

L'addio di Blair e la “politica sobria”

di Leo GIUNTI

Oggi che ascoltiamo l'appello per una “politica sobria” e per una riforma dei suoi strumenti, non possiamo non volgerci con rispetto e ammirazione al modello dei Parlamenti europei. L'Aula di Westminster, dove con asciutta eleganza, ma anche nobiltà di accenti, si è chiusa una grande carriera politica.

In occasione del tradizionale *Premier question time* del mercoledì, mezz'ora di confronto corretto, efficace, franco e asciutto. Che ha toccato tutti i temi dell'attualità. Ed è stato anche l'occasione per il congedo, di fronte a una straordinaria classe parlamentare. Che ha mostrato la sua compattezza nell'esibizione di toni degni del più elegante e aristocratico club. L'omaggio asciutto del *leader* dell'opposizione al Primo Ministro uscente, che “senza ombra di dubbio ha fatto i più alti sforzi a servizio della nazione”. Cui il *Premier* ha replicato ringraziando questi sentimenti generosi. “Nonostante tutti i disaccordi politici tra noi, è sempre essenziale poter lavorare su temi di importanza nazionale, al di là delle divisioni politiche, e io - ha detto il *Premier* - ho sempre trovato il *leader* dell'opposizione perfettamente giusto, corretto e cortese nei miei confronti”.

Una battuta di pochi secondi, che descrive una realtà dell'Aula verde dei Comuni, che per noi è l'auspicio di una buona politica futura. Un auspicio che proprio in questi giorni, e per essere compreso da un pubblico e dalla stampa italiani, è stato proposto, ripetuto e ribadito, nel discorso di Walter Veltroni a Torino, con frasi ricche di aggettivi e piene di immagini, percorrendo la lancetta dei minuti la stessa distanza che oltre Manica aveva percorso quella dei secondi. E pochi scatti ha dovuto fare quest'ultima perché questo grande e consumato attore potesse descrivere l'essenza della forma di governo parlamentare: “Non ho mai smesso di aver paura dell'Aula. L'ansia che ho sentito tre minuti prima dell'inizio oggi è la stessa che ho provato dieci anni fa, sempre egualmente acuta.

È in questa paura che il rispetto - *verso il Parlamento* (lo aggiungiamo per esplicitare il senso di una frase che in inglese è ancor più asciutta!) - è contenuto”. E subito dopo per descrivere cos'è la politica: “Alcuni forse sminuiscono la politica, ma noi che siamo impegnati in essa sappiamo che è lì che si sta ritti (*stand tall*). Pur sapendo che implica aspre dispute, essa è comunque l'arena che fa battere più forte il cuore. E se talora è luogo di basse meschinità, è più spesso quello in cui si perseguono nobili cause. Auguro a tutti, amici e nemici, ogni bene”.

Per terminare, come Garrick su un palcoscenico shakesperiano: "That is that. The end."

Camera dei Comuni

Question time del 27 giugno 2007

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [145772] **Mr. David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 27 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): First of all, I know that the whole House will want to join me in sending our deep condolences to the family and friends of Major Paul Harding of the 1st Battalion the Rifles, and Corporal John Rigby of the 4th Battalion the Rifles, both of whom died in Iraq; and Drummer Thomas Wright, of the 1st Battalion the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment. All three of them were outstanding soldiers and will be deeply missed.

Mr. Speaker, since this is the last time that this, the saddest of duties, falls to me, I hope that the House will permit me to say something about our armed forces, and not just about the three individuals who have fallen in the past week. I have never come across people of such sustained dedication, courage and commitment. I am truly sorry about the dangers that they face today in Iraq and Afghanistan. I know that some may think that they face these dangers in vain. I do not, and I never will. I believe that they are fighting for the security of this country and the wider world against people who would destroy our way of life. But whatever view people take of my decisions, I think that there is only one view to take of them: they are the bravest and the best.

Before listing my engagements, because this is the last time that I will be able to do so, may I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your gentle courtesy and kind forbearance toward me over the years? I have had need of both.

Now to my engagements. This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have no such further meetings today, or any other day.

Mr. Burrowes: I thank the Prime Minister for that comprehensive answer on his engagements. I am sure that the whole House wishes to associate itself with those words of condolence.

In 1997, the Prime Minister said that there were

“24 hours to save the NHS”.

Why is it that, more than 87,600 hours later, his successor is indicating that there is still a need to save the NHS? Given that Enfield Chase Farm hospital is tomorrow publishing plans to cut maternity and accident and emergency services, is it more or less likely that in the next 24 hours, with a new Prime Minister, local health services will be saved?

The Prime Minister: Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman that, as he knows, the proposals for the hospitals in his constituency were reviewed by Sir George Alberti, who is someone who has spent a whole lifetime of service in the national health service. He said:

“Put starkly, it is evident that high quality modern care cannot be provided for all specialties in all three acute hospitals in the area.”

He therefore said specifically that there had to be change. However, that change goes alongside 26 different facilities and schemes, with a value of £1.7 billion, that have opened in the hon. Gentleman’s area, and thousands more staff. Whereas in 1997, people used to wait more than 18 months for their operation—people used to die on waiting lists—now, those waiting lists are at record lows.

Q2. [145773] **Colin Burgon** (Elmet) (Lab): The Prime Minister can relax, because I will not ask him about Venezuela today.

Like thousands of other parents, I have watched anxiously as my daughter has prepared for her exams, but we can safely predict that when the GCSE results come out in August any rise in pass rates will provoke the Conservatives and their media allies to devalue the work of teachers and young people. So if in response I state our socialist belief that education is a path that should be open to the many, not the few, will the Prime Minister—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to hear a question. I have not heard one yet.

Colin Burgon: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Will the Prime Minister, as one comrade to another, at last agree with me on something, and thus ensure his place in history?

The Prime Minister: First, let me shock my hon. Friend by saying that the definition of socialism that he has just given—that it is for the many and not the few—is one that I wholeheartedly share. Secondly, let me say that it is absolutely right that we recognise that results are better not because of a downgrading of the exams, but because our pupils are performing better as a result of the investment and changes that have been made in our school system. The fact is that the exams are monitored by a wholly independent body. The other fact that it is necessary to point out is that, whereas in 1997 just over 80 schools in England got more than 70 per cent. five good GCSEs, the figure today is more than 600. That is the difference that investment and reform have made.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) (Con): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Major Paul Harding, Corporal John Rigby and Drummer Thomas Wright, who died serving their country in Iraq and Afghanistan. I think that the Prime Minister was absolutely right to put on record once again the huge debt that we all owe to our armed forces. Their professionalism, courage and heroism is a constant source of inspiration and pride throughout our country.

Before I wish the Prime Minister well for the future, I would like to ask some questions about the floods in Britain and the situation in the middle east. On the floods, four people have lost their lives, thousands of homes have been flooded, and many people are in temporary accommodation. The emergency services are clearly doing an incredible job. Will the Government ensure that they have all the support that they need, and that the local authorities under the greatest pressure get all that they require?

The Prime Minister: First, in respect of the flooding, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly says, it has meant that four lives have been lost. I think that we should all send our condolences and sympathy to the families of those who have lost their lives. In respect of what we now have to do, we have increased the amount of money for our coastal defence protection to something in the region of £600 million a year. We are doing an immense amount for the future to make sure that we have proper provision in place. I am afraid that we will have to spend a lot more money and invest a lot more in the years to come. In addition to that, of course, under the Bellwin scheme, it will be open to local authorities to be reimbursed for the additional costs that they face, and I know that those requests will be looked at sympathetically. It is a very difficult situation; thousands of properties have been affected, and I am afraid that hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of damage has been caused, but we will of course do everything that we can, in conjunction with the Environment Agency and the local authorities, to try to improve the situation.

Mr. Cameron: I am grateful for that answer. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs rightly praised the work of the RAF. He said that armed forces liaison officers were “ready to provide support” if necessary, but that otherwise there was no need for any further Army deployment. Will the Prime Minister assure us that, if necessary, that decision can be changed, and military resources can be deployed?

The Prime Minister: We will, of course, keep that decision under review, and we will put in any further resources that are necessary. It is worth pointing out, and the right hon. Gentleman is right to do so, that not only have our armed forces—in this case the RAF—played a very important role, for which we thank them, but the emergency services as a whole have responded to the crisis in the most exemplary manner, as indeed they always do.

Mr. Cameron: May I turn to an issue that might be relevant to the Prime Minister’s future? Clearly, this is a very difficult time in the middle east, with the desperate situation in the Gaza strip and instability in the west bank, all against the backdrop of a Palestinian economy that has failed to develop. Can the Prime Minister tell us what his first priority will be, if and when he takes on his new role?

The Prime Minister: The absolute priority is to try to give effect to what is now the consensus across the international community: the only way of bringing stability and peace to the middle east is a two-state solution, which means a state of Israel that is secure and

confident of its security, and a Palestinian state that is viable, not merely in terms of its territory, but in terms of its institutions and governance. I believe that it is possible to do that, but it will require a huge intensity of focus and work.

Mr. Cameron: When it comes to the Palestinian territories, clearly what is on everyone's mind in this country is the fact that Alan Johnston is still in captivity. All of us who saw that chilling video will feel enormous sympathy for him, his family and his colleagues. His continued captivity is utterly senseless and serves no cause. Will the Prime Minister agree with me that, as many Palestinians have demonstrated, both in the territories and here in Britain, their interests can best be served if he is released immediately?

The Prime Minister: I should say in respect of Alan Johnston that we deeply regret the fact of his continued imprisonment, and we are working closely with the BBC and the Palestinian Authority to do everything that we can to secure his release. I am sure that the majority of Palestinian people want to see him released. It is worth simply pointing out that he was a journalist doing a job as a journalist. It is completely without any justification at all to take him as a target for any action of whatever nature. I would also simply point out that I believe that the majority of Palestinian and Israeli people want to see a situation where hostage-taking and violence is a thing of the past, and the two groups of people can live together in peace.

Mr. Cameron: On behalf of everyone on these Benches, may I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his remarkable achievement of being Prime Minister for 10 years? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] For all the heated battles across the Dispatch Box, for 13 years he has led his party, for 10 years he has led our country, and no one can be in any doubt about the huge efforts he has made in public service. He has considerable achievements to his credit, whether it is peace in Northern Ireland or his work in the developing world, which will endure. I am sure that life in the public eye has sometimes been tough on his family, so on behalf of my party may I wish him and his family well, and wish him every success in whatever he does in future?

The Prime Minister: Let me thank the right hon. Gentleman for those very generous sentiments. For all the political disagreements between us, it is always important to be able to work with people on issues of national importance across the political divide, and I have always found him most proper, correct and courteous in his dealings with me, and I thank him for that. Although I cannot wish him well politically, none the less, personally, I wish him and his family very well indeed.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know that I have not made a habit in the past 10 years of standing up at Prime Minister's Question Time and praising him and his Government for the good work that has been done in that period in Rother Valley—a constituency that was ravaged by the previous Government's pit closure programme and under-investment in public services. Does he agree that the investment that the Government have put into public services has served my constituents well in the past three days? Hundreds of them have been removed from their homes because of flooding in the villages of Catcliffe, Treeton and Wiston. Will he make sure that his predecessor—[HON. MEMBERS: "Predecessor?"]— gets his priorities right? I am sorry, I should have said that his predecessors did not get their priorities right, but will he make sure that his successor does so?

The Prime Minister: First, I express my sympathy to my right hon. Friend's constituents who have been displaced by the floods. Secondly, I thank him for what he said about the Government's record of investment in communities such as his. In those former mining communities, there has been an enormous amount of regeneration and, in addition, we can count as a very proud achievement the fact that thousands of former miners have been paid compensation amounting to several billion pounds. That is something I do not believe would have happened under any Government other than a Labour Government.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife) (LD): May I join the Prime Minister in his expressions of sympathy and condolence, and in his generous tribute to Britain's armed forces? Is he satisfied that proper provision has been made for those servicemen and women who suffer both physical and psychological injury as a result of their service in Iraq and Afghanistan? What assurances can he give them and their families that they will not be forgotten?

The Prime Minister: On Monday evening, I held a reception in Downing street for staff in the medical services—staff employed by the armed forces as well as staff in the national health service—who work for our armed forces. They are an immensely committed group of people, and they do a wonderful job for our armed forces. At Headley Court, Selly Oak and Peterborough, and in the many different facilities up and down the country, we do our level best to provide the highest quality of care for them, and of course we should continue to do so even after they are discharged from hospital.

Sir Menzies Campbell: As the Prime Minister knows, he and I have had a number of disagreements, not least on Iraq. In our personal dealings, however, he has been unfailingly courteous, and I should like to express my gratitude to him for that. As he leaves office, may I, on behalf of my colleagues, extend our very best wishes to him and his family?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for that, and may I return the compliment? Again, whatever differences we have had politically, I do not think anybody in the House would think that he is a person other than one of generosity of spirit and courtesy.

Iraq

Q3. [145774] **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North) (Lab): When he expects British troops to be finally withdrawn from Iraq.

The Prime Minister: The numbers of UK forces in Iraq depend on the conditions in Iraq. The numbers of forces have come down from 9,000 to 7,000 to 5,500. When, in the next few weeks, we are able to complete a further phased withdrawal, they will come down even further, but they must come down as and when the security conditions allow. We have already handed over responsibility for several provinces that used to be under our control to the Iraqi forces. The 10th division is now operating very effectively down in Basra, so we will be able to do more in the near future, but it must be dependent on the security circumstances.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Prime Minister for that answer. Does he recognise that, in the United States, the Congress has voted for the withdrawal of US forces and only a

presidential veto is preventing that from happening, and that overwhelmingly, British public opinion wants the British troops to be withdrawn and the occupation to end? Does he not think that it is time to give a timetable to bring the troops out of Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid I do not, for the reasons that I have often given. What is important is that those people who are fighting us in Iraq, who are either backed by elements in the Iranian regime and who are using terrorism to try to kill our troops, or al-Qaeda up in Baghdad who are using the most evil carnage through terrorist bombs to kill as many innocent civilians as they possibly can—those two elements that we are fighting, we are fighting the world over. We will not beat them by giving in to them. We will only beat them by standing up to them.

Ann Winterton (Congleton) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware that when troops are eventually withdrawn from Iraq, that will be the most dangerous time, unless there is peace in Iraq, which at present seems unlikely? Will he or perhaps even his successor ensure that by then our troops are properly equipped to fight a counter-insurgency war, rather than just a conventional war?

The Prime Minister: I do not, I have to say, accept that our troops are not properly equipped. Indeed, every time these claims are made, we look into them and find that, when urgent operational requirements are made, we do our level best to meet them. Our troops are, in fact, extremely well equipped. However, the hon. Lady is right in this sense—that it is important that we judge when it is right to leave Iraq in relation to the security circumstances. The fact is that Basra is different from Baghdad. Most of the attacks that happen now in Basra are aimed at British troops; the sectarian levels of violence have declined very sharply. Up in Baghdad, however, it is a different situation altogether. But whether in Basra or Baghdad, the criteria that we have set out for the Iraqis being able to handle their own security are the criteria that have to be met for withdrawal—no other criteria. Of course we will make sure between now and that time that we give our troops every form of equipment that they need. Indeed, just recently, for example, at the main base in Basra substantial additional protections have been given against some of the incoming indirect fire.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend welcome the findings at the weekend of the Iraqi higher tribunal, which found Ali Hassan al-Majid—“Chemical Ali”—guilty of genocide and the killing of 180,000 Kurds? May I assure the Prime Minister that many, many people in Iraq salute his courage and leadership, without which that regime would never have been brought to justice?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for that. It is important to emphasise that, even as we try to deal with the new situation in Iraq, which is about terrorism visited on the country in substantial part by outside elements, we should never forget the hundreds of thousands of people who died in Iraq under Saddam, including those who died through the use of chemical weapons, or, indeed, the 1 million casualties of the Iran-Iraq war.

Q4. [145775] **Paul Rowen** (Rochdale) (LD): After 10 years of a Labour Government, why is the educational achievement of white British boys still so low?

The Prime Minister: It has gone up, of course, enormously over the past 10 years. One of the reasons why we now have the best results at the age of 11 for primary schools and the

best results for GCSEs—in fact, in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency there has been a remarkable increase in the numbers getting five good GCSEs over the past few years, and the best results at A-level—is the investment in our education system. I agree entirely that we have to make sure that those educational benefits are spread right across the country and into all groups of people, but if the hon. Gentleman looked at education in his constituency, he would be hard put not to say that over the past 10 years it has got significantly better, precisely because of the investment that we put in and, if I may say so, the reform that he opposed.

Q5. [145776] **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for the huge contribution that he has made, not only to the success of our party, but to the transformation of our country, and at a personal level, I pay tribute to his work and that of the Chancellor in standing by the communities of south-west Birmingham following the collapse of MG Rover two years ago.

Looking to his future, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Quartet has a potentially crucial role to play in bringing peace to the middle east, and that one of the lessons of the Northern Ireland peace process is that for peace to be successful we need not only to involve friends but to reach out to hardliners?

The Prime Minister: I obviously agree entirely with what my hon. Friend says about the importance of bringing peace to the middle east. As I learned in respect of Northern Ireland, it is important to be in a position to bring people together, including those who have been very hostile towards each other. That is the whole basis of the peace process.

I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words in relation to the closure of Longbridge in his constituency. He is absolutely right. I think that 85 per cent. of the work force have now found a job, and I congratulate him on that. I feel a certain solidarity with them since I received the following communication by urgent letter yesterday:

“Details of employee leaving work: Surname Blair. First name T”—

it actually says “Mr., Mrs., Miss or other”—

“This form is important to you. Take good care of it. P45.”

Mr. Speaker: I call Richard Younger-Ross.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge) (LD): Would the Prime Minister say—
[Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Q6. [145777] **Richard Younger-Ross:** What advice would the Prime Minister give his successor on the relationship between faith and state, in particular with regard to his successor’s reported views on the disestablishment of the Church of England?

The Prime Minister: I am really not bothered about that one.

Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell) (Lab): Rather unnervingly, the last public visitor to No. 10 yesterday was "The Terminator". If, like Arnold Schwarzenegger, my right hon. Friend came back from the future, what would he do to save the planet?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work that he has done in relation to climate change. It is true that I and the Governor of California had a meeting on climate change, and the prospect of the United States joining other countries in bringing a global deal to fruition is exciting. That is the most important priority over the next few years. Interestingly, when the Governor and I visited a state primary school in London, he was, I think, taken aback and hugely impressed by the state of the school and the investment in it, and I took some comfort from that as well.

Q7. [145778] **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): I wish the Prime Minister and his family well for the future, but is he aware that a majority of the people of the United Kingdom feel betrayed by the fact that they are being drawn down further into the suffocating quicksand and expensive bureaucracy of the European Union? If he and his successor genuinely believe in trusting the people of this country as they claim, will they now honour their commitment at the last general election to a referendum to enable the people to decide on the new treaty that is in substance the old discredited constitutional treaty?

Hon. Members: More!

The Prime Minister: First, I like the hon. Gentleman, and what I am about to say is no disrespect to him at all, but after the guttural roar from his own Benches that greeted his statement, I really believe that if I were the leader of the Conservative party I would be worried about that. I am afraid that we cannot agree on the treaty, but as for his good wishes to me, may I say to him au revoir, auf Wiedersehen and arrivederci?

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside) (Lab): I only learned Esperanto, so I cannot add to that. On behalf of the little part of the planet that I represent, I thank the Prime Minister for what he has done in transforming the lives of so many people in the Brightside constituency and across the world.

Does the Prime Minister agree that record police numbers, tough new sentences for the most dangerous criminals and zero tolerance of antisocial behaviour, together with 2.5 million new jobs, record investment in education and Sure Start centres across the country, is precisely what he meant by

"tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime"?

The Prime Minister: It is correct, of course, that crime has fallen over the period of this Government, but there are still tremendous challenges to overcome, as we know. However, when I visited my right hon. Friend's constituency recently, I was able to see for myself the benefits that the antisocial behaviour legislation had brought about. His role in that when Home Secretary was of immense importance, and he never forgot, either, the importance of investing in tackling the causes of crime. I genuinely believe that in time to come the focus on early years learning, the Sure Start centres, the children's centres, the extension of nursery education and the investment in primary schools will stand us in good stead for the future in creating the responsible citizens we all want to see.

Q8. [145779] **Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): In the coming months, my constituents are faced with the prospect of a serious downgrading of our local general hospital, the closure of a number of otherwise perfectly viable local post offices, a failure to deliver on a promised referendum on the European constitution, and an ever-increasing tax burden. Which of those are new Labour and which are unremittingly Brown Labour?

The Prime Minister: What is new Labour is the fact that within the hon. Gentleman's own area there is an investment worth £485 million in the health service, which has meant that, for example, the numbers of people waiting for more than 26 weeks has fallen from 27,000 to nil. In relation to education, he has had, I think, six new schools, 16 schools rebuilt and 549 additional or refurbished classrooms in his LA, plus an extra £1,000 funding for his pupils. In respect of the economy, as opposed to the situation when he was a Minister in the previous Government, when we used to have recession and high interest rates, under this Chancellor we have had low interest rates, low unemployment, high employment and a booming economy.

Q9. [145780] **Ms Angela C. Smith** (Sheffield, Hillsborough) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has visited the city of Sheffield on a number of occasions over the past 10 years to see for himself the work done by that city in rebuilding itself after the economic devastation of the 1980s. Now, of course, we have to start all over again. On his final day as Prime Minister, can I ask my right hon. Friend what message he has for the people of Sheffield? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: Certainly, they should vote Labour. Also, as we can see from the investment in the school system in Sheffield today, there is now the possibility of making sure that not just those who are comfortably off but those who come from poorer backgrounds get the chance of world-class education. That is why it is important to keep the programme of investment and reform going, which will deliver over time, as it is already delivering now, for every part of the country, a high quality—indeed, a world-class—education system.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): May I say to the Prime Minister that I fully understand the exasperation that he felt many a day when I visited him? I understand that he was downcast many a day, that he was disappointed, angry and that perhaps he even lost his temper, but I want to say that he treated me with the greatest courtesy. I disagreed with him about many things, but we faced them. I am glad that I can stand here today and say to the Prime Minister that the people of Northern Ireland felt the same way as him—they were angry and cross, lost their tempers and were sad—but we made progress. It is not as great as I would like, but the Unionist people for whom I speak in the House are dedicated to seeing what was started concluded, so that every man and woman in Ulster has the same rights, liberties and opportunities to lead their lives, have their families and have a future.

The Prime Minister begins another colossal task. I hope that what happened in Northern Ireland will be repeated and that, at the end of the day, he can look back and say that it was well worth while.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman very much indeed for those immensely kind words. I was waiting for the “but” and it never came, and I am most grateful to him. Let me say—although it will do neither of us good in many quarters—that I found him to be not merely a very good person to work with but someone who was

completely straight with me throughout my dealings with him. I wish him the best of luck in the future, because he has shown immense courage in what he has done.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West) (Lab): I apologise for being more political than I normally would, but it is a special occasion.

May I wish the Prime Minister success and fulfilment in whatever he chooses to do? I hope that he chooses to do something that makes best use of those qualities that brought peace to Northern Ireland. He and I have not always agreed on policy, but I genuinely say to him that he is one of the outstanding Prime Ministers of my political lifetime and, without doubt, the most politically effective Prime Minister that the party has ever had.

May I thank him for leading us out of 18 years of wilderness life on the Opposition Benches, leading us successfully through three general elections and giving us 10 years of government with more to come? Under him, the party has once again become a natural party of government.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend the Father of the House for that extraordinarily generous remark.

Mr. Speaker, if I may just finish with two brief remarks—first to the House. I have never pretended to be a great House of Commons man, but I pay the House the greatest compliment I can by saying that, from first to last, I never stopped fearing it. The tingling apprehension that I felt at three minutes to 12 today I felt as much 10 years ago, and every bit as acute. It is in that fear that the respect is contained.

The second thing that I would like to say is about politics and to all my colleagues from different political parties. Some may belittle politics but we who are engaged in it know that it is where people stand tall. Although I know that it has many harsh contentions, it is still the arena that sets the heart beating a little faster. If it is, on occasions, the place of low skulduggery, it is more often the place for the pursuit of noble causes. I wish everyone, friend or foe, well. That is that. The end. *[Applause.]*