

The Tory Party Jumps the Shark



Hal G.P. Colebatch

Jumping the Shark: the tipping point at which a TV series is deemed to have passed its peak, or has introduced plot twists that are illogical in terms of everything that has preceded them.

See www.jumptheshark.com

The *New York Times* has endorsed British Conservative Party leader David Cameron as ‘nimble, persuasive, telegenic and popular’.

This latest indictment must send shivers down the spines of those looking for some renewal of Britain after the cultural disintegration, decay of national identity and looming economic crisis that are the legacy of the New Labour years. Cameron seems to be dismantling all that is left of the British Conservative Party’s traditions, values and achievements and deliberately turning it into a clone of New Labour—indeed, to be trying to outflank Labour from the left.

It is not socialism but Thatcherism that is Cameron’s *bête noire*. Indeed, high-taxing socialism at home and

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possibly a dash of anti-Americanism abroad seem the Tory leader’s goals.

Cameron has repeatedly denounced Thatcher’s legacy and policies, and in South Africa recently he apologised for her having called the African National Congress ‘terrorists’.

Actually, they *were* terrorists. Soviet trained, they planted bombs in public places and burned people (nearly all black) to death by setting fire to petrol-filled tyres round their necks, sometimes filming the process. Cameron, holding a position previously occupied by William Pitt, the Duke of Wellington and Winston Churchill, as well as Margaret Thatcher, might be expected

to know a little history.

Cameron suggested that Thatcher had supported Apartheid when in fact she had strongly opposed it. What are we to make of a Conservative leader who slanders the record of his own party’s greatest Prime Minister in the last 50 years?

Symbolically, Cameron has dropped the Tories’ previous logo of a burning torch and replaced it with a child’s scribble of a green tree, although one critic pointed out that it could equally well be a distant view of an old Etonian in a cloud of marijuana smoke. The Conservative Party seems to have no policies except to distance

itself from any possible accusations of being conservative.

A policy review group set up by Cameron effectively apologised for the party's alleged traditional hostility to the public sector (in fact, spending on the public sector has grown under every British Government in modern times—it has simply tended to grow slower under the Tories), and called

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for an end to 'public bad, private good' thinking.

'The political culture has often required the Conservatives to belittle the efforts of people whose objectives we share', the Public Service Improvement Policy Group said.

Increasing the size of the public sector as the country became richer was allegedly 'part of being human', and 'it is in this context that we believe that all Conservatives should embrace an unambiguous commitment to the growth of public services, as part of general well-being'.

Oliver Letwin, the party's policy director, endorsed the conclusion of more public spending as a 'decisive turning point' both for the country and the Party. There is an alarming probability that he is right. Letwin has called for income redistribution as though it were a new, promising and untried idea in British politics. This is the same Oliver

Letwin who, as Shadow Chancellor in April 2004, told the party conference that a Tory government would reduce the civil service by 100,000 people. He also promised *then* that regulations would be made more difficult to introduce and easier to abolish. Blogger Tim Worstall commented of the Cameronian Tories: 'Perhaps we should adopt the US moniker of RINO (Republicans in name only) and call them TINOS. Surely there is room for a party that says redistribution is bunkum?'

The report also claimed that what the public sector could learn from the private sector had been 'vastly overstated'. This doesn't really mean anything except a declaration of commitment to socialist principles and probably the further entrenchment of public-sector employee privileges. It is thought likely that its recommendations will be adopted by the Conservative shadow cabinet.

The party should also, the report claimed, embrace a new approach involving greater 'respect' for front-line professionals, and 'commitment to equitable access to services such as health and education'.

Back in 2003, the *Weekly Telegraph* editorialised:

The public sector has employed an additional 354,000 people since 1997, and is due to grow by more than 200,000 over the next three years. It now employs 5.3 million, one in five of the working population ... Industry has lost 11% of its workforce, Whitehall has more than half a million civil servants, about as many as the city of London ... The new ruling class has privileges that most people working in the productive sector can only dream of: generous state-funded pensions, guaranteed against fluctuations in the stock-market; jobs guaranteed against fluctuations in the labour market; and subsidised housing reserved for public-sector workers ... Practically all the new money pouring into health and education

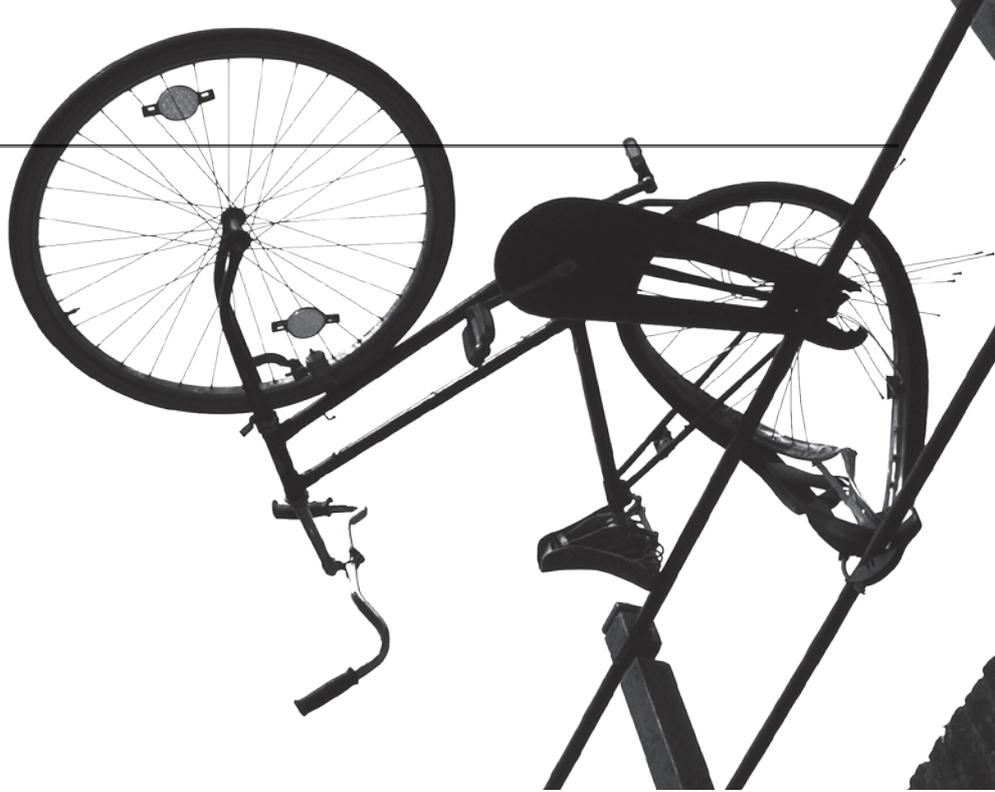
is being spent on salaries. Public sector pay is now rising faster than ever before, but efficiency is some 16% below that of America. We are spending a third more on the National Health Service, with hardly any improvements ... Taxes are due to rise by another 95 billion pounds over the next three years.

The London *Spectator* editorialised on 2 September this year: 'The latest OECD figures show Britain now faces a heavier tax burden than Germany. The value for money offered to the taxpayer is appalling: productivity in the National Health Service has fallen, though spending on health had doubled since 1997.'

To all this the Cameronian Tories seem oblivious. Tory support went up on opinion polls a bit because Labor is in such a state that it would go up if the Tories were led by a chimpanzee, but it has stalled again. Britain seems to have had enough of the high-taxing, high-spending socialism which Cameron seems determined to perpetuate. According to a recent poll, nearly half the population thinks that the country is a worse place to live than it was 20 years ago. More than one in four said that failing public services had made life worse, although public spending on health has doubled in the last six years and 700,000 more public-sector workers have been taken on since New Labour came to power in 1997. There is great resentment over the fact that they will enjoy indexed-linked pensions while the government has slashed the value of private pension funds by tax-raids.

In a statement of core principles, Cameron has said that tax-cuts will not be a top priority—and when a politician says that, you can't say you haven't been warned. Cameron attacked the Tories for the fact that 'While people wanted, more than anything else, stability and low mortgage rates, the first thing we talked about was tax cuts'. Is Cameron really unable to realise that these things are actually connected? Or

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that tax cuts and low mortgage rates are not an either/or proposition?

He claims that high taxes are necessary to finance the welfare state, and one wonders if he has ever heard of the Laffer Curve—the notion that lower taxes could increase government revenue as the economy expands. Googling some of the very few references to ‘Cameron’ and ‘Laffer Curve’ suggests unavailing attempts to tell him about it.

The statement of core principles also promised, somewhat ungrammatically, ‘giving all those who work in our public services the freedom to fulfil their vocation’.

Does this include those with a vocation for ordering other people’s lives about and constructing their own Utopian dreams via State Power? Here are a few examples of their recent activities: the *Daily Mail* of 9 September reported a Mr Gordon MacKillop had been summonsed and may be arrested and prosecuted under the *Protection from Harassment Act 1997* for dressing a gnome in his garden in a miniature policeman’s helmet—he was woken late at night by two policemen who served him with the notice telling him the constabulistic mannikin was offensive to his neighbours. Two days later, it was reported that up to two years in jail or fines of up to £2,500 were being

considered by the Government as penalties for the crime of not having a bell on a bicycle.

A day later, it was reported that some local authorities told war veterans that they could not hold Remembrance Day marches unless they organised public liability insurance, carried out risk assessments and engaged marshals in fluorescent jackets to police the event. On 17 September, the *Sunday Mail* reported a driver spent two nights in jail after having been accused of ‘revving his car in a racist manner’. (The charge was later dropped.) A choir suddenly could not sing in a church where choirs have sung for 900 years without risk-assessment and insurance. Does Cameron think that what this intrusive and bullying, yet inefficient and dysfunctional, Nanny-State really needs is *more* power and prestige?

Cameron speaks of ‘developing with America a tough and effective foreign policy for the age of international terrorism: a policy that moves beyond neo-conservatism, retaining its strengths but learning from its failures’. Trouble is, it is impossible to know what this means. Neo-conservatism is a term with many meanings—and what ‘failures’ exactly did he have in mind?

Former Tory Minister Ann Widdecombe asked recently: ‘Why does Her Majesty’s Opposition run a moral Vi-

chy instead of a moral resistance?’

Churchill wrote of Alfred the Great in *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* that, in eras of confusion and decay, Britain had a knack of producing great leaders and champions to save the situation. There seem none on the horizon at present.

The best hope for Britain is that the Leader of the Opposition doesn’t mean it and that, like Blair in reverse, he will gradually introduce an agenda he has been at pains to distance himself from.

That he and those around him actually believe what he is at present spouting would mean three socialist, left-of-centre parties (with the Liberal Democrats) for Britain, and no sizeable right-of-centre party. Blair’s likely successor as Labour leader is Gordon Brown, an old-fashioned socialist to the left of Blair.

Thatcher’s courage and hard-headedness in the 1980s pulled Britain out of deep trouble and also restored it as a world power. Now a future for Britain as an impoverished, broken-backed socialist State is not inevitable. But it is again looking possible.

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