



10 DOWNING STREET

# Press Notice

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH

BY

THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE GORDON BROWN MP

TOWARDS A NEW POLITICS

TUESDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2010-02-02

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Lisa – let me thank you for your introduction, and also for the amazing work that you and Carrie have undertaken at the IPPR – an organisation which remains as it has always been, at the forefront of the debate about democracy and empowerment – and let me also say what a pleasure it is to be here at the RSA, an organisation which under the leadership of Matthew Taylor shows precisely what I want to talk about today; that institutions which are very old can embrace the very new, and if we have the courage to embrace the future, we can all become agents of change.

It's clear people want to change the way politics is done in this country. People want to get involved in big causes and want to be part of a strong community, as they showed so movingly in the recent Haiti disaster appeal and in campaigns like Make Poverty History before it, but we have to accept we have a lot to do to make politics the focus of their idealism and their hopes.

From young people who have more faith in single issue campaigns than broad based party programmes, to the people who say they won't vote, to those who are tempted by the fringes and the extremes, it is clear that the way we do politics in the future needs to be different from the past.

And while the vast majority of MPs work around the clock to serve their communities, it is clear that the public have been rightly outraged by the expenses crisis, so trust needs to be restored.

And so the question today is do we make the championing of the renewal of politics and a new constitutional settlement a central cause for this decade, or do we just talk about change without giving it substance?

This choice must be faced head on, so that we arrive at a radical, modern, open and democratic agenda to change the way our country governs itself.

As a constitutional reformer and long standing supporter of change, I admit that at times I have been frustrated by the slowness of the process of change.

But with the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill now going through the House of Commons it is now time to set out the next stage of reform – and how we can reshape the terms of the debate about our

constitutional future, and how over the next few months and beyond, we can accelerate the pace of change.

I believe this agenda can inspire progressives who believe in shifting power back to the people but we must embrace the right kind of change not the wrong kind of change. And so I believe that the choice before us is clear:

Whether we advance towards a new politics, where individuals have more say and more control over their lives or whether - by doing nothing, or by design - we retreat into a discredited old politics, leaving power concentrated in the hands of the old elites.

Let me be specific about the choices:

It is a choice between the new politics of ending the hereditary principle in the Lords in a bill before parliament now, or letting it continue for far too long into the future.

It's a choice between agreeing to move ahead with a democratically accountable House of Lords or postponing further change for more than a decade.

It is a choice between the new politics of offering the people the chance to ensure each MP has a majority mandate from the voters and the old politics of 'no change'.

It is a choice between the new politics of giving the people a right to recall MPs who break the rules where parliament itself fails to act, or refusing the people a say even if members place their personal greed above their public duty.

It is a choice between putting into people's hands more rights to information and to a say over the work of government or a constitutional stalemate.

And it is a choice which today also goes to the heart of the delivery of our public services - giving people new rights to control the services they depend upon -or simply muddling through in the old ways.

The new politics is, in essence, a choice between parties who want to make the people more powerful and those who talk about change but reject the changes that would genuinely empower people.

My interest in these questions is not new but long standing.

And our government has already helped deliver changes that have given more power to people with changes that are more profound than any to politics since the war - and where we have been able to achieve it we have sought and won all party support.

Devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the creation of a Mayor for London is about power redistributed away from the centre and held closer to the people.

And I cannot overstate the importance of proceeding with the devolution of policing and justice in Northern Ireland.

The independence of the Bank of England and more recently the independence of national statistics is about the executive being prepared to give up long held powers.

A new Supreme Court establishes a stronger relationship between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

Offering people legal rights to public services and entitlements is a way of ensuring fair access to all, while at the same time improving public services for the many.

And guaranteeing individual liberties through the Human Rights Act, making public data available and delivering freedom of information has started a process of giving more power to the individual and enshrining in our constitution our commitments to liberty, a matter I feel so passionately about that I want to return to it in a later speech.

And one of my first actions on becoming Prime Minister was to propose new powers for parliament and to set out my thoughts on how we could enshrine our belief in liberty in better policies for the future. Reform of parliament has included giving to the representatives of the people the final responsibility for the agreement of treaties, agreeing the removal of ancient royal prerogatives, giving select committees the power to hold

pre-appointment hearings and, for the first time ever, putting civil service independence on a statutory footing. Indeed many of these issues are currently contained in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill currently going through parliament.

But while this government's record is one of real change, the changes we have made are not nearly enough to deliver the new politics which I want to see, and which we need to secure for the benefit of the British people.

For let us be in no doubt that we are talking today about some fundamental questions about our lives together as citizens: where power is located, how it is distributed, how it can be exercised, and how we can make changes when institutions no longer work at their best for the people they should serve.

And there are real choices with real consequences for people's lives. Politics shouldn't be seen just as sport, spectacle or sideshow. For all its shortcomings it is the greatest vehicle mankind has yet devised for lasting peace and shared prosperity.

When politics works conflicts are resolved, unity is established, cohesion is advanced and nations are prosperous and at peace.

And in recent times politics has also become how we are able to determine the care our sick and our old people are entitled to, the help our families receive, the education our children have a right to.

When politics works, health services are delivered, education is of the highest standards, crime and anti social behaviour are dealt with and we all feel part of something bigger than ourselves. It is not an end in itself, but the way that determine the rules of a civilised society.

And if we are to renew the politics of Britain for our times and for the future, the agenda must be about change in how we distribute power between individuals, neighbourhoods, regions and the centre and about change in how we restore the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of parliament, through reform of the unelected House of Lords, a referendum on a new voting system for the House of Commons, and a public life that starts to reflect the dynamism and diversity of Britain.

And so let me begin with our agenda for change in the House of Lords.

There is simply no space for a hereditary principle in a modern legislature and so in the last few days we have voted to remove the procedures by which new hereditary peers can join the House of Lords. It is for others to explain their opposition to this immediate change, but our proposals for the Lords are based on very simple principles: that the new politics cannot be real without fundamental change of the functioning of our ancient institutions, and we must do away with the unacceptable practices of an earlier age that are redolent of deference and privilege.

Let me put on record my huge admiration for the individual peers of the House of Lords for the professional and dedicated way they have conducted their role.

But I also say today: a modern democracy cannot tolerate power to initiate and revise legislation being held for ever by those without a mandate from the people. So in the next few weeks we will be publishing the key parts of a draft bill for a democratically accountable House of Lords. And my pledge today is that we will take forward these reforms in the next term of a Labour government, completing the work started before the First World War and to which we have been committed since then.

And alongside our moves to bring democracy to the second chamber, we will also bring new politics to the primary seat of power in the land, the House of Commons.

And it was in the search for a new and fairer way of arranging our affairs that we set up the Wright committee and in thanking them for their work I am happy to confirm that we will give parliament itself more control over its business and the elections of its committees.

So parties should elect their own members of select committees in a secret ballot; select committee chairs should be elected by a ballot of the whole house; and non-government business should be managed by members of parliament, not the executive.

These reforms will increase the ability and the legitimacy of parliament to hold the government to account – as I believe that the proper role of

parliament is, indeed, to scrutinise the executive and it should be given all the necessary tools to do so.

On Thursday Sir Thomas Legg will publish his findings on expenses. It will be a sobering moment for the House of Commons. But transforming parliament must mean going much further than even our recent root and branch changes to the parliamentary allowances system. It was right to take away from MPs their ability to set and police their pay and expenses, and so self regulation has given way to statutory regulation by people independent of MPs.

But we are also determined to do all that is necessary to restore trust and to ensure that all MPs, like the vast majority do already, concentrate on serving the public and not themselves.

And that is why, in grave situations where financial impropriety has been proven, but where parliament itself has failed to act, we are proposing the ultimate power of recall by the people.

But, in the new politics, it is also essential that MPs are accountable to their constituents and that their mandate is clear and strong. If the public choose this change as the right way forward, I hope we can move to a situation where every MP is able to say, as they cannot today, that when it came to the final count, they were the choice of an absolute majority.

The first past the post system maintains a clear link to a member of parliament's constituency and it has usually given governments a clear mandate to govern.

But as we seek to re-engage people and enhance public participation I believe we should ask the people to look afresh at whether the electoral system can enhance the mandate of the constituency MP, as well as engaging people further in the choice they have at the ballot box.

The alternative vote system has the advantage of maintaining the benefit of a strong constituency link; allowing MPs to be not simply policy makers, but also community leaders, community organisers, and the strongest champions for neighbourhoods they know and love.

But if the people decide to back the alternative vote, it also offers voters increased choice with the chance to express preferences for as many of

the candidates as they wish. It means that each elected MP will have the chance to be elected with much broader support from their constituency, not just those who picked them as their first choice. In short it offers a system where the British people can, if they so choose, be more confident that their MP truly represents them, while at the same time remaining directly accountable to them.

Any change will not be for the forthcoming election.

But we are agreed there should be a referendum at a date in the near future, because any decision on something as fundamental as electoral reform must not be the subject of an executive decision endorsed by parliament but rather a question for the British people in a referendum. I will argue and campaign for such a change.

And because this is a major change in our democratic arrangements, we are today publishing the key clauses we are tabling as part of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill. That bill will have the effect of introducing the primary legislation required to hold a referendum on moving to the alternative vote system, which we intend should be held before the end of October 2011.

And in moving towards a more democratic form of election, I hope too that we can move towards making parliament itself better reflect the people it serves.

When I entered parliament in 1983, the House of Commons was an all white chamber. There were only 23 women. Just think – a chamber where 50 per cent of the population had only 3 per cent of the representation.

And while my party has a proud record of having the first black mp, the first black cabinet minister, the first Asian and the first Muslim MP attending cabinet, and four times more representation of black, Asian and minority ethnic representatives than the other parties put together, there are no grounds for complacency. A black woman did not speak at the Commons despatch box until late last year. That is unacceptable – and it must change.

The Equality Bill is extending all-women shortlists until 2030 – and I'm proud that already three in every five of those candidates selected for



the Labour Party in seats we currently hold are women. And we will take measures to improve representation and diversity and remove barriers based on gender or sexuality, disability, race or background.

I am committed to it not just because it is at the heart of my values, but because it is also in the interests of the whole country to have the talents and perspectives of all the people of Britain represented in the ways we make decisions.

So we will change both the Commons and the Lords, because we are so profoundly committed to the renewal of parliamentary democracy. We will ensure that the new politics will be delivered in the House of Commons, and we will do more to restore the relationship of mutual respect between MPs and those who elect them.

But the test of our commitment to democracy is not merely the changes we make to the institutions at the centre: it is how far we are prepared to give power away; to give citizens themselves greater control over their lives.

That is why citizen empowerment must be at the heart of the new politics I want to see.

That means opening up government, with much more control and information held by the public and not concentrated in Westminster and Whitehall. Over and above our commitment to transparency through FOI we are committed to progressively reducing the time taken to release official documents - ensuring the public have access to public papers far quicker than ever before.

And we can now open up government in new transformative ways not open to us a decade ago.

We have brought public services closer to people in the internet age through the [direct.gov](http://direct.gov) website.

And last year I invited Sir Tim Berners Lee, the inventor of the world wide web, and Professor Nigel Shadbolt, to work with us on opening up even more government information to all the people of the country.

In a short space of months we have now created data.gov.uk which already opens over 2,500 data sets to enable people to hold us to account and make decisions about their public services - from monitoring traffic accidents locally to seeing how your local schools are performing.

But this is just the start of creating new, more transparent public services and public sector bodies.

Public services will not only be more personal in future but they will be more interactive - with the ability of the citizen enhanced to make their views known directly and influence the way our communities work.

Already as a result of the Berners Lee /Shadbolt initiative a transformation is at work. A myriad of applications are being developed on the web by citizens for citizens – new websites on health, education, crime and local communities - that inform, enrich and enliven our democracy. It is truly direct democracy in action.

Over the next few months we will be releasing more and more information; we will make it easier to link different datasets together so that you can assess the overall picture of public services in your community; and Nigel Shadbolt is working with local government to extend the same principles there.

To back this up, we must also create a more direct route for the people to make their concerns known to parliament. And so we will support the case for public petitions to be debated in the House of Commons – a direct means by which the public can influence the political debate and decisions of the country.

Giving people far more say in and power over the services they use is not just about the better provision of public services: it is about new social rights that people can enjoy and see guaranteed.

For too long until recently public services have been seen as uniform as take it or leave it services without individual control.

But now for the first time the National Health Service has a constitution setting out individual rights of patients and, rightly too, their responsibilities.

And now we do not rest our case on the delivery of better services to people merely on aspirations or targets: we are offering personal guarantees to citizens about the rights they can expect and enjoy:

- The right to see a doctor in the evening or at weekends
- The right to see a cancer specialist within two weeks
- The right to early treatment in hospitals
- The right, over time, to free health check ups for the over 40s

But we are giving rights not only in health but

- The right to catch-up tuition in education for those who need it
- The right to education or an apprenticeship to 18
- And then the right to effective neighbourhood policing

And not only these rights to services:

- Equally the rights of many, with long standing conditions, to control your own social care or health budgets.

These are lasting innovations which make public services personal services - more tailored to their needs and more subject to people's direct control. And I am sorry that there is not all party support for this development of these new guarantees.

And as we expand and enhance direct democracy, so too we must let people exercise that power in the places that matter to them most, the towns, cities and local communities where they live. That is why the flowering of local democracy is a key part of our new constitutional settlement.

In 1997 we inherited a situation where local government had been starved of funding and had very little power over decisions taken that affected their communities. Many felt left behind by an over-centralised state in Whitehall which dictated rather than empowered people to shape their own prosperity. No wonder so many people felt that politics wasn't delivering for them; an invisible hand in Whitehall was determining their futures without properly understanding their wishes and concerns.

Our strengthening of local government, with more powers and flexibilities – including recent advances such as the total place initiative and John Denham's proposals to enhance scrutiny by communities over local services and public spending - has aimed to meet this legitimate demand for more power. We have also put communities more directly in control over key services that affect their lives – from neighbourhood policing to foundation hospitals.

And I want us to put more power in the hands of local communities and our great cities, ensuring that they are playing a central role in delivering the services, the housing and transport that their communities want and need, as well as generating jobs.

Local government should be free to innovate and to be creative in delivering better public services. And as we move forward with devolution, we can reduce the number of central targets and indicators, relying instead on core national entitlements and guarantees to ensure that increased localism meets the test of equity, so that high standards of public service are met wherever you live.

But make no mistake. Where others see localism as a chance to make cuts out of sight, to put up charges in a cut-price airline approach to service delivery - a recipe for a postcode lottery - our objective will be local decision making in a framework of guaranteed standards. So our guiding principle is that wherever possible control over excellent public services will be placed in the hands of the user, and that whenever risk and resources need to be pooled at a higher level than an individual family – whether that is local or national government – they should be responsive and accountable, with decision making resting at the lowest possible level.

It is true that in the past local government has had too many streams of funding from a multitude of central government sources. Our total place reforms are potentially transformative in the better use of resources: they will allow local government and its partners to reach across all the funding coming into an area and enable better choices to be made at a local level about how this money is spent.

So while others may talk about localism, we have been delivering it. Take what is going on in greater Manchester and Leeds. Out of the

glare of publicity and based on the new tools we have provided, we are seeing a quiet but profound revolution starting to emerge as to how England is governed. These great cities have been pioneering new arrangements and central government is devolving real powers over jobs, skills, transport, housing and low carbon development so that they can be planned and delivered closer to the communities they serve. These reforms will make a real difference to people's lives – with the city regions and local communities themselves driving their futures, not being dictated to from Whitehall.

And let me add that I see business-led regional development agencies as vital to helping make this work for the city regions and other areas. So while some would abolish RDAs, just when they are needed to help a strong recovery, we will ensure that they play their full role.

Not only do I hope we can finalise the agreements as soon as possible, but I also want us to support other city-regions to come forward and demonstrate similar innovation and leadership.

There is a wider issue – the question of a written constitution - an issue on which I hope all parties can work together in a spirit of partnership and patriotism.

I can announce today that I have asked the Cabinet Secretary to lead work to consolidate the existing unwritten, piecemeal conventions that govern much of the way central government operates under our existing constitution into a single written document.

In the summer I announced that we would consult on the question of codifying our constitution as part of the consultation exercise on the British Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. There is, however, no consensus on what a codified constitution would be for, on what it would encompass and on what its status would be.

But if we are to go ahead with a written constitution we clearly have to debate also what aspects of law and relationships between each part of the state and between the state and the citizen should be deemed 'constitutional'. I can therefore also announce today that a group will be set up to identify those principles and I hereby issue an invitation to all parties to be represented on this group. And if we are to decide to have

a written constitution the time for its completion should be the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta in Runnymede in 1215.

I believe the future will belong to those who understand the new politics, and the need for change and respond to the needs and desires of the British people for it.

I will work with all parties to build a consensus for change and I hope that we can all agree to put aside any differences and rivalries to work together for the constitutional renewal this country needs.

Throughout the agenda for constitutional change there is the choice between a progressive, radical approach and one that defends the status quo.

And so these, for me, are the key questions to ask any would be reformer:

Do they accept the need to remove the hereditary principle now, or do they wish to leave in place the mechanisms for renewing the supply of hereditary peers?

Do they want the people to decide in a referendum on an alternative vote system or do they oppose both change and trusting people with the choice?

Do they believe that what really matters is making gestures to diversity, or delivering real change?

Do they talk about localism, or do they want to join us in giving local government real powers to transform people's lives.

The parliamentary expenses scandal scarred our democracy, battered the reputation of our parliament and so profoundly breached the bond of trust between the people and those elected to serve them that it called into question the very legitimacy of parliament and of our political system as a whole.

Politics is, in the end, about public service.

So I say that for that reason alone the reputation of politics is worth fighting for.

That people's participation in politics is worth fighting for.

And building a renewed belief in our political system is worth fighting for.

Because whilst faith in parliament and political parties has diminished, people have not lost their appetite for politics and for the change it can bring.

So the urgent imperative for politicians on all sides is to do everything we can to connect with the people.

The current movement for constitutional change and new politics is of historic importance. It signals the demand for a decisive shift in the balance of power in Britain, a long overdue transfer of sovereignty from those who govern to those who are governed, from the old outdated sovereignty to a modern popular sovereignty, not just tidying up our constitution but transforming it.

If we the people want a politics that is more open, more plural, more local, more democratic, and more responsive to our underlying British liberty, then we will need to have the strength to make these changes because the only way to ensure that politics serves the people's values is to make all those who wield political power genuinely accountable to the people.

That is what the new politics is all about – and that is why today this government pledges a radical programme for change.

