

## Dave on camera and the 'new' toff Tory

Cian O'Neill reports on the triumph of the New Tories.



Like any good lord of the manor should be, David Cameron has now been properly blooded as Tory leader and has since last autumn burrowed his becrimsoned muzzle deeper and deeper into the exposed withers of Honeymoon Gordon. Remember him? The General Election that never was, Northern Rock; citizens' personal data; Mr Abrahams; Boris Johnson [or as he is known in the offices of *The Spectator* magazine, BJ], Crewe and Nantwich... dear, dear. The wheels appear to have come off the Labour wagon, which would have been hauled off for scrap if the 42 days detention bill had not been passed.

► One would wonder over it, if luck weren't so variable in politics: "Events, dear boy, events...". Yet there is something more to it than mere circumstance or honeymoon hubris on the part of 'the surprisingly jejune Broom'.

Mr OnCamera's breezy hour-long Tory Conference speech romanced the political hacks and mittel-Englanders and made the Tories seem electorally viable once more, mainly because it was given without autocue and showed a benefit of that expensive education in the Bullingdon

Club – aplomb. It was a 'moment' and swung the public perception of the Conservatives. Once Parliament sat again after the summer recess, their onslaught began and PMQs came to resemble the hyena cluster-fuck of a tired Moose.

Yet a well-received conference speech, events, opportunism and undeniable sheen do not alone account for their, and his success. The quark in this instance is a class thing. The day before OnCamera made his conference speech the Tories were still in the wilderness and immediately afterward they were somehow a party revived. Why? Two things: an oft-cited though difficult to prove British instinct to be led by one's slightly sneery betters, as shall not be discussed here; and the arrival of a new type of toff, borne to lead and fit to feed on oiks.

Labour must be wondering where these highly efficient predators came from. 1997 saw Labour smash the carapace of Tory electoral infallibility. When Blair arrived, all his third way generalities and London Weekend Television hair seemed like a slice of raw hope to the English electorate. To the Welsh and Scots, it was enough that he not be Tory. Middle England, however, *loved* him, because really he was a Tory at heart but said nice things and looked slick. After the 2008 Crewe by-election victory Dave claimed that New Labour is no longer the party of aspiration, which makes it clear how Blair was actually perceived by those who have limited interest in redistribution or increased social mobility.

Post the 1997 electoral disaster, the Tories tried to find a new hope several times. Choirboy to Thatcher at the 1977 Party Conference and the most talented Parliamentarian of his generation, William Hague's only non-Euro-sceptic problems came when he tried to do glitz /cool when he was better off with detail. Then came IDS, which moniker sounds, not inappropriately, like an immuno-deficiency disorder. Then, Michael Howard, who had a smile just a little less winning than that of the grave. Doomed, all. So, could anyone beat Blair? Well, in reality the toff element of the Tory party had never gone away but had merely been submerged. Having made the right sort of friends in the right schools and colleges, they normally got work in Tory central office or a right-wing rag / periodical and eventually a seat.

They had been preparing themselves for rule and once Howard resigned in 2005 they made their play.

Dave was initially an outside chance for the leadership. He won because of the 'Blair effect', or rather the similitude of the younger, to the older, man. This was made clear at the last Blair PMQs appearance, whereat Dave lavished praise and in so doing made clear that Blair was his role model, another new salesman from an old school. Cameron, Osborne, B.J. *et al* knew that the old boy manners would not translate in the new age. So the new Tory Toff comes equipped with ipod sock and a 'positive-approach' quiff. He does technology and can webchat about secondary-level academies while mucking in and washing any dishes that the maid might have been ordered to leave aside. Thus, and alas, with all the grim inevitability with which bran exercises the bowels, we end up with 'Webcameron'.

Dave's online diary is little better. See his 'gap-year' like weeks of work experience spent with, for example, the police: 'Then we spot a well known local hard man heading in the opposite direction and turn and give chase, successfully [...] on a previous occasion it's alleged that he punished a grass by using a red hot poker to brand the letter T on their forehead.' [24/5/07]. A 'grass'?! Why, has Dave been watching too many DVD boxsets of 'The Sweeney'? Scarcely plausible – but the man on the Clapham omnibus might have, and Dave wants him to believe in his blokeish persona.

Later: 'Of course, the way the police handled the protests is an operational matter for them.' [3/9/07] Quite. Particularly when protest was restricted by the police and physical aggression on both sides was observed. Best to avoid offending anyone, openly. Indeed, what is most apparent from the diary and blogs, is that poor Dave is perennially beset by approbation. Everyone agrees with him – 'I was glad to see heads nodding'; 'I think the speech went well – I got a good reaction in the hall' etc, etc. Bowed like a crone from all the slaps-on-back, he soldiers on and on. He must be desperate for a bicker and this has seen him scour the country, looking for dissent, which is tiring.

He deals with social malaise by spending a week living with a family of British Asian strangers in Birmingham, press in attendance. Luckily, the Asian Peoples warm to him, and teach him all sorts of things you don't discover if you go straight from Eton to Oxford to politics, like how to hold a spade, or use a cash register.

Part of Blair's legacy as a Labour PM who had a huge mandate for social change but no actual interest in pursuing it is that social mobility is more restricted than it was in the days of Thatcher and is worsening. Whilst the electorate lost their appetite for being in every visible actuality ruled by the upper class some time ago, the Tories never did; but they have come to see that if they are to rule again they



cannot speak down to the masses. So, Cameron is a super-evolved new Tory Toff politician. He speaks in Blairite generalities and soundbites, loves the camera and comes complete with the tiny and grossly inefficient wind-powered generator atop his home that shall become the wealth signifier for the new posh.

'Else might we be Milton's heritors', wrote Wilde while at Oxford. In one of his first major interviews as party leader, Cameron admitted, 'I know where I want to get to, but I'm not ideologically attached to one particular method.' Well, Milton hasn't been hip for a while. Cameron was more interested in Blair's legacy, which is decidedly non-Miltonic in its being about a conservative and non-redistributionist will to power [with no specific purpose] mandated through an appeal to populism. Dave doesn't have specific values as such and is in this wise and others Blair and Thatcher's progeny – not a thinker, necessarily, not the real deal, certainly, but a fine example of the 'new' Toff Tory nonetheless, coming soon, perhaps, to an executive near you.



The Bullingdon Club. David Cameron, back row, second from left. Boris, right, front row.