

## David Cameron and friends

*Gordon Brown quits Downing Street, and David Cameron and his new-found Liberal Democrat allies take over.*



GORDON BROWN emerged from the famous front door of Number 10 to address the country again on May 11th. The day before, his message had been that the Labour Party was still in Britain's unfamiliar political dogfight, though he himself would soon be resigning as the party's leader and therefore as prime minister. Mr Brown said then that Labour would be beginning formal negotiations with the Liberal Democrats, Britain's third party, over the possible formation of a "progressive coalition"—which might have prevented the Conservatives, who won the most votes and seats at the general election of May 6th, but not an absolute majority in the House of Commons, from taking power.

But it swiftly became clear that such a coalition was impractical. So last night Mr Brown admitted defeat.

Standing alongside his wife, Mr Brown announced that he intended to tender his resignation to the queen, and that he would advise her to call for David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party, to form the next government. Mr Brown wished the next prime minister well. He said he himself had "loved" the job; not, Mr Brown said, for its prestige, titles and ceremonies, but for its potential to do good. He also said he resignation as leader of the Labour Party would now take immediate effect (meaning that Harriet Harman, currently the party's deputy leader, will take temporary charge of it, now in opposition, while a new Labour leader is elected). "Thank you," Mr Brown concluded, "and goodbye".

Mr and Mrs Brown went back into Number 10 to retrieve their two young sons, emerging again for a rare family photo opportunity. Then Mr Brown departed on the short ride to Buckingham Palace, to tender his resignation.

Shortly after Mr Brown left, Mr Cameron made his way down the Mall to the Palace, to kiss hands and receive the seals of office. Afterwards, standing outside his new home in Downing Street, Mr Cameron paid tribute to the outgoing government. He then explained that he intended to form a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. The new administration, he said, would be guided by the values of freedom, fairness and responsibility.

As leader of the party with the largest number of MPs, Mr Cameron would have been entitled to attempt to form a minority administration. But the Tories too, have been negotiating with the Lib Dems, and more thoroughly. The resulting coalition will involve Lib Dem politicians occupying seats around the cabinet table. The two parties together comfortably command a parliamentary majority.

The deal has yet to be ratified by Lib Dem MPs, and by the party's federal executive, as Lib Dem rules require. But some details of the agreement have begun to emerge. It is said to include, for example, the jettisoning of Tory commitment to raise the inheritance-tax threshold.

So, the New Labour era is over. Britain has a new prime minister. It also has its first coalition government since the second world war. The Lib Dems, despite their poor showing in the general election, have achieved greater power than their party or its predecessors have enjoyed since the early 1930s. And—one part of the Tory-Lib Dem deal that was advertised in advance—there is to be a referendum on a change in the voting system.

There are still many unanswered questions. One concerns the exact complexion of the new government. Another is how long it will last. In any event, this has been a seismic few days in British politics.

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