

David Cameron: The tide of ideas is turning

Today should have been the day of the General Election. To mark this occasion, David Cameron will make a speech in his constituency setting out his vision for change and explaining why the Conservative Party has got the best ideas for Britain. He will say:

(Please check against delivery)

“Today was supposed to have been election day. Instead of being here together, we would have been out knocking on doors. The candidates on stage with me here: they would have been out in their constituencies, pounding the pavements for those last, crucial hours. And the Prime Minister: he would have been enjoying his last moments in power as the voters prepared to bring down the curtain on ten years of Labour government.

Well, it wasn't to be. Gordon Brown cancelled the election. The change Britain needs has been delayed. The vision we have, of a Britain where people have more opportunity and power over their lives, where families are stronger and society is more responsible, where our country is safer and greener...delayed. Delayed until the election of a Conservative Government. I want to tell you today why I'm so confident that we can win that election. And why it's so important that we do.

THE TIDE OF IDEAS

There are times in politics when you just know that change is coming. When there is a sea-change in ideas; a big shift in attitudes. When people realise that the world has moved on but their government hasn't. When the country decides that a new government is the only way to move forward. We saw it in 1979. We saw it in 1997. And I believe we are starting to see it again today. Not just because of this government's incompetence, now revealed on a daily basis. But because the tide of ideas has turned, leaving Gordon Brown on the wrong side of history.

And it is in Britain's recent history that we can see the reason why.

1979

By 1979, it was clear that the age of nationalisation had to end. Strikes, inflation, stagnation...everyone knew that we'd reached the end of the road marked 'state control of the economy.' Britain voted for change, and Margaret Thatcher delivered. A passionate belief in free enterprise, combined with an iron determination to take on the forces holding Britain back, changed Britain from the sick man of Europe to an economic role model for the world. We in this Party should never stop taking pride in the magnificent achievements of the Thatcher and Major governments. They rolled back the state, and Britain's economy was transformed. But by 1997, if we are honest with ourselves, the tide of ideas had turned again.

1997

By 1997, people wanted more than a strong economy. They wanted a stronger society; stronger public services. And they could not see how a Conservative government, committed to rolling back the state, could deliver those things. So they voted for Labour, who promised more money for public services, along with the reform of public services. The promises were what people wanted to hear. The causes of crime would be tackled. The NHS would be saved. Child poverty abolished. Schools would become the best in the world. Welfare as we know it would be ended. Labour certainly spent the money – and more money was needed. But instead of real reform, Labour rolled forward the state – indeed they ushered in a new age of the hyperactive state.

WHY LABOUR FAILED

No longer committed to nationalisation of the economy, Labour instead devoted their energy to the nationalisation of our society. No social problem, no public service was considered immune to the magic touch of the master bureaucrats. Everything would be achieved through the benign intervention of a new army of technocrats, equipped with the latest in bureaucratic weaponry, initiatives, units, tsars, strategies, partnerships,

pilot programmes, roll-outs, co-ordination and evaluation. At the head of this army of interventionism was the bureaucrat-in-chief, Gordon Brown. It was Brown, not Blair, who created the culture of targets that have blighted our public services. Intended to show that public money wasn't being wasted, they instead guaranteed that it was by undermining professional discretion and making public servants accountable to politicians and managers instead of the public.

It was Brown, not Blair, who created the one-dimensional anti-poverty strategy that has seen the poorest in our society get poorer and youth unemployment rise. Intended to lift millions out of poverty, it has instead left millions dependent on benefits with the labour shortages filled by uncontrolled immigration, with the consequences we are seeing today. And it was Brown who systematically blocked Blair when at last he realised that the only way to improve public services was to set them free from Whitehall control. The age of Labour's hyperactive state has failed to deliver the hopes of 1997. Gun crime has doubled; violent crime has doubled; anti-social behaviour wrecks our quality of life every day. The NHS - almost unbelievably considering its budget has nearly trebled - is suffering cutbacks and closures, with an utterly demoralised workforce. Child poverty targets have been missed, and more and more children's lives are blighted by family breakdown and the complex and interconnected problems of entrenched poverty. Schools have done their best to cope with endless interference, instability and gimmickry from on high, but at the end of it all we have fallen down the international league tables with thousands of our children leaving school without the skills they need to thrive in the modern world. And as for welfare: far from being ended, it is now a way of life for many. There are now nearly five million adults of working age on out-of-work benefits, four million of whom, according to the government's own figures, want to and could work if they had the right skills, incentives and support. This is perhaps the most shocking social failure of Labour's hyperactive state.

But it's not just that Labour have failed to deliver their promises. After

ten years in power, it seems they still haven't mastered that fairly basic requirement of government – running the country competently. The shambles over immigration. The fiasco over prisoner releases. The first run on a bank for over a hundred years. U turns every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. This latest shambles over immigration shows exactly why we need a new government. It's not just because Gordon Brown has no vision for the future. It's because this government is incompetent. They try to run everything but they can't actually run anything. Their whole philosophy is about top-down control, but on this vital issue of migration, they've lost control. No wonder people are saying it's time for change.

BROWN CANNOT CHANGE

And now the architect of Labour's failure is in charge of the building that he himself designed. The roof is leaking; the paint is peeling; the walls are crumbling. But all he's got in his back pocket are the same old plans, because this Prime Minister, I can tell you, is never going to change. He stands at the despatch box in the House of Commons singing hymns of praise to top-down targets. He makes relaunch speeches, as he did again yesterday, which in one breath say that "culture change is critical to achieving success in reforming public services", and in the next explain that it's all about a top-down "systematic plan" based on "annual improvement targets." Who's he trying to kid?

He's never going to give up on top-down targets and central control, because that is all he knows. It's his nature. It's his philosophy. But unfortunately for him, it is history.

NEW WORLD: POST-BUREAUCRATIC AGE

Because we are living in a new world of freedom. A world where people have more power and control over their own lives. A world where people's horizons are broader and their ambitions are greater. And a world where people expect to make more and more decisions for themselves. In this world, the age of the hyperactive state is nothing but a lumbering, clunking anachronism. Its time has passed and it will not be

missed.

As I meet centre-right leaders from around the world, and discuss our shared agendas, whether on school reform, welfare reform, criminal justice reform or environmental protection, I sense that we are now on the brink of a new, post-bureaucratic age. An age in which we increase wealth by backing free enterprise, markets and competitive tax rates. And we increase well-being by rolling forward society. So as Labour stumble incompetently in search of a vision, we are confidently setting out our own.

OPPORTUNITY

We want to build an opportunity society, where everyone has the chance to get on in life and get on with life, where people have the power to make their own decisions. Opportunity in the post-bureaucratic age is achieved not through complicated and costly government schemes but by giving people control - whether over the money they earn or the services they use. We have already set out our plans for abolishing Stamp Duty for nine out of ten first-time buyers, and for abolishing Inheritance Tax for all but millionaires. And later this month we will publish our plans for a supply-side revolution in Britain's schools, to increase the number of good school places.

RESPONSIBILITY

We want to build a responsible society, where everyone understands that we're all in this together; that there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state. Responsibility in the post-bureaucratic age is achieved not by the state taking more and more responsibility but by strengthening the ties that bind society together: families, neighbourhoods, communities. We have already announced our plans for National Citizen Service – a six-week programme for every sixteen year-old that will help inspire them to become responsible adult citizens. And in January next year we will publish our plans for a welfare revolution that will help make British poverty history by helping people move from dependency into work.

SECURITY

We want to build a secure society where people are protected from threats old and new – from crime to climate change; from economic instability to terrorism. Security in the post-bureaucratic age is achieved not through lectures on liberty or expensive monuments to big government like ID cards, but through a clear and determined focus on the real changes required to make our society safer. We have already announced plans for police reform, including the local accountability that will give communities the beat-based policing they want and need. And next February we will publish our plans for prison reform, to help cut crime by reducing the levels of re-offending in our country.

NHS BILL

In every policy area, we are the party that is setting the agenda, putting forward the arguments about how Britain needs to change to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, and developing new ideas for Britain's future. Tomorrow we will publish our NHS Autonomy and Accountability Bill . It shows how a Conservative Government will move our health service into the post-bureaucratic age, freeing NHS professionals from political control and making them accountable to patients.

CONCLUSION

There is now an unmistakable whiff of decay about this government. In place of vision there is just the desire to hang on to power. It wouldn't be so bad if they were half-way competent. But they are not. They are hapless and hopeless, constantly buffeted around by events. Today was the day we could have put them out of their misery. Well, it wasn't to be. But cheer up – they can't hang on for ever. Soon there will be a new team in charge. Soon we will see the dawn of a new post-bureaucratic age. Change may have been delayed, but I promise you this: change is on its way.”