

The Times Guide to the House of Commons



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**The Times Guide to
the House of Commons**

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The most definitive and authoritative guide to 2010's much-anticipated General Election. Compiled and written by The Times's unrivalled team of leading political journalists, The Times Guide to the House of Commons offers an in-depth look at UK politics, charting the run-up to the general election of 2010, as well as a thorough analysis of the extraordinary outcome and the implications it holds for Britain's future. This large-format authority on UK politics will prove an indispensable and enjoyable point of reference for anyone interested in the state of government in Britain. Published just 9 weeks after the official election date, this is the first account of its kind to hit the shelves. Contents include: • Commentary and essays from leading Times political writers, including Matthew Parris, Ben MacIntyre, David Aaronovitch, Daniel Finkelstein and Ann Treneman, covering a great range of fascinating subjects and angles. • Expert analysis of how Britain voted and why. Includes like-for-like comparison with the results of 2005. • Inside accounts on why David Cameron embraced a full coalition with the Liberal Democrats and of Gordon Brown's decision to call off an early election. • A personal account from Matthew Parris on why his own parliamentary career failed, and advice on what an MP must do to be effective. • A wealth of election statistics: which MPs have the most vulnerable majorities; new MPs; MPs by age, length of service, etc. • Results by constituency: informed and pithy summaries of every MP; series of full-colour maps detailing election results across the nation. • The coalition agreement in full.

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Содержание

The Times: Guide to the House of Commons 2010	8
Greg Hurst	9
Emily Gosden	10
Chris Davalle	11
Matthew Lyons	12
Table of Contents	13
THE TIMES An aid to the navigation of uncharted political waters	15
The House of Commons	18
A	19
B	20
C	23
D	25
E	27
F	28
G	29
H	31
I	33
J	34
K	35
L	36
M	38
N	41
O	42
P	43
Q	44
R	45
S	46
T	48
T	49
U	50
V	51
W	52
Y	54
Z	55
An ordinary beginning to an extraordinary campaign	56
How the polls really got it right	61
A tremor that changed the political landscape	63
Who cares what the papers say?	67
And the winner is...television	69
It will never be the same again	71
Meet the Class of 2010, the new politics in person	73
Women failed to break through	76
Bad news for big spenders: money can't buy you votes	78
Little joy for the smaller parties	81
Don't emerge as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal	83
The man who detoxified the Conservative brand	87

At long last it's OK to be a Tory	92
Path to power: how the Lib Dems made history	94
How Brown's rivalry with Blair proved to be Labour's undoing	98
Names of the dead were read to a silent Commons	103
Hail and a fond farewell to the dearly departed	106
The tragedy of Gordon Brown	109
New Labour found its reforming stride too late	111
'This sucker's going down': diary of a financial crisis	114
SNP pioneers of minority rule	118
Northern Ireland comes back from the brink	120
Welsh coalition complications	123
All change, the gravy train has hit the buffers	125
The growing powers of the humble backbencher	130
Select Committees	131
Wright committee	132
Legislation	133
Private Member's Bills	134
The chamber	135
Opposition days	136
Direct public involvement	137
Conflicting roles	138
New intake foots bill for the old	139
A few words of friendly advice for aspiring MPs	141
Take Parliament seriously	142
Strike a balance between constituency and	143
Put your name down for a place on a good select	144
You are not an automaton	145
Do not be in too much hurry to become a parliamentary	146
Don't be afraid of cross-party alliances	147
Don't become a rent-a-quote	148
If at first you don't succeed, persist	149
Never lose sight of the big picture	150
If you get a call from a company inviting you to do a	151
Make time for your family	152
The pleasures of opposition	153
Life as a Member of Parliament	155
MPs who stood down before the election	157
Labour	158
Liberal Democrat	161
Other	162
Defeated MPs	163
Labour	164
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	165

The Times: Guide to the House of Commons 2010

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TIMES BOOKS

Table of Contents

Cover Page
Title Page
THE TIMES An aid to the navigation of uncharted political waters
The House of Commons
The new Parliament
An ordinary beginning to an extraordinary campaign
How the polls really got it right
A tremor that changed the political landscape
Who cares what the papers say?
And the winner is...television
It will never be the same again
Meet the Class of 2010, the new politics in person
Women failed to break through
Bad news for big spenders: money can't buy you votes
Little joy for the smaller parties
Don't emerge as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal
The old era
The man who detoxified the Conservative brand
At long last it's OK to be a Tory
Path to power: how the Lib Dems made history
How Brown's rivalry with Blair proved to be Labour's undoing
Names of the dead were read to a silent Commons
Hail and a fond farewell to the dearly departed
The tragedy of Gordon Brown
New Labour found its reforming stride too late
'This sucker's going down': diary of a financial crisis
SNP pioneers of minority rule
Northern Ireland comes back from the brink
Welsh coalition complications
All change, the gravy train has hit the buffers
The work of the House of Commons
The growing powers of the humble backbencher
New intake foos bill for the old
A few words of friendly advice for aspiring MPs
The pleasures of opposition
Life as a Member of Parliament
MPs who stood down before the election
Defeated MPs
Her Majesty's Government The Cabinet
Departmental Ministers and Whips
General Election 2010: results by constituency
House of Commons, May 2010
MPs with majorities of less than 10 per cent
How the nation voted
Tories rediscovered the art of by-election victory
By-elections 2005-10

[Manifestos](#)

[Coalition programme for government](#)

[Conservative manifesto](#)

[Liberal Democrat manifesto](#)

[Labour manifesto](#)

[Smaller parties' manifestos](#)

[Index to candidates](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

THE TIMES An aid to the navigation of uncharted political waters

Greg Hurst

Editor of the Guide

The general election of 2010 was a watershed: the first since February 1974 at which no single party won an overall majority. The inconclusive outcome was accompanied by a strong sense of paradox. The Conservative Party won the most seats, 305, with one additional seat expected, and duly delivered, in the election in Thirsk & Malton that was delayed by the death of a candidate. And yet, by falling short of an absolute Commons majority, David Cameron was widely held to have failed to seize fully, particularly in the final year, the opportunity presented to him as the outgoing Government, and Gordon Brown in particular, became steadily more unpopular.

The Liberal Democrats, clear winners of the campaign itself, were stunned actually to suffer a net loss of five seats, bringing their tally down to 57. They had expected significant gains after the television debates propelled Nick Clegg into the living rooms of voters unhappy with Mr Brown but with nagging doubts about Mr Cameron. The ten-point jump in support for the Liberal Democrats after the first leaders' debate was unprecedented in polling history. Even as the party's poll ratings began to glide downwards many Liberal Democrats hoped for, and expected, net gains of perhaps 20 or 30 seats.

The paradox was greatest within the Labour Party. Clear loser of the election, with a net loss of 90 seats, it endured its worst performance since 1931 during the Great Depression. Within Labour ranks, however, a grim sense of satisfaction was evident, even some pride, both at having clawed back from the prospect of being pushed into third place by the Liberal Democrats and at having denied Mr Cameron the majority that he wanted and, they may have calculated, he needed.

One refreshing aspect was that turnout, having reached a postwar low in 2001, rose again to 65.1 per cent, up by 3.7 per cent on 2005; if an election is interesting or the result uncertain, voters are more inclined to take part.

If the result appeared confusing to some, its immediate aftermath must have seemed doubly so. Gordon Brown, vanquished, returned to Downing Street. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, after weeks, months even, of fighting one another tooth and nail, dispatched teams to begin talks on a tentative arrangement for a minority administration or even a coalition. The outcome, Britain's first coalition since Churchill's cross-party administration during the Second World War, from 1940-45, and the first in peacetime since Ramsay MacDonald's National Government of 1929-35, and those that followed, ushered in a new era of British politics.

Coalition politics presents significant new challenges for the House of Commons. Ministers who are members of competing parties must find ways of working together that go beyond pragmatism and practical effectiveness and are based on trust, while maintaining their separate political entities and those of their parties. Backbench Members of both governing parties must find the language, tone and levers to criticise and influence individual aspects of policy or decisions of administration without tearing at the fabric of the coalition itself. There will be others unhappy about the very fact of coalition government, whose challenge is to advance their cause without being cast as wreckers. Such questions apply well beyond the exchanges on the floor of the Commons, to its select committees, public bill committees and its very culture as an institution.

For the Labour Party, in particular, the task of opposition carries heightened responsibilities. In the previous two Parliaments, the Liberal Democrats provided an increasingly significant alternative voice to that of the official Opposition, for example as the only British party to oppose the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and offering an alternative analysis during the financial crisis of 2008-09. Their entry

into office gives the coalition Government an initial working majority in the Commons of 82 once the Speaker and Sinn Féin are excluded and leaves the main duty of opposition on Labour's shoulders alone. Furthermore, the coalition will have, between its peers, a large majority over Labour in the House of Lords, where cross-benchers do not vote as a block. This is the first time a Government has commanded majorities in both Houses of Parliament since John Major in 1997, and makes the opposition's work of scrutiny and challenge in the Commons doubly important.

Gordon Brown's resignation as Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party heralded the opening of a new chapter for his party. Amid the uncertainty and fast-moving events of the post-election hiatus, this happened in two stages. First came an undertaking to step down at a future date if an alternative "progressive" coalition with the Liberal Democrats and minority parties could be negotiated. Then came his immediate departure as the coalition between Mr Cameron and Mr Clegg fell into place, although before its details were complete. Harriet Harman, Labour's deputy leader, took his place temporarily as Leader of the Opposition as the party agreed to a timetable of more than four months to elect a new leader for its annual conference in late September.

Two parties are represented in the new House of Commons for the first time: the Green Party, 11 years after it gained two seats in the European Parliament, thanks to its method of election by proportional representation, and the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom Independence Party and British National Party polled substantially more votes than the Greens, and both improved their share of the vote, without winning seats. The trend of independent Members of Parliament, re-established by Martin Bell in 1997, was reversed in mainland Britain with the defeat of Richard Taylor in Wyre Forest, where he served two terms, and Dai Davies in Blaenau Gwent. It was maintained only by the presence of Lady Sylvia Hermon, who broke with the Ulster Unionists to retain her seat with a large majority. Her victory reflects the very different politics of Northern Ireland.

The outcome of the general election, inconclusive as it was, nonetheless captured the mood of Britain in the late spring of 2010: dissatisfied with Labour (other than in Scotland, the only part of Britain where the party's vote went up, and Inner London); attracted in significant numbers by Mr Cameron, although with doubts harboured by some and antipathy among a minority; restless for change; and disenchanted with politics and the excesses of the previous Parliament.

The most important dynamic for the Commons itself is the scale of the turnover of its Members. More than one third, 227, are new to Parliament. This is fewer than the 242 new MPs returned in 1997, a postwar record, but is a massive transfusion for an institution that had lost touch with what the electorate expected from it. At the election 149 MPs stood down of their own volition (or their party's) rather than face the voters again, far more than the 115 who did so before the end-of-era election of 1997. Five former MPs also return after periods of broken service.

The Times Guide to the House of Commons 2010 has itself undergone change. Its commitment to accuracy and balance remain, but with even greater emphasis on analysis and comment. Writers from *The Times* explore the wider undercurrents that had an impact on the voters' view of politicians: the scandal of misuse of Commons allowances; the banking crisis and recession; and the handling of military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The *Guide* gives greater scope for the best of *The Times's* journalism beyond that of its writers, with the work of its photographers, illustrators, graphic artists and designers used to full effect.

Profiles of each Member of Parliament are livelier, intended to convey a sense of what each is like, what motivates them and how effectively they discharge their role, in addition to biographical details of what they have done. Information is included, too, on thousands of candidates who contested the election, were unsuccessful but attracted sufficient support to hold their deposit. Many among them, no doubt, will be the subject of fuller profiles in the next *Guide* as Members of Parliament.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a new chapter that explains and discusses the work of the House of Commons, its powers, recent reforms and their effect. Former Members

of Parliament describe the reality of serving on the government and opposition benches, from the challenge of finding how to make their voice heard and the satisfaction of influencing events to the monotony of waiting, day after day, night after night, to vote.

The new Parliament is embarking on a journey of political change through waters familiar to much of continental Europe but, to date, largely uncharted by practitioners of politics, commentators, observers and electors in the United Kingdom. *The Times Guide to the Commons* seeks, as ever, to offer itself as their navigational aid.

The House of Commons

The following were elected Members of the House of Commons in the 2010 general election

Alliance Alliance

C Conservative

DUP Democratic Unionist Party

Green Green

Ind Independent

Lab Labour

LD Liberal Democrat;

PC Plaid Cymru

SNP Scottish National Party

SF Sinn Féin

SDLP Social Democratic and Labour Party

Speaker Speaker

A

Abbott, Diane Hackney North & Stoke Newington	Lab
Adams, Gerry Belfast West	SF
Adams, Nigel Selby & Ainsty	C
Afriyie, Adam Windsor	C
Ainsworth, Bob Coventry North East	Lab
Aldous, Peter Waveney	C
Alexander, Danny Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey	LD
Alexander, Heidi Lewisham East	Lab
Alexander, Douglas Paisley & Renfrewshire South	Lab
Ali, Rushanara Bethnal Green & Bow	Lab
Allen, Graham Nottingham North	Lab
Amess, David Southend West	C
Anderson, Dave Blaydon	Lab
Andrew, Stuart Pudsey	C
Arbuthnot, James Hampshire North East	C
Austin, Ian Dudley North	Lab

B

Bacon, Richard Norfolk South	C
Bagshawe, Louise Corby	C
Bailey, Adrian West Bromwich West	Lab
Bain, Willie Glasgow North East	Lab
Baker, Norman Lewes	LD
Baker, Steven Wycombe	C
Baldry, Tony Banbury	C
Baldwin, Harriett Worcestershire West	C
Balls, Ed Morley & Outwood	Lab
Banks, Gordon Ochil & Perthshire South	Lab
Barclay, Stephen Cambridgeshire North East	C
Barker, Greg Bexhill & Battle	C
Baron, John Basildon & Billericay	C
Barron, Kevin Rother Valley	Lab
Barwell, Gavin Croydon Central	C
Bayley, Hugh York Central	Lab
Bebb, Guto Aberconwy	C
Beckett, Margaret Derby South	Lab
Begg, Anne Aberdeen South	Lab
Beith, Sir Alan Berwick-upon-Tweed	LD
Bell, Sir Stuart Middlesbrough	Lab
Bellingham, Henry Norfolk North West	C
Benn, Hilary Leeds Central	Lab
Benton, Joe Bootle	Lab
Benyon, Richard Newbury	C
Bercow, John Buckingham	Speaker
Beresford, Sir Paul Mole Valley	C
Berger, Luciana Liverpool Wavertree	Lab
Berry, Jake Rossendale & Darwen	C
Betts, Clive Sheffield South East	Lab
Bingham, Andrew High Peak	C
Binley, Brian Northampton South	C
Birtwistle, Gordon Burnley	LD
Blackman, Bob Harrow East	C
Blackman-Woods, Roberta Durham, City of	Lab

Blackwood, Nicola Oxford West & Abingdon	C
Blears, Hazel Salford & Eccles	Lab
Blenkinsop, Tom Middlesbrough South & Cleveland East	Lab
Blomfield, Paul Sheffield Central	Lab
Blunkett, David Sheffield Brightside & Hillsborough	Lab
Blunt, Crispin Reigate	C
Boles, Nicholas Grantham & Stamford	C
Bone, Peter Wellingborough	C
Bottomley, Peter Worthing West	C
Bradley, Karen Staffordshire Moorlands	C
Bradshaw, Ben Exeter	Lab
Brady, Graham Altrincham & Sale West	C
Brake, Tom Carshalton & Wallington	LD
Bray, Angie Ealing Central & Acton	C
Brazier, Julian Canterbury	C
Brennan, Kevin Cardiff West	Lab
Bridgen, Andrew Leicestershire North West	C
Brine, Steve Winchester	C
Brokenshire, James Old Bexley & Sidcup	C
Brooke, Annette Dorset Mid & Poole North	LD
Brown, Russell Dumfries & Galloway	Lab
Brown, Gordon Kirkcaldy & Cowdenbeath	Lab
Brown, Nicholas Newcastle upon Tyne East	Lab
Brown, Lyn West Ham	Lab
Browne, Jeremy Taunton Deane	LD
Bruce, Fiona Congleton	C
Bruce, Malcolm Gordon	LD
Bryant, Chris Rhondda	Lab
Buck, Karen Westminster North	Lab
Buckland, Robert Swindon South	C
Burden, Richard Birmingham Northfield	Lab
Burley, Aidan Cannock Chase	C
Burnham, Andy Leigh	Lab
Burns, Conor Bournemouth West	C
Burns, Simon Chelmsford	C
Burrowes, David Enfield Southgate	C

Burstow, Paul Sutton & Cheam	LD
Burt, Alistair Bedfordshire North East	C
Burt, Lorely Solihull	LD
Byles, Dan Warwickshire North	C
Byrne, Liam Birmingham Hodge Hill	Lab

C

Cable, Vince Twickenham	LD
Cairns, David Inverclyde	Lab
Cairns, Alun Vale of Glamorgan	C
Cameron, David Witney	C
Campbell, Ronnie Blyth Valley	Lab
Campbell, Sir Menzies Fife North East	LD
Campbell, Gregory Londonderry East	DUP
Campbell, Alan Tynemouth	Lab
Carmichael, Alistair Orkney & Shetland	LD
Carmichael, Neil Stroud	C
Carswell, Douglas Clacton	C
Cash, Bill Stone	C
Caton, Martin Gower	Lab
Chapman, Jenny Darlington	Lab
Chishti, Rehman Gillingham & Rainham	C
Chope, Christopher Christchurch	C
Clappison, James Hertsmere	C
Clark, Katy Ayrshire North & Arran	Lab
Clark, Greg Tunbridge Wells	C
Clarke, Tom Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill	Lab
Clarke, Kenneth Rushcliffe	C
Clegg, Nick Sheffield Hallam	LD
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey Cotswolds, The	C
Clwyd, Ann Cynon Valley	Lab
Coaker, Vernon Gedling	Lab
Coffey, Ann Stockport	Lab
Coffey, Therese Suffolk Coastal	C
Collins, Damian Folkestone & Hythe	C
Colville, Oliver Plymouth Sutton & Devonport	C
Connarty, Michael Linlithgow & Falkirk East	Lab
Cooper, Rosie Lancashire West	Lab
Cooper, Yvette Normanton, Pontefract & Castleford	Lab
Corbyn, Jeremy Islington North	Lab
Cox, Geoffrey Devon West & Torridge	C
Crabb, Stephen Preseli Pembrokeshire	C

Crausby, David Bolton North East	Lab
Creagh, Mary Wakefield	Lab
Creasy, Stella Walthamstow	Lab
Crockart, Michael Edinburgh West	LD
Crouch, Tracey Chatham & Aylesford	C
Cruddas, Jon Dagenham & Rainham	Lab
Cryer, John Leyton & Wanstead	Lab
Cunningham, Jim Coventry South	Lab
Cunningham, Alex Stockton North	Lab
Cunningham, Tony Workington	Lab
Curran, Margaret Glasgow East	Lab

D

Dakin, Nic Scunthorpe	Lab
Danczuk, Simon Rochdale	Lab
Darling, Alistair Edinburgh South West	Lab
Davey, Edward Kingston & Surbiton	LD
David, Wayne Caerphilly	Lab
Davidson, Ian Glasgow South West	Lab
Davies, David Monmouth	C
Davies, Glyn Montgomeryshire	C
Davies, Philip Shipley	C
Davies, Geraint Swansea West	Lab
Davis, David Haltemprice & Howden	C
de Bois, Nick Enfield North	C
de Piero, Gloria Ashfield	Lab
Denham, John Southampton Itchen	Lab
Dinenage, Caroline Gosport	C
Djanogly, Jonathan Huntingdon	C
Dobbin, Jim Heywood & Middleton	Lab
Dobson, Frank Holborn & St Pancras	Lab
Docherty, Thomas Dunfermline & Fife West	Lab
Dodds, Nigel Belfast North	DUP
Doherty, Pat Tyrone West	SF
Donaldson, Jeffrey Lagan Valley	DUP
Donohoe, Brian Ayrshire Central	Lab
Doran, Frank Aberdeen North	Lab
Dorrell, Stephen Charnwood	C
Dorries, Nadine Bedfordshire Mid	C
Dowd, Jim Lewisham West & Penge	Lab
Doyle, Gemma Dunbartonshire West	Lab
Doyle-Price, Jackie Thurrock	C
Drax, Richard Dorset South	C
Dromey, Jack Birmingham Erdington	Lab
Duddridge, James Rochford & Southend East	C
Dugher, Michael Barnsley East	Lab
Duncan, Alan Rutland & Melton	C
Duncan Smith, Iain Chingford & Woodford Green	C

Dunne, Philip Ludlow	C
Durkan, Mark FoyleS	DLP

E

Eagle, Maria Garston & Halewood	Lab
Eagle, Angela Wallasey	Lab
Edwards, Jonathan Carmarthen East & Dinefwr	PC
Efford, Clive Eltham	Lab
Elliott, Julie Sunderland Central	Lab
Ellis, Michael Northampton North	C
Ellison, Jane Battersea	C
Ellman, Louise Liverpool Riverside	Lab
Ellwood, Tobias Bournemouth East	C
Elphicke, Charlie Dover	C
Engel, Natascha Derbyshire North East	Lab
Esterson, Bill Sefton Central	Lab
Eustice, George Camborne & Redruth	C
Evans, Jonathan Cardiff North	C
Evans, Christopher Islwyn	Lab
Evans, Nigel Ribble Valley	C
Evans, Graham Weaver Vale	C
Evennett, David Bexleyheath & Crayford	C

F

Fabricant, Michael Lichfield	C
Fallon, Michael Sevenoaks	C
Farrelly, Paul Newcastle-under-Lyme	Lab
Farron, Tim Westmorland & Lonsdale	LD
Featherstone, Lynne Hornsey & Wood Green	LD
Field, Frank Birkenhead	Lab
Field, Mark Cities of London & Westminster	C
Fitzpatrick, Jim Poplar & Limehouse	Lab
Flello, Rob Stoke-on-Trent South	Lab
Flint, Caroline Don Valley	Lab
Flynn, Paul Newport West	Lab
Foster, Don Bath	LD
Fovargue, Yvonne Makerfield	Lab
Fox, Dr Liam Somerset North	C
Francis, Hywel Aberavon	Lab
Francois, Mark Rayleigh & Wickford	C
Freeman, George Norfolk Mid	C
Freer, Mike Finchley & Golders Green	C
Fullbrook, Lorraine South Ribble	C
Fuller, Richard Bedford	C

G

Gale, Roger Thanet North	C
Gapes, Mike Ilford South	Lab
Gardiner, Barry Brent North	Lab
Garnier, Edward Harborough	C
Garnier, Mark Wyre Forest	C
Gauke, David Hertfordshire South West	C
George, Andrew St Ives	LD
Gibb, Nick Bognor Regis & Littlehampton	C
Gilbert, Stephen St Austell & Newquay	LD
Gildernew, Michelle Fermanagh & South Tyrone	SF
Gillan, Cheryl Chesham & Amersham	C
Gilmore, Sheila Edinburgh East	Lab
Glass, Pat Durham North West	Lab
Glen, John Salisbury	C
Glendon, Mary Tyneside North	Lab
Godsiff, Roger Birmingham Hall Green	Lab
Goggins, Paul Wythenshawe & Sale East	Lab
Goldsmith, Zac Richmond Park	C
Goodman, Helen Bishop Auckland	Lab
Goodwill, Robert Scarborough & Whitby	C
Gove, Michael Surrey Heath	C
Graham, Richard Gloucester	C
Grant, Helen Maidstone & The Weald	C
Gray, James Wiltshire North	C
Grayling, Chris Epsom & Ewell	C
Greatrex, Tom Rutherglen & Hamilton West	Lab
Green, Damian Ashford	C
Green, Kate Stretford & Urmston	Lab
Greening, Justine Putney	C
Greenwood, Lilian Nottingham South	Lab
Grieve, Dominic Beaconsfield	C
Griffith, Nia Llanelli	Lab
Griffiths, Andrew Burton	C
Gummer, Ben Ipswich	C
Gwynne, Andrew Denton & Reddish	Lab

Gyimah, Sam Surrey East	C
--------------------------------	---

H

Hague, William Richmond (Yorks)	C
Hain, Peter Neath	Lab
Halfon, Robert Harlow	C
Hames, Duncan Chippenham	LD
Hamilton, Fabian Leeds North East	Lab
Hamilton, David Midlothian	Lab
Hammond, Philip Runnymede & Weybridge	C
Hammond, Stephen Wimbledon	C
Hancock, Mike Portsmouth South	LD
Hancock, Matthew Suffolk West	C
Hands, Greg Chelsea & Fulham	C
Hanson, David Delyn	Lab
Harman, Harriet Camberwell & Peckham	Lab
Harper, Mark Forest of Dean	C
Harrington, Richard Watford	C
Harris, Rebecca Castle Point	C
Harris, Tom Glasgow South	Lab
Hart, Simon Carmarthen West & Pembrokeshire South	C
Harvey, Nick Devon North	LD
Haselhurst, Sir Alan Saffron Walden	C
Havard, Dai Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney	Lab
Hayes, John South Holland & The Deepings	C
Heald, Oliver Hertfordshire North East	C
Healey, John Wentworth & Dearne	Lab
Heath, David Somerton & Frome	LD
Heaton-Harris, Chris Daventry	C
Hemming, John Birmingham Yardley	LD
Henderson, Gordon Sittingbourne & Sheppey	C
Hendrick, Mark Preston	Lab
Hendry, Charles Wealden	C
Hepburn, Stephen Jarrow	Lab
Herbert, Nick Arundel & South Downs	C
Hermon, Lady Sylvia Down North	Ind
Heyes, David Ashton-under-Lyne	Lab
Hillier, Meg Hackney South & Shoreditch	Lab

Hilling, Julie Bolton West	Lab
Hinds, Damian Hampshire East	C
Hoban, Mark Fareham	C
Hodge, Margaret Barking	Lab
Hodgson, Sharon Washington & Sunderland West	Lab
Hoey, Kate Vauxhall	Lab
Hollingbery, George Meon Valley	C
Hollobone, Philip Kettering	C
Holloway, Adam Gravesham	C
Hood, Jim Lanark & Hamilton East	Lab
Hopkins, Kris Keighley	C
Hopkins, Kelvin Luton North	Lab
Horwood, Martin Cheltenham	LD
Hosie, Stewart Dundee East	SNP
Howarth, Gerald Aldershot	C
Howarth, George Knowsley	Lab
Howell, John Henley	C
Hoyle, Lindsay Chorley	Lab
Hughes, Simon Bermondsey & Old Southwark	LD
Huhne, Chris Eastleigh	LD
Hunt, Tristram Stoke-on-Trent Central	Lab
Hunt, Jeremy Surrey South West	C
Hunter, Mark Cheadle	LD
Huppert, Julian Cambridge	LD
Hurd, Nick Ruislip, Northwood & Pinner	C

I

Illsley, Eric Barnsley Central	Lab
Irranca-Davies, Huw Ogmore	Lab

J

Jackson, Glenda Hampstead & Kilburn	Lab
Jackson, Stewart Peterborough	C
James, Margot Stourbridge	C
James, Siân Swansea East	Lab
Jamieson, Cathy Kilmarnock & Loudoun	Lab
Javid, Sajid Bromsgrove	C
Jenkin, Bernard Harwich & Essex North	C
Johnson, Gareth Dartford	C
Johnson, Diana Hull North	Lab
Johnson, Alan Hull West & Hessle	Lab
Johnson, Joseph Orpington	C
Jones, Susan Elan Clwyd South	Lab
Jones, David Clwyd West	C
Jones, Kevan Durham North	Lab
Jones, Andrew Harrogate & Knaresborough	C
Jones, Graham Hyndburn	Lab
Jones, Marcus Nuneaton	C
Jones, Helen Warrington North	Lab
Jowell, Tessa Dulwich & West Norwood	Lab
Joyce, Eric Falkirk	Lab

K

Kaufman, Gerald Manchester Gorton	Lab
Kawczynski, Daniel Shrewsbury & Atcham	C
Keeley, Barbara Worsley & Eccles South	Lab
Keen, Alan Feltham & Heston	Lab
Kelly, Chris Dudley South	C
Kendall, Elizabeth Leicester West	Lab
Kennedy, Charles Ross, Skye & Lochaber	LD
Khan, Sadiq Tooting	Lab
Kirby, Simon Brighton Kemptown	C
Knight, Greg Yorkshire East	C
Kwarteng, Kwasi Spelthorne	C

L

Laing, Eleanor Epping Forest	C
Lamb, Norman Norfolk North	LD
Lammy, David Tottenham	Lab
Lancaster, Mark Milton Keynes North	C
Lansley, Andrew Cambridgeshire South	C
Latham, Pauline Derbyshire Mid	C
Lavery, Ian Wansbeck	Lab
Laws, David Yeovil	LD
Lazarowicz, Mark Edinburgh North & Leith	Lab
Leadsom, Andrea Northamptonshire South	C
Lee, Dr Philip Bracknell	C
Lee, Jessica Erewash	C
Leech, John Manchester Withington	LD
Lefroy, Jeremy Stafford	C
Leigh, Edward Gainsborough	C
Leslie, Charlotte Bristol North West	C
Leslie, Christopher Nottingham East	Lab
Letwin, Oliver Dorset West	C
Lewis, Ivan Bury South	Lab
Lewis, Brandon Great Yarmouth	C
Lewis, Julian New Forest East	C
Liddell-Grainger, Ian Bridgwater & Somerset West	C
Lidington, David Aylesbury	C
Lilley, Peter Hitchin & Harpenden	C
Lloyd, Stephen Eastbourne	LD
Lloyd, Tony Manchester Central	Lab
Llwyd, Elfyn Dwyfor Meirionnydd	PC
Long, Naomi Belfast East	Alliance
Lopresti, Jack Filton & Bradley Stoke	C
Lord, Jonathan Woking	C
Loughton, Tim Worthing East & Shoreham	C
Love, Andy Edmonton	Lab
Lucas, Dr Caroline Brighton Pavilion	Green
Lucas, Ian Wrexham	Lab
Luff, Peter Worcestershire Mid	C

Lumley, Karen Redditch	C
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M

Macleod, Mary Brentford & Isleworth	C
MacNeil, Angus Na h-Eileanan an Iar	SNP
MacShane, Denis Rotherham	Lab
Mactaggart, Fiona Slough	Lab
Mahmood, Shabana Birmingham Ladywood	Lab
Mahmood, Khalid Birmingham Perry Barr	Lab
Main, Anne St Albans	C
Mann, John Bassetlaw	Lab
Marsden, Gordon Blackpool South	Lab
Maude, Francis Horsham	C
May, Theresa Maidenhead	C
Maynard, Paul Blackpool North & Cleveleys	C
McCabe, Steve Birmingham Selly Oak	Lab
McCann, Michael East Kilbride, Strathaven & Lesmahagow	Lab
McCarthy, Kerry Bristol East	Lab
McCartney, Jason Colne Valley	C
McCartney, Karl Lincoln	C
McClymont, Gregg Cumbernauld, Kilsyth & Kirkintilloch East	Lab
McCrea, Rev William Antrim South	DUP
McDonagh, Siobhain Mitcham & Morden	Lab
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair Belfast South	SDLP
McDonnell, John Hayes & Harlington	Lab
McFadden, Pat Wolverhampton South East	Lab
McGovern, Jim Dundee West	Lab
McGovern, Alison Wirral South	Lab
McGuinness, Martin Ulster Mid	SF
McGuire, Anne Stirling	Lab
McIntosh, Anne Thirsk & Malton	C
McKechin, Ann Glasgow North	Lab
McKinnell, Catherine Newcastle upon Tyne North	Lab
McLoughlin, Patrick Derbyshire Dales	C
McPartland, Stephen Stevenage	C
McVey, Esther Wirral West	C

Meacher, Michael Oldham West & Royton	Lab
Meale, Joseph Mansfield	Lab
Mearns, Ian Gateshead	Lab
Menzies, Mark Fylde	C
Mercer, Patrick Newark	C
Metcalfe, Stephen Basildon South & Thurrock East	C
Michael, Alun Cardiff South & Penarth	Lab
Miliband, Ed Doncaster North	Lab
Miliband, David South Shields	Lab
Miller, Maria Basingstoke	C
Miller, Andrew Ellesmere Port & Neston	Lab
Mills, Nigel Amber Valley	C
Milton, Anne Guildford	C
Mitchell, Austin Great Grimsby	Lab
Mitchell, Andrew Sutton Coldfield	C
Moon, Madeleine Bridgend	Lab
Moore, Michael Berwickshire, Roxburgh & Selkirk	LD
Mordaunt, Penny Portsmouth North	C
Morden, Jessica Newport East	Lab
Morgan, Nicky Loughborough	C
Morrice, Graeme Livingston	Lab
Morris, Grahame Easington	Lab
Morris, James Halesowen & Rowley Regis	C
Morris, David Morecambe & Lunesdale	C
Morris, Anne-Marie Newton Abbot	C
Mosley, Stephen City of Chester	C
Mowat, David Warrington South	C
Mudie, George Leeds East	Lab
Mulholland, Greg Leeds North West	LD
Mundell, David Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale & Tweeddale	C
Munn, Meg Sheffield Heeley	Lab
Munt, Tessa WellsL	D
Murphy, Conor Newry & Armagh	SF
Murphy, Jim Renfrewshire East	Lab
Murphy, Paul Torfaen	Lab

Murray, Sheryll Cornwall South East	C
Murray, Ian Edinburgh South	Lab
Murrison, Andrew Wiltshire South West	C

N

Nandy, Lisa Wigan	Lab
Nash, Pamela Airdrie & Shotts	Lab
Neill, Bob Bromley & Chislehurst	C
Newmark, Brooks Braintree	C
Newton, Sarah Truro & Falmouth	C
Nokes, Caroline Romsey & Southampton North	C
Norman, Jesse Hereford & Herefordshire South	C
Nuttall, David Bury North	C

O

O'Brien, Stephen Eddisbury	C
O'Donnell, Fiona East Lothian	Lab
Offord, Matthew Hendon	C
Ollerenshaw, Eric Lancaster & Fleetwood	C
Onwurah, Chi Newcastle upon Tyne Central	Lab
Opperman, Guy Hexham	C
Osborne, Sandra Ayr, Carrick & Cumnock	Lab
Osborne, George Tatton	C
Ottaway, Richard Croydon South	C
Owen, Albert Ynys Mon	Lab

P

Paice, Jim Cambridgeshire South East	C
Paisley, Ian Junior Antrim North	DUP
Parish, Neil Tiverton & Honiton	C
Patel, Priti Witham	C
Paterson, Owen Shropshire North	C
Pawsey, Mark Rugby	C
Pearce, Teresa Erith & Thamesmead	Lab
Penning, Mike Hemel Hempstead	C
Penrose, John Weston-super-Mare	C
Percy, Andrew Brigg & Goole	C
Perkins, Toby Chesterfield	Lab
Perry, Claire Devizes	C
Phillips, Stephen Sleaford & North Hykeham	C
Phillipson, Bridget Houghton & Sunderland South	Lab
Pickles, Eric Brentwood & Ongar	C
Pincher, Christopher Tamworth	C
Poulter, Daniel Suffolk Central & Ipswich North	C
Pound, Stephen Ealing North	Lab
Primarolo, Dawn Bristol South	Lab
Prisk, Mark Hertford & Stortford	C
Pritchard, Mark Wrekin, The	C
Pugh, John Southport	LD

Q

Qureshi, Yasmin Bolton South East	Lab
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R

Raab, Dominic Esher & Walton	C
Randall, John Uxbridge & Ruislip South	C
Raynsford, Nick Greenwich & Woolwich	Lab
Reckless, Mark Rochester & Strood	C
Redwood, John Wokingham	C
Reed, Jamie Copeland	Lab
Rees-Mogg, Jacob Somerset North East	C
Reevell, Simon Dewsbury	C
Reeves, Rachel Leeds West	Lab
Reid, Alan Argyll & Bute	LD
Reynolds, Jonathan Stalybridge & Hyde	Lab
Reynolds, Emma Wolverhampton North East	Lab
Rifkind, Sir Malcolm Kensington	C
Riordan, Linda Halifax	Lab
Ritchie, Margaret Down South	SDLP
Robathan, Andrew Leicestershire South	C
Robertson, Hugh Faversham & Kent Mid	C
Robertson, John Glasgow North West	Lab
Robertson, Angus Moray	SNP
Robertson, Laurence Tewkesbury	C
Robinson, Geoffrey Coventry North West	Lab
Rogerson, Dan Cornwall North	LD
Rosindell, Andrew Romford	C
Rotheram, Steve Liverpool Walton	Lab
Roy, Lindsay Glenrothes	Lab
Roy, Frank Motherwell & Wishaw	Lab
Ruane, Chris Vale of Clwyd	Lab
Rudd, Amber Hastings & Rye	C
Ruddock, Joan Lewisham Deptford	Lab
Ruffley, David Bury St Edmunds	C
Russell, Bob Colchester	LD
Rutley, David Macclesfield	C

S

Sanders, Adrian Torbay	LD
Sandys, Laura Thanet South	C
Sarwar, Anas Glasgow Central	Lab
Scott, Lee Ilford North	C
Seabeck, Alison Plymouth Moor View	Lab
Selous, Andrew Bedfordshire South West	C
Shannon, Jim Strangford	DUP
Shapps, Grant Welwyn Hatfield	C
Sharma, Virendra Ealing Southall	Lab
Sharma, Alok Reading West	C
Sheerman, Barry Huddersfield	Lab
Shelbrooke, Alec Elmet & Rothwell	C
Shepherd, Richard Aldridge-Brownhills	C
Sheridan, Jim Paisley & Renfrewshire North	Lab
Shuker, Gavin Luton South	Lab
Simmonds, Mark Boston & Skegness	C
Simpson, Keith Broadland	C
Simpson, Thomas David Upper Bann	DUP
Singh, Marsha Bradford West	Lab
Skidmore, Chris Kingswood	C
Skinner, Dennis Bolsover	Lab
Slaughter, Andy Hammersmith	Lab
Smith, Sir Robert Aberdeenshire West & Kincardine	LD
Smith, Nick Blaenau Gwent	Lab
Smith, Henry Crawley	C
Smith, Chloe Norwich North	C
Smith, Andrew Oxford East	Lab
Smith, Angela Penistone & Stocksbridge	Lab
Smith, Owen Pontypridd	Lab
Smith, Julian Skipton & Ripon	C
Soames, Nicholas Sussex Mid	C
Soubry, Anna Broxtowe	C
Soulsby, Sir Peter Leicester South	Lab
Spellar, John Warley	Lab
Spelman, Caroline Meriden	C

Spencer, Mark Sherwood	C
Stanley, Sir John Tonbridge & Malling	C
Stephenson, Andrew Pendle	C
Stevenson, John Carlisle	C
Stewart, Bob Beckenham	C
Stewart, Iain Milton Keynes South	C
Stewart, Rory Penrith & The Border	C
Straw, Jack Blackburn	Lab
Streeter, Gary Devon South West	C
Stride, Mel Devon Central	C
Stringer, Graham Blackley & Broughton	Lab
Stuart, Graham Beverley & Holderness	C
Stuart, Gisela Birmingham Edgbaston	Lab
Stunell, Andrew Hazel Grove	LD
Sturdy, Julian York Outer	C
Sutcliffe, Gerry Bradford South	Lab
Swales, Ian Redcar	LD
Swayne, Desmond New Forest West	C
Swinson, Jo Dunbartonshire East	LD
Swire, Hugo Devon East	C
Syms, Robert Poole	C

T

Tami, Mark Alyn & Deeside	Lab
Tapsell, Sir Peter Louth & Horncastle	C
Teather, Sarah Brent Central	LD
Thomas, Gareth Harrow West	Lab
Thornberry, Emily Islington South & Finsbury	Lab
Thurso, John Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross	LD
Timms, Stephen East Ham	Lab
Timpson, Edward Crewe & Nantwich	C
Tomlinson, Justin Swindon North	C
Tredinnick, David Bosworth	C

T

Trickett, Jon Hemsworth	Lab
Truss, Elizabeth Norfolk South West	C
Turner, Karl Hull East	Lab
Turner, Andrew Isle of Wight	C
Twigg, Derek Halton	Lab
Twigg, Stephen Liverpool West Derby	Lab
Tyrie, Andrew Chichester	C

U

Umunna, Chuka Streatham	Lab
Uppal, Paul Wolverhampton South West	C

V

Vaizey, Ed Wantage	C
Vara, Shailesh Cambridgeshire North West	C
Vaz, Keith Leicester East	Lab
Vaz, Valerie Walsall South	Lab
Vickers, Martin Cleethorpes	C
Villiers, Theresa Chipping Barnet	C

W

Walker, Charles Broxbourne	C
Walker, Robin Worcester	C
Wallace, Ben Wyre & Preston North	C
Walley, Joan Stoke-on-Trent North	Lab
Walter, Bob Dorset North	C
Ward, David Bradford East	LD
Watkinson, Angela Hornchurch & Upminster	C
Watson, Tom West Bromwich East	Lab
Watts, Dave St Helens North	Lab
Weatherley, Mike Hove	C
Webb, Steve Thornbury & Yate	LD
Weir, Mike Angus	SNP
Wharton, James Stockton South	C
Wheeler, Heather Derbyshire South	C
White, Chris Warwick & Leamington	C
Whiteford, Eilidh Banff & Buchan	SNP
Whitehead, Alan Southampton Test	Lab
Whittaker, Craig Calder Valley	C
Whittingdale, John Maldon	C
Wicks, Malcolm Croydon North	Lab
Wiggin, Bill Herefordshire North	C
Willetts, David Havant	C
Williams, Hywel Arfon	PC
Williams, Roger Brecon & Radnorshire	LD
Williams, Stephen Bristol West	LD
Williams, Mark Ceredigion	LD
Williamson, Chris Derby North	Lab
Williamson, Gavin Staffordshire South	C
Willott, Jenny Cardiff Central	LD
Wilson, Sammy Antrim East	DUP
Wilson, Rob Reading East	C
Wilson, Phil Sedgefield	Lab
Winnick, David Walsall North	Lab
Winterton, Rosie Doncaster Central	Lab
Wishart, Pete Perth & Perthshire North	SNP

Wollaston, Dr Sarah Totnes	C
Wood, Mike Batley & Spen	Lab
Woodcock, John Barrow & Furness	Lab
Woodward, Shaun St Helens South & Whiston	Lab
Woolas, Phil Oldham East & Saddleworth	Lab
Wright, Iain Hartlepool	Lab
Wright, Jeremy Kenilworth & Southam	C
Wright, Simon Norwich South	LD
Wright, David Telford	Lab

Y

Yeo, Tim Suffolk South	C
Young, Sir George Hampshire North West	C

Z

Zahawi, Nadhim Stratford-on-Avon	C
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The new Parliament

An ordinary beginning to an extraordinary campaign

Roland Watson

Political Editor

After asking the Queen to dissolve Parliament, Gordon Brown returned from Buckingham Palace to Downing Street and declared: “I come from an ordinary family in an ordinary town.” As the opening line of the 2010 general election, it was designed to draw attention to the privileged background of his Eton-educated Conservative rival, David Cameron. It ill served as a guide for what followed, though, which was, by any standards of modern British political history, extraordinary.

None of the three leaders had led their parties into a general election and each faced a monumental task. Mr Brown was seeking an historic fourth term for Labour against the backdrop of the deepest recession for 60 years. He was also looking to overcome the memory of the election-that-never-was in October 2007 when, five months after inheriting the job from Tony Blair and revving up Labour’s campaign machine, he ducked out of going to the country at the last moment.

Mr Cameron needed to achieve the biggest swing since the war to gain the 116 seats required for a Commons majority. His party had endured a jittery few months in which questions about its economic policy and a tightening in the polls fed off each other to spread deep unease through Tory ranks. He was beginning the campaign with a seven-point lead, well down from the double digits the Tories had enjoyed for most of the past year and not enough for an outright win.

Nick Clegg, the Liberal Democrat leader, needed to capitalise on the prospects of a hung Parliament. He also had the first televised debates between the leaders to look forward to. They would offer him a stage never before enjoyed by his predecessors: equal prime-time billing with his two rivals. Initially, though, the campaign conformed to type, focusing on the two established parties. Mr Cameron pre-empted Mr Brown’s return from the Palace to stage a rally on the south bank of the Thames, across from Westminster. Waving his finger at the Houses of Parliament, he vowed to “make people feel proud again of that building over there”. He was, he said, campaigning for “the Great Ignored”, a group that encompassed black, white, rich, poor, town and country folk. It was a slogan he ignored for the rest of the campaign.

The styles of the Tory and Labour campaigns differed starkly from the start. As Mr Cameron tore round the country on a leased private plane, Mr Brown made political capital out of financial necessity, travelling by rail in standard class. Labour had raised less than half the Tories’ £18 million war chest, and had spent much of it during the phoney war since the start of the year. Once at his campaigning destinations, Mr Brown rarely delivered speeches, preferring to meet small groups of voters in supermarket canteens or the living rooms of Labour supporters, fuelling questions about whether he was reaching swing voters. Mr Cameron, boasting a campaign team with a sharper eye for “optics”, was pictured repeatedly, sleeves rolled up, in warehouses or stock rooms surrounded by workers and clearly visible logos of well-known brands.

The contrast carried through to their manifestos, in which Labour offered a “smarter” State, the Tories a smaller one. Mr Brown unveiled a traditional-looking pitch in a newly built and soon-to-be-opened wing of a Birmingham hospital. It promised to tailor public services to people’s needs, giving them guarantees on rights of redress against schools, hospitals and police forces if services failed to reach certain standards.

The Tory manifesto was unusual and innovative, and not just for being presented in the semi ruins of Battersea power station. A hard-backed blue book on A5 paper titled *An Invitation to Join the Government of Britain*, it urged people to take more control over their workplaces, children’s schools and how they are policed and ruled, offering a glimpse of life in what Mr Cameron billed the Big Society.

Mr Clegg chose the City of London as his launch pad, an attempt to show that the party often criticised for having uncostered policies was serious about its finances. The signature policy was to raise the starting threshold for income tax from £6,500 to £10,000, costing £17 billion. The document even included tax tables at the back to show that the sums added up, calculations immediately disputed by Labour and the Tories.

The choice between an empowered individual in a smaller Tory State and a smarter Labour State that provided service guarantees offered the central intellectual dividing line, although both sides fought surprisingly shy of their offering on the stump. Instead, the debate revolved around the economy, in particular whether the £6 billion of immediate savings the Tories were proposing to make in Whitehall, and subsequently used to ease Labour's proposed rise in national insurance contributions, would help or hinder the recovery.

So far, so normal. The campaign was turned on its head from the moment Mr Clegg stared into the cameras of the first TV debate, hosted by ITV in Manchester, and told the 10 million viewers that he was offering something other than business as usual. Presenting himself as a fresh alternative to the tired old parties he was fighting, he spoke crisply and directly about bringing fundamental change to politics. Mr Brown, sensing the early mastery of the medium shown by Mr Clegg and keen to isolate Mr Cameron, used the words "I agree with Nick" half a dozen times. (The following day, the phrase was appearing on Lib Dem badges, posters and banners.) But Mr Clegg would not be caught in a Labour bear hug. Mr Cameron, expected to shine on a stage apparently made for the ease and informality of his communication skills, tried to look prime ministerial but instead appeared stiff and awkward.

Mr Clegg ran away with the verdict of viewers. In the course of 90 minutes he had wrested from Mr Cameron the mantle of change, in which the Tory leader had cloaked himself for the past four years. Within days, the Lib Dems shot up ten points in the polls. One found Mr Clegg to be the most popular political leader since Churchill. And so the game changed. Although campaigning continued, the oxygen sucked up by the first debate in effect suspended the state of the race while all sides waited for the second debate. Hosted by Sky in Bristol, it saw Mr Cameron recover some of his poise. Mr Clegg, despite his first success, refused to play safe, showed that his first offering was no fluke and cemented his place as a contender.

Shortly before the third debate, Mr Clegg, in an interview with *The Times*, said that the Lib Dems had replaced Labour as the progressive force in politics and that the election now boiled down to a two-horse race between him and Mr Cameron. Two weeks previously such an assertion would have been laughed out of court. With many polls showing the Lib Dems nudging ahead of Labour, it now carried weight.

Mr Clegg's success, or Cleggmania to give it its official media term, forced Labour and the Tories into tactical switches. They both turned their guns on Lib Dem policies, such as an amnesty on some illegal immigrants, softer sentencing and a refusal to guarantee the future of Britain's nuclear deterrent. The Tories did so with menaced warnings whereas Labour, with an eye on the possibilities of a Lib-Lab deal if voters returned a hung Parliament, were less harsh.

Mr Brown also re-wrote his personal campaign. Labour strategists, faced with selling a leader who was unpopular with voters, had kept the Prime Minister to a routine of small meetings largely behind closed doors. It had left Mr Brown frustrated. He would spend the final ten days meeting more "real people" and making more speeches. The new style made a calamitous start. In Rochdale, Mr Brown was accosted by a Labour-supporting grandmother, Gillian Duffy, who took him to task on issues ranging from student fees to immigration. She walked away happy to have had her say and quietly thrilled to have met the Prime Minister. He got into his official car and branded the mild confrontation a disaster, called her a bigoted woman and blamed an aide. The remarks were picked up by a radio microphone he had worn for his walkabout and had not yet taken off.

For the rest of the day Mrs Duffy became the centre of an extraordinary maelstrom. She was devastated to learn of Mr Brown's remarks, which were played repeatedly on news channels. They were doubly damaging: Mr Brown had appeared deaf to the concerns of millions of voters on immigration; and his apparent instinct to blame aides underlined a wider perception of character flaws. Over the next six hours, Mr Brown apologised six times. He tore up his schedule, abandoned preparation for the following day's final debate and returned to Rochdale where he spent 40 minutes in Mrs Duffy's living room trying to explain himself.

The third and final debate, hosted by the BBC in Birmingham, was Mr Brown's last chance to turn the campaign around. Labour aides had negotiated successfully for its theme to be the economy, Mr Brown's perceived strongest suit. Although he put in his best performance, he again trailed in third place, according to snap polls. In the final days, he was at his best, delivering his most passionate speech on social justice to an audience in London. Some wondered where this fiery campaigner had been for the previous three weeks, and why he had not been let loose. Others concluded that he was able to let himself go because he suspected he had lost.

On the eve of polling day Mr Cameron campaigned through the night, a self-consciously arduous bus trip from Scotland to Bristol via Grimsby where he met night workers in depots and sorting offices along the way. Such a gruelling final lap was hardly the best preparation for what was to follow.

Polling day itself was marred by near tragedy when Nigel Farage, an MEP and the former leader of the UK Independence Party, escaped with his life from a light plane crash after a campaign stunt went disastrously wrong. The aircraft carrying Mr Farage, who was standing against the Speaker, John Bercow, in Buckingham, was trailing a 15ft banner that read: "Vote for your country – Vote UKIP". The banner became entangled with the plane's tail about 10ft above the ground, causing it to nosedive. Mr Farage said that he and his pilot, Justin Adams, had had a miraculous escape.

On the stroke of 10pm, the exit poll commissioned by the BBC, ITN and Sky suggested that the Tories would win 307 seats, Labour 255 and the Liberal Democrats 59, pointing to the first hung Parliament for 36 years. Its forecasting was immediately doubted by psephologists, both amateur and professional, who believed that a survey of 18,000 voters at 130 polling stations would fail to catch the Lib Dem surge. In fact, it turned out to be remarkably prescient.

An eleventh-hour surge of voters, Lib Dem or otherwise, did, however, surprise election officials across the country. Queues of voters, some who had been waiting up to an hour, were turned away from polling stations in Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester, Chester, Lewisham and Hackney. There, officials applied the letter of the law and closed the door on anyone who had not been admitted and received a ballot paper. Their counterparts in Newcastle and Sutton Coldfield defied electoral law and stayed open past 10pm to let people vote. The scenes of chaos, to which the police were called in some cases, triggered a review by the Electoral Commission that could have far-reaching implications for the way Britain votes.

Britain woke on May 7 to a landscape unfamiliar to this generation of politicians. There was no clear winner and each party leader had reason to feel disappointed. Mr Cameron had failed to translate an economic crisis and weariness with 13 years of Labour into an overall Tory majority. Mr Brown had polled 29 per cent, only marginally above the party's disastrous showing in 1983, and had lost 91 seats. For all the enthusiasm that surrounded Mr Clegg during the campaign, he had lost five seats.

Voters had handed them not just the first hung Parliament for 36 years, but the most complicated Commons arithmetic since the 1920s. Mr Cameron, with 306 seats, was well short of the 326 that guaranteed a Commons majority. To soldier on alone as a minority government, he would at least need an assurance of broad Liberal Democrat support, known as a "confidence and supply" arrangement, under which the third party would not stand in the way of a Budget or Queen's Speech in return for some concessions.

On the other side, Labour, with 258 seats, and the Liberal Democrats, with 57, were also well short of being able to form a Lib-Lab pact that commanded a Commons majority. The only certainty was that the Queen would not be receiving any of the party leaders this post-election Friday. Instead, she, and the rest of the country, witnessed an extraordinary three-act drama played out across Westminster as the three leaders began to play the hands dealt them by voters.

Mr Clegg moved first. Arriving at Liberal Democrat headquarters in Cowley Street after taking the dawn train from his constituency in Sheffield, he said that Mr Cameron had the right to try first to form a government. It was a momentous nod, but one that he had set himself up for by insisting during the campaign that he would respect the rights of the party that won the most seats and most votes.

Mr Brown was not for giving in. He pre-empted a Tory response with a brazen assertion of prime ministerial power, emerging from the front door of No 10 to remind the country that he remained in charge. He said his two leadership rivals should take as much time as they felt necessary to see if they could reach a deal. “For my part, I should make clear that I would be willing to see any of the party leaders.”

Within the hour, Mr Cameron was making what he called “a big, open and comprehensive offer to the Liberal Democrats”. Speaking at the St Stephen’s Club in the shadow of a portrait of Churchill, himself at different times a Liberal and a Conservative, Mr Cameron sketched out a possible deal for “collaborative government” between the parties. He did not use the word coalition. After a night grappling with the possibilities, though, that was what he was pitching.

With theatrical timing, Saturday required the three leaders to attend the Cenotaph for the 65th anniversary of VE-Day. Normal service would have seen the Prime Minister approach to lay his wreath first, followed by the two other party leaders in turn. The occasion was choreographed, though, to reflect the election result: the three approached the Cenotaph together. The body language ranged from uncertain to icy.

The first public sign of the talks came on Sunday when the negotiating teams – William Hague, George Osborne, Oliver Letwin and Ed Llewellyn for the Tories; Danny Alexander, Chris Huhne, David Laws and Andrew Stunell for the Lib Dems – arrived at the Cabinet Office. The arrangement for the use of government property with civil servants on hand to answer questions about policies and costings was a first, codified in advance by Sir Gus O’Donnell, the Cabinet Secretary, in preparation for just such an electoral outcome.

To the background clatter of news helicopters overhead, a crowd of political tourists joined reporters outside the teal door of 70, Whitehall, to await news of who would govern and how. The parties left after nearly six hours without a deal. Meanwhile, ominously for the Tories, Mr Brown returned from Scotland and went almost immediately into a meeting with Mr Clegg at the Foreign Office. Cabinet ministers, including Lord Mandelson, Lord Adonis, Alan Johnson, Ben Bradshaw and Peter Hain were offering increasingly vocal support for the idea of a “rainbow coalition” of Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the nationalist parties and independents. It was clear that Mr Clegg was making Mr Cameron sweat.

Tory perspiration turned to desperation on Monday when Mr Brown played his final card. After two further conversations with Mr Clegg, he stood in Downing Street to announce that the Liberal Democrats wanted to open formal talks with Labour and that he intended to step down. His announcement reversed the chronology of his discussions with Mr Clegg. The Liberal Democrat leader had made clear during the campaign that he could not prop up a defeated Mr Brown in Downing Street. The Prime Minister’s departure, even if at a later date, was a pre-requisite for the start of Lib-Lab talks.

Nonetheless, Mr Brown’s bombshell took the Tories by surprise. Labour, it turned out, had sent its own team of negotiators – Lord Mandelson, Lord Adonis, Ed Balls and Ed Miliband – to talk to the Liberal Democrats on Saturday. Throughout the weekend senior Liberal Democrats, including Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon, Charles Kennedy, Sir Menzies Campbell and Vince Cable,

had been urging Mr Brown to budge and thus usher in the “progressive alliance” or realignment of the Left that they, in varying degrees, had devoted their political lives to achieving. The message received in Downing Street from the senior Lib Dems was clear: we do not want to go into coalition with the Tories.

Mr Cameron and those around him had woken on Monday believing that they were heading to Downing Street. Despite offering Mr Clegg a referendum on the alternative vote system and Cabinet seats, they went to bed fearing that they were out of the game. The proposed Lib-Lab deal hit immediate problems, however, on the Tuesday morning. First, senior Labour figures including David Blunkett and John Reid hit the airwaves to warn that the country would not wear what was being dubbed a “coalition of the losers”. The maths were also against it: adding the three Welsh nationalists, four non-Unionist Ulster MPs, one independent Unionist and Britain’s first Green MP to the Labour and Lib Dem ranks gave such a coalition only 324 MPs, hardly the basis for stable government.

Secondly, the two parties’ negotiating teams fared badly. Labour subsequently accused the Liberal Democrats of making unrealistic spending demands; the Liberal Democrats accused Labour of posturing and failing to take them seriously. The upshot was that shortly after lunch, the Tory and Liberal Democrat negotiating teams were back in the Cabinet Office. There, they hammered out terms of a seven-page document that expressed where they agreed and where the Lib Dems would be allowed to opt out of government policy, such as on the future of Trident.

With every passing minute it became clearer that whatever emerged, Labour had lost the negotiations as well as the election. Mr Brown gathered his entourage in Downing Street for his farewell. With the sun beginning to set, and stung by accusations that in fulfilling his constitutional role to remain Prime Minister until an alternative emerged he had tried to cling to office, Mr Brown’s dignity could wait no longer.

In a telephone conversation with Mr Clegg, witnessed by the photographer Martin Argles who was in No 10 to record Mr Brown’s final hours for posterity, the Prime Minister said: “Nick, Nick, I can’t hold on any longer. Nick, I’ve got to go to the Palace. The country expects me to do that. I have to go. The Queen expects me to go. I can’t hold on any longer.”

In Downing Street he ended 13 years of Labour rule that had begun with Tony Blair being cheered from Whitehall to the front door of No 10. In a moment of poignant self-awareness, he said that the job had taught him about the best in human nature and about its frailties “including my own”.

He and his wife, Sarah, walked to the waiting car holding hands with their two sons, John and Fraser, a very rare sight of the family together after years in which the Browns had protected their sons’ privacy.

Within the hour Mr Cameron travelled from a Buckingham Palace bathed in late evening sunshine to the gloom of Downing Street at dusk. He arrived as the youngest Prime Minister since 1812, the twelfth to serve under Elizabeth II and the first Tory for 31 years to depose a Labour prime minister.

How the polls really got it right

Andrew Cooper

Founder of Populus

The 2010 general election saw more opinion polls published than ever before – more than 90 polls during the course of the campaign: a rate of about three per day. Nearly half of these were from one organisation, YouGov, who produced a daily poll for *The Sun*, but during the campaign 11 different research companies produced voting polls.

The polling organisations between them used every conceivable mode of interviewing voters and deployed a wide range of ways to weight and adjust their data. These differing approaches, however, produced a fairly consistent picture as the election campaign kicked off, with the Conservatives 7 to 10 per cent ahead of Labour and the Liberal Democrats about a further 10 per cent behind. The polling story of the campaign was the subsequent abrupt surge in Liberal Democrat support, and its failure to materialise on election day.

Several polls picked up a growing frustration among many voters during the first week of the campaign. Even before the first TV debate the Populus poll for *The Times* published on April 14 found that more voters were hoping that the election would result in a hung Parliament than in a Conservative or Labour majority. The same poll found 75 per cent thinking that it was “time for a change from Labour”, but only 34 per cent that it was also “time for a change to the Conservatives”; two fifths of the electorate wanting change, but unsure which party, if any, they trusted to deliver the kind of change they wanted. Furthermore, only 6 per cent of voters felt that the main parties were being completely honest about their plans for dealing with the deficit and only 4 per cent that they were being honest about their tax plans. These findings to a great extent defined the mood of the voters.

The first debate resulted in one of the most dramatic swings in party support ever seen, with the Liberal Democrats jumping by about 10 per cent more or less literally overnight, with the gain coming slightly more from the Conservatives than from Labour. There were nearly 40 polls published between the end of the first debate and the end of the third debate and the Lib Dems were in the lead in five of them and in second place, ahead of Labour, in all but four. When, on the stroke of 10pm on election night, the exit poll predicted that the Liberal Democrats would end up with fewer MPs than at the previous election it was met with widespread incredulity because it seemed irreconcilable with the consensus of pre-election polls. The exit poll turned out, of course, to be right.

Close analysis suggests that Lib Dem poll support was always frothy: it relied heavily on strong support from younger voters and people who had not voted at the previous election, groups that in past elections have been disproportionately likely to end up not voting at all. Most polls are weighted to take account of how likely respondents say they are to vote, but there is a tendency for people to overstate their own probability of voting and there is little or nothing pollsters can do systematically to compensate for those who insist that they are certain to vote and then do not.

Polls during the campaign also consistently suggested that Lib Dem support was softer: those saying that they were going to vote Lib Dem were also consistently more likely than Labour or Conservative voters to say that they had not definitely decided and may end up voting differently. The implication of these findings was that the election result was always likely to be worse for the Lib Dems than the mid-campaign polls implied. But voting polls are heavily modelled these days, applying adjustments intended to project what the result will look like, not just present a snapshot of responses. This means that by the end of the campaign the polls ought to have reflected the underlying softness in Lib Dem support in a lower vote share, and that did not happen. Furthermore all the opinion polls overstated support for the Lib Dems: if the polls overall were performing properly they

should have scattered either side of the result, with some understating Lib Dem support, and that did not happen either.

There is some evidence that the swing away from the Lib Dems mainly occurred in the final 24 hours, too late to be properly reflected in the final pre-election polls. The *Times* poll published on election day, for example, put support for the Conservatives on 37 per cent (which is what they got), Labour on 28 per cent (they got 30 per cent) and Lib Dems on 27 per cent (they got 23.5 per cent). Fieldwork for this poll was done on the Tuesday and Wednesday before the election and the two halves of the sample produced revealingly different results. The 1,500 interviews conducted on Tuesday, May 4, would, if presented separately, have shown the Conservatives on 35 per cent, Labour on 26 per cent and Lib Dems on 29 per cent. But among the 1,000 people interviewed on Wednesday, May 5, the Conservatives were on 38 per cent, Labour on 30 per cent and the Lib Dems on 24 per cent. Conducting fieldwork over a longer timeframe – two or three days, rather than one – generally improves the chances of a poll sample being properly representative, capturing the views of busy and harder-to-reach voters. In this case it may have helped to obscure a very late swing away from the Lib Dems, principally to Labour.

It was not all bad news for the pollsters. All but one of the nine organisations that produced a poll on election eve came within 2 per cent of the Conservative share, five were within 1 per cent and two got it exactly right. All but two of the final polls came within 2 per cent of the Labour share and two were within 1 per cent. Overall it was not as good a performance as 2005, when the polls as a whole were more accurate than ever before, but it was better than at many other elections.

A tremor that changed the political landscape

Peter Riddell

Chief Political

Commentator

The general election of May 6, 2010 was one of the most enthralling and exciting in living memory. Yet the dramas of the televised leaders' debates and of the negotiations leading to the creation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government have tended to obscure the big changes in voting patterns.

Although the Conservatives failed to secure an overall Commons majority, they still gained 100 seats and one of the largest swings of votes ever recorded. There were big variations in party performance in different parts of the country, and all three main parties both gained and lost seats. In detail, the election was notable for a big increase in turnout of 3.7 points up to 65.1 per cent. This was still well below the levels familiar before 2001 (a range of 71 to 79 per cent between 1955 and 1997) but it partly reversed the sharp decline in 2001, down to 59.4 per cent, with just a small recovery to 61.4 per cent in 2005. The Conservatives boosted their share of the vote by 3.7 points to 36 per cent. With the higher turnout, this gave them nearly 2 million more votes, up to 10.71 million. This was a clear 2 million ahead of Labour, which suffered a decline of nearly 1 million in its vote to 8.6 million. Its share of the vote fell by 6.2 points to 29 per cent, its lowest since 1983.

Many Labour MPs were relieved that the party had not done worse, partly because of fears towards the end of the campaign that it might come third in share of the votes and win only 200 to 220 MPs. Labour also did well in the borough elections in inner London and in district elections in some northern and big cities. But May 6 was still the party's second worst performance since 1918 and most of its gains achieved since the early 1990s in the Midlands and southern England outside the big cities were reversed.

More than a third of voters, 35 per cent, voted for parties other than the Tories and Labour, the highest proportion since 1918. Conversely, the creation of the coalition means that, together, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats won, at 59 per cent, the highest percentage of the vote for any new government since 1945. The Liberal Democrats managed to raise their vote by nearly 850,000 to 6.83 million, an increase of 1 point to 23 per cent. The Democratic Unionists are now the second largest opposition party, although with just eight MPs after Peter Robinson, their leader and the First Minister, lost his seat to the Alliance party, which gained its first Westminster MP.

The Scottish Nationalists were unchanged on six seats (although they did lose a by-election gain) with Plaid Cymru on three seats. The UK Independence Party did, as usual in general elections, much less well than in the previous European Parliament elections, but boosted its vote by a third to 917,832, an increase of 0.9 points to 3.1 per cent. This partly reflected a rise of 62 in its number of candidates up to 558.

The British National Party, with 220 more candidates, at 339, nearly tripled its vote to 564,000, a rise of 1.2 points to 1.9 per cent. The Greens, who gained their first MP, maintained their vote in absolute terms at 286,000, but had a 0.1 point decline in share to 1 per cent.

The Conservatives always faced an uphill struggle to win an overall Commons majority. Their starting point of 198 MPs was less than Labour at its lowest point in 1983 of 209. Even after adjusting for the boundary changes that came into force in the May 2010 election and produced a notional gain for the Conservatives up to 209, the party still faced a huge mountain.

The swing of 4.9 per cent from Labour to the Tories was the third largest since 1945, exceeded only by the huge 10.2 per cent swing to Labour in the Blair landslide in 1997 and the 5.3 per cent swing to the Tories under Margaret Thatcher in 1979. The May 6 swing was exactly the same as the

late Sir Edward Heath achieved when winning office in 1970, but it was still not enough to produce an overall Conservative majority, given the number of seats that had to be won.

The Tory share of votes cast, at 36 per cent, was the party's lowest lower for a century and a half, apart from the three Blair victories in 1997, 2001 and 2005. The most comparable performances were in the 1920s, another era of three-party politics. The Tories won 37 to 38 per cent of the total votes cast in three of the four general elections in the 1920s.

Nevertheless, the Conservatives gained a net 96 seats, rising to 306, only 20 short of an overall majority. This involved 100 gains and four losses (all but one to the Liberal Democrats). This is the largest number of seats gained by the Conservatives at a single general election since 1931 after the collapse of the Labour Government. It exceeds the 62 seats gained by Mrs Thatcher in 1979 and the 58 gained in 1983; and, in its turn, is exceeded only by Labour's 236 gains in 1945 and 147 in 1997.

Labour lost a net 90 MPs, with 94 losses and four gains (including from independents in Blaenau Gwent and Bethnal Green & Bow). This is by far the worst Labour performance since its debacle in 1931, when it was reduced to just 52 MPs. Since the 1945 election, the biggest Labour losses of seats have been 78 MPs in 1950, 76 in 1970, and 60 in 1983.

The Lib Dems suffered a net loss of 5 seats, down to 57. This involved a loss of 13 seats (all but one to the Tories) and a gain of 8 (5 from Labour and 3 from the Tories).

One of the most striking features of election night was how the Tories won seats very high up on their target list but failed to win ones lower down, the mirror image of the Labour performance. For instance, the Tories captured Cannock Chase on a 14 per cent swing, but failed to take Birmingham Edgbaston, which required a swing of only 2 per cent. Gisela Stuart, the victor in Edgbaston, was one of the heroines in being an early winner in the Blair landslide of 1997 and, apart from a brief period as a minister, she has been an independent-minded backbencher, notably on Europe.

Of the 116 gains needed to win an overall majority, the Tories failed to capture 34, nearly half of which were successfully retained by the Lib Dems. The Lib Dems' net loss of seats was disappointing to them after the high expectations produced by Nick Clegg's success in the television debates. Yet the party did well in resisting the broader pro-Tory swing, notably in some of the top 30 Tory targets, such as Cheltenham, Somerton & Frome, Eastleigh, Westmoreland & Lonsdale, Carshalton & Wallington and Taunton Deane (three held by future ministers in the coalition Government). The Tories also failed to win any of their target seats from the SNP.

The other Labour seats to hold out against the trend were Westminster North (held by Karen Buck against the controversial Tory barrister Joanne Cash), Eltham, Bradford West, Hammersmith, Halifax, Gedling, Poplar & Limehouse (where Jim Fitzpatrick easily saw off George Galloway, the former Respect MP), Elmet & Rothwell (where Ed Balls held on after a fierce campaign), Tynemouth, Bolton West and Bolton North East.

Labour did worse in England (down 7.4 points) and slightly worse in Wales (down 6.5 points) than it did nationwide (down 6.2 points), but managed to improve its relative share in Scotland by 3.1 points compared with 2005. In England, the best Labour performances were in London, where the swing to the Tories was just 2.5 per cent, half the UK average. This explains its success in holding on, against the trend, to the seats mentioned above, as well as in seeing off Lib Dem challenges in Islington South and the new Hampstead & Kilburn seat (where Glenda Jackson beat her Tory challenger by 42 votes in a tight three-way contest).

Labour's vote fell by 2.3 per cent in London, but 8.2 per cent elsewhere in England and, apart from Battersea, the Tory gains were concentrated in a band on the northwest of the capital, from Brentford & Isleworth, via Ealing Central & Acton, up to Harrow East and Hendon. Labour did well in seats with a large Muslim population, where the party suffered in 2005 because of the Iraq war, such as some in East London where Respect had done well in 2005 (East Ham, West Ham and Bethnal Green & Bow).

Outside London and the big industrial cities and towns of the North Labour did very badly along the motorway belts and in the East and West Midlands (together accounting for a third of their losses). Labour lost Middle England (but not Scotland and, partly, Wales) where Tony Blair's new Labour did so well in the 1990s. The map shows vividly how Labour was wiped out in the Medway towns, where it just held on in 2005 (Chatham & Aylesford, Dartford, Gillingham & Rainham); and on the other side of the Thames in Essex (Basildon South & Thurrock East, Thurrock, and Harlow); in its 1997 gains along the South Coast (Brighton Kemptown, Dover, Hastings & Rye, Hove, and Dorset South); in the southern East Midlands (both Milton Keynes and Northampton seats, Nuneaton and Rugby); in a belt of more than a dozen seats from Worcestershire up around Birmingham and into Staffordshire, Derbyshire and the northern East Midlands (such as Burton, Cannock Chase, Corby, Derbyshire South, Erewash, High Peak, Leicestershire North West, Lincoln, Stafford, Tamworth, Warwick & Leamington, Warwickshire North, Wolverhampton South West, Worcester and Redditch); in South Yorkshire and Humberside (Brigg & Goole and Cleethorpes); and then in an unbroken group on either side of the Pennines (Colne Valley, Dewsbury, Keighley, Pendle, Pudsey, Rossendale & Darwen and South Ribble).

This analysis is reinforced by a social breakdown by Ipsos MORI, based on its campaign polls weighted to reflect the final result. This suggests that Labour lost the support of skilled manual workers, the C2s, by a huge 18 points on the 2005 election. The switch was even sharper among C2 women. This is classic aspirational Britain, highlighted by Lord Radice, the Labour peer and former MP who produced a detailed analysis for the Fabian Society after Labour lost in 1992. Entitled *Southern Discomfort*, this showed why the party was out of touch with the interests and hopes of this group: a problem that Mr Blair successfully addressed in 1997.

One of the perennial complaints of the Tories is that the electoral system is biased against them because of the way that boundary changes work. They point to the much larger number of votes required to elect a Tory MP compared with a Labour MP, and hence the much larger vote share required for a Tory majority.

This is only partly true. On average, seats won by the Conservatives had larger electorates than those won by Labour by a margin of 3,750: 72,350 to 68,600. But there is an uneven pattern: only four of the ten constituencies with the largest electorates are Tory held, six are Labour held. The main explanation is differential turnout where there is a much larger gap. For instance, the turnout in seats that the Tories won was 68.4 per cent, but it was only 61 per cent in those held by Labour. Hence the proposal by the Conservatives, reaffirmed by the coalition agreement, to equalise the size of constituencies will only partly address the imbalance in the system against the Tories because it will not and cannot address the issue of differential turnout.

The three safest seats in the country are held by Labour in Merseyside: Liverpool Walton, Liverpool West Derby and Knowsley. The safest Tory seat is Richmond, North Yorkshire, held by William Hague. (All three of the main leaders at the election had above-average personal results in their constituencies.) Five seats have majorities of under 100: Hampstead & Kilburn (Lab, 42); Warwickshire North (C, 54); Camborne & Redruth (C, 66); Bolton West (Lab, 92); Thurrock (C, 92); and the narrowest of all in Northern Ireland, where Sinn Féin held Fermanagh & South Tyrone by only 4 votes.

The election saw a further slight improvement in the gender and ethnic balance among candidates, even slighter among MPs. Just over a fifth of candidates were women: at 20.8 per cent, this represented a slight improvement on the figure of 20.3 per cent in 2005. About 30 per cent of Labour's candidates were women, against 24 per cent of Tories and 22 per cent of Lib Dems.

Just over a fifth (22 per cent) of the new MPs are women: at 142 the highest number and share ever. There are 48 Tory women MPs, 31 more than in 2005. The number of Labour women MPs is 17 less than in 2005 because of the party's overall losses but, at 81, it is still well over half the total. The Lib Dems continue to perform poorly, with just seven women MPs.

A total of 26 MPs are from minority ethnic groups. The Tory total rose from two to eleven, while Labour numbers rose by two to fifteen. There are still no Lib Dem ethnic minority MPs.

The inconclusive result of the 2010 election leaves intriguing prospects for the next one. The Tories require a further two-point swing from Labour to gain an overall majority and Labour requires a swing from the Tories of 5 per cent to return to power with an absolute majority (exactly the same as the swing against it on May 6).

Who cares what the papers say?

Alexi Mostrous

Media Editor

In 2005, *The Sun* decided that the general election was so boring that it needed to employ a Page 3 girl to represent each of the three main parties. The paper followed up by announcing support for Mr Blair with a puff of red smoke from an office chimney. Five years on there were no such stunts. Political reporting was re-energised as Labour sought an historic fourth term. As doubts over David Cameron's prospects of victory increased, editors flooded pages with election copy. In the month before polling day on May 6, national newspapers printed 11,017 stories mentioning the election, compared with 9,263 during the same period in 2005.

After two elections in which the majority of the press supported Tony Blair and new Labour – overwhelmingly in 2001, begrudgingly in 2005 – Gordon Brown entered this campaign without the unequivocal support of a single national daily newspaper. *The Sun* abandoned Mr Brown in September 2009, defecting on the day of his speech to the annual Labour Party conference. After more than a decade of supporting Mr Blair, the News Corporation publication offered its 7½ million readers the front-page headline: “Labour’s Lost It”. The paper spent the next seven months gleefully capitalising on Mr Brown’s unpopularity. A story in April revealed that even Peppa Pig, the children’s television character, had apparently “turned her back” on Labour.

Less than a week before polling day, *The Times* came out for the Tories for the first time in 18 years. In a fullpage editorial, the paper said that Mr Cameron had shown the “fortitude, judgment and character to lead this country”. After supporting Labour in the past four general elections, the *Financial Times* also concluded that “on balance, the Conservative Party best fits the bill”. Less surprisingly, *The Daily Telegraph*’s 2 million readers were encouraged, for the 18th consecutive time since 1945, to vote Tory, as were the *Daily Mail*’s 5 million.

In perhaps the most significant change, *The Guardian* decided to switch its support from Labour to the Liberal Democrats. “Invited to embrace five more years of a Labour government, and of Gordon Brown as prime minister, it is hard to feel enthusiasm,” the paper told its million readers. Even the *Daily Mirror*, Labour’s most loyal supporter since 1945, urged some of its 3.3 million readers to vote tactically for the Lib Dems.

At the same time, media cognoscenti were calling time on the very relevance of the press. Nick Clegg had supposedly broken the two-party mould with his barnstorming appearance in the first party leaders’ debate on ITV. Like Susan Boyle before him, a virtuoso performance seemed to catapult Mr Clegg into the nation’s consciousness. Unlike Susan Boyle, good first impressions did not translate into votes. The Lib Dem leader’s approval ratings jumped by 11 percentage points but subsequently fell back, with the party winning fewer seats although more votes than in 2005.

Part of that disparity may be explained by the barrage of anti-Clegg stories unleashed by right-leaning newspapers after the first debate on April 15. On the morning of the second debate, the *Telegraph* used a massive front-page headline to reveal that some Liberal Democrat donors had been paying money directly into Mr Clegg’s bank account. He produced bank statements showing that these were to fund part of a researcher’s salary. The *Daily Mail* upped the ante with a front page accusing Mr Clegg of a “Nazi Slur”. The story was based on remarks he made in 2002, when he wrote that Britain had a “more insidious...cross to bear” than Germany over Nazism. The scoop drew ire from Mr Clegg’s supporters, who pointed out that the *Mail*’s website at one point carried no fewer than eight anti-Clegg stories.

Private Eye provided some light relief. “Is Clegg A Poof?” ran a fake *Sun* headline in the satirical magazine. “Voting For Clegg Will Give You Cancer,” a fake *Mail* page warned. “And Cause Collapse In House Prices.”

Many journalists expressed excitement at Mr Clegg's elevation, however, not least because it added to the tantalisingly vague prospect of a hung Parliament. Nick Robinson, the BBC's political editor, told the Radio 4 *Today* programme that Cleggmania was "the reason people in our business are getting so excited". *The Sunday Times* ran a front-page story on a YouGov poll showing Mr Clegg to be more popular than Winston Churchill.

Whether the attacks on Mr Clegg had a significant effect is arguable. They may have slowed some of his momentum and left voters in doubt as to his party's ability to govern. Perhaps more likely is that voters showed themselves more influenced by sustained media exposure in the years before an election, which the Lib Dems have never enjoyed, than by a one-off television performance, however impressive. With Mr Clegg as Deputy Prime Minister, that disparity is likely to be corrected.

Mr Cameron and Mr Brown were convinced that newspapers move votes. Yet as Roy Greenslade, Professor of Journalism at City University, points out, the press has been mostly pro-Tory since 1945, but Labour has won more elections. According to an Ipsos MORI poll cited by Professor Greenslade, between 20 and 30 per cent of *Daily Mail* readers consistently voted Labour between 1997 and 2005, despite the paper's protestations. In 2010, however, the result may have been more similar to 1992, when only 14 per cent voted for Neil Kinnock.

Times readers appear to be even more independent: 64 per cent agreed with the paper when it advised them to vote Tory in 1992, according to Ipsos MORI, but in 2001, when the paper came out for Labour, 40 per cent of readers still said that they would support the Tories.

About 45 per cent of *Sun* readers pledged to vote Tory in 1992, when the paper put Neil Kinnock's head in a light bulb on polling day and ran the headline: "If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain turn out the lights." In contrast, only 29 per cent said that they would vote Conservative when the paper supported Mr Blair in 2001. A similar swing back to the Tories this year may have carried influence, especially in marginal seats.

Readers themselves do not consider newspapers to be influential at all. A survey by *Press Gazette* in March suggested that nine out of ten voters believed that their vote would be unaffected by any media organisation. Editors have to hope that Anthony Wells, a political commentator for YouGov, is right when he says: "The real impact is more subconscious, the long-term drip-drip of positive or negative coverage."

The great irony about reporting this election is found in the numerous editorials warning voters against a hung Parliament. In the event, the actual outcome of 2010 was one that no newspaper, save *The Independent*, endorsed.

And the winner is...television

Andrew Billen

Television Critic

The sky was dusty with volcanic ash and the airwaves thick with politics. Yet for a while the electorate refused to inhale. In a multichannel world, it is easy to avoid the news, easier still the election specials. ITV's studio debates, *Campaign 2010 with Jonathan Dimbleby*, lost rather than gained audience as the election wore on. The regular political gabfests, BBC One's *Question Time* and *The Andrew Marr Show*, suffered dwindling not growing viewing figures. It was like soccer fans turning off *Match of the Day* during the World Cup.

If, like the grounded aeroplanes, the campaign was going to take off, it would take something new, and something different. It was supplied by three live, 90-minute election debates agreed between the politicians and networks after tortuous discussion. Their order having been decided by lottery, the first, ITV's on April 15, centred on domestic policy. Its MC, Alastair Stewart, proclaimed it historic. Its 9.5 million viewers – a figure that would not disgrace a Saturday night *Britain's Got Talent* – apparently agreed. But even Stewart could not have predicted that the commentariat and the focus-grouped would independently declare a clear winner in the Liberal Democrats' Nick Clegg or that his party's trend in the polls would go vertical. The debate was declared a “game changer”.

As talent contests, the following debates on April 22 and April 29 were less decisive, mainly because, what by now could be seen as Clegg's challengers, Gordon Brown and, especially, David Cameron got better at them. Mr Cameron particularly mastered the “trick” of addressing the camera lens directly, a technique pioneered more than 50 years ago when hosts of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* realised that faced with the choice of addressing the stalls or the nation's sitting rooms it was wise to talk to the many not the few.

The second debate, focusing on foreign policy and held by Sky News, was a success for a channel whose political editor, Adam Boulton, had campaigned hard for them to happen. Its 4.4 million viewers was a record audience for a Sky News production. Ofcom, the regulator, received many hundreds of complaints, however, mainly because Boulton, as chairman, broke protocol by asking a question of his own. Most confidently staged was the BBC's final “economic crisis debate”, although it attracted fewer viewers than the first. Its experienced host, David Dimbleby, intervened more than either Stewart or Boulton, but only to repeat his audience's questions. In future such debates may have less constricted or more varied formats. It is, surely, impossible to imagine an election happening without them.

With even Jeremy Paxman's traditional roastings of the leaders producing few headlines, only once outside the set-pieces did television change the agenda, and then it was by accident. A Sky News radio mike was left on and attached to Mr Brown as he sped from an unsatisfactory encounter with a pensioner supporter. She was, he told an aide, a “bigoted woman”. Within hours, his remarks were played back to him on Jeremy Vine's Radio Two show. The camera showed him head in hands. After a self-immolating visit to Mrs Duffy's home in Rochdale, Mr Brown emerged before more cameras bashfully declaring himself a sinner but a penitent one. The mini-soap looked a disaster for Mr Brown, but, as it turned out, his ratings had nowhere further to fall.

The election night programmes for the first time featured an exit poll jointly paid for by the BBC, ITV and Sky. Its prediction of a hung Parliament, with Mr Cameron short of an overall majority by 19, was initially treated with scepticism by the studio pundits, mainly because it insisted that the Lib Dems' representation in Westminster would decline. It proved almost uncannily accurate. The result was so close that BBC One's election programme, which began at 9.55pm on the Thursday did not end until 8.45am on the Friday. David Dimbleby, showing stamina uncommon in a septuagenarian, resumed his anchorman's seat at 11am and carried on until 4pm. His efforts, showcased in a huge glass

set built in Television Centre, earned the BBC more than 4 million viewers overnight. ITVI's show, hosted by Alastair Stewart, attracted only an average of 1.26 million and was beaten by a satirical commentary on the results from Channel 4. Sky News did worse than it had five years before, its 111,000 viewers probably depleted by its new-fangled HD transmission causing its sound to ride out of synch.

And so, like the old politics, the senior mass medium endured. Just as there was no decisive breakthrough for the third party, there was none for multichannel or the blogosphere. Had television turned the election into a beauty contest? By the end it appeared more likely that its debates had found a new way to scrutinise not only character but policy and that those of each contestant had been found wanting. The Friday after polling day, Sandy Toksvig, chairwoman of Radio Four's *The News Quiz*, made the Nick Clegg/*Britain's Got Talent* comparison explicit. We saw someone new, liked what we heard but, in the end, decided to vote for someone else. At least, however, by then we knew whom we were voting for. After a foggy start, it was a good election for television.

It will never be the same again

Daniel Finkelstein

Executive Editor

On Friday, May 7, 2010 David Cameron, the Leader of the Opposition, woke from a very short night's sleep and made an historic decision. It was one that would propel him into 10 Downing Street within five days and would change British politics for ever. He was, he determined, going to attempt to form the first coalition government since the Second World War.

Mr Cameron had long thought a hung Parliament rather likely. The number of seats that the Tories would have to win to have an overall majority was daunting. But his team had not, as Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats had, spent a great deal of time agonising over what to do if it actually happened. Mr Cameron did not unveil a carefully developed plan. He acted on instinct.

But it was not just Mr Cameron's instinct that changed history. It was also the maths and Mr Clegg had always believed that the maths would be crucial. On May 7, the cold fact was that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives could together form a government with a majority of more than 80, but the Lib Dems and Labour would not have a majority even if they voted as a single block on everything.

So just before lunch on Friday, Mr Clegg arrived back at Lib Dem HQ and announced that he was sticking to the plan he had formulated before the election, one designed precisely for the sort of numerical position he was now in. He regarded the party with the largest support as having earned the right to seek to show that they were able to govern in the national interest. And that meant opening talks with the Conservatives.

What Mr Clegg had almost certainly not expected was Mr Cameron's response. The latter had quickly won support for coalition from his team, starting with his closest ally, George Osborne. Working with his adviser, Steve Hilton, he prepared a statement in which he said that while a mere pact with the Lib Dems was possible, he wanted to make a "big, open and comprehensive offer" to the third party. His aim: full coalition.

The negotiations began quickly, with the teams meeting that afternoon at the Cabinet Office for an initial session. Mr Osborne selected the venue. He wanted the Lib Dems to be able to see power out of the window. And so, looking over the Downing Street garden and in a sweltering room where the central heating had broken, the teams began to talk. Danny Alexander, David Laws, Chris Huhne and Andrew Stunnell for the Lib Dems quickly came to see that Mr Cameron was serious. They realised that his negotiating team – Mr Osborne, William Hague, Edward Llewellyn and Oliver Letwin – had come ready to make big concessions. Perhaps they did not quite realise why. From the word go, Mr Cameron realised that he needed a deal, but he also saw the whole thing as an opportunity.

First, the necessity. The Cameron team thought that a minority government was a very grim prospect indeed. Having introduced unpopular measures to deal with the deficit, the Government could be turfed out at the worst possible political moment.

There was raw political calculation in this, of course, but also consideration of the national interest. A minority government would not survive for long. It would need, or be forced, to fight an early election, making it impossible to begin the difficult work that the next administration needs to undertake. So the negotiators found themselves in an ironic position. The Lib Dems wanted policy concessions but were politically nervous of a full-scale coalition. The Tories, whom everyone assumed would play it tough, wanted to make policy concessions so that a proper long-term partnership could be formed.

One issue remained difficult: electoral reform. The Tories were offering a free vote in the Commons on a referendum on the Alternative Vote and that was not enough. That, plus the emotional pull of Lib Dems towards the Left, sent Mr Clegg's team talking to Labour. For a brief period a new

Lib-Lab arrangement appeared a real possibility. But it was brief. Labour did not have the heart for it. Labour's negotiations – informally over the weekend and formally on the Monday after Gordon Brown announced his intention to resign – were half-hearted. They were not prepared to concede much, underestimated the progress the Lib Dems had made with the Tories, and thought that the numbers did not really stack up anyway.

It was also brief because the Tories made a big offer – a whipped vote to have a referendum on AV – and this offer, skilfully guided through the party in the hours after Mr Brown's departure had scared the Tories into imagining a Lib-Lab deal, brought Cameron not merely the premiership, but more besides: a great opportunity.

Finding it hard to gain even 40 per cent of the vote, the Conservative Party has, for years now, been threatened by the possible emergence of a unified progressive Left. Blair advisers such as Lord Mandelson and Lord Adonis have long seen this. They regard the split in the Left between Labour and the Liberals that took place at the beginning of the 20th century as having ushered in a Conservative century. They are probably correct. That split has been a very important reason for the election of Tory governments, particularly in the past 40 years.

If the Conservatives had won a small majority, it is not hard to imagine them being swept out in five years by an alliance, either explicit or implied, of Labour and Liberal Democrats. Something like that happened in 1997 and produced the Blair landslide. Now a combination of the new maths of the Commons and Cameron's boldness disrupted this and in doing so, changed politics for years. The Liberal Democrats have been picked up and put down in a different place, partly by Mr Clegg of course, but largely by a Cameron offer of partnership. The anti-Conservative majority is, in an extraordinary political coup, no longer an anti-Conservative majority. Things are more complicated now.

The second part of the opportunity relates to Mr Cameron's own party. Five years of work to rebrand the party did not change perceptions as much as his team had hoped. But now this. Mr Cameron has the potential to lift himself and the party above normal partisan politics.

And so, after some of the most dramatic days in modern politics, David Cameron found himself waving to the photographers outside No 10, flanked by Nick Clegg. But he has made a huge gamble. Could this move split his party? Might the Liberal Democrats prove not merely prickly partners, but impossible ones?

Unknown, unknowable. But this can be said with certainty. Politics has changed for ever.

Meet the Class of 2010, the new politics in person

Rachel Sylvester

Times columnist

There is a black-belt karate expert, a female football coach, a Mormon, a former television presenter and a bestselling author who has had the film rights to his life bought by Brad Pitt. A total of 232 new MPs were elected for the first time on May 6, 2010, including 147 Conservatives, 67 Labour members, 9 Liberal Democrats and the first representative of the Green Party, Caroline Lucas, who won in the Brighton Pavilion constituency.

They are the novices in the Virgin Parliament, the new boys and girls who were swept into Westminster on the wave of public revulsion that followed the expenses scandal in what was widely perceived to be a House of Whores. Some were elected purely as a result of the swing away from Labour to the Tories that came after 13 years of one party having been in power, but many replaced MPs who had either resigned or been voted out by an electorate angry about the duck houses, moats and mortgages. The turnover at the last election was unusually high. The result is that more than a third of those now sitting on the green benches in the House of Commons are innocent about the wiles of the whips, ignorant of parliamentary tricks and unequipped by the now-abolished John Lewis List. Half the Tory MPs have just been elected for the first time. The Class of 2010 is the physical embodiment of “a new politics”. They are younger on average than in 1997, the last time power changed hands: 34 per cent of the new MPs are aged in their thirties. There are more black and Asian faces on the green benches than ever before: 26 MPs from ethnic minorities and marginally more women. Three Muslim women were elected, including the bright and beautiful Rushanara Ali, who regained Bethnal Green for Labour from the Respect party’s George Galloway.

Matthew Hancock, a former economist at the Bank of England who was an adviser to George Osborne before being elected Tory MP for West Suffolk at the election, says: “I’m 31 and I don’t feel particularly young. There’s a feeling of a huge generational shift.”

Michael Dugher, a former aide to Gordon Brown who is now Labour MP for Barnsley East, agrees. “People are very keen to learn the lessons of the past,” he says. “We are going to do things differently now. It is noticeable that the new MPs are hanging around with each other rather than the old hands. There is a togetherness about the new generation.”

As the new arrivals gathered for training sessions on parliamentary procedure, security and the expenses regime at the start of the new session, it became clear that whatever their party allegiances they were united by a determination to represent a clean break with the dirty past. Nicholas Boles, the new Conservative MP for Grantham and Stamford, who until recently worked for Boris Johnson and is seen as one of the party’s smartest policy brains, says: “Everybody is obsessed about not getting caught up in another expenses scandal. It is not that we are a bunch of selfrighteous men and women in white suits but there is an overwhelming feeling that that was terrible, that we are at the beginning of our careers and the last thing we want to do is to have even the slightest hint of anything improper.”

Among the new Tory and Liberal Democrat MPs there is a sense of excitement about the possibilities opened up by the coalition Government. One session of the induction course took place in the chamber and the two parties’ members drifted to the Government side and sat among each other, intermingled. “We chatted very easily and got on in a way that would have been much more difficult for the old guard on either side,” one Conservative member says.

The Class of 2010 is more professional than previous generations. About 20 per cent of the new MPs are defined as having come into the Commons from politics, having worked either as advisers or councillors, 15 per cent from business, 12 per cent consultancy, 12 per cent law and 10 per cent financial services. Only 6 per cent have come in from charities, 5 per cent from the education sector and 5 per cent from the media.

According to an analysis by the Sutton Trust, an educational charity, 35 per cent of MPs in the new Parliament went to independent schools. More than half of Conservative MPs were educated privately and 20 out of the 306 on the Tory benches went to one school – David Cameron's alma mater, Eton. On the Labour side, it is rather different. "There are a lot of regional accents, most of us are working class-made-good," says one new MP. Several union officials won seats, after a successful operation by Unite.

There does, though, also seem to be a hereditary principle at work in the House of Commons across the board. At least nine children of politicians were elected in 2010. They include Zac Goldsmith, the new Conservative MP for Richmond Park, who is the son of the late Referendum Party leader, Sir James Goldsmith; Ben Gummer, elected in Ipswich, the son of John Gummer, the former Tory Cabinet minister; and Anas Sarwar, who took over as Labour MP for Glasgow Central from his father, Mohammed Sarwar. Harriet Harman's husband, Jack Dromey, joins her in Parliament as MP for Birmingham Erdington and Valerie Vaz, Labour MP for Walsall South, is the sister of Keith Vaz, the longstanding Labour MP for Leicester East. Jacob Rees-Mogg, the son of the former *Times* Editor Lord Rees-Mogg, was elected in Somerset North East.

The new Conservative members are generally socially liberal and supportive of David Cameron's modernisation of their party. A few days after the election, the Tory leader held a meeting of all his new MPs and was rather astonished by the attitude he found. "The general mood of the group was that, if anything, we had not gone far enough on modernisation," one of those present says. "David said afterwards how remarkable it was, he was quite taken aback."

Like Mr Cameron, most of the new Conservative MPs, are also pretty Eurosceptic. According to George Eustace, the former campaign director of the anti-euro "no" campaign, who is now MP for Camborne and Redruth: "Most think we should be taking powers back from the EU, but the new intake is also very committed to the idea of social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups being involved in public services. The Iain Duncan Smith agenda is where traditional right-wing Conservatism can come together with the more liberal modernising wing of the party."

Other high-profile Tories include Rory Stewart, in Penrith and the Border, a former deputy governor of Iraq and bestselling author. He once walked across Afghanistan and also spent a summer as a tutor to Princes William and Harry. It is his life story that has been snapped up by Brad Pitt. Dan Byles, the new Tory MP for Warwickshire North, is almost as adventurous – he has rowed across the Atlantic and skied to the north pole with his mother.

Mr Goldsmith, the brother of Jemima Khan, will add a touch of glamour to the green benches, but could also clash with the leadership over green issues. Tracy Crouch, Tory MP for Chatham and Aylesford, is the qualified football coach. David Rutley, a former banker who represents Macclesfield, is the House of Commons's first Mormon. Helen Grant, in Maidstone and the Weald, is the first black woman Conservative MP. Dominic Raab, Tory MP for Esher and Walton, a lawyer by training, has represented Britain at karate.

On the Labour side there is a fighting spirit as well. Those to watch include Tristram Hunt, the television historian who has just been elected in Stoke-on-Trent Central, and Chuka Umunna, the new MP for Streatham, a former lawyer who has been described as a potential British Barack Obama. Rachel Reeves, in Leeds West, is a former Bank of England economist with a reforming zeal, and Gloria De Piero, who was until she became MP for Ashfield a GMTV presenter, is certain to attract plenty of attention. Two former ministers under Tony Blair who lost their seats in 2005 also returned to Parliament: Stephen Twigg in Liverpool West Derby and Chris Leslie in Nottingham East.

One new MP says: "It is nothing like 1997, when lots of people got in who never expected to. Everyone here now has got black under their fingernails from having scraped their way up. They are quite a brutal, hard-headed bunch. They don't look at the world through the prism of Blair-Brown or Left versus Right. They look at the world through the prism of Labour's defeat."

Whatever their party affiliation, those elected this year also look at the world through the prism of the MPs' expenses scandal. There is the possibility of a really quite dramatic change of culture, brought about by a younger, more independent-minded intake who are all too aware of voters' anger with politicians. Some of the Conservatives have been chosen in open primaries, which may make them less willing to toe the party line. Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs have used the election campaign to make clear their determination to alter the way in which politics is done. Across the board, the new intake is generally more receptive to constitutional reform, including changes to the voting system, than their parties' older grandees.

Just as the Blair Babes transformed how the House of Commons looked in 1997, bringing flashes of feminine colour to the rows of grey suits, so the Class of 2010 could alter for ever the way in which politics is conducted. One new Tory MP says: "We get the scale of the public's anger over the expenses scandal in a way that those who were in Parliament when it broke do not really get. We understand just how much change is needed."

Women failed to break through

Rosemary Bennett

Social Affairs Correspondent

The 2010 general election was, pretty much, a male affair. Senior women from the main parties were curiously absent from the campaign and silent during the rows that blew up over taxation and spending. Attention was resolutely focused on the three leaders as the TV debates dominated the campaign and, in the end, more column inches were devoted to their wives' outfits than equality.

At constituency level the story was not much better. In as many as 262 seats the three main parties all fielded male candidates, compared with just 11 seats where the main contenders were all women. The election was just too close to make gender an issue.

Not surprising, then, that there was no great breakthrough in the numbers of women entering Parliament. For all the talk of new dawns, it was old politics as usual when the 2010 intake took their seats for the first time. In terms of the numbers, there were 142 women MPs, compared with 126 in 2005, equivalent to 22 per cent of the total. That puts Britain on a par with the United Arab Emirates in terms of female representation.

The Conservatives made the most headway from their low base of just 18 MPs, 9 per cent of the parliamentary party, when the election was called. They emerged with 48 MPs, 16 per cent of the parliamentary party. Their success did not come easily. It was the result of considerable efforts, not in the approach to the election but throughout much of the previous Parliament, to make sure that a decent number of women candidates ended up in winnable seats.

For a while, they had the controversial "A" list comprising 50 per cent women from which the best seats were required to choose. In the end it was scrapped, such was its unpopularity, but it did help to boost the numbers. There was also a mentoring programme and, of course, plenty of encouragement from David Cameron.

In the end, though, it was not the sea change that the leadership had hoped for and privately senior party figures would admit that there was clearly farther to go.

Campaigners for equality worry that if this was the Conservatives' best chance to push the agenda then the results look particularly disappointing. "The Conservatives do deserve to be congratulated. They trebled the number of women MPs. But you cannot help being left with the feeling that they could have gone a lot further. They had a new leader, they were ahead in the polls. They might not have such a good opportunity in the future to push this agenda," Ceri Goddard, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, said.

Labour lost women MPs in terms of numbers, with 81 in the new Parliament compared with 94 in the last. In percentage terms the total rose slightly to 31 per cent from 27, largely owing to the party's use of all-women short lists in many winnable seats. That is unlikely to change in future elections.

The performance of the two main parties left the Lib Dems looking particularly feeble. They lost two of their already tiny pool of female MPs and now have only seven, equivalent to 12 per cent of the parliamentary party. Their poor record was underlined when the party had no woman MP senior enough to be in contention for the five Cabinet positions offered to the party under the deal.

Ms Goddard said that the Liberal Democrats were left looking very exposed, and had a fundamental problem if they were serious about increasing female representation. The party has an ideological opposition to positive action, a position backed powerfully by younger women in the party despite warnings from grandees such as Baroness Williams of Crosby that they will never get anywhere under existing procedures.

"To be fair to the party, they ran about half and half male and female candidates, but clearly the men were in the best seats. The party consistently refuses to adopt positive action to increase the

number of women, which we think is an odd position given they are the party of electoral reform,” Ms Goddard said.

So what do the new women MPs now amassed on the government benches want to do with their power?

Despite the derision of the Blair babes, Labour women used their numbers to push for more maternity leave and pay, and new rights for flexible work, very much bottom-up reforms. Conservative women say that they will push for even grater reform on flexible work so that as many men and women as possible can work part time and, perhaps surprisingly, equal pay. And they may make their presence felt most by opposing a key leadership policy, tax breaks for married couples, that many think is not the best use of money.

They may, however, have to expend their political capital in other ways too. There is already concern that the “new politics” of the coalition is perhaps not so much of an opportunity for women as a challenge. Women were absent from the coalition negotiations with both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats fielding all-male sides. And in the scramble for a workable deal between the parties, the argument for fair representation at Cabinet level was somehow lost.

The first coalition Cabinet had just four women, and only one running a big department, with Theresa May at the Home Office. Analysts say it was not a great start. “Cameron and Clegg were acutely aware they have very few women on which they could credibly draw,” said Colin Hay, Professor of political analysis at the University of Sheffield. “The politics of the past was gender discriminatory. The irony, in a way, is that the Cabinet remains a sort of last bastion of that old order.”

Bad news for big spenders: money can't buy you votes

Sam Coates

Chief Political Correspondent

For donors thinking of filling the coffers of Britain's political parties, there could be few worse advertisements than the previous Parliament. Three of its five years were stained by continuing police investigations; Scotland Yard interviewed a sitting Prime Minister for corruption offences; and more than half of its MPs had to hand back money after claiming for expenses they were not rightfully owed. Trust in politicians dropped to levels never seen before: only one in ten people thought MPs told the truth. Public antagonism was stoked by an often hostile media and insurgent blogosphere picking over the personal lives and motivations of public figures, especially donors who were often treated as if they had already been found guilty of paying for access to power.

Given the contempt with which so many politicians came to be held – one utterly blameless Lib Dem quit the Commons after his wife was spat on in the street – it is perhaps a surprise that just so many moneymen kept their faith and continued to write their cheques, mainly to the Conservatives. Over the course of the Parliament donors gave money to David Cameron at rates never seen before in British politics.

In his four years as Leader of the Opposition, from January 2006 to May 6, 2010, a record £122 million went through Tory coffers, by any international political yardstick an extraordinary amount. Barack Obama's presidential campaign committee in 2008 raised £450 million. That was to fund a campaign that won decisively in a country where campaigns hinge on TV advertising and with an electorate five times the size. In domestic terms this figure is also striking: Labour's income was £71 million over the same period, although £22 million of this came while Tony Blair was still in office. It also beats sums raised in previous Parliaments: the Tories' income was £49 million and Labour's £61 million between 2001 and 2005.

Perhaps more intriguing is the limited impact that this vast spending appeared to have. By Mr Cameron's own yardstick, set in a *Spectator* interview shortly before polling day, his own campaign was a failure. The Conservative vote increased by 3.8 percentage points on its 2005 vote: an increase of 2 million votes net, or, taking into account the higher number of votes received by rival parties, 1.1 million more than last time. In other words, every additional vote cost the Tories £111.

What is more, for the shrewd financial investor, the archetype of the modern Tory donor, the way the Conservative Party operated under the stewardship of Andy Coulson, Steve Hilton and ultimately George Osborne as general election co-ordinator, must have seemed horrific. At a national level, half a million pounds was gambled on cinema advertisements that were never shown, £400,000 on a January 2010 "cut the deficit not the NHS" poster campaign later disowned by some senior figures. About half a million was spent on a much-ridiculed "don't be a tosser" campaign on the national debt and the same sum again on a national newspaper campaign to recruit internet "friends of the Conservatives", which was never mentioned again by the leadership.

The previous Parliament brought the downsides of political giving into sharp relief. Of these, the loans-for-peerages saga, which overshadowed Mr Blair's final year in office, was perhaps the most seismic, involving the Prime Minister and senior staff, 136 people questioned by Scotland Yard's Special Crime Division, 6,300 documents handed to the Crown Prosecution Service and four people arrested, including a Downing Street aide at dawn. At its heart was an allegation, never tested in a court and strongly denied by all those involved, that Labour figures seduced wealthy donors with promises of peerages in return for vast secret loans to bankroll the party through the 2005 election campaign.

It came to light in 2006 after it emerged that four Labour supporters had been turned down for peerages by the House of Lords Appointments Commission. Chai Patel, the founder of the Priory

healthcare group, publicly complained after his application was leaked to a newspaper, then rejected. It soon emerged that three other businessmen were put forward for peerages – Sir David Garrard, Sir Gulam Noon, and Barry Townsley – having all made huge loans to Labour before the election at the behest of Lord Levy, Mr Blair's gregarious fundraiser. Sir Gulam even revealed that he had been told by Lord Levy to remove references to his £250,000 loan to Labour from his peerage application form.

Despite an ignominious political tradition of peerages for donors, epitomised by Harold Wilson's Lavender List, opposition MPs started complaining that there had been a breach of the Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925, introduced after David Lloyd George sold honours for cash. An initial inquiry by the Public Administration Committee was halted after Scotland Yard agreed to investigate a complaint by Angus MacNeil, a Scottish Nationalist MP. The police investigation was initially treated lightly by Downing Street, until a number of arrests culminating with that of Lord Levy, who was brought in for questioning. Ruth Turner, an aide to Mr Blair, was arrested at dawn and questioned under suspicion of perverting the course of justice. The inquiry had reached the heart of No 10. In December 2006 Mr Blair became the first serving Prime Minister in history to face a police interrogation, seeing officers three times in Downing Street.

Mr Blair's staff had raised the stakes, warning Scotland Yard that the Prime Minister would resign if he was arrested while in office. In fact, Mr Blair left office before the investigation was complete. After 16 months, the inquiry was dropped without charges by the Crown Prosecution Service. The CPS said that it had never intended to go to court unless there was "unambiguous agreement" between two people that a gift would be made in exchange for an honour, adding: "There is no direct evidence of any such agreement."

Officers in the Speciality Crime Unit, which had pursued the case, were unhappy. They believed that they had two strong pieces of evidence: the diary of Sir Christopher Evans, who loaned money to Labour and was later arrested, which detailed conversations with Lord Levy. Detectives believed that this provided "spectacular" evidence of what they interpreted as an agreement for Sir Christopher to be ennobled in return for the loan. Detectives had also discovered that Downing Street officials initially drew up a plan to give peerages to eight of the twelve businessmen who secretly bankrolled Labour's 2005 general election campaign: four more than had been thought.

The reason for the CPS decision, apparently late on in the investigation, to demand "unambiguous" evidence as the basis of a criminal case and thus rule out the use of the two strongly circumstantial pieces of evidence in police hands remains a mystery. The investigation, which spanned the transition of power from Mr Blair to Gordon Brown, highlighted the culture clash between politicians and police, with the friction between both sides often played out in the media. It highlighted the levels of ignorance among many officials about the electoral reforms Labour had brought in during the first Parliament but now showed little sign of bothering with. It also came as the Labour Party was adjusting to life without large numbers of individual donors, forcing a return to a reliance on trade unions.

By the end of the Parliament, notions of abandoning the union link, once aired by Blairites such as Alan Milburn, seemed fanciful. At the lowest point in its popularity early in 2008, union funding accounted for 92 per cent of donations to Labour, amid claims that the party was solvent only because of a guarantee from Unite, the super-union, that it would never allow it to go bust. In November 2007, it emerged that Labour's third biggest donor, David Abrahams, had concealed his identity and given hundreds of thousands of pounds in the names of his secretary and a builder, illegal under electoral law. Mr Abrahams, a colourful Tyneside lawyer, said he had done so to avoid the limelight. Facing a police investigation, Mr Brown fired the Labour general secretary, Peter Watt, who carried the can for the arrangement set up by his predecessors. In May 2009 the CPS decided again that there was insufficient evidence for any prosecution.

The police also investigated the admission in December 2007 by Peter Hain that some donations to his own campaign to become Labour's deputy leader "were not registered as they should have

been”. The police inquiry, at the request of the Electoral Commission, cost him his post as Work and Pensions Secretary. He was cleared 11 months later, however, after prosecutors questioned the watchdog’s interpretation of the law, suggesting that no one involved in Mr Hain’s campaign could be prosecuted.

This was one of several uncomfortable moments for the Electoral Commission. In its first full term between 2001 and 2005 the watchdog, which oversees money in politics, was regarded as a largely benign if somewhat bureaucratic body. But its failure to see that political parties were taking out huge secret loans led to accusations that it was unfocused, too passive and failed to use its powers to investigate allegations of wrongdoing. It defended itself vigorously, saying that it could only act using the laws passed by Parliament. Nevertheless, the commission strengthened its investigative capacity and started casting its spotlight elsewhere, bringing its own complications when it started picking over the donations by Lord Ashcroft to the Conservatives.

Lord Ashcroft, Tory vice-chairman, businessman and philanthropist, had long been a Labour hate figure whose funding they blamed for losing their party a number of seats in 2005. He revelled in his pariah status. After receiving his peerage in 2000 from William Hague, then Tory leader, he attempted unsuccessfully to become Lord Ashcroft of Belize, reflecting his dual citizenship. He stopped donating to the Conservatives under his own name in November 2001, fuelling suggestions, which he never denied, that he was no longer on the electoral register and giving instead through a small company, Bearwood Corporate Services.

In 2009 the Electoral Commission began examining suggestions that millions given to the Tories by Bearwood originated in Belize, possibly making the donations against electoral law. The money was reported to have been moved from Stargate Holdings based at Lord Ashcroft’s bank in Belize City through two British holding companies and then to Bearwood Corporate Services. In a 15-month investigation, however, the watchdog was unable to discover what, if any, business the secretive Belize City-based Stargate conducted, and how it was financed. Lord Ashcroft was cleared.

He still ended up causing the party much embarrassment on the eve of the election, when it emerged that he had accepted his peerage on the understanding that he would pay full tax in Britain, only to remain secretly non-domiciled for tax purposes for a decade. This allowed him to save an estimated “tens of millions” of pounds of British tax on his overseas earnings while retaining his ermine.

Yet for all the fury directed at Lord Ashcroft, it is not clear that the marginal seats campaign he ran once he became the Conservatives’ deputy chairman had the impact that many Conservatives had hoped for. His blueprint, outlined in a 2006 pamphlet *Smell the Coffee*, involved early candidate selection, relentless leaf-leting, repeated canvassing, candidate performance polling and targeted advertising as the key to winning marginal seats. Constituencies such as Hammersmith, Cheltenham and Bolton followed to the letter the Ashcroft plan yet all remained in Labour or Liberal Democrat hands. Indeed, research suggests that the spending advantage in the marginal seats helped the Tories to win at most an additional 14 seats above those that would have fallen anyway on the 5 per cent Labour to Tory swing.

Much analysis on the 2010 general election is yet to be done but the early indications suggest that it was one where, refreshingly, big money still failed to have a decisive impact on the result.

Little joy for the smaller parties

Jill Sherman

Whitehall Editor

The election of the Green Party's first MP as dawn broke on May 7, 2010 was one of the highlights of a long, unpredictable night. Caroline Lucas's breakthrough in Brighton Pavilion was some compensation for an otherwise disappointing result for the minority parties, who failed to exploit the disaffection with mainstream politics. Dr Lucas, leader of the Green Party since 2008, capitalised on her own popularity and activists' hard work for years in southern England to achieve, finally, a foothold at Westminster.

In the final stages of post-election negotiations between the parties after the inconclusive result, Dr Lucas, an MEP for the South East since 1999, briefly found herself being counted as part of a "progressive alliance" as the arithmetic meant that every additional seat was crucial. The plans fell apart but Dr Lucas turned her suitors down anyway, saying that she was interested in cooperation but not a formal coalition.

The Greens made their biggest push in a general election by fielding 335 candidates and spending £400,000 on their campaign. They had particularly high hopes in three target seats: Brighton Pavilion, Norwich South, and Lewisham Deptford. By early morning the day after the election, however, it became clear that Dr Lucas, a charismatic former CND-protester, was the only victor and the party's overall share of the vote fell slightly by 0.1 per cent from 2005.

The party argues that the decline was a result of a highly targeted election campaign in which it pooled most of its resources into those key seats, with busloads of Green activists brought in to campaign along the seafront each weekend. In the end, the tactic was vindicated, but it was a close race: despite being favourites to win the seat, after a nail-biting count the Greens eventually won with 1,252 votes.

While disappointing for Adrian Ramsay, the party's deputy leader, who lost in Norwich South, and Darren Johnson, who failed to make much headway in Lewisham Deptford, the most important thing for the party, was winning its first seat. As Dr Lucas said in an interview with *The Times*, she hopes she won't be there on her own for too long.

Most of the minority parties failed to recapture their success in the European elections the previous year. In 2010, squeezed out of the running by the three-horse race of the main parties, the smaller ones retained their 14 Westminster seats but took a smaller overall share of the vote, 11.9 per cent, than the previous year. It was, however, up 1.6 per cent from the general election in 2005, mainly because the parties fielded more candidates. The results were particularly disappointing because many of the smaller parties had looked likely to benefit more from the backlash against the main parties over MPs' expenses the previous year. The scandal may have stopped people voting for those individuals who had been at the centre of the expenses storm but in the end the minority parties failed to reap what should have been easy pickings.

The UK Independence Party, which had seen its popularity soar during the European elections, in which it took second place and 16.5 per cent of the vote, again failed to win a Commons seat. At one stage it looked as if Nigel Farage, the party's former leader, could be out of the race altogether when a light aircraft in which he was being flown crashed on the eve of the election. He was fortunate to escape without serious injury but was unable to oust John Bercow, the Commons Speaker, in Buckingham.

The British National Party also failed to make the breakthrough that many had feared after the party's shock success in 2009 when it won two European seats. It did, however, increase its share of the vote by a whisker, from 1.2 per cent in 2005 to 1.9 per cent. Nick Griffin, the party chairman and an MEP, raised his profile after appearing on *Question Time* on BBC One in autumn 2009, when

he faced a barrage of criticism from other panellists. He was humiliated in the general election in Barking, where he stood against Margaret Hodge, the Labour incumbent, who increased her majority.

The BNP also targeted Stoke-on-Trent, where it had previously won a clutch of council seats, but Simon Darby the party's deputy chairman, was beaten into fourth place after Tristram Hunt, the Labour candidate parachuted into the constituency, won the seat.

George Galloway, the leader of the anti-war Respect party, also had his comeuppance. The colourful Mr Galloway, who made an embarrassing appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother*, failed to hang on in Poplar & Limehouse, East London, where he came third behind Labour and the Tories. He did not even turn up for his count. Respect's national share of the vote halved from 2005 to about 0.1 per cent mainly because the Iraq war was no longer a big central issue in the 2010 election.

The march of the independent MPs also came to a halt. In 2005 a record number stood and total votes cast for them reached 141,903. The betting money was on a further surge this year, with a predicted revolt against duck houses and flipped homes. But in the end it was the independents who were driven off the Commons green benches. Richard Taylor, the retired consultant who took Wyre Forest in 2001 on the back of a single-issue campaign to save his local hospital in Kidderminster, failed to retain his seat in 2010. Dr Taylor, who in his professional life wore a white coat, had taken the place of the white-suited Martin Bell, the former independent MP who seized Tatton on the back of the cash-for-favours scandal in 1997.

Dai Davies, who won a by-election at Blaenau Gwent in 2006 as an independent, was also unable to retain his seat. Even Esther Rantzen failed in her well-publicised bid to oust Labour in Luton South. The former *That's Life* presenter stood as an anti-sleaze candidate against Margaret Moran, the Labour MP who claimed £22,500 in Commons allowances to fix dry rot in a second home in Southampton. Ms Moran, however, decided to stand down before the election. Her replacement, Gavin Shuker, a 28-year-old church pastor, won 14,725 votes. Ms Rantzen came fourth with 1,872 and lost her deposit.

Only one MP was left holding the flag for the independents: Lady Sylvia Hermon, a former Ulster Unionist. Lady Hermon stood down from her party in March 2010 after the UUP formed an alliance with the Conservatives. Two months later she romped home to retain her North Down seat as an independent.

Don't emerge as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal

Matthew Parris

Times columnist

That no MP has yet suffered a heart attack in the minutes before making a maiden speech in the House of Commons, is some kind of miracle. The waiting is the worst. Sitting on those green leather benches, dreading the moment when the Speaker first calls your name, yet longing to get it over with as fast as possible, remains one of the most intense short periods of personal anxiety a man or woman can experience outside warfare.

I have parachuted freefall; aged 10 and dressed in a sailor-suit I have waited to launch into a song-and-dance routine of *I Whistle a Happy Tune* before a packed house in a repertory production of *The King and I*, as the orchestra struck up. Neither was as scary as awaiting my Commons maiden speech. But once you are on your feet, and you have your trembling hands and shaking notes under control, and you have started to talk, it is fine. You are away.

For me it went well. In light of what I shall tell you next I can tell you now that my maiden speech was considered one of the best of many maidens from the big and unusually talented parliamentary intake of 1979. That speech was a triumph. It was the rest of my parliamentary career that flopped. After my moment of glory I sank without trace in the Commons, never to resurface.

In all the seven years that followed at Westminster I did not say or do or achieve anything that came anywhere close to the success of that first Commons occasion, my maiden speech. My parliamentary career was undistinguished: for me a bitter if infinitely gentle disappointment. Cleverer new MPs than me, yes, but in time stupider ones too, overtook me one by one.

Why? My slow-burn failure baffled me. What had I overlooked? I wasn't lazy, crazy, or personally objectionable. Even after I had left I did not really understand. Only during the decades since, decades of thinking about politics as a journalist and commentator, has the truth dawned.

The truth is this: you will never get anywhere in the House of Commons speaking for yourself. You are the representative of people's interests, or you are nothing. There are, of course, ideals to be championed. There are arguments to be explained. There is policy logic to be pursued on its merits as well as its popular appeal. But, in the end, if what you say within that surprisingly small chamber carries no echo in the big country outside it then you are without point, and with discreet and subtle cruelty the very stones and carpets at Westminster will communicate to you that fact.

"Speaking for myself, Mr Deputy Speaker..." is a phrase that, sought in *Hansard's* electronic archive, would doubtless yield a generous harvest of instances. Do not be fooled. Whether they know it consciously or not, the most effective parliamentarians are never speaking mainly for themselves. They are inhabited by a kind of animal understanding of the beast that an MP is supposed to be: of what, in that remarkably large assembly of directly elected persons that with unintended accuracy we call the Lower House, an MP is for.

You, the MP, are there for the herd. You are there to speak for substantial groups of citizens with shared interests or desires. By no means are you there for the majority alone – or, necessarily, at all. You can usefully spend your whole career fighting for minorities. Groups for whom you speak may be beleaguered and outnumbered; but they must be groups. They must need and want a voice. You are their voice; they must respond to your voice, adding theirs; and your fellow parliamentarians must hear the noise. Your voice is your own, but if you are not somebody else's voice too, the place will not work for you.

You, the MP, are mainly there – not only, but mainly – as a messenger. You bring the message; you frame the message; you may have a talent for phrasing and targeting and marketing the message. You may even improve the message. You may have the skill so to express the message that it gathers force among those you represent. But you are seldom there to create the message, and unless and

until it has gathered that force, you are the sounding brass or tinkling cymbal of St Paul's epistle. In the end the message comes not from inside your head but from outside the walls of Westminster, or it does not come at all. You, the MP, are there to carry it.

"Tribune" is an old-fashioned word whose meaning as we move into a new millennium is in danger of passing from the popular understanding. But if the word is out of date, what it signifies is not. Not for nothing have MPs been classically called the tribunes of the people. Their own beliefs and opinions carry most weight, and sometimes only carry weight at all, when they reflect the beliefs, opinions and *interests* of significant, numerous or powerful groups among the people who have sent them to Westminster.

Edmund Burke missed the point when he wrote: "Your Representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." Note the sly old propagandist's selection of the word "judgment" for the MP's view, and "opinion" for the elector's. But in rejecting Burke's advice I am not making a moral judgment. I am describing a dynamic. In our legislature, arguments born of the personal reflections of individual legislators do not prosper. Arguments carried into the chamber from the country outside do. Burke, in fact, knew that well enough, and in terms of his own personal career fared better articulating the external voice than advancing it within the chamber. The Commons is not really about debate, it is about tug-o'-war; and your pull on the rope is a pull-by-proxy, for those not present.

How do I know this? I can only reply that it is not a matter of constitutional theory, but of experience. There was perhaps one moment during my seven years when I did, flickeringly, understand in heart as well as head what it meant to be an advocate – and I realised even at the time that it was on an arcane, minor and minority issue. I had become greatly exercised by the brutality and pointlessness of sending women convicted of prostitution to prison. In the event (with Robert Kilroy-Silk, then an MP) I managed to persuade my standing committee, and through them the Home Secretary, to change the law and remove imprisonment from the tariff.

Much of my argument was an argument in logic, but to bolster our case I invited the English Collective of Prostitutes to send down to the Commons a bus-load of their members (waiting for them in the Central Lobby I mistook a delegation on another issue from the Catholic Women's League for my own invitees, displeasing the League greatly) and led them to a committee room in Westminster Hall, where we addressed the other members of my standing committee, and took questions.

As I spoke, believing in the women's cause, and with many of them, real people, sitting around me, responding, I understood in the gut as well as the brain, what it means to be an MP.

Democracy as we British know it is not experienced in the intellect but in the stomach. What an MP is for is felt collectively at an unconscious level by a population few of whom could express it even if they cared to try. Popular sentiment is a current. It is a wind. It is a subterranean force. When you are with it – when it is with you – you just know. When you are not, you are that sounding brass or tinkling cymbal.

Time and again I rose to my feet in the chamber with what I thought, and still think, a brilliantly true idea to explain. How sure I was that we should adopt road-pricing in our country: that the economic theory of rationing a scarce commodity by price rather than by queue applied not just to turf or treacle tarts, but to tarmac too. Time and again I made speeches, asked questions, wrote newspaper articles, or argued in my Transport Select Committee, setting out a logical case that I knew, and still know, to be true and in the end inevitable.

Nobody listened. Nobody agreed. Nobody disagreed either. Nobody was interested. Nobody cared. Inevitable, yes: but not in 1986. Twentieth-century Britain was not ready for road pricing.

Or reform of the law on homosexuality. Time and again I argued the case for reducing the age of consent. Persistently I complained about police harassment of gay men. How cogently did I unpick the contradictions and expose the imperfections of the law relating to importuning in a public place. How assiduously did I collect evidence, interview defendants, correspond with the Commissioner of

the Metropolitan Police and question ministers. How patiently I explained all this in the standing committee. How contemptuous I felt when a kindly Labour whip, the late Walter Harrison, took me aside to advise: “You will get nowhere in this place, lad, unless you leave all that alone.” There is not (Walter went on to explain) the feeling for it in the country. How hotly I protested to myself, under my breath: “Well there ought to be.”

Walter and I were both wrong. Public opinion on homosexuality was moving, changing. There existed the beginnings of an interest group among aggrieved gay men, the beginnings of the courage to stand up for themselves in public; and the beginnings of a supporting group of sympathisers among their millions of friends and relatives. HIV-Aids would in time bring all this to the surface. But 1982 was too early. Fifteen years later, Tony Blair, with his cannier instinct for the public mood, judged the moment right to propose change, as I had judged the moment wrong; and laws were duly amended. That was a time when young politicians and soon-to-be politicians such as David Cameron were changing their minds on social issues like these – or under the impression that they were changing their minds. What they were really doing was picking up, instinctively, a message from the people.

Time and again I spoke and wrote and asked Parliamentary Questions about the plight of the Sahrawi people in the Western Sahara, violently dispossessed by the Kingdom of Morocco. I visited them. I saw their plight. I heard their case. I studied their history. I was convinced. The case I made to the Foreign Secretary was unanswerable.

Indeed unanswered. He could not disagree and did not care to agree. Silence, that most eloquent of Commons responses, should have told me what no minister would put into words: the Sahrawi people have no constituency in the United Kingdom; and the United Kingdom has an interest in supporting Morocco. Silence said so; silence says so much at Westminster; but I was blocking my ears to the silence.

It is a funny feeling, speaking in the chamber when your argument carries no resonance outside it. Your fellow MPs do not howl you down. They just talk among themselves, or lope out for a drink or a cup of tea. You notice the Press Gallery above the Speaker’s Chair clearing. Once you have gained a reputation for arguments that are disconnected from popular sentiment or headline news, your colleagues stop coming in when you are speaking. You argue into a void, like someone talking to the birds in a park. You wait for responses to your speech the next morning; but there is nothing, not even a report. And you reflect on that passage in Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, describing an early feminist: “The Abbess was one of those persons who have allowed their lives to be gnawed away because they have fallen in love with an idea several centuries before its appointed appearance in the history of civilisation. She hurled herself against the obstinacy of her time.”

You hear it said, not of yourself but of others like you, that they are “frightfully clever” but “a bit of a loner”. And if not remarkably thick-skinned (which, surprisingly, few MPs are) you become prey to feelings of injustice and self-pity.

They are misplaced. You are overlooking something rather obvious. The House of Commons is not a place where ideas are born and knows in its heart that it is not supposed to be. It is an echo-chamber in which interests and opinions are spoken for, and tested for resonance among more than six hundred other tribunes – and for their resonance, when reported, outside.

Resonance is not the same thing as rationality. During the last Parliament, Joanna Lumley, Nick Clegg and a small band of mostly backbench MPs understood how much more resonant was the case for special privileges for former Gurkhas than it was rational. Towards the end of the last century, Margaret Thatcher and much of her Cabinet failed to understand how much less resonant was the case for the Poll Tax, than it was reasonable. When the last Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, was Chancellor in 2000 he and his Cabinet colleagues were surprised (and threatened with a backbench rebellion) when they failed to anticipate that opposition to an entirely rational 75p per week increase in the state pension (in line with subdued inflation) would carry tremendous resonance outside the counting-

houses of Whitehall. The same Cabinet entirely misjudged the (irrational) anger of motorists at (rational) increases in fuel duty, in line with rising prices.

Let us try to construct the profile of a fictional backbencher who made the right call on each of these judgments: the imaginary MP (let us call him Reg Smythe) who found himself on the right side of the argument on Poll Tax, Fuel Tax, pension increases, Gurkhas and Joanna Lumley. Three features, I would submit, stand out in Reg Smythe's profile. First, he is not unduly troubled by logic. Secondly, he has a keen sense of the importance to voters of their wallets. Thirdly, his ear is well-attuned to waves of popular sentiment.

But I would add this about Reg. He gets genuinely fired-up in the causes to which he attaches himself. His eyes prick with tears as he stands beside Dame Joanna and a cluster of ageing Ghurkhas, and the hard-heartedness of the Ministry of Defence infuriates him. His rage at the 75p pension increase is not synthetic, and he knows many pensioners in his own constituency whose distress is real. He has entirely persuaded himself that fuel-tax increases are wrong not because motorists should not pay their share of environmental costs (Reg is passionate about the environment, too) but because transport is the lubricant of our whole economy, and these increases will hit entrepreneurs, road-hauliers and small business people.

And one further and most important remark. Not all these causes, and by no means all the arguments to which a dedicated tribune of the people may devote his energies, are majority causes. Some will be as unpopular among some voters as they are popular among others. Great parliamentary careers have rested, often enough, on the dogged association of an MP with a small but defined interest group, whose self-appointed guardian angel he becomes. He brings to the table that group, their concerns, and their potential support, and may not distract himself with larger causes. He is their man – or she their woman – and the MP the Chancellor takes aside for an anxious chat whenever the issue looks like trouble. An MP, in short, can fight for minorities all his life, while staying in tune with the type of democracy that energises a British parliamentary career.

In 1981 I was lucky to be among the seven backbenchers whose names were drawn from a hat, and who were invited to attend the Prince of Wales's wedding to Diana Spencer. Sitting among the huge congregation in St Paul's Cathedral I heard, over the loudspeakers, the questions – “Do you take this woman?” – and the responses. At each “I do” there came into the Cathedral, faintly but audibly, the distant-sounding roar of the crowds of tens of thousands, like the faint rumble of an ocean lapping at the steps of St Paul's.

That echo was for me the most moving thing of all. I wish I had followed its logic down Fleet Street, the Strand and Whitehall, to Westminster, and understood then what I understand now: that unless when you advance a case at Westminster you can hear in your imagination, and your fellow MPs can hear in theirs, that faint roar of approbation from the sea of public opinion, then prepare for the kindly obituaries many decades hence, after your knighthood and your sobriquet “veteran backbench MP” have long been earned. From the obituarist's phrase book will come those old favourites “brave thinker”, “keen intellect”, “gadfly”, “never really a team player”, “maverick”, “radical theorist”, “principled debater”...we can almost hear the chamber emptying as we read.

In less smart phraseology than the famous passage quoted above, Burke expressed the opposite view, but a truer one, when he wrote: “To follow, not to force the public inclination; to give a direction, a form, a technical dress, and a specific sanction, to the general sense of the community, is the true end of legislature.” *Matthew Parris was Conservative MP for Derbyshire West from 1979 to 1986 and is a former parliamentary sketch writer for The Times.*

The old era

The man who detoxified the Conservative brand

Francis Elliott

Deputy Political Editor

David Cameron best reveals his character and that of his political project at moments of defeat. He felt the blow of losing his first attempt at becoming an MP keenly in 1997, analysed correctly the reasons for the Tories' abject performance in 2001 but then misjudged why Michael Portillo's subsequent leadership bid fell short. The failure of Iain Duncan Smith's leadership forced him to reconsider his attitude to modernisation and his last doubts were extinguished by the third successive Conservative defeat under Michael Howard.

During his own period as Leader of the Opposition, Mr Cameron was at his best when he faced the greatest danger, tacking and trimming and finally outmanoeuvring Gordon Brown in the autumn of 2007 to scare the new Labour leader off an early election. When at last the poll was called in May 2010, Mr Cameron best showed his political gifts not during the campaign but in the days afterwards, converting an inconclusive result into a decisive outcome.

But if defeat best reveals the nature of the man and his project, it is in success that his closest friendships and alliances have been forged. The first of these is his relationship with Steve Hilton, whom he first met in the late 1980s when both worked for what was then Conservative Central Office. Their decades-long conversation about the Tories, their strengths and weaknesses, their prejudices and favourites, is the dialogue that most drives the project. At first sight the two men could hardly be more different. Mr Cameron's privileged background, social assurance and cultural Conservatism fitted him smoothly for the Conservative Research Department in the Tories' old HQ in Smith Square. Mr Hilton, the son of Hungarian immigrants and a scholarship boy who became a Conservative only at university, was less obviously a CRD Tory boy. Mr Cameron favoured red braces; Mr Hilton was known to wear a "voluminous poncho".

It is what they share, however, not what they do not, that most influences the modern Conservative Party. A passionate belief in the primacy of the individual over the collective – open in Mr Hilton's case, partly shielded from view in that of Mr Cameron – is their first shared value. Mr Hilton, whose family endured the Communist repression of Budapest in 1956, has a visceral dislike of the statist mindset.

Neither, however, is a straightforward economic liberal. The purpose of freeing individual action is so that people can better deliver social goods. And the State has a role in fostering and encouraging those other institutions, such as marriage, that help people to share responsibility for one another. The pair have tried a number of attempts to rebrand these strands of right-wing philosophy during their period at the helm of the Conservative Party. It has been known variously as "modern, compassionate Conservatism", the "post-bureaucratic age" and finally "the Big Society". For the second big thing that Mr Cameron shares with his closest ally is an abiding interest in and facility for political communication. Both schooled according to the exacting standards of a Margaret Thatcher-era CRD, they write crisply and without jargon or cant. In the run-up to the 1992 general election the pair were selected to manage the relationship with the Tories' advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi.

There is one final shared attribute: their age. They were part of a Smith Square "brat pack" in 1992 and were still young enough to weather the wilderness years so that they could emerge as part of the "next generation" just as new Labour was running out of steam.

In Stafford Leisure Centre in the early hours of May 2, 1997, however, those years outside power were just beginning. By then 31, the Conservative candidate, left hanging around as a loser at the count, knew that losing was no personal disgrace and certainly not a career-ending moment. Nonetheless, he felt it keenly when an elderly woman approached him in tears as the scale of the

Tories' national defeat became clear. "I don't want to die under a Labour government," she said. The misery of that exchange still lingered when he wrote of it many years later.

Mr Cameron has suffered personal setbacks. The influence of the birth, life and death, aged 6, of his first son Ivan is well known. It is fair to say, however, that he has suffered less in the way of professional reverses than many other senior members of the Conservative leadership. After defeat in Stafford Mr Cameron went back to a well-paid City job as director of communications for the media company Carlton. It was a younger generation of Conservative staffers who tasted the most bitter fruits of opposition, and started to do the most original thinking about how to return to power.

Although they overlapped while the Tories were in government, Mr Cameron did not really know George Osborne until both were elected in 2001. He was not in Smith Square as Mr Osborne and a handful of other young staffers, including several defectors from the Social Democratic Party, began to think deeply about how to decontaminate the Conservative brand. Figures such as Andrew Cooper and Rick Nye, who went on to set up the polling firm Populus, began pointing out that voters tended to like Conservative policies, until they found out that they were Conservative policies. It was not the policies that were the problem.

Just as Europe divided the party during its previous years in power, so the question of "de-toxifying" the Tory brand fractured it in opposition. The modernisation of the Tories, started under William Hague, slowed as it became entangled in the Tories' *kultur* war over social issues such as gay adoption and marriage. Throughout it all Mr Hague's political secretary, Mr Osborne, had a ringside seat.

Mr Cameron, as he now privately admits, had a slower conversion to the modernisers' cause than some of his most senior allies. Less than a week after being elected in 2001 (having been selected for the safe seat of Witney) he was asked how the party should change. His answer is telling since it dwells on questions of presentation, not substance. "[The Conservative Party] needs to change its language, change its approach, start with a blank piece 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 nationalisation and unionisation. The question for the Conservative Party is far more difficult because there are no obvious areas of policy that need to be dropped." Almost as an afterthought, he then added: "We need a clear, positive, engaging agenda on public services."

Later, when he was leader, Mr Cameron was often asked when he would have a Clause Four moment, a reference to Tony Blair's totemic defeat of party critics. His answer was always a version of that first, raw, draft. The riposte might be caricatured as: "We're right, it's just that the voters don't realise it yet."

Although he backed Mr Portillo, the modernisers' candidate in the 2001 leadership election, the support was hesitant, even knowing. When Mr Portillo lost in an early round, the new Witney MP opted for Mr Duncan Smith over Kenneth Clarke. "What went wrong?" Mr Cameron mused in an online column. "Here was a leadership contender with buckets of charisma, a CV that included experience at the highest level of government and genuine cross-party appeal. Our man had offered leadership, radical change and ideas that challenged the party both in Parliament and the country. They simply weren't ready for it. In many ways it is view that I share."

Mr Cameron's early career as a backbencher is not littered with examples of him acting as a spokesman for the need for the party to broaden its appeal. He was, for example, a passionate defender of fox-hunting. (In fairness, he also took a brave and principled position on the decriminalisation of drugs.) Gradually, however, and partly as a result of a developing friendship with Mr Osborne, Mr Cameron started to think more deeply about what was needed, and in particular what a "clear, positive, engaging agenda on public services" might look like.

At the same time, Mr Cameron was receiving firsthand experience of the NHS as it cared for his son, who was born with Ohtahara syndrome, a serious neurological condition. If the Tories were

really going to modernise, Mr Cameron came to realise, they had to embrace properly funded, high-quality, universally available public services. Michael Gove, then a journalist with *The Times*, Mr Hilton, Mr Osborne and others began to meet regularly in a Mayfair restaurant to plot a Conservative future.

There was still time to test to destruction the alternative model. Mr Howard, who replaced the ousted Mr Duncan Smith in 2003, flirted with a full-throated modernisation but came to view it as unauthentic, at least in his mouth, and opted like Mr Hague for a safety-first “core-vote” strategy in the 2005 election.

Mr Cameron, who with Mr Gove helped to patch together the party’s manifesto, saw at first hand the consequences of limiting Tory appeal to existing supporters. Mr Cameron, then, emerged from another election disaster surrounded by two long-term friends, Mr Hilton and Mr Gove, and one newer ally, Mr Osborne. It was, however, someone he had known longer than any of them that pushed him hardest to run for the leadership. Andrew Feldman, a friend since Brasenose College, Oxford, set up the key meeting with Lord Harris of Peckham, a former Conservative treasurer, that helped to convince him to contest the leadership. Mr Feldman, who was later appointed chief executive of the party and then co-chairman, is an important, although non-political, member of the inner circle.

There were others who might have led the modernisers’ charge against David Davis in 2005. Andrew Lansley, David Willetts, Francis Maude, even Oliver Letwin, had all, at various times, held the mantle. Mr Osborne, had he been a little older and a little more confident, might have challenged Mr Cameron’s right to present the case. But he could see that Mr Cameron was exactly the reassuring figure that the party’s grassroots would trust to carry out the sort of radical changes that were needed to restore the party’s electoral fortunes. Together with Mr Hilton, the pair crafted a leadership campaign that balanced the modernising creed with a traditional message on the family. It was Mr Cameron’s star performance in hustings at the Conservative Party conference in Blackpool, however, that landed him the job. He beat Mr Davis by a margin of two to one: 134,446 to 64,398.

Veterans of the early days of Mr Cameron’s stint as Leader of the Opposition wonder, however, how they avoided disaster. It was not that the Tory leader lacked a solid backroom team: he had in Ed Llewellyn and Catherine Fall two long-term friends for his chief of staff and deputy chief of staff, and another former colleague reporting for duty was George Bridges. It was that the sheer, exuberant energy of the creative talents of Mr Hilton and Mr Letwin, coupled with Mr Cameron’s own inexperience and a general lack of organisational clarity, led to some hair-raising scrapes.

A fascinated and largely supportive media did not seem to notice, at least at first, as it lapped up the youthful leader. The environment provided the theme and the backdrops for an initial repositioning. Carefully crafted photo-opportunities, the most famous involving dog-sledding in the Arctic Circle, challenged voters’ preconceptions about what a Conservative leader looked like. Even the party’s slogan in the 2006 council election – Vote Blue, Go Green – seemed designed to blur former associations.

The Conservative grassroots were a tougher audience, particularly on the sensitive issue of candidate selection. Local associations had seen off previous attempts to dilute their power to select representatives but the new leader knew that, if he was to make the party look more like modern Britain, this was a battle he had to win. His first attempt, the creation of a 100-strong “A-list” of preferred candidates, was a crass but ultimately effective opening gambit. In the new Parliament there are 48 women Conservative MPs and 11 who are black or from other ethnic minorities. In the previous Parliament there were just eight women and two non-white MPs on the Conservative benches.

But while candidate selection was a fight that Mr Cameron knew he had to have with his grassroots, the defining battle of this period was one that he did not mean to pick. Ill-judged briefing around the issue of grammar schools in May 2007 brought resentment over Mr Cameron’s leadership to the surface among activists and MPs. That an Old Etonian was setting his face against state-funded selective education provided the first opportunity for critics to wheel out the issue of his class. Mr

Cameron first tried to escalate the crisis making it a “key test” to establish whether it wanted just to be a “right-wing debating society”. When the backlash grew fiercer, Mr Cameron made a tactical retreat. It was the start of an uncomfortable summer, the low point of his leadership in opposition. An increasingly restive party, Mr Brown’s arrival in No 10 and the threat of an early election pushed the Tory leader to the right. Issues such as crime and immigration, deliberately ignored for two years, were foreshadowed.

Here Mr Cameron again showed his skills as a political communicator and the advantage of his youth. A thoughtful speech against multiculturalism won the distinction of an endorsement by Trevor Phillips, head of the new Equality and Human Rights Commission. Similarly, concerns about law and order were framed in the language of social justice. The emphasis was on the impact of crime, antisocial behaviour or welfare dependency on low-income households rather their better-off neighbours.

It took a straightforwardly old-fashioned Tory tax break, the offer to increase inheritance tax to a threshold of more than £1 million, to provide the Conservatives with the momentum at that year’s conference to scare Mr Brown away from going to the country. As the Conservatives began to enjoy huge poll leads after that disastrous miscalculation by Labour, it seemed to Mr Cameron and his inner circle that he had at last resolved the party’s brand problems. Mr Cameron could use the full palette of issues without being accused of lurching to the right. Even Nick Clegg’s arrival as the new Lib Dem leader, another youthful leader offering change, failed to make a significant impact on poll ratings that seemed to pave a sure path to No 10.

The advent of the global economic crisis exposed such confidence as premature, although at first it seemed that it would deliver a landslide victory. Britain’s galloping debt levels seemed to Mr Cameron and Mr Osborne to confirm, not challenge, the need for a smaller State. A tactical decision to match Labour’s spending plans and deny Mr Brown his favoured “investment versus cuts” dividing line was abandoned in favour of a formula that “shared the proceeds of growth”, code for cuts in spending. Expenditure would grow at a slower rate than GDP for all departments except in three ring-fenced areas, health, international development and education. This formulation was itself jettisoned as the recession took hold, however, and the Tories’ economic credibility was tested.

Indeed the global nature of the crisis, and Mr Brown’s relentless use of an international stage to illustrate the need for state action, undermined the Tory case. When framed as a choice between who could best cope with the economic storms, voters cooled on the Conservatives. Mr Cameron found his party’s poll rating pegged back beneath 40 per cent, the share of the vote at which an overall majority was assured.

Throughout his leadership the party’s private polling had consistently shown Mr Cameron to be more popular than his party. When the broadcasters’ attention was on the Tory leader, the Conservative poll rating increased, when it was not they slipped back. The overall strategy of the campaign seemed simple enough: highlight Mr Cameron’s personality while delivering a message of broad reassurance on public services and economic competence.

In fact, as the long campaign ground on through early spring it became clear that Mr Cameron had overestimated his own popularity with voters while underestimating the remaining suspicion voters harboured about the Conservative brand. In avoiding a Clause Four moment with his party, and then by using the economic crisis to seek a mandate for a smaller State directly, Mr Cameron left himself open to Labour claims that he represented the “same old Tories”. It was Mr Clegg, however, who was best able to exploit the vulnerability. Voters wanting a change but not convinced about the Conservatives were offered a route out of their dilemma.

While the campaign exposed some of Mr Cameron’s faults – a tendency to substitute personality for policy, an over-reliance on a small group of confidants – his pragmatism and speed of manoeuvre served him in excellent stead for its aftermath. The manner in which Mr Cameron fashioned his coalition and then drove it through a reluctant party impressed even his enemies.

His coalition with the Lib Dems offers the chance for the late and reluctant convert to complete the modernisation of the Tories.

Francis Elliott is co-author of David Cameron: The Rise of the New Conservatives (2007)

At long last it's OK to be a Tory

Alice Thomson

Times columnist

Who wants to be a Tory? In 2005 it was a lonely life. Even in the shires it was more embarrassing to say that you had voted blue than that you could not reverse a horse box. The Tories were in despair. They had liked the nice William Hague, the comprehensive-educated, northern lad with a pretty wife and lovely manners. It still rather hurt that the electorate had ridiculed his attempts to be more matey with his baseball caps and his 14 pints of beer.

This man seemed honourable and decent but Britain had rejected him. So they tried again. They chose an officer with four children, another charming, blonde wife and the shadow of a moustache. Iain Duncan Smith could put some backbone into the party, thought the loyalists. He would show the shallow Tony Blair how to be a gentleman.

But the quiet man soon went and Michael Howard, the former Home Secretary who promised cleaner hospitals and more school discipline, still could not make a dent in the polls.

The Tories were desperate. Who could save them from a life of slammed doors and dinner party jokes? The leadership contest of 2005 was a despondent affair. There was David Davis with his derring do and pick axe in his office and David Cameron, a Newbury boy with slicked-back hair.

As they met at the party conference in Blackpool, the mood was sombre. A few girls ran around wearing Mine's a DD, for David Davis, T shirts. The tone seemed set. The words running through the Blackpool rock were Tory Losers.

Then something miraculous happened. A young man bounded on to the stage, with no notes and began to talk. The grassroots, who had become pale and lifeless in the arid soil, suddenly felt as though they had been watered. Soon they were nudging each other, tapping their hearing aids, looking thoughtful and clapping ecstatically.

David Cameron brought the Conservative Party back to life. When he patted his wife's pregnant stomach at the end of his speech, the party knew that they had found their man. Here was an Old Etonian as at home in shorts as he was in plus fours, who gave them some credibility, no one sneered at him. Young women in wraparound dresses began to pour into Conservative Central Office, Oxbridge graduates were queuing for jobs as interns.

The leader wore things called Converse trainers that seemed to impress the press. He cycled to work (although there was that little hiccup when it was discovered that his chauffeur was following with his briefcase). His insistence on riding a sledge in Norway for a photoshoot was rather embarrassing but the country did not seem to mind so the grassroots were determined that they would not either. They turned a blind eye when Mr Cameron started hugging hoodies. The Heir to Blair, well that was a bit humiliating but never mind.

Onwards and upwards, the Tories were finally going places. Samantha Cameron was a working mother but she was not strident like Cherie Blair. And then there was Ivan. Mr Cameron was obviously a wonderful father to his disabled son.

It began to look rather promising. They soon started winning more council seats. The A list proved to be a blip. Then there was the question of grammar schools. Could they really accept a leader who didn't cherish these great institutions? But they did.

Then just as they thought they might finally be in with a chance, Gordon Brown became Prime Minister and extraordinarily the country decided they liked him.

Here was the first real wobble. Had they chosen the right man? Didn't he suddenly seem a bit young, a bit flash, a bit too toff? They should have stuck with Mr Hague. The party conference was a gloomy affair that year. Mr Major was wheeled in to provide extra support. Then young George Osborne did it. He promised to cut inheritance tax. The grassroots were relieved. They had not made

a mistake, these boys knew on which side their crumpets were buttered. They would help the middle classes and wow Middle England. They had outbluffed Mr Brown, who could not now call a general election. The party was ecstatic. Mr Brown had become Mr Bean. The grassroots may have had a woman or ethnic minority candidate pressed on them but they proved to be decent chaps and chapesses. They would win.

Only, the polls changed again. By the beginning of 2010 it was clear that the Tories were not romping home. The recession had hit them hard. It was difficult to talk about GWB (General Well Being) when GDP was plummeting. People were not so polite any more. They thought the boys were a bit too aloof and distant. Their inner circle was too cliquey.

Mr Cameron sounded angry during the expenses scandal but he was not that clean either. Why should voters prune his wisteria? Who had let this happen? The grassroots felt let down by everyone now. The MPs whom they had served with scones and tea had done the dirty on them.

So they arrived at the election looking like an Eton mess, bits and pieces all jumbled together. Not really sure what they thought of their leader or their candidates or even their policies.

Then came Cleggmania, a slightly too clever Conservative manifesto (*Invitation to Join the Government of Britain*), the Big Society that none of them understood, and then days of uncertainty followed by a coalition, the kind of shabby deal that, a few days before, their leader had been writing off as disastrous.

Now they want to believe, they really do. They want to see the roses in the garden and the coalition and smile on it. They want to discover that they have two for the price of one, but they are nervous. Could they be the losers? The coalition manifesto drops many of their cherished plans and policies.

They worry that they have already had to give so much to the sandal-wearing yellows. It could all come at too high a price.

But they are emotionally shattered. They have given their all to this man in the past five years. They are staunch, they are loyal, they are tribal. And they are, after 13 long and lonely years, back in power where they believe that they belong. They will give him a chance.

Path to power: how the Lib Dems made history

Greg Hurst

Editor of the Guide

The Liberal Democrats scarcely looked like a party on the brink of power for much of the 2005-10 Parliament. Two leaders resigned after losing support and authority, twice pitching members into leadership elections that were bitterly fought and bruising, rather than cathartic, and left some participants damaged. Yet despite periods of intense turbulence, the party underwent a profound transition as the leadership passed to a new generation with a different outlook from the social liberalism that had been its dominant philosophy for decades. An influx of 20 new MPs, a third of the parliamentary party, many of whom were able, experienced and, above all, ambitious, was another important dynamic.

The general election of 2005 was a double-edged sword for the Lib Dems. A net gain of 11 seats took them to 62 MPs, the highest for a third party since 1922, with some huge swings from Labour. The Conservatives, who gained five seats but lost three to the Lib Dems, unnerved those MPs who survived with precarious majorities with a ferocious new style of locally targeted campaigning. Such were the expectations that many Lib Dems hoped for a bigger breakthrough and saw the election as an opportunity missed.

Charles Kennedy, exhausted two days after the birth of his son, had torpedoed his own manifesto launch during the campaign by floundering over the details of a flagship policy for a local income tax. He found himself under pressure from the outset of the new term. Disappointment with the election result, compounded by tensions between social and economic liberals and frustration among new MPs with the party's organisation in the Commons were compounded when Mr Kennedy drifted into one of his periodic bouts of introspection just as the party was crying out for leadership and strategic direction.

Although popular with many voters, Mr Kennedy was a source of increasing frustration with colleagues owing to an innate caution, chaotic organisation and reliance on a tight-knit inner circle of long-time friends. Although many suspected it, relatively few knew that he was an alcoholic who, when confronted by leading figures in the party in 2004, had agreed to undergo treatment but was subject to intermittent relapses. After months of tension, fresh drinking episodes in the autumn of 2005 proved to be the final straw for several of the younger generation of senior Lib Dem MPs, who began discussing plans for a multi-signature letter of no confidence in their leader.

A series of semi-public confrontations ensued during which Mr Kennedy, having previously appeared oddly detached, proved himself extraordinarily tenacious in seeking to cling on. Even when his alcoholism was disclosed, by a television journalist, he attempted a final throw of the dice by calling a leadership ballot of members in which he declared that he would be a candidate. His critics countered with a collective threat of resignation: 25 MPs declared that they would resign from their front-bench positions unless he fell on his sword. In a dignified statement the following day, Mr Kennedy duly stepped down.

The damage to the party did not stop there. Mark Oaten, a senior MP and, briefly, potential candidate for leader, was disgraced over liaisons with a male prostitute. Another candidate, Simon Hughes, Mr Kennedy's chief rival for much of his leadership, was forced to admit to past sexual relationships with men, despite telling journalists that he was not gay.

It was the nadir: in January 2006, a YouGov poll put Lib Dem support as low as 13 per cent. The party looked at though it might tear itself apart. The unlikely and unexpected victory in the Dunfermline & West Fife by-election the following month, for which Mr Kennedy himself returned to the spotlight to campaign, helped to steady the ship.

The front-runner to replace him was Sir Menzies Campbell, the deputy leader, who made his name articulating the party's opposition to the Iraq war. Any hopes of a coronation were dashed when Chris Huhne, a former MEP and one of the sharpest of the party's new MPs, entered the race despite previously pledging to support Sir Menzies. Mr Huhne's audacity enraged senior colleagues who had risked their reputations to topple Mr Kennedy but quickly won the admiration of many party activists, who mistrust anything that smacks of a stitch-up.

Sir Menzies won the election but Mr Huhne finished a strong second, after a vigorous campaign. Despite claims from supporters that Sir Menzies would bring a statesman's authority to the role, his opening appearances in the Commons proved to be disastrous, as he struggled to be heard in the bear pit of Prime Minister's Questions. In one early outing, as acting leader, he asked why one in five schools were without a permanent head. As his own party was itself without a leader, this provoked uproarious hilarity. Rapidly he was portrayed as too old, at 64, and out of touch. A determined man, he received coaching and his Commons performances improved but too late to rescue his reputation as an assured parliamentarian. Recriminations over his role in the traumatic resignation of Mr Kennedy also poisoned the well of the party's body politic.

This was the Lib Dems' awkward predicament as David Cameron, in his first year as Conservative leader, set about a re-branding exercise seeking to bite chunks out of their support. In a speech in Hereford, a precarious Lib-Con marginal constituency, Mr Cameron declared himself a "liberal Conservative" and appealed to Liberal Democrats to back him. His skilful championing of green issues threatened to wrest the mantle of environmental campaigning from the Lib Dems' complacent grasp: plans by Mr Cameron for a wind turbine on the roof of his house and travelling by husky sled to view melting glaciers in Norway were vivid pieces of political positioning, although his environmentalism proved short-lived.

Another Conservative overture, seeking to field the former BBC Director-General Greg Dyke as a joint Tory-Lib Dem candidate for London Mayor, was more deftly rejected by Sir Menzies. The Lib Dems' eventual candidate, Brian Paddick, proved to have questionable judgment and trailed in third place.

The following year, when Gordon Brown succeeded Tony Blair at No 10, the Lib Dems' defences were tested again. Mr Brown wanted to appoint two Lib Dems to his Cabinet: Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon and another peer who he hoped would defect to Labour, as he tried to construct a broad-based "government of all the talents". His plan leaked and was scuppered; oddly, Mr Brown assumed that Lib Dems would serve in a Labour administration, not a coalition with agreed policy concessions. The new Prime Minister settled on advisory posts for several Lib Dems: Lady Neu-berger (on volunteering), Lord Lester of Herne Hill (on constitutional reform) and Baroness Williams of Crosby (on nuclear proliferation). Matthew Taylor, a former front-bencher, conducted an inquiry on rural housing.

The impact was deeply unsettling for the Lib Dems. It smacked of a crude attempt to divide the party's senior ranks, signalling to its left-of-centre supporters to return to Labour's embrace. Like many of Mr Brown's initiatives, the strategy soon unravelled but it again called into question the judgment of Sir Menzies and his closest adviser, Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope, both of whom had presented his long-time friendship with Mr Brown as an asset.

Another unnerving factor for the Lib Dems was the unfolding narrative of the prosecution of their biggest donor, Michael Brown, whose donations of £2.4 million doubled their 2005 election budget. He was later convicted of money-laundering and theft and some wealthy investors who were his clients demanded that money be returned to them by the Lib Dems, who insisted that they had taken, and spent, the money in good faith. The episode severely damaged the Lib Dems' attempts to portray themselves as political reformers.

Under Sir Menzies' leadership, his party's poll ratings drifted slowly downwards, from 20 per cent in March 2006 to 15 per cent in the summer of 2007 and even 12 per cent that autumn, according

to Populus, although they rose before and afterwards. When Mr Brown flirted with but abandoned a snap autumn election, Sir Menzies saw his chance and announced his resignation, knowing that his party had breathing space to elect his successor. His 18-month tenure, while difficult, saw important advances. Most notably he promoted to key spokespersonships and party positions a new generation eager to inject credibility on policy and greater professionalism into its organisation at Westminster: MPs such as David Laws, Ed Davey, Norman Lamb, Vince Cable and Nick Clegg. The forthcoming leadership election gave them a chance to complete their grip on the party's levers of power.

There was little doubt that this new generation would choose as its champion Nick Clegg, a former MEP who entered the Commons in 2005, took an erudite interest in policy, was articulate and effective on television but had a restless disrespect for convention and a keen appetite for reform. As Sir Menzies had, Mr Clegg began in the uncomfortable position of front-runner and, like him, faced a formidable challenge from Mr Huhne. Mr Clegg's campaign was cautious, holding back from his instinct to offer a bold, modernising agenda for fear of jeopardising his lead; Mr Huhne's was slightly populist and overtly aggressive, attacking his rival for "flip-flopping". His supporters at one point issued a rebuttal document entitled *Calamity Clegg*. The result was uncomfortably close, with Mr Clegg winning by about 500 votes.

Another by-product of the campaign was that the Lib Dems emerged with a new celebrity. Vince Cable, who was elected the party's deputy leader in place of Sir Menzies, found himself standing in at Prime Minister's Questions during the interregnum that followed his resignation. Dr Cable, who harboured leadership ambitions of his own before reluctantly ruling himself out because of his age, seized the moment.

His first attempt, when he cracked a joke, fell slightly flat: humour in the charged atmosphere on the floor of the House requires split-second timing and the ability to catch a mood. Undeterred, he tried again the following week. Mr Brown, having cancelled the autumn election, was embroiled in a scandal of hidden donations to Labour and the loss of child benefit records for 25 million families. "The House has noticed," Dr Cable began, "the Prime Minister's remarkable transformation in the last few weeks from Stalin to Mr Bean, creating chaos out of order, rather than order out of chaos." The Commons collapsed into laughter. Vince Cable became a household name almost overnight.

Mr Clegg, like all new Lib Dem leaders, struggled to make an impact with the electorate, often finding himself in the shadow of his energetic deputy leader, whose profile rose throughout the financial crisis that engulfed Britain's banks from autumn 2008. To frame the party's response to the economic crisis Mr Clegg convened a small group of experts and advisers; Vince Cable was a prominent member but Mr Clegg insisted on chairing it himself, asserting his authority rather than deferring to his more experienced deputy.

He took care to stay close to Mr Huhne, seeking his counsel often and holding him close rather than allowing any rift to open between them; Mr Huhne repaid him with loyalty. Meanwhile, Mr Clegg's allies were given key roles: David Laws played an increasingly key role in policy development, Ed Davey took charge of communications and Danny Alexander, who impressed Mr Clegg while working on his leadership campaign, became his chief of staff. Among backroom allies, he relied most on John Sharkey, a former advertising executive, for language in interviews and speeches; Polly MacKenzie to write his speeches; Jonny Oates for strategic media advice; Leana Pietsch on how issues would play in the press; and Alison Suttie to organise his office. This latter role was key: Mr Clegg, with three young children and impatient with the after-hours culture of the Commons, was ruthless in prioritising his diary and insisted on having time to take his boys to school or put them to bed, even if it meant returning to the Commons later. Much key party business was decided in conference telephone calls, with several advisers asked to ring a number with a PIN code at a given time for a focused discussion with the leader. It meant that the demands of managing a difficult and disparate party were contained and he could concentrate his energies elsewhere.

Mr Clegg's approach was to develop an irreverent, anti-Establishment edge to the Lib Dems, both as a strategy for being noticed and to differentiate himself from Labour and the Conservatives: when standing for leader he pledged to go to prison rather than comply with a national identity card register. This meant embracing some future hostages to fortune: opposing the replacement of the Trident nuclear deterrent, on which Mr Huhne had campaigned, and an "earned amnesty" for illegal immigrants, developed by Mr Clegg himself while home affairs spokesman. The latter, in particular, cost the Lib Dems many votes. Other key policy developments included dropping a symbolic commitment to a new 50p top rate of income tax, agreed under Sir Menzies' leadership and later implemented by Labour. Instead emphasis shifted towards taxing wealth, such as pensions contributions and capital gains, and exempting people earning beneath £10,000 a year from paying tax altogether, a policy revived from the 1997 manifesto. Mr Clegg made a further priority of improving education provision for children from poorer families.

An early test of his mettle was over Europe: Mr Clegg ordered his MPs to abstain on a Commons vote on whether the Lisbon treaty should be subject to a referendum, for which the Conservatives were campaigning. Several Lib Dems had pledged to constituents that they would back a referendum and could not comply, notably David Heath, Tim Farron and Alistair Carmichael in his Shadow Cabinet. Mr Clegg would not submit to a fudge by allowing them a free vote and accepted their resignations when they were among 15 Lib Dems to vote in favour.

If this episode was oblique, the issue that next introduced Mr Clegg to the voters was anything but. The Lib Dems inflicted on Gordon Brown his first significant Commons defeat, using one of their opposition days to table a motion to allow ex-Gurkha soldiers the right to live in Britain. The issue was simple for voters to understand and had the added appeal that the Gurkhas were backed by the television actress Joanna Lumley. Mr Cameron raced outside the Commons to join Mr Clegg celebrating with Ms Lumley for the television cameras. Mr Clegg again made waves by demanding the resignation of the Speaker, Michael Martin, over his inept handling of the MPs' expenses scandal, the first party leader in modern political history to do so. He appeared about to find his voice just at a moment when Conservative support was slipping while Mr Brown remained a deeply divisive Prime Minister. Yet his pre-election conference missed this opportunity, with several errors. Mr Clegg unwisely urged "savage" cuts in public spending, and appeared to ditch a commitment to scrap university tuition fees but was forced to back-track after a party backlash. Vince Cable provoked anger from MPs by unveiling, like a magician pulling a rabbit from a hat, a "mansion tax" on houses worth more than £1 million, later modified to £2 million.

Another of Sir Menzies' legacies was to have ordered preparations for an early election from 2007, meaning that target seat planning, candidate selection, fundraising and campaign staff recruitment were well advanced. The process was headed by Lord Rennard, the party's chief executive and architect of a string of by-election coups, but under Mr Clegg's leadership pressure developed for a new approach. Lord Rennard stood down in May 2009, coinciding with controversy over his Lords expenses claims, for which he was later cleared, meaning that none of Mr Clegg's core team had experience of running a general election.

Given Dr Cable's higher profile, they agreed long beforehand to make the campaign a double act. To avoid a repeat of the fraught "two Davids" SDP-Liberal Alliance duopoly of 1987, when reporters took delight in pouncing on differences between David Owen and David Steel, they campaigned together. The Clegg-Cable partnership worked well enough but was rapidly overtaken by events, as the television debates finally made Nick Clegg a national figure in his own right. *Greg Hurst is the author of Charles Kennedy: A Tragic Flaw (2006)*

How Brown's rivalry with Blair proved to be Labour's undoing

Philip Webster

Election Editor

His voice breaking with emotion, Gordon Brown, wearing a borrowed red tie, said farewell to frontline politics outside the door of No 10 five days after the general election. His final attempt to keep his party in office with a last-ditch deal with the Liberal Democrats was doomed from the start. When it came unstuck he was impatient to go, setting off for the Palace to see the Queen when his successor, David Cameron, was barely ready to follow suit. It was the job for which he had yearned all his life, and particularly during the ten years it was held by Tony Blair.

When his dream to win an election in his own right was finally shattered, however, Mr Brown was in no mood to hang around. In just three years the two founding fathers of new Labour had gone and the Conservatives were back in government for the first time since 1997. It was a partnership that had made Labour electable again after 18 years in the wilderness, but when they looked back on the Blair-Brown years most Labour politicians reflected that it was the intensity of their relationship, and Brown's at times irrational desire to oust his old friend, that helped to destroy the project that they had worked so hard to create.

Mr Blair won the 2005 election having issued in advance an unprecedented promise that it would be his last, although he intended to serve for most of it. The move, taken at a time of weakness towards the end of the previous Parliament, was regretted by friends and other Blairites, who always harboured doubts about Mr Brown's ability to win an election.

In the year after his third victory the Brownites kept snapping at Mr Blair's heels and in the summer of 2006, *The Times* was dragged into the drama. Late in August we were invited to Chequers for an interview to mark Mr Blair's return from his summer holiday. Our expectation was that the intention was to allow Mr Blair to lay out a timetable for his departure. The opposite happened. Given at least eight opportunities to say that the autumn party conference would be his last, Mr Blair declined. Asked at lunch afterwards what we thought the story would be, we told Mr Blair that it would be: "Blair defies Labour over leaving." He did not demur.

Our splash the next day provoked an explosion throughout the Labour movement. Brown's allies were furious and some of them launched into a plot to remove him. A Wolverhampton curry house was the venue for a number of parliamentary aides and Tom Watson, a junior minister close to Brown, to plan a letter calling on Mr Blair to go. "Without an urgent change in the leadership of the party it becomes less likely that we will win the election," it said and its publication left the Prime Minister looking hugely vulnerable.

There was only one way to save his skin: to do what he had so deliberately avoided doing in his interview with *The Times* the previous week. He announced that the forthcoming conference would be his last as Labour leader, admitting that he would have preferred "to have done this in my own way". Mr Brown got his way, but as the years unfolded it began to look increasingly like a pyrrhic victory. Mr Blair's concession at least allowed the relationship between the two to return to something like the friendship they had once enjoyed.

Mr Brown was on course for the leadership and with no senior figures rising to challenge him he was crowned Labour king without a contest on June 24, 2007, promising to give the party not just policies but a soul. In his acceptance speech in Manchester, Mr Brown appointed a general election coordinator to show his party that it should be thinking of going to the country soon.

A far more dramatic announcement was, however, going to be part of Mr Brown's speech until only a short time before he delivered it. He and many of his closest aides were planning that Sunday

morning to do what no other leader had done before and announce there and then that there would be a general election the following year. This was to be a new-style leadership, it was argued, so let's start doing things differently from the start. In the end it was removed; they concluded that it would be giving away far too much to the opposition parties, and there was even a fear that it might look disrespectful to the Queen, who is supposed to be told first of such matters. As later events were to show, however, it might have changed history.

It was left only for Mr Blair to take his bow the following week in the Commons, which he did with such customary élan that he had MPs from all sides rising in an unprecedented standing ovation at the end. He had managed ten years as Prime Minister, a remarkable feat. He had 28 minutes in the Palace saying goodbye to the Queen. Mr Brown went in later for a 57-minute audience and returned to No 10 as Prime Minister declaring: "Let the work of change begin."

Along with Peter Mandelson, Mr Brown and Mr Blair were the architects of the new Labour project. They were friends from their entry to the Commons together in 1983 but the tensions created when Mr Blair took the leadership never lifted until he finally left office. He gave his Chancellor unprecedented powers over domestic policy, ones that he exercised to an extraordinary degree. Decisions that might normally have been made in No 10 were taken at the Treasury; Mr Blair often learnt details of Brown Budgets at the last possible moment. His style was one of "Stalinist ruthlessness", according to a former Cabinet Secretary.

Mr Brown's most fervent supporters believe that the tragedy of their man was that he came to the post too late, when public enthusiasm for new Labour, eroded so much by the Iraq war, was already seriously on the wane. With three victories chalked up by Mr Blair, his successor was always going to find it hard to bring off a fourth. But within the wider Labour movement, the tragedy of Mr Brown was that both he and his allies overestimated his ability to do the hardest job in Britain. They never foresaw that the man who enjoyed strong levels of public support for most of his time as Chancellor could become so unpopular in the relatively short time he occupied No 10.

For all the tributes he received for the way he led the country, and to a lesser extent the world, during the financial crisis, the public took against him. David Cameron based his whole election campaign on a slogan warning of "five more years of Gordon Brown" because Conservative focus groups, like Labour's, told them that Mr Brown's personal position was irretrievable.

For those who know him well, the other tragedy of the outgoing Prime Minister is that the clunky, ill-at-ease, irascible man the public perceives is not the same person that Mr Brown, at his best, can be. That Mr Brown is a man utterly devoted to his family and friends, warm in his dealings with the public when the cameras are out of sight, funny when relaxing, as wellread as anyone could be, a sporting facts-and-figures nerd. His wife, Sarah, and sons, John and Fraser, quite obviously mean so much to Mr Brown, who married in his forties, and he has often told friends that the one consolation of being out of office would be being able to spend more time with them. Sadly, as even his closest friends admit, the public perception is not an accident and is justified by Mr Brown's behaviour over the years. His image as a bully is not accurate but he did get angry with himself, and with others, when things went wrong or they failed to meet his expectations.

It was, however, another personality trait that condemned Mr Brown to a political career that was to end without him winning a general election. During his long spell at the Treasury, and more crucially during those early weeks after he succeeded Mr Blair in 2007, Mr Brown acquired a reputation for dithering over big decisions. The habit was to cost him dear. As he almost announced on becoming leader, it had always been his intention on taking over to go to the country in 2008, but in the honeymoon period after he became Prime Minister, his popularity and that of Labour soared. The public liked the way he handled a run of national emergencies, including the floods and an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. So much so that Cabinet ministers were, by August, taking an autumn election for granted. Mr Brown, as a non-elected Prime Minister, could have rightfully asked for his mandate that September, ensuring that the party conferences were cancelled.

His inherent caution held sway. He needed more evidence that he was on a winner. He held the election threat over the Tory conference, believing that it would destabilise them. It was a disastrous miscalculation. He made the mistake of visiting British troops in Iraq on the day of the defence debate at the Conservative gathering, and a Tory charge of using the Forces as pawns got home. George Osborne's announcement that he was slashing liability to inheritance tax shook the Labour high command. Even so, as the conference season ended Mr Brown was still being urged by his closest allies to take the plunge and finish off Mr Cameron. But Mr Brown's pollsters, Deborah Mattinson and Stan Greenberg, who only weeks before had told him that he would win an election, began to back off. On the Thursday night figures such as Ed Balls went off to their constituencies certain that an election would be announced within days.

The next day Mr Brown digested with his advisers the results of a poll of marginal constituencies taken after the conference. It suggested that the Tory conference had gone down well, particularly the inheritance tax cut. Mr Greenberg insisted that Mr Brown could still win, but he might not win well. For Mr Brown, whose only reason for going early was to increase his majority, that was devastating news and he went cold on the idea. Ministers who had been keen on a poll suddenly retreated. Having allowed his team to stoke speculation, a humiliated Mr Brown finally bottled it and called off the election the next day. His only real chance of winning in his own right had gone and his tight group of advisers, who had been with him throughout his Treasury days, were torn apart by the episode. Long friendships ended, never to be repaired, and loyal workers such as Spencer Livermore found themselves taking the blame.

In the years that followed it is the decision that Mr Brown and his allies most regret. Most believe it is certain that he would have won then against the inexperienced Mr Cameron. It was only months into the Brown premiership but, viewed today, it was the beginning of the end. Britain was to have more than two further years of financial crisis and Mr Brown was to survive three serious attempts to oust him from office but something happened during that period that caused the country and some of his friends, however reluctantly, to doubt Mr Brown's capacity to win. For the band of Brownites who had stuck by the former Chancellor throughout his long period in office it was never to be the same.

Mr Brown was pitched into a series of financial earthquakes that brought out the best in him. History may judge his decision to nationalise Northern Rock early in 2008 to have been a success. His rescue of banks including Royal Bank of Scotland through taking a massive taxpayer stake in them may ultimately be seen to have saved the whole industry, with the taxpayer eventually making a profit. His handling of the G20 world summit over the banking crisis won plaudits from around the world. But at home Mr Brown was on a permanently downward spiral and it was a tribute to his prodigious resilience that he staggered on.

It was one of his last decisions as Chancellor, the abolition of the 10p rate of tax, that came back to haunt him. That part of his last Budget was largely ignored at the time because, with a typical Brown flourish, he had announced a cut in income tax, but the move hit millions of low-paid workers and, confronted by a mass backbench uprising, Brown had to ask his Treasury successor Alistair Darling to come forward with a mini-Budget to put it right.

In the summer of 2008, after dismal by-election defeats, Mr Brown faced his first serious coup attempt. MPs, many of them former Blair supporters, took to the airwaves to call for a leadership contest but no Cabinet ministers joined the rebellion and he survived. He was, though, was skating on thin ice and even his closest advisers realised that he badly needed to shore up his position. He did it in the most surprising way. For some months he had been talking to Peter Mandelson again. Mr Mandelson, in Brussels serving a stint as a commissioner, was worried about the survival of his new Labour project. The Prime Minister shocked him by asking him to come back to the Cabinet for the third time. He bit off Brown's hand and came back as a peer, Business Secretary and a host of other

things. He was to be with Mr Brown to the end, finally running the election for him. The move was a masterstroke, virtually killing any chance that a Blairite would stand against Brown.

In June 2009, after terrible local elections, James Purnell, the Work and Pensions Secretary, resigned with an attack on the Prime Minister. Crucially David Miliband, as he had the previous year, failed to follow him over the top with Lord Mandelson warning him it would be disastrous. Again Mr Brown pulled through, but with more and more Labour MPs admitting privately that an election could not be won under him. Finally, in January 2010 Geoff Hoon and Patricia Hewitt, both former Cabinet ministers, mounted yet another unsuccessful putsch. No one who mattered followed them but the delay as ministers laboured to voice support spoke volumes. Somehow, Mr Brown made it through to the general election. He fought a strangely subdued campaign that he brought to life only with passionate speeches towards the end. The result was better than most in Labour had expected but it was a defeat for which Mr Brown took responsibility.

Mr Brown's allies had always confided that if he felt at any time that his party would benefit from his departure he would go. His and their judgment was always that Labour would not be helped at all by the spectacle of a leader being forced out so close to an election. But on the night of the second television debate during the election campaign, Mr Brown told his closest political ally and friend, Ed Balls, that he would resign if Labour failed to get the highest number of seats and his continued presence was a block to a power-sharing deal.

As the results came in on Thursday night and Friday morning perhaps the biggest surprise was how well Labour had done. Topping 250 seats exceeded the expectations of most party strategists, the pollsters and the bookmakers. The better-than-expected showing followed a campaign in which Mr Brown was himself the reason massive numbers of voters gave to Labour candidates for not voting for their party. He was "cyanide on the doorstep", in the words of one unkind Labour minister. After the election, many Labour figures pondered whether if any other leader had been at the top of the party Labour would now be in its fourth term in a row.

Among Labour people it was a weekend of "if onlys". If only Mr Blair had taken on Mr Brown in a contest in 1994 after John Smith died and beaten him. Mr Blair would never then have had that sense of obligation to Mr Brown that in the end made him give way to him. If only Mr Blair had called Mr Brown's bluff and demoted him from the Treasury in the second term. If only Mr Blair had not announced before the 2005 election that it would be his last as leader. If only in 2006 Mr Blair had changed his mind, seen off the Brownite plot against him, and stood again in 2010.

On that dramatic Monday after the election Mr Brown announced plans to quit, as he had told friends he would. He called the cameras to Downing Street and said that he would stand down within months. He first told Nick Clegg. In so doing he removed the biggest obstacle to Mr Clegg doing a deal with Labour, if his attempts to wring further concessions from the Conservatives bore no fruit. As it happened, it was a final throw of the dice for Mr Brown and Labour and it did not work. Mr Clegg went with the Conservatives, even though he tried to keep open the prospect of a deal with Labour to the last. Mr Brown's Monday gambit was designed to give Labour its only chance of staying in power and it meant that when he finally resigned the next day he could go with dignity.

Exactly 1,048 days after he first kissed hands, Mr Brown was on his way back to the Palace to tender his resignation to the Queen, the eleventh prime minister to have done so. As he did so he could have been forgiven for wondering if his own and Labour's fortunes would have been better served if he had contained his ambitions. With Sarah by his side he left the stage saying that he had learnt about the very best in human nature and "a fair amount too about its frailties, including my own". The words spoke volumes. In those long years at the Treasury, getting Mr Brown to admit to mistakes, or even to human fallibility, was an impossible task. During his much shorter term as Prime Minister, Mr Brown seemed to learn much more about himself. He left the front line believing that Britain had become a better place during the Labour years. But no one is tougher on himself than

Mr Brown. He will agree with the verdict that his years in No 10 did not live up to what had gone before. *Philip Webster was Political Editor of The Times throughout the new Labour years*

Names of the dead were read to a silent Commons

Deborah Haynes

Defence Editor

British deaths on the front line were greater during the last Parliament than in any other since the Korean War. The toll, 369 service personnel, coupled with public anger over a lack of helicopters and armoured vehicles for troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, helped to draw the military into the political debate in a way not seen for a generation.

It did not happen straight away. Britain was a country at war on two fronts for most of the five years, but servicemen and women returning home would find themselves bemused at how little attention their efforts received. There was an underlying sense of disconnect between the politicians in Whitehall and the soldiers, sailors and airmen fighting and dying on their behalf in Helmand province and across southern Iraq. The sight of Tony Blair and after him Gordon Brown sporting flak jackets, helmets, sand-coloured boots and wide smiles on fleeting visits to fortified bases in both warzones did little to change this impression.

The political-military divide was further hindered by the rotation of four different defence secretaries in five years. Des Browne, who held the post from May 2006 until October 2008, was simultaneously made Secretary of State for Scotland when Mr Brown became Prime Minister, an appointment that many in the military saw as an insult, confirming their suspicion that the Government had failed to attach sufficient importance to its Armed Forces.

Mounting questions about the legality of the Iraq campaign, however, coupled with revelations in the media about the state of medical care for wounded troops, inadequate equipment on the front line and a litany of other shortfalls, began to create awkward political questions for ministers to answer. Driving home this sense of unhappiness, General Sir Richard Dannatt, then the head of the Army, broke with a tradition that frowns upon serving officers criticising the government and gave warning in September 2007 that the presence of British Forces in Iraq was worsening local militia attacks. He also spoke out on other emotive topics, such as inadequate accommodation for soldiers, unfair pay and the need for more boots on the ground in Afghanistan. Retired military chiefs added their voices to the chorus of complaints, with high-profile figures such as General Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank, a former chief of the defence staff, becoming a regular critic of Mr Brown, who was accused of cutting the defence budget during a time of war.

The mood of blame and betrayal differed sharply to the plaudits that Margaret Thatcher earned when she took Britain to war in 1982 to recover the Falkland Islands from Argentina. That successful campaign, despite the loss of 255 British lives, helped her to secure a landslide victory in a general election the following year. In contrast, the invasion of Iraq and its bloody aftermath, while defended by military commanders and politicians at the time, cast a shadow over the 2005-10 Parliament that did not disappear when Tony Blair stepped down. Instead, the Government's conduct in siding with the United States over Iraq began to be scrutinised in the Chilcot inquiry, set up to learn lessons from the Iraq campaign.

The previous Parliament also oversaw the deployment of British Forces into southern Afghanistan on a mission that was supposed to be about reconstruction but evolved into the bloodiest combat operation for the British military in decades. The punishing toll of casualties in Helmand over four summers belatedly captured people's attention back in Britain. Every week at Prime Minister's Questions the names of the dead were read out to a silent Commons, while television screens across the country tuned in to watch crowds line the street of a town called Wootton Bassett as convoys carrying the bodies of repatriated service members were escorted from a nearby military airbase. The reality of soldiers with missing limbs, horrific scars and the less obvious but equally debilitating

problem of mental disorders also awoke a sense that Britain was at war and more needed to be done to help the Armed Forces. The Government came under increased scrutiny.

Public outrage at the continued use of Snatch Land Rovers, dubbed “mobile coffins” by the soldiers who used them because of their inability to protect against roadside bombs, was one of the emotive issues that changed the relationship between the military and the politicians. So, too, did anger at an inadequate pool of Chinook helicopters, which was forcing British troops to move by road, making them more vulnerable to improvised explosive devices, the biggest killer of British Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The criticism added to a growing perception that the Government had tried to fight “Blair’s wars” on a peacetime budget. Even coroners were calling into question how frontline soldiers were being kitted and trained. To their credit, ministers responded to urgent requests from commanders on the ground, with the Treasury signing off on new, improved armoured vehicles and helicopters in record time. The damage, however, had already been done and repeated assurances that no request had been turned down rang hollow amid the belief that the military had never been properly funded in the first place.

The issue became hugely sensitive, with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats keen to knock Labour’s record, while the Government was anxious to demonstrate that it was doing everything possible to improve the situation. Highlighting the politicisation of what should be a military matter, a decision to replace the Snatch Land Rover with 200 new vehicles was revealed while Mr Brown was on a trip to Afghanistan. He embarked on the March visit immediately after giving evidence at the Chilcot inquiry in which he delivered a strong defence of his military spending record. He was, however, later forced to make an embarrassing correction to his evidence.

As well as requiring more of the Government, the growing political awareness and appreciation of defence also prompted the politicians to look more closely at how the Ministry of Defence conducted itself. The Defence Select Committee and the National Audit Office produced damning reports on its procurement record, with billions of pounds wasted on delayed projects.

Under Bob Ainsworth, Labour’s final Defence Secretary, the MoD published a Green Paper that set the scene for a long-overdue Strategic Defence Review, although it was left to the Lib-Con coalition to implement. The failure to conduct a review sooner – the last one was in 1998, before the world-changing terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – was regarded as another legacy of Labour’s inability to understand the military and, arguably, a failure of commanders to push for it. As a result, many of the long-term programmes to which the MoD was committed, such as two new aircraft carriers, planes to fly off them, and scores of additional fast-jets, were seen as out-dated and no longer suited to equip Britain for the wars of the future with only limited resources available.

Separately, a realisation of cash shortages in MoD coffers to look after wounded personnel and veterans prompted the creation of a number of new military charities on top of the established organisations to raise extra money for serving and former members of the Armed Forces. They moved quickly to capitalise on the sudden, public appreciation of the military, with *The Sun* newspaper backing a charity called “Help for Heroes” that ran a hugely successful campaign selling blue and red wrist bands as well as a host of other money-raising events that further boosted the profile of the military.

Joanna Lumley added an unlikely dimension to the relationship between MPs and the military when she fronted a bid to secure Gurkha veterans with at least four years’ service in the British Army the right to resettle in Britain.

It was not just the Armed Forces that were in focus. *The Times* ran a campaign in 2007 to urge the Government to help hundreds of Iraqi interpreters who were facing death at the hands of militiamen in Iraq because of their association with the British military. In response, Mr Brown created a scheme to relocate the interpreters and their families in Britain or give them a cash payment.

Another unfortunate legacy was a growing pile of lawsuits against the Ministry of Defence ranging from allegations of torture and abuse by Iraqi detainees to claims of negligence by the families of soldiers who died in Snatch Land Rovers. This costly process will take a long time to resolve.

The increased awareness of the military among the public and politicians during the last Parliament failed to translate into a heightened interest in the general election. Military insiders had hoped that a debate would take place about what sort of country Britain aspires to be: does the nation want to maintain its costly but influential place on the top table as a nuclear power alongside the United States or is it happy to downgrade to a less-significant player?

This fundamental question was left to be answered in the Strategic Defence Review. Aligned to this will be the extent of expected cuts in the defence budget, which will affect the scope of future operations, from the size of the Armed Forces to the weapons at their disposal. Unlike the first half of the previous century, the number of MPs with military experience remained low, although the new Parliament has the highest tally in at least the past two decades – 19 Conservative MPs and one from Labour, according to Byron Criddle, of the University of Aberdeen. Despite a shortage of hands-on experience, MPs look set to retain their rekindled appreciation of the military, at least for as long as British troops are deployed in Afghanistan.

Armed Forces Day, created by Mr Brown in June 2007, created an annual programme of events to celebrate all three services nationwide. The real test of Britain's relationship with its military, however, will occur in the decades ahead.

Hail and a fond farewell to the dearly departed

Ann Treneman

Sketch writer

So farewell, then, Manure Parliament. A solemn wave to those who are gone but not, as yet, forgotten. All in all, 147 MPs stood down before the election, some with honour and others not, exhausted, disillusioned, angry and shamed. On the night, many more joined them. Surely it is symbolic that, on a night when the overall swing to the Conservatives was 5 per cent, Mr Manure himself, David Heathcote-Amory, lost his seat in Wells, Somerset. Mr Manure, who had to pay back almost £30,000 in exes and submitted bills for dozens of sacks of manure for his garden, said: "Expenses damaged all incumbents and perhaps me particularly." I especially like that "perhaps".

His was not the only whiffy result. Many were surprised that Jacqui Smith, the first woman home secretary, stood for re-election in Redditch. Ms Smith, notorious for her claim for two porn videos for her husband, not to mention 88p for a bathplug, had fought a bizarre, almost guerrilla, campaign in which she did her best to avoid the press. Her best-known booster was Tony Blair, who popped in for tea one day. I am not sure if that helped or hindered: she lost with a 9.21 per cent swing to the Tories. She can now spend more time with her (second) home.

It was a bad night for former home secretaries. Charles Clarke lost his Norwich South seat by 310 votes to the Lib Dems. I shall miss Mr Clarke, a big beast of the Westminster village in every way, who fought a long and wonderfully personal campaign against Gordon Brown as Prime Minister. How sad for him that, in the end, he went before Gordo. Another Labour defeat was the minister Jim Knight, more talented than most, in the marginal Dorset South. I was not surprised to see that he was promptly made a peer.

I find it hard to imagine politics without Lembit Öpik, the celebrity-crazed Lib Dem just as well known for dating a Cheeky Girl whose big hit was called *The Cheeky Song (Touch My Bum)* and for believing that Earth could be destroyed by a meteorite. In the end, his career was wrecked by something much more mundane: a 13 per cent swing to the Tories. Hours after losing, Lembit popped up on the TV quiz show *Have I Got News for You* urging his fellow contestants to hurry up: "Can we get on with it? I've actually got an appointment at the JobCentre in about half an hour." Paul Merton responded: "They phoned earlier, they cancelled." Lembit loved this. He is a glutton for publicity.

Another shocker was Peter Robinson, Northern Ireland's First Minister and DUP leader, who lost his East Belfast seat. His defeat came after damaging revelations about himself and his wife, Iris, nicknamed the Swish Family Robinson after reports that they claimed more than £500,000 a year in salary and expenses. Iris, who always used to do a fine line in morality when she spoke in the Commons, had already stood down after it became known that she had obtained £50,000 for her teenage lover to fund his business. It is a sad tale but not without its moral.

In the pantheon of retiring MPs, I must make special mention of Sir Nicholas Winterton, Tory MP for Macclesfield since 1971. He and his wife, Ann, were known as Mr and Mrs Expenses. Sir Nicholas was wildly opinionated, red-faced and rambunctious (last year he slapped the bottom of the Labour MP Natasha Engel in the Commons tea room). But his retirement cannot pass without remembering his supremely ill-judged remarks about why he needed to travel first class: "If I was in standard class, I would not do work because people would be looking over your shoulder the entire time, there would be noise, there would be distraction. They are a totally different type of people: they have a different outlook on life. They may be reading a book but I doubt whether they are undertaking serious work or study."

So goodbye, Sir Nicholas, see you in economy. I will actually miss the rather gentle manner of Sir Peter Viggers, an MP for 36 years, who is now spending more time with his ducks, who never even liked their cute little house. Andrew MacKay, who with his wife, Julie Kirkbride, was another Mr

and Mrs Expenses, was amazingly orange. His seat in the Commons, on the aisle, first bench back, will always have a tangerine hue for me. John Gummer, who seems to have been around for ever, is gone but not forgotten after his expenses got tangled up with his attempt to get rid of his moles. And then there is Mr Moat (aka Douglas Hogg), whose final act was to give an interview clarifying that he had not claimed for the moat per se and noting that, anyway, it wasn't a moat at all but a "broad dyke". Does that make it worse? After all, there is a certain majesty in a moat.

On Labour's side, in addition to the expenses villains, there are the lobbyists, not to mention the plotters. Stephen Byers, who once described himself as a cab for hire, is now out in the big bad world, his light on. I will never have to hear the patronising undulations of Patricia "Patsy" Hewitt's voice again. Geoff "Buff" Hoon, the man who specialised in never being there when it came to Iraq, now really won't be there. Despite it all I rather liked his plodding pedestrian ways. Other "hall of shame" retirees include Kitty Ussher, a once rising star, who wrote a two-page letter explaining why her London house needed major repairs: "Most of the ceilings have Artex coverings. Threedimensional swirls. It could be a matter of taste, but this counts as 'dilapidations' in my book!" And Kitty, let us remember, was a member of the People's Party.

So where is the good in the good, the bad and the ugly? Almost everybody else, actually. Of particular note is James Purnell, facial hair fashionista, whose sideburns will be missed by me. His shock resignation from the Cabinet almost brought down Gordon Brown. Mr Purnell was the brave one. It could have all been so different if he had succeeded.

For us sketch writers, John Prescott is simply irreplaceable: but he lives on, in the Twitter-sphere, boldly going where no one would have predicted he would. I will miss the bolshie proclamations of Labour's Andrew Mackinlay and the snide if somewhat forlorn comments of Chris Mullin, who proved to be a better diarist than politician. Others of note to go include Labour's Bob Marshall-Andrews, a man more or less permanently in opposition to his own side. In September 1997, commenting on an opinion poll that gave Tony Blair a 93 per cent approval rating, he said: "Seven per cent. We can build on that."

Others to be missed include

- Tony Wright, the much respected Labour MP who coined the phrase "Manure Parliament". He headed the eponymous committee on parliamentary reforms with tenacity and, dare I say it, wisdom.

- The Rev Ian Paisley, ancient Galapagos tortoise, who always spoke as if he was sermonising, possibly because he was.

- Michael Howard and Ann Widdecombe, linked forever by her "something of the night" comment about him. He was always worth watching, an astute and clever parliamentarian, and she was the only true reality TV star in the Commons: "I always imagined that when I was making my last speech, I would be sad. Instead I find that my uppermost sentiment is one of profound relief."

- David Howarth, a thoughtful Liberal Democrat, who returns to teach law at Cambridge. "People talk about standing down. I am standing up!" he told me. He is gloomy about politics, saying that it is no longer a "high trust" profession. Like estate agents, MPs now must always be watched like hawks. Inevitably, he said, the result will be that it attracts less trustworthy people.

- Martin Salter, the Labour MP for Reading West, was larger than life and louder than it too. Before he left, I found him in his chaotic office brandishing a "stress banana", a gift. "I use my banana for pointing," he chortled. "People say, 'Don't Miliband me!'" His office was plastered with pictures of fish. "I am leaving politics to spend more time with my wife, my camper van and my fish, in that order."

Last but not least in any way is Sir Patrick Cormack, the Tory grandee who bowed out after 40 years. He was a bit of an old buffer but no one doubts that he loves Parliament (which he pronounced "Parl-i-ament", with a little wiggle). When I stopped by to see him in his magnificent office, which he was emptying out, there was palpable regret in his voice as he talked of his career ups and downs.

He had wanted to be Speaker but, when he stood, received only 13 votes. “You take the rough with the rough!” he noted, his pug face crinkling. “Absolutely!”

So, at 71, he left to spend more time with his weekends. “It will be a terrible wrench. It has been my life for more than half my life. It is a very funny feeling at the moment: it is the last of this, the last of that. I am still behaving as normal but all the time I am sort of signing off.” It is hard to imagine the chamber without Sir Patrick. For 40 years, whenever “Parl-i-ament” was sitting, he spent at least three hours a day seated in his place, the middle aisle seat towards the back. In his last speech, he ended with these words of Catullus: “Ave atque vale”. Hail and farewell, indeed. *Ann Treneman is the author of Annus Horribilis: the Worst Year in British Politics (2009)*

The tragedy of Gordon Brown

David Aaronovitch

Times columnist

It was the longest understudy, for one of the shortest performances. A decade of increasingly unquiet waiting for his moment to take over from Tony Blair was followed by just under three years in the long-coveted post. Departing No 10, Gordon Brown left behind a reputation for grumpiness, intellectual brilliance, ambition and, in the end, enduring personal tragedy.

The grey, jowly, plodding figure who left office was scarcely recognisable as the brilliant, Heathcliffian man who entered the Treasury in 1997. In opposition, Mr Brown had shredded his opponents with thunder and wit, which turned to lightning and cleverness early in new Labour's first term. In the first week of that term he announced the independence of the Bank of England, a reform that was to become accepted by his political rivals, but which was not even put to the Cabinet.

His most deployed political term in the first two years of the Labour Government was the legendary "prudence", who was invariably accompanied by "with a purpose". He knew exactly what he was doing; he was the great intellectual of modern politics. His supporters told anyone who would listen that he was the real brains behind new Labour. He was literally unassailable.

When writers use terms such as "paradox", "enigma" and "contradiction" it is often a sign that they simply do not understand the subject. Gordon Brown has had these words applied to him more often than any other modern British politician. It has been hard, throughout his career in government, to explain how his different characteristics coexisted within the same person.

Mr Brown was, famously, the "son of the manse" – a man built upon the bedrock of religious and social principles as bequeathed to him by his minister father. "Understand this about him," I was told more than once by Scots, "and you understand everything." And when he repeatedly used the word "values", like a mallet on a wooden tent-peg and pronounced with an almost unending first vowel, it sounded convincing and deeply meant.

In his international campaigns to reduce Third World debt and to increase aid to Africa, both hugely successful, it was easy to see high moral principle at work, although such goods are indeed oft interred with the politician's bones. These were real and important achievements, but ones unlikely to be appreciated by most journalists, let alone most voters.

It could also be that in 30 years the first historians of the 2000s will single out Gordon Brown's leadership during the banking crisis of 2008-09 as having been central to saving the world from a second full-scale Great Depression. For a year a formerly depressed Prime Minister was transformed into a man full of hectic energy and knowledgeable determination.

But then there was the thin-skinned, jealous, tricky and occasionally even treacherous Brown, who seemed to stand at 90 degrees to the morals of the manse. This was the Chancellor who would cook the figures to make them more palatable and to suggest that he was being more generous than in fact he was; the colleague who allowed his closest advisers to run around Westminster bad-mouthing anyone who was considered to be an opponent; the Cabinet member who tried to keep his budgets secret from his own Prime Minister; the co-founder of new Labour who, for half a decade, connived secretly at the replacement of his one-time friend.

When, in the late Nineties, the first reports began to be written about rival camps forming around Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, some of us dismissed them as overblown – the product of junior aides shooting their mouths off and hacks anxious for a story. It seemed intrinsically unlikely that men who had been so disciplined and thoughtful in their pursuit of government should be so adolescent in their relationships with each other. I could not have been more wrong and gradually it became clear that this was not a matter of six of one and half a dozen of the other, but of a jealousy and resentment felt by Mr Brown towards Mr Blair.

So Gordon Brown became the man who opposed Tony Blair's attempts at public service reform when the latter was in office, and then embraced the same reforms once he had been pushed out.

And then, when in the post he had wanted so long, elected from a field of one, the politician who had moved decisively in 1997 on the question of the Bank of England, havered disastrously when, for a moment almost exactly ten years later, he might have won a general election in his own right.

In the televised debates in the 2010 campaign the former romantic lead came over as a rather querulous and awkward pensioner, barely restraining his innate grumpiness. Perhaps most ruinous to his long-term reputation, though, was the perception, widely shared and cleverly exploited by political opponents, that the economic crisis was somehow his fault, almost alone. The accusation was that Britain was particularly disadvantaged in responding to the crisis because of his earlier profligacy, saddling the nation with a mountain of public debt. When the Cameron-Clegg coalition began its governance of the country its main theme was blaming Mr Brown and his high-spending ways for any unpopular decision that it was about to make.

It might also be that Mr Brown is the last British leader in the modern era to be nothing like a television or film celebrity. His predecessor and his successor both possessed an easy public charm and a capacity to share their private existences in some way with the public and the media. Mr Brown palpably loathed this aspect of 21st-century politics, taking care to minimise the significant disability represented by his damaged eyesight, to play down the trauma of the loss of his first child in 2002, and to guard the privacy of his two young sons who, for one moment only, shared his last public appearance outside 10 Downing Street.

Gordon Brown was a substantial politician, a man of substantial achievement and significant faults, probably in the end too cautious, too thin-skinned and too cussedly human to be a great leader.

New Labour found its reforming stride too late

Phil Collins

Leader writer

The obituaries of the new Labour period in office are already being written, even though its time has only just passed. Politics always requires that you tell a clear story about what you are doing. In truth, in the maelstrom of internal conflict and external pressure, policy formation is often driven by scandal and panic as much as it is by principle and forethought. Much of the policy work the Labour Party did in opposition turned out to be inoperable. Policies enacted spawned unintended consequences. Then events occur that come to define the period in office that were never part of the original prospectus.

All that said, it still makes sense to divide the Labour period in office into three parts, broadly corresponding to changes in approach. The first period lasted from the golden glow of May 1997 until the winter crisis in the National Health Service in 2000. The failure of extra money alone to improve the service prompted the second, most fruitful, period of government between 2001 and the departure of Tony Blair from office in the summer of 2007. The premiership of Gordon Brown then marks a third phase in the Government, in which the pace of the second was slowed.

When the Blair Government was elected in May 1997 it came to office with a long history of policy development behind it. In office, though, it exhausted that preparatory work quite quickly. The granting of independence to the Bank of England was the most conspicuous policy, but really stood alone. There were three themes during this period in government. The governing idea of the administration was supplied by Mr Brown: the idea of work. The New Deal for the long-term unemployed, funded by a levy on the privatised utilities, and the introduction of tax credits to supplement the wages of those in work, heralded, it was said, a return to the idea that work was the best form of welfare.

The second notable theme of the first period was constitutional reform, although the half-hearted and incomplete programme indicated ambiguity on the part of senior personnel, not least the Prime Minister himself. Still, the devolved assemblies for Scotland and Wales are now a part of the political landscape accepted by all parties and the argument about the House of Lords is how to finish off Labour's near-abolition of the hereditary principle, rather than how to reverse it.

In the public services, the Government's strategy, which was essentially command and control from the central State, was well-equipped to deal with deep failure. There had been, for example, no progress on literacy for almost half a century. Placing a team in the department to force through curriculum change was an old-fashioned, and for a time very effective, use of state power. Hundreds of Public Service Agreements were set. The regimes of inspection and audit were toughened and the publication of information about services became commonplace.

The time ran out on this approach when the Chancellor of the Exchequer released the grip he had hitherto held on spending. The Government had come to office determined to shed Labour's historical association with profligacy. Mr Brown had, for that reason, submitted to the spending plans he had inherited from his Conservative predecessor. The paradox of releasing that restraint, though, was that it called forth the need for reform.

The standard Labour analysis, throughout the Thatcher and Major years, had been that there was not a great deal wrong with the public services that a lot of money could not put right. To some extent, that was true. Teachers, nurses, doctors and police officers had all fallen behind in the pay scales, relative to their professional counterparts in the private sector. Schools and hospitals were in a dilapidated state and the system was rationing provision in the only way it could – by queues. It was obvious that extra money was going to be part of the answer. That it was not the whole answer became clear when the money started to pour. The Prime Minister, late in 2000, realised that the analysis he

had inherited from opposition was wrong. He realised too that the provision of extra money was a necessary accompaniment to the difficult reforms that, it was now clear, were needed.

The second phase of Labour government was dominated, in the coverage at the time and by the accounts of it since, by foreign policy. The terrorist atrocity on September 11, 2001 confirmed in the mind of the Prime Minister something that he had defined in a speech in Chicago in 1999: that terrorist threats could no longer be contained within national borders and that, therefore, the definition of what was in Britain's interest had to be hugely expanded. The attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq were the immediate consequences of the Chicago doctrine, applied to the terrorist attacks.

The last word will probably never be said on these decisions but it is not true that foreign policy meant that the Government's domestic momentum was lost. On the contrary, it started to speed up. Changes to the healthcare system began in earnest. The internal market bequeathed by the Conservatives, which Frank Dobson had torn up, was remade. A tariff was introduced to apply to procedures to change the incentives in the system. Private companies were encouraged to offer their services and patients were given a choice of which hospital to go to.

In education, the gradual demise of what Alastair Campbell famously called the "bog-standard" comprehensive began. City Academies, free from local authority control and aided by bequests from philanthropists, made the schools system more diverse. Again, the ideas inherited from the Major Government, which had been vanquished in the first term, were revived. Much to the chagrin of the Labour Party, which contains more than its fair share of defenders of municipal accountability, a new model school was established: independent and not wholly funded by the State. The dispute between the Labour leadership and the Labour Party reached a head over the 2005 Act, which sought to establish a new cadre of independent state schools. After a bruising battle, a very much diluted Act passed into statute, to no great effect.

Over time, a model of public service reform had developed that came to define the Government at its most radical. Pressure on the provider of the service came from three sources: from the users who could choose to go elsewhere; from the central State, which set targets for performance and ensured that services were audited and inspected; and from the threat that any failing institution would be subject to losing its franchise in competition with a private company.

The practice always fell some way short of the theory, not least because few Labour MPs could be assembled to agree with it. A more comfortable phase began when Mr Blair left office and was replaced by Mr Brown. Although, ostensibly, there was no serious change of direction, the Government slowed everything down. The reforms in health were slowed almost to a standstill. Education policy was almost entirely derailed by a crisis in child protection with the aftermath of the dreadful case of Baby P, a boy battered to death at the hands of his mother, her boyfriend and their lodger despite repeated visits by social workers. Only in welfare did the radicalism of the second phase continue as James Purnell tried to add greater conditions to the receipt of benefits and tried to widen the range of suppliers of welfare.

In a sense, the third phase of the Government brought it full circle. The emphasis during the Brown years on a multitude of small initiatives driven by central targets, now rebranded as guarantees, and the evident reluctance of the Government to open up the health and education markets were reminiscent of the Government's stuttering beginnings.

Of course, just as the Blair years will not be remembered for the travails of domestic policy, so the Brown years will be recalled as the moment that the banking system almost collapsed. The banking rescue, the small discretionary fiscal stimulus and the recession were events of great economic magnitude on which the Government chose, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to fight the general election.

By the time of that general election the ideas that had sustained the Labour Party through more than a decade of government were widely felt to have been emptied of content. And yet this was only a half truth. In the Conservative policy on free schools, for example, there were glimpses of where

second-phase Labour was trying to get to. The social liberalism of the coalition Government owed something to Mr Cameron's desire to change his party, something to Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats, but rather more to the example of the Labour governments.

Phil Collins is a former speechwriter for Tony Blair

‘This sucker’s going down’: diary of a financial crisis

Suzy Jagger

Politics & Business

Correspondent

For the man who told a reporter three years ago that he had no idea whether the US was heading into recession because he got a B in basic economics, President Bush showed astonishing prescience on the future of the world financial system. As Lehman Brothers collapsed in September 2008, almost dragging the global banking system down with it, the President declared: “This sucker’s going down.”

While Britain’s “sucker” of a financial sector started to go down before its American rival, it was a US fiscal malaise that triggered the fall. Throughout the summer of 2007 banks who had lent extensively to borrowers on low incomes with bad credit histories began to warn publicly that in many cases they would not get their money back. HSBC, the owner of a US lender called Household International, startled the City and Wall Street in May of that year when it wrote off \$5 billion of bad US debts. As the summer dragged on, more banks admitted that mortgage borrowers were defaulting on their repayments and that they would have to write the bad debts off. Banks started to become wary about lending to each other and by the end of the summer the wholesale lending market, where banks lend billions to each other for short periods, had dried up.

It was the crisis in this market that triggered the collapse of Northern Rock, sparking the first run on a British bank for more than a century. Its business model, devised by Adam Applegarth, its chief executive, had two main consequences. By choosing the wholesale lending market to fund Northern Rock’s mortgage book, rather than backing it with savers’ deposits, the former mutual was able to grow its business quickly and become Britain’s fifth biggest provider of home loans. It also meant that when the wholesale lending market ground to a halt, Northern Rock was the most heavily exposed.

The public began to develop a new financial vocabulary. The word “liquidity” crept into headlines, television news alerts and ordinary conversations. It seemed, almost overnight, that everyone had become familiar with the term “sub-prime loan”, even if they were not entirely sure what it meant. (It means a loan to a low-income borrower with a poor credit score.)

Central banks started to pump cheap money into the financial system to get capital markets moving again but it failed to stem the rot. If the British public had become nervous about the state of the banking sector, their anxieties took a turn for the worse on September 13, 2007. At about 10pm, the news ticker along the bottom of the BBC news screen reported that Northern Rock had gone to the Bank of England to beg for emergency funds. Once news of the approach leaked out, the bank was effectively dead. The next day, a Friday, the shares lost 32 per cent of their value. Savers, who formed long queues outside branches, withdrew £1 billion that day.

Bankers from other institutions rushed to reassure shareholders that they did not need Bank of England funds. It emerged rapidly that Northern Rock could not survive without being acquired by a rival but none volunteered, put off by a £2.7 billion refinancing bill, its shonky mortgage book and limited branch network.

The infection spread to other parts of the financial markets, such as bond insurers. Citigroup, then the biggest bank in the world, started to dump losses. Merrill Lynch admitted at the end of October to \$7.9 billion of bad debts. Between December and March, central banks across the world started slashing interest rates in the hope that cheap money would cushion the strain. Brussels set up a \$500 billion facility just to tide banks over the Christmas period.

In January 2008 major stock markets, including London, suffered their worst one-day fall since 9/11, prompting the US Federal Reserve to reduce the cost of borrowing in the biggest cut for 25

years. Alistair Darling, the Chancellor, announced the following month that Northern Rock was to be nationalised.

It took one month for the next major bank to break. Bear Stearns, the weakest of the five Wall Street banks, was acquired by its bigger rival JP Morgan Chase in a deal worth \$240 million, having been valued at \$18 billion the year before. The manner in which the acquisition was handled dictated the rescue terms of every other terminally fractured US bank over the next 18 months. Four men masterminded every subsequent US bank rescue deal: Henry Paulson, the former US Treasury Secretary; Ben Bernanke, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board; Christopher Cox, the former head of the Securities and Exchange Commission; and Tim Geithner, then president of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, latterly President Obama's Treasury Secretary.

While hedge funds were allowed to snap like twigs under the financial strain, no US bank, large or small, was allowed to go bust on a weekday. The rescue talks often began in earnest on a Friday evening when world stock markets were shut. Mr Paulson was worried that if private rescue talks were leaked during the trading week, it could trigger wild swings in the stock market. The public statement declaring a troubled bank's new buyer or winding down arrangement would typically be made by early evening on a Sunday in the US, just before Tokyo opened for Monday morning business and 13 hours before New York. On the other side of the Atlantic, RBS, UBS, the Swiss bank, and Barclays begged existing investors to pay £27.2 billion of new money between them to repair their damaged balance sheets. A number of banks also sold stakes in themselves on the cheap to cash-rich foreign states such as Qatar. But existing small UK shareholders were reluctant to increase their holdings at all as they watched the value of their own homes fall for the first time in 12 years.

Two months later, in July 2008, HBOS, then Britain's biggest mortgage lender, tried to raise £4 billion from its own shareholders. It was a disaster. Only 8 per cent of investors agreed to buy more stock. Within days, the Chancellor warned Britain that it faced its worst economic crisis for 60 years and that the recession would last far longer than most had feared. Within a week, the world economy was plunged into the worst financial storm since the Wall Street crash of 1929.

The pace of the crisis accelerated to such an extent that almost each day delivered a new horror. On September 7, the mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which accounted for almost half of all America's home loans, were bailed out by Washington in one of the biggest financial rescues in history. The US taxpayer was faced with guaranteeing \$5 trillion of outstanding loans. Three days later, Lehman Brothers admitted that it had lost \$3.9 billion in 12 weeks. Rumours spread across Wall Street and the City that Dick Fuld, the head of Lehman, had not been able to find a rescue buyer.

On September 12, 2008, office workers descending into Wall Street's subway on their way home may have noticed the stream of limousines pulling up around the corner. Like hearses, they delivered 30 of the world's most powerful financiers to the office of the Federal Reserve. Between them, the men controlled the world's banking system and they had been summoned by Mr Paulson to be told that Lehman was bust. He said that the US taxpayer was not going to bail it out and warned them that, if they failed to rescue Lehman or carve it up, they would all be caught up in the havoc. Those who attended included Lloyd Blankfein, chief executive of Goldman Sachs, and John Thain, his opposite number at Merrill Lynch. Mr Fuld was not invited.

By 3pm on Sunday, the rescue talks were off. Barclays had wanted to do a deal but was blocked by Britain, which demanded that the US Government should sweeten any deal with American money. With the collapse of Lehman now inevitable, employees of the bank in Canary Wharf and Manhattan were summoned back to their desks to calculate the bank's colossal exposure and prepare for bankruptcy.

Mr Thain realised that his bank would be the next casualty. As Lehman employees packed up their belongings, Mr Thain was secretly signing a deal to sell Merrill to Bank of America for \$44 billion. He even made sure that \$4 billion of bonus payments for himself and Merrill staff were accelerated before the agreement was signed.

Six weeks before US presidential elections, Mr Paulson was adamant that the American taxpayer would not be called upon to bail out Lehman. Just before midnight, Mr Fuld announced that the bank was bust. During the course of one day, half of Wall Street had either been taken over or been declared bankrupt.

A far bigger, immediate financial crisis loomed. AIG, the world's biggest insurer, was on the brink of collapse. Washington could not let AIG fail because it would have triggered a terrifying financial unravelling across the world. AIG, founded in Shanghai, owned substantial businesses. Most importantly, a huge financial markets business, with big operations selling products called credit default swaps, effectively writing insurance policies against other companies' bankruptcies. In September 2008, it controlled assets worth \$1 trillion. By the end of Monday, Washington had bailed AIG out with \$85 billion and taken control of a 79.9 per cent stake.

In London, Sir Victor Blank, venerable chairman of Lloyds TSB, was signing a deal to bail out HBOS. After a run on HBOS shares, the British Government agreed to waive all competition rules and allow Lloyds to buy the bank, grabbing a third of the UK mortgage and savings market in one go. The deal went through but the strain of assuming HBOS's bad debts on the healthier Lloyds became unsustainable. The transaction bought HBOS only a month before it needed to be bailed out.

The US Treasury Secretary became convinced that the whole banking system was vulnerable and came up with a plan three days later to rescue everybody. He proposed setting up a bailout fund into which \$700 billion of taxpayer money would be pumped to buy lenders' bad debts so the banks would start trusting each other again and start lending. Despite all-night talks during which politicians were ordered to leave their BlackBerries outside and Mr Paulson went down on one knee to beg Nancy Pelosi, the leader of the House of Representatives, to be sympathetic, it failed. On September 29, Congress blocked the creation of the fund and the markets slumped.

Mr Paulson's counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic were also having a bad day. Having sought to secure HBOS days before, the Chancellor was forced to announce that Bradford & Bingley was to be nationalised and made the British taxpayer take control of £50 billion of its mortgages. To make matters worse, Iceland, whose own financial system was intertwined with the fate of British investors, started to collapse.

Desperate to create a fund that would help to restore some confidence in the US financial system, Mr Paulson endured new talks to persuade Washington to agree to the \$700 billion rescue plan. On October 3 on the White House lawn, Mr Paulson announced his deal.

On the morning of October 7 in London a bloodbath broke out in the markets. A Treasury official phoned Mr Darling, who was in Europe at a meeting of finance ministers, to say that RBS stock was down 40 per cent, pulling the rest of the banking sector with it. A team led by the Prime Minister's trusted aide Baroness Vadera rapidly drew up a three-point plan to provide liquidity, guaranteed funding and capital injections. They agreed a new £50,000 threshold to guarantee retail deposits. They pulled together a rescue package of £50 billion for the banking system, supplemented by another £200 billion of support. By the end of the day, five central banks including the Bank of England had cut interest rates by half a percentage point.

Had observers been in any doubt about the purpose of releasing a wall of money on the British banking system, it would have become clear to them on the morning of October 13. The Government announced that it had pumped £37 billion into RBS, Lloyds and its new business, HBOS, to prevent the three lenders collapsing and part-nationalised them.

In the months that followed Wall Street and the City proved that they had emerged from the storm. The credit crisis began to spread to other industries, such as the automotive sector. But Westminster and Washington began the process of devising long-term assistance schemes and drawing up new regulatory regimes.

Within 18 months of the height of the banking crisis, Mr Paulson and Mr Darling had both been voted out of office. In neither case because they were seen to have personally failed to deal with

the worst financial crisis for almost a century, but because politically both countries had moved on. Mr Paulson's battered mobile Motorola phone, which was used to negotiate every bail-out, is now an artefact in the Smithsonian Institute. Observers may hope that the banking crisis is contained, if not consigned, to history.

Suzy Jagger covered the American sub-prime crisis as US Business Correspondent until February 2009.

SNP pioneers of minority rule

Angus Macleod

Scottish Political Editor

Within the 2005 general election there lay a warning for Labour north of the Border that went largely unheeded. The party in Scotland, as everywhere else in Britain, had benefited for years from the Tony Blair “Big Tent” approach to building support across voter categories and divides. Yet, as opposition to the Iraq War lingered, that essential coalition of interests showed signs of breaking up in Scotland. Suddenly, middle-class Scottish voters who had supported the party since the mid-90s were increasingly exasperated and bitter. While its Scottish working-class heartlands stayed loyal, less committed Labour voters turned to the anti-war Liberal Democrats and SNP, to voice their dissent. Urban seats in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and throughout Scotland’s central belt, while still returning Labour MPs, had become highly marginal.

If there was disillusion with Labour at UK level, the same was true at the Scottish Parliament. Devolution had recovered from early traumas over MSPs’ expenses and controversy over the £400 million cost of the new Holyrood building, but it had not delivered the step change in public services that the Scots imagined it would. The Labour-led Scottish Executive had delivered groundbreaking policies, such as a ban on smoking in public places and free personal care for the elderly, but it was widely perceived to have governed looking over its shoulder for approval from London. For the Scots, devolution had not been Scottish enough.

The SNP, once more under the shrewd leadership of Alex Salmond, who returned to the post in 2004, was also recovering from a series of average election performances but Mr Salmond saw that the 2007 Scottish Parliament election would provide his party with its biggest chance yet to win power.

He saw that his party representing the Scottish interest and with no obligation to a wider party at UK level left him a golden opportunity. He set about professionalising the party machine, amassing an unprecedented £1 million election war chest from sympathetic business donors and presenting a set of policies that played into Scottish anxieties about escalating council tax bills, the NHS and education priorities.

Labour was flat-footed, perhaps believing that an SNP victory would never happen. In the months leading up to the 2007 election, it was obvious that only one party had momentum and it was not Labour. Anxieties about the SNP’s core aim of independence were put to one side because voters knew that the break-up of Britain could not happen without a referendum. Labour’s campaign was confused; the SNP’s, with promises to abolish the council tax, cut class sizes and restore hospital A&E units, was exciting for many of those “soft” Labour voters who had deserted Labour in 2005 and were ready to do so again. To Labour’s dismay and disbelief, the SNP emerged as the largest party. When their promise of an independence referendum proved an insuperable roadblock to forming a majority coalition with the Lib Dems, Mr Salmond opted for minority government, daring Labour and the other unionist parties to bring him down. His calculation proved prescient especially as his honeymoon in government turned out to be no nine-day wonder. He and his minority government set about delivering on manifesto promises that did not need legislation. Through delicate and skilful manoeuvring, he was able to attract enough support from at least one opposition party to get his annual budgets through Parliament.

Labour was dumbstruck. Unable to react, it became embroiled in an internal row over the leadership campaign expenses of Wendy Alexander, who succeeded Jack McConnell as Scottish leader. She resigned and was followed by Iain Gray, whose dogged but lifeless leadership meant that Mr Salmond, as First Minister, was able to retain his position as the major personality of devolved

politics. As Labour's problems grew at Westminster under Gordon Brown, poll after poll showed that the SNP was, if anything, consolidating its position in Scotland.

The gloss was bound to come off the nationalists at some point. From mid-2009 it did. Their very status as a minority administration meant that a whole series of probably over-the-top manifesto priorities, such as cutting class sizes and abolishing student debt, had to be ditched. The SNP had delivered a council tax freeze, but the next step of abolishing the tax altogether and replacing it with a local income tax was also put on hold, simply because the nationalists did not have the parliamentary votes.

Labour, in the meantime, entered into an opposition coalition with the Lib Dems and the Conservatives over constitutional powers looked at by the Calman Commission, which recommended a tranche of new tax-raising and other powers for Holyrood. Calman was a direct riposte by the unionist parties to the SNP's independence agenda, although some unionists saw it as yet another concession to the nationalists. The SNP, for its part, was busy redefining what it meant by independence, talking loudly and often of a "social union" with the rest of the UK that would give Scotland full fiscal independence but with shared defence and diplomatic interests and retaining the Queen as head of state. It was dubbed *independencelite*. It was also a recognition by the SNP that Scotland, for all the SNP spin about the "London" parties, remained firmly unionist while wanting their devolved Parliament to acquire more profile through greater autonomy from Westminster.

The 2010 election allowed Labour to present itself as more in tune than the SNP with Scots' wishes on the constitution while exploiting to the full Scots voters' fears about a Conservative government returning to the worst days of Thatcherism. Many found the latter tactic somewhat childish and disreputable, but there is no doubt that it worked. The key trend in the general election results of 2010 was that voters throughout Scotland voted for the party in their constituency most likely to keep the Tories out. Labour was the main beneficiary, returning 41 MPs, while the Lib Dems retained 11, the SNP repeated their 2005 performance with 6 MPs and the Tories returned a paltry 1, showing that whatever else, David Cameron was still regarded with suspicion north of the Border. But Labour, for the first time since devolution, found itself in opposition on both sides of the Border.

Northern Ireland comes back from the brink

David Sharrock

Ireland Correspondent

It was the parliamentary term in which the Northern Ireland peace process was finally completed, a time of extraordinary events that few could have imagined even five years earlier. The defining image must be that of the Rev Ian Paisley, the old warhorse of No Surrender Unionism, and Martin McGuinness, the former “Public Enemy No 1” in his role as Provisional IRA commander, laughing uproariously together in the company of Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, and his Irish counterpart, Bertie Ahern. And yet there should be no surprise that, this being Northern Ireland, the conclusion of the peace process does not mean the end of the Troubles nor the threat from violent Irish republicanism to the security of the State. A page was turned in the history of Britain’s involvement with Ireland but the story was left far from over.

The backdrop was the usurpation of the Ulster Unionist Party, since the founding of the Northern Ireland state its “ruling party”, by its rivals the Democratic Unionists in the 2005 general election. As disaffection with the outworking of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the dysfunctional power-sharing Executive led by David Trimble, the First Minister, reached new heights among Unionists, a sea change in voting patterns swept away the *ancien régime*, rewarding the DUP with nine Westminster seats and reducing the UUP to just one, North Down, held by Sylvia Hermon.

Mr Paisley’s party promised an end to “pushover Unionism” and the experiment of sharing power with Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Provisional IRA. Yet even before the 2005 anointment of the DUP as the new voice of Northern Ireland’s majority community, there were sufficient straws in the wind for Mr Blair’s advisers to form the view that the real endgame in Ulster was to bring together the political extremes, abandoning the centre ground shared by the UUP and the SDLP, to create a new political status quo.

Indeed, Mr Blair’s delayed departure from No 10 had much to do with the Prime Minister’s determination to see his project reaching some definable goal, nearly a decade after the euphoria of the Good Friday Agreement. He courted Mr Paisley assiduously with a near-perfect reading of the psychology of Ulster’s “Dr No”. By now in his 80s and with a terrifying brush with mortality a recent memory, Mr Paisley was conscious that his political career was drawing to a close. He wanted, and was encouraged by Mr Blair in this with lengthy intimate chats about religion, to leave behind a legacy that subverted all the beliefs of his admirers and enemies.

At the same time Mr Blair’s wingman in Ulster, the Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain, was given the job of playing Bad Cop to the PM’s Good Cop. Mr Hain threatened the DUP with dire warnings that, if it failed to respond to the political progress that Sinn Féin was making, the British and Irish Governments would implement a Plan B – a far deeper green shade of Direct Rule for Northern Ireland bordering on joint sovereignty shared between London and Dublin.

Sinn Féin was suffering some game-changing setbacks. The manner in which Mr Blair had indulged Republican leaders for so long over the Provisional IRA’s failure to decommission its vast arsenal of weaponry no longer impressed Washington, which began to threaten Gerry Adams’s frequent trips to the United States with visa withdrawals. The Provisionals’ murder of Robert McCartney, a working-class Roman Catholic from a strongly Republican Belfast district, in addition to the £26.5 million cash raid from the Northern Bank – at the time the largest robbery in UK criminal history – set an ominous new tone. Sinn Féin was in a corner and only the winding up of its military wing would extricate the party.

With time running out for Mr Blair, the scene was set for a final attempt at resolution with one more round of negotiations at a venue away from the pressures and distractions of Belfast. In October 2006 the parties and British and Irish leaders convened at St Andrews. Even the choice

of a Scottish location played to Mr Paisley's Ulster-Scots roots. The DUP leader was said to be more enthusiastic than some of his party officers on signing a new international treaty between two sovereign governments that Mr Paisley would argue was an improvement on the 1998 Belfast Agreement.

The St Andrews Agreement contained more inducements for Mr Paisley than it did for Mr Adams and Sinn Féin, but the republicans also knew that they had fewer cards to play. Just as with Mr Blair, Sinn Féin's investment in years of developing a political strategy to achieve Irish unity without resort to violence now depended on the man who had made a career out of wrecking every attempt to reach an accommodation with nationalism. Sinn Féin agreed not only to recognise but to support the forces of law and order in the guise of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, a reformed Royal Ulster Constabulary shorn of its name and emblems, in return for the DUP's agreement to share power at Stormont. This was the moment when the sacred cow of the legitimacy of the Provisional IRA, a construct of the Irish liberation movement dating back to 1919, was finally dispatched. The following summer the Provos would quietly announce that they had formally ended their campaign to force Britain out of Ireland.

Symbolically this was a significant victory for Mr Paisley and the DUP, but it was still proving to be a hard sell to his grassroots, for so long weaned on the rhetoric of smashing Sinn Féin and republicanism. Mr Paisley demanded and got another Northern Ireland Assembly election, the tenth time that Northern Ireland had been called to the polls since 1998, to test his mandate for going into government with his former sworn enemies.

The March 2007 election rewarded the DUP with 36 seats in the 108-seat Assembly, reinforcing its primacy. The UUP managed only half that number and Sinn Féin also pulled away from the SDLP, taking 28 seats. On May 8, Mr Paisley was formally sworn in as First Minister. "If anyone had told me that I would be standing here today to take this office, I would have been totally unbelieving," he said. Mr Blair and the Provisional IRA's ruling Army Council, separated by just a few seats, watched from the Stormont gallery. Mr McGuinness took the oath as Deputy First Minister. Mr Blair left office with his peace project prize.

The "Chuckle Brothers" era was golden but brief, a honeymoon period in which the two former enemies laughed in public at one another's jokes even though Mr Paisley still refused to shake Mr McGuinness's hand. The former's fortunes soon waned. Having been schmoozed by the Establishment he had for so long spurned, even his wife Eileen was now a member of the House of Lords, he was rejected by the very Church he founded. Free Presbyterian elders forced him to stand down as Moderator over his decision to share power with "unreformed terrorists".

It was the tangled allegations of financial impropriety against his son Ian Jr that provided the excuse to get rid of him (the Stormont Ombudsman later cleared him). Mr Paisley tersely announced that he was retiring, to be replaced as DUP leader and First Minister by Peter Robinson. Mr McGuinness learnt of it from the radio news.

Mr Robinson promised a new era of "business-like" dealings with Sinn Féin: code for less grinning, which was going down badly with the grassroots. The DUP's foot-dragging over the transfer of policing and justice powers from Westminster to Stormont began to unnerve Sinn Féin, which withdrew its cooperation, effectively rendering the power-sharing Executive mute for many months. In local parlance, the Chuckle Brothers had become the Brothers Grim.

Northern Ireland slid in slow motion towards a new crisis. Sinn Féin privately briefed that its patience was not eternal and that if policing and justice were not devolved by Christmas 2009 they would bring down the institutions whose construction had taken so long to complete.

Then came the most unpredictable of crises for Northern Ireland's leaders. Gerry Adams was accused of covering up for decades the alleged sexual abuse by his brother Liam of Liam's daughter. Mr Robinson was revealed as a cuckold, his wife, Iris, MP for Strangford, having had an affair with a teenager. There was more. Iris had raised £50,000 from property developer friends to set her young

lover up in business, pocketing a “commission” herself from the cash. Mr Robinson was accused in a BBC investigative documentary of having breached his office’s code of conduct by not having made the authorities aware, a charge that he strongly denied.

The personal and political crises intertwined as Sinn Féin increased the pressure. Gordon Brown, whose interest in Northern Ireland had been minimal until now, was forced to fly with Brian Cowen, his Irish counterpart, to Belfast to hold emergency proximity talks. These failed and after three days the Prime Minister abandoned Hillsborough Castle, leaving Shaun Woodward, his Northern Ireland Secretary, to oversee two weeks of marathon negotiations, during which Mr Robinson temporarily stood down as First Minister.

Eventually the deal was done and sealed by the British and Irish leaders, who returned to unveil a firm date for the transfer of policing and justice powers, a hugely symbolic act for Sinn Féin since it could henceforth argue that the English were no longer running the show.

The extraordinary survival of Mr Robinson and Mr Adams as leaders of their respective parties was much commented upon, with most agreeing that neither could or would have remained in any other part of the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland. Yet there was one surprise in the general election of 2010. Mr Robinson’s party saw off the challenge from a revived Ulster Unionist Party, now in alliance with the Conservatives, but also the Traditional Unionist Voice power-sharing rejectionists.

Establishing themselves beyond question as the voice of Unionism, talk began once more about a united Unionist party to challenge Sinn Féin’s onward march towards becoming Northern Ireland’s largest party. But Mr Robinson lost his East Belfast seat, which he had held for 31 years, to Naomi Long of the cross-community Alliance party, which designates itself neither Unionist nor nationalist. Across the city in West Belfast Mr Adams increased his share of the vote to 71 per cent.

As the parliamentary term drew to a close it seemed as if the self-denial about the threat of a fresh cycle of terrorism from a new generation of Irish Republican extremists was finally over. The Real IRA, a splinter of the Provisionals, bombed the Army’s Palace Barracks outside Belfast where MI5 has its headquarters.

One phase of the Troubles had drawn to a close, but another was threatening to commence.

Welsh coalition complications

Greg Hurst

Editor of the Guide

Britain's first postwar coalition government involving the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats came within a whisker of being forged in Wales, three years before that agreed in Westminster. The two parties struck a deal to become junior partners in a coalition led by Plaid Cymru after the elections to the Welsh Assembly in 2007, only to see it unravel at the eleventh hour.

The collapse of Cardiff's "rainbow" coalition propelled Plaid into the arms of Labour, the dominant party of Wales, which remained in office to lead a red-green Government that was anathema to many supporters of both.

The biggest beneficiary was Rhodri Morgan, returning as First Minister to secure his place as the man who, more than anyone else, shaped the direction and tone of Welsh devolution. Donnish, quirky, consensual in approach but statist by instinct, Mr Morgan's achievement was to reach out well beyond Labour's strongholds in industrial South Wales to foster a sense of national purpose, often while his party did not. To do so, he had to lead, cajole and endure a Welsh Labour Party whose tribal instincts were directly contrary to the principles of pluralism on which Welsh devolution was built.

Unlike Donald Dewar, who led the parallel devolved Executive in Scotland from its creation to earn the mantle of father of the nation, Mr Morgan lost out in Labour's first election to lead the Welsh Assembly in 1999 after some heavy-handed intervention from Tony Blair in support of his chosen candidate, Alun Michael. Yet this opening battle was subsequently of enormous help to Mr Morgan because it illustrated his willingness to stand up to his party in London and do things his way. That became his approach as First Minister.

From the outset Labour's Assembly group refused to countenance coalition, despite being short of a majority, leading to the fall of Mr Michael and clearing the way for Mr Morgan to replace him, first in coalition with the Liberal Democrats from 2000-03 and subsequently, when Labour won 30 of the 60 Assembly seats in 2003, ruling alone.

Mr Morgan rejected new Labour's reforms to public services and sought to tackle inequality by extending the State: free bus passes for pensioners, free prescriptions for all, free breakfasts for primary school pupils.

The Assembly itself underwent a profound change in 2006 as the Government of Wales Act gave it law-making powers, known as "assembly measures", on areas of devolved policy, subject to the agreement of the Welsh Secretary and approval of both Houses of Parliament. It also separated the powers of the executive government from the Assembly.

Mr Morgan announced in 2005 that he would seek re-election to the Assembly in 2007 but, if successful, stand down some time in 2009, mid-way through the Assembly's term. The Assembly elections in 2007 coincided with a fall in Labour's popularity across Britain. Although the party in Wales tried to distance itself from Mr Blair, discouraging him from campaign visits, Labour lost four seats in the Assembly, leaving it well short of control.

In the ensuing vacuum, the opposition parties began an extraordinary attempt to oust Labour. Plaid, with a more professional campaign and fresh emblem of a yellow Welsh poppy in place of its traditional green, gained three seats to take its tally to 15. It also diluted its wish for Welsh independence to become a "long-term vision", making it a more palatable partner, opting instead for community campaigns against closing hospitals and sub-post offices and spending pledges such as a free laptop for every child at school,

Plaid's leader, Ieuan Wyn Jones, opened talks with the Welsh Conservatives, who had also nurtured a more distinctly Welsh identity, urging national status for the Welsh language and a bank

holiday on St David's Day, and with the Liberal Democrats. The three had met regularly, and constructively, to discuss opposition tactics; they now planned for government.

A week and a half later the three parties had hammered out a 20-page agreement, giving priority to education, renewable energy, a halt to hospital closures and a referendum on full law-making powers to the Assembly. Mr Wyn Jones was to become First Minister with the Conservative and Liberal Democrat leaders, Nick Bourne and Mike German, both as Deputy First Minister. It would have created the first Conservative ministers since 1997 and the first three-party coalition in Britain since Lloyd George was Prime Minister.

Incredibly, it was the party that stood to gain most, the Welsh Lib Dems, with just six Assembly seats, that pulled the plug. Their negotiating team backed the deal, as did their Assembly group, but a vote of their Welsh national executive committee split, nine in favour and nine against, with no provision in the rules for a casting vote. Furious, Plaid opened talks with Labour to agree a One Wales Agreement that confirmed a rethink on hospital closures and put emphasis on affordable housing and better transport links between North and South Wales. Mr Wyn Jones had to settle for the post of Deputy First Minister, with Mr Morgan back in charge.

The latter honoured his pledge to stand down, bowing out in December 2009 after almost a decade as the figurehead of Welsh devolution, declaring that he would spend more time digging his allotment and attending to his hobby of wood-carving. The election to succeed him was spirited but predictable with Carwyn Jones, the favourite of three candidates, emerging as the victor with 52 per cent of the vote. A barrister in criminal and family law, and Assembly Member for Bridgend since its creation, he had a relatively low profile other than during the foot-and-mouth outbreak in 2001, when he was Minister for Rural Affairs. His most recent post was that of Counsel General and Leader of the House.

The One Wales Agreement left little scope for him to make his mark in policy, other than by his choice of ministers and progress implementing the coalition programme, particularly the unfinished business of a referendum on full law-making powers for the Assembly. Labour's defeat in the general election of 2010 left Carwyn Jones one added responsibility, as the most senior Labour politician in power in Britain.

All change, the gravy train has hit the buffers

Ben Macintyre

Times columnist

There was the Rump Parliament (1649) and the Long Parliament (1640), the Mad Parliament (1258) and, quite simply, the Bad Parliament (1377). But what to call the 54th Parliament, which seemed so very long, so mad and, in many ways, so very bad? This will be, for ever, the Duck House Parliament. Little did Sir Peter Viggers imagine, when he ordered an obscure and expensive item of furniture for his pond, that he would be creating a grim leitmotif for an era of scandal that inflicted such damage on the institution he had served for 36 years. In a cruel twist, the wretched ducks did not even like their new house, which Sir Peter tried to include in his parliamentary expenses. They refused to live in it.

The Parliament ushered into being by the 2005 election and put out of its misery in April 2010, was one of astonishing turbulence, buffeted by scandal, economic meltdown and political acrimony. All the major parties changed leader: the Liberal Democrats twice. The Speaker was forced out of office for the first time since 1695. At the end of the Parliament, a remarkable 149 MPs stood down, including 100 Labour members and 35 Tories.

Far more important than the changing faces was the transformed relationship between the electors and the elected. Faith in politicians plummeted. After the expenses scandal of 2009, John Bercow, the new Speaker of the House of Commons, declared: "Let me be brutally honest about the scale of what has occurred. I cannot think of a single year in the recent history of Parliament when more damage has been done to it than this year, with the possible exception of when Nazi bombs fell on the chamber in 1941."

The bomb of the expenses scandal fell from a sky that was already overcast and stormy. The election of 2005 brought some notable newcomers to the House, including Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband. When Tony Blair won his third consecutive victory in 2005, with a reduced overall majority of 66, the Afghan war was already four years old and the war in Iraq had been under way for two years. The Parliament started in a truculent mood, which got steadily worse. Mr Blair was accused of misleading Parliament over the war and of ruling in presidential style. Mounting war casualties, the bitter grinding rivalry between Blair and Brown and the Prime Minister's growing unpopularity gave a sour, *fin de siècle* flavour of intrigue to the first two years of the Parliament, as it became ever clearer that Mr Blair would not fulfil a promise to serve a full third term.

David Cameron became leader of the Tories in October 2005 after a late surge of support. Sir Menzies Campbell took over leadership of the Liberal Democrats after Charles Kennedy resigned, citing a drink problem. Sir Menzies resigned after 19 months, paving the way for Mr Clegg to win the leadership by a waferthin margin. While the opposition parties forged new leaderships, the Blairites and Brownites traded blows and snide spin. The first attempted coup came in September 2006, when the Brownite parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Defence, Tom Watson, signed a letter to Mr Blair asking that he resign to end the uncertainty over his succession. He was told to withdraw the letter or resign his ministerial position. He quit, with another broadside at Mr Blair: "I no longer believe that your remaining in office is in the interest of either the party or the country...the only way the party and the Government can renew itself in office is urgently to renew its leadership."

Mr Blair described Mr Watson's actions as "disloyal, discourteous and wrong". The plot thickened when it appeared that Mr Watson had visited Mr Brown's home in Scotland the day before the memo was sent. Mr Watson claimed that he had merely been dropping off a gift for the Browns' new baby son, Fraser.

The uncertainty, the rumours, the whiff of conspiracy and allegations of treachery set the tone for the rest of the Parliament: a poisonous legacy that Mr Blair would bequeath to Mr Brown, along

with the premiership, in June 2007. Mr Brown's uncertainty over whether to call an election four months later, and his final decision to wait, compounded the impression, in some quarters, of a vacillating prime minister, untested at the polls and unwilling to throw the dice, holding on to office and motivated by expediency.

In April 2009, it emerged that Damian McBride, Mr Brown's special adviser and former head of communications at the Treasury, had discussed with the former Labour Party official Derek Draper the setting up of a website to post false and scurrilous rumours about the private lives of senior Tories and their spouses. Mr McBride resigned. Mr Brown was publicly apologetic and privately apoplectic. "Smeargate" left another stain.

This, then, was the unsettled backdrop for the great expenses explosion: creeping political disillusionment and war-weariness, a sense that after coming to power amid widespread euphoria Blair had done little to change parliamentary culture, a souring economy and the looming spectre of recession, and the peculiarly nasty aftertaste of Mr McBride's Smeargate. A series of smaller scandals paved the way, most notably when it emerged that the Conservative MP Derek Conway had employed his son, a full-time student at the time.

Under the old rules, MPs could claim expenses, including the cost of accommodation, "wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred for the performance of a Member's parliamentary duties". A Freedom of Information Act request filed early in 2008, aimed at finding out exactly what MPs were claiming, was challenged by the House of Commons authorities as "unlawfully intrusive". When, after much legal wrangling, the House agreed to release the details, it did so with obvious reluctance, insisting that "sensitive" information be removed. Even before the touch-paper was lit, the House of Commons adhered firmly to the belief that how MPs chose to spend our money was their business, not ours.

On May 8, 2009 *The Daily Telegraph* obtained a full, uncensored copy of MPs' expenses claims dating back to 2004 and began publishing details: first those of the Labour Party, then the Tories, then the Liberal Democrats and finally the smaller parties. The scandal touched every corner of Westminster: ministers, Shadow Cabinet members, backbenchers, MPs and peers. It was, as *The Times* observed, "a full-blown political crisis". The ensuing outrage was focused on the abuse of parliamentary expenses relating to second homes: numerous MPs were accused of "flipping", the term for switching the designation of a second home between a constituency and London property, to ensure maximum expenses. Some MPs were renting out properties while simultaneously claiming for second homes. Home improvements in some cases went far beyond "making good dilapidations", suggesting that the expenses system was simply being milked as a way to increase property values, and turn a profit.

MPs were able to claim up to £400 a month for food, and many claimed every penny, every month, even when Parliament was not sitting. Items worth less than £250 could be claimed for without producing a receipt. A suspiciously large number of claims came in just under that mark.

The fallout was cataclysmic, and almost instantaneous. The headlines were devastating, revealing not only greed, but small-mindedness. Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary, was found to have claimed for various domestic items, including pornographic films viewed by her husband; the Tory MP Douglas Hogg claimed for the expense of cleaning the moat at his country house; Frank Cook, a Labour backbencher, tried to claim back £5 he had donated at a Battle of Britain memorial service.

And then there was the duck house. The "Stockholm" model, which Sir Peter Viggers bought in 2006 for £1,645, was 5ft high and positioned on a floating island. This was only part of the £30,000 Sir Peter claimed towards gardening at his home, including £500 for manure. He was never actually reimbursed for the duck home, as a Commons official wrote "not allowable" beside the claim. "I paid for it myself and in fact it was never liked by the ducks," he said.

But it was the thought that counted.

Sir Peter made a statement: “I have made a ridiculous and grave error of judgment. I am ashamed and humiliated and I apologise.” He also announced that he would not be standing at the next election.

The shockwaves crashed through Westminster. It was the detail that inflicted the lasting damage, as much as the sums involved. *The Daily Telegraph* reported that Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, had been claiming the maximum allowable expenses for three properties, £4,874 on furniture, £899 on a new bed and £913 on a new TV, the second such television in under a year. She volunteered to pay the £13,332 capital gains tax she had avoided on the sale of her second home, and stood down in June.

All parties moved to try to limit the fallout: Mr Brown publicly apologised “on behalf of all politicians”. Mr Cameron described some of the claims as “unethical and wrong” and announced that Shadow Cabinet members would repay all questionable claims. A panel, under the former civil servant Sir Thomas Legg, was established to begin the detailed accounting. Eventually each MP involved would be informed whether they would have to repay any expenses. Three Labour MPs and one Conservative peer would finally face criminal prosecution for “false accounting”.

Even more damaging than the accusations, in some cases, was the reaction of MPs to the charges. Some wriggled: Douglas Hogg insisted that the moat in question was more a “broad dyke”. Some dug themselves in deeper: “I have done nothing criminal, that is the most awful thing,” insisted the Tory MP Anthony Steen. “And do you know what it’s about? Jealousy. I’ve got a very, very large house. Some people say it looks like Balmoral.” Some seemed bizarrely sorry for themselves: Nadine Dorries, a Conservative MP, described the detailed media coverage of MPs’ expenses as a sort of torture.

Never has the cultural chasm between voters and their representatives seemed so vast. While most of Britain reeled from rising unemployment and fretted over mortgage payments, here was a world of moated second homes and ride-on lawnmowers, where the ducks were pampered in special houses, and people bragged of living in their own Balmoral. The gulf between the MPs’ sense of entitlement, and public outrage at the perceived pettiness and greed, could not have been wider. Publicly there was much handwringing, by those implicated and those in charge; privately, there was intense fury that the scandal had erupted, and then been left to swirl around unchecked. Many MPs felt hard done by, some with good reason, but there was no doubting the level of public anger over a system that was clearly seen, by far too many politicians, as an adjunct to their salaries, the trappings of an upper-middle-class lifestyle that they believed they deserved. Most seemed more angry than genuinely contrite.

At a time of deep financial uncertainty, the spectacle of MPs feathering their own nests, or duck houses, ignited a firestorm of public fury: two days after the scandal broke, the BBC programme *Question Time* attracted a viewership of nearly four million, the highest in its 30-year history.

The tale of sackings, de-selections, public apologies, repayment, retirement and, eventually, prosecutions, rumbling on for months, marked a low point in British political history. Some of the abuses were flagrant; some venial and some, frankly, irrelevant or unfair. Many decent, honourable and entirely honest MPs found themselves tarred by the overwhelming public perception that Westminster was rotten to the core. Some got their comeuppance; some watched, with horror, as the disillusionment that had marked the early stages of this Parliament turned to outright condemnation and calls for wholesale political reform.

The most high-profile casualty of all was the Speaker, Michael Martin. A Glasgow-born, hard-grained politician of the old-style Labour school, Mr Martin’s election in 2000 was controversial from the start. Some suspected him of bias.

Mr Martin’s own expenses had long been the subject of scrutiny: he used public money to employ a law firm to fight negative media stories, while his wife spent £4,000 on taxis. Refurbishing

the Speaker's official residence within the Palace of Westminster cost the taxpayer an estimated £1.7 million over seven years.

There was more than a hint of tribalism in Mr Martin's resistance to the investigation of MPs expenses. His response to the exploding scandal appeared to be more concerned with the way the information had leaked out, than apologising, explaining or making amends.

To an increasing number, both inside and outside Parliament, Mr Martin was a symptom of the disease, a symbol of all that had gone wrong. Mr Clegg spoke for many when he declared that the Speaker had become an obstacle to reform. To his dwindling band of supporters, he was a scapegoat.

No Speaker had been forced out of office since Sir John Trevor was expelled for accepting bribes more than 300 years earlier. On May 19, 2009 the Conservative MP Douglas Carswell tabled a motion of no confidence, which was signed by 22 MPs. Later that day Mr Martin announced that he would resign from his position as Speaker of the House of Commons.

He took ermine in the Lords, becoming Lord Martin of Springburn. His throne in the House was occupied by John Bercow, elected on a promise to clean up Parliament. It subsequently emerged that the new Speaker had spent an additional £20,000 on refurbishing the grace-and-favour flat in the palace, again.

And so the Parliament – the “Rotten Parliament” as some were now calling it – wound down accompanied by a litany of recriminations, the familiar sound of plotting, and one last dollop of scandal.

In the autumn of 2008, Siobhain McDonagh, a junior government whip, who during her time in office had never voted against the Government, spoke of the need to discuss Mr Brown's position as party leader. She was swiftly sacked.

Then, in the month that Mr Martin stepped down, James Purnell, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, delivered another blow to Mr Brown's authority by announcing his resignation. This was not a statement of ambition but, far more threateningly, of principle. “I now believe your continued leadership makes a Conservative victory more, not less, likely...that would be disastrous for our country. I am therefore calling on you to stand aside to give our party a fighting chance of winning.”

As speculation about Mr Brown's future swirled, his ministers backed him, with potential rivals such as Harriet Harman and David Miliband denying that they were preparing leadership bids. But with each plot, and each denial, his chances of clinging to power in the coming election seemed to recede. The final attempt to unseat him came in January 2010, when the former Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt and former Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon jointly called for a secret ballot on the future of Mr Brown's leadership. The plot fizzled. Mr Brown later called the abortive mini-coup “a form of silliness”.

Perhaps the final symbolic motif for this grim Parliament came just before the election was announced, when Mr Hoon, Ms Hewitt and the former minister Stephen Byers were each caught out by undercover journalists posing as lobbyists. The former ministers appeared to be cashing in on their influence. Ms Hewitt explained that, for a fee of £3,000 a day, she could help “a client who needs a particular regulation removed, then we can often package that up”. Mr Hoon was heard saying that he was “looking forward to...something that, frankly, makes money”.

Above all, the crass remarks made by Mr Byers seemed to sum up the previous five years. “I am a bit like a sort of cab for hire,” he explained to the fake lobbyist. “I still get a lot of confidential information because I am still linked to No 10.” His trump card came close to self-parody: “We could have a word with Tony”. Mr Blair was long gone from No 10, but his potential earning power lingered on.

At the start of the 54th Parliament, public confidence in politicians was already crumbling; by the end it was radically eroded. The perception that MPs lined their own pockets at taxpayer expense was widespread in 2005; by 2010 it was universal conventional wisdom. Unfairly, but

understandably, Parliament had come to be seen as one large rank of cabs for hire. The tumult, sleaze and political skulduggery left the public jaundiced and angry, and many MPs traumatised and exhausted. Contemplating her own retirement, Ann Widdecombe spoke for many when she remarked: “I find that my uppermost sentiment is one of profound relief.”

Like Oliver Cromwell, surveying the Rump Parliament, the public’s patience had run out: “You have sat too long for any good you have been doing lately...Depart, I say; and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!” And they went: in addition to the 149 MPs who stood down before the 2010 election, 76 were voted out of office in May of that year. In some ways, both the level of interest in the election, and a result giving no party an overall majority, were also an accurate reflection of the rancour and uncertainty of the five years that preceded it.

The unhappy 54th Parliament was, perhaps, a necessary trauma. Wholesale political reform became inevitable. Closer scrutiny of parliamentary expenses began. The gravy train hit the buffers, making a fantastic mess that will take many years to clear up.

Britain has a new Parliament, a new form of government and a large new crop of MPs. They will make their own mistakes and commit their own sins, but only this can be predicted with absolute certainty: no MP in the 55th Parliament will ever buy a duck house. *Ben Macintyre was parliamentary sketch writer for The Times from 2002-04*

The work of the House of Commons

The growing powers of the humble backbencher

Peter Riddell

Chief Political

Commentator

One of the great paradoxes of the House of Commons is that just as its public standing has hardly ever been lower, MPs have seldom been more hard-working or potentially more effective. Procedural changes over the past dozen years have given backbench MPs more chance to play a creative role at Westminster.

The “declinist” view of Parliament has, of course, been reinforced by the expenses scandal (as discussed in an accompanying article). There is nothing new in such complaints. There never was a golden age. Every generation has had protests that the executive is too strong and the legislature too weak but, as the Hansard Society’s Annual Audit of Political Engagement showed in March 2010, while the expenses row did not create a problem of trust, which has existed for many years, it did reinforce public scepticism. Less than two fifths of the public believe Parliament to be one of the two or three national institutions that have most influence on their everyday lives.

The counter view has been put most eloquently by Jack Straw, a former Leader of the Commons and closely involved in constitutional reform during his 13 years in the Cabinet. He argued, in a lecture to the Hansard Society in March 2010, that “the view that Parliament is irrelevant or powerless is complete nonsense”. He acknowledged that the institution was far from perfect, and the balance remained tilted in the Government’s favour, but changes in recent decades had strengthened the legislature. As Mr Straw pointed out, in the three decades from the mid-1940s until the mid-1970s, the executive was all powerful. Backbench MPs seldom rebelled: there were two whole sessions in the 1950s when not a single Conservative backbencher defied the whip and voted against the Government. There were few select committees. Those that did exist were mainly weak, apart from the Public Accounts Committee. Admittedly, many newspapers until the mid-to-late 1980s did carry full reports of what was said on the floor of the Commons, but radio broadcasting did not arrive on a regular and continuous basis until April 1978, and television cameras not until November 1989.

Select Committees

Since the 1970s, a number of far-reaching changes have been introduced, most significantly in 1979 with the creation of 12 broadly departmental select committees. Each big department is monitored by a select committee to examine its policymaking and performance. There have been variations in the number, titles and remit of committees to match changes in the machinery of government, but the principle has remained. This has created wideranging opportunities for MPs to question ministers, civil servants and interested bodies, and has unquestionably broadened the range of public debate. For instance, the opening up of decisions on setting interest rates, both in the mid-1990s and then with the creation of the Monetary Policy Committee in 1997, has meant that the Governor and senior directors of the Bank of England appear before the Treasury committee at least once a quarter.

There has been a similar opening up in other areas of policy. The banking crisis was examined frequently from autumn 2007 onwards by the Treasury Select Committee, when all the main players appeared at often uncomfortable hearings. The Defence Select Committee also pursued allegations that British troops in Iraq and Afghanistan were inadequately supplied and supported. The public gathering of evidence and the questioning of ministers has often been more important than the recommendations in the final reports.

There were three waves of reform during the Labour years: when Robin Cook was Leader of the Commons from June 2001 until March 2003; when Jack Straw was Leader from 2006 until 2007; and, finally, in the aftermath of the expenses scandal, when a special committee was set up under the respected Labour MP and political scientist Tony Wright to examine ways of strengthening the influence of the Commons and of backbenchers.

Among the changes have been a strengthening in the role of select committees in 2002 by giving them ten core tasks, including examining annual departmental reports and expenditure plans, aided by the creation of a central Scrutiny Unit to provide expert support in addition to the clerks and advisers to particular committees. But each committee has its own distinctive style, priorities and approach, notably reflecting the personality of the chairman. Additional pay for select committee chairmen was introduced from October 2003, while from 2007 the committees were given the additional role of holding pre-appointment hearings for those chairing a variety of public bodies. This is not, however, a veto power, as was shown when Ed Balls brushed aside the objections of the Childrens, Schools and Families Select Committee to an appointment in his area. In 2009, eight new regional committees were set up, despite the protests from the main opposition parties.

The Prime Minister was, for a long time, above this process, but, since July 2002, he has given evidence for about two and a half hours twice a year to the Liaison Committee, which consists of the chairmen of the main select committees. This enables a wide range of topics to be raised, but at times it can be too wide since neither Tony Blair nor Gordon Brown, in their very different ways, was ever discomfited during an appearance.

Wright committee

After the expenses scandal there was widespread agreement that the Commons not only needed to sort out this specific issue but also to address wider questions about the role of MPs. This led to the formation of the cross-party Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, generally known as the Wright committee. This was different from the Modernisation Committee, which had discussed most big changes since 1997 but had become dormant under Harriet Harman's leadership of the Commons. Whereas the Modernisation Committee had always been chaired by the Leader of the Commons, the Reform committee was chaired by a leading backbencher. Its remit was limited to what were seen as the most pressing problems: appointments to select committees, the arrangement of business in the House and the possibility of direct public initiation of issues in the chamber. The committee's report, *Rebuilding the House*, published in November 2009, concentrated on giving backbenchers more control and reducing the role of the party whips in determining the membership of select committees and the non-governmental business of the House.

The reform committee recommended that the chairmen of most select committees should be elected by the House as a whole and other members should be elected within each political party, with the basis of election being decided by each party. The party balance of committees and of the chairmen will continue to reflect the proportion of seats that each party holds in the House. The Speaker will determine what the balance should be between the parties and they will negotiate about which party will provide chairmen for which select committee. Nominations will be sought and candidates will submit manifestos. There may be hustings and elections will then take place.

The intention is that the chairmen and the members should be more independent than in the past, when there had been occasional rows on the floor of the House over attempts by the whips to prevent independent-minded MPs from being re-elected to chair committees. In addition, the size of departmental select committees was limited to 11, in the hope of ensuring greater attendance and higher commitment from MPs.

The most contentious proposal would involve ending the Government's exclusive hold on the agenda of the Commons. The reform committee proposed that a backbench business committee should be appointed to schedule backbench business and that, in time, a House business committee should be set up to schedule all business before the House. In March 2010, the Commons agreed with these proposals and with the establishment of a House business committee during the course of the following Parliament but the Labour Government and the party whips ensured that no time was available before the dissolution of the House and the election. Even the creation of a backbench business committee would represent a significant shift in the balance of power within Parliament, allowing backbenchers, rather than the party whips, to decide whether to have an increased number of short, topical debates and to give more time for discussion on select committee reports.

Legislation

The Commons scrutiny of legislation has commonly been regarded as one of the least satisfactory aspects of Parliament. The formal procedures are unchanging. A Bill is introduced without discussion, its first reading, then about ten days later it is debated in principle on the floor of the Commons in its second reading. Most Bills then go “upstairs” to be scrutinised line-by-line in what used to be called standing committees and are now known as public Bill committees. (Exceptions are constitutional Bills, the committee stages of which are always taken on the floor of the Commons, and the most controversial parts of the Finance Bill, which are again taken on the floor.)

This is the most criticised part of the process because government backbenchers are whipped to toe the line and constructive debate has been discouraged. Until a few years ago, the committee stages were allowed to run for a certain number of hours (often about 80) before the Government put down a guillotine motion limiting the time for further debate. This often left large parts of the Bill undebated before it got to the Lords. After a committee stage, a Bill returns to the floor of the Commons for a report stage, when further amendments can be made. This is often the stage at which controversial changes are debated. There is then a, usually short, third reading before the Bill goes to the Lords, where it follows similar procedures.

The main differences in the Lords are that there are seldom votes or divisions on the committee stages of Bills, which are increasingly taken in the Moses Room or a similar committee room. So the Lords allows votes on amendments on the third reading of Bills as well as at report stage. Each year some Bills are introduced in the Lords rather than the Commons to even out the workload between the two Houses. Money Bills, such as the Finance Bill, cannot be changed in the Lords and receive only a formal debate before being passed.

There have been a number of changes in these procedures. First, more Bills are being published in draft form, which allows time for examination either by a select committee or by a special committee (often a joint one of both Houses). These inquiries can lead to changes to Bills before they are formally introduced and it becomes a matter of the government’s authority. The practice has been disappointing, however, with a marked decline over the past six years in the number of Bills published in draft form.

Secondly, the need for post-legislative scrutiny is now increasingly accepted, with Acts being examined five years after their passage. This is still in its early stages. Thirdly, Bills are now subject to formal timetables from their second reading onwards, with a programme motion stating when a committee stage has to be completed and how long there is for the report and third readings. This has led to complaints that opposition parties and backbenchers have been deprived of their rights to scrutinise, and occasionally, hold up Bills. Fourthly, standing committees were replaced in 2003 by public Bill committees, which permit brief scrutiny sessions when expert witnesses can give evidence immediately before the line-by-line examination of any measure. While, in theory, this offers scope for improving the scrutiny of Bills, the time allowed is often too short and the process needs to be reviewed.

Private Member's Bills

Most legislation is put forward by the Government, but in every session a few Bills sponsored by backbench MPs become law. Most of these emerge through a ballot held at the beginning of each session. A total of 13 Fridays in each session are allotted to Private Member's Bills, which go through the same stages as government Bills, but only seven Fridays are allotted to second readings: the other six are for later stages.

An MP who is lower than seventh will have to put their Bill down for a Friday on which it will not be the first to be debated. This involves astute tactics to judge which Bills will be controversial and therefore face opposition. Debates on important Bills often last most of the Friday sitting (from 9.30am to 2.30pm). Sponsors of Bills have to mobilise support among their fellow MPs since a closure motion to end the debate and have a second reading vote requires the support of 100 MPs, quite a high hurdle for a Friday when many MPs like to be back in their constituencies. Without a closure motion, a Bill can be blocked by a single MP shouting, "Object", in which case the debate is adjourned. The same happens to Bills that have not been debated. In practice, they then have virtually no chance of becoming law.

Bills introduced under this procedure vary enormously in importance, from highly controversial subjects such as hunting and abortion to minor adjustments of existing law. The Government sometimes offers backbenchers high in the ballot fully drafted Bills that have not found a place in the Queen's Speech programme. Pressure groups and constituents will also bombard MPs with ideas.

Another way for a backbencher to introduce legislation is under the ten-minute rule, which allows an MP the chance to make a brief speech in favour of introducing a Bill. Another MP can speak against and the proposal can then be voted upon. Even if successful, however, the Bill then has to take its chance for a second reading on a Friday. In practice, most ten-minute Bill debates, held in prime time twice a week after Question Time and any statements, offer a chance for an MP to get publicity for an issue. Bills can be introduced without debate by any backbench MP but they also have to compete for time on Fridays coming after the ballot bills. So they have very little chance of becoming law unless they are uncontroversial.

The chamber

It is a commonplace that the chamber of the Commons is not what it was. Debates are no longer reported in the press and most are poorly attended, but that is partly because there are now many other ways in which MPs can raise issues. The introduction of Westminster Hall as a secondary chamber has taken some of the pressure off the floor of the Commons. Westminster Hall holds debates from Tuesdays to Thursdays on constituency issues as well as national policy questions, with time regularly allocated for debates on select committee reports. In each case, a minister has to be present to give the government's response to either a narrow grievance or a broader policy issue.

Question Time, traditionally seen as the epitome of adversarial politics, has changed in a number of largely unappreciated ways. Each departmental Question Time now has a period for topical questions asked without any prior notice to the minister, while there is also a reduced notice period for tabling oral questions. MPs also table more written questions. Since 1997 Prime Minister's Questions has been a 30-minute session each Wednesday, later moving to noon, rather than two 15-minute sessions at 3.15pm on Tuesday and Thursday.

That has also reflected a series of changes in the timing of the parliamentary day. Monday and Tuesday sessions now begin at 2.30pm and last until between 10.30pm and 11pm, depending on the number of divisions at the end of the main business. The Wednesday session starts at 11.30am and ends at about 7.30pm; the Thursday session begins at 10.30am and ends at 6.30pm; and the much less frequent Friday sessions start at 9.30am and end by 3pm. This has had the effect of concentrating the parliamentary week from Monday evening until, usually, Wednesday early evening, and only occasionally Thursday.

John Bercow, elected as Speaker in June 2009, and reelected in May 2010, has made a priority of strengthening the chamber and empowering the backbench MP. He has sought to speed up parliamentary business and ensure that more questions are asked of ministers. He has also allowed many more urgent questions, roughly one a sitting week compared with two in the 12 months before his election. Urgent questions allow any member to seek to compel a minister to come to the Commons to address an issue of importance. This has put pressure on the Government to volunteer statements of its own.

Opposition days

In each parliamentary session, the opposition parties are given the right to initiate debates on 20 sitting days. These days are allocated according to the strength of the parties in the Commons, to give the smaller groups such as the Scottish and Welsh nationalists and the Democratic Unionists a chance to have debates. The timing of such debate is in the hands of the Government but the subject for debate is entirely determined by the opposition party. The topics are normally urgent and controversial issues where the Opposition wishes to challenge or embarrass the Government.

These set-piece debates attract little media attention and often few MPs are in the chamber even for the opening or closing speeches. There have been suggestions in the past few years that the Opposition might exchange some of their time for shorter and more topical debates just after Question Time when a minister has to justify their policy and decisions. This possibility is likely to be explored in the current Parliament when a backbench business committee is set up to allocate time for non-government business.

Direct public involvement

The Commons has been slow to give voters a greater direct say. Proposals for direct e-petitions have been accepted in principle but nothing has been done to implement them, partly because of a lack of political will. The Wright committee made only vague suggestions for a new agenda initiative whereby a proposal attracting a certain amount of support would trigger a debate. There are two related, but separate, issues here: first, agenda-setting petitions that could trigger debates on a topic or even a Bill (although not binding MPs on how they should vote); secondly, more general e-petitions, as adopted in the Scottish Parliament, where members of the public can raise anything from individual cases of maladministration and local grievances to broader public policy problems requiring fresh legislation.

Conflicting roles

Any discussion of Parliament is complicated by the multiple loyalties of MPs: to their constituents, to their parties (locally and nationally) and to the House of Commons. That is partly because, unlike the United States, we do not have a separation of powers. So MPs have loyalties to either support or oppose the government of the day, which can conflict with or supersede their more parliamentary roles on, for example, select committees. This need not, and did not, prevent committees with a Labour majority in the last Parliament from publishing critical reports on the Brown Government's policies and performance. It is all a question of balance.

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New intake foots bill for the old

Sam Coates

Chief Political Correspondent

It was designed as a punishment to fit the crime. Having hustled, exaggerated and bullied at least £1 million out of the expenses system to which they had no right, the eventual response of MPs in the last Parliament was to strip those in the next of the power to administer their own affairs. So MPs who returned to Parliament after the general election found themselves subtly but crucially disenfranchised. Theirs is the first generation of representatives with powers to make the laws of the United Kingdom, but banned from having input into the rules governing their own behaviour.

To its critics, Parliament and its centuries-old sovereignty was, at a stroke, subjugated beneath the control of an unaccountable quango. For those who witnessed repeated pitiful displays of self-interest by a Parliament unable to face up to the outrage caused by its own behaviour, however, there seemed to be no other route. Twice in the last Parliament, in 2008 and 2009, MPs debated changing the rules only to decide to cling on to as many of the perks, privileges and loopholes as they could. And twice they attempted to block or alter freedom of information laws to keep as much information about their claims secret as possible. Instead of agreeing to change, MPs would blame a hostile media and public misunderstanding for their predicament.

They were undoubtedly helped by a culture of compliance among those inside the Commons Department for Resources, affectionately known by its historic name, the Fees Office. These largely anonymous public servants waived through payments, some subsequently blaming bullying by MPs as the reason they signed off the payments. Yet on the rare occasions they were glimpsed in public, the senior figures appeared every bit the accessory in a relationship that had become too cosy. When Andrew Walker, then head of the Department of Resources, appeared publicly at a tribunal in 2008, he argued against greater transparency over MPs' expenses. His argument was that this would "distract them or lead to additional questions which they have to defend, even if they have (acted) perfectly sensibly, because there is a great desire to look at the private lives of public individuals".

Only when the full, unredacted publication of every receipt submitted for expenses was published in the summer of 2009 were MPs so cowed that they agreed to change the system for good. And so, at the end of 2009, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), arbiter of the conduct of the new generation of MPs, was born. Together with Sir Christopher Kelly, chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, they have drawn up a new, far tougher, regime.

Gone are the days when generous second-home allowances, coupled with rising property prices, combined to mean that a valuable property empire was a near inevitability for any MP beyond London. Also gone are the days when MPs in Zones 3-6 could classify themselves as living out of London, thereby helping themselves to a £20,000-plus second-home allowance. Farewell, too, to the so-called "food" payments, a monthly cheque of £400, no questions asked, no receipts required.

Today's MPs face a new austerity package of expenses that Sir Ian Kennedy, the chairman of IPSA, admits is a response to the expenses crisis. In effect, the new generation of MPs is paying for the crimes of the last. Many face the prospect of a lonely existence cut off from their families and living in one-bedroom flats in the cheaper districts of London, unless they supplement the cost from their £64,766 salary. Renting is now the only option. Only MPs who were re-elected and already have houses they own can continue claiming for mortgage payments, and then only until August 2012, forcing an earlier-than-expected sale of many homes.

London MPs will be defined as those who live within 20 miles of Westminster or can reach any part of their constituency within 60 minutes by public transport in peak hours, meaning that 128 MPs in this Parliament will be unable to claim for extra accommodation.

Beyond the housing allowance, the clampdown is equally severe. Only MPs with children under the age of 5 will be able to claim an extra travel allowance that takes into account their family circumstances. All MPs must travel in standard rather than first class, although ministers will still be allowed to travel first class under the government expenses scheme. One small concession by IPSA agreed to allow MPs to continue to employ one relative, continuing a long-established parliamentary tradition. This has still prompted howls of protest from some who pointed out that the first indication of the depth of the expenses scandal emerged when Derek Conway, then a Tory MP, was found to be paying his son but was unable to prove that he worked for him.

Yet in spite of the still-evident levels of public scorn at MPs' handling of their claims, several spent the early days of this new Parliament protesting about the new settlement. Some Members claimed that they were being forced to sack their researchers because of unexpected changes to pensions arrangements for staff. Others complained about over-zealous IPSA staff who would deal with personal queries only in writing by email, then never reply, and require marriage and birth certificates before paying for family travel.

Meanwhile, some MPs were angry that IPSA hired three press officers, some paid more than backbenchers, while demanding that Members pay for expenses such as constituency offices out of their own pocket and claim the money back later. Some MPs reacted so badly to the new rules that they were warned to stop abusing staff or risk legal action. MPs now suffer the humiliation of being greeted with warning signs that read: "Abuse of staff will not be tolerated."

The new Parliament was unable to draw a clean line under the expenses affair. The first scalp of the session was David Laws, the Lib Dem MP for Yeovil, who was forced to quit as Chief Secretary to the Treasury less than three weeks into the job over £40,000 of rent claims that he paid to his partner, James Lundie. After 2006, payments to family members and partners were banned by the Commons, but Mr Laws demurred from declaring his relationship, kept secret even from his own family, to the parliamentary authorities. Mr Laws's insistence that privacy rather than profit was behind the move was not enough to justify an apparently straightforward breach of the rules nor prevent his resignation.

It was an early reminder of the toxic consequences of abnormal expenses arrangements, and how the general election had done little to dilute this.

A few words of friendly advice for aspiring MPs

Chris Mullin

Labour MP for Sunderland

South 1987-2010.

A few days after I was selected, in June 1985, an editorial appeared in the *Daily Mail*. “Poor Sunderland,” it began, “first its football team is relegated and now comes even worse news...” The Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, was not best pleased either. Not long afterwards, on a visit to the North East, he was overheard asking: “What has gone wrong in Sunderland?” He went on: “First they have an MP who is a boil on the arse of the Labour Party,” a reference to my estimable colleague Bob Clay. “And now they have gone and selected a certifiable lunatic.”

Despite this unpromising beginning, I was elected in 1987 with a swing to Labour more than double the national average. Being a friend of Tony Benn and having played a part in the uprising in the Labour Party in the early 1980s, I did not expect on arrival in Parliament to be carried shoulder high into the Tea Room and I was not disappointed.

At my first meeting of the parliamentary party there was a post-mortem examination on the outcome of the election – we had, after all, by now lost three in a row so it seemed a good idea to see what lessons could be learnt. I got up and made what I thought was a conciliatory little speech, the gist of which was that “we must turn our guns outwards and not shoot at each other”.

Up got Roy Hattersley, then the deputy leader of the Labour Party. “What Chris ought to know,” he said, “is that we aren’t taking any prisoners.”

And so it proved. For several years I put my name down for every vacancy on the Home Affairs Select Committee, without result. My fortunes began to change only when my campaign to free the various innocent people, 18 in all, convicted of just about all the main IRA bombings of the mid-1970s, bore fruit. A cause that had once seemed eccentric and extremist was now mainstream.

Suddenly I was respectable. I could no longer be denied a place on the Home Affairs Select Committee and scarcely an eyebrow was raised when, in due course, I became chairman and later a minister. Although I never scaled the Olympian heights, I like to think that I left the odd footprint in the sand during my 23 years in Parliament.

Here, for those who come afterwards, are a few tips that they may or may not find useful.

Take Parliament seriously

Given that we struggle so hard to get ourselves elected, it never ceases to amaze me that so many colleagues disappear as soon as the final bell rings each week. If we, the elected, don't take Parliament seriously, why should anyone else?

Never lose sight of the fact that our primary, albeit not the only, function, as Members of Parliament is to hold the executive to account for the considerable power that it wields. Something we do imperfectly. This need not consist of making brilliant speeches to an otherwise empty chamber. Well-targeted, prime-time interventions in ministerial speeches or statements are often much more effective.

Strike a balance between constituency and parliamentary work

So far as possible it is desirable for an elected representative to share the same sunshine and the same rainfall as his or her constituents. By all means live in your constituency and make sure that you are visible, hold surgeries, open an office, attend fairs, fêtes and concerts, but not to the exclusion of an active role in Parliament.

Some of my more modern colleagues, especially those in marginal seats, take the view, for which there is little hard evidence, that they will improve their chances of re-election if they rush around pretending to be fairy godmothers to their constituents (“Hello, I am your MP. Have you got a problem that needs solving?”).

This, in my view, is a mistake. First, because it is beyond our powers to resolve the personal problems of many of our constituents and disappointment is the most likely outcome.

Secondly, because pavement politics (and I intend no disrespect) ought to be the preserve of local councillors. Thirdly, because excessive devotion to the small picture distracts from the primary function of an MP, which is to represent his or her constituents in Parliament. Please note, I am not saying neglect your constituents; only that there is a balance to be struck and that, in recent years, the pendulum has swung too far in favour of parochialism.

Put your name down for a place on a good select committee

Preferably one that deals with issues of interest to you and your constituents. You may not be successful at first, but do persist. Having been appointed, take it seriously.

The ground rules for a successful select committee member are as follows: (a) read the brief before the meeting; (b) turn up on time; (c) keep your backside on the seat throughout the proceedings (no nipping in and out to deal with supposedly urgent messages); (d) ask concise, relevant questions; and (e) do not indulge in petty politicking – conclusions should be reached on the basis of evidence, not prejudice. Active membership of a select committee can be one of the most fulfilling aspects of life in Parliament. The chairman of a good select committee has far more influence than most junior ministers, and these days they are also paid.

You are not an automaton

Do not waste time devising lollipop questions (“Could I trouble the Prime Minister to list his five greatest achievements?”). They do not impress anyone. By all means be constructive, support the programme on which your party was elected, but that does not mean that you have to sign up to every dot and comma, every piece of stupidity or foolishness devised by your political masters.

First, of course, make representations in private, but if all else fails and you want to be taken seriously there has to be a bottom line. On occasion, it may be necessary to vote against your party and in retrospect you may be vindicated, witness the Tory poll tax rebels or the 139 Labour MPs who voted against the Iraq adventure.

Do not be in too much hurry to become a parliamentary private secretary

By all means sign up with one of the big fish, prime minister, chancellor, home or foreign secretary, but not with one of the middle rankers. There are far too many PPSs and for the majority this will be the peak of their careers. Most do not have enough to do and while away their time hanging around the lobbies dishing out patsy questions. A sad fate for otherwise intelligent people.

Don't be afraid of cross-party alliances

One of the pleasant surprises of election to Parliament is the discovery that on many issues there are like-minded people in other parties and an alliance is often far more effective than ploughing a lone furrow. During the course of my miscarriages of justice campaign I teamed up with a ruddy-faced Tory backwoodsman, Sir John Farr, who, once engaged, was completely fearless. I inquired if our collaboration had caused him any trouble within his own ranks. "Only with the lawyers," he grunted, "and they're all arseholes."

Don't become a rent-a-quote

Try to stick to what you know about. Those who have opinions on everything are not taken seriously, even on their own side.

If at first you don't succeed, persist

In the land of the soundbite, he who can concentrate is king.

Never lose sight of the big picture

Most of us went into politics to make the world a better place and in the hope that we had something to contribute. Outcome, not process, is what matters.

If you get a call from a company inviting you to do a little lobbying, put the phone down.

Finally, a piece of advice that trumps all of the above.

Make time for your family

Politics is littered with broken marriages. Don't let yours be one of them. Quite apart from which, a little hinterland makes you a better politician.

Chris Mullin is the author of a volume of diaries, A View from the Foothills. A further volume is due in 2010.

The pleasures of opposition

Paul Goodman

Conservative MP for Wycombe 2001-2010

I was first elected to Parliament in 2001. I departed nine years later after a further election, disagreeing with the consensus view that the Commons should be a chamber of professional politicians. In almost a decade, I never sat to the right of the Speaker's Chair, on the government benches. Although I served as a shadow minister for most of that period, standing down from David Cameron's front bench of my own accord in 2009, I did not get the chance to be a real one.

So, although I am unqualified to pronounce on life as a minister I am, if not exactly an expert on opposition, at least in a position to reflect on it. Is there a point to not proposing but opposing? If so, what is it? And is it best done from the front or back benches? Indeed, what is the role of a backbencher in any event?

The answer to all these questions is: it depends on what you believe an MP to be in the first place. If you think that having those two letters after a name is useless unless they are followed by a title (Minister for Holistic Governance and Horizon Scanning; Minister for Best-Practice Benchmarking and Blue-Sky Thinking) it follows that you will consider opposition a waste of time.

Some MPs who have been ministers enjoy opposition for a while, or semi-permanently as elder statesmen, able to pronounce on how much better life was when, well, they were ministers. This only goes to prove the point that most MPs want to be ministers in the first place. A few enter the Commons wanting to be backbenchers, and speak for their local area; fewer still come wanting to chair a select committee. But for many of their colleagues, the wish for red boxes is compulsive. Parliamentary life seems meaningless without being Under-Secretary of State for Community Engagement and Meaningful Dialogue (until, of course, one is an Under-Secretary of State, at which point parliamentary life seems meaningless without being a Minister of State, and so on).

It remains to be seen whether the growing tendency of voters to back local champions rather than future ministers, a shift given new impetus by the expenses scandal, alters the parliamentary balance in the medium term. In the short term, it will not: most members of the new Commons intake of 2010, like their predecessors, will want a desk in Whitehall and Westminster.

For those MPs who want to be ministers, then, being a shadow minister is merely a preparation for the real thing, although one tempered by the horrifying possibility that this happy transformation may never take place. After all, one may be sacked. Or one's party may lose the election. Or, worse still, one's party may win the election...and one may not be appointed. The ripe fruits of power may be snatched away by the whim or caprice of the prime minister of the day.

Nonetheless, those who enjoy opposing – tabling parliamentary written questions or, better still, freedom of information requests (since ministers do not answer written questions if they can get away with it); digging for stories damaging to the government; hauling into the light information that ministers want hidden; pouncing on their weaknesses, especially at times of crisis; utilising every procedural device (urgent questions, ministerial statements, opposition day debates) to gain advantage and, above all, using the media – will be as happy as pigs in dung.

This gross image is less disparaging than it sounds, because the low politics has a high point: the holding of government to account. Ministers must be answerable for their actions. And to whom should they be accountable, if not to our elected representatives? Furthermore, the odd shadow minister, when not scheming against ministers or schmoozing lobby groups, may be a creator of policy, picking good ideas from bad ones, like a man removing nuggets of gold from earth, thus preparing a future government to make Britain better. It follows that there is a case for taxpayer-funded shadow ministers, although not, in my view, a persuasive one. A political class of taxpayer-

funded politicians, distinct and thereby distanced from those who elect them, is already in place. Its position should not be further entrenched.

The majority of MPs of any party will not, at any one time, sit on its front bench. They will soldier on as backbenchers, whether in government or opposition, willingly or unwillingly. And if to be a backbencher when one's party is in government is to be removed from the centre of events, being one in opposition is to be twice removed. The best chance of nudging one's way back towards them is to sit on a select committee. The quality of these committees varies greatly, but the better ones are well-chaired; have, therefore, a sense of purpose; cooperate across party lines; probe ministers and departments, performing an irreplaceable public service in so doing; and issue useful reports making strong recommendations.

Why, though, assume that the purpose of being an MP in opposition is to work towards the centre of events? Indeed, why think that this is the purpose of being an MP at all? I return to my first answer: it depends. If one believes that an MP's work is invalid if he does not sit on a front bench, one will look at such a person with scorn. But why take this view? Members of the local Conservative Association or Labour Party may bask in the reflected glory of being represented by a Cabinet minister. But, as previously noted, a growing number of constituents do not: they want a local champion, not a future minister, someone who will reply to their emails quickly and deal with their problems effectively (even if those problems are outside the scope or beyond the reach of the local MP). They are the masters now, in an age of soaring consumer expectations, not servants in an age of deference trooping meekly to the ballot box every five years and voting either Conservative or Labour on the basis of class. This is the "it" that "they just don't get".

A question follows. If being an MP is a job, how can MPs not only have outside interests, but work as ministers? After all, being a minister is also a job, one that has no intrinsic connection with representing Chuff-nell Poges or Sin City South. In future years, the pressure to split the executive from the legislature may become irresistible. In such circumstances, opposition would be differently shaped and constituted, as would government. But until or unless this happens, the opposition backbencher, like his frontbench counterpart, must pack up his troubles in his old kit bag, pressing ministers on behalf of his constituents. After all, that is largely why he is there.

Life as a Member of Parliament

David Howarth

Liberal Democrat MP

for Cambridge 2005-2010

The central feature of parliamentary life is waiting: waiting for the division bell to go off; waiting to be called to speak; waiting for people to turn up for meetings or waiting for stories, good or bad, to appear in the media.

How one copes with waiting defines a parliamentary life. Some people manage to fill all those waiting hours with activity – signing piles of letters to constituents, replying to emails or (for London MPs) rushing to and from constituency engagements. Others, perhaps those whose constituents are not very demanding or who have organised their offices so efficiently that they have completed all their correspondence, engage in a parliamentary form of *dolce far niente*: hanging around the Tea Room (the best refuge in Parliament because the media are not allowed in), or, for the more distressed, the Strangers' Bar, or arranging some form of escape – in the past, before the scandals, a foreign trip with a select committee, or latterly an early return home on a Wednesday evening. Some even take an interest in legislation, and spend their time writing amendments to Bills, although that is very much a minority interest.^s

There is even an activity that manages to combine all three – giving the appearance of constituency activity and of taking an interest in parliamentary business but, in reality, doing nothing – namely signing early day motions. Members can be seen in every part of the building flicking through an important-looking blue document occasionally scribbling their signature on it. They are adding their names to EDMs. Technically, EDMs are motions the sponsors of which would like the House to debate some time soon, but on no specific day.

In reality, no one sponsoring an EDM expects, or even wants, the House to debate it. EDMs are merely a form of petition that only MPs can sign, a petition aimed at no one in particular that achieves precisely nothing. Even if every single MP signed an EDM, nothing would happen or change. They are, as someone once remarked, parliamentary graffiti.

Most EDMs are cobbled together by pressure groups with some simple-minded campaign message to promote, who have found some sympathetic, or fearful, MPs to act as proposers. The pressure groups' main purpose, however, is not to create pressure for change but to give their supporters something to do, or merely to build the group's database. Supporters are given pre-printed postcards to send to their MPs (or, increasingly, preprepared emails) urging the MP to 'sign EDM no XXX'. The pressure group always gives the impression that signing the EDM is a matter of vast importance, a deception many MPs are happy to go along with if it impresses constituents or a gullible local newspaper.

But the attraction of signing EDMs is that it takes far less energy than the other method of making sure that one's name appears in the local media, namely the intervention game. The intervention game consists of saying the name of one's constituency – or, better still, the name of one's local newspaper – on the record in the chamber or in Westminster Hall as many times as possible.

To achieve this end, MPs scan the agenda to look for opportunities to intervene in questions or debates and then rush from place to place so that they can pop up, utter the name of their constituency and disappear to the next opportunity as soon as is decent (or even sooner). The verb for this activity is 'to ketter', in honour of one of its greatest devotees in the 2005 Parliament, Philip Hollobone, the MP for Kettering, who managed to work the name of his constituency into almost every debate.

A determined ketterer will put down questions containing the name of his or her constituency to every department, including the Foreign Office and the House of Commons catering committee. If the question does not come out of the hat, the ketterer will turn up and 'bob' (stand up to try to

catch the Speaker's eye) in the hope of being able to ask it anyway. The ketterer will also turn up at the start of every debate to intervene on the minister to ask a question of astounding irrelevance to the debate, but that, naturally, contains the name of the ketterer's constituency. Ketterers are, of course, a menace for those interested in parliamentary debate, but their party organisations love them, because, from the point of view of the party, the only point of an MP is to achieve re-election, and the only function of Parliament is to assist the MP in that task.

In days past, MPs would deal with all the waiting in another way, namely in other jobs. But second jobs have become very much frowned upon, to the extent that after the expenses crisis the House passed a motion that has been interpreted as meaning that MPs have to report every hour they spend not just in other paid work but even in volunteering.

This is the infamous 168-hour rule, the rule that MPs are MPs for every hour of the week, with no time off at all for anything else. Even writing a book or an article on politics, paid or not, is seen as a shameful activity to be reported to the authorities. One suspects that in the future those MPs who sleep more hours a night than Margaret Thatcher managed with will have to obtain permission from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. But the effect of the 168-hour rule is that MPs will have to spend even more time just waiting.

One wonders what sort of people will want to be MPs in the future. The combination of minor celebrity status, with its constant observation by the media, enforced inactivity and being cooped up in the same place for weeks on end is reminiscent of only one thing. Welcome, then, to the Big Ben Brother House.

MPs who stood down before the election

Conservative

Ainsworth, Peter Surrey East
Ancram, Michael Devizes
Atkinson, Peter Hexham
Boswell, Timothy Daventry
Browning, Angela Tiverton & Honiton
Butterfill, Sir John Bournemouth West
Cormack, Sir Patrick Staffordshire South
Curry, David Skipton & Ripon
Fraser, Christopher Norfolk South West
Goodman, Paul Wycombe
Greenway, John Ryedale
Gummer, John Suffolk Coastal
Hogg, Douglas Sleaford & North Hykeham
Horam, John Orpington
Howard, Michael Folkestone & Hythe
Jack, Michael Fylde
Key, Robert Salisbury
Kirkbride, Julie Bromsgrove
Lait, Jacqui Beckenham
Lord, Sir Michael Suffolk Central & Ipswich North
MacKay, Andrew Bracknell
Maclean, David Penrith & The Border
Malins, Humfrey Woking
Maples, John Stratford-on-Avon
Mates, Michael Hampshire East
Moss, Malcolm Cambridgeshire North East
Spicer, Sir Michael Worcestershire West
Spring, Richard Suffolk West
Steen, Anthony Totnes
Taylor, Ian Esher & Walton
Viggers, Sir Peter Gosport
Widdecombe, Ann Maidstone & The Weald
Wilshire, David Spelthorne
Winterton, Ann Congleton
Winterton, Sir Nicholas Macclesfield

Labour

Armstrong, Hilary Durham North West
Austin, John Erith & Thamesmead
Battle, John Leeds West
Blackman, Liz Erewash
Browne, Des Kilmarnock & Loudoun
Burgon, Colin Elmet
Byers, Stephen Tyneside North
Caborn, Richard Sheffield Central
Challen, Colin Morley & Rothwell
Chapman, Ben Wirral South
Chaytor, David Bury North
Clapham, Michael Barnsley West & Penistone
Clelland, David Tyne Bridge
Cohen, Harry Leyton & Wanstead
Cousins, Jim Newcastle upon Tyne Central
Cryer, Ann Keighley
Cummings, John Easington
Curtis-Thomas, Claire Crosby
Davies, Quentin Grantham & Stamford
Dean, Janet Burton
Devine, Jim Livingston
Ennis, Jeff Barnsley East & Mexborough
Etherington, Bill Sunderland North
Fisher, Mark Stoke-on-Trent Central
Follett, Barbara Stevenage
George, Bruce Walsall South
Gerrard, Neil Walthamstow
Griffiths, Nigel Edinburgh South
Grogan, John Selby
Hall, Mike Weaver Vale
Heal, Sylvia Halesowen & Rowley Regis
Henderson, Doug Newcastle upon Tyne North
Heppell, John Nottingham East
Hesford, Stephen Wirral West
Hewitt, Patricia Leicester West
Hill, Keith Streatham
Hoon, Geoff Ashfield
Howells, Dr Kim Pontypridd
Hughes, Beverley Stretford & Urmston
Humble, Joan Blackpool North & Fleetwood
Hutton, John Barrow & Furness
Iddon, Dr Brian Bolton South East
Ingram, Adam East Kilbride, Strathaven & Lesmahagow
Jones, Martyn Clwyd South
Jones, Lynne Birmingham Selly Oak
Kelly, Ruth Bolton West

Kemp, Fraser Houghton & Washington East
Kennedy, Jane Liverpool Wavertree
Kilfoyle, Peter Liverpool Walton
Laxton, Bob Derby North
Lepper, David Brighton Pavilion
Levitt, Tom High Peak
Mackinlay, Andrew Thurrock
Marshall-Andrews, Robert Medway
Martlew, Eric Carlisle
McAvoy, Thomas Rutherglen & Hamilton West
McCafferty, Christine Calder Valley
McCartney, Ian Makerfield
McFall, John West Dunbartonshire
McKenna, Rosemary Cumbernauld, Kilsyth & Kirkintilloch East
Milburn, Alan Darlington
Moffat, Anne East Lothian
Moffatt, Laura Crawley
Moran, Margaret Luton South
Morley, Elliot Scunthorpe
Mountford, Kali Colne Valley
Mullin, Chris Sunderland South
Murphy, Denis Wansbeck
Naysmith, Doug Bristol North West
O'Hara, Edward Knowsley South
Oler, Bill Nuneaton
Pearson, Ian Dudley South
Pope, Greg Hyndburn
Prentice, Bridget Lewisham East
Prescott, John Kingston upon Hull East
Purchase, Ken Wolverhampton North East
Purnell, James Stalybridge & Hyde
Reid, John Airdrie & Shotts
Salter, Martin Reading West
Sarwar, Mohammad Glasgow Central
Simon, Siôn Birmingham Erdington
Simpson, Alan Nottingham South
Smith, John Vale of Glamorgan
Southworth, Helen Warrington South
Stewart, Ian Eccles
Stoate, Dr Howard Dartford
Strang, Gavin Edinburgh East
Tipping, Paddy Sherwood
Todd, Mark Derbyshire South
Touhig, Don Islwyn
Truswell, Paul Pudsey
Turner, Des Brighton Kemptown
Turner, Neil Wigan
Ussher, Kitty Burnley
Vis, Rudi Finchley & Golders Green

Williams, Alan Swansea West

Williams, Betty Conwy

Wills, Michael Swindon North

Wright, Tony Cannock Chase

Wyatt, Derek Sittingbourne & Sheppey

Liberal Democrat

Barrett, John Edinburgh West

Breed, Colin Cornwall South East

Howarth, David Cambridge

Keetch, Paul Hereford

Oaten, Mark Winchester

Taylor, Matthew Truro & St Austell

Willis, Phil Harrogate & Knaresborough

Other

Conway, Derek (Ind Con) Old Bexley & Sidcup

McGrady, Eddie (SDLP) Down South

Paisley, Ian (DUP) Antrim North

Price, Adam (PC) Carmarthen East & Dinefwr

Salmond, Alex (SNP) Banff & Buchan

Short, Clare (Ind Lab) Birmingham Ladywood

Wareing, Robert (Ind) Liverpool West Derby

Defeated MPs **Conservative**

Heathcoat-Amory, David Wells
Waterson, Nigel Eastbourne

Labour

Ainger, Nick Carmarthen West & Pembrokeshire South

Anderson, Janet Rossendale & Darwen

Atkins, Charlotte Staffordshire Moorlands

Baird, Vera Redcar

Barlow, Celia

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