

The 2010 Poison Chalice Awards



The Four Nominations

- David Cameron in “Last Man Standing”
- Gordon Brown in a “Good Bye Mr. Chips”
- Nick Clegg in “Mr. Clegg goes to Westminster”
- David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Gordon Brown in “3 Men and a Baby” (baby played by a new democratic voting system)

It's Election Day in the first truly modern media campaign in British History – albeit the 60 year old medium of live TV and not today's interactive media, the blogosphere and social networking.

I've tried to keep my commentary fairly light during the last week of the campaign – as befits my distance from the daily hurley-burley of the election, at the constituency level, from my view in the South of France. Today will be no different - but the somewhat darker content will hopefully be offset by some fairly interesting Photoshopped images that I found while reviewing the papers and the political columnists in the lead up to today.

Most people who know me at all know I am a pretty optimistic person and have little time for dwelling on the dark side of any situation. For the most part, I see life in terms of the Chinese image of crisis as the mingling of the symbols for threat and opportunity. As a non-Chinese speaker and thinker I often wonder if that is true or not – but, what the hell?, it makes for a great learning story and tool for thought!

But sometimes the dark side must be opened up and explored – usually when it is being denied or deflected by those charged with that responsibility. The dark side of this Election is “the economy (stupid!)”.

None of the parties wants to address the issue, in any detail, of what happens next. Oh sure, they all have plans for cuts – but they are spun to such an extent that all three parties can engage in semantics (where they are the masters) rather than in root and branch macro-economics. This may be because it isn't interesting or engaging in a televisual way – which is important in the television election of 2010. It may be that the dumbing-down of politics has finally reached

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he extent that the party strategists have at last denigrated the ability of the electorate to assimilate the Pestonesque jargon of economics in any form at all. It could conceivably be that the same strategists have decided that the voters couldn't handle the concept of a team, rather than one man, running the country.

Would the electoral campaign have been different if Vince Cable, the most trusted politico in the country before the campaign started, and little George Osborne (or big old bruiser Kenny Clarke) had been pitted against Alistair (gotta love those eyebrows!) Darling in a "presidential" head to head?

I have to say I think not. This election began about the battle for the most seats at the Palace of Westminster in a two party Parliamentary system and transformed into a battle for the hearts and minds of a generation of voters who had become apathetic, at best, and disgusted and disengaged, at worst, from their own MP's.

This was less a traditional British General Election and more of a war situation. The kinds of strategy that were demanded of the decision makers were less akin to the politics as evolved over the last 30 years and more to do with fighting battles based on Grand Strategy, that the great generals always knew would dissolve in the first encounters with the enemy in the classic "fog of war". The televised debates threw up a cloud bank the size of which hadn't been seen in over 100 years – and the party decision makers in this fog delivered an inconclusive result.

The biggest generator of fog and uncertainty as to who the winner is likely to be is the question of the economy and what happens after the election. The electorate is prepared mentally for "hard times", even if they aren't sure what this means for them personally. They literally don't know up from down.



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In the past our research has indicated that the fear of hard times - like unemployment, inflation (remember inflation?), terrorist attacks, crime, etc. – is always higher before the event occurring. Franklin Roosevelt, the American President in charge during the worst Depression in the 1930's, is quoted as summing this up in the phrase, “we have nothing to fear except fear itself”.

The political parties and their spokespeople – don't forget Yvette Cooper over at the Treasury – seem to be the most fearful people in Britain. This cowardice – a strong word, but it is election day - wasn't an accidental omission or trump card to be played on the final day of the campaign but the very sort of behaviour that lead to apathy at the beginning of the campaign. Enough is enough - tell the truth as you know and let people decide for themselves how they will turn that into votes.

This is the challenge to all of the nominees for the Poison Chalice Award after they have won.

The Challenge



The voters have listened to you painting your own versions of how you can change “for the better” – painting pictures of clear blue skies with little puffy clouds – when all the electorate want you to do is open up the window of opportunity, let out some of the stagnant hot air, and let reality into the discussions. That reality is not as pretty or as safe as the fantasy world that campaigns have constantly portrayed – but is something that we have confronted already. We don't fear it – but we do want to be prepared for it. People want to get real but you are still obfuscating. The real change will come when truth is told and the spinning stops.

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In future pieces, we will bring out more of what we have found out about British culture over the last 38 years - the values and desires of pre-war generations challenged constantly by the values of the Boomer generation, and the complex interactions between the Boomers and their children and their children's children - the tensions between BOTU and Ubuntu and the dynamics of desire between conformity and autonomy.

But right now – halfway through election day – just a few thoughts to end with before getting a bit more serious in the coming weeks.

I've just re-read what I've written so far and it is a lot less light hearted than my original intention! Maybe not a good indicator of future thoughts? Oh well, we'll just have to wait and see.

Many Decisions to Make – It Isn't Gonna Be Simple



The majority of the working population, and many of the retired population spend, or have spent, their lives dealing with complex situations where the future is concrete but the path from Now to Tomorrow is full of many junctions, dead ends and places to fall off the path to success. They assume they will try their best but sometimes their best will not be good enough. They are used to working in teams tasked with working their way through the mazes that confront them on a daily basis. This is normality. Yet when politicians talk to them it appears to be from a separate reality – an unreal alternative universe where “great men” make monumental decisions” and “change history” through their “grand strategies”. This perception at one time was the politicians strength – that somehow they had access to more information and by extension power, than the ordinary person

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and as such should be given a level of deference and respect not given to other sources of opinion or knowledge. In today's world of instant knowledge and information and the MP's inability to give the time to working in the new infosphere, the deference is no longer given or even thought about as something to be consider when hearing their opinions.

The economy is an issue for which the politician, or politicians, that win the Poisoned Chalice must build a team to explore the macro and micro maze for ways of surviving in the coming years – before success can even be contemplated. Politicians need to be aware that, once the hot air goes out the window, the stench of the devastated landscape will become the new reality. The British public knows this and have prepared themselves for it. All three leaders have alluded to themselves as “servants of the people, rather than masters” during the campaign. Now is the time to walk that talk!

All this talk of politics and I've forgotten to mention the most important event of the week, nay the year so far! Let's end this on a happy note!

The happiest man in the UK today!



Come On You Spurs!!!!!!!!!!