



Old Hickory's Diary - 10

Diary Entry date 20th
January 2006

This time Old Hickory looks at:

1. The latest renewal of the oil scare
2. Gordon Brown
3. The elite EU superstate
4. David Cameron.

CAN CAMERON WIN?

What was done in one election can clearly be undone in another. This is the clear fact that many who go on about the great odds against a Tory revival overlook. There is also the fact that every schoolboy should know viz. that most in his class are basically conservative and that many who are not will tend to be so as they get older. At any time the majority are highly likely to be conservative. Cameron has made a good start in terms of new members joining the party. The Tories have gained some 16,000 and that puts them as having over 20 000 more members than the Labourites and the Liberal Democrats combined.

Like Blair, Cameron is from the upper classes. His Conservative background is also solid as he has in his family tradition three prominent Conservative MPs of the late 19th and early 20th Century. He is the first Eton-educated Conservative leader since Sir Alec Douglas-Home back in the early 1960s. He is a member, as is Prince Charles and his sons, of an exclusive Mayfair gentleman's club called White's. He is also distantly-

related to the Queen. But Cameron is also down to earth and up to date. He rides a mountain bike, is much photographed and seen on the news television broadcasts. He has a fondness for indie rock music that he has discussed with news reporters around his own age. They have patronised him by asking him questions on all aspects of youth culture, finally exasperating him on one occasion. He has described his current favourite music as The Killers, and that his favourite album of all time as the 'Queen is Dead', by The Smiths.

He told the *Sun* newspaper that he enjoys a pint of real ale, rather than champagne, and that he smokes Marlboro Lights but he also has said he might soon give up.

David William Duncan Cameron was born on 9 October 1966 in London. He is the son of a stockbroker, Ian Cameron, and he spent the first three years of his life in Kensington and Chelsea before his family moved to an old rectory near Newbury in Berkshire. He feels that he had a "happy childhood" in a traditional family that had him as one of four, the others being his brother Alec and sisters Tania and Clare.

The family's political legacy is on his mother's side of the family, whose ancestral home was Wasing, in Berkshire. He descends from William Mount, who was the Conservative MP for the Isle of Wight in the 19th Century. There were a number of other MPs also called William Mount who won the Newbury constituency, which remained in the family, as Sir William Mount, the first baronet and David Cameron's great grandfather also won it. Cameron went to prep school and then followed in the

family tradition by going on to Eton. By chance, his headmaster there, Eric Anderson, had been Tony Blair's housemaster at Fettes public school, which has been called the Scottish Eton. He got 12 O-levels and three As at A-level, in history, history of art and economics with politics.

He took a gap year off before going on to the University of Oxford. He worked for the for Sussex MP Tim Rathbone for a while and then he went off to Hong Kong for three months. He travelled back through the USSR and Eastern Europe. At Oxford he took Philosophy, Politics and Economics. He took no interest in student politics there. Instead he claims to have had a good time and this is the time when he was questioned as to whether he took drugs.

His tutor at Oxford was the exceedingly dull Professor Vernon Bogdanor, who often displays his incompetence on television. He thought that Cameron was "one of the ablest" students he has taught, whose political views were "moderate and sensible Conservative". Cameron got a first class degree. He then went on to a job in the Conservative Research Department. There, he worked with David Davis on the team briefing John Major for Prime Minister's Questions. He there met George Osborne, whom Michael Howard, many years later, promoted to be shadow chancellor and whom was Cameron's leadership campaign manager.

In 2001, Cameron won the safe Conservative seat of Witney in Oxfordshire, given up by Sean Woodward, who defected to Labour. Cameron was by now a married man with a family. His wife, Samantha, is the daughter of landowner Sir Reginald Sheffield. She grew up on the 300 acre Normanby Hall estate, near Scunthorpe. Her step father, Viscount Astor was a minister in John Major's government,

with responsibility for broadcasting. Mrs Cameron has a tattoo on her ankle and went to art school in Bristol where, she says, she was taught to play pool by rap star Tricky. The couple were introduced by Cameron's sister, Clare, who was and is Samantha's best friend, and they were married in 1996. Their first child, Ivan, was born severely disabled and he needs round-the-clock care. They have a daughter, Nancy, who is now 23 months, and Samantha is also pregnant with their third child. They divide their time between their London home in North Kensington and a cottage in Witney, Oxfordshire.

On becoming an MP, Cameron rose rapidly through the ranks, serving first on the Home Affairs Select Committee which recommended the liberalisation of drug laws. He was adopted as a protégé by Michael Howard who put him in charge of policy co-ordination and then, in May 2005, made him the shadow education secretary. Cameron also served as shadow deputy leader of the house and deputy party chairman.

Cameron plays tennis, often with former leadership rival Liam Fox, and enjoys dinner parties with his close-knit circle of friends, like George Osborne and Michael Gove, the warmonger, and they have become known as the Notting Hill set.

It has often been said in the last few weeks that David Cameron is a blank canvas. But which new leader has not been thus? However, he has put himself about a bit from backing the Greens to increasing Aid to Africa and in this, he has roped in people like Zac Goldsmith, editor of the *Ecologist* magazine, and Bob Geldof.

How Green is Cameron likely to be in the long run? Cameron sees climate change as a key concern and he sought a meeting with members of *Friends of the*

Earth and Greenpeace. He has set up a policy group on the environment to find “tough decisions” for cutting greenhouse gas. As chairman, Cameron has nominated the wet ex-Environment Secretary, John Gummer; who has some popularity with the Greens, and the group includes the Green, Zac Goldsmith, who will look at “quality of life” issues. Goldsmith may well soon be a Tory MP, as he is now on the Conservatives' approved candidates' list. Cameron aims to come up with policies in 18 months' time after this policy group present their recommendations. But Cameron is of a mind that to be Green does not involve stifling the economy. “We don't want people to go and live like monks,” he said. That idea may save him yet.

The Green Party has challenged Cameron to commit himself to a 12-point plan that includes the ending of aviation tax breaks, the scrapping of the road building programme, and £2 billion to shape the economy with “eco-taxes”. He may well dodge that lot during the next 18 months. .

It is one of six such groups that Cameron has set up to aid him to decide party policy at the next election and they are all due to consider things over for the next 18 months. This might allow some of the issues to remain in the long grass. Iain Duncan Smith has been put in charge of a group on social justice and Kenneth Clarke has accepted the chairmanship of a group on “democracy taskforce”.

Cameron's supporter, Oliver Letwin has said that the Tories are now keen to redistribute. Time was when he was keen on lower taxes, but now it is redistribution. This is a sign that they do not realise that the market economy is about the best the public can get as a means of improving their lot in life. More politics can only mess it up.

Cameron has been accused of aping Blair, a thing he has denied and that his supporters, like Matthew Parris on *Any Questions* [Radio 4] on 23 December, also deny. He is a true Conservative, said Parris. But a fellow panellist, Peter Hitchens thought he had nothing to say and that he had no chance of ever winning an election, and nor had the Tory party any chance of winning any election – ever. This idea is utterly unrealistic. It was more realistic when said of the Labourites in the 1980s, but we can all now see how false that was.

But the appearance of redistribution has not quite crowded out the ideas of lower taxes, though they look set to remain smothered in qualifications as to whether it can be afforded. Cameron has repeatedly said he believes in lower taxes but he also repeats all the qualifications that Michael Howard foolishly insisted upon. Cameron has suggested that he might use the gains of future economic growth to split between tax cuts and also more state spending. He has said that he might take many poorer people out of taxation completely by raising the income tax threshold level.

Cameron has made a lot of fuss over backing the Labourites when they were right, and on the NHS he favours more involvement of the private sector to end up with a first class *state* health system, a bit like Gorbachev attempting to get the advantages of the market within the USSR. Cameron also backs Labourite reforms in education, a post he shadowed till he ran for the leadership. He favours freedom for schools to run themselves. And he thinks that top up fees in higher education are basically right and that it was perverse of the Tories to oppose those sort of things simply for the sake of it. It made them look unprincipled.

Much has been made of his tactic of splitting off Blair from Brown. In the House of Commons since becoming

leader, Cameron has set out to back Blair and to also attempt to make clear that this is in contrast with much of Blair's backbenchers, who show no desire to back him on many of the reforms Blair is attempting to push. Cameron backs top up fees in the colleges and he suggested synthetic phonics before the Labourites adopted it. The idea is to get a split between New and Old Labour with the former dying off when Blair goes and an Old Labour under Brown returning to its losing streak of the 1980s. Cameron also thinks that Thatcherism needs to be abandoned as a thing of the past and he wrote to that end in *The Mail on Sunday* Sunday, 1 January 2006: "I Don't Believe In Isms" (p24f). He says here that he will not be confined by what a Conservative is thought to be, that world poverty and global warming are significant issues and that big business ought to face up to its social responsibilities. It reads like the ranting of a lunatic. He explicitly says that there is such a thing as society and that it is not just the state. But Mrs Thatcher never did say that society did not exist if she was taken in context. Rather, that society could not be blamed for what people chose to do. Society was not a thing but mere social interaction and, as such, it could not be aptly personified and blamed for the wrongs that people do. This is all clear enough but Neil Kinnock and his BBC fans have repeated the phrase, drawn out of context, that "there is no such thing as society" ever since, sometimes more than once a day and on every day of the week.

Cameron says that he expects 2006 to be a good year for his party. By 2 January 2006 he was repeating that he was keen to take on big business, and by Wednesday, 4 January 2006 he was saying that the NHS was safe with him and that he would never give tax breaks to those who go private. The next day he came onto the *Today* radio programme where they announced him by saying that

his month as leader seemed a lot longer and that he had already reshaped British politics. Cameron said that he wanted a new politics, a politics of trusting people and sharing responsibility, a compassionate new conservatism for the modern world. He was not against private health care and he expected it to grow for he was not ideologically against it as Labour had been, but nor was he going to encourage it and thus weaken the NHS, as the Tories had done so earlier. He was for a mixed economy in health as in everything else. He does not favour the rich and he would stand up to big business, but they would welcome their social and environmental responsibility rather than being over regulated by hostile laws as they were now. It was a new deal with them. They would be freer to go out to create wealth, he said. He was questioned on this but evaded the questions. It did look to be less regulation and an informal Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR] pact. Or it could be all flannel! Hopefully, it is the latter and he just scraps some regulation and then forgets about it, but it is not easy to gauge. He wanted more women as Conservative candidates. He sees Political Correctness as having lots of merit. Cameron has said that he does not want his child to be called a spastic for example. He is out to reform the police and that contrasts sharply with many of his forerunners who tend to back the police against crime. He got 67% of the vote in his leadership race as the party saw the need for change. He likes Britain as it is or has it has become and many in the party have hitherto rather regretted the decline of traditional values. Is this all rhetorical gesture or a radical change? He is to move to the centre ground and to favour the poor rather than the rich. His explicit support for what is called public services, meaning state services is, after all, only repeating what Mrs Thatcher so often repeated, only many found her incredible on that topic. But she never was out to stand up against

big business. All this supposes that there is a clash of interests in society, and that it might be good to substitute the positive sum game of the market for the negative sum game of state policy. But that can only be a pain in the neck for one and all. Cameron maybe lacks the wit to realise that fact.

Perhaps he is stupid enough to think this will be on par with the Labourites ditching clause four, and if so, then more fool him. It is merely perverse for a Conservative party to modernise, and there never was any handicap like clause four for the Conservatives to ditch. It has been the restless change, ever since William Hague rather drastically cleared out the pre-election cabinet in 1997 that has been the most alienating thing the Tories have done. The modernisers have been their enemy within, and the likes of Portillo have been far more damaging than Tony Benn ever was for the Labourites. If ever a man should be expelled from a party as an unmitigated menace, that man is Francis Maude.

Cameron has attempted to show support for the traditional family whilst endorsing what is taken to be the modern alternatives too. He has hinted that he might privilege the family in the tax system. He seems not to see that it has been the state that has been the main opponent of the family since 1945, not least in its urge to get women to work, and that the announcement of the determination to enforce equal pay and to deal with maternity leave made in the last weeks of December 2005 is typical of the *de facto* attacks on the traditional family from the state. The family does not require state support so much as for the state to get off its back by using taxation to foster alternatives to it.

Cameron has gone into many areas, maybe too many, to coherently adopt in the long run. One of them is immigration and he has suggested the

introduction of border controls. *The Guardian* though, has welcomed this move to the centre and notice that it has put the Tories ahead in the polls. Many have been all the more surprised by the changes Cameron has made, as he was the main author of the last Conservative election manifesto. He has continued to cycle to work and is seen to do so about two or three times a week on the news. His plan is to get people to feel good about voting Conservative again. That they were ashamed to do so even before 1997 was an important sign of their decline.

He has shown that he is willing to oppose the superstate of the EU by withdrawing the Tory MEPs from a pro-EU grouping: the European People's Party in Brussels. He has also ruled out joining the single currency or signing up to a constitution. Drugs was a big issue for Cameron in 2005 as he was asked if he had ever taken them and he attempted to give a no comment. Since his rise to leadership he has suggested a review of drugs policy and the downgrading of ecstasy.

Can Cameron win power? It is not easy for a party to win a fourth election in a row so he must stand a very good chance of getting the Tories back to power next time. But will it aid Britain to become freer? Maybe not.

OLD HICKORY

“He means well is no good unless he does well.” MARTIAL