progress and reform. That the government cannot achieve prosperity by planning is by them rejected as "subversive rubbish."

The division between "right" and "left" in the Tory party is attributable to the false premises rooted in traditional political thinking that make it possible for both sides to be partly right. But it is not a matter of finding

a middle way, or of compromising, but of acknowledging the existence of another dimension in political ideas, a dimension that has its own unique and independent principles, yet which incorporates and harmonises what is best in *laissez faire* with what is best in "left-wing" thinking. The distinction between earned and unearned income, using these terms not in their currently accepted taxation meaning but in their literal meaning, is vital and necessary.

The disparity in the distribution of wealth among individuals and classes is not only attributable to ability, inheritance and windfalls. Even superiority of ability springs largely from superiority of opportunity and general environment attributable to prior accumulations of wealth.

As wealth is produced, much of it is channelled away from labour and capital, the active factors in production, into the pockets of those who make no positive contribution to production. These passive elements in society, the beneficiaries of subsidies, grants, quotas, tariff protection and monopolies, cannot be regarded as the earners of what they receive, and sooner or later society will have to face up to the fact that incomes derived from the unimproved value of land, the passive factor of production, must also be included in this unearned category.

In terms of economic efficiency, private enterprise and the free market is absolutely indispensable. In terms of social justice, the distinction between rewards to monopolies and privileges on the one hand and to labour and capital on the other is also indispensable.