

**NO LONGER THE NASTY PARTY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE  
TORIES UNDER DAVID CAMERON**

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“I had come to the view that the Tory Party needed to skip a generation. We needed telegenic, charismatic, modern – not in a grumpy, tortured, Portillo way, but in a relaxed, effortless comfortable-with-themselves sort of way. And [Cameron] seemed to fit the bill very closely.”<sup>1</sup> – Greg Barker, Conservative MP for Bexhill and Battle since 2001

The Blair decade is at an end. The most politically successful Labour Prime Minister ever – who led his party to three successive general election victories – is now out of Downing Street. As the dominant figure in parliament for ten years, Blair remained while Leaders of the Opposition came and went. He saw off more opposition leaders than any prime minister for a century. Blair’s chief rival within the Labour Party, the dour Scotsman Gordon Brown, has taken power. He faces in David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative Party since December 2005, an opponent who at first glance seems quite Blair-like: he is young, ambitious, exuberant, and non-ideological in his politics. With the next general election looming, perhaps as soon as the spring of 2008, has Cameron put the Tories in a position to win or is he yet another Conservative pretender? Will he join former Tory leaders William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith, and Michael Howard in spending yet more time in the political wilderness?

Let’s begin with one of the most overused words of the Blair decade: ‘modernize.’ After becoming leader of the Labour Party in 1994 following John Smith’s death, Blair promised to continue the work of Neil Kinnock to ‘modernize’ (i.e., change) the Labour Party to account for a changing society. Claiming that modernization is not about dumping principle, it’s about retrieving what the Labour Party is really about, Blair set out the modernization agenda with some sobering facts. In an editorial he wrote for the Guardian in July 1995, Blair lamented:

Analysis should be based on facts. The facts are these. It is over 25 years since Labour won 40 per cent or more of the vote. It is 21 years since we won an election. By 1996, we will have been out of power for longer than any other mainstream left-of-centre party in the western world. Our 1992 vote was actually below our 1979 vote. Our swing required to win at the next election is the largest in any election since 1945.<sup>2</sup>

Faced with those facts, Blair offered his judgment. He demanded that the Labour Party undergo a “transformation at every level: organization, ideology, and ideas.”<sup>3</sup> Arguing that this change would only succeed if it were based on principle, he offered this case for change:

...the foundation of democratic socialism or European social democracy is the belief that, in working together, we can advance individually and collectively in a way that we cannot do alone. It is a very simple philosophy, which certainly pre-dates the Labour Party. It is based on a set of values....The objectives won't change: a prosperous and just society; tackling the evils of unemployment and poverty; coping with massive economic and technological change; a modern industrial partnership between government and business, and at work between management and workforce; good public services; safer communities; and a political constitution that fits a new age.<sup>4</sup>

Blair's symbolic victory for the modernization cause came with his triumph in re-writing Clause IV of the Labour Party's constitution. Blair ally Jack Straw concluded that Clause IV was an important part of the reason for Labour's failure to win the 1992 General Election. It wasn't that swing voters fretted that Labour would nationalize the whole economy, but it served as evidence that something was out of tune in Labour's core message. Straw argued that “people felt uncertain about what we might do with the country because of a glaring gap between the sensible reassuring detail of our policy, and the ideology to which we had all signed up, Clause IV.”<sup>5</sup> In winning the Clause IV debate, Blair had triumphed over left-wing MPs like Ken Livingstone and Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn did not go down without a fight, noting that “a very large number of

party members joined the party because they believe in a collective solution to a common problem and they support the idea of common ownership. There has never been more public support for the ideas of public ownership.”<sup>6</sup> Quite ironically, Ken Livingstone added that it was unthinkable to end up in a situation where the Liberal Democrats are to the left of Labour.<sup>7</sup>

Blair’s victory on Clause Four is well-established territory by now. Nevertheless, it is important to re-establish this context and Blair’s critique of his party post-1992 in order to parallel those circumstances with what is faced by today’s Conservative Party. In 1995, Jack Straw wrote that “it might all seem very easy now. But that was not how it looked then. For we have not been dealing with words on paper, but with a monstrous religious icon, a graven image that has provided false certainty in an age of huge change.”<sup>8</sup>

Jack Straw’s point emphasizes that, even in 1992, the Labour ‘brand’ was still tarnished by its history in the 1970s and 1980s. Through the election campaign of 1992, the Conservatives were still able to conjure up images of the “Winter of Discontent” (1978-1979) and its past stance on nuclear disarmament, etc. Clause IV was a ‘monstrous religious icon’ because its very invocation allowed it to tap into past dissatisfaction with Labour.

If Clause IV was Labour’s ‘monstrous religious icon,’ and something that hurt their credibility with the electorate, what has played the same role for the Tories? What has damaged the Conservative ‘brand’? One immediately thinks of Thatcherism and especially the Thatcherite stance on Europe as being the party’s biggest millstone, as it was the greatest source of internecine party warfare in the years leading up to 1990 and

the years after. Yet Thatcherism has many dimensions: it is both an ideology and a style of governance. The 1990 leadership election which produced John Major resolutely rejected Thatcherism as a *style* of governance. Major was certainly less formal than Mrs. Thatcher, and found his way into the lobbies and tea rooms to consult with MPs in a way that Thatcher never attempted. He tried to create a consensus within the Conservative Party on a number of issues, especially Europe, which would successfully navigate the dangerous political waters of Euroskeptic Thatcherites and Euro-enthusiasts like Ken Clarke. Hence, Major's negotiation of the 1992 Maastricht treaty (Treaty on European Union) produced acceptance of the treaty, while opting-out of its social chapter; this played to both sides of the European issue within the Conservative Party. His vision of Maastricht was simultaneously Euro-skeptic and Euro-enthusiast. He must have felt that in 1992, he had vastly outperformed his predecessor on Europe, whose relish of a fight with other European leaders left Britain increasingly isolated within the European project.

Because Europe was the single greatest reason for the fall of Mrs. Thatcher, and the single greatest reason for the squabbling within the Tory in the 1992-97 period, is it easy to overlook the fact that the Tories were wedded to a bit a Thatcherite ideology that remained: tax cuts. The Conservative Party was transformed in the 1980s by Thatcher's monetarist policies, which included the belief that low taxes create greater wealth by creating greater incentives to work. By transforming the tax structure from pay-as-you-earn in the direction of pay-as-you-spend; by reducing taxes on income in favor of sales taxes like VAT, Thatcher had established the credentials of the Conservatives as the party of low taxes, especially in contrast to the Wilson-Callaghan Labour governments of 1974-1979.

In 1997, the Conservatives played their trump card – the tax issue – once again. Under the slogan “New Labour, New Danger,” the Tories prophesized that voting for New Labour would mean a return to high, 1970s era taxes and unemployment. They even made the claim, subsequently proved completely false, that Labour’s plans to introduce a national minimum wage would cost jobs, and send record numbers of low-skilled, low-wage earners to the unemployment line.

Given the fact that the Conservatives had been in power for eighteen years in 1997; that the Major years were beset by scandals and disasters not the least of which was Black Wednesday (16 September 1992), when Britain exited the European Exchange Rate Mechanism at an estimated cost to the British taxpayer of £3.4 Billion; that the Tories were constantly feuding with one another (especially over Europe); that Major’s leadership had been challenged by John Redwood in 1995; that crime had steadily increased, was it any wonder that they lost? Democracy requires that power cannot be held by the same party forever; it is self-evident that the Tories were suffering the fatigue of having been in power too long in 1997, and the 1997 election had a certain air of inevitability. The Tories were due for a loss.

In the wake of the 1997 election debacle, was there a sense that the Conservative Party needed to follow Blair’s assessment of his own party to seek a “transformation at every level?” In 1999, David Willetts, MP for Havant and Shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, offered his assessment of where the Tories were in After the Landslide, a pamphlet published by the Centre for Policy Studies. He argued that the survivors of the 1997 general election needed to learn from their party’s history. The Conservatives had faced similar epoch-changing elections in 1906 and 1945, from which “the Tories took

respectively sixteen and six years to recover.”<sup>9</sup> For Willetts, the lesson needed was that the Conservatives “must concentrate on party reform, a big-picture strategy, bread-and-butter populism, and policies grounded in voters’ future needs rather than their previous applause.”<sup>10</sup> Hugo Young, writing for the Guardian, responded thus:

The trouble is that present circumstances do not mimic 1945 but 1906. The prime error Willetts cautions against is party division and the inward-looking obsessions it nourishes. What wrecked the Tories after 1906 was a decade spent bitterly divided between protectionists and free-traders. Could there be a more resounding antecedent for the party’s modern struggle? It prefigures the Euro rage exactly. While the politician in Willetts persuades him towards 1945, the scholar in him surely sees 1906 as the true analogy. Europe is at the heart of the Thatcher-Major viciousness. The rows about it dominate the party William Hague leads but cannot be said, in all its amplitude, to speak for. Until they finish, sixteen years not six is nearer the mark.<sup>11</sup>

Young concluded that the 1999 Conservative Party conference offered at best “a few bits of policy” that added up to little more than “a string of items, not a vision and nowhere near a strategy.”<sup>12</sup>

Hague’s slogan during his leadership campaign in 1997 was “A Fresh Start,” and he offered the Conservative Party a dynamic, modernizing image that could (theoretically, anyway) reach out and bring back former Tory voters that had defected to New Labour. Hague began as a modernizer, though his photo ops sometimes misfired. That he wore a baseball cap on his bald head at an amusement park and attended the Notting Hill Carnival seem, in retrospect, to have enhanced neither his modernizing nor multi-cultural credentials, but rather left the impression that he was a bit of a “wally” or a “plonker.”

The strategy of “reaching out” to disaffected voters was laid out in an internal Tory Party document in November 1998 called “Kitchen Table Conservatives.” It was

co-authored by Andrew Cooper, then the Tory director of operations and an ally of Michael Portillo, and Danny Finkelstein, the party's head of policy. Kitchen Table Conservatism was a vision of "a fresh, inclusive, open and accountable modern conservatism."<sup>13</sup> It was also an attempt to get the Conservative Party to reconsider its language, and encouraged the party to rethink how to have a conversation with the electorate. Its purpose was to re-center the Tory focus on "kitchen table" issues like health and education. Hague felt that the report offered a credible thesis as to why the Conservative Party was so soundly defeated in 1997, and he ordered the Shadow Cabinet to "adopt a more modern approach and concentrate on 'bread and butter' issues."<sup>14</sup>

The tone of the kitchen table report was damning. It argued that the Conservative Party had lacked a coherent strategy for four years, and that the party had comprehensively failed to successfully get across a message about what the party was going to do about the public services. It explained that Labour's landslide victory in 1997 was the product of "a deep-seated loss of faith in the Conservative Party which had festered and soured for almost a whole Parliament."<sup>15</sup> Cooper's thesis was that "the decay in [Conservative] support was rooted in the party's failure to develop a new policy and that the party's revival would depend on *new ideas* [my emphasis] on issues that people really care about – most crucially, the reform and improvement of Britain's public services."<sup>16</sup> Cooper insisted that the Tories needed to express their genuine concern towards public services; if their intentions were perceived as malign, then it would not matter how intellectually compelling their policies were.<sup>17</sup> The report offered this analysis and way forward:

Recovery cannot begin until we understand that a lot of the things people said about us before the election were true. We were out of touch. We had

stopped listening. We were undisciplined and divided. We didn't have any clear idea of the direction in which we wanted to take Britain. The end came as relief for everyone, even, if we're honest, ourselves.<sup>18</sup>

One of the aims of the report was to not only to transform the *language* of the party, but to transform its *look*. It trumpeted that the Conservative Party would gain more credibility the more it looked and sounded like the rest of Britain. What could have been more of a departure from the Thatcher years? For Thatcher, what mattered was ideas and policy. It did not matter what social background you came from or what sex you were; what mattered were your convictions. In Thatcher's Britain, it was not the number of women MPs, but the quality of MPs that mattered. A political poster from the 1983 election campaign showed a picture of black man in a business suit with the caption, "Labour says he's Black. Tories say he's British."<sup>19</sup> Now, in 1998, that had to be re-written. What really mattered was that he was a visible minority. Note the report's use of "looks"; it mattered not whether a Black Conservative candidate was wealthy and public school educated; what mattered was the racially inclusive image that was projected to the voters. Labour had more Black MPs and women MPs, so the Conservatives had to catch up. Not only did the color of its candidates matter, but so did the color of its logo! The paper argued that "our house style, color scheme, and logo are key parts of the overall identity and personality of the party."<sup>20</sup> It offered a seven-point plan for recovery:

1. Speaking about the issues people really care about: kitchen table issues, not Westminster issues.
2. Being prepared to change the party's entire agenda.
3. Using opinion polling, not just relying on guesswork.
4. Realizing that the party has to change the way it looks and sounds.

5. Being positive and having ideas, not just attacking Labour.
6. Being prepared to take risks.
7. Ruthless organization, not banking on Labour becoming unpopular.

When the report came out, William Hague told his Shadow Cabinet that their political careers depended on sticking rigorously to the ‘kitchen table’ strategy. Yet just three months later, a follow up report to the initial “Kitchen Table Conservatives” document warned that the strategy was not being followed; that the party was instead focused on asylum, crime, and section 28 and that the party’s image was continuing to suffer. One unnamed senior Tory was quoted in the Telegraph as saying:

The reason why the Conservative Party looks set to lose disastrously badly at the election is because it’s perceived as the Nasty Party. It doesn’t seem to have any of the mood, the culture, the problems and anxieties of modern Britain.<sup>21</sup>

The implementation of the “kitchen table” strategy was handled with monstrous incompetence, achieving the alienation of right wing party activists and core Conservative voters without broadening the party’s appeal. In April 1999, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Margaret Thatcher’s premiership, Deputy Leader Peter Lilley delivered the annual R.A. Butler lecture, which would be ‘spun’ in advance as a major repudiation of Thatcherism by ruling out privatization of health and education. The timing of the speech offended both Mrs. Thatcher and the Thatcherite wing of the party, who saw it as tantamount to slapping core voters in the face. Faced with howls of protest from his most loyal supporters, Hague did a u-turn, which one adviser described thus:

He had to protect his position. His strategy was not working and if even the core voters defected, he was finished. We could not reach out for new voters until we shored up our base.<sup>22</sup>

The switch from a ‘kitchen table’ strategy to right wing populism to establish ‘clear blue water’ between the main parties made sense if the objective was to secure the party’s core, loyalist vote. However, as Professor David Broughton has pointed out, “as a strategy to increase the party’s attraction to floating voters and those who were disaffected and distrustful of the party after eighteen years in power, it appeared to be an admission of inevitable defeat.”<sup>23</sup>

The problem was that right wing populist issues – like immigration – were not the issues that mattered to ‘floating’ voters, whose concerns were all but ignored in the years leading up to (and beyond) the 2001 election. By the time of the 2005 election, the Conservatives were again caught in the same dilemma. Polling suggested that floating voters ranked their most important issues in this order: 1. the National Health Service, 2. crime, 3. education, and 4. the economy.<sup>24</sup> Immigration was still the issue upon which the Conservatives had the largest lead, “but it did not matter enough to floating voters, and the Conservative campaign did not succeed in persuading those voters that immigration mattered more than the NHS, education, and the economy.”<sup>25</sup>

In the absence of a “kitchen table” agenda, William Hague often returned to the traditional Tory issues of tax and over-regulation. One of Hague’s favorite tactics was to attack Labour’s ‘stealth taxes.’ While Labour could claim it had not raised income taxes – as they had promised in the 1997 campaign – the overall tax burden was evidently rising. At Prime Minister’s Questions on 3 November 1999, Hague launched a full attack on New Labour’s ‘stealth taxes’:

The question is whether business taxes have gone up. The Prime Minister is as stealthy with the truth as he is with taxes. He claims that taxes are going down when they are going up; he says that he is worried about red tape when he is introducing it by the yard; he talks about the importance of

information technology, but will tonight vote to drive many such companies abroad; he speaks about competition but is diminishing Britain's competitive advantage. Along with his promise to increase no taxes at all, is not all that part of the great Labour lie?<sup>26</sup>

To this rather strong language, Blair retorted:

In the end, the choice is between the economic priorities and economic competence of both parties. We inherited a £28 billion borrowing requirement and a national debt which had doubled, but we had sorted out the public finances and, for the first time in many, many years, given the country the prospect of steady growth. The right hon. Gentleman has totally failed to say how he manages, at one and the same time, to tell people that he will cut their taxes by billions and billions of pounds, but increase social security spending by billions of pounds, while still wanting more money to be spent on defense, law and order, schools and hospitals.

In opposition, we had to answer those questions, and at some point the right hon. Gentleman will have to answer them, too. Then, the country will see that it has a clear choice between a Labour Government who are running a competent economy and a Conservative Party that not merely cannot add up its sums, but has not the faintest clue of how to deal with the tough decisions affecting the British economy.<sup>27</sup>

Hague landed the blows he could, but the situation was extremely difficult. The Tories had lost the issue of economic competence. The economy *did* improve under New Labour. Jobs did *not* disappear with the introduction of the national minimum wage. Rates of long-term youth unemployment fell. Blair described his government's first term achievements as follows:

In our first term, we altered the entire system of economic management with Bank of England independence and new fiscal rules, which have given Britain today the lowest inflation in Europe, 1 million more jobs in the economy and interest rates half what they were in 18 years of Conservative government. I believe that today the Labour Government are the Government of economic competence for our country. In 1997, 42p of every extra £1 of public spending went on social security and on interest payments on the nation's debt. Today, the figure is 16p. Today, Britain has the fourth largest economy in the world, the national debt is falling and youth unemployment has been halved. Those are not abstract economic

figures; they mark real improvements in this country and in the living standards of our people.<sup>28</sup>

Although Hague was a prepared and fierce debater, his attacks lacked any coherent narrative. With astonishing swiftness, Hague's Conservatives lurched from 'kitchen table' conservatism to 'compassionate conservatism' to Common Sense Revolution to a 'core vote' strategy "without successfully developing any of these."<sup>29</sup> Philip Lynch and Mark Garnett, who co-authored an edited volume about this dark period in Tory history, concluded:

Previous spells in opposition suggested that a coherent policy review was an essential stepping-stone to recovery. But in 1997-2001, the policy review process was flawed. The Conservative Research Department had been subsumed within a Central Office 'war room' and there were few fruitful exchanges with think tanks. Peter Lilley's review produced disappointingly little, undermined by funding constraints and differences over the way forward. The Common Sense Revolution was hastily drafted, containing a raft of policy commitments but little by way of a connecting theme.<sup>30</sup>

That left Hague's 2001 election campaign centered on a "core vote strategy" that targeted crime, immigration, bogus asylum seekers, and Europe. The 2001 Manifesto was titled "Time for Common Sense" and was launched by Hague on 10 May 2001 with this introductory sentence:

My greatest fear for the country I love is that we will wake up one day and find that something very precious has been lost without our ever quite realizing how or why we let it happen.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, the tone of fear combined with yet another relaunch of 'common sense revolution' was easy to attack. At the end of May 2001, Hague was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman on the BBC's Newsnight program. He was greeted with this introductory question:

Since you became leader of the party, we've had "Fresh Start", "The British Way", "The Right Way", "kitchen table Conservatism", "compassionate Conservatism", "the common sense revolution" and "believing in Britain". What are we on now?<sup>32</sup>

Hague replied:

Those things have come together in time for "Common Sense" which is our manifesto. Over the last four years, we've become a much stronger party, with 2,500 more councilors, we control 70 more town halls and have twice as many MEPs.<sup>33</sup>

When Paxman asked Hague if he considered himself a compassionate Conservative, Hague responded "Yes, I think Conservatism is inherently compassionate."<sup>34</sup> Paxman, ready to spring his trap, then asked "What is compassionate about locking up all asylum seekers?" Hague, sticking to his guns, countered that "is the only way that we will get a system fair to the genuine refugee."<sup>35</sup> After his joust with Hague on immigration, Paxman again lambasted Hague for phony 'compassion'. He attacked Shadow Home Secretary Ann Widdecombe, who had spent much of the election campaign taking helicopter flights all over Britain in order to leave behind "Put a Policeman Here!" banners to indicate where she felt Labour was failing on crime measures. Paxman asked:

What is compassionate about Ann Widdecombe describing part of the Labour Government's epitaph as being to put an imprimatur upon sodomy at 16?<sup>36</sup>

Hague defended his Shadow Home Secretary by saying:

[She] has personal views. These are matters of conscience, and those things are matters of conscience....The fact is the Conservative Party welcomes people of all races, of all sexual orientations.<sup>37</sup>

In the introduction to his 2001 election manifesto, Hague proclaimed that "at this election, Britain has a choice between a Labour Party that trusts government instead of

people and a Conservative Party that trusts people instead of government.”<sup>38</sup> Despite his best efforts, the choice before voters in 2001 seemed to be between a Labour Party making progress on economic growth and public services and a rather nasty Tory Party whose campaign issues failed to connect with the British electorate.

The 2001 Conservative campaign utterly failed to detoxify the poisoned Tory brand. This is quite ironic if one considers that Hague had sought the widest possible consultation from the electorate during his “Listening to Britain” exercise of 1998-1999. After 1,400 meetings open to the general public and 200-odd “Listening to Britain’s Churches” meetings, as well as various other related meetings, the Tories had come no closer to crafting a resonant message.<sup>39</sup> No matter how well researched or focus-grouped a political message is, there is nothing that can hide the lack of genuine authenticity. Voters must believe that politicians believe in what they are preaching. If the message is too slick or too obviously tailored, then it loses its credibility. Without a convincing, genuine, and resonant vision, Blair and New Labour had little difficulty in painting Hague’s Tories as the same old nasty party.

In an article exhorting the British public to give Labour a second full term, The Guardian offered this indictment of Hague’s Tories:

The Tories remain a party in hock to the dogmas of possessive individualism. They are still consumed with a post-imperial fantasy of Britain’s place in the world. They are still gripped and controlled by a Euro-phobic clique which seeks to drive out apostates and unbelievers. They are still out of touch with the priorities of ordinary voters about public services which, in all too many cases, they do not themselves use. Their dwindling appeal is centred on an electorate which is getting older and is increasingly confined to the English countryside. Though the Tories have run a surprisingly disciplined campaign with a certain disarming bravado, you can already hear the squeals.<sup>40</sup>

Hague did indeed run a disciplined campaign, and did his personal best to radiate good health and positivity. Faced with journalists' cat calls about his rock-bottom poll ratings and impending demise, he maintained his enthusiasm for the work. He even responded to the charge that the Conservatives deserved their reputation as the nasty party, saying:

No, I do not think that is true. We are the party that is tough about certain things. Yes, we are tough on crime – because we care about the victims and I do not call that nasty. Yes, we are tough on the asylum system and we want to sort it out so it's a safe haven, not a soft touch, because we care about the genuine refugees and care about the system being fair. But I would reject the word you use. You only have to look around the Conservative Party to see it does welcome people from all backgrounds. I was in Bradford a couple of weeks ago – most of our candidates are Asians and most of our councilors are British Asians. We have some openly gay candidates too.<sup>41</sup>

Giles Marshall, chairman of the Tory Reform Group, contradicted his party leader in an editorial written just a month before the general election. Condemning Hague's "monumentally ill-advised speech about 'a foreign land,'" he argued that his words "add credence to the view that this is a nasty party wildly out of touch with anything other than a base of bigots."<sup>42</sup> He opined:

The Conservative Party's tragedy is to have lost all hold on its historical moorings, and to be cast off into the eddy of rabid right-wing ideology. The moderate, one-nation trend has all but vanished and there seems only a slim chance of it ever returning.<sup>43</sup>

Despite Hague's campaigning, the results of the 11 June 2001 election were nearly as catastrophic as the landslide of 1997. The Conservatives finished the night with 166 seats, just 1 seat better than in 1997, with their overall share of the vote at just 31.7%. One of the influx of new MPs into the Conservative Party in 2001 was David Cameron, the MP for Witney. After just six days on the job, he offered this assessment of the failure of the Conservatives' 2001 election campaign:

[The Conservative Party] has to change its language, change its approach, start with a blank sheet of paper and try to work out why our base of support is not broader. Anyone could have told the Labour Party in the 1980s how to become electable. It had to drop unilateral disarmament, punitive tax rises, wholesale nationalization and unionization. The question for the Conservative Party is far more difficult because there are no obvious areas of policy that need to be dropped. We need a clear, positive, engaging agenda on public services.<sup>44</sup>

Gregory Mackay, William Hague's former press secretary, commented that the 2001 election was the electoral equivalent of Groundhog Day. He admitted that Labour had successfully pigeon-holed the Conservatives as a caricature of themselves: a party of selfishness and individual excess – the nasty party. He warned that unless they find the language to broaden their appeal, and unless they avoid the “short-termism” the public is so fed up with, election results would continue to deliver a feeling of *déjà vu*.<sup>45</sup> Tom Brown, writing for the Scottish Daily Record, offered this blunt assessment of the 2001 Tories: “The once-honorable Conservative and Unionist Party has become a coalition of miserable, me-first, racist, Little Englanders.”<sup>46</sup>

The agony of a second landslide defeat brought about Hague's resignation, and the party was plunged into a rather protracted leadership contest. The grassroots ballot of Conservative Party members would take place 12 September 2001; that left more than three months for political maneuvering that would insure the party stayed in the newspaper headlines. However, the Times correctly predicted that Hague's new leadership election rules could produce a situation in which the second choice of MPs was actually the first choice of the grassroots.<sup>47</sup> A Times columnist commented that “the taunts from the Labour benches for any leader given his post under such circumstances are easy to imagine.”<sup>48</sup>

Although the Times correctly predicted the scenario that produced Iain Duncan Smith: a Conservative leader by virtue of mostly Euro-skeptic grassroots support, but not by virtue of his colleagues' approval, they incorrectly identified the direction from which Duncan Smith's problems were to come. The problems this scenario created were less those occasioned by Labour derision than by the internal dissatisfaction of a Tory leader who did not enjoy the confidence of his colleagues. Nevertheless, Duncan Smith began his leadership with inclusive language, a centrist direction, and an olive branch for his enemies. Duncan Smith said the focus of Tory policy was on the issue that matters most to voters – public services, and that the Tory party had stopped being a nasty party obsessed with “asylum-seekers, gays, and other assorted enemies of the state.”<sup>49</sup>

Although some Euroskeptics like Bill Cash were awarded with frontbench appointments, the centre ground was clearly the party's objective. Even Michael Howard, newly appointed as Shadow Chancellor, argued that “health, education, and transport” have priority over tax cuts.<sup>50</sup> He even managed a decent joke at the October 2001 conference in Blackpool, when he said: “Iain's laid much stress on the environment. He believes in recycling. So here I am.”<sup>51</sup>

Despite his inclusive intentions, Iain Duncan Smith labored under two great burdens. First, he could not hide the fact that he was an uninspiring speaker who gave “dull, boring, and flat” speeches both in large venues such as at the Conservative Party conference, but also in the House of Commons. The Westminster press dubbed his uncomfortable performances the fault of “Freddie the Frog,” who lived in his throat.<sup>52</sup> The satirical magazine Private Eye dubbed him “Iain Duncan Cough.” Second, his early leadership period was dominated by the global war on terrorism in the wake of the events

of September 11, 2001. Duncan Smith gave his unstinting support to the government in the war on terrorism, providing neither cautious oversight nor constructive criticism. This failure severely damaged the ability of the Conservatives to exploit the subsequent difficulties of the war in Iraq, as is evident by the Tories under Michael Howard to capitalize on the Hutton Report. Francis Elliott and James Hanning put this succinctly:

By the time Howard became leader, the issues of Iraq and Blair's trustworthiness had become entwined. It was an obvious political opportunity and one that Howard was determined to exploit. Shortly after becoming leader, he demanded to know what questions his party had asked Blair of his dossier on its publication. The answer – that Duncan Smith had ruled that it should not be queried at all – infuriated him. 'He went berserk. I have never seen him so angry,' recalls a witness.<sup>53</sup>

The failure of Iain Duncan Smith to capitalize on Blair's Iraq woes brought out the knives. The 15 February 2003 anti-war protest in London, organized by Britain's Stop the War Coalition, drew crowds in excess of 750,000 people.<sup>54</sup> This attendance figure was hailed as "the largest political demonstration in London's history" by rally organizers. By committing his party so completely to Blair's cause, there was no political possibility of the Conservatives being able to take advantage of the swelling anti-war angst in the country: one of the few obvious political wounds Blair had suffered. Duncan Smith, who unwisely described himself as the "quiet man" at the 2002 Conservative conference, gave one of the most unconvincing, dreadfully dull speeches at the 2003 party conference – it was punctuated by far too many pauses – in which he switched gears from 2002 and indicated that "the Quiet Man is here to stay, and he is turning up the volume."<sup>55</sup> His colleagues in the parliamentary party were convinced by neither the "Quiet Man" routine nor his "turning up the volume," and a vote of no-confidence was

held on 29 October 2003, which Duncan Smith lost by a closer margin than expected: 90-75.

Duncan Smith's ouster paved the way for Michael Howard to become party leader. He stabilized a difficult situation, and landed some real political blows against Blair, which I detailed in "Michael Howard's Effectiveness as Leader of the Opposition," a paper delivered at the 2006 American Political Science Association conference. Howard led the Conservative Party from November 2003 until the general election of 5 May 2005. That general election produced a Labour majority of 66 seats. Howard, by fighting an election campaign on deliverable promises and centered largely on crime and immigration, had clawed back some lost ground from Labour. With only eighteen months as leader, Howard had done a respectable, professional job; he simply had not had the time to "rethink twenty-first-century conservatism from the bottom up."<sup>56</sup> Maurice Saatchi, the party Chairman, criticized Howard for failing "to inspire the voters towards a radical vision of a low-tax state" even though Steve Hilton, the marketing guru responsible for giving Blair demon eyes for the 'New Labour, New Danger' campaign in 1997<sup>57</sup>, had told Saatchi that "no matter how tax cuts were packaged, voters preferred adequate public services."<sup>58</sup>

In the wake of the 2005 general election defeat, Howard took a series of actions that amounted to an attempt to fix who would succeed him. He announced, in the South West London constituency of Putney – the site of a notable victory for Tory candidate Justine Greening on a swing of 6.5% from Labour – that he would resign his leadership because he would be "too old" to fight the next general election. He then appointed Francis Maude, a man with a reputation as an arch modernizer, as the next chairman of

the Conservative Party. Maude's appointment was followed by an attempt to change the rules under which Conservative leaders are elected. The rules established under William Hague's leadership allowed MPs to narrow the field down to two candidates who would then be presented to the party membership for a final selection. However, as in the case of Iain Duncan Smith, there is always the possibility that a leader could be chosen who did not secure a majority of MPs. Howard sought to give the choice to MPs, but the change required supported from both two-thirds of MPs and two-thirds of voluntary activists in the 1,141-strong constitutional college. The rule was backed by 71% of MPs, but only 58% of voluntary activists, so the change failed. Howard told the BBC that he "thought it would be sensible for us to change the rules and a majority of the party agreed with me but not enough of them."<sup>59</sup> This meant MPs would narrow the potential field down to two candidates.

The appointment of Maude combined with the attempt to change the leadership rules were taken by many in the Tory Party that Howard was doing all he could to prevent David Davis from succeeding him as leader. As a final, anti-Davis gesture, Howard re-shuffled his post-election Shadow Cabinet to allow Davis's rivals a chance to shine. Howard offered the post of Shadow Chancellor to David Cameron, who declined that position but accepted the job as Shadow Education Secretary. It was a tactical decision, made to avoid Gordon Brown. Cameron's biographers, Francis Elliott and James Hanning, suggest several factors explain Cameron's decision. First, the British economy was strong and showed no signs of faltering. Second, Brown had already seen off six Shadow Chancellors in eight years. Third, they suggest that Cameron learned from Brown's own political experience. While Brown himself had desired the position, it was

one that actually held him back and allowed Tony Blair to outmaneuver Brown in internal Labour Party politics. For Cameron, the position of Shadow Education Secretary allowed him to avoid fights with Gordon Brown on taxes, and would instead allow him to “develop his modernist credentials and – like Blair before him – redeem for his party what had once been a negative issue.”<sup>60</sup>

When George Osborne, who did take the job as Shadow Chancellor, decided on 19 May 2005 not to run for the party leadership, the path was open for Cameron to put his name forward as the candidate who offered the Tories the best possibility for youthful regeneration and as the champion of the modernizing message. There were other potential ‘modernizing’ candidates such as David Willetts (MP for Havant), Andrew Lansley (MP for South Cambridgeshire), and Tim Yeo (MP for South Suffolk) who had espoused the modernization of the party for a lot longer than Cameron had. Indeed, Andrew Mitchell, MP for Sutton Coldfield and David Davis’s campaign manager, discouraged Cameron from running by arguing he was too young to put his name forth:

Someone recently gave me a few bottles of Chateau Latour 2000. I think it would be wiser for me to leave it in the cellar for quite a few years yet before I open it, and I would give the same advice to some of the younger leadership contenders.<sup>61</sup>

However, with the prodding of Michael Gove (MP for Surrey Heath), Cameron made the decision to run. Before the Autumn 2005 leadership campaign was formally launched, Cameron and his allies spent the summer attempting to build parliamentary support. By the end of the summer recess in July, Cameron’s declared parliamentary support had not even reached double figures. On the other hand, David Davis’s campaign, bolstered by his strong performance in response to the 7 July terrorist bombings in London, was gathering momentum. Davis had an imposing CV: He was a working-class boy who had

been brought up by a single mother on a council estate in South London, had won a place to Warwick University and then earned advanced degrees from London Business School and Harvard University, and had served in the 21<sup>st</sup> Special Air Services Regiment of the British Territorial Army. This was in addition to serving as an executive of Tate & Lyle before entering politics.

However, Cameron made up ground in the summer months by making a series of speeches connected by his eventual campaign theme of “modern compassionate Conservatism.” With the media looking to fill space during the summer months, his charm offensive was helping to advance his message.<sup>62</sup> In a speech in Devon, he said: “Modern compassionate Conservatism means recognizing there’s more to human life than getting and spending money.”<sup>63</sup> Yet he still needed to gather more parliamentary support. To achieve this, Osborne encouraged Cameron to “step up a gear and make the case for radical change more aggressively.”<sup>64</sup> On Osborne’s advice, Cameron supplemented his campaign slogan ‘modern compassionate Conservatism’ with ‘Change to Win.’

By the time MPs had voted to narrow the leadership race down to just Davis and Cameron, every paid up Conservative party member was sent a concise leaflet from the two candidates with a final pitch to the party. The headline of Cameron’s leaflet was “We must be a voice for change, optimism, and hope.” In a classic example of Alistair Campbell-style spin, Cameron claimed that he was a “conviction politician” who would lead “an intellectual revolution on a scale not seen since the days of Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph.”<sup>65</sup> His pamphlet stated:

Conviction, judgment and a clear sense of direction are the hallmarks of leadership. I want to lead a modern, compassionate Conservative Party

that reaches out to those people whose support we need: women, younger voters, pensioners, professionals, public servants, and those living in our great cities. We need to learn from our success in local government and the excellent work our councilors are doing. I want us to win support from Labour and Liberal Democrat voters, and those who have not voted at all.<sup>66</sup>

Anticipating that the next election would be in 2009 or 2010, he laid out five important challenges he believed Britain would face, and the vaguest policy prescription for each area. The five challenges Cameron established were:

1. Good Jobs and High Living Standards in an age of global competition.
2. Delivering the school and NHS reform which Labour have totally failed to achieve.
3. Improving the quality of life by cutting crime and strengthening families.
4. Devolving power from big government to local councils and communities.
5. Meeting big global challenges like terrorism, global poverty, and climate change.<sup>67</sup>

His sales pitch ended with the line, “There is such a thing as society, it’s not just the same thing as the state.”<sup>68</sup> An insert MORI poll of ‘floating voters’ indicated that they preferred Cameron to Gordon Brown by a margin of 48% to 33%. This information was supplemented by a separate survey that indicated “Cameron was rated 36% more likely than David Davis to attract support from younger voters.”<sup>69</sup> The Cameron Campaign included an endorsement from a veteran American pollster, the guttersnipe Republican pollster Frank Luntz, who said that “David Cameron is exactly what swing voters are looking for in a Conservative leader. He represents the future of Britain and a new generation.”<sup>70</sup>

On the basis of advice from his ‘Notting Hill’ advisor, Steve Hilton, Cameron decided to formally announce his leadership campaign on the same day as David Davis’s launch: 29 September 2005. This was decided to maximize press coverage for Cameron, whose campaign team assumed – rightly—that the media would frame this as a “Davis vs. Cameron” clash. Cameron’s venue was the Whitehall Headquarters of the Royal United Services Institute, and journalists were treated to strawberry smoothies and chocolate brownies with faux New Age music in the background. Cameron’s biographers compare Cameron’s launch with David Davis’s by noting:

It was all very different from David Davis’s launch that morning in the fusty oak-paneled surroundings of the Institute of Civil Engineers on Great George Street. Davis’s message might have been ‘Modern Conservatives,’ but that was just a slogan: this *was* modern.<sup>71</sup>

In their judgment, what mattered most was image. It is particularly ironic that given endless Tory complaints about New Labour’s ‘spin culture,’ their new leader would be hailed not for the *content* of his message, but for how he *spun* his image at his campaign launch! The calorie-laden smoothies and brownies were a gimmick designed to pacify members of the press who might have the audacity to ask about policy! Perhaps this is something Cameron learned from his time pacifying Michael Green at Carlton Advertising. In contrast, Davis had argued that focus groups were a poor foundation for political principles, and that while the party needed new policies, its principles were sound:

Parties do not lose elections because they are too principled. They may lose because their principles are out of touch with the beliefs of the people, or because their principles do not work. That is the story of the Labour party. It is emphatically not the story of the Conservative party.<sup>72</sup>

Davis, a convert to Iain MacLeod's One Nation Conservatism whilst a university student at Warwick, argued: "My principles are 200 years old: low taxation, a small state, and help for those in need."<sup>73</sup>

Despite besting Cameron on the BBC's Question Time leadership special on 3 November 2005, Davis still could not overcome a lackluster speech to the Conservative Party Conference which served to deflate rather high expectations for the front-running candidate. If his desire was to be the most unifying candidate, then perhaps it was a mistake in tone to remind Conservative delegates of the European skeleton in their closet:

The issue of Europe hasn't gone away and it is not about to. The drive to deeper integration never rests, so ask yourselves this. If the Conservative Party doesn't speak up for British interests, then who will?<sup>74</sup>

Cameron's strategy was to speak as if he were already the leader, promising the Blackpool conference that he would deliver fundamental change:

When I say change, I'm not talking about some slick re-branding exercise – what I'm taking about is fundamental change so that when we fight the next election street by street, house by house, flat by flat, we have a message that is relevant to people's lives today, that shows we are comfortable with modern Britain and that we believe our best days lie ahead.<sup>75</sup>

Evidence has conclusively proven that David Cameron has used illegal drugs such as cannabis in his past – including while at Eton in 1982 – and yet, he has steadfastly refused to comment on his past drug usage by claiming entitlement to a "private past." On David Dimbleby's Question Time leadership special on the BBC, he claimed that he was a human being who had erred "and I think if you want to have machines as politicians who have never done anything wrong, I think that is a very sad day and we should not be driven by the media on that."<sup>76</sup> Cameron's stance on privacy is complicated

by his liberal (some would say ‘soft’) attitude to drugs. In 2002, he publicly supported the prescription of heroin and the creation of safe-injecting rooms, and criticized the failure of a drugs policy where “cannabis use has consistently increased and 50 per cent of young people now admit to having tried it.”<sup>77</sup> Dimbleby, Paxman, and other journalists failed to ask Cameron about the connection between cannabis as a gateway drug and heroin addiction. Assuming that people do not just wake up one day with a desire to use heroin, but that heroin is on an escalating chain of substance abuse, then it would be fair to ask Cameron to justify his compassion for heroin addicts in the light of his support for the 2004 declassification of cannabis from Class B to Class C. By framing the debate in terms of his privacy, Cameron sought and received sympathy from the public against over-zealous journalists. This sympathy is best seen as part of the anti-journalist ripple we might call the ‘Diana effect.’

Emerging relatively unscathed by the drugs issue, Cameron won a convincing victory over Davis in the leadership ballot of paid up Conservative members:

David Cameron	134, 446
David Davis	64, 398

Having achieved his long-sought goal, Cameron’s first item in his victory speech was to express his desire for change. He lamented:

Nine out of ten Conservative MPs – like me – are white men. We need to change the scandalous under-representation of women in the Conservative Party and we will do that. We need to change the way we feel. No more grumbling about modern Britain. I love this country as it is not how it was. Our best days lie ahead. We need to change the way we think. It’s not enough just to talk about tackling problems in our inner cities, we have to have all of the right ideas for turning those communities around.<sup>78</sup>

Like a good ad man, Cameron first considered image and style – not substance. He wanted more minority and women MPs, but so too did William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith, and Michael Howard. His point was that the political *product* – to use one of the more ubiquitous words of market capitalism – should *look* appealing to those who consume it, much like the Carlton adverts that show young, half naked women drinking alcohol – and not hairy middle-aged men in dark pubs with huge guts and Wellington boots. Like the cigarette ads of yore, the objective is to convince the consumer that what is obviously destructive of their health is ultimately good for them. Cameron’s very first victory speech shows him trying to spin an image that is divorced from reality. He tries to convince the British public that an upper class Etonian who can pay £1,125,000 cash for a home in London and £650,000 in cash for a second home in Oxfordshire is a man of the people and a champion of the poor who truly understands the hardships of working families in modern Britain.

Cameron claims that the Conservative Party needs to change in order for people to trust them, yet how can one trust a leader who, as head of the Conservative party’s policy coordination team, helped author the 2005 Conservative manifesto, and yet subsequently rejected its positions on patients’ passports, foundation hospitals, NHS targets, tax cuts, the environment, and higher education? Is Cameron to be honestly believed when he tells Jeremy Paxman that the Tories will be “consistent and not opportunistic,” that they will avoid “Punch and Judy” politics, and then opportunistically attacks targets in the NHS to score some quick political points with disgruntled nurses? That decision directly led to the defection of Quentin Davies, MP for Grantham and Stamford, in June 2007 to Gordon Brown’s Labour benches. Davies told Nick Robinson

of the BBC that he “deeply disapproved of his [Cameron’s] attitude to politics, which is to put image-making first and to be entirely cynical about policy.”<sup>79</sup> In his resignation letter to Cameron he gave an example of this cynicism:

One day in January, I think a Wednesday or Thursday, you and George Osborne discovered that Gordon Brown was to make a speech on the environment the following Monday. You wished to pre-empt him. So without any consultation with anyone – experts, think-tanks, the industry, even the Shadow Cabinet – you announced an airline or flight tax which, as you have subsequently heard from me in a long paper (which has never been refuted) and I am sure from many others, is certainly defective and contradictory – and in my view complete nonsense. The PR pressures had overridden any considerations of economic rationality. Equally it seems that your hasty rejection of nuclear energy as a ‘last resort’ was also driven by your PR imperatives rather than by other considerations. Many colleagues hope that that will be the subject of your next U-turn.

You regularly make apparent policy statements which are then revealed to have no intended content at all. They appear to be made merely to strike a pose, to contribute to an image.<sup>80</sup>

In terms of policy, has Cameron followed his own advice subsequent to the 2001 election and started over with “a blank sheet of paper?” No; there is nothing substantively different in Conservative policy under David Cameron from William Hague’s “kitchen table Conservatives” report. There is plenty of slick rebranding, but there is very little substance and even less soul. There is no resonance, no connecting theme, and certainly no radical new ideas.

If we examine the policy reviews and speeches since Cameron became leader, what is there that is substantively new? What is different from Hague’s “kitchen table Conservatism?” Cameron charged Iain Duncan Smith with the task of leading an 18 month-long investigation into the causes of social breakdown. Duncan Smith’s committee, the Social Justice Policy Group (SJPG), produced a 200,000 word report on

the estimated annual £100 Billion cost of “social breakdown.” While Duncan Smith is rightly outraged that the average life expectancy in some postal districts in Glasgow is 55 – lower than in the Gaza Strip – his claim that the report “urges the biggest shake-up of the welfare system since the Beveridge Report” seems like total hyperbole.<sup>81</sup> The report does little more than attack New Labour’s system of means-tested benefits and tax credits, ideas long simmering in the Conservative Party. Conservative Revival: Blueprint for a Better Britain, an edited volume of political wisdom written by a team of Tory candidates who contested seats in the 2005 election, made the same point a year earlier:

Means-tested benefits and tax credits now apply to a vast number of people who are being taxed by Gordon Brown’s left hand, while receiving their own money back from his right. This has the effect of creating a culture of dependency on the state and a vast and costly bureaucracy to administer the system: tax collectors are one of the fastest growing parts of the government payroll.<sup>82</sup>

Iain Duncan Smith’s report also makes the rather Thatcherite point that New Labour’s benefits scheme is rife with what Ronald Reagan used to call “waste, fraud, and abuse.” He repeats the claim of an Institute for Fiscal Studies report that there are “some 200,000 more lone parents claiming benefits than there are lone parents in the UK.”<sup>83</sup>

Most of Cameron’s speeches have revolved around some variation of either “social responsibility,” “the quality of life,” “strengthening families,” or “compassionate Conservatism.” His “Our Society, Your Life” speech from Tooting on 18 June 2007 emphasized ‘social responsibility’ as the foundation of Conservative values – a foundation “that’s not about detailed policies” – a theme that echoed his leadership campaign literature by repeating that “there is such a thing as society, it’s just not the same thing as the state.”<sup>84</sup> He says the Conservative Party wants to trust people – unlike

Gordon Brown – because Gordon’s answer to “crime, his answer to education, his answer to everything – is a top-down government scheme.”<sup>85</sup> Cameron’s generally vapid, insipid, mind-numbing prose is nothing if not repetitive. His Tooting keynote echoed his “Civility and Civil Progress” speech to the Royal Society on 23 April 2007 which demanded “a revolution in responsibility.”<sup>86</sup> Most of his responsibility talk has translated into little more than a policy on school discipline that holds that head teachers who exclude pupils from class should not be overruled by their local authority, but should have their decisions appealed to the individual school’s group of governors, who would then presumably not overrule head teachers as often. Ho-hum. School discipline was a plank of the 2005 Tory Manifesto, so it seems completely mad to believe that that’s the issue that will turn around the fortunes of the Tory party in the next general election.

The circumstances leading up to Gordon Brown’s accession to power on 27 June 2007 – and the days immediately following – was exceptional to say the least. With months to prepare for his new role and no leadership election to fight, Brown could calmly and soberly select a Cabinet without the pressure of time and thus insure a smooth transition. Before Brown’s Cabinet was announced to the British public, an Ipsos MORI poll, taken for The Observer, already revealed a “Brown bounce.” According to the poll, “40 per cent of voters believe Brown would make the more capable Prime Minister, against 22 per cent who believe that Cameron would be better.”<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the poll revealed that Labour had moved ahead of the Tories for the first time in eight months, with Labour on 39 per cent, up four points from the previous month; the Tories on 36 per cent, down a point; and the Liberal Democrats on just 15 percent, down from 18 per cent

the previous month.<sup>88</sup> The nudge downward for the Conservatives was an immediate concern. The national share of the vote for the Tories in the 2005 General Election was 33.2 percent – only marginally higher than in 2001 and 1997, both elections which were disastrous. With Tony Blair pushed out of Downing Street as a result of an internal Labour Party coup; with dissatisfaction over the war in Iraq and over the National Health Service; and with a young, fresh-faced new leader, the numbers for the Tories were supposed to go up, right?

Speaking before the Labour Party Conference in Manchester on 24 June 2007, Brown's leadership acceptance speech was replete with "change" and "new." His speech began:

It is with humility and it's with pride and it's with a great sense of duty that I accept the privilege and the great responsibility of leading our party and changing our country. I will endeavor to justify every day and in every act the trust you have placed in me.

Despite the emphasis in the speech on "change," Simon Hoggart, writing for the Guardian, rightly pointed out that his opening line "was straight out of an old Blair speech, one of those fake oxymorons, the besetting sins of most politicians."<sup>89</sup> He commented that "the whole conference was a classic New Labour event familiar from the past ten years: the thunderous, ear-splitting, eye-watering, brain hemisphere-cleaving rock music. The videos in which happy smiling people of all ages, sexes, and races praise New Labour achievements, their words echoed by the cheering in the hall. They cheered that wildly too. This was Glastonbury without the mud, a North Korean rally without the missiles."<sup>90</sup>

However, before the Tories could charge that this was "more of the same" and that no real change was possible under Brown, events interceded that altered the national

mood. On Friday, 29 June 2007, good luck and vigilance prevented what could have been horrific carnage when an improvised explosive device – a car packed with gasoline, gas cylinders, and nails – was found and defused outside a central London nightclub. This horrifying discovery was amplified by another event in Glasgow the following day, when a car filled with gas cylinders was driven into Glasgow airport. With the national emphasis on Britain's counter-terrorism efforts and on bringing the guilty to justice, Brown was able to seize the moment as *the* national voice calling for unity and calm, and to rise above the daily routine of partisanship.

Nevertheless, if after a year and a half of Cameron's leadership, all it took for New Labour to rise from its polling doldrums was a speech and a cabinet reshuffle, then Cameron's leadership must surely come under question. While Gordon Brown was preparing an ambitious constitutional agenda and building his new Cabinet from a talented pool that included many non-Labour Party outsiders, what was David Cameron doing? He spent most of May squabbling with his party about grammar schools. While he said that the Tories were against the creation of new grammar schools, and in fact had not created any new grammar schools in 18 years, his handling of the issue led members of the 1922 committee to call his policy 'ridiculous' and 'absurd,' and forced the front bench resignation of Graham Brady, MP for Altrincham & Sale West and a former grammar school pupil, who defied the party's chief whip to write:

First, accept it's absurd to claim grammar schools stop kids from poor families getting on in life. Second, make it clear that a Conservative government will listen. We don't need to promise 'a grammar school in every town,' but we should make it clear that if people want one we won't stand in their way.<sup>91</sup>

In his effort to emphasize a slick image, Cameron managed to alienate his party's base without winning over any new converts to his side. He was constantly forced to deny that his party was in disarray, as well as deny a Bristol University study that suggested "children who go to grammar schools in England achieve better grades than those of similar ability who are not in selective areas" and claimed "pupils from poorer backgrounds do particularly well."<sup>92</sup> Brown gleefully pronounced that the grammar schools row demonstrated that "Tory policy ideas unravel."<sup>93</sup>

On his blog, BBC commentator Nick Robinson argues that at the heart of the grammar schools matter is not Tory education policy, but class. The Tory revolt over grammar schools is really a rebellion against the public school boys in the Shadow Cabinet:

Many of David Cameron's fiercest critics are those who believe that the job of the Tory party is to fight for what Margaret Thatcher called "our people" – by which they mean the aspirational classes. They believe that in the years BT (Before Thatcher) there existed a cross party consensus which punished "our people." The consensus, they believed, was sustained by the political classes who were largely public school boys. In the years AD (After David) they fear a new consensus is emerging which is politically correct, green, liberal, and sneers at those who work hard to get their kids the advantages they didn't have. The pre-Thatcher consensus was called But-skellism. We might call the new one Bla-meronism.<sup>94</sup>

Cameron describes himself as a Liberal Conservative. He has re-imagined the Tory Party as a third liberal party in British politics. Yet, underneath the slogans, imagery, and gimmickry there is a party still at war. The Tories may create the right slogans and advertising, but their product has not yet metamorphosed into the liberal party Cameron so desperately wants to establish. Cameron does not yet command troops marching in unison. The fault lines between the traditional Tories and the liberal Tories;

between the Euroskeptics and Euro-enthusiasts; between the Thatcherites and the One Nation Tories; between the grammar school kids and the public school boys are still there. Tory MPs from the Cornerstone Group will not be marching for gay adoption rights any time soon, and there are no immediate factors that will congeal the disparate ingredients in the Tory Party. The reality is as it was under Hague: one tune from the leadership's inner circle and quite another from the grassroots and backbenches. Menzies Campbell, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, argues that British politics has fundamentally shifted. The old left/right split does not matter: the real battle in British politics is between liberalism and authoritarianism and "he knows who the real liberals are."<sup>95</sup> While it is nonsense to believe that the Labour Party's identity card proposals make them "authoritarian," what if British politics has become a fight over different shades of liberalism?

Peter Mandelson has stated that "the public is ready for new personnel, not a fundamentally different direction, whether in Labour or Conservative hands."<sup>96</sup> Is Mandelson right? I believe that he is, and that Gordon Brown should welcome an election as soon as possible. It is within the Labour Party's grasp to win a fourth term if it builds on Blair's achievements, and remembers to have a dialogue with the nation and not with itself.<sup>97</sup> The rules of the game have not changed. The Tory Party is still a party that after ten years is bereft of big ideas and has nothing genuine to say about the economy, and while part of it is having a new conversation with the nation, it remains dysfunctional because, while that conversation is had, other parts remained bored, disillusioned, or outraged. Ali Miraj, Lord Saatchi, and ex-treasurer Lord Kalms have attacked Cameron's leadership in July 2007 alone. They have all publicly stated that they are deeply

disillusioned with the Conservative Party. A recent opinion poll indicates that 42% of Tory voters said that although they liked their party, they disliked their leader.<sup>98</sup> Sir Tom Cowie, an 84 year old entrepreneur who has paid over £630,000 to the Tories over the last six years, told the BBC that “he will not mince words: I shan’t send them any more money.”<sup>99</sup> The reason was that he was disillusioned with Cameron’s leadership after the grammar schools row and after he abandoned his constituency in Witney during the recent summer floods for a photo opportunity in Rwanda. He said:

The Tory Party seems to be run now by Old Etonians and they don’t seem to understand how other people live. They seem to be very arrogant like I suppose Old Etonians can be. They certainly don’t understand about grammar schools.<sup>100</sup>

With sentiments from core Conservative voters like that, it will be a long time before a change to Conservative personnel happens. Sir Tom built his fortune when he took over his father’s bicycle repair business. Although David Cameron is an avid cyclist who bikes to Westminster quite often, one suspects that the first repair that will be made by the ‘Conservative bicycle repair shop’ after the next election will be to find a new rider – and then a new bike.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Elliott and James Hanning, Cameron: The Rise of the New Conservative (London: Fourth Estate, 2007), p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Blair, “Left with No Option,” in The Guardian, 27 July 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Straw, “And so farewell, monstrous icon, 1918-1995,” in The Independent, 29 April 1995.

<sup>6</sup> James Hardy, “Blair warns of wilderness years as Clause 4 row heats up,” in Press Association, 23 January 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Idem.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Straw, “And so farewell, monstrous icon, 1918-1995,” in The Independent, 29 April 1995.

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- <sup>9</sup> Hugo Young, "The Tories Have No Strategy. Only time is on their side," in The Guardian, 5 October 1999.
- <sup>10</sup> Idem.
- <sup>11</sup> Idem.
- <sup>12</sup> Idem.
- <sup>13</sup> "Good Chaps don't make a party. Tory unpopularity is still growing among young women. Hague just doesn't speak their language," in The Guardian, 26 November 1999.
- <sup>14</sup> Rachel Sylvester, "Why Hague abandoned 'kitchen table' policy," in The Daily Telegraph, 23 April 2001.
- <sup>15</sup> Rachel Sylvester, "Memos show frustration that rebranding strategy was not being adhered to," in The Daily Telegraph, 23 April 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> Andrew Cooper, "Reality of 'kitchen table' strategy," in The Daily Telegraph, 25 April 2001.
- <sup>17</sup> Idem.
- <sup>18</sup> Rachel Sylvester, "Memos show frustration that rebranding strategy was not being adhered to," in The Daily Telegraph, 23 April 2001.
- <sup>19</sup> See A.J. Davies, We, the Nation: The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power (London: Abacus, 1995), picture is between p. 260 and p. 261.
- <sup>20</sup> Idem.
- <sup>21</sup> Rachel Sylvester, "Why Hague abandoned 'kitchen table' strategy," in The Daily Telegraph, 23 April 2001.
- <sup>22</sup> Dennis Kavanagh, "How William Hague Lost the Election," in The Independent, 3 September 2001.
- <sup>23</sup> David Broughton, "The 2001 General Election," in M. Garnett and P. Lynch (eds.), The Conservatives in Crisis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 202.
- <sup>24</sup> Chris Philp, ed. Conservative Revival: Blueprint for a Better Britain (London: Politico's, 2006), p. xiii.
- <sup>25</sup> Idem.
- <sup>26</sup> House of Commons Debates, vol. 337, col. 288, 3 November 1999.
- <sup>27</sup> House of Commons Debates, vol. 337, col. 288, 3 November 1999.
- <sup>28</sup> House of Commons Debates, vol. 370, col. 50, 20 June 2001.
- <sup>29</sup> Philip Lynch and Mark Garnett, "Conclusions: the Conservatives in Crisis," in Garnett and Lynch (eds.), The Conservatives in Crisis, p. 251.
- <sup>30</sup> Idem.
- <sup>31</sup> Launch of 2001 Conservative Manifesto, BBC News, 10 May 2001.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview of William Hague by Jeremy Paxman, "BBC Newsnight," BBC (Television) News, 31 May 2001.
- <sup>33</sup> Idem.
- <sup>34</sup> Idem.
- <sup>35</sup> Idem.
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