

Old Tories, new tricks

Politics continues its analysis of the top three political parties: this week, Cameron's Tories come under the spotlight for examination

By **Andy Rennison**
 Deputy Political Editor

The Tories are on the warpath. Popping up amongst the middle order of headlines just last week was Shadow Defence Secretary Liam Fox, claiming that Argentina is once again threatening the Falklands.

Well hoorah with big brass knobs on. Let's paint over the rust and send down the fleet – where's the Admiral? Take him off that ventilator, prop him up and let's smash those filthy Argies! Hold on, there is one slight complication. Mike Summers, from the Falklands Island Council, says the possibility of an invasion is 'almost laughable'. Since he's 8,000 miles closer to the issue than Dr Fox, I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Okay, so we can put the Harriers back in their boxes for now, as this isn't a particularly serious matter. But it does show that confidence is high enough in the Tory camp to incite international conflict.

At the heart of this buoyancy is the word 'change'. Change is seen to be sweeping the Conservative regime, blowing away the snobbish cobwebs and moulding an opposition fit to govern one and all. Cameron is apparently leading this youthful charge, his full-bodied mane rippling as the wind rushes past at breakneck speed.

Big C's importance to this Tory rev-

olution was indeed underlined earlier this month, when former leadership contender Ken Clarke admitted that there would have been a 'blood bath' if he had tried to achieve the kind of change young David is bringing in.

Hang on a second though: Ken Clarke? That flabby pensioner-elect, the self-labelled 'big beast'? He seems

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a little rusty to be speaking for his party during this new era of stupendous upheaval; you'd have thought that three failed attempts at leadership would have inclined him to sod off.

Yet it gets worse. Amid a variety of new units set up to move the party forward, the 'Democracy Task Force' is being led by none other than Mr Clarke. Never mind whatever the hell a 'Democracy Task Force' is, the key issue is that ol' Kenneth has the chair of it.

Maybe my alarm bells are ringing a bit too loudly – I mean, he is only one wrinkly stalwart interrupting a sea of vibrant Tory newness, right? Eh, no. There is more than one Conservative

task force.

Michael Heseltine – that's Lord Heseltine to me and you – has been given the job of getting the urban masses to vote Tory, heading a new cities task force. I'm aware that this particular Lord has some experience in helping the likes of Liverpool out of the doldrums over two decades ago, and fair play to him for that achievement.

But this guy is retired, he's 73 this Tuesday, and he's worth around £250 million at the last count. To me, that's an ill-suited CV for someone trying to get their ear to the street and sort out Britain's crumbling inner cities.

And yet, just when you think Cameron couldn't hark back any further to the depths of Tory history, he does. Heading up the task force for Social Justice is the Right Honourable MP for Chingford and Woodford Green, Mr Iain Duncan Smith.

What is the thinking behind this? I mean, as an MP you can keep him sitting quietly on the backbenches, but don't make him any more prominent than that. Considering the widespread public indifference he received as leader, it would be social justice indeed to wipe poor IDS off the political radar. It's bad enough that William Hague is now Shadow Foreign Secretary, but at least he got to contest a general election as Tory chief.

So it seems clear that there is little truly new about the aesthetics of the

Conservative benches, despite the fresh-faced, moisturised Mr Cameron. The question is whether or not this is a case of old dogs but new tricks, or simply more of the same Conservatism.

Nobody can know for sure whether modernity will infect the Tories and overcome its well-established ranks. Though I'll bet that if you ask a 73 year-old Lord to change his political principles, he'll give you a damn good

thrashing.

You cannot blame Cameron for employing the services of those with track records behind them; you don't discover a new generation of hip-hop Tories overnight. But, somewhere, a hidden PR monkey is fashioning this illusion of a newborn Tory transformation, and that monkey should not be fooling anyone.



HESELTINE: 73 this week and still has something to say

THE VOICE FROM WITHIN

By **Tim Hewish**
 Conservative Party Member

Home Counties Conservatism is a very different experience from the Welsh variety. Having been brought up in Buckinghamshire, the 'Tory Blue County', I was in for a shock when I moved to Cardiff.

In Freshers' week I walked up to the table marked 'Tory Party', and was somewhat reluctant to put my name down, as the people representing the party looked like two geeks who spent too much time face-down in political textbooks.

The 'I love Boris' badges went down well, but considering he was my former neighbour in Henley-upon-Thames, I thought to myself: what relevance does BJ have to Wales? I put my name down and thought little of it until just before Christmas, when David Davis came to town. I'd have preferred Santa Claus, but I suppose he wasn't a bad second.

Meeting the university's supporters of the party, I found about eight people who sadly fell immediately into their above stereotypes. Upon

quizzing them on who they wanted to win the leadership contest all sided with Cameron and cited that a 'compassionate Conservative' was what 'we' needed. What those alliterative words mean, I'm not totally sure.

To quote the official website, 'Conservatives are not ideologies, that is why in each generation we

change, applying our values for new challenges'. This has me at pains because ideology is exactly what politics needs. Well, what else can we believe in?

It is needed because without it, your party has no base, no structure. Labour found this with the vote on education, with Blair having alienat-

ed his 'Old Labour' members and destined to rely on Tory votes to push his bill through.

Some wings of the Tory party welcome this move as Cameron's support is like that of Robert Peel, who transformed the Tory party into the Conservative party, and believed firmly in 'not opposing for opposition's sake'. This is a mature concept as it supports the view that what is best for Britain should prevail, not simply one party's agenda.

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But like all political greats he had enemies; Peel was branded a person who 'rattled on the Tories' and who had 'stabbed them in the back' over Roman Catholic Emancipation and the Corn Laws to name but a few.

Today, the right of the party feels Cameron has done the same to them, but whereas Peel brought them suc-

cess and long years in Government many feel Cameron may simply be all talk and no walk. Cameron needs support from all wings of his party if he is to succeed and gain office.

However, there are murmurs that we need 'one nation Conservatism', such as the ideology used by Disraeli, not 'compassionate Conservatism', which holds little substance. 'One nation' is all about all classes working together and all regions, not just the elite ruling the waves.

There is also a common view that the Tories are 'anti-Welsh' because we do not support the calls for devolution. Our belief is that a fragmented Britain isn't a successful one, and we can support a strong Wales without such moves.

With the Hustings meeting this Wednesday I urge supporters of the party to listen to what the candidates have to say on the Tory view for Wales and vote accordingly. The National Assembly elections start in May 2007 and 20 of the seats are via the proportional representation vote; this is a great opportunity to move forwards showing that Conservatism in Wales is not just for eight geeky people, but for the whole nation.



BO JO: Has he got news for you?