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# A strong and ineffective touch [1]

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Despite encouraging Conservative policy positions on cutting regulation [3], its stance on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is rather less impressive.

Speaking at the launch of the Conservative Report, *A Light But Effective Touch* [4], David Cameron claimed: "We will only get tax and regulation down... if business plays its role in being responsible... I want low taxes and a low regulation economy, but we won't get that unless we reduce the demands on the state." However, the answer is not to transfer responsibility from the state to business, but from the state to individuals.

The proposal in *A Light But Effective Touch* is for the introduction of Responsibility Deals: "a mechanism that enables companies to collaborate more effectively with other groups in society to address issues of common concern in a coherent and focussed way." Although the report claims that much regulation is already in place, it admits that new regulation will be necessary.

In his foreword, David Cameron states that: "The Conservative Party has always been the party of business: we instinctively understand and appreciate the vital role that businesses play in creating the jobs, wealth and opportunity on which all else depends" and writes of a "post-bureaucratic age in which the state does less, but does it better." Yet when it comes to business regulation, "less" and "better" are more or less the same thing. The report claims to favour the free-market, but also demands that it be "shaped to provide not just products and services, but social and environmental goods as well." Regulation by another name.

Clearly this is a response to a societal trend. But if businesses want to push in this direction it should be an entirely voluntary matter, one that the government takes no part in. In reality much social and environmental policy that goes under the name of CSR does little to help society or the environment. However, if businesses see it as expedient to engage in projects to increase prices, attract more customers and the best workers, then it is entirely their "*business*". Ultimately, they don?t owe responsibility to society or government, but to their shareholders.

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