



# ASSET

## THE THEORY

### A POLITICIAN'S VIEW

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Cheryl was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Lord Privy Seal, Leader of the House of Lords from 1994 until July 1995. In July 1995 she was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Employment. She was appointed Frontbench Spokesman for Trade and Industry in June 1997, and in June 1998, she was appointed Frontbench Spokesman for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. From September 2001 to June 2003, she was an Opposition Whip. In December 2003, she was appointed a Shadow Minister for Home, Constitutional & Legal Affairs and since December 2005, she has been the Shadow Secretary of State for Wales.

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# THE THEORY

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Croeso

Welcome to Wales. I am a Welsh export made good. I was born and brought up in this city of Cardiff, in Llandaff, and lived here until I was ten. So I felt very fortunate to be appointed the Shadow Secretary of State for Wales by David Cameron the new leader of our party. Coming back to the country of my birth has been a great pleasure. I hope that those surveyors at this conference will see enough to tempt them back again and again; and not just to conferences.

Those who live here are very lucky. This country is small, but perfectly formed, and has many qualities on offer in addition to its workforce, education and universities. Wales is also a holiday venue. There are National Parks to die for, scenery that is so spectacular it will take your breath away and some of the most unspoiled coastlines in Britain. Those who come across the border will find that there really is a welcome in the hillside. So please come back to Wales.

Also Wales is an area of the country that is bilingual. We have our own language here. I have to admit that although I was born, brought up and educated here I am not bilingual but I can speak a little bit of Welsh and sing the National Anthem in Welsh and have done so live on BBC Radio.

### EXCITING TIMES

This paper is called "A Politician's View" and being asked to give a politician's view on this day (10th May 2007) is terrifically exciting because over the past week or so we have had some monumental things happening in politics. We have had the local elections in England and Scotland and in Scotland we have learned that you should not hold elections for a parliament and local government at the same time without extremely careful thought on the design of ballot papers and the wording of instructions to voters. Otherwise the ballot papers become too complicated and make it almost impossible for voters to make choices.

We have had important Assembly elections here in Wales

and today we have had the announcement of the timetable for departure of the Prime Minister Tony Blair. France has a new President. George W Bush has had his greatest moment while hosting a dinner for Her Majesty the Queen who was visiting America. He couldn't get his a speech straight but did call her mother. This is thought to be a breakthrough for American politics.

We are in an exciting part of the political cycle. Interestingly there is the danger that politics may be starting to stir with the electorate. For a politician that is pretty exciting. Generally, for a believer in democracy, turnout at elections is disappointing but at least in the Welsh Assembly elections there were increases in turnout across the board, a healthy sign for Welsh democracy. Politicians must engage more with the people they seek to represent and govern.

For the Conservative Party the recent local elections were difficult as the party was at a high point in the terms of the numbers of elected local representatives. Now we have more than 900 gains from the local elections right across the country and there has been a breakthrough for us in the north. If you are seeking to represent a country there can be no no-go areas for political parties. They must have representation and be in touch with the electorate in all parts of the country. Improvements are vital in areas where there is a dearth of representation. We gained 140 seats in the north of England and about 19 councils. We took control of 39 more councils and now Conservatives control 207 councils, the Labour Party 53 and the Liberal Democrats 29. To set the political scene there has been a huge shift at local government level towards my party. There are now 89 councils throughout the UK that have no elected Labour councillors at all. There is a noticeable contraction of the Labour Party so this is the political scene against which local government will deliver its services and you will do your jobs.

Scotland is different. We see a huge resurgence of the SNP. Interestingly this raises again the whole topic around devolution, moving governments closer to people, looking at what we do with local councils and with groupings, whether we go for unitary authorities or regional government. This is all due to what is happening in Scotland, the resurgence of the SNP and the discussion about total devolution/independence. From my visits to Scotland and from talking to people throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, I do not think that amongst the electorate there is a real desire for independence but there certainly is a demand for autonomy. Taking government closer to the people is something the electorate is wanting more and more from modern day politics.

### ELECTIONS

The Conservatives did well in Wales, as a party, but even so there is a very difficult situation. There are 60 seats up for grabs in the Welsh Assembly and we have this hybrid situation of first-past-the-post and a list system. It is the

same in Scotland but with slightly different rules and again a different system in Northern Ireland. We have ended up with a multiplicity of electoral systems in the United Kingdom.

The first-past-the-post seats are the real test of party progress as this effectively mirrors the Westminster constituencies. Before the election we had one first-past-the-post seat and ten list members, eleven altogether. The post election situation is five first-past-the-post and seven list members, twelve in all. The overall position is 26 for Labour, 15 for Plaid Cymru, 6 for the Liberal Democrats and 1 Independent, the latter being Trish Law. The Trish Law result is interesting in both political terms and in relation to what is happening with the electorate. Trish Law is a particularly gutsy and brave woman. She took on her husband's mantle when Peter Law, who had left the Labour Party and become an Independent, sadly died. Much was made in the campaign in Blaenau Gwent about the possibility of a sympathy vote. This shows how wrong politicians can be because it was certainly not a sympathy vote that Trish Law received. She was returned with an increased majority and although I am a party political animal I was pleased to see a politician who was standing on a platform of what she could do for the people of Blaenau Gwent come out on top. This result is another indicator of this fundamental shift happening underneath our political system about what the electorate is expecting and what it wants to see as its politicians.

Interestingly enough in terms of seats my party is third but in terms of votes the Conservative Party is second. It received more votes in total in Wales than Plaid did but the vagaries of the electoral system has delivered Plaid a larger number of seats. Consequently we have a situation, and great speculation about how an administration is going to be formed here. Those familiar with the New Zealand model will know what happens next and I know that there have been huge overtures between the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. But whatever happens there has to be compromise and a form of coalition, if not coalition government then at least a stability pact between political parties. A unique situation for the United Kingdom; and if there is a stability pact it will be interesting to see how it works.

There are big changes coming due to the local government results, what is happening in Scotland with thoughts of what follows devolution, and how Wales will govern itself. But there are bigger changes in Westminster. There is for me a fundamental change in Westminster politics after the departure of Tony Blair and the arrival of, I assume, Gordon Brown. The background to Blair's departure and the leadership contest - or not - in the Labour Party, and then the actions of Gordon Brown will set the scene for the next two or three years and it is against this backdrop that you will be operating. I do not know what is going to happen. This choreographed departure of a Prime Minister who I admit, when he came in, I felt strongly was a great hope for the electorate. I know he is not in my party but he came in with promise and panache and one of the best marketing programmes I have ever seen and he really was absolutely superb. But gradually the gloss

has come off the gingerbread and remarkably there is now open rebellion amongst Members of Parliament. It is the sort of open rebellion that occurred in the Conservative Party during the Thatcher/Major years; now to be seen in the Labour Party. No announcements but his departure will be highly orchestrated and choreographed. I suspect the tone of these arrangements will not concern what is best for the United Kingdom; it will be about what is best for Mr. Blair. His schedule will include a meeting with Sarkozy in France, trips to Africa and Washington and there is a rumour that John Prescott will take Prime Minister's Questions so it will be Prescott v. Hague - interesting. At least that is something to look forward to. Then he has the G8 World Economic Summit in Germany followed by the European Council in Brussels. All of this will be carefully orchestrated so he can complete this world tour before he finally departs the stage.

## BROWN

Then we have Brown. He will be working against the Blair legacy. Now you know that I am a party political animal so I have to be party political so please forgive me if I upset anybody; I do not mean to. There are good things that the Labour Party and Labour government has done and I am the first one to admit it. On Northern Ireland I will be second to none in my praise for what Peter Hain, the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and the Prime Minister have achieved. It will be is absolutely fantastic if the agreements hold and are ultimately successful. And likewise despite the interest rates going up to 5.5% during the morning, the independence of the Bank of England has to be the right way to go.

But there are many legacies from the Blair years that are unwelcome. There has been the politicisation of the civil service. When I was a Junior Minister my press officer was a straightforward civil servant; an information officer that dealt with my press. Now we have seen so many political advisers and Labour Party people being taken into departments of state and being put into the press office. There has been unprecedented spin. Be warned when reading another big announcement about the departure of the Prime Minister and just look carefully through other departmental press releases to see where there is bad news being buried and slipped out at the same time.

We are passing over to a man who has in fact has been right alongside Blair throughout and has put the Treasury at the heart of a control centre and power system based on the Treasury and No. 10 in a way never previously seen in this country. Casually people refer to it as social government. It is not the cabinet collective government that I left behind and was usual under a Conservative government. Blair's government has concentrated heavily on what No. 10 has said, and what the Treasury has said, with the result that other departments have found it hard to make an impact. Gordon Brown has been planning his accession for ten to fifteen years so expect a military-like operation. I predict

he will come in and do a hundred days and a hundred things. It is all lined up. He has been working at it. The Treasury is divided in such a way that he will be able to put out policies in each specific area. But of course he has many problems to address. These fall into a number of categories and I am not sure that there are easy answers given the political climate.

## PROBLEMS

These are the problems. First there is the elephant in the room – Iraq, a very difficult subject. I think he will announce a phased withdrawal from Iraq. It is a war that many felt that we should not have entered and there is a weekly event when that the Prime Minister comes to the Despatch Box and sadly announces another set of names of our soldiers and our service personnel that have lost their lives. Currently the problem seems much bigger than a solution but Mr. Brown must come forward with something on Iraq.

He must also do something about our defence forces. Now here in Wales we have had a huge fillip on defence because the Tri-service Training School is coming to St. Athan and I am absolutely delighted about that. It will bring tremendous prosperity to Wales and we will do a good job here for the defence services. But Mr. Brown has to address how the defence services are equipped, how they are deployed and what the future role for the armed services is to be.

He will find he will have a tough battle with the pensioners. They are not going to forgive the ACT provisions and the damage to their pensions. He has unfinished business with many people that have lost their pensions, not least the ASW steelworkers here. There is a huge problem that has to be resolved.

In local government I think will have to look at the plethora of central government-set performance measurements that local councils have to comply with. In talking to people from local government the main complaint is the bureaucracy, the target setting and the controls that everybody has to face. There has to be some liberation.

Both where we go with devolution and the structures of local government are still unanswered. We have got the White Paper. We have some going for unitary authorities, some authorities going for enhanced working. We have still got the regional government but the North East Referendum

kicked that into touch and certainly you will know my party is set against that because it will take local government further away from the electorate. But Mr. Brown will have to do something about that and, of course, England may have to face revaluation. The revaluation in Wales has not been popular particularly as it could mean an increase in taxes if you have added a patio to your property.

Healthcare is another big issue and top of the agenda is cancer care. The headlines in the papers today say that cancer treatment in the United Kingdom is way behind many of our European neighbours. The delivery of modern medicine is not taking place in a rapidly enough to make interventions. I had a PET scan this week in London. Wales does not have a single PET scanner. It does not have the diagnostic tool that is one of the most essential aids to early diagnosis and the monitoring of patients with certain illnesses. In Wales 50% of the people cannot find an NHS dentist and indeed finding an NHS dentist anywhere is getting harder and harder. I was accosted in Cardiff station by AXA doing a survey on whether people had an NHS dentist in Cardiff. I said, "I don't think you want to ask me. Mine is in Sheffield". But it is true. My NHS dentist is in Sheffield and my husband, slightly older than me, got thrown off his NHS dentist's list in the south of England as he had reached a certain age. Another problem to be addressed.



You have heard what is happening with doctors and nurses and what is happening with hospital closures. In the health service property and property rationalisation is going to be so important. Local hospitals are an enormous issue as people are attached to their own local facility and not to enormous centres of excellence far away.

Education must move to compulsion up to 18. In Wales we have the largest number of people that are not in education, training or employment, at the moment in excess of one million and more than in 1997.

The environment will be particularly important. We have just closed down Trawsfynydd nuclear power station in the centre of Wales and another will be coming to the end of its life soon. There are proposals for a Severn Barrage and other renewable energy projects all enormous areas of policy that will have to be tackled and will have to be re-energised after the Blair years.

On Europe obviously the constitution will be revisited.

Given all the problems on law and order the only proposal is to split the Home Office into two, a tinkering with the bureaucracy and administration and an emphasis on

structural reshaping when in fact problems should be tackled much more directly.

There are also a number of quirky things that will have to be dealt with. The use of Lottery funding for the Olympics with the result that funding for heritage and charities is disappearing has to be reconsidered. Particularly as the pricing and budgeting of the Olympic Games has been so weak that it is quite shameful. Reform of the House of Lords will come back onto the agenda and the “cash for peerages issue” will come to the forefront.

Gordon Brown has got an enormous task and an uphill battle to restore some faith in the Labour Party and Labour government at a time when my own party is starting to develop a philosophy and a way of thinking that we hope is beginning to engage the electorate. Certainly it is proving to do so at the ballot box. I am not an arrogant politician. I know things can change in politics just like that. It is not longer “a week is a long time in politics” but a couple of hours can be a long time in politics and can destroy a career.

As to the future I believe the electorate will want different qualities from both politicians and the people that provide their services. They will want people that are primarily interested in the community and what they can do for the community and not primarily in what they can do for themselves. Politics is essentially a selfish job but I am sure the electorate do not want to see selfish politicians anymore. They have had enough of these people. Therefore the electorate will want more engagement and more real focus on the needs of the community from people in both political positions of power or service delivery.

My party is working on an agenda of social responsibility, personal responsibility and corporate responsibility. David Cameron has said that we are not in this on our own but we are in this together. It is not about politicians knowing all the answers. It is about groups of people getting together and trying to solve the problems in communities and so improve them and we hope that that is a philosophy that will come through. I hope that some of this philosophy proves attractive to the new leadership in the Labour Party because I do not wish my country ill and I do not wish to see any more areas of our life get worse as they have done over the past four or five years of the Labour administration.

But I have to tell you that politics is becoming really exciting. It was in the doldrums for a long time. People did not want to talk about politics or engage with politicians. Now whenever I have been knocking on doors or doing phone-ins on the radio people are beginning to see the relevance of politics to their lives. Irrespective of age there is not a single area of our lives that are unaffected by what politicians do at every level, be it local, Assembly, the parliament in Scotland, the parliament in Westminster or in Europe. And I do hope that my party, and I, will continue to increase engagement with people and that we make sure that if we do reach power in Westminster we work diligently with civil servants just as I know that many of our councillors and council groups are working with you.

So thank you very much for having me here. I hope I have set a bit of a political scene for you.

Cheryl Gillan MP

## QUESTION

**Malcolm MacAskill, South Ayrshire Council**

Can I ask what your view is on the shared-services agenda? That is where local government, the NHS, and other public sector bodies work together, not just co-locating, but integrating service delivery.

**Answer**

I will answer that as a constituency politician. My district council is Chiltern District Council. My local health authority covers from Buckinghamshire down to the Isle of Wight. That is much too big. The constituency cases that cross my desk are of failed operations between the services. It is where people fall through the gap, where funding is unclear, where there is a lack of funding, where targets distort what the outcome is for the individual. There has to be an increased and enhanced way of operating between public sector bodies. Often there is little ‘joined-up government’. Often the way services have been set up predicated against there being any sort of joined-up liaison

particularly in the areas of mental health, housing and the discharge of patients from hospitals. These problems can sometimes be solved when I gather the various people around and put them together in a room.

I will just give you another example. I am exceedingly worried about the way in which the Home Office is being divided up and what has been happening with the National Offenders Management Service with Probation and prisons because unless you have some sort of seamless connection through between the areas I think we are going to see even more people falling through the gap coming out of prison, not getting the right rehabilitation, not getting the right monitoring. And now we are starting to create a bigger divide between two departments, the Department of Justice and the Department that is going to deal with immigration.

# NOTES

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