

Crossbow

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SETTING OUR OWN DIRECTION

TIME TO GIVE THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY BACK TO ITS MEMBERS



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A message from the Chairman

Ben Harris-Quinney

The recent rounds of debates between Nigel Farage and Nick Clegg have concluded at least one thing; the Conservative Party has been left out of the real ideological debate going on in Britain: liberalism vs conservatism.



Attempting to move to the left to attract liberal voters and then playing catch-up with UKIP on Europe and immigration has left the Conservative Party caught between two stools, pulled in two directions but without the space to define an ideology distinct from either.

If UKIP's increasing popularity heralds nothing else, it is the dissatisfaction the public holds with the populism of the third way, of parties desperate to ape the centre ground, blind to the common ground.

It means that despite progress on the economy, genuine popular opinion and the sense of being the force behind a national movement has been lost by the Conservative Party, and at the current rate UKIP will overtake the Conservative Party as a membership organisation within 7 years.

At least to the country at large, it will be impossible to define our own ideology as a party whilst in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, and if we can't do that before the next election, it will be impossible to win a clear and Conservative majority.

That is why in this edition of Crossbow we call for the dissolution of the Coalition Government, to allow the Conservative Party a year to set out its stall to the country as a party of solid conservative ideology. A party of competence and long-term vision as well as short-term pragmatism.

For younger Conservatives this is yet more important, as it will also demonstrate what the Conservative Party will be as a membership organisation and the nature of its values and relevance as a movement that a new generation will give their lives and labour to.

Conservatives can be proud of conservative values, to build a stronger, greater and more responsible nation; we have nothing to fear and everything to gain in showing those values to the nation once again.

Research update

Head of Research and Editor of Crossbow, **Luke Springthorpe**

It's been a busy few months for research output, and there is plenty in the pipeline moving forward. If it is possible to identify a trend that runs through a number of these papers, it's that state intervention needs to be curtailed when it comes to regulating private enterprise and that the state should not tell businesses how to conduct their own affairs.

It is in this vain that we circulated papers arguing against George Osborne's proposed 11% minimum wage hike that would be well in excess of productivity growth as well as an excellent paper by Marina Yannakoudakis MEP opposing boardroom quotas for women, as was proposed by the European Commission and also supported by Vince Cable. Given how staunchly opposed many women are to the idea of being 'golden skirts' as shoe ins on to the boards of listed companies motivated by meeting a quota rather than merit, this seems to be a textbook case of the political class and bureaucrats being out of touch with what the people "they seek to help" actually want.

We have also published a report arguing against a prescriptive approach to regulating crowd funding platforms. This immensely successful sector has seen 600% growth in the funds being lent to fledgling businesses that have the potential to be the next 'big thing', but the risk is that heavy handed legislative intervention will hamper this. The regulator and George Osborne seem to be at odds given that George Osborne has seemingly sought to increase 'Peer to Peer' lending by making it something that be included in the annual ISA allowance, while the regulator is pushing the other way by restricting it to professional investors (or 10% of investable assets where someone doesn't meet the narrow criteria of being a professional). We can only hope that George Osborne pushes

“The question many of us are left asking is how the man responsible for the sale of Royal Mail, Vince Cable, is still in his job.”

against this prescriptive 'nanny knows best' approach that would potentially smother the nascent growth of crowd funding and cut out young investors.

That said, where there is a case for state intervention, it needs to be considered and well thought through. This has clearly not been the case in the instance of the culling of badgers as a means of reducing bovine TB (bTB). At a cost of £4,121 per badger, the maths doesn't add up given that cattle controls have led to a 9.5% reduction in cattle slaughtered. As such, one of the recommendations of our report is that an independent bTB panel is established to lead policy decisions in the future. There was also the case of the Royal Mail sell-off, with taxpayers missing out on £1.5 billion of proceeds if the company were sold at its current price. With the FTSE 100 standing at much the same level now as it was back in October, it simply doesn't wash that good news on the economy has caused this rise. Previously listed stocks haven't experienced such a rise, and the stock was clearly undervalued – a point we argued prior to the floatation. The question many of us are left asking is how the man responsible for the sale, Vince Cable, is still in his job.

As ever, we are always keen to hear your pitches for research papers. If you do have any suggestions, please get in touch via research@bowgroup.org. All our research papers can be viewed online at www.bowgroup.org though PDF copies can be emailed to you should you wish.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this edition of Crossbow. It is clear from our contributors and conversations we have had off the record that dissatisfaction with the Coalition is now at breaking point. With UKIP likely to inflict great pain on the party in May, costing us many excellent and able councillors and MEP's in the process, it's crucial that we are able to present a solid conservative platform in the run up to the election to convince our lost core-voters that they need to return in 2015 in order to see sensible, right wing policies enacted. If the Liberal Democrats continue as an obstacle to this, we must go our separate ways and be prepared to govern as a minority government.

A change for the better

There is a route to success before the 2015 election. But are we brave enough to take it asks **Alex Deane**

If we are to successfully present ourselves as real Conservatives in the run up to 2015, then we need to take decisive action to turn around our parlous present situation – for, without change, we will not only lose the next election; we also run the risk that we will look back and think that we allowed the Lib Dem drag anchor in Coalition to prevent us really doing much whilst in government.

I would do three things between now and the 2015 poll:

A deal with UKIP – several slots in the House of Lords, which would simply reflect their standing in the country in any case; moreover, standing down Tory candidates in a small number of seats and clearing the way for some UKIP MPs at the election, in return for them standing down where they may harm us. This would enable us to go to the electorate with a real Coalition we can believe in – one that unites the right. Certainly, given both that we have spent a great deal of time insulting them, and that they now hold the whip hand, they might not go for it. But we should try.

Moving the Referendum up the calendar: seal this issue (on which the electorate doesn't really believe our promises) by actually having the referendum at least legislated, and preferably held, before the election. We can do it if we set our minds to it. Hold it on the same day as the election.

“Have the referendum at least legislated, and preferably held, before the election”

*“This is the kind of big picture,
strong Conservative action we need”*

A tax cut: not something small, but something with a genuine impact. My own preference is for the abolition of Employer Contribution National Insurance, which is a straightforward tax on jobs. Our message should be that this big decision not only simplifies the tax system (a good in and of itself) but returns productive capital to where it should be – with businesses and individuals. Our message could be that you should expect some of it from your employer, but not all of it – they should keep some of it to invest in the business and in creating new jobs. It’s a powerful message. Of course, it would require real cuts to enable us to deliver it – but at least we’d be cutting for something, rather than just against the deficit which we’ve failed to really control.

You can pick your own bold choices to substitute for some or all of mine; my point is that this is the kind of big picture, strong Conservative action we need. The fact that none of these things – neither my own suggestions, nor the substitutions you’re thinking about as you read this – are likely to happen demonstrates the problem we face in this period of constrained policies and action dictated by the art of the possible rather than by what we truly believe. If we’re going to get anywhere, we need to move away from the former, which has dogged us since 2010, and to the latter – as soon as possible.

Alex Deane is Head of Public Affairs at Weber Shandwick.

Trading places

Ben Balliger believes Britain's trading aspirations should go beyond the EU

The British trade deficit was £2.565 billion for January 2014. This is unsustainable and all Conservatives, grassroots members and Primrose Hill dwellers alike, agree: Britain must export more goods and services abroad.

One of the great achievements of Hague as Foreign Secretary and Cameron as Prime Minister (as part of winning the global race) has been their policy to visit Commonwealth countries and the world's fastest growing economies to promote British business abroad. The mandatory creation of specialised contact books at all British Embassies for the use of British businesses abroad is indicative of this enthusiastic and practical approach.

However this policy has by no means been perfect in implementation. The Prime Minister's business trip to India certainly raised a few questions as to the British delegation's tactical approach. It is surprising how often liberal western politicians can be so blind to the differences between western and eastern perceptions of honour, integrity and strength which are so critical to successful trade negotiations.

Nevertheless, the concerted efforts of Cameron, Hague, Osborne and Johnson to fly the flag of British business abroad is a breath of fresh air in comparison to the self-seving Eurocentric Blair years.

No British Prime Minister had travelled the world so regularly, was so often and so notably absent from Westminster and yet achieved so little for "Britain PLC" than Blair. It is notable that during the 13 Blair-Brown years the Commonwealth as a place of business was recklessly ignored (no British Foreign Secretary visited Australia) and as Blair himself has bemoaned: little or no business capital was gained from our internationally unpopular and economically disastrous "wars of liberation".

Aside from the wilful neglect of the Blair-Brown years, British business abroad still suffers from two ongoing issues: reluctance to take greater risks and a Eurocentric approach to our international trade.

Britain has traded internationally for well over a millennium and became the most powerful nation economically in the world because of its belief in a global trade outlook. Britain's historic legacy gives it an edge both in existing international relationships and in admiration for the reputation of the quality of its goods and services, though now potentially deteriorating assets.

“It is notable that during the 13 Blair-Brown years the Commonwealth as a place of business was recklessly ignored”

Britain still offers world class services, from Health service consultation and implementation, logistical consultancy to the usual financial and legal services and top-end high quality branded engineered and manufactured goods.

International trade today still comes with some risks through the resurgence of international piracy and terrorism, however instant communications, quick transport, technology and medical advancements significantly mitigate potential risks to person and property. The greatest restraint to a resurgence of a truly global export of British services and goods does not come from threats to the person and property, but from our geopolitical attitude of mind and this will ultimately be determined by our relationship with the EU. The EU currently determines who we can trade with. A future Britain with a truly global trade agenda would want access to EU markets, but would also need to trade with as many countries as possible.

It is regrettable that global free trade is still an elusive utopia and that Britain could not easily trade outside the world’s trade blocs. However trade within the EU does not mean we must inevitably become part of a federal Europe nor must we focus our international trade in Europe: Cameron’s attempted renegotiation of the current EU settlement recognises this.

If failed renegotiations and a referendum mean Britain leaves the EU, through EFTA we would still retain the ability to trade freely in the EU, albeit with no political influence. Furthermore we would be free to join other trading blocs such as NAFTA (secret talks confirmed this was an option in the recent past). Britain could access new markets without the vulnerability of “going it alone” and even then some argue that trade tariffs are currently so low that trade outside these blocs would still be viable.

So what now? Britain simply cannot remain part of the currently envisaged EU federation and be a truly global trading power. If nothing changes, a choice will need to be made or it will be made for us.

Regardless, future British Governments must prioritise promoting “Britain PLC”, as begun in earnest by the current Government. Rebuilding Britain PLC globally will take time and hard work but emerging markets and developing countries offer tremendous opportunity which we can no longer afford to ignore.

Ben Balliger is a Conservative councillor and Political Director of the Bow Group.

Out of kilter?

Beth Davies looks at how Scottish independence could affect the UK's international standing

The more that Scottish Independence is debated in terms of economic implications, the more conspicuous becomes the relative hush about what it would mean for our international standing.

Vice-Admiral John McAnally, a former commandant of the Royal College of Defence Studies, though misguidedly, struck the heart of the matter. The Navy's fleet of nuclear submarines is based at Faslane, Scotland and the Scottish Government's White Paper on independence pledges the removal of Trident within the first term of the Scottish Parliament. Should independence win the day, McAnally warned that Britain could be forced into unilateral nuclear disarmament, *"our relationship with the United States, our status as a leading military power and even our permanent membership of the UN Security Council would all probably be lost"*.

It should be stipulated that the Anglo-American special relationship predates the nuclear age and is based upon much more than the possession of nuclear weapons. The notion of US "exceptionalism" – that US history is somehow different – omits recognition of how culturally, educationally and institutionally, we are brothers. Values matter. It was Britain that took the lead in developing a party system, abolishing slavery and conquering Napoleon. In other words, when it comes to championing liberty and constitutionalism, Britain will remain America's right-hand man.

"The Anglo-American special relationship is based upon much more than the possession of nuclear weapons"

“That Obama went to the Germans, French and Polish before Britain over recent events in Crimea should concern the Prime Minister”

What is more, the special relationship is practical. If the US wants its voice heard in the EU, its safest passage is through us. While Obama might flirt with France, the US is wedded to Britain. With US soft power increasingly under scrutiny, dependability is found in marriage, not one’s bit on the side.

That said, the potential loss of Trident, however unlikely, could provide a helpful trigger for a bit of needed counselling. That Obama went to the Germans, French and Polish before Britain over recent events in Crimea should concern the Prime Minister. Further, taking offence to Obama’s adviser on Europe, Phil Gordon’s comment last year that it was in America’s interest to see Britain strongly participating in the EU is not enough. Britain must stress its capacity to lead Europe, as Thatcher did.

All relationships encounter challenges. Isn’t it the very resilience of the Anglo-US relationship that justifies the self-ascribed title ‘special’?

Beth Davies is an undergraduate student at the London School of Economics.

Economic forecasting - foggy with poor vision

Surprises are inevitable, policy based on hoping for no bad surprises is no policy at all believes **Chris Dillow**

There's an awkward fact about macroeconomics that economists are increasingly recognising but which has not yet affected policy-making in any of the main parties. It's that the economy is inherently unpredictable.

It's become a cliché to say that economists did not foresee the great recession of 2008-09. The cliché is true. A survey of private sector forecasters in March 2008 by the Treasury found that the consensus expected real GDP growth of 1.7% in 2008 and 1.9% in 2009. The ONS now estimates that GDP fell 0.9% in 2008 and 5.2% in 2009.

What's not so well-known though is that there's nothing unusual about this failure. Back in 2000 Prakash Loungani, an IMF economist, looked at GDP forecasts around the world between 1989 and 1999. In this period, there were 60 recessions – defined as a year of falling GDP in any country. He found that economists failed to foresee 58 of them. An inability to anticipate recessions, he concluded, “is a ubiquitous feature of growth forecasts.”

A big reason for this consistent failure is that the standard textbook approach to macroeconomics is wrong. This thinks of the economy as comprising “representative agents”. This view has percolated into everyday talk of “the consumer”, “the stock market” and “the corporate sector”. What this misses is that recessions are all about differences between people, and interactions between them. What looks like something as simple as a change in GDP is in fact a complex, emergent process – the unpredictable outcome of relationships between agents.

The first clue that this is the case comes in a classic study of the early 90s recession by Paul Gregg and the late Paul Geroski. They show that the worst-hit 10% of firms between 1989 and 1991 accounted for an 80% of the drop in sales and 85% of the fall in employment.

Recessions are a minority activity. Xavier Gabaix at Stern School of Business in New York has shown how recessions can occur if a few big firms get into trouble. This implies that recessions might not have “macroeconomic” causes, which means they'll be unpredictable to economists looking at macroeconomic factors.

Of course, some firms get into trouble all the time; it's in the nature of a market economy that bad management, shifts in demand or sheer bad luck will drive some to the wall.

Whether these failures will cause recession or not depends, as MIT's Daron Acemoglu has shown, upon the inter-linkages between firms. A banking failure does more damage than a retailers' failure, for example, because banks are deeply intertwined with other banks and with the wider economy in a way that most retailers are not.

Spillover effects of individual corporate misfortune can happen in other ways. If heavily-indebted firms suffer a fall in demand, their bankruptcies might trigger banking losses and a fall in general

lending and hence recession, whereas a similar fall in demand among companies in better financial health would have no such ill-effects.

Also, animal spirits can be contagious; one company's pessimism can infect others. In fact, the language of disease is apposite; Chris Carroll of Johns Hopkins University has shown that economic sentiment can spread in much the same way that diseases do.

In these senses, recessions are much like riots. Riots are unpredictable because whether they happen or not depends upon small and unnoticeable events: will a handful of people cause trouble? Will others restrain them or imitate them? We just can't know.

All this should matter for fiscal policy. It means that forecast-based policy is silly. Promises, such as that made by Ed Balls recently, to balance the budget by the end of the parliament make no sense. We just cannot know what state the economy will be in by then, and so can't know whether a budget surplus will be feasible or desirable. One of the worst defences of the coalition's fiscal policy came from Vince Cable in 2012, when he tried to blame poor GDP figures not upon austerity but upon the euro crisis. What this missed is the fact that economic surprises are inevitable, and a policy that only works if there are no bad surprises is no policy at all.

So, is it possible to have a fiscal policy that isn't dependent upon forecasts?

Yes. A lot of such policy is or should be forecast-neutral anyway. You can believe public spending is too big or too wasteful (or not) without taking a view on where the economy is heading. And questions of whether to (say) raise education spending or cut taxes should be decided by cost-benefit and political considerations, rather than forecasts.

What's more, policy could, in economists' jargon, be state-contingent rather than time-contingent. Rules to raise tax or cut infrastructure spending if unemployment falls below a particular level, or to cut taxes or raise spending if it rises above a particular level would maintain fiscal discipline whilst ensuring that policy is counter-cyclical, helping to moderate recessions and curb booms. There's an analogy here with the Bank of England's forward guidance. Its promise to leave interest rates at 0.5% at least until unemployment dropped below seven per cent was a state-contingent policy. Fiscal policy could take the same form.

The Bank of England – under both Carney and King – was quite candid about its inability to foresee the future. Politicians should be too, and should base policy upon the fact of this inability.

Herein, though, lies a problem. Politicians are selected for overconfidence; you don't go into politics unless you think you know enough about the economy and society to change them. This militates against them acknowledging their ignorance. So too does public and media pressure. Imagine the response of Andrew Neil or Jeremy Paxman if Ed Balls or George Osborne were to tell the truth, that he didn't have a clue where the economy was heading. They'd be met with consternation and excoriation. The public wants politicians to appear to be "in charge of events".

In this sense, the forces of selection and incentives operate against intelligent economic policy. There's a big difference between economists and politicians: economists' errors are corrigible; politicians' are not.

Chris Dillow is economics writer at the Investors Chronicle.

Interview with Professor John Kay

On January 30th, Bow Group Research Secretary **Luke Springthorpe** interviewed renowned economist **Professor John Kay** at a Bow Group event

A former Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Visiting Professor at the LSE, Financial Times Columnist and founder of Said Business School of Oxford University, Professor John Kay has recently chaired the Kay Review of UK Equity Markets and Long-Term Decision Making.

Key points emerging from the interview, (on the Bow Group's Youtube channel (TheBowGroup) and website) were that **the regulatory approach isn't about more or less, but is about learning lessons**. The financial sector being one example, we see that regulation is growing and one of the lessons of regulatory history is that regulations that are based on detailed supervision of corporate behaviour rarely work but it is not a lesson we have learned. "What we have now is a whole regulatory industry consisting of more than just regulators but compliance officers, a whole battery of consultants and lawyers involved in mediating. You go to meetings where these groups are involved and get the impression they are talking to each other and for each other. What's more, when regulation takes the form of a wildly complicated form of rules and being left to compliance officers, it becomes regarded as a nuisance to operational officers who become interested only in how to minimise the effects of regulation."

What's more, recent years have seen a diminishing role for equity investment, with share buybacks being commonplace and even IPO's often only representing liquidity events for early stage investors to realise profit. The structure of ownership has also changed significantly in that small investors have been replaced by large asset managers and a long chain of intermediaries.

Meanwhile, the Financial Transactions Tax in Europe is almost as unsatisfactory as our own Stamp Duty Reserve Tax, which "gives us the worst of all worlds, attacking long term savers and exempting short term investors". Furthermore, it "doesn't address the problem of short termism and HFT is not the source of short termism in the corporate sector"

“One of the lessons of regulatory history is that regulations that are based on detailed supervision of corporate behaviour rarely work but it is not a lesson we have learned”

Rather interestingly, his book ‘Obliquity’, in which he concluded **“The most successful companies often aren’t those that are most profit oriented**, and it was this phenomenon that prompted [him] to write [his] book Obliquity.” This seems to fly against the conventional wisdom that companies focused solely on profit are the most successful tech companies such as Google, with their slogan of “don’t be evil” would be a prime example of a company with a mission beyond making money that drives its employees to innovate and make a difference.

One of the biggest areas of interest for economists is the unwinding of Quantitative Easing (QE) and that “What we have seen so far is a withdrawal in the face of an adverse reaction and whilst we will see a winding down, we have landed ourselves with an extraordinary monetary policy and we shouldn’t believe that we have solved the underlying problems. The benefits for society have been limited.”

Even post 2008, he claimed that the sources of power of the banking industry in lobbying remain strong and that there is a need to think much more systematically about how we develop the financial sector to work for users rather than having banks that trade with each other.

So, where will the next crisis originate? We have two possibilities: “one being the Emerging markets fallout as a result of the wind down of Quantitative Easing, and the other being the slow burn of the Eurozone crisis which still hasn’t gone away given that bad debts have only been swept under the carpet with much of the poor quality collateral still not being acknowledged as such.”

No song for Europe

From criminal justice to Europe, Conservative voters are craving for common-sense reforms believes **David Nuttall MP**

Many traditional Conservative voters could be forgiven for being a bit fed up right now. Following the last election, hopes of Conservative-led common sense reforms to get the country back on track after years of socialism were thwarted, to a large extent, by three words – “The Coalition Government”.

On many issues important to traditional Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats are not natural bedfellows and Coalition Government has been proof.

At the next General Election, the Conservative Party needs to spell out what it would do without the shackles of the often socialist-leaning Liberal Democrats. Ironically, many of the Coalition Government’s weaknesses could well be the Conservative Party’s biggest strengths in the run up to the election. Some of the compromises that have been made with our Liberal Democrat partners are on issues where the Conservative position is the clear vote winner.

If you take criminal justice, as a start, the Liberal Democrats’ weakness in this area in no way reflects what most people are thinking. Their perceived pandering to criminals and determination to see fewer people in prison are not likely to gain much approval on most voters doorsteps. The Conservative Party has risked a lot of its previous reputation as being the Party that is most robust on law and order issues as well as instinctively more in tune with the public and it needs to urgently repair the damage that has been done. What traditional Conservative voters would like to see is more criminals being locked up – not less. They want to see honesty in sentencing so that the sentence given is the one served – not see criminals released automatically half way through their sentence or even a quarter of the way through in many cases. Traditional Conservative voters – in fact most voters – already see the sense in new ideas such as a “sentencing escalator” whereby anyone committing an offence on a second or subsequent occasion should, as a starting

“We will never be able to control our borders whilst we remain members of the European Union”

“Traditional voters are not impressed by the all too frequent pandering to political correctness or the ever-expanding nanny state”

point, be sent to prison for longer than on the first occasion. I, and colleagues, introduced a Bill on this very point and according to polling carried out by Lord Ashcroft the policy was hugely popular amongst the general public with a massive 90% supporting it – more than most coalition policies!

We must also get a grip of our borders. Whilst my position of Britain being better off out of the EU is clear, I appreciate this is not Party policy! We will never be able to control our borders whilst we remain members of the European Union. We need to know who is in our country and we must have the power to remove all those who break the law regardless of the views of the European Court of Human Rights. There is no point in pledging to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights whilst ever we remain subject to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It is totally unacceptable and a breach of the Government’s duty to protect its people to have the situation where people come to this country and commit crimes – often after leaving their own country with a criminal record and then pitching up in Britain without their criminal record catching up with them.

Traditional voters are not impressed by the all too frequent pandering to political correctness or the ever-expanding nanny state. We must return to the traditional Conservative principle of trusting the people.

Conservative principles are timeless. We need to do more to explain them to a sceptical public and redouble our efforts to convince voters we are going to stick to them. The Conservative Party needs to spell out the clear message it stands for a smaller state that spends less and lets hardworking people keep more of what they have earned. It should make sure that everything it says and does rewards those who work hard and not those who do nothing to help themselves. Conservatives must be clear that people should have the freedom, with responsibility, to run their own lives as they see fit – without Government or bureaucrats getting in the way. This is a true Conservative approach and I believe it would attract both traditional voters and, crucially, new voters.

David Nuttall is the MP for Bury North and a former Solicitor.

Back to the future

We must unite the right to make the next election a re-run of 1992 and not 1945 advises **Nick De Bois MP**

When we're considering what policies might go into the Conservative manifesto for next year's general election, it's vital that we do so with a focus on forming a majority Conservative government. We're in coalition now, but we don't want to be in May 2015. To help with that, let me take you back to October 2007.

It was party conference season. Labour were 11 points ahead in the opinion polls, with speculation rife that Gordon Brown could call a snap election. If he did, Conservative candidates in marginal seats like mine would be facing almost certain defeat. Four more years of Labour government beckoned. The then shadow chancellor, George Osborne, stepped forward and gave a speech that changed everything.

Yes, David Cameron's outstanding conference closer capped off a superb week. But the real shift in momentum was generated by George Osborne's pledge on inheritance tax. By promising to free everyone but millionaires from having to pay death duties, Labour's poll lead was axed to just four points. Brown bottled it. Two and half years later, we had a Conservative Chancellor in Number 11 Downing Street.

But read further into the details of that policy and you'll notice something striking. The Telegraph's reporting was rightly enthusiastic but still noted that "Some two million homes in Britain are now valued at more than £300,000, bringing them into the inheritance tax net... The Government has said just 6 per cent of estates pay the tax each year". More generous estimates put the number of those set to benefit at between five and nine million. So the policy credited with changing the course of history in Britain affected between just 7% and 14% of the population.

The truth is, the power of that policy was not that it offered financial gain to an identifiable number of electors. It resonated on an emotional level with everyone and anyone who wants to get on in life. People who want to see their hard work rewarded, to be able to pass on something to their children. The inheritance tax promise was about aspiration, the most important word in the Conservative vocabulary.

“The inheritance tax promise was about aspiration, the most important word in the Conservative vocabulary”

That's why the Conservative manifesto for the 2015 election, and our campaign to win that contest, needs to focus on the future. The record of this Conservative-led government in dealing with the deficit and restoring the nation's finances has but a background role to play.

David Cameron spoke in 2012 of Britain being in "the economic equivalent of war". He was absolutely right about throwing everything at winning the global race. Thanks to the determination to balance the books whilst encouraging growth, Britain is winning that war. Growth has returned, employment has increased by a million, interest rates have remained low, and business confidence is growing. But in 2015 we have to offer people more than the past.

Some people see the next election as looking like a repeat of 1992. A Labour Party polling badly on economic competence and led by with a weak leader but nonetheless enjoying a strong poll lead – only for the Conservatives to be voted back into office after an election campaign focusing on the economy, tax and jobs.

However, with the economic war on the way to being won, we risk actually repeating a 1945 scenario. Voters didn't reward Winston Churchill for leading Britain through the Second World War; many arguing because the Conservatives didn't offer a vision for the future. It's more than plausible that, should we simply fight on our record of winning an economic war, the public will not be convinced we have a plan to win the peace.

The Conservative manifesto for 2015 therefore needs to inspire Britain that we can see the way forward. A way forward that includes reforming Stamp Duty so that a young couple's savings can be invested in higher deposits, providing the security of lower mortgage repayments. One where tax thresholds keep rising – both for the personal allowance and the 40p tax band – so that we reward hard work and aspiration. Combining income tax and national insurance so that citizens can see clearly how much of their money the government takes from them. Lifting the regulatory burden on providers so that childcare is more affordable. Cutting or even abolishing Employers' National Insurance contributions to spark an increase in wages and boost job creation.

Whatever policies do go into the manifesto, we have to make sure the message coming out of it is one of aspiration. If we map out the direction of travel we're setting for Britain, we'll take people with us on the way there.

Nick de Bois is the MP for North Enfield.

Seize the momentum

Emulate sister parties' successes abroad and end the coalition well before the 2015 election argues **Dominic Schofield**

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR in the early 90s Communism is now a part of many GCSE and A Level history courses. For first and second-time voters at the 2015 General Election the early 90s is a distant land. A pre-Internet place of funny haircuts and Atari game consoles. And also the last time our Party conclusively won anything. The brutal truth is that since then we have lost our relevance and bite, and watched sister parties recover from their bitter defeats and return to power (Australian Liberals, the CDU, Spain's PP, Canada's Conservatives to name but four). The 'modernising project' launched in 2005 sadly didn't succeed – if success is defined by winning over voters (we polled 36% on a 60% turnout). Instead of renewing us the last 8 years has only increased our feelings of existential angst.

If the Conservative Party has any chance of recovering and yielding real benefit from the successes of the Coalition then the Coalition needs to end at least 5-6 months before the first Thursday in May 2015. With recovery gaining momentum we need this platform to be able to show purpose, vision and energy in Government without the endless ('continental coalition style') squabbles with the Libs. Ruling alone would give voters a clear sense of what they'd get from a majority Conservative Government – voting Tory wouldn't be a step into the unknown.

At risk of sounding like a management consultant I think there are four areas we need to sort out urgently:

- **Unity & Loyalty:** the 'Tory tribe' has been a rancorous one of late, and the voters notice. The ranks need to unite behind Cameron – regicide is not an option. But Team Cameron needs to go beyond its clique. The many reasonable rebels need to be forgiven and the 'war on the right' waged by the uber modernisers needs to stop. The departure of the Lib Dems gives the PM the chance to bring to bring in (bring back in some cases) big hitters (Liam Fox, David Davies?) and younger talent (Dominic Raab, Priti Patel, Jesse

“Ruling alone would give voters a clear sense of what they'd get from a majority Conservative Government”

“For one of the major parties, summer 2015 will be marked by a depressive rumination and probably a civil war. Let’s make sure that it’s not us”

Norman) into the Government and give them real exposure in the ‘long campaign’. Cameron needs a Party Chairman who looks and talks differently and will galvanise the wider Conservative movement and make a good pitch to the electorate. Take a radical step and replace Shapps with Robert Halfon (MP for Harlow), one of our most talented and imaginative figures, a political street fighter who is likeable to boot. Loyalty will follow.

- **Discipline & Focus:** if our 2010 campaign was chaotic, 2015 must be highly disciplined. We must know where we stand, where we’re strong and where Labour are weak – and fight accordingly. This may sound like “the bleedin’ obvious”, but we didn’t do this in 2010 and haven’t always done it since. Discipline means keeping our nerve after a mauling in the Euro-elections. If we’re focused, we will look competent.
- **Tone & Tangibility:** no more gimmicks (huskies, Big Society, Vote Blue Go Green). Our tone must be sincere, calm and competent – let the UKIP be the ranters. But our manifesto and messaging must be very tangible. Voters must know at least two things we stand for. Such as – we’ll make the shale revolution happen and this will cut utility bills. Or – we’ll cut National Insurance in half. Or we’ll introduce the British Green Card to control immigration. You get the idea.
- **Vision & Attack, not just attack:** the minority Conservative Government and its defenders need to be a yin and yang of 1992 style ‘You Can’t Trust Labour’ genre attacks and upbeat vision (remember Reagan’s “good morning America”). Any attack on Labour shouldn’t be launched without the accompanying ‘yang’ of the Conservative alternative.... Too much attack and we’ll come across as insincere, too much vision and we’ll miss a trick with Ed Milliband.

For one of the major parties, summer 2015 will be marked by a depressive rumination and probably a civil war. Let’s make sure that it’s not us.

Dominic Schofield was Deputy Director of the Conservative Research Department between 2003-05 and Conservative Candidate in Battersea in 2005.

The lost tribe

With 100,000 members having left the party, **Ben Harris-Quinney**, **Luke Springthorpe** and **Don Porter** discuss how to win them back

Last year, the Bow Group authored our Conference edition of Crossbow in which we were among the first to flag an issue that threatens the existence of the Conservative Party as we know it. It was titled "The Lost Conservative", and it drew attention to the rapid decline in party membership with numbers having halved since David Cameron took over as party leader. With the issue highlighted once again in our packed out 'State of the Party' lecture by Lord Tebbit, it is time for the Conservative Party to fundamentally reform the way it operates.

The measures articulated here are perfectly reasonable and many used to be core principles upon which the party operated. That it has deviated from them has been to the detriment of its active membership, and in turn, activists who do the work in helping it to win elections.

Some will argue now isn't the time to be distracted by internal politics. We disagree. With over 100,000 members having left the fold, now is exactly the time for us to show that the party wants them back and, importantly, to have complete ownership over their party. The recommendations detailed below would go a long way in achieving that.

Bow Group Chairman and Director of Conservative Grassroots Ben Harris-Quinney: The Conservative Party hasn't won an election in 25 years, if current trends continue Bow Group research has shown that UKIP will overtake the Conservative Party membership within a decade.

The result of this modernisation project has not been to increase the likelihood of a majority Conservative Government or to increase Party membership, but the opposite. The result of discarding conservatism and centralising party management is that we have lost half of our members since 2005 and UKIP are now leading our policy direction.

We have to ask ourselves as a Party, do we want to represent conservatism in Britain? If so we need to make not minor, but radical changes to recapture the conservative ideology and membership.

If urgent action isn't taken the Conservative Party will cease to exist as a valued or relevant political organisation.

By undertaking these long overdue measures, freedom and democracy can be driven down and out throughout the Conservative Party, and offer members the opportunity to be part of a genuine grassroots movement again.

Luke Springthorpe, Head of Research at the Bow Group:

With party membership in rapid decline, it is clear that drastic action is required if the trend is to be reversed. The assertion that people are 'too busy' or that it is just a sign of the times is a lazy one to make.

The last leader's debate was the biggest show in town, with the first airing achieving 9.4 million viewers – eclipsing the viewing of Eastenders and Coronation Street on the same day, whilst Nick Griffin's controversial appearance on Question Time attracted 7.9 million viewers. This, combined with the success of single issue groups, lays waste to any assertion that voters have just become a bunch of reality TV obsessed layabouts with no interest in politics.

The failure of the established parties has been twofold. First, there is a perceived convergence on the way they conduct themselves in their clamouring for the 'centre ground' of politics. To describe the 'centre ground' or third way as an ideology is to miss what it truly is. It is government by polls and spin doctors and the public have grown wise to it. They yearn for conviction but are often found wanting. The shock rise of Nick Clegg following the 2010 TV debates and the recent ascendancy of Nigel Farage is a testament to the fact that the public crave someone new who possesses conviction.

Secondly, there isn't enough 'bang for the buck' in being a party member anymore. Candidate selection used to be almost entirely conducted by local associations and their members but this has been reduced to an exercise of choosing between all too similar candidates that have passed a centralised selection procedure by CCHQ. Meanwhile, the party conference has become little more than a big press and lobbyist junket with members deprived of the opportunity to speak in the main hall by the present leadership. This has to change. The party is built on the work of volunteers, and it is this that keeps the party relevant and in touch. This needs to start and end with handing power back to members and placing them right at the core of what the Party does.

Don Porter CBE, Conservative Voice:

Conservative Voice, the grassroots organisation which aims to build relationships between MPs, MEPs, peers, councillors and volunteers, is replicating the American success story. With a structure completely different from that of the national party, Conservative Voice brings volunteers into the Conservative fold by engaging them with campaigns relating to, for example, energy prices, the cost of fuel and affordable housing. By building a broader base of volunteer support, the Conservative Voice approach can help secure a Conservative victory in 2015.

We all want a Conservative majority in 2015. Another five years of Coalition with the Liberal Democrats holds little appeal. The prospect of Downing Street being occupied by Miliband and Balls, the only two men in Europe who see Francois Hollande's economic policy as a glorious triumph, does not bear thinking about.

However, with our Party's membership at its lowest in living memory – almost certainly under 100,000 – we urgently need to re-engage the grassroots members who currently feel overlooked and undervalued.

The grassroots need to be put back at the heart of the core of what the party does.

The recommendations

So can this be achieved? The Bow Group, Conservative Grassroots & Conservative Voice recommend the following 11 practical measures that the Conservative Party can quickly take in order to increase its membership, energise the grassroots and re-engage activists. In addition to the above, the actions to be taken with immediate effect in a bid to revive the party and turnaround our fortunes:

1. More dialogue between MPs and senior volunteers

There needs to be real and regular dialogue between senior volunteers and Conservative Members of Parliament. We passionately believe in the concept of 'one party' – volunteers and parliamentarians working together for electoral success. During his time as Chairman of the Conservative National Convention, Don Porter was delighted to pioneer the election of three additional MPs to the Party Board. This simple change, overwhelmingly endorsed by both senior volunteers and MPs, allowed those with different roles within the Party to work together more closely to deliver a single vision and such initiatives could be rolled out in other more localised structures.

2. Party Board Chairman – let volunteers decide

The Chairman of the Party Board should not be appointed by the Party leader. The Conservative Party website states that the Chairman's role is to "bring the Conservative family together" and to "connect" the Voluntary and Parliamentary branches of the Party. To achieve this, the Chairman of the Board should be elected by Party members.

3. Empower the National Convention

The National Convention is the Parliament of the Voluntary Party. It comprises all Association Chairmen and Regional Officers, along with representatives from the Conservative Women's Organisation and Conservative Future. This body, whose members bring with them so much campaigning, experience and understanding of the Conservative grassroots should be given real powers and authority.

For example, National Convention members should have a real say about how the money they raise for the Party is spent. Volunteers raise over £28 million annually – more than even the most generous individual or corporate donors. They keep the blue flag flying at the local level by campaigning in local elections, fundraising and producing literature. Locally, they decide how to spend the money they raise. It is only right that they should have a say in how the money they raise for the national Party is spent by CCHQ.

4. Hold a Conservative AGM

There should be a Conservative Party AGM which is open to all members. In addition, biannual regional meetings of the Party, to which all members in the region are invited, should also be resurrected nationwide. All MPs and MEPs should play a role in these sessions.

5. Let Volunteers Choose Candidates

Every Party Board committee should be led by an elected and experienced volunteer. Similarly, there must be no dilution of the involvement of members in the selection of their local and national candidates. This is an essential component in the fabric of our party. To that end, open primaries should be scrapped in favour of closed primaries. They de-motivate Conservative activists and members. Loyal activists should not be overlooked by people with no history of commitment to the Party in favour of candidates who may feel that they owe no loyalty to the Party.

Closed primaries offer a better alternative, and CCHQ should have no involvement in pushing forward an 'approved list' that has been centrally picked. The role should be reduced to one of very basic background checks.

6. Build a Broader Base of Support

The days of mass membership politics are over. Therefore, we need an enlightened approach which allows the Conservative Party to reach out to groups which share our values, and to mobilise their support for the Conservative cause. We need to learn lessons not just from the American political parties but also from major charities, and to become more professional in our retention of members and supporters.

Both the Republican and Democrat Parties seek support from other like-minded organisations, political or otherwise, as a core part of their engagement activities. They use these 'affinity groups' to build up the level of trust in their party; they fundraise or gain volunteers for specific issues that voters relate to and then 'grow' them into regular activists over a period of time. In an age where voters are more likely to support a single issue campaign than to join a political party, it makes sense for the Conservative Party to seek support amongst members of other groups which share our values.

7. Let Volunteers Drive the Conference Agenda

Volunteers should be given more chances to choose motions for debate at the annual Party Conference. These debates should be held away from television cameras and the media.

By allowing members to speak in the main hall once again and vote on party policy as well as election manifestos, the conference can be reformed into a democratic, open and less stage-managed occasion.

8. Say No To State Funding

No public money should be given to political parties. This would further damage levels of engagement among activists and reduce the incentives for the leadership to engage with them.

9. Recognise and Reward Volunteers

There should be a real emphasis on recognising and rewarding loyal volunteers across the Party. Volunteers do not give up their time because they expect financial reward. However, some form of recognition – even a simple letter showing that the Party is aware of and appreciates a volunteer’s efforts – would be hugely appreciated and could raise grassroots morale.

Trusting the electorate to make decisions about local issues must be matched by trusting our local activists and members to have a greater say in the organisation of our Party and in the development of policies based on our values and principles. The time is now ripe for a real engagement of volunteers and parliamentarians in the running of our Party.

10. Revolutionising online communications

Digital has opened a whole array of options to interact with a politically curious but disaffected population. This requires a less centrally managed approach based on the delivery of a static message, and greater interaction by being open to petitions and motions to be debated. This is done successfully by pressure groups such as Avaaz and 38 degrees but needs to be mimicked by political parties in order to remain relevant.

11. The break-up of the Coalition Government

The Coalition should dissolve in the lead up to the 2015 general election, followed by a commitment not to enter into coalitions with non-conservative parties going forward. With the Coalition’s reason for coming in to existence – namely, the stabilising of the economy – now achieved, there is little reason to justify its existence. The normal shelf life of a government is four years, and the most significant aspects of the legislative agenda have been delivered. By seeing out the rest of this parliament as a minority, the Conservatives can put clear night and day between themselves and their opponents and showcase themselves as the only choice for right wing voters in 2015. With a recent ComRes poll suggesting support for right wing parties (UKIP & Conservatives) is at 49%, the notion that chasing this vote is a road to nowhere is a fallacy.

If the above points are enacted, we can not only revive our hopes of securing a majority in 2015, but secure the long term health of the party. The situation is perilous, however, and we need to act fast. The time to enact these measures is now.

Trouble and strive

Will Millard

Will Millard believes IHT is a tax on potential and punitive against ordinary people

The Conservative 2015 election slogan should be 'accelerating aspiration' and the group think in party echelons is coming round to understand that an embargo on talent bodes very badly for a future fair for all. The indefensible threshold freeze on Inheritance Tax (IHT) is a case in point.

The Inheritance Tax threshold was frozen in 2009 at £325,000 and is currently set to remain in place throughout the next parliament until 2019; the price Conservatives paid for Coalition. IHT is what I coin the 'tax on potential', and is a truly punitive tax. IHT is a prime example of a Treasury trade off: progressive tax enacted for political harmony. But the status quo is not good enough.

Touted before 2010 as the Conservative flagship policy, an increase from the £325,000 to £1 million before paying inheritance tax represented the economic policy gold-standard. It should have kept pounds in pinched pockets but died a premature death at the hands of Coalition agreement.

Government complacency on inheritance tax has, in fact neither hit the poorest or the richest the most – it's hit ordinary people. This is a flagrant disregard for the dreamers: those truly on the cusp of success. From the parent who pines for the financial security or enrolling their child at university to a young couple looking for the first rung up on the housing ladder – these 'strivers' should never have to make the excruciating choice between succeeding and passing their home on to the next generation, when the time comes.

Taking the South East and most especially London into account, where the average home falls £100,000 above the IHT threshold at £409,000 this tax truly has the biggest impact. The tied hands of Conservatives in coalition has left London homeowners in the lurch and facing crippling high tax.

To win our battle against the Red Ed's, we must first win the battle of wages and wallets, for the people in the middle feeling the pinch. We can do this by not only throwing out burdensome tax, but also by parting company with the Liberal Democrats at the same time.

This is a government where the Liberal Democrat tail is wagging the Conservative bulldog, especially when it comes to enhancing social mobility. It is imperative that David Cameron takes the initiative here not only for success at the General Election but the success of society as a whole.

YouGove.ok

The Education Minister has brought in much-needed reforms and if the Conservatives ‘go it alone’, they should be continued argues **Peter Smith**

Most Conservatives consider Gove’s reforms as one of the two flagship Tory reforms of the Coalition (the other, as Ryan Bourne notes, is IDS’ welfare recalibrations). His successes should not be underestimated. As Toby Young recently summarised, Gove has cut the number of children being taught in failing schools by 250,000, enabled more than half of England’s state secondary schools to become academies, opened over 170 free schools (with three quarters assessed ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted), reshaped the national curriculum in favour of more intellectually demanding courses of study, raised standards in GCSEs and A levels by removing coursework and introducing more assessments, made it easier for head teachers to enforce discipline, weakened the grip of Left-wing academics on the teaching training process, made league tables more transparent and improved accountability.

But at what cost have these improvements come about? The sporadic artillery fire from the revanchist Left is only to be expected. Yet some on the right see Gove as a maverick with leadership ambitions; others – while acknowledging his charm – see an unnecessarily pugnacious or even abrasive man. Education policy has become vested in the personality of Michael Gove and, until 2015, the two shall thrive or decline together.

Putting personalities aside, should the Conservatives go it alone with a year before the general election, the tenor of The Gove Reforms should be continued. However, a sensible and mature government should acknowledge and correct mistakes, as the Secretary of State himself admitted over the termination of the Building Schools for the Future programme and the replacement of the GCSE with an English Baccalaureate Certificate.

Herewith some ideas for the thrusts of that reform:

1. Schools. Remove local education authority control and don’t supplant it with more Whitehall control. If school budgets are to be set by a national funding formula, for

“Gove’s successes should not be underestimated. He has cut the number of children being taught in failing schools by 250,000 and enabled more than half of England’s state secondary schools to become academies”

instance, make sure LEAs and school governors have enough flexibility to make decisions about school buildings and staffing levels. When more academies and free schools fail, as undoubtedly they will, don't be tempted to alter the principle and take back power from parents on the basis of high-profile but comparatively rare defeats: weather the storm. Keep faith schools strong: allow them to keep the virtues and discipline of religion central to their school ethos and retain control over their admissions policies.

2. Universities. Don't forget that universities have requirements too. If A levels become too tough through prohibiting resits, reducing modular courses and making mathematics and science results dependent on 'death-or-glory' final exams, fewer otherwise able students will apply and the undergraduate base will shrink. In some cases this will be welcome, but the risk is that harder courses, particularly the STEM courses, will be hit.

3. Curriculums. The haste towards tougher exams must not be at the expense of vocational qualifications. Insufficient progress has been made towards realising the benefits of practical training as explained by Professor Alison Wolf in 2011. Apprenticeships should be frequently examined to ensure they train the right skills, building on solid foundations in numeracy and literacy. Don't forget practical skills in academic subjects too: universities need students with both 'dry' knowledge gleaned from reading and teaching and 'wet' knowledge learnt through doing: conducting experiments, writing essays, carrying out fieldwork. More thought should be given of the move towards a single national exam board: let schools have some choice as to the inherent trade-offs in selecting the appropriate blend of skills and knowledge.

4. Policies. More innovation, but not at the expense of the orthodox mechanisms of policy formulation: think, propose, test, and roll out. Some good ideas have been mooted, such as the plan to dock child benefit from parents who allow their children to miss school. Although first proposed two years ago, Nick Clegg vetoed it, and the idea should be resurrected and brought forwards to testing for inclusive in the 2015 manifesto if it should prove practical and effective. Plans for a transferable voucher should also be dusted off, allowing parents the flexibility to spend their money on private education as they see fit.

Only with more radical ideas will the British education system produce the human capital capable of competing in the global race.

Peter Smith is a barrister practising in media and commercial litigation and is a governor of a comprehensive school in central London.

Towering infernos

John Hayes MP thinks it is time to restore conservatism to architecture

One of the great challenges the Conservative Party has long faced is how to reconcile aspiration with tradition; how to help more people to fulfil their ambitions whilst simultaneously protecting our way of life.

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of this tension is property ownership. The Conservatives have long believed in establishing what Anthony Eden was the first to call ‘a property owning democracy.’ We have made great strides over the years towards achieving this vision, but, sadly, in the last decade or so, this has been an exception with an increasing number of people feeling that they will never be able to afford to own their own home and, consequently, feeling trapped in rented accommodation. As we are now seeing, help for first time buyers also provides a boost for house building as developers know more people are able to enter the market.

During my time as Energy Minister I often heard a truism that helps to explain why people have become instinctively resistant to new development. I helped to move policy towards a more balanced approach to onshore wind development. It wasn’t just the costs of onshore wind that I was concerned about. I was also alarmed that industrial buildings could be forced on communities, imposing dramatic structures on the skyline and destroying views that had been enjoyed for generations. Central to my continuing concern is that wind turbines are simply ugly. Those that disagreed with me simply dismissed an aesthetic argument as irrelevant. They did so on the basis of the easily grasped, though utterly crass notion that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’, or, still more worryingly, because they did not think that aesthetics mattered much at all.

This notion that beauty is relative has been used to justify much of the ugliness imposed on our towns and cities by architects, planners and developers since the Second World War. Even today people still laud the tower blocks that blighted lives and destroyed

“This notion that beauty is relative has been used to justify much of the ugliness imposed on our towns and cities by architects, planners and developers since the Second World War”

communities. While the failure of tower blocks as a social experiment is rooted in the misconception that humans are perfectible and their needs are uniform, their aesthetic failure is based on the opposite misconception: that the physical world is not. Indeed, at the heart of modern architecture, like modern art, is the Nietzschean concept that we can create our own value system. It is not for nothing that the 'hero' of Ayn Ryan's dreadful book 'The Fountainhead' is an architect.

Much modern architecture fails precisely because it rejects those principles of design that time has taught us delight the senses. Where modernist design does succeed it is largely by accident, or, because where form has at least followed function, a building has a high degree of utility. But utility is not, as Edmund Burke noted long ago in an early work on aesthetics (A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful) the same as beauty. Burke understood that there is a great deal in common in what people find beautiful. But this is not related to utility; our appreciation of beauty is an effect 'previous to any knowledge of use.' Our perception of beauty is not rational, it stems from the unconscious; from our deepest feelings and emotions as human beings.

While the solipsism of the architect may be the driving force behind the push to render much of our public space unsightly, it is our scepticism that has enabled this desecration to take place. It is because we have become so doubtful about the ability to make valid judgements about aesthetics, and even faintly embarrassed by those who do, that we allowed ourselves to be ridden roughshod over by those who put profit and ego above all else. Ultimately, as John Keats wrote, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all'. If we follow the logic of relativism, are we to conclude that 'truth is in the eye of the beholder' as well?

Tradition and social advancement are often characterised as being juxtaposed. It is, however, a liberal myth that progress inevitably means greater individualism. As previous times in our history have demonstrated, it is when we are most confident about our shared values and our common culture that we have been most successful. If we were to reignite the appreciation of beauty that helped to build a Britain we all still treasure, then we might also build a better future. Rather than being apologetic about the need for new homes we should be ambitious about what can be achieved: a legacy for future generations of beautiful housing, as loved as Georgian townhouses and Victorian villas.

John Hayes is the MP for South Holland and the Deepings and member of the Cornerstone group.

Invest we trust

Charitable Britain must rethink global development strategies says
Maxwell Chapman

The UK allocated an estimated £12billion in international aid in 2013, the highest per capita foreign aid contribution in the world. Yet many case studies suggest that foreign aid, especially bilateral aid, tends to result in misallocated government spending, unsustainable development and systematic dependency. In contrast, multilateral aid through Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and UN backed initiatives lead to more successful outcomes such as the recent Global Polio Eradication Initiative and food security campaigns.

Foreign aid, while channeled through global charitable NGO's that strive for low administrative costs and local relevancy, serves an important purpose in undertaking challenging humanitarian causes. Yet there is a limit to the amount of progress such NGO's can achieve due to the lack of local infrastructure in place and overall bureaucratic inefficiencies. Where foreign aid fails, direct foreign investment thrives.

Instead of using UK government funds to finance unsustainable and often politicized initiatives used for personal political gains, the government should incentivize private investment in developing countries (DC's). Foreign direct investment (FDI) has been proven to be more transparent and lead to sustainable growth due to the spillover effects on domestic firms and infrastructure development. Moreover, FDI has been shown to generate employment, diversify worker skills, stimulate technology transfers and enhance economic efficiency which all leads to a dynamic integration into the global market.

“FDI has been shown to generate employment, diversify worker skills, stimulate technology transfers and enhance economic efficiency”

“The UK can once again become a leader in free trade by encouraging UK businesses to shift their interests from the stuttering economies of the West to emerging markets worldwide”

Unfortunately, current FDI inflows are limited to the primary section of foreign economies, namely mining, quarrying, and petroleum extraction. While natural resource extraction is essential to commercial production and international economic competition, FDI needs to be extended to other sectors of DC economies such as the telecommunication and service sectors to promote a more horizontal market and help modernise their economies.

A diverse FDI strategy in DC's will provide the foundation for a rise in per capita income that will make way for a budding global middle class. Meanwhile, the rise in income will also foster a strong purchasing power that will create new channels in global trade. The UK can once again become a leader in free trade by encouraging UK businesses to shift their interests from the stuttering economies of the West to emerging markets worldwide.

Ultimately, British foreign aid funds should be redirected into government incentives for global private sector investment within multiple economic sectors. Such an injection of capital could then serve as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth, both at home and abroad.

Maxwell Chapman is the Secretary of the Bow Group.

Chancing round the May poll

The fate of our Zombie Coalition hangs on the European elections
says **Nick Wood**

Donald Rumsfeld made one significant political contribution – more to the language of politics than the art itself – but a contribution nonetheless, certainly on a par with Macmillan's "Events, dear boy, events".

The former US Defense Secretary spoke of known unknowns and unknown unknowns.

The fate of the Coalition is a known unknown. It will come to an end one day – certainly no later than May 7, 2015. But in all probability it will limp on until at least the autumn of this year. It suits David Cameron and his payroll vote and Nick Clegg and his hangers on not to cut the rope any sooner than absolutely necessary.

After all, it is quite nice being a minister, especially being a Prime Minister or, God forbid, the constitutional absurdity of a Deputy Prime Minister. Hot and cold running Jaguars, an endless army of willing flunkeys, red carpets and banquets wherever you go, obsequiousness everywhere, bar the Commons and the Press. All that five star luxury and non-stop grovelling can be hard to kick.

And that institutional bowing and scraping does not stop with the Boss and his sidekick. There's another 100 on the ministerial payroll, some of whom – I mean the Lib Dems – never thought they would get so much as a parliamentary junket to Gibraltar.

*“Tory MPs will scan the results on Sunday
May 25 and see the writing on the wall”*

Too many para-powerful people have a vested interest in keeping the Coalition charabanc on the road for as long as possible to chuck the old banger on the scrapheap before it blows its final gasket. It may look ridiculous, it may attract the general scorn of the populace, it may be sucking the life blood out of both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, it may be the making of the anti-politics brigade headed by Mr Farage, but it will clonk on to the bitter end.

So what about the other part of the Rumsfeld riddle? Unknown unknowns? Macmillan-style events, like a Profumo scandal, we cannot even begin to factor into the calculus of political life. Even here, the chances have to be that this zombie government will somehow ride them out.

That takes us back to the known unknowns – and to one in particular: the elections to the European Parliament on May 22.

Political prediction is a mug's game. But I hazard one. The world will feel a different place after the Faragists have had their day at the ballot box. Tory MPs will scan the results on Sunday May 25 and see the writing on the wall. Anyone with a majority of less than 5,000 will be staring defeat in the face – and that is a lot of Tory MPs.

As one Cabinet Minister put it to me: "We will be wiped out and then there will be raw panic."

Questions will inevitably raised about Cameron's leadership. All it will take is for 46 irreconcilable or panic-stricken Conservative MPs to write to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee demanding a vote of confidence in Mr Cameron and we are in unknown

territory; Rumsfeld–land you might call it. And the word around Westminster is that 25-30 Tories have already sent such a missive to the poker-faced Mr Graham Brady.

Conventional wisdom has it that the current sniper fire between Boris and Michael Gove is all about George Osborne's prospects of succeeding Cameron as leader in 2015. But there has to be at least the suspicion that the infighting is not unrelated to the slim but growing chance of a leadership crisis this summer.

It is against this febrile background that one should view the fate of the Coalition.

Mr Cameron should call in Mr Clegg no later than in the immediate aftermath of the May elections, present the pearl-handled revolver and announce that all bets are off. The Coalition is over and that henceforth he will govern as the leader of a minority administration.

The Lib Dem leader would be left with the choice of siding with Labour in an attempt to bring down the Government and force an election or allowing Mr Cameron to rule without a majority for the next year or so. Any inclination he would have to kick the Conservatives out would be tempered by the fact that after a pasting in the European elections, the Lib Dems would face oblivion in an early general election. Fixed-term parliaments and the other jiggery-pokery of the Coalition complicate the picture of course.

But ultimately, with no one party wanting an early election, the door would open for Cameron, Clegg and Miliband to set out their stall to the electorate. Cameron could become a Conservative again, spelling out a vision of a future Tory Government doing what it believed in (cutting taxes, curbing spending, boosting enterprise and trade, reforming the public services in the interests of the consumer, taking welfare reform to a new level, and dealing firmly with criminals and terrorists – all without reference

“Cameron could become a Conservative again, spelling out a vision of a future Tory government doing what it believed in”

to foreign meddling from Brussels). And, yes, cutting a deal with UKIP to reunite the Right.

The business of government could continue on a maintenance-of-supply basis until the spring of next year and then we could go to the polls with a chance of outright victory (Boris take note).

It will be for historians, not today's commentators, to assess the success or failure of the Coalition. It has proved more stable than many of us expected. But at the same time, it has cast a pall over the land. Politics as we once understood it as a fluid, passionate clash of ideas across a wide canvas has stalled and become a desultory affair. Lassitude fills the air.

It is as if the country is frozen in aspic. The Coalition cannot end too soon.

Nick Wood is a former chief political correspondent of The Times and political editor of the Daily Express. He was press secretary to two Conservative leaders: William Hague and Iain Duncan Smith. He founded Media Intelligence Partners Ltd in 2004.

Manifestly Conservative

Forget the mythical centre ground, we need bold and radical policies says **Priti Patel MP**

Conservatives have traditionally been at our most successful in Elections when we have broadened our appeal to the public. In doing so, the public have had the confidence to express a positive vote for us to elect a Conservative Government rather than use their vote negatively to remove a Labour Government. In the 1980s we polled more than 13 million and surpassed 14 million in 1992, consistently securing over 40% of the vote share.

But the lesson from the 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992 General Elections is that we did not achieve these election victories by shifting our Party towards a mythical centre ground and compromising on our values and beliefs. We broadened our appeal to voters by delivering robust Conservative policies and ensuring that our actions in Government convinced them that they were better off with us in.

Under Margaret Thatcher, we steered the economy through turbulent economic times and transformed our economic foundations to usher in a generation of economic prosperity. We were bold and radical and innovated. We shifted the burden of taxation away from earnings, inspired an era of home ownership and got behind those who saved, invested and were entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurialism soared, new jobs were created and while tax rates fell, tax revenues increased. The public finances were brought back under control and Britain re-established itself as a major world power ending decades of decline.

This was the culmination of the delivery of resolutely Conservative policies in the face of opposition from those committed to expanding the size of the state. Although we have been in coalition with the Liberal Democrats since 2010, the deficit reduction programme and economic and fiscal blueprint being implemented is predominantly a Conservative initiative. Just as Conservative policies fixed broken public finances inherited from Labour in 1979.

“The reason for the Coalition being established - Liberal Democrat support in the House of Commons to ensure that our programme of economic reforms can be implemented - has now effectively expired”

With growth this year predicted to be 2.7%, record numbers of people are in work as unemployment falls, and welfare bills are being capped. The closing of the opinion polls on the back of the Chancellor's brilliant Budget in March, which included reforms to pensions and savings and cuts to green levies demonstrates that the public like Conservative policies and want more.

Crucially, this means that the reason for the Coalition being established – Liberal Democrat support in the House of Commons to ensure that our programme of economic reforms can be implemented – has now effectively expired.

This gives us an opening to be more confident as a Party to express our principles and put forward further truly Conservative policies to broaden our appeal to the public. Firstly, we should be unapologetic in our support for tax cuts. Removing taxes on businesses is good for job creation, while lowering the tax burden on families is the most effective way to help with the cost of living. Although we are still constrained by the size of the deficit, cutting taxes must remain a key priority for Conservatives.

Secondly, we should be firm and robust in our belief that Government should be tough on crime and strong on law and order. The public want their streets safer, criminals locked up and human rights laws changed, and so do we. In Government, Conservatives have already delivered reforms to policing, prisons and rehabilitation while reducing spending. There has been no negative impact on the frontline as crime is falling so we should go further. We should look to introduce tougher punishments for persistent and serious offenders and press ahead with reforming the ridiculous human rights laws that make an absolute mockery of the justice system.

Thirdly, we should continue with our reforms to public services and public spending to reduce the size of the state and empower the British people to have more choice and control over their lives. Whether it is over raising standards in schools and hospitals, or introducing limits on welfare spending; only Conservatives have the values to deliver the changes that best help the public.

By reaffirming these beliefs over the next 12 months, we can go into the next General Election with a strong Conservative manifesto, which accords with the aspirations of the British people and attracts the broad support needed to win a majority.

Priti Patel is the MP for Witham.

The state of welfare

Ryan Bourne believes Conservatives are unclear about what the party's long-term vision is regarding welfare. Time is running out

Of all the Coalition government's policy platforms, it's clear that the most popular is welfare. It's worth taking a step back, and asking: why?

Yes, by all accounts the long-term trend has been for a hardening attitude on the subject. Even Labour supporters fit the trend: 46% say if benefits were not as generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet, a figure that has risen from 16% in 1987. It is quite possible that, having observed the consequences of welfare over a good many years, people have just come to the conclusion that fundamental reform is necessary.

A key factor for the Conservatives, though, is that in Iain Duncan Smith they have someone who has also been critiquing the welfare system since he founded the think tank the Centre for Social Justice in 2004. His plan, to overhaul a number of benefits, and replace with the introduction of universal credit (which has been oversold in terms of its transformational effects) is at least his attempt to address what he sees as the key problems of complexity and often extreme marginal tax rates caused by benefit withdrawal.

The budget deficit has meant the Conservative party in Government has sought to make other more difficult changes to the benefits system to save money. The Labour party has made great play of the 'bedroom tax' and the Government has also restricted the growth of many benefits to 1% per year, below inflation. Yet the public remain unmoved. If anything, they demand that the Government be tougher still.

It's difficult not to conclude that IDS's long association with the issue of welfare reform has given him a credibility for undertaking it. Someone who makes a long critique about something that is going wrong is well placed to deliver change when public opinion demands it. On welfare, the Conservatives have made a clear case for change over a good number of years, and as such have acquired the political capital to carry out their reforms, with leeway for purer budget saving measures. In an age when there's a tendency to react to events with short-term announcements and wheezes, there is still a payoff to thinking

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“It took a huge public debate and the eventual economic recovery in 2013 for Conservatives to finally claim victory in the macroeconomic debate”

through an issue from first principles, identifying problems and coming up with a clear idea of a solution.

There are obvious examples of the opposite too, when a lack of a sustained critique of an issue means that the public doubt your motives. The Conservative leadership spent years prior to 2010 seeking to convince the public they could be trusted to maintain the NHS by saying nice things about it. When they then sought to introduce a large reform to the health service under Andrew Lansley in 2010, they hadn't convinced the public of the need for change.

Even worse was the disastrous decision prior to the financial crisis in 2008 to sign up to Gordon Brown's spending plans. The Conservative party abandoned their tax-cutting and smaller government instincts and convinced themselves the public were happy with Brownian spending and so committed to “share the proceeds of growth” between tax cuts and more public spending. When the crash came, and the full extent of the spending profligacy and reliance on financial sector tax revenues became clear, the party had no accumulated critique for what had gone wrong. The public were unsure of the party's intentions in the 2010 election and it took a huge public debate and the eventual economic recovery in 2013 for Conservatives to finally claim victory in the macroeconomic debate.

The lesson here then is the need to make your case and acquire the trust to carry out your agenda. A key advantage of an early Coalition divorce and a Conservative minority government would be the opportunity for the Conservative party to set out clearly its own agenda, distinct from the Coalition. The party needs to develop and outline what it believes the key challenges facing the country are, and show its priorities by bringing forward legislation and daring Labour and the Lib Dems to oppose it. The chosen current narrative is for a 'long term plan' and 'values'. At the moment, many Conservatives and the public are unclear what the vision is and what it means in policy terms. Time is running out to show them.

Ryan Bourne is the Head of Public Policy at the Institute for Economic Affairs.

Create wealth, not stealth

Rather than reduce incentives for business, the Government needs to reward companies which produce and export says **Sheila Lawlor**

The Coalition, which came to power in 2010, inherited unsustainable levels of deficit and public debt. It also inherited unparalleled levels of peace-time public spending at almost 50% of GDP. The task from the outset was to cut the deficit as rapidly as possible (initially the aim was to do so by 2015) and to cut public spending as a proportion of GDP. That was also the surest way to economic recovery and growth. Public spending cuts work. The economic evidence is that significant public spending cuts were and are needed to restore the fiscal balance and bring economic growth. The picture from a sample of economies that cut public spending dramatically and introduced economic liberalisation and structural reform is of growth levels between 3.5% and 9.8%.

However, since the outset, the Lib Dems have made no secret of their wish to tie the hands of their Conservative Coalition partners in tackling the fiscal imbalances, having held out for targeted public spending and structural reform or tax cuts to favour certain groups. Britain's public spending level is still pitched at around 48% of GDP – still higher than Germany's 45%, though it is coming down, less slowly than a Conservative administration might want.

But it is on structural reform, and the incentives in place for business and people to do well, that the Chancellor has been boxed in both by his Coalition partners and the high public spending levels from which the country must be weaned. Although he has begun to cut the costs on business by reducing corporation tax from 28% to an intended 20%, that figure could shrink further down to Ireland's 12.4% or Switzerland's 17%, with an annual cut. And business rates and the employer NIC's, which add to the penalties for producing or growing, could also be cut.

“The economic evidence is that significant public spending cuts were and are needed to restore the fiscal balance and bring economic growth”

“The UK needs to set free the millions of brilliant, hard-working people who make money for themselves and the economy, so that they are rewarded, not penalised, for doing better”

Business, however, is only as successful as long as its workers and entrepreneurs succeed and want to succeed. Far more needs to be done to remove the tax on effort and enterprise for those on middle incomes. The take-home pay of someone earning around £42,000 per annum is just £31,000, though by the time travel costs to work are paid, a family might hardly be as well off as the family on benefits with £26,000.

The matter at stake here is that if people are to have the incentive to do well, there must be differentials. That is something the left, including the Lib Dems, are slow to pronounce, let alone encourage. The UK needs to set free the millions of brilliant, talented hard working people who make money for themselves and the economy, by making, producing and exporting so that they are rewarded, not penalised, for doing better.

Yes, reforming welfare matters; getting people into work, and keeping them there, also does. But if tax cuts are mainly targeted at the low paid and the small number of high earners while others are doing better and might go far further are not encouraged, there will be not so much a poverty trap, but a static trap. When George Osborne became Shadow Chancellor he supported simpler taxes and was attracted to the flat tax. For this country to grow, we need to see this vision reflected in structural reforms: lower, simpler, taxes, especially for people caught by the static trap.

Sheila Lawlor is the Director of Centre-Right think-tank Politeia and is an MEP candidate for London.

The porn ultimatum

It's time to destroy the scourge of hardcore pornography argues

Tim Stanley

It's a funny thing, morality in government. You'll find morality in foreign policy and economics – but try to talk about it in relation to sexuality and you'll be called a tyrant. Which is doubly strange because sex is perhaps the strongest human impulse. With distrusting Lib Dems following shortly behind.

Nevertheless, if David Cameron wants to strengthen the Tory brand in the run up to 2015, he'd do well to cast off the libertarians and double his efforts to tackle online hardcore pornography.

Why? Because there's been a revolution in porn that threatens the moral health of society. In the good old days, the only way you could access the hard stuff was to visit a sex shop or purchase a dirty magazine from a corner shop – and it was understood, at least in my community, that this was innately seedy. Nowadays anyone, including children, can access the most disturbing images at the click of a button. The variety and sheer quantity of porn on the internet has to have had an effect upon our attitudes towards sex. We already know that it's spawned something called the Sexual Attention Deficit Disorder, comprising an addictive attitude towards smut that is dramatically changing people's expectations of sexual intimacy and relationships. Research suggests that SADD is driving up divorce rates.

The content of a great deal of porn also warps attitudes towards women. Heavy users are six times more likely to rape and a man who regularly watches porn doubles his likelihood of raping his spouse. Some 83% of rapists and 67% of child molesters consume hardcore pornography at high rates. Horror stories of children raping other children in an effort to imitate what they see on the computer screen should ring alarm bells: we are at risk of producing adults with a dehumanised view of the opposite gender. One of the great evils of porn is that it invites men to degrade women and then has the audacity to suggest that the woman quickly finds she enjoys it. It is a simulation not just of sex but of the most brutal understanding of the relationship between the sexes: man as sadist, woman as masochist.

The industry itself is not a nice one. A recent outbreak of HIV in Los Angeles among porn actors confirms that risks are taken and disease is rife. The links with organised crime are strong; many of the women involved will be motivated by poverty, drug addiction or abusive partners. You could in effect be watching someone being sexually abused.

“Heavy users are six times more likely to rape and a man who regularly watches porn doubles his likelihood of raping his spouse”

We have to respect the rights of the free citizen and their privacy. But a balance clearly has to be struck between an individual's idea of a good time and what harms the society around them. So let's talk seriously about better control of pornographic content and reducing access. We have to focus on better control of content and reducing access. The good news is that the Government has backed family friendly porn filters (no one gets to access filth unless the bill payer requests to) and a ban on rape porn. It is an out-and-out lie to suggest that these ideas won't work – the Internet can easily be policed, as any poor Chinese dissident will tell you. And the UK campaign could in fact be even bigger and bolder. Education should focus on discouraging porn use and promoting instead healthy, respectful attitudes towards partners. We need increased surveillance of the web to clean it up and a policy of forcing all pornographic websites to use the .xxx domain name so that people are in doubt about what they are clicking on to. And the growth in sex scenes on television should be countered, because it essentially validates hardcore online content by normalising it. Some nights, a cursory glance at the television is akin to sticking an old copy of “Debbie Does Dallas” into the video player.

We've already discovered the dreadful longterm impact of the 'whatever turns you on' culture of the 1970s, when liberation turned quickly into sexism and child abuse. Likewise, we are witnessing a revolution in attitudes that, in forty years' time, we may look back on and think, “We must have been mad to tolerate it.” Of course, if Tories make changing our sexual culture a priority then they'll get called prudes. But who cares? Perhaps the Right risks losing the demographic of heavy-breathing, hairy-palmed rape porn fans. But they are a constituency that we can lose with pride.

Tim Stanley is a leader writer and columnist for the Daily Telegraph.

Breaking up is what to do

Coalition, UKIP and a change in leadership are the Conservative priorities of **Lord Tebbit**

I have three priorities. Firstly I believe the Coalition is now beginning to smell past its sell by date, and the sooner it is broken up the better, never to be returned to. Secondly if the UKIP bubble has not burst by 2015 I would favour local deals to be made on the basis that the prime thing on which we and UKIP agree is that we do not want a Labour or a Lib-Lab government.

So where we look at a constituency we should say, first of all, who has the best chance of ensuring that we do not get a Liberal or Labour member elected in that constituency? If it's a Conservative then UKIP ought to withdraw and support us. If it looks to be UKIP then we should withdraw and tell our voters they should go that way.

The leadership have a curious way of persuading UKIP voters to return having gone out of their way to describe UKIP members as fruitcakes and swivel eyed loons. But if I ran a retail business that happened to be very profitable, but whose former customers began to leave the shop to go to a newly opened shop down the road, I wouldn't stand in the window and abuse them.

Thirdly, let me talk about the Conservative leadership. There really were no excuses for David Cameron's failure to win enough support from the electorate in the last election. His attempt to win their support by moving across towards them ideologically meant that he reinforced the conviction of Lib Dem voters that they were right, but left many of our own voters feeling lost.

We need a leadership with an attachment to the grassroots, one that spends less time on focus groups and opinion polls and much more establishing a network of constituency associations and agents to rebuild the membership.

“The Coalition is now beginning to smell past its sell by date, and the sooner it is broken up the better, never to be returned to”

“It should not be that the membership changes with the leadership, but the leadership changes with the membership”

When eventually it comes to choosing the next leader, it's not about whether we go left or right but whether we will be a top down, narrowly focused party run by an elite, or a bottom up party run by like-minded, anti-statist minded people. I hope that change can be brought about and that before the General Election, we can feel like conservatives again and feel like the Prime Minister is a son of Thatcher and not a son of Tony Blair.

There is need for change in the way the party is run, it has now become far more centralised. The grassroots members are now seen as members of a party with its head office in Westminster. In my day, I saw those grassroots members as members of their local associations which all formed an institution which is, alas, gone – the National Union of Conservative & Unionist Associations. I was not the chairman of that organisation. I did not have power, but it was they – not I – who selected their candidates. The party needs to hand total power back to associations to select their candidates.

Dismantling the local structure in the belief that the leader of the day is always right is a mark of the centrism which is inherently unconstructive. It should not be that the membership changes with the leadership, but the leadership changes with the membership.

The party conference used to be an event held for our members, to which the media were invited to attend and watch. These days, they are still called conferences but they are indeed media events to which members are kindly invited to attend and watch, but not to take part.

And on the subject of the Chairmanship, I do not believe you can have two people doing the same job? – I refer to the shared Chairmanship of Lord Feldman and Grant Shapps.

This article is a précis of the speech Lord Tebbit made to the annual Bow Group State of the Party Lecture in March 2014.

The collapse of the political classes

Ben Harris-Quinney believes that the political class that bankrupted the country is now facing destruction

In 2008 Peter Osborne wrote his seminal modern political work; “The Triumph of the Political Class”, identifying and bemoaning the replacement of the British Establishment with a new, self-serving, cross-party, incestuous political class in Westminster.

The book was a crystallisation of the frustrated yet suffocated reaction most people in Britain have had to the rise of third way populism that was ushered in during the Blair years, and has remained ever since.

Like many entities that quickly fill a vacuum once occupied by strength and longevity, they often wilt and pale in comparison to their predecessor. The British Establishment that has been replaced by the modern political class was wrought with catastrophic imperfections, but it was at least a structure that held honour, duty, patriotism and stewardship at its heart. This political class is made of none of these tenets but is a self-serving cancer that, in the space of a mere few decades, has rendered a great nation bankrupt, deeply divided, and crashed our democracy into the doldrums of homogeneity and stasis.

And yet, the system that ruled Britain for a few decades, and was so incisively exposed by Osborne just 6 years ago, now seems to be crumbling as swiftly as it arrived.

“Michael Portillo assessed the Miller episode, and specifically the post-facto handling of it, to be the worst political shambles he had ever witnessed”

Taking the legislation she oversaw, the manner in which she approached politics and her abuse of expenses, I cannot think of a single person who has been more damaging to the Conservative Party than Maria Miller. Indeed Michael Portillo, a man who has experienced his fair share of crises, assessed the Miller episode, and specifically the post-facto handling of it, to be the worst political shambles he had ever witnessed.

Miller is the archetypal third way moderniser and quota filler, supposedly the model solution to the “nasty party” problem, full of identity politics and smiles cynically designed to appeal to the mumsnet generation. The lesson to all those who believe that spin, centrism and homogenisation is the answer to politics, is that the result of putting what is perceived to be the correct image before talent and authenticity is that you end up with an indendikit Maria Miller, and far from being the antidote to the perception that the Conservative Party is out of touch, they become the proof.

I don't believe that any significant part of the country wishes to see her, her ilk, or the theory behind her creation back in government “very soon”. Upon the appointment of Miller's successor Sajid Javid, the Conservative MP Harriet Baldwin tweeted “Proud to be @Conservatives – the party of equal opportunity. First female PM and now the first Asian in Cabinet.”.

I fear it is a happy coincidence that Javid deserves to be in Cabinet not because he is “an Asian” or “a Muslim”, but because of his stellar career and ability. I don't doubt that Baldwin meant well, but the perception that immediately follows the removal of Miller is that politicians are still trying to force the appearance of a modern diverse party on a largely indifferent public, that are far more interested in character than they are in a “right on” overly stage managed image.

As the title of political class suggests, this is a trend to be found in all major Parliamentary parties, that's a crux of the problem, but it was clearly thought that the Conservative Party could be lead down the same path as (New) Labour, discarding its hard won and strongly held ideas for short term, calculated centrism. I am pleased and proud to say that it is large parts of the Conservative Party and the wider conservative movement that have fought back, and it feels at least to me, whether you look at "loongate", the NickVNigel debates or the Maria Miller episode, that the hands of the political classes are now slipping from the tiller. No one wanted the heir to Blair, we wanted an end to Blair, that was my and many other's biggest motivation for campaigning for and voting for the Conservative Party throughout the 2000s.

A poll commissioned by Conservative Grassroots and Breitbart London carried out this week found that 60% of the public felt that Maria Miller was representative of a wider political class, across all parties, that needs to leave politics. There is, moreover, a clear dissatisfaction with the major political parties themselves, who are from a public perspective seemingly and roundly disliked, but present in their current form chiefly to due to the intransigence of the political system. UKIP has manifested as a reaction to the entrenched political classes, but as with trends of political populism throughout history, the danger of one form of short term populism following another is ever present. Since their co-option into the mainstream of British political discourse there is also evidence to suggest that UKIP too are adapting to the norms of the metropolitan political classes.

As Osborne theorised, much of why the political class exists, and why they have failed, relates to their stockade in London; a giant media, political and financial salon in which an internal conversation occurs that no one else in the country can understand or identify with. There can be no doubt that modern London is a truly great city, but as Tony Blair said in 2006, it can no longer be described as a British one. Boris Johnson similarly described London as an

“Those that are of the modern political classes are done for”

international metropolis: New York, Washington and LA all rolled into one. It is that over centralisation and disconnection, often from communities and civil society but a short train ride away, that has produced a generation of politicians that are of and for themselves and no one else.

Maria Miller and the recent furore surrounding her is therefore a totem and symptom of the failure of third way politics and its political class. A figure without great discernible talent, integrity or character, promoted to the very top of British politics to do the bidding of a narrow “progressive” metropolitan elite, with little regard to the long term future and security of Britain, and much to their own careerism.

This model will be heavily defended by the political classes and their cohorts, but it must fail, because the people of Britain are just not stupid or lazy enough for them to hold on to power. However they may pivot and try to re-brand themselves, from consensus to conviction politicians and back, those that are of the modern political classes are done for, the grinning dis-ingenuity, hypocrisy and spin just don’t cut it anymore, it’s the only game they know, not the only game in town and their game is up.

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