



BRITISH POLITICS REVIEW

Journal of the British Politics Society, Norway

Volume 5 | No. 3 | Summer 2010



The coalition Backdrop and consequences

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British Politics Review

Volume 5 | No. 3 | Summer 2010

ISSN 1890-4505

British Politics Review is a quarterly newsletter issued by the British Politics Society, Norway. With contributions from academic and journalistic sources, the *British Politics Review* is aimed at everyone with a general interest in political developments in Britain.

British Politics Society, Norway is politically neutral and has no collective agenda apart from raising the interest and knowledge of British politics among the informed Norwegian public.

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Cover photo

Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg approach their joint press conference in the garden of Downing Street, 12 May 2010.

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Editorial

A political drama with substantial effects

Little more than three months have passed since this year's General Election, an election which, beyond the drama of those few days in May, is likely to have a deep political impact on Britain.

The election campaign was affected by excitement due to the expected end of an era. The decreasing popularity of the Labour government and its leader Gordon Brown was met by the vigour of his main Prime Ministerial contender, David Cameron. In addition, helped by his appearance in the first-ever televised debates between the three main party leaders, Nick Clegg added additional fervour to the campaign, achieving a breakthrough for the Liberal Democrats in the press, in opinion polls and in the general political consciousness of the electorate.

Consequently, Election Day itself and the days that followed became even more of a thriller than most analysts had expected. Once the election result was made public, it was clear that Britain for the first time since 1974 was faced with the precarious situation of a hung Parliament. Days of speculation, negotiation and uncertainty followed. For a few days, Gordon Brown and the Labour Party had a small, if not too realistic, hope of clinging to power. However, when it became clear that the negotiations between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were in fact progressing, Brown stepped down following a moving resignation speech outside Downing Street. The speech represented the *de facto* end of Labour's unprecedented thirteen year period in power.

The new British government is atypical. Not only are coalition governments in themselves a rare phenomenon in British politics, but Britain now has a coalition government between two parties - the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats - that were seen to be incompatible according to the perceived progressive kinship between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. And, of course, the new occupant of 10 Downing Street is historic too: at the age of 43, David Cameron is the youngest Prime Minister to have held the post since the Earl of Liverpool resigned in 1827.

Despite the initial warnings from many quarters, the coalition government survives after three months in power, having delineated its plans for the public sector (notably through the crisis budget) as well as for constitutional reforms. The Liberal Democrats had reform of the electoral system as a key priority in the election campaign, and so far reform seems to be a price the Conservatives are willing to pay for being in office.

At the time of writing, it still remains to be seen whether the government's imprint on the British political landscape will be a lasting one and, indeed, whether it will be able to honour its pledge of serving the full five-year term till 2015. In the meantime, this issue of *British Politics Review* offers a broad range of perspectives on the coalition.

Øivind Bratberg & Kristin M. Haugevik, Editors

Contents

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Cameron: no accidental reformer <i>Jan Tore Sanner</i> | p. 3 | Renewal of British politics: the Scottish perspective <i>Stewart Hosie</i> | p. 8 |
| A historic achievement <i>Trine Skei Grande</i> | p. 4 | Beyond localism: rethinking the way Britain is governed <i>Adam Schoenborn</i> | p. 9 |
| A win for the Green Party and the politics of hope <i>Adrian Ramsay</i> | p. 5 | Parliamentary reform: the coalition's challenge <i>Øivind Bratberg</i> | p. 10 |
| Liberal Democrats enter government: no more realignment of the left? <i>Duncan Brack</i> | pp. 6-7 | Coalition: Cameron's stroke of genius? <i>Atle L. Wold</i> | p. 11 |
| | | The political map of Britain 2010 | p. 12 |

Cameron: no accidental reformer

By Jan Tore Sanner, Høyre (the Conservative Party of Norway)

Jan Tore Sanner is deputy leader of Høyre. A member of the Storting since 1993, he has since 2001 played a central part in the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. In the present Storting he is second vice chair of the committee and deputy leader of Høyre's parliamentary party.



use of new technology to reach younger voters, and a focus on David Cameron's person helped rebrand the party. Personal traits are clearly visible his style of political leadership. He has been very open with respect to his personal history, and on how his experiences as a father and the death of his son have shaped him both as a person and as a politician.

Both the reformed policies and the modern image were already evident during Cameron's visit to Norway in 2006. Six months into his leadership he went to Svalbard to study climate change first hand. In Oslo he met with politicians from Høyre and held a speech on the issue. The message was clear: "Vote Blue, Go Green". This has been a key theme for the party ever since.

Observers have commented that the Tories' modernisation and reorientation under Cameron has brought them closer to their European, and especially their Scandinavian sister parties. In many ways this is true. Though cooperation between the Conservatives and Høyre historically has been close, Cameron's reformed party is in many ways much more similar to the modern conservative parties of Scandinavia than some earlier incarnations. Inspiration from Fredrik Reinfeldt's Swedish Moderaterna seems to have been especially strong, and the trajectories of their respective leaderships and party reforms have run almost in parallel.

On key policies, the cooperation and exchange of ideas remains strong. Today,

the only major point of contention is the respective positions on Europe and the EU. The decision to leave the European People's Party group in European institutions, an early pledge made to the strong Euro-sceptic wing of the party, weakened both the EPP and the Tories' potential for influence in Europe. Hopefully, this can be rectified.

"[T]he Tories' modernisation and reorientation under Cameron has brought them closer to their European, and especially their Scandinavian sister parties."

Translating Cameron's ambitions into real reforms is now the responsibility of his new coalition government. So far, signs are good. The formal coalition agenda contains many of the best policies from both the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. Inter-party cooperation seems to be going well, as do personal relations in the Cabinet. The emergency budget of 22 June shows a clear commitment to make

some very tough choices.

However, serious challenges remain. The economic situation is critical, with Britain being one of the most indebted countries in Europe after 13 years of Labour rule. The government's promise to cut the deficit in five years will have a huge impact and potentially create great tension both within the government and with the public. It is in many ways a huge gamble. During a parliamentary group visit to London last year, I discussed the financial crisis at length with George Osborn, then shadow Chancellor, now one of the key members of the cabinet. He was very clear in his views on the way out of the crisis, and has in many ways delivered a "cure or kill" budget.

The fiscal situation, however, leaves less room for the implementation of promised new policies, with large spending cuts in almost every sector except health and development aid. The pressure on both the government and David Cameron himself will probably only increase as the true consequences of the economic crisis unfold over the coming years. The handling of the economy will be the true test of Mr. Cameron's leadership - a fact of which he himself is acutely aware. Though the times are dire, the hope remains that a leaner, stronger Britain can emerge from the crisis.

"Britain's accidental revolution" read the cover title of the first issue of *The Economist* after the British general election in May this year. Though the first coalition government in the UK in 65 years may have been accidental, that is certainly not true for David Cameron's drive to reform - first his party, then British politics itself. After the 6 May elections he emerged as the youngest Prime Minister in 200 years.

After losing three general elections in a row, and after a 2005 campaign that left the party exhausted, deeply divided and with an image truly living up to its old reputation as "the nasty party", reform was sorely needed. Cameron won the leadership race soundly by promising revitalisation and transformation - to give the party a different look and sound and to increase its appeal beyond traditional Tory supporters, especially among young, urban and northern voters. The years that have passed since then have lent credence to his plan.

From the start he challenged the right wing of his party and aimed to reclaim the political centre that had been lost to Labour in the late nineties. Gradually limiting his opponents' room for manoeuvre, he systematically delivered new policies aimed at tackling the issues of our time, such as climate change and the environment, integration, development and high quality public services. These policy changes have now become the basis of the new Government's platform.

A new image and modern communication with the voters has also been essential to the Tories' success. Active



Head of government. David Cameron takes questions during a PM Direct session at EasyJet in Luton, 16 July 2010. Crown copyright / The Prime Minister's Office

A historic achievement

By Trine Skei Grande, Venstre (the Liberal Party of Norway)

Trine Skei Grande is the party leader of Venstre. Elected to the Storting in 2001, she chaired Venstre's parliamentary



group from 2001 to 2005. Grande was elected leader of the party in 2010. In the current Storting, she again leads the party's parliamentary group and serves in the standing committees on Education, Research and Church Affairs as well as Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs.

This year's General Election in the UK may very well be remembered as one of the most intense and exciting elections in modern British history. Throughout its campaign, Venstre's sister party, the Liberal Democrats, managed to strike a chord with the British electorate which eventually awarded them 23 percent of the popular vote – their best result in a general election in decades. Although the current British election system disfavors third parties with regard to proportional representation in parliament – 23 percent of the popular vote gave the party only 8.8 percent of the seats in parliament – the election secured the Liberal Democrats governmental power in coalition with the Conservative Party. This is indeed a remarkable achievement by a third party faced with a profound electoral threshold. The Liberal Democrats has managed to alter the political balance between the Conservative Party and Labour that has been so dominant in post-war British politics, and relaunch themselves as a significant political alternative for the British electorate.

For as long as I have been an active member of Venstre, we have enjoyed close contact with the Liberal Democrats, both at the party level and between party individuals. This falls very natural, given our two parties' shared ideological background and similar political values and priorities. Great political thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Hill Green and later L.T. Hobhouse have been crucial in formulating the ideology of social liberalism which both the Liberal Democrats and Venstre adhere to. These thinkers – often referred to as the New Liberals – collectively and individually made a strong case against *laissez-faire* classical liberalism and in favour of some degree of state intervention and

regulation. The New Liberals saw freedom and individual liberty as achievable only under favourable social circumstances that are secured by a relatively strong welfare state. The state is not seen as a goal in itself, but rather as a tool for its citizens. This ideological strain has been the underlying *raison d'être* for both the Liberal Democrats and Venstre.

On the day of the British General Election in May this year, I was lucky enough to be spending time with Liberal Democrat colleagues in London. With Nick Clegg's knock-out performance in the televised debates in mind, as well as the excited anticipation among the general public about the outcome of the election, it was truly inspirational to follow the last campaign efforts by local Liberal Democrat representatives and activists close-up.

For Venstre it is important to draw inspiration and learn from the campaign strategy of the British liberals. As Venstre's newly elected party leader, I am particularly fascinated by the Liberal Democrats' very practical and hands-on focus on community issues – so-called "pavement politics" – with which the party has had considerable success.

In short, pavement politics rests on the notion that all politics in its very essence is local, and that in order to enjoy electoral successes – on the local as well as national level – one must focus on the big and small issues that really matter to people. Politicians are ombudsmen for the electorate, and any political campaign must reflect this. Of course, there is nothing new with this notion as such, but the Liberal Democrats have had a very meticulous and systematic focus on pavement politics, and I think this – along with Mr Clegg's performance in the televised debates – may count as a major explanatory factor as to why the party did rise in the polls throughout the election campaign.

Another important factor explaining the Liberal Democrats' breakthrough in this year's General Election is the fact that over the last couple of decades, the party has gained much local representation – e.g. in city councils – and thus managed to establish itself as a credible and viable alternative *vis-à-vis* Labour and the Conservative Party on the local level. This is, of course, not to undermine the fact that after thirteen years with Labour in power and with a fresh-looking and

increasingly popular Conservative Party, the British electorate was ready for a change in government.

Still, merely representing an alternative to more established political parties, and being perceived as a viable – and increasingly possible – party in a coalition government, is not in itself sufficient to succeed in a general election. Indeed, having a political project which people believe in and are inspired by is just as important, if not more. Like Venstre and several other European social liberal parties, the Liberal Democrats have remained loyal to their core political priorities and values, including environmental issues, social responsibility, education, and civil liberties. It is my impression that the British electorate – as in other European countries – is becoming increasingly

aware of and interested in these issues. Seen from this perspective, the 23 percent of the votes cast for the Liberal Democrats in this year's General Election looks promising for the future.

At the time of writing, polls suggest that the Liberal Democrats have lost some of the support they won during this year's election campaign. Given the tough

measures that the coalition government has put forward, not least when it comes to deficit reduction and cuts in public spending, this is not very surprising. In addition to this, being the smaller party in a coalition government is never easy. I am, however, confident that the Liberal Democrats will push wholeheartedly for the various measures that are expressed in the coalition agreement between the party and the Conservatives. It will be particularly interesting to follow the upcoming process on electoral reform, which is one of the most important factors impacting on the Liberal Democrats' future representation in and influence on British politics.

I congratulate the Liberal Democrats on their performance in this year's election campaign. In my opinion, their achievements in the campaign and on Election Day have already initiated a fundamental change in the British party system. That is certainly no small achievement.

"Like Venstre and many of the other European social liberal parties, the Liberal Democrats have remained loyal to their core political priorities and values, including environmental issues, social responsibility, education, and civil liberties."

A win for the Green Party and the politics of hope

By Adrian Ramsay

Here's renewal. We did it. For the first time anywhere in the world a Green politician has been elected to a national parliament under a first past the post electoral system. It is a tremendous achievement for the Green Party of England and Wales to have finally found parliamentary representation through Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion.



Adrian Ramsay is deputy leader of the Green Party of England and Wales and a councillor in Norwich City Council. A candidate in Norwich South at the 2010 general election, he secured the second highest Green vote in the country, doubling the party's support to 15%.

avoid the possibility of a double-dip recession, while creating much-needed jobs and tackling environmental problems. The good news is that the big three parties have already started to pinch some of our policies – talking about our Green New Deal, green investment banks, and free insulation schemes. The bad news is that so far it's all talk and no action. In fact many backward steps are being taken with major cuts recently announced to environmental schemes, including the scrapping of the Sustainable Development Commission.

The election of the UK's first Green MP brings tremendous opportunities for Green policies and principles to be aired nationally and for the big three parties to be held accountable for their actions (or lack of action). Issues that would never have been raised on the agenda can now be debated and brought to public attention.

Some are sceptical about the difference that a single MP can make, but the election of the first Green MP is far more important than just another Labour, Lib Dem or Conservative MP. Caroline Lucas will bring a fresh approach to politics, but she will also pave the way for more Green MPs to follow, bringing a new political force to Westminster. The big three parties can no longer claim that "a Green vote is a wasted vote". We've shown that we can win under first past the post. Under a fair and democratic system of proportional representation we would see even more Greens elected, but even in the absence of a fair voting system in Britain we have shown that Green votes do make a difference.



Caroline Lucas, leader of the Green Party and MP following this year's election.

One Green voice in Parliament is a hugely positive step, not only for the Green Party, but for British politics as a whole. Before the 2010 general election, the UK was the only European country never to have elected Greens in its Parliament.

In Caroline's maiden speech she compared her presence in Westminster to the first Socialist and Independent Labour MPs "whose arrival over a century ago was seen as a sign of coming revolution... What was once radical, even revolutionary, has become understood, accepted, and even cherished." In this way, the Green Party win in Brighton Pavilion is a sign of

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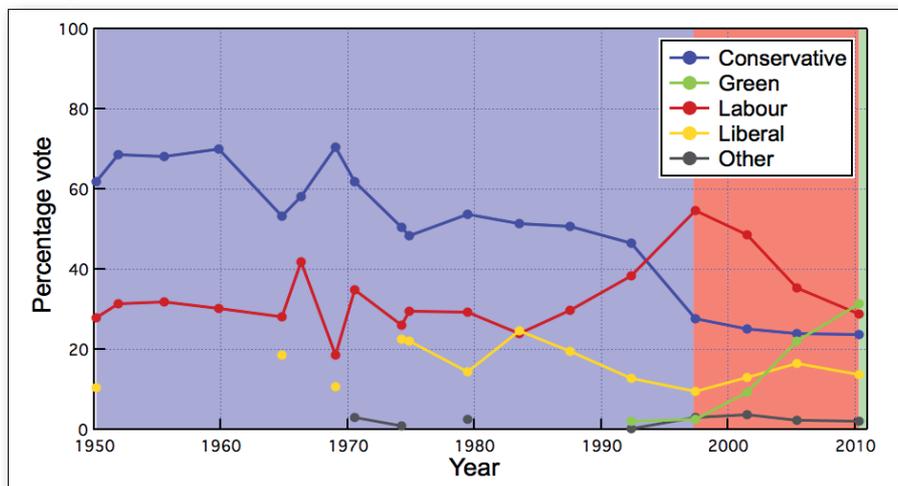
change and acceptance for a new kind of politics – a politics where people can vote for what they really want, not against what they fear.

If Caroline Lucas can be elected even under our current unfair voting system, then there is hope for a reinvigorated

British politics where diverse views and voices are represented. It is refreshing to see that the people of Brighton Pavilion have chosen the "politics of hope" above the politics of fear." The courage of those voters has opened up new choices for all voters in Britain and has paved the way for many others to vote for what they believe in.

This historic breakthrough into Westminster is already changing public perceptions of the Green Party. Since I joined the Party twelve years ago I have witnessed our support grow steadily as a result of effective grassroots campaigning and our achievements on local councils, the European Parliament, the London Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. But the election of the first Green MP has brought Green Party policies to the national stage. More and more people are recognising Green politics as a serious alternative to the old three-party system. The old stereotypes of the Greens as a "single issue" party are fading away as people hear our wide range of policies on diverse social and economic issues.

Many people today are not just attracted by our environmental policies, but by our policies on education, the NHS, the economy, protecting public services, and creating jobs. Our core values of social and environmental justice resonate with many people who have grown disillusioned with the failure of the big three parties to tackle social inequalities. As the new Coalition Government wields its axe of "callous and uncaring cuts" over vital public services and vulnerable social groups, the Green Party's membership is growing at an unprecedented rate. People are drawn to our positive vision for tackling the economic crisis through investment in green jobs and local manufacturing, and a tax on the high-risk financial transactions that caused the global crisis in the first place.



Green at last! Vote shares at general elections since 1950 in Brighton Pavilion, the constituency which in 2010 elected Britain's first Green MP.

We believe our policies would

Liberal Democrats enter government: no more realignment of the left?

By Duncan Brack

At the threshold of a new era? The 2010 election proved to be the most dramatic in the twenty-two year history of the Liberal Democrats. The most high-profile election campaign the party has ever enjoyed was followed by disappointment – a rise in votes but a fall in seats – but then by the party's entry into coalition government, not



Duncan Brack is the Editor of the *Journal of Liberal History* (see www.liberalhistory.org.uk), and a member of the Liberal Democrats' Federal Policy Committee.

with the partners most observers would have expected – the Labour Party – but with the Conservatives. Does this mark the end of the strategy pursued by Liberal leaders since the 1960s, of a realignment of the left? And what can be learnt from the experiences of the election campaign?

The Liberal Democrats entered the 2010 election campaign with expectations of at least a reasonable result. The 2005 election had seen a sharp increase in the party's vote, to 22.0 per cent, and the highest number of seats – sixty-two – since 1923, largely on the back of the party's opposition (alone amongst the major parties) to the war in Iraq. Two successive Liberal Democrat leadership elections, in 2006 and 2007, coupled with the revival of the Conservative Party under David Cameron and the growing unpopularity of the Labour government, had seemed to presage a fall in the Liberal Democrat and Labour votes and a Conservative victory. Yet opinion polls showed that the rise in the Conservative vote was mostly the result of a dislike of Labour rather than any strong attraction to the Tories, and the new Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, proved steadily more popular with the electorate. The party entered the election on about 18–20 per cent in the opinion polls and could reasonably have expected to put on 3–6 per cent during the campaign, probably picking up seats from Labour but losing a few to the Conservatives.

The television debates between the three main party leaders – Britain's first – transformed the election. Clegg clearly out-performed the other two in the first debate, on 15 April, and more narrowly in the second, on 22 April. His message, that real change was needed, clearly resonated with the electorate, and the argument that only the Liberal Democrats, with no record of failure in government, could deliver it seemed to strike a chord. The party shot up in the opinion polls, reaching as high as thirty-four per cent on a couple of occasions, ahead of both the other two parties. The Liberal Democrat 'surge'

became the highlight of the election, and was itself covered at length in the media, helping to perpetuate the phenomenon.

The surge did not survive the third debate, however, on 29 April, where both the other leaders were perceived to have performed more strongly. The media spotlight meant that, inevitably, more attention was paid to Liberal Democrat policies than hitherto, and some of them, notably a liberal attitude to immigration, proved unpopular with some voters. Possibly the party's focus on winning seats through intensive local campaigning, with the candidate presented as the local advocate, ready to take up citizens' grievances whatever their basic views, did not help to build any kind of ideological attachment to Liberal Democrat policies; when they started to find out what these actually were, a proportion of the party's local voters began to detach themselves. Possibly, also, the rapid increase in the party's standing in the polls helped to undermine its own targeting strategy, convincing candidates and activists in what were in reality unwinnable seats that they had a chance and deterring them moving to help in more winnable prospects.

What the opinion polls also failed to pick up was the ephemeral nature of much of the Liberal Democrat support. Closer analysis reveals that those who said they were planning to vote for the party were also those least likely to be sure about their choice, least likely that they would vote at all, and most likely not to have voted at the previous election (the strongest determinant of turn-out at the next). In addition, as in the 1992 election, the fact that the polls pointed steadily to a hung parliament as the most likely outcome seems to have scared some voters back to their traditional loyalties. This was probably reinforced by many of the main newspapers, particularly the wide-circulation *Daily Mail*, arguing strongly against a vote for the Liberal Democrats.

Whatever the reason, the outcome of the election of Thursday 6 May proved a disappointment to Liberal Democrat activists. While the last opinion polls of the campaign had pointed to a final vote of 26–28 per cent, in fact the result was 23.0 per cent and a net loss of six seats, ending on fifty-seven (from sixty-three, the 2005 total of sixty-two plus one by-election gain from 2006).

In fact, however, there was much to be optimistic about. The party's total vote of 23.0 per cent was 1 per cent up on 2005, only the second time that the Liberal

vote had increased under a Labour government. It represents the second best Liberal result since 1929, exceeded only by the Liberal-SDP Alliance's 25.4 per cent in 1983; and 2010 is the third election in a row in which the Lib Dem vote rose. By comparison, the Labour vote of 29.0 per cent was very poor, their second worst result since 1918 (when they fought only half the seats), after only 1983 (27.6 per cent). Similarly, the Conservative vote of 36.1 per cent was their fifth lowest since 1918; only 2005, 2001, 1997 and October 1974 were worse. For the first time ever since Labour supplanted the Liberals as the main non-Conservative Party, the combined Conservative and Labour vote fell below two-thirds of the total.

The Liberal Democrats scored particularly well in the younger age groups, winning 34 per cent of women aged 18–24 (ahead of both other parties, and 8 per cent up on 2005), and 30 per cent of men aged 25–34 (well ahead of Labour, and 3 per cent up on 2005). In terms of the regional breakdown, the party's vote rose most strongly in the East Midlands (+2.4 per cent), South-western England, Yorkshire & the Humber and Eastern England (all +2.2 per cent). The party ended in second place in three regions, South-west, South-east and Eastern (where it took second place from Labour and won four seats, the highest number since 1929). In only one case did the party's vote fall: Scotland, by 3.7 per cent (although this led to no net loss of seats).

"[I]t took 33,000 votes to elect each Labour MP, 35,000 for each Tory, but 120,000 votes for each Liberal Democrat."

In terms of seats, the first-past-the-post system yet again demonstrated its capricious and arbitrary nature: it took 33,000 votes to elect each Labour MP, 35,000 for each Tory, but 120,000 votes for each Liberal Democrat. There was a large number of very near misses – the party failed to gain or hold no less than twelve seats by less than 1,000 votes in each case. In other encouraging signs, the number of Liberal Democrat second places rose from 188 to 242; the party is now within 10 per cent of winning in 45 seats, compared to 31 in 2005; and the Lib Dems lost no deposits at all (the Tories lost two, Labour five).

Despite Liberal Democrat disappointments, the end result of the 2010 election was indeed a hung parliament, with no party achieving an overall majority. Most observers probably expected a Conservative minority government, which would avoid anything too controversial until it could call a second election in the hope of winning a majority (as Labour had done in 1974).

Liberal Democrats enter government... (cont.)

By Duncan Brack

However, it was not to be; the pressing need to deal with the UK's public sector deficit, coupled with a genuine desire amongst Conservative and Liberal Democrat leaders to work together, led to an unexpected and, in recent British experience, rare, outcome: a coalition government, agreed by both parties on Tuesday 11 May. This followed five days of dramatic and intensive negotiations between the Liberal Democrats and, separately, both Conservative and Labour parties. The end result was a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, with five Liberal Democrats taking their places as the first Liberal cabinet ministers since 1945. (A further fourteen took up junior positions in the new government.)

Does this mark the end of the strategy of the realignment of the left, an aim pursued by successive Liberal and Liberal Democrat leaders since the 1960s? The rise of the Labour Party in the early part of the twentieth century, supplanting the Liberal Party as the main anti-Conservative Party (and recruiting many ex-Liberals in the process) seemed to point to a much closer affinity between Liberal Democrats and Labour than between either party and the Conservatives. From the 1960s onwards, every decade has seen Liberals attempt some sort of realignment of the left, aiming to create either a new non-socialist radical alternative to the Tories or, less ambitiously, a closer relationship between the two "progressive" parties.

The narrow Labour victory in 1964, following years of ideological disputes, had given rise to Liberal leader Jo Grimond's hopes of a split in the Labour Party, but this was brought to an end by the decisive

Labour electoral victory in 1966. In the 1970s, the loss of the Labour government's parliamentary majority in 1976 led to the Lib-Lab Pact, through which the Liberals kept Labour in office; but the outcomes were not clear and further cooperation was swept away by Mrs Thatcher's election in 1979. In the 1980s, Labour finally did split, leading to the breakaway Social Democratic Party, which fought elections in alliance with the Liberals; but the experiment failed, the Labour Party survived and in 1988 the two alliance partners merged to form the Liberal Democrats. In the 1990s, the first Liberal Democrat leader, Paddy Ashdown, abandoned his initial strategy of "equidistance" between the other two main parties, and tried to use the election of the new Labour leader Tony Blair to once again seek a rapprochement between the two parties. But as in 1966, the possibility of any dramatic new development was put to

an end by the overwhelming Labour victory of 1997. In addition to these Westminster events, Labour and the Liberal Democrats formed coalitions in the new devolved parliaments in Scotland (1999-2007) and in Wales (2000-03).

What was different about 2010? Why did the Liberal Democrats end up in coalition with the Conservatives? At least four reasons can be ascertained. First, electoral arithmetic. A Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition would enjoy a clear majority in the House of Commons; a Labour-Liberal Democrat one would be just short. Although it would be possible to add in the votes of the other "progressive" parties (the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, one Green and one from the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland), any such arrangement would be terribly vulnerable to parliamentary rebellion.

Second, because a significant portion of the Labour Party did not want it. Although some at least of the Labour negotiating team - including their leader Gordon Brown - seemed to be genuine in their desire for a deal, it was clear that others were not, feeling, perhaps rightly, that the Liberal Democrats were using them to try and extract a better deal from the Conservatives. The negotiations were also conducted against a background of Labour

"[W]hat would have been expected to have marked the 'realignment of the left' - a Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition - was simply not an available option: both because it was not practical and, more arguably, because Labour had ceased to provide the left-wing option."

MPs and ex-ministers calling for their party to have nothing to do with any such a coalition - partly out of dislike of the Liberal Democrats, partly out of a feeling that after such a clear rejection by the electorate, Labour had no moral case for staying in government. And certainly it would have been difficult to have formed a government out of two parties which had

both lost seats in the election.

Third, because the Conservatives offered the Liberal Democrats a much better deal. The final coalition programme for government incorporated many specific Liberal Democrat pledges, and was particularly strong on political reform (including a referendum on reform of the voting system, reform of the House of Lords, and the extension of civil liberties) and on environmental policy, two areas dear to Liberal Democrat hearts. The Liberal Democrat negotiators felt that they were being offered a particularly good deal by the Conservative leadership both because it was desperate to get into government and also because it wanted to use the Liberal Democrats to marginalise its own right wing.

And fourth, because the personal chemistry

between David Cameron and Nick Clegg clearly worked, whereas neither got on well with Gordon Brown. Although this factor by itself would clearly not have been sufficient, it certainly helped, and should prove of value in managing the coalition in the difficult times to come.

In the final analysis, what would have been expected to have marked the "realignment of the left" - a Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition - was simply not an available option: both because it was not practical and, more arguably, because Labour had ceased to provide the left-wing option. After thirteen years of Labour government, increasingly centralising and authoritarian, with a poor record on political reform and on many social issues such as income inequality, and with a disastrous foreign policy record, the so-called "progressive coalition" option in reality did not look that progressive. The final coalition deal was recognised even by left-wing commentators as more progressive, in many areas, than Labour's manifesto had been.

Does this, then, mark a final end to any prospects of the realignment of the left? Not necessarily, though how this turns out will depend on the performance of the coalition government, and of the Liberal Democrats within it. Two possible outcomes (at least) can be foreseen.

In the pessimistic scenario, the government takes an increasingly right-wing direction and the Liberal Democrats are seen merely as propping up the Conservatives, without achieving anything distinctive themselves. In this case, one could expect the Liberal Democrats themselves to become more right wing, as their own left-wingers drop out of the party or defect to Labour or the Greens. The 2015 election (held under the old first-past-the-post system, as the electoral reform referendum is lost) sees the party lose most of its seats and be relegated to the sidelines once more.

In the optimistic scenario, the government is a success, and many of its achievements are identified with its Liberal Democrat members; it is clearly different from a majority Conservative government. Labour fails to provide a compelling alternative, descending instead into mere oppositionism; as a result, the more moderate and less tribal Labour supporters steadily swing to the Liberal Democrats, leading to it overtaking Labour as the main non-Conservative party. The 2015 election (held under a reformed voting system) results in a much more even outcome, with the Liberal Democrats able to choose either of the other two main parties as a new coalition partner. Perhaps for the first time in recent history, the Liberal Democrats have their future very much in their own hands.

Renewal of British politics: the Scottish perspective

By Stewart Hosie, Member of Parliament for Dundee East

Contradictions. The adversarial, dualistic nature of Westminster politics is well reflected in the green benches of the House of Commons chamber. Two rigid sides in perpetual opposition. Long rows designed for big groups. However, that simply does not reflect the political reality which exists in the UK.



Stewart Hosie (SNP) has been MP for Dundee East since 2005. He is chief whip and deputy leader of the SNP's parliamentary party and currently serves in the Treasury Committee.

Devolution in 1999 changed the political landscape forever - and around the new administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland strong national parties emerged.

The Westminster system now sits alongside the devolution settlement and not always comfortably. The 2010 General Election and its aftermath demonstrate how competing for seats at Westminster as a smaller party can prove particularly challenging.

This article will consider what the particular challenges presented by the campaign and - now that the dust has settled - what opportunities have subsequently developed for smaller parties in the Westminster parliament now that the Liberal Democrats have entered into government with a focus on my own party, the Scottish National Party.

The 2010 campaign was dominated by three leaders' debates. Taking their cue from the US Presidential Debates, the BBC, ITV and Sky each proposed 90 minute discussions involving Labour leader Gordon Brown and Conservative leader David Cameron and Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg.

While this high profile platform with massive potential to engage voters was welcomed by all parties, for the SNP and our sister party Plaid Cymru in Wales, the proposed format put forward were unacceptable.

Including the Liberal Democrats represented a slight shift away from the adversarial Labour / Conservative debates which tend to play out in the UK media but it did not make adequate provision for the smaller parties and by extension did not reflect the political choice voters had to make on polling day.

The SNP and Plaid are both parties of government in Scotland and Wales respectively but were excluded from the leaders' debate by broadcasters on the basis that they did not put forward candidates in all UK constituencies.

Together, the SNP and Plaid Cymru proposed a number of solutions to ameliorate this exclusion and entered into discussions with broadcasters. While some concessions - such as increased airtime around the debates - were granted, none of the broadcasters offered coverage which truly reflected the political reality around the UK.

While the commercial broadcasters - Sky and ITV - had no obligation to offer balanced political coverage, public sector broadcaster, the BBC does. It was on this basis that the SNP took the matter to the Scottish Court of Session but the timeframes were such that this action could not be concluded before the BBC debate took place.

The SNP remain optimistic that our action this time will strengthen our position to ensure the make up of any subsequent debates better reflect the political choices faced by voters across the UK.

The issues around the leaders' debates highlighted the challenges faced by smaller parties in Westminster elections. Where the dominant political parties are given media exposure as a matter of course, smaller parties have to battle for it. While the SNP and Plaid Cymru may have been disadvantaged by their exclusion from the leaders' debates, with the polls predicting a hung or balanced parliament, the significance of smaller blocs within the UK Parliament was considerable.

Together, the SNP and Plaid Cymru launched "4 Wales, 4 Scotland" - a joint

policy and campaigning platform which committed both parties to a series of objectives which they would strive to achieve in a balanced parliament.

This predicted outcome proved accurate. No party won an outright majority and it seemed likely that the next UK Government would be a coalition - the 9 seats held by the SNP and Plaid Cymru became very significant.

There were three possible scenarios: the Conservatives could form a minority government or they could go into coalition with the Liberal Democrats or Labour could form a rainbow coalition with the Liberal Democrats together with MPs from the SDLP, SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party.

In the week following the General Election, a series of tense negotiations took place in London. The SNP met with civil service negotiating teams in preparation for negotiations over a possible rainbow coalition. In the end, the Conservatives favoured a coalition with Liberal Democrats but this close election contest underlined the important role smaller parties can play.

Since the formation of the new Coalition Government and the shift by the Liberal Democrats from third party to party of government, there have been some small changes at Westminster. While speaking time in the Chamber for the 30 MPs representing smaller parties still remains very limited, some concessions have been granted. SNP, Plaid Cymru and Democratic Unionist Representatives have been allotted places on key Select Committees including the Treasury Select Committee and increased opportunities to ask questions at Scottish Questions.

Smaller parties have also been offered a small increase in the number of Opposition Day debates they are permitted to propose. However, representatives from the smaller parties have been excluded from Backbench Business Committee - a powerful new committee established to engage MPs who are not members of the government to help set the agenda in parliament.

The General Election 2010 demonstrated how the political system at Westminster caters for the needs of larger political parties and the interests of smaller ones are often marginalised. As the Liberal Democrats have entered government and changed the dynamic at Westminster, we will watch with interest to see what new role emerges for smaller parties in the UK Parliament.



Two sides. The emphasis on adversarial politics must be revised to take notice of smaller parties and multiple interests, argues Stewart Hosie MP.

Beyond localism: rethinking the way Britain is governed

By Adam Schoenborn

Decentralise to deliver.

Whenever a government leaves office in Britain, it inevitably leaves in its wake a glut of insightful memoirs. While the headline-grabbing memoir this year may be Peter Mandelson's candid look into the profound interpersonal problems that famously plagued New Labour's time in office, it was hardly internal agonism which stopped New Labour from realising their progressive vision for society. For a real insight into the philosophical, political and pragmatic error embedded in New Labour's core, the most instructive memoir remains Michael Barber's *Instruction to Deliver*.

Writing about his time as the Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit from 2001 to 2005, Barber's memoir is a chronicle of how the Blair administration set about the centralisation of the British public sector and political apparatus. Frustrated by the lack of progress on public sector reform in his first term, Tony Blair interpreted his re-election in 2001 as "a mandate for reform ... an instruction to deliver." Reasonably enough, in exchange for greatly increased public sector investment, the Blair administration wanted demonstrable outcomes of its choosing: more offenders brought to justice, lower cancer mortality rates, better rates of literacy and numeracy, and so on. Barber's answer was to increase the power and control of the Prime Minister's Office using "deliverology," a method of policy implementation by centrally-set targets, performance indicators and financial incentives, which carried detailed prescriptions from the Delivery Unit down through every Department to the knights and knaves on the frontline of service delivery. New Labour's *raison d'être* became the universal standards of central control.

Even in the economy, where political consensus favoured market freedom, New Labour oversaw a period of steady centralisation. A competition regime predicated on a narrowly defined standard of consumer benefit allowed the takeover of landmark British businesses and the concentration of essential industries, particularly banking and grocery retail. Planning laws designed to



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bypass local Nimbyism saw diversity and independent retailers visibly eroded from high streets. Small shops were replaced by the same chain retailers and restaurants so systematically that, in 2004, the term "clone town" entered the British lexicon.

Private and state monopolies have centralised markets, capital and political power, disenfranchising individuals and communities around the country. The election of a new government offers a window, if not a mandate, to revisit this political and economic settlement.

Set in firm contrast to this vision of Big State and Big Business solutions to centrally identified problems is David Cameron's vision of the Big Society, the stated aim of which is to go beyond localism to state-enabled social action. The Big Society has been summarised by Cameron as "a huge

culture change, where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace, don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities." The idea is to allow agents in civil society to identify social needs and for the Government to provide them with the resources, from devolved public sector budgets and community asset transfers to Social Impact Bonds and guidance from civil servants, to remove barriers to the community providing for those needs.

Critics and cynics of this approach are not hard to find, especially as it comes hand-in-hand with unprecedented cuts to public spending. Local councils and public sector employees themselves will

be wary of this brand of localism, as new resources and decision-making power will often bypass them and be put directly in the hands of community groups, while existing resources drop off radically. In the face of these vested interests, securing widespread support will require evidence that local empowerment and civic engagement is not just being used as a "fig leaf" for rolling back the state. It will also require a frank discussion with the public about the risk and local variation that this will inevitably entail.

Political decentralisation alone will not give people transformative power to shape their lives and communities, economic decentralisation will be every bit as important to this goal. Despite inhibiting the growth of income inequality, New Labour allowed meaningful asset-ownership to become the preserve of the rich, culminating in a society where the wealthiest half of households now hold 91 per cent of the UK's total wealth and the least wealthy half hold the remaining 9 per cent. It remains to be seen whether the Coalition Government will pursue economic decentralisation with the same enthusiasm it has displayed towards

"Political decentralisation alone will not give people power to shape their lives and communities, economic decentralisation will be every bit as important to this goal."

political decentralisation. Restoring an ownership stake in communities must be a top priority whether through a one-off give away of assets, as with the Thatcher administration's Right to Buy scheme, or an asset-based approach to the benefits system, something which has already been seriously undermined by the withdrawal of Child Trust Funds and the Savings Gateway.

George Osborne's offer of progressively discounted shares in state-owned banks is certainly a promising start, but needs to be a signal of an enduring commitment to widespread economic participation. The Coalition need to follow it up by revisiting competition in the retail sector, encouraging employee share ownership and cooperative business models (not least within the public sector), favouring small and medium-sized local business for state procurement contracts, offering communities a voice in the planning of their high streets, reducing the marginal taxation rate for benefits recipients moving into paid employment and transferring state assets to community groups and social enterprises.

Amongst the proposals for reform that Michael Barber's memoir sets out is the formation of a power-centralising "Department of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to drive through reform of public services ... The incoming Prime Minister should unapologetically justify it on the grounds of effectiveness and coherence." The test of the Coalition will be to show that the opposite approach - decentralisation in the economy, politics and the public sector - can be every bit as effective, by giving individuals, communities and public servants an ownership stake in society.

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Parliamentary reform: the coalition's challenge

By Øivind Bratberg

Worth fighting for. Governing through coalition involves a great extent of compromise and it thereby contrasts with the clear commanding lines for which British politics is renowned. Compromise moreover depends on the relative strength of the partners. In entering a coalition with the Conservatives, it was therefore obvious that the Liberal Democrats, given the election result, could only hope to see through a handful of their own policies.



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immediate dissolution of Parliament, a two-thirds majority of the House of Commons will be required.

Relieving the Prime Minister of the power of dissolution marks a fundamental change in the relationship between government and Parliament in Britain. It quite clearly reduces the PM's strategic room for manoeuvre and raises the political significance of the House of Commons. Nevertheless, it is the second part of Nick Clegg's scheme that has caused the most debate in Britain and which is likely to decide how his party's participation in government will be judged. On 5 May 2011 a referendum will be held on electoral reform. The proposal on the table is the Alternative Vote system (AV), well short of the Liberal demands for a proportional electoral system but nevertheless a significant step in departing from the ruthless first-past-the-post arrangement.

AV allows the individual voter to rank-order the candidates on election day and ensures that the winner has a minimum of 50% support. From a voter's perspective, AV eliminates the need for tactical voting; counting the second preferences of those who support the weakest candidates also reduces the number of "wasted votes" and secures a broader platform of support for the MP. However, proportional the system is not, and there is no guarantee that the reform will amend the under-representation of Lib Dem MPs in the country as a whole. Ironically, as AV is a compromise between Liberals demanding more extensive reform and Conservatives preferring the status quo of first-past-the-post, it is Labour's favoured reform rather than any of the coalition partners. Nevertheless, the referendum will be seen as decisive vote on the Liberal agenda. Adding an interesting twist to the plot is the fact that the devolved elections for Scotland and Wales will also be held on that day in May. The spring month, like its precursor a year before, will be an interesting one for followers of British politics.

Beyond the reforms in and for the House of Commons lurks another House of symbolic significance to any pretension of change in British politics. The House of Lords may finally see a conclusion to its century-long journey towards democratisation. This is less of a make-and-break issue for the Liberal Democrats than a shared challenge for the political class as a whole. Democratisation of

the Lords has been a catchword on the progressive side of politics for many years. Yet, no consensus has been reached on how this should be done. The Labour government removed the hereditary peers in 1999 (though allowing for 92 hereditary amongst them to remain for their lifetime). However, what should be substituted for the hereditary principle remains unclear. Nomination or election, or any combination of the two, represent the alternatives.

Since 1999, nomination has prevailed through the creation of life peers (nominated partly by the political parties and partly by the House of Lords Appointments Commission). Life peers ensure a balance between the parties broadly equivalent to the House of Commons, as well as a pool of resourceful and independent representatives who perform their task of scrutinising and revising legislation. Indeed, one of the strongest arguments against reforming the House of Lords is that, despite its democratic flaws, it fills its purpose.

"There is work ahead for Clegg and his fellow reformers. 2010 represents a window of opportunity for institutional reform in Britain, with a new Parliament and a distinct mandate for change."

Substituting a directly elected assembly (a proposal heavily opposed by the Lords) would replace autonomy with the party whip. Moreover, democratisation entails a mandate for political power which could challenge the House of Commons, which since the late 1800s has been the superior chamber. The Liberal Democrats, in line with the party's federal vision for Britain, would prefer a reformed House to be composed by representatives from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Such an arrangement is highly unlikely; more plausible is an arrangement for proportional elections for representatives with long and non-renewable mandates, perhaps with a third of the House renewed at each general election.

However, from the vantage point of the first few months of the new government, it is electoral reform that remains the omnipresent target for the Lib Dems. A Liberal dimension is visible in a set of government policies, but what the party has fought and aspired for is fundamental change of the rules of the game. This agenda remains a first priority regardless of the overwhelming focus on economic policy in the first few months of the new regime. Party members will look at the nine months towards next May with apprehension.

Constitutional reform is one such area which will be given the highest priority. Allocated to Nick Clegg in his capacity of Deputy Prime Minister, it covers a classical agenda for Liberal parties, and particularly so in Britain. The electoral system has discriminated against the party since its heyday of the early twentieth century, and the first steps to reform the House of Lords were taken by Asquith's Liberal government in 1911. Representing the classical, political left has meant a consistent emphasis on political equality, the dispersion of power and rule of law. These principles remain central to the reforms which Clegg and his fellow reformers now wish to embark upon. 2010 represents a window of opportunity for institutional reform in Britain, with a new Parliament and a distinct mandate for change. The agenda was spelt out by the Deputy Prime Minister in the House of Commons on 5 July. According to Clegg,

"If anything was clear at the General Election, it was that more and more people realised that our political system is broken and needs to be fixed. They want us to clean up politics. They want to be able to hold us properly to account. So the government has set out an ambitious programme for political renewal, transferring power away from the executive to empower parliament, and away from Parliament to empower people."

Starting with the House of Commons itself, the government proposes fixed parliamentary terms of five years. This will terminate the Prime Minister's right to call an election at will. Moreover, a parliamentary vote of no confidence will not result in dissolution and a new election (as happened in 1979, when James Callaghan's government was rejected and a general election ensued). Following the proposed reform, two weeks will be offered for a new government to be formed, and only if this is unsuccessful will a general election be called. To obtain

Coalition: Cameron's stroke of genius?

By Atle L. Wold

Breaking the mould. The forming of the first British coalition government since the Second World War has led to much glancing into the crystal bowl in attempts to predict the future— can it possibly last? Initially, most commentators seemed to agree that success was unlikely, though a few also claimed that it could work. It will be argued here that, although the risk of failure is present, the Con-Lib experiment does have a fair chance of lasting a full parliament, not the least because the Conservatives, in particular, should have a strong interest in making sure that it does.



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At first glance the odds seem to be stacked firmly against Con-Lib success. The policies of the two parties are, no doubt, quite far apart on a number of issues. One needs only mention foreign affairs, defence and immigration to find policy areas where the differences are considerably less marked between the Conservatives and Labour, than they are between the two coalition partners. In a government which is bound to be dominated by the Conservatives, this may become a very bitter pill to swallow for party members on the left-wing of the Lib Dems. The swift demise of the party at the next general election as a consequence of this break with the party's idealist past has been predicted by some. Furthermore, this is a government which will have to make very unpopular political decisions, and which has the unenviable task of governing the country at a time of a severe economic recession. Such is likely to wear quite hard on any government, but in this case, there is also the clear possibility of the two coalition partners falling out with each other. And added to this is, of course, the much noted lack of a tradition for, and experience with, coalition governments in Britain.

Nevertheless, there are several good reasons why this government may well survive the five-year term to which the two party leaders have committed themselves. For the Lib Dems the most obvious reason must be the sweet taste of power. This party has never been in a position of power before, and it is a good nine decades since its predecessor, the Liberal Party, held the reins of government. And if the example of the Norwegian Socialist Left Party (SV) is anything to go by, then discarding dearly-held principles in order to stay in position does not seem to be too much of a problem, even for idealistically oriented parties.

It does, however, require that the Conservatives – as the dominating partner in the coalition – give the Lib Dems a real say in government policies. For the Conservatives, there is good reason to do so in order to safeguard the coalition. The Con-Lib coalition means that the Conservatives are yet again in a position of power, as the dominating partner in a majority government. This is important enough in itself, but it also means that Cameron has sabotaged the competing vision on the left of forming a so-called “progressive alliance” (consisting of the Lib Dems, Labour, the SNP and possibly other minor parties), thereby also splitting the progressive majority for the immediate future. The favoured Conservative vision is that of a realignment of British politics moving the initiative to the centre-right and committing the Lib Dems to it (or, at least, blocking the potential of a coalition from the centre-left).

The importance of the coalition's survival is underlined by the election results themselves, which show the fragility of the Conservative exploits. Although it seems fair to say that the party won the election with an impressive swing of five per cent, it is nonetheless clear that it secured “just” 36% of the total votes cast. This is, of course, far off an outright majority, but also quite far off the 40%+ the Conservatives needed to obtain a majority in the House of Commons. Moreover, there is no given – despite what some conservative commentators seem to think – that the Tories would do better in the next general election, indeed, they could very well do much worse! (36.9% may ring a bell for Norwegian readers at this point, i.e. never

assume that a political party enjoys a “natural” level of support to which it will tend to return or re-bounce.) In this sense, having someone with whom to “share the blame” might come in handy for both parties at the next general election.

With regard to the prospects for survival, one should be careful about over-stating the lack of experience with coalition governments in Britain. For one thing, the main political parties in a two-and-a-half-party system such as the British are typically quite broad coalitions themselves. Thus while the distance between the left-wing of the Lib Dems, and the right wing of the Conservative Party may be significant, so is the gap between the left and the right of the Tory Party itself on many matters. This naturally means that both parties have long experience in accommodating such differences within. In the same vein one should also stress that – unlike the Lib Dems – the Conservative Party has always been a pragmatic party seeking power. In its long history as a most successful election-winning machine, the desire and wish to gain position and stay in government has always come before ideology or adherence to strict political principles. One could even argue that this was the case during the seemingly dogmatic Thatcher-years.

Lastly, there is a territorial dimension to the results of 6 May which ensures that going it alone would not be a good alternative for the Conservatives. If the party won the election, then it was clearly a victory achieved in England, though with unusually good support in Wales. In Scotland, the Conservatives retained the single seat they won in 2005, having lost all seats in the 1997 election.. And while the Labour Party lost badly in England, they actually enhanced their support in Scotland and defended their 41 seats from 2005. Thus if a government had been based on the Conservative Party alone, the old saying that Thatcher lacked a “Scottish mandate” could have been revoked by its opponents (notwithstanding the fact that devolution was put in place to deal with the problem of English dominance within the Union). By comparison, the Lib Dems add significant good will through their strength in both Scotland and Wales, and by bringing them onboard, the Conservatives have given the government as much of a Scottish (and Welsh) mandate as they could, short of inviting the Labour Party to cooperate.

In essence, therefore, the coalition government might just be Cameron's stroke of genius. On the other hand, it could also collapse next week. Exiting times are ahead.



New deal. David Cameron speaking during his first press conference as Prime Minister, 12 May 2010.
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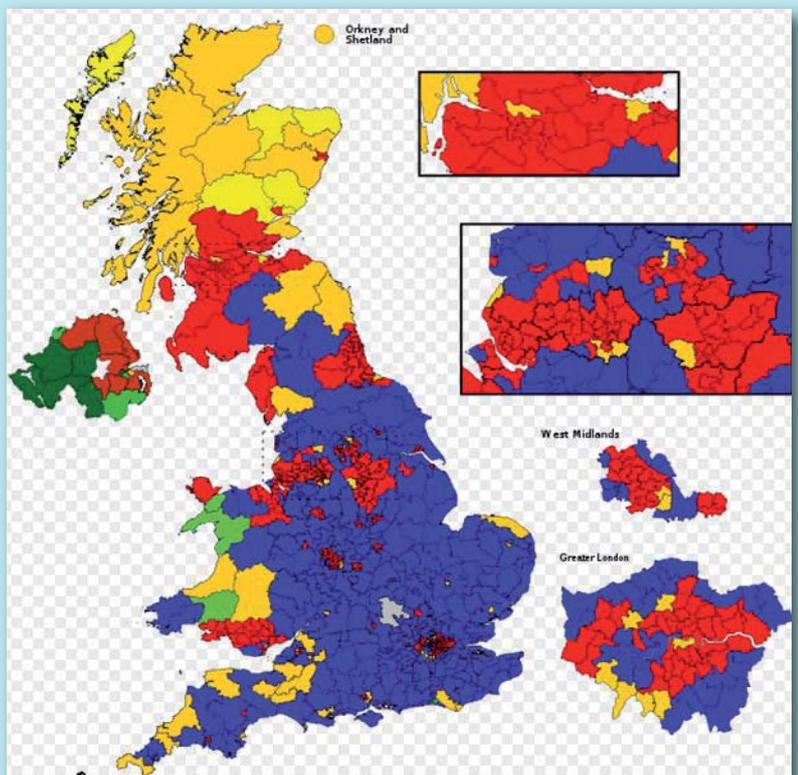
The political map of Britain 2010

| | Seats | Change | Votes | Vote share | Change |
|------------------------------------|-------|--------|------------|------------|--------|
| Conservative | 307 | +97 | 10,726,614 | 36,1% | +3,8 |
| Labour | 258 | -91 | 8,609,527 | 29,0% | -6,2 |
| Liberal Democrat | 57 | -5 | 6,836,824 | 23,0% | +1,0 |
| Democratic Unionist Party | 8 | -1 | 168,216 | 0,6% | -0,3 |
| Scottish National Party | 6 | 0 | 491,386 | 1,7% | +0,1 |
| Sinn Fein | 5 | 0 | 171,942 | 0,6% | -0,1 |
| Plaid Cymru | 3 | +1 | 165,394 | 0,6% | -0,1 |
| SDLP | 3 | 0 | 110,970 | 0,4% | -0,1 |
| Green | 1 | +1 | 285,616 | 1,0% | -0,1 |
| Alliance Party | 1 | +1 | 42,762 | 0,1% | 0,0 |
| Ulster Conservatives and Unionists | 0 | -1 | 102,361 | 0,3% | -0,1 |
| UKIP | 0 | 0 | 919,546 | 3,1% | +0,9 |
| British National Party | 0 | 0 | 564,331 | 1,9% | +1,2 |
| Others | 1* | 0 | | | |

*Speaker

The General Election took place on 6 May 2010 across 650 constituencies. The turnout, at 65,1%, improved from 2001 and 2005 but was lower than at any general election from 1945 to 1997. The results prepared the ground for a "hung Parliament" where no single party commands a majority: only in 1974 had such an outcome occurred at any postwar election. The share of votes to other parties than Labour and the Conservatives was the highest since 1918. While the Green Party had its first MP elected, the election was also characterised by an unusually high turnover due to the number of MPs standing down and the electoral swing from Labour to the Conservatives.

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Red | Labour |
| Blue | Conservative |
| Yellow | Liberal Democrat |
| Bright yellow | SNP |
| Green (England) | Green |
| Green (Wales) | Plaid Cymru |
| Light green (N.I.) | SDLP |
| Dark green (N.I.) | Sinn Fein |
| Red (N.I.) | Democratic Unionist |



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Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review

Austerity has returned to the vocabular of British politics, as the consequences of the recession become clearer. The new government has made the tightening of the public purse a quintessential task for the years to come.

The ambition, to restore the health of Britain's economy, takes priority over a range of bread-and-butter matters that would otherwise take centre stage. The self-imposed constraints also mean that courting the voters by offering new and

costly policies will be well-nigh impossible.

The next issue of *British Politics Review* addresses the consequences of recession as its overarching theme. To what extent has the crisis changed the battle lines in British politics? Could the class issue return to the forefront of British politics as certain social and geographical groups are hit disproportionately by the recession? What are the effects of financial restraint on the various parts of the

public sector? Finally, what parallels are recognisable from previous economic crises in Britain, with regard to form and severity as well as political consequences?

As usual, the Review will draw upon articles both from political, academic and journalistic sources. Contributions from readers of *British Politics Review* are very welcome.

The autumn edition of *British Politics Review* is due to arrive in November 2010.