

Building Britain's Future

Labour launches its platform for the election



Building Britain's Future, the policy document launched by the Prime Minister this afternoon sets the scene for the political debate in the run up to the general election, which must be held within the next 11 months.

Today's document will be followed by an Education White Paper which Children's Secretary, Ed Balls, will publish tomorrow and proposals for banking reform which are expected from the Chancellor in the next few weeks.

Building Britain's Future is divided into three main themes:

- Restoring trust in democracy;
- Returning the country to economic growth; and
- Reforming public services and investing in infrastructure.

Peter Mandelson has described it as *"the platform on which we will build our manifesto for the next general election"*. Across the broad canvass of the document, the Government has attempted not only to set out dividing lines between itself and the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats but also wherever possible to steal their best lines.

Lord Mandelson's strategic approach has determined much of the structure and presentation of the document and it is no coincidence that today's *Financial Times* featured a major interview with the Business Secretary; who must surely now rank as the most powerful man in the Government - bar none.



Lord Mandelson was at pains to stress in his interview, the importance of returning the country to economic growth in order to protect frontline services. The strategy for economic recovery is a central part of today's proposals and it is clear that with rumours that the next spending review will be dropped until after the election (apparently confirmed by Peter Mandelson) Labour is planning an economic assault on the Conservative front bench in which they will try to use the cover of the existing spending plans to avoid talk of their own cuts.

The Prime Minister opened his statement by seeking to establish a binary choice between the Labour Government and their Conservative opponents *"by rejecting the view that government should cut investment during a recession"*. By contrast he set out plans to invest heavily in job creation, green technologies and infrastructure and to continue to reform the financial sector. His approach was derided by David Cameron, who said the Prime Minister was living in a dream world and described the proposals as *'a package without a price.'*



The Prime Minister also set out proposals to restore trust in democracy. He said that the last vestige of the hereditary principle would be removed from the House of Lords, proposals to complete the reform of the Lords would be brought forward and an independent regulator for parliamentary standards would be set up.



On public service reform the PM set out proposals to shift away from the targets based culture of the past decade towards a system in which citizens would have specified entitlements to public services. He also said new proposals would be forthcoming about investment in infrastructure including further electrification of the railways.

Today's proposals suggest that the Prime Minister, guided by Lord Mandelson, is planning an election campaign in which - having posed as the champions of democratic renewal and guardians of economic recovery and having attempted to steal the best ideas on public services from the opposition parties - Labour will seek to batter them with the charge that a Conservative victory will savage frontline services, stall the economic recovery and strip popular entitlements from the electorate.

Such an approach by a deeply unpopular fourth term government in the midst of recession could normally be dismissed as a desperate and futile tactic and on first impressions Brown's statement certainly looked less than convincing. But with Lord Mandelson pulling the strings, the opposition parties are likely to be kept sweating to the end.

With at least the vestiges of a plan in place to take on the Conservative Party, the question left hanging is whether Lord Mandelson intends such a plan to benefit Gordon Brown or whether he will switch his allegiances to a more marketable leader in the late autumn, when it will be possible to resist calls for an immediate election until the spring. Intriguingly, the Government today announced proposals to allow life peers to resign their seats, raising at least the possibility of a Commons return for Lord Mandelson after the election. Perhaps the Prime Minister would be wise to join the opposition leaders in stocking up on the anti-perspirant!

KEY PROPOSALS

THE ECONOMY

The Prime Minister unveiled a number of new proposals aimed at delineating a divide between a government that would invest in jobs and the economy and an opposition that would savage it with cuts. He claimed that the resources would be found by adjusting priorities and reallocating funds.

Key among his proposals were:

- £1 billion for a Future Jobs Fund which would provide 150,000 new jobs, 100,000 to young people and 50,000 targeted on areas of deprivation;
- plans to provide a guarantee of a job, work experience or training for every young person under 25, and an obligation on their part to take it;
- a trebling of the extra £600 billion promised for new affordable housing in the budget to £2.1 billion, which the PM claimed would create 110,000 new homes and generate 45,000 jobs;
- plans for an Energy Bill which would support pilot schemes for commercial carbon capture and storage and complement £1.4 billion investment in green energy announced in the budget;
- A claim that renewable energy targets would see a further £100 billion invested by the private sector making Britain a leader in the global low carbon market and creating over 400,000 jobs in the sector by 2017;
- A new innovation fund to lever in up to £1 billion in private sector investment in biotechnology, life sciences and low carbon technologies;
- a Digital Economy Bill to extend high speed broadband throughout the country; and
- A financial services and business bill would ban unsolicited credit card cheques and the FSA would take action to prevent excessive executive pay.

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

The public service reform elements of the paper which were heavily trailed in this morning's papers are focussed on moving away from the political culture of targets which have dominated the public services over the last decade towards a culture of citizen entitlements in health, education and housing.

The Government has for some time echoed the mantra of returning powers from Whitehall to the citizen which has been the call of David Cameron and the Conservative Party since early in his leadership. The health entitlements also closely mirror longstanding Liberal Democrat proposals for a 'Patient's Contract.' Today's Government proposals, however, mark the first concrete steps towards shifting away from the centralised Whitehall based approach.

Key citizen entitlements would include:

Health

- Hospital treatment within 18 weeks for all patients;
- For cancer patients, the right to be seen by a specialist within two weeks of referral by a GP; and
- Free health check ups for all people aged 40-74;

In addition the government will look closely at extending entitlements to:

- NHS dentistry,
- evening and weekend access to GPs,
- an individual budget for those with long-term or chronic conditions; and
- whether a right to choose to die at home can be created as further progress is made in implementing the end of life care strategy.

Housing

- Local authorities to be freed to give priority for social housing to those who live in the area who have been on waiting lists;

Education

- Parents will now be guaranteed an education that is individually tailored for their child, including:
 - a personal tutor for every pupil at secondary school;
 - stretching teaching for all pupils, with catch up tuition for those who need it, including one to one tuition;
 - all children will be entitled to start school in the September after their fourth birthday, or be offered 25 hours of free early learning a week; and
 - the right to request flexible working will be extended for parents of children aged under 16.

Community Safety

- Local people will be given the right to hold the police to account at monthly beat meetings,;
- An entitlement to 'have a say' on CCTV and other crime prevention measures; and
- The right to vote on how offenders pay back to the community.

REBUILDING TRUST IN A MODERN, DEMOCRATIC BRITAIN

Gordon Brown's statement reiterated the government's commitment to introducing an independent regulator for Parliamentary standards and a binding Code of Conduct for all MPs. These provisions are set out in the Parliamentary Standards Bill, which was introduced on 23 June and is intended for Royal Assent before the summer recess.

The Constitutional Renewal Bill is also intended for introduction before the end of the current session and makes provisions for further reforms to the House of Lords, including the process of removing the hereditary principle. The government will then look to set out its proposals and publish a draft bill for a smaller and democratically constituted second chamber.

Looking ahead, in the next session of Parliament, the government also plans to introduce a Bribery Bill to "modernize law on bribery to support the highest ethical standards across business and public life and to equip prosecutors and courts to deal effectively with bribery".

Constitutional Renewal Bill

- Completing the process of removing the hereditary principle from the second chamber;
- Providing for the disqualification of Peers convicted of a serious criminal offence;
- Allowing life peers to resign;
- Placing the Civil Service Code, recruitment into the Civil Service and the role of the Civil Service Commissioners on a statutory footing;
- Creating a statutory basis for the Parliamentary scrutiny of Treaties, prior to their ratification;
- Limiting the circumstances in which the Attorney General can intervene in cases and requiring her to publish a protocol on how the Attorney General would work with the Directors of the prosecution services that she oversees;
- Removing the Prime Minister from involvement in all judicial appointments in England and Wales;
- Repealing legislation that limits protests around Parliament; and
- Standardizing the time limit within which legal action can be brought under the Human Rights Act across the UK.

Bribery Bill

- Providing a new, modern and comprehensive scheme of bribery offences enabling a more effective response to bribery in the public and private sector, at home and abroad;
- Enabling the courts to consider evidence from proceedings in Parliament in the event of a prosecution for bribery of a Member of Parliament or Peer;
- Creating an offence of bribery of foreign public officials in order to obtain or retain business;
- Creating a new corporate offence where a business fails to prevent bribery being committed by those working on its behalf;
- Guaranteeing that foreign nationals who are resident in the UK are liable to prosecution for bribery committed abroad in the same way that UK nationals are already liable; and
- Removing the existing requirement for the consent of the Attorney General to a prosecution for bribery.

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FULL LIST OF BILLS

The full list of Bills announced in the Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons are set out below:

- **Constitutional Renewal Bill**
- **Bribery Bill**
- **Financial Services and Business Bill**
- **Digital Economy Bill**
- **Energy Bill**
- **Flood and Water Management Bill**
- **Improving Schools and Safeguarding Children Bill**
- **Equality Bill**
- **Policing, Crime and Private Security Bill**
- **Child Poverty Bill**
- **Cluster Munitions Prohibition Bill**