



David Cameron: Blair's heir?

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For years, the British people – and the rest of the world – have thought that Tony Blair's heir would come out from the ranks of the Labour Party. The last three Conservative leaders, William Hague, Ian Duncan-Smith and Michael Howard, were no winners in electoral terms and therefore they did not represent any danger for the continuity in power of either Blair or the Labour Party. Under these circumstances, everybody was betting for a succession within the Labourite ranks. Furthermore, until some days ago the conventional wisdom pointed at the everlasting aspirant to become PM, Gordon Brown, actual Chancellor of the Exchequer. Nevertheless, things have changed, not only with the designation of David Cameron as the new leader of the Conservative Party. It is not only a new face bringing hope to defeat in the polls a Labour Party that has been so many years in power, it is also that his ideology better represents Blair's conservatism, opposite to the British Left's

traditionalism that Brown personifies. He also got a nickname in a swift manner; he is not called *Tory* Blair for nothing.

Some months ago, just at the beginning of summer, David Cameron, young MP, 39 years old with a cheerful glee, admitted that the political team he counted on in order to get the Conservative Party's control could easily fit in a London taxicab. His situation, yet improving, never got an edge over his main opponent, David Davis, in the internal polls. On the contrary, to the last minute, Cameron was considered the loser. In spite of all that, he won by a landslide in the recount. The unexpected happened and this young politician, whose participation in the Conservative Party's convention was witty and, apparently, spontaneous, finds himself in the position of challenging Blair's government and become the leader of a historic change in favor of the Conservatives.

The first impact that Cameron's victory has had is an enormous wave of hope and joy among the Conservative ranks. Cameron's face and style represent a leap to modernity. Youth, classic education, but with the manners of the common man (He used to ride his bicycle from home to the House of Commons), unruffled father of 2 children – one of them, handicapped, and expecting a third one – he speaks bluntly and clearly, someone real out of today's Britain, not an Eton and Oxford posh boy, hardened by years of holding a seat in the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Like Cameron himself has said after his victory: "I want a Conservative Party loving today's Britain, not yesterday's." A breath of fresh air.

That encouragement to advance has been noted by all the British press that looks at the new leader, momentarily, with good eyes. Journalists love surprises and his election has been one. For the first time in fifteen years, the polls give the Conservatives a slight advantage over Labour, like yesterday's Sunday Telegraph poll revealed. However, that Cameron and his relaxed style sit well with a TV audience or with the Press does not mean that he will always have the media's approval. One thing is to win the primaries where his modernizing attitude clearly differed from his opponent's whiff of traditionalism; another thing is to win the general elections. As he starts shaping his strategies, he will have to deal with analytical criticism, something he still has not endured in excess.

Perhaps that is the new Conservative leader's weakest point. His relative inexperience in Parliament and politics makes that his program, his ideas and personal beliefs are practically un-

known. It is true that he helped write the Conservative Manifesto and therefore one assumes that a big part of those values reflected in there are his, but we all know that leaders develop rapidly their own set of ideas once they reach a position of responsibility. Cameron gives the impression of being coherent but he still has to explain in what.

His basic platform is very simple, so much that one cannot get much out of it: "We need to change how we feel, we need to change how we think and we need to change and we will change the way we behave." Big words that can produce all kinds of proposals. In fact, David Cameron has only said one concrete thing: That they have to increase the number of women in the Conservative leaders' ranks, particularly in Parliament. It is a way of showing his penchant for the Conservative Party's adaptation to Britain's social reality; one with not only equal opportunity but also that is also multiracial.

He did well in his first meeting with the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons control session last week about education reform. He showed authority and did not make any mistakes, maybe – as some of his adversaries pointed out – because he followed the script he had prepared. In any case, the most relevant –politically speaking – about his dialectic confrontation with Blair was his demeanor, the manners and the tone he used to hide or reveal his global strategy. Cameron did not want to punish or ridicule Blair; he was offering his hand to cooperate in a project with procedural difficulties. It is not weakness. Cameron knows that his enemy is not Tony Blair, but Gordon Brown, whom he must confront – and more – in four years for the

general elections. To criticize Blair does not help his own purposes.

Blair represented change in his day. Until a certain extent, he is the most avant-garde inside Labour. What Cameron should suggest to the British voters is that he is the natural successor of that tendency for change and modernity while presenting Gordon Brown - King Kong as his supporters call him - as a relic of the past and of the reactionary Left. Cameron himself said it, using a phrase that belongs to Labourite Heath: "You -- meaning Brown - are people of the past with ideas of the past." In addition, one must say that Brown is making it very easy for Cameron. His recently made public proposal about the budget is more of the same: Fall of competitiveness, low growth, more taxes and more public

sector. With all, David Cameron must convince the 700.000 public servants created with Brown's money that his probable government is not going to send them to the unemployment line and that they will live better by getting their taxes cut. It is not easy, but there is an emergent social consensus that the actual situation is unattainable in the medium run. That benefits Cameron.

Anyhow, the new leader has several years ahead until his time comes to define more concretely his political proposals. For the moment, what he must do is to control his Party well, to make a good team and to be the talk of the town. Everything suggests that he can make it happen.

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