

FREDERICK FORSYTH ARTICLE FOR THE YORKSHIRE POST

TO RELY entirely on some sections of the Press, one would think that, in the leadership contest, the Conservative Party's amour for David Cameron is already nudging intoxication. When it comes to getting drunk on six-week hero worship, I tend to be pretty teetotal. I like to take a long, cool, hard look at two things: what is needed and what is available for the task.

On the first, I make no apology for being pretty disenchanted with the Tory Party and its performance over the past 10 years. It has behaved like a rabbit, and one caught in the headlights at that. Part fascinated, part terrified, wholly immobilised. And the oncoming truck was always called Blairism.

All right, May 1997 was a massacre and we all know that. What seemed to be going out of power was something tired and decrepit. What seemed to be coming in was something fresh and rejuvenating. That was nearly nine years ago. How times change.

What governs us today, and even good stalwart Labour voters admit it, maybe only privately, is corrupt, incompetent and lying.

We see our soldiers treated like dirt; we are cripplingly taxed, over-regulated into the ground, in daily thraldom to an unseen government in Brussels and watching our pensions destroyed. Not a single Blairite pledge that I can think of has been fulfilled. So what might the Tories do about it? Ah, well, here's the rub.

Even out of power, what have the Tories proposed over eight years? Think of one big idea, one bold policy that might have attracted the voters back. Think of one great notion, one exciting reform that has come out of Tory HQ in eight years.

Well, I cannot think of one, and there is a reason. This country yearns for changes. People throw buzz words like "reform" and "modern" around like confetti at a wedding, as if platitudes change things. They don't.

The changes most of us want, the real reforms we yearn for, are going to take audacity, boldness, what the Cockneys call "bottle".

As in 1979, if we are ever to get the country most of us want, it is going to take struggle. With Brussels, with vested interests here at home, with the forces of political correctness. None of them will give up the bloated privileges they have acquired under Tony Blair.

Margaret Thatcher did not come back to power back then with a trembling timidity. She came with a hatful of ideas so audacious that her "wimp wing" was adamant: it can't be done. But it could and it was.

Now I look at the candidates. David Cameron is, beyond doubt, an attractive man: to look at, to listen to, to dine with. Well, his boyhood was nanny, prep school, Eton and Oxford. No blame attached, but he just happened to have the most easy, moneyed, privileged, struggle-free upbringing possible in our country. It is after emerging from Oxford at 22 that I find his career interesting.

What does a privileged young man do after that kind of boyhood? Go out and see the world? Try a stint in Africa to learn how the other half lives? A bit of soldiering? Climb a mountain? Fly a plane? Jump out of one? Not this young man.

He goes straight to the tiny hothouse of Tory headquarters as a gopher, bag-carrier and toecap-buffer to the mandarins. Seven years as spin doctor to a TV company, but always in London's West End, and back to Tory HQ. Then the gift of a can't-lose Tory seat at Witney. I find that an extraordinarily timid life.

I know Conservative HQ. It is an incredibly tiny world, nothing whatsoever to do with the planet you and I live on. And now, adopting the working-class Dave as a first name, he tells us he will adopt policies that are careful, moderate, cautious. For which I read "timid".

But, you know, unless Tories are truly daft, they should not pick timid. We have had timid, nervous, apologetic for 10 years. In this life the timid just get walked over.

That's why my vote is going for the other David: the Yorkshire-born one, as tough as the Pennines he hikes over.

The one who fought his way up from housing estate to grammar school, to Warwick University, to Harvard Business School.

The one who joined the Territorial Army to use the bounty to put himself through college; the one who tested himself with boxing, flying, free-falling, rugby, fell-walking and rock-climbing.

David Davis will never, like David Cameron, try to please all of the people all of the time; he simply cannot be all things to all men.

Maybe the charm, the beam, the beautiful manners of the Old Etonian are what you want. Then Cameron is for you. But a word of caution.

Whoever takes over the Conservative Party is going to have to take on New Labour's attack dogs and they are provenly vicious. And Paris and Brussels over EU reform and they are ruthless. And the vested interests who live off all our backs and they are devious and unscrupulous.

So that is the real choice. I plump for the man who has been there for 20 years. Occupied five senior offices. Been round the block a few times. Taken hardship, opposition and tough times and beaten them all. It's the tested fighter or the beaming Tory Boy.

Just put it this way: if you were in an alley late at night, with two jobs bearing down, which one would you prefer beside you? Ah, you say, politics are not like that. Oh yes they are, chum, oh yes they are.