Conservatives
Draft Manifesto 2010

CHAPTER THREE
FIXING OUR BROKEN POLITICS

YEAR
FOR
CHANGE

FIXING OUR BROKEN POLITICS

No one can doubt that our political system is broken. Millions of people in this country are at best detached from democracy, at worst angrily disillusioned. Putting this down to the expenses scandal alone would be a great mistake. MPs' expenses might have been the trigger for the public's anger, but this political crisis is driven by a deeper sense of frustration – people's frustration that they have too little control over the decisions that affect their daily lives. This lack of power and control was barely tolerable when times were good. But now times are hard and people are on the receiving end of wage cuts, job losses, negative equity, home repossession and rising crime. These revelations about some politicians' behaviour have appalled them – people are furious and demanding big change.

The top-down model of power that exists in Britain today is completely out of date. The argument that has applied for well over a century, and to which Gordon Brown clings – that in every area of life we need people at the centre to make sense of the world for us and take decisions on our behalf – has collapsed. We now live in an age when technology can put information that was previously held by a few into the hands of almost everyone; an age of personal freedom and choice; an age when culture and debate are shaped by a multiplicity of voices. But politics has not caught up with this new age. Instead of giving people more power over their lives, government is taking it away.

We can't go on like this. Shutting people out of the political process is not just undemocratic; it is impractical and it is unprogressive. Conservatives have always been in favour of social responsibility over big state power – and today the information revolution gives us the practical tools to realise that philosophy. So we plan to change the UK with a sweeping redistribution of power: from the state to citizens; from the government to Parliament; from Whitehall to communities; from Brussels to Britain; from judges to the people; from bureaucracy to democracy. This is what we mean by the post-bureaucratic age. The information revolution meets the progressive Conservative political philosophy: sceptical about big state power, committed to social responsibility, supportive of non-state collective action. Taking power away from the political elite and handing it to the man and woman in the street.

Using decentralisation, transparency and accountability we will weaken the old political elites, strengthen the power of the people, fix our broken politics and restore people's faith that if we act together things can change. This is a serious agenda for a new politics.

3.1 ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

It is vital that we act decisively to restore the reputation of politics. Too many unacceptable practices have gone unchecked for too long, from excessive expenses and subsidies to secret donations. We need nothing less than a deep clean of the political system in Westminster to root out sleaze and dispel suspicion.

Our political crisis was triggered by the scandal of MPs' expenses. We took the lead on this issue by pushing for maximum transparency, so that voters can really see what is going on. We have **insisted that MPs' expenses are published online,** and **support the implementation of the independent proposals to clean up the House of Commons.** To provide even greater clarity about the status of all members of Parliament, we have **proposed legislation so that anyone wanting to be a member of either the House of Commons or House of Lords will need to be treated as a full UK taxpayer.**

At the moment there is no way that local constituents can remove an MP found guilty of wrongdoing until there is a general election – and that could take up to five years. The sight of disgraced MPs clinging onto their jobs and perks does massive harm to the reputation of Parliament. That is why a Conservative government will **introduce a power of 'recall' to allow electors to kick out MPs, a power that will be triggered by proven wrongdoing.** And we will **introduce a Parliamentary Privilege Act to make clear that the rules of parliamentary privilege cannot be abused by MPs to evade justice.** This was recommended by the Nicholls Report in 1999 but has been totally ignored by Labour.

Lobbying is an issue that has tainted our politics for too long, exposing the far-too-cosy relationship between politics, government, business and money. Contacts and knowledge gained while being paid by the public to serve the public should not be used for private gain. So a Conservative government will **ensure that ex-ministers are banned from lobbying government for two years after leaving office.** And we will **rewrite the Ministerial Code to make clear that any former Minister who breaks the rules on appointments will be forced to give up some or all of their Ministerial pension.** We will **introduce new rules to stop central government bodies using public money to hire lobbyists** to lobby other government bodies. **The lobbying industry must regulate itself to ensure its practices are transparent – if it does not then we will legislate to do so.**

Labour have been timid in their attempts to clean up the big donor culture in British politics because they are afraid to take on their union paymasters. We **will seek an agreed long term settlement that would introduce an across-the-board cap on donations as part of a comprehensive package of reform.** This will mark the end of the big donor era and the sleaze it has sometimes entailed.

The cost of politics has got out of control and there are too many subsidies, perks and privileges. We will send a message that the Westminster gravy train is over by **cutting the perks and bureaucracy associated with Parliament to save up to £120 million a year.** We will **cut the pay of Ministers by five per cent and freeze it for the rest of the Parliament,** and **cut the number of MPs by ten per cent.** We were the first political party to **propose that MPs should move away from the generous final-salary pension system they currently enjoy.** We will consult on the best way to make this happen with the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, which will have responsibility for this issue.

Because we are serious about redistributing power, we will restore the balance between the government and Parliament, which has tipped too far in the government's

favour. We **support the substance of the Wright Report's recommendations on strengthening Parliament** and want to give MPs a proper opportunity to debate and vote on its recommendations. We will **establish a Backbench Business Committee to give the House of Commons more control over its own timetable.** There will be **more free votes** and **Select Committee chairmen and members will be voted for by MPs.** We will **allow MPs the time to scrutinise law effectively.** Debates in chamber will be made more relevant by **introducing more flexible topical statements.** We will **limit the use of the Royal Prerogative so that Parliament is properly involved in all big national decisions,** not left on the sidelines.

Rebuilding trust in politics means making our political system better reflect the people it is meant to represent. Despite there being over 10 million disabled people in the UK, there are still too few in public life – often put off by the costs of running for office with a disability. That is why we will **introduce a £1 million fund to help people with disabilities who want to become MPs, councillors or other elected officials.** This will be funded by the Government Equalities Office, with disability charities invited to tender to administer the fund.

Citizens have been shut out of Westminster politics for too long. Having a single vote every four or five years isn't good enough – we need to give people real control over how they are governed. So with our government, **any petition that secures 100,000 signatures will be eligible for formal debate in Parliament. A petition with a million signatures will allow members of the public to table a Bill** eligible to be voted on in Parliament. And we will build on existing opportunities for encouraging greater participation by **introducing a new Public Reading Stage for Bills** to give the public an opportunity to comment on proposed legislation online.

Labour have shamelessly meddled with the electoral system to try to gain political advantage. They have introduced postal voting on demand and are piloting other schemes, despite warnings about electoral fraud. A Conservative government will **restore the integrity of our electoral system by introducing 'fair vote' reforms to equalise the size of constituency electorates** – every vote will have equal value. We will **implement individual voter registration, give everyone the right to cast their vote in person** and **make it easier for UK citizens living overseas to vote.** But we **reject calls for a system of proportional representation to elect Parliament** because it would put power into the hands of party managers making backroom deals and stop voters being able to kick out any government they are fed up with.

Labour have failed to implement their election pledges to make the House of Lords 'more democratic and representative'. We will **work to build a consensus for a mainly elected second chamber to replace the House of Lords.**

To make the changes our country needs the performance of government has to improve. So we will **make it easier to reward the best civil servants and remove the least effective.** We will **reform the Civil Service Compensation Scheme** to bring it more into line with practice in the private sector. We will scrap **Labour's failed PSA target regime and instead require every department to publish a business plan,** with **senior management accountable to more rigorous departmental boards for their performance.**

We want to bring an end to the politicisation of the civil service. We will **put limits on the number of so-called 'special advisers'** and **protect the impartiality of the civil service.** Ministers will listen to civil service advice, even when they decide not to follow it.