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**Article:**

Heppell, T [orcid.org/0000-0001-9851-6993](http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9851-6993) (2014) Ministerial selection and portfolio allocation in the Cameron Government. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 67 (1). pp. 64-79. ISSN 0031-2290

<https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gst022>

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# Ministerial Selection and Portfolio Allocation in the Cameron Government

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Paper presented to the Conservatives and Conservatism PSA Specialist Group Conference  
University of Hull  
June 2012

## *Abstract*

This paper examines how David Cameron has utilised the Prime Ministerial power of ministerial selection and portfolio allocation within the context of the relationship between party expectations and coalition constraints. Specifically, the paper considers the significance to the Parliamentary Conservative Party of Cameron's use of patronage in terms of proportionality (numbers); portfolio distribution (prestige) and reshuffles (renegotiation of numbers and prestige). It argues that Cameron has been relatively astute in terms of his allocation of portfolios to the Liberal Democrats. However, it notes that the constraining impact of coalition has been detrimental to three groups within the PCP: first, those made ministers at a lower level than expected; secondly, those who held shadow ministerial posts in opposition but were overlooked when fewer ministerial roles were available; and, finally, the new intake of 2010 whose career progression has been slower than in previous administrations as fewer reshuffles have occurred.

## **Introduction:**

The power to appoint and dismiss is one of the most important powers at the disposal of the UK Prime Minister (Allen and Ward, 2009, p. 238). It is through their powers of patronage that they shape, and reshape through reshuffles, their government. It is this power that gives them political leverage and ensures their dominance over their ministerial and party colleagues. All Prime Ministers 'wield this instrument with strategic effect' (Berlinski et al, 2012, p. 2). The rise of the career politician would appear to intensify the significance of this power (King, 1981, pp. 249-85) as ministerial office represents the 'height of ambition' for most contemporary parliamentarians (Berlinski et al, 2007, p. 245). Most of them 'passionately want to be ministers' and 'if they are already ministers, they want to be promoted in the ministerial hierarchy', and above all else 'they certainly do not want to be demoted or dismissed' (King and Allen, 2010, p. 251). Prime Ministers are thus the 'monopoly supplier' of a good which is in 'short supply and for which there is an enormous demand' (King, 1991, p. 38).

However, there is a need to acknowledge that Prime Ministers do face a myriad of constraints when making ministerial selections. First, who can the Prime Minister potentially promote, i.e. who is suitable for the demands of ministerial office? From within the restricted talent pool of the House of Commons the literature focuses on the following when assessing who gets preferment and why. Is there evidence to suggest that individual parliamentarians are administratively competent—that is, will they be able to follow the agreed policy objectives of the Government and successfully implement those policies within their department? Are they able to defend their department within the heat of parliamentary debate? There is also an increasing emphasis on assessing the ability of ministers to defend their departmental policy choices within the media, i.e. do they look and sound good on television? This process of

identifying ministerial suitability does remove a significant proportion of the parliamentary party from consideration.

An additional question to ask would be whether certain parliamentarians are unsuited to ministerial office for reasons other than competence. Some will have to be discounted due to the fact that their personal behaviour or political attitudes could make them a liability if a minister. The Whips' Office will be identifying inappropriate personal conduct, such as excessive drinking or sexually inappropriate behaviour, and where known it can lead to a parliamentarian being discounted as a potential minister. Embarrassment for the governing party can also be caused by backbenchers who are seen to be ideologically extreme and advocate policy prescriptions that are at odds with the objectives of the government. The process of weeding out those not suited to ministerial office leads to a 'distinctly finite' number of parliamentarians who are (Jones, 2010, pp. 619–200).

Once the Prime Minister has ascertained those who possess the necessary ability to be considered for ministerial office, they will also have to consider a variety of balances from within those that they do select. Some parliamentarians will be discounted on the grounds of being too old, whereas new parliamentarians are not usually considered for ministerial preferment because they are seen as being too inexperienced and in many cases are too young. There is also the challenge of regional balance, which can be particularly problematic for Conservative Prime Ministers. Given that the Conservatives have limited support in Scotland, Wales and the North of England they need to avoid creating a ministerial team which seems to be dominated by the southeast of England (King and Allen, 2010, p. 258). There is the need to ensure appropriate gender balances and an awareness of balances with regard to race and sexual orientation (Jones, 2010, p. 621).

Other balances that relate to party considerations also need to be recognised. Differing intra-party ideological factions will expect representation within the ministerial ranks and within Cabinet. They will have an expectation that the ideological composition of the government should be representative of the parliamentary party. For reasons of leadership security the Prime Minister needs to ensure that the faction to which s/he is associated (and which helped to propel her/him to the party leadership) secures sufficient ministerial preferment. For reasons of sound party management colleagues of significant standing in the party, and perhaps representing slightly different ideological constituencies within the party, need to be rewarded (Allen and Ward, 2009, p. 39).

What is interesting about the above analysis—about ministerial suitability and the myriad of balances that Prime Ministers have to consider—is the complete absence of the coalition dimension from the exiting literature on ministerial selection in British Government. And thus far within the academic output on the Conservatives and the coalition very little academic attention has been devoted to the issue of ministerial selection. This represents an important gap in the academic literature as the shift to coalition not only constrains the traditional Prime Ministerial power of appointment, but the experience of coalitions is that they make reshuffles less likely (see Kam and Indriðason, 2005; Berlinski et al, 2007; Allen and Ward, 2009). To address this gap, this paper seeks to assess how the demands of coalition impact upon the Prime Minister's power of patronage, but with a specific focus on what it tells us about the internal dynamics of the Conservatives. From the comparative coalition ministerial allocation literature three themes emerge that will help inform the structure of this paper, first proportionality (numbers); secondly, portfolio distribution (prestige) and thirdly, reshuffles (renegotiation of numbers and prestige).

What relevance do these themes have to our academic understanding of the power dynamics within the coalition and how have the Parliamentary Conservative Party reacted to these coalition dynamics? The first part of the paper examines the original proportionality (numbers) and portfolio distribution (prestige) from the May 2010 formation of the Cameron government. The second part of the paper then considers the impact of the September 2012 reshuffle when proportionality and prestige was renegotiated. The concluding part of the paper assesses the impact of coalition upon the PCP and identifies those whose prospects for ministerial advancement have been undermined by the constraints of coalition.

## **The Cameron Government 2010–2012: Proportionality and Portfolio Distribution**

Before considering ministerial selection in the context of proportionality and prestige within the coalition it is necessary to assess Cameron's appointments against the traditional criteria for selection. The decisions as to which Conservatives were to be selected for ministerial office in May 2010 were strongly influenced by allocations to the shadow ministerial positions in opposition. Then Cameron had identified which fellow parliamentarians he felt possessed the necessary characteristics as potential ministers, and had rooted out those deemed inappropriate either on the grounds of competence or other personal or political reasons. Tradition dictates that newly elected parliamentarians are not considered immediately for ministerial office (or not until a year or two in Parliament) and so Conservative ministers were inevitably drawn from those in the previous Parliament [1].

As the transfer from shadow ministerial portfolios to government office was undertaken Cameron demonstrated some sensitivity to intra-party politics. On the question of ideological factions he rewarded his key allies, for example, placing George Osborne in the Treasury, and offering Michael Gove the education portfolio. However, he also placated the traditional Thatcherite right with the appointment of William Hague to the Foreign Office, and Liam Fox to the Ministry of Defence, while the selection of Iain Duncan Smith (Department of Work and Pensions) met with the approval of the socially conservative right. However, given that his incoming ministerial team was bound to lack experience following three terms out of office, Cameron did not fully exploit the ministerial experience that existed on the Conservative benches. It is true that senior positions were offered to Kenneth Clarke (Ministry of Justice) and George Young (Leader of the House of Commons), but ministerial office was not taken up by other survivors of the Major Cabinet: Peter Lilley, Stephen Dorrell and Malcolm Rifkind.

In regional terms, the limited representation in Scotland and Wales meant that the Cardiff born Cheryl Gillan was appointed Secretary of Wales despite not actually holding a Welsh constituency, whilst with David Mundell being the only elected Conservative from a Scottish constituency, he was appointed with two Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Office. The record of previous Conservative governments in terms of female representation within Parliament (which is an essential precursor to securing frontbench responsibilities), and the limited efforts made to address, had led to the argument that the Conservative party is ‘institutionally sexist’ (Lovenduski, 2005, p. 53). The Cameron government has a stronger record than previous Conservative governments due to increases in parliamentary representation in 2010. However, 49 female parliamentarians out of 307 still represents only 16 per cent of the PCP and they are still inferior to Labour who have 81 female parliamentarians, which constitutes 31 per cent of the PLP (Campbell and Childs, 2010, pp. 761–769). In terms of how this has translated into

ministerial office the coalition has 97 ministers drawn from the House of Commons of which 85 are male and 12 are female, which is below the percentage level of women within the PCP; and at 12.3 per cent is below the 22 per cent of Parliament who are female (Heppell, 2012, p. 214).

Having considered the ministerial allocation of the Cameron ministry in terms of some of the traditional criteria, the paper will now concentrate on situating allocation and distribution within the context of coalition politics. Scholarship exists examining the norm of proportionality in coalition formation and argues that small parties will tend to be awarded slightly more ministerial seats than the proportionality would demand, and the larger party slightly fewer (Budge and Keman, 1999; Laver and Schofield, 1990). While the coalition agreement established that ministerial posts would be allocated 'in proportion to the parliamentary representation of the two coalition parties', that comparative norm was adhered to as the Liberal Democrats secured 19.3 per cent of all frontbench portfolios despite holding only 15.7 per cent of all coalition representation in the House of Commons (Quinn et al, 2011, p. 307).

It is acknowledged that the process of bargaining over portfolios constitutes an important phase in the formation of any coalition government (Laver and Budge, 1992). This argument suggests that the allocation of the portfolios may be more important than proportionality itself, given that political actors themselves attach greater importance to what they deem to be high prestige portfolios (Warwick and Druckman, 2001). Thus, portfolio allocation provides an insight into the pay offs that parties are seeking. Parties will seek ownership of specific departments/portfolios because they are critical to the identity and purpose of the party, and regarded as critical to their continuing electoral strategy (Bäck et al, 2011, p. 441). Comparative portfolio allocation literature suggests the party that controls the portfolio controls the policy agenda (Laver and Shepsle, 1996, p. 295). Claiming that 'ownership' of the policy agenda within



coalition circumstances is important: what parties negotiate to own illustrates the instrumental mentality of parties within coalition and their continuing vote-maximising instincts (Laver and Schofield, 1990, p. 183).

However, the issue of portfolio distribution, and the prestige of specific portfolios was not part of the coalition negotiations, and has been left to bilateral negotiations between Cameron and Clegg (Bennister and Heffernan, 2012, p. 781). Bale implies that the Liberal Democrats 'underplayed their hand' (Bale, 2012, p. 329). How to allocate portfolios to the Liberal Democrats involved two clear choices. First, concentrate their designated ministerial offices in a small number of departments providing the potential for ownership of certain policy domains (and the prospect of electoral rewards for evidence of positive policy impact). Or, secondly, dilute their potential impact by spreading them across the whole machinery of government. The second option was pursued with the Liberal Democrats securing ministerial posts in all departments except Northern Ireland, International Development, Environment and Culture, Media and Sport.

The exploitation of the Liberal Democrats is more evident when considering their five Cabinet positions. Only three departments would be run by Liberal Democrats (Vince Cable at Business, Innovation and Skills; Chris Huhne and later Ed Davey at Energy and Climate Change and Danny Alexander went to the Scottish Office only to be replaced by Michael Moore after a matter of weeks). The positioning of the five Liberal Democrats adhered to the Conservative need to bind, marginalise or undermine. On the issue of binding, it is clear that offering the Liberal Democrats a Cabinet post within the Treasury, but subordinate to Osborne, was to ensure that they had shared responsibility for the austerity measures that were to be pursued. By positioning first David Laws, and then Danny Alexander in this post, it allowed the

Conservatives to articulate their agenda as being in the national interest, with greater conviction (Laws, 2010, p. 200). In terms of marginalisation, Nick Clegg was left co-ordinating what might be portrayed as self-interested and low salient issues for many voters (electoral and Lords reform), from the Office of Deputy Prime Minister, where he was ‘overworked and understaffed’ (Bale, 2012, p. 329). The logic of marginalisation also applied to the offer of the Scottish Office, which in the post-devolutionary era is a relatively ‘unsubstantial’ office, and one which the Liberal Democrats had previously advocated abolishing (Bennister and Heffernan, 2012, p. 781). Undermining was clearly the objective in the offering of Energy and Climate Change and Business, Innovation and Skills to the Liberal Democrats. Within months of entering the Department of Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne announced the development of eight new nuclear power stations, which directly contravened the general election campaign commitment to oppose the construction of further nuclear power stations (Russell, 2010, p. 516). However, the most humiliating experience for the Liberal Democrats was Vince Cable piloting through Parliament the imposition of increased tuition fees, which contradicted the position that they had campaigned so strongly on during the general election (Evans, 2011, p. 57).

Thus, the significant offices of state were saved for Conservatives—Foreign Office (William Hague); Treasury (George Osborne); Home Office (Theresa May); whilst the Liberal Democrats were not permitted to lead any of the big spending departments or policy areas which were central to the agenda or identity of the Conservatives (Debus, 2011, p. 300; Lees, 2011, p. 284). Moreover, 14 Conservatives entered Cabinet positions that mirrored their shadow Cabinet portfolios when in opposition; but no Liberal Democrats did so (Russell, 2010, p. 519). The Conservatives retained control of ministries to which they did not want to allow the Liberal Democrats to take ownership. For example, retaining the Department for International

Development was central. Having ring fenced spending cuts in this department continued ownership of this policy arena was designed to help to overcome the nasty imagery which Cameron felt had undermined them in opposition (Heppell and Lightfoot, 2012, pp. 130–138). Through the appointment of Michael Gove they retained ownership of the Education department, with the contentious higher education portion deliberately left where it was under New Labour (under the auspices of Business, Innovation and Skills). Retaining education was significant when viewed within the context of comparative coalition formation studies and portfolio allocation. Here it is argued that the more emphasis a party places on a specific policy area, the more likely they are to be allocated it when the coalition is formed. However, although education had been a high priority area for the Liberal Democrats Cameron denied them the opportunity to claim ownership of this policy domain (Debus, 2011, p. 302).

Therefore, whilst it has been noted that the Liberal Democrats came out of the forming of the coalition in a numerically strong position (Evans, 2011, p. 55), they did not secure through ministerial appointments a strong capacity to influence the policy agenda. Cameron outmanoeuvred Clegg on the prestige aspect of ministerial allocation, leading Bale to conclude that it is the Liberal Democrats that had: left all of the high offices of state in their partners' hands, left their partner in full control of fiscal and economic policy ... [and were left] ... chiefly responsible for devising and implementing a policy (university tuition fees) that made a mockery of its prior commitments, and offered it so few tangible policy wins on which to fight the next election (Bale, 2011, p. 248).

### **Cameron's September 2012 Reshuffle: Renegotiating Numbers and Prestige**

Before we can examine the September 2012 reshuffle, it is worth asking the following questions: first, what are they exactly and how should they be defined; secondly, why do they occur or what benefits are derived to Prime Ministers through utilising them; thirdly, how do reshuffles compare between single-party administrations and coalition administrations and from within that if differences exist what are the implications of them?

First, what constitutes a reshuffle? A reshuffle involves three different types of alteration to the composition of the ministerial team. First, new vacancies are created via ministerial dismissals—ministers who wished to continue in office but have lost the backing of the Prime Minister. Secondly, new vacancies can also be created by resignations. Dismissals do not occur as often as one might suppose. The research of Allen and King shows that between 1982 and 2007 between them Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Tony Blair, ‘dismissed’ only 52 ministers (King and Allen, 2010, p. 264). Vacancies are more often created by voluntary departures from office, as ministers resign due to policy or administrative failings within their department (which is not often); their refusal to endorse the collective view of the Government on a matter of policy (which is also not often); a desire to return to the backbenchers after a prolonged period as a minister (which as being a minister is very demanding means this occurs more often) or due to scandals (which due to the personal failings of so many politicians contributes to a significant number of resignations). Finally, there is what is best described as the churn of existing ministers being appointed to a different ministerial role. It is this form of reshuffle that has increased significantly in the last 50 years (King and Allen, 2010, p. 252).

The second question requiring analysis is why do they occur and what do Prime Ministers obtain through engaging in them? Blair admitted that ‘there's a kind of convention that it should be

done every year' (Blair, 2010, p. 593), and as annual events Alderman noted that they have 'huge intra-party significance' (Alderman, 1995, pp. 497–512). However, there are clearly disadvantages to such a frequent rate of ministerial turnover. Constant ministerial changes prevent ministers from 'developing the expertise and acumen needed to control a complex modern bureaucracy' and thus 'reshuffles destroy the informational gains that prolonged ministerial tenure can bring' (Indriðason and Kam, 2008, p. 621).

However, whilst Blair describes this as a convention it is unlikely that reshuffles are conducted due to 'tradition'. This has been viewed as an 'unsatisfactory explanation' given the evidence that suggests that parliamentary politics is so 'manifestly strategic' (Kam and Indriðason, 2005, p. 328). With this strategic thinking so prevalent it is clear that the Prime Minister utilises a reshuffle to aid them in the pursuit of two objectives: first, the retention of power and thus electoral mobilisation; and secondly, to fend off intra-party rivals. That Prime Ministers engage in reshuffles indicates political underperformance has been identified within government, and underperformance undermines policy implementation and success and thereby governing competence (Indriðason and Kam, 2008, p. 620). Prime Ministers may also feel that reshuffles are necessary to restore public confidence in the government, which may have been undermined not only by perceived policy failure, but also due to scandals (Dewan and Dowding, 2005, pp. 45–56; Berlinski et al, 2007, p. 259).

Reshuffles thus seek to 'weed out' those identified as 'bad' ministers, with such perceptions embracing not only competence but whether ministers have demonstrated their loyalty to the leadership and the ideological compatibility with the objectives of the Prime Minister. Those that appear disloyal and motivated by a desire to promote alternative policy prescriptions or political strategies to those advanced by the Prime Minister make the party seem disunited, and thus

undermine their chances of securing re-election (Indriðason and Kam, 2008, p. 624). Reshuffles are thus the opportunity for the Prime Minister to reassert their dominance over the party to reclaim perceptions of competence, reaffirm the merits of loyalty and showcase the unity of purpose within the governing party. As an exercise in party development, they are a means through which the Prime Minister promotes new, young and talented parliamentarians and eases out elderly and potentially fading ministers (Berlinski et al, 2007, p. 246, 258).

The above analysis would suggest that reshuffles do involve a ‘meritocratic’ mechanism through which talent is identified and rewarded to aid the overall performance of the governing party. Whilst there may be some validity to this assertion, there is also a need to recognise that Prime Ministers regard reshuffles as ‘strategic devices’ designed to ‘fend off intraparty rivals’ (Kam and Indriðason, 2005, p. 328). The self-interested mentality of ministers means that they have mixed motives. On the one hand, they share one ambition with the Prime Minister—the re-election of their party as their ministerial careers are dependent upon this. However, on the other hand they do have an incentive to use their ministerial office, and the departmental positions, to serve their own interests, be that elevation to a more senior and prestigious portfolio, or the party leadership itself. Prime Ministers thereby recognise that ‘all ministers have the motive and opportunity to use their portfolios in a manner that runs against the Prime Ministers interests’ (Indriðason and Kam, 2008, p. 622–624).

It is therefore clear that Prime Ministers can use reshuffles to manipulate the political environment in a way that ‘undercuts the ministers’ incentives to engage in self-interested behaviour’ (Indriðason and Kam, 2008, p. 624). Dismissing ministers or moving them sideways (to unappealing portfolios which are regarded as ‘poisoned chalices’), or simply rotating them around similar portfolios, and even the threat of doing so, limits the capacity for senior ministers

to challenge the authority of the Prime Minister. The 'greater the ministers' incentives will be to use their portfolio in a self-interested fashion' then the 'greater the benefit the PM will receive from reshuffling the cabinet' to 'limit the agency loss generated' by that 'self-interested cabinet minister' (Kam and Indriðason, 2005, p. 333–334; Indriðason and Kam, 2008, p. 622–624).

The third question regarding reshuffles relates to whether any differences can be detected in the regularity of reshuffles between single-party administrations and dual-party coalition administrations. Studies of coalition administrations demonstrate that whole-scale ministerial reshuffles are less likely to occur than in single-party administrations (Kam and Indriðason, 2005, p. 336). Prior to the formation of the coalition, it was argued that it was a *fact* that British prime ministers reshuffle more often and more easily than the premier of coalition governments' (Berlinski et al, 2007, p. 259) as coalitions are 'less likely to be reshuffled than single-party administrations' (Allen and Ward, 2009, p. 336). Coalition politics creates a constraint upon Prime Ministers, as it creates increased risks when making dual-party ministerial reshuffles. Reshuffles provide an opportunity for coalition partners to strike new deals, i.e. to attain a redistribution of portfolios without having to terminate the government (Kam and Indriðason, 2005, p. 336).

Cameron has been more reluctant to reshuffle than his predecessors. Reshuffles involve renegotiating on numbers and proportionality, as Clegg has to be 'fully consulted' on ministerial removals and portfolio redistributions. The coalition agreement ensures that Clegg has the right to secure 'joint agreement' with the Prime Minister 'regarding the allocation of portfolios between the parties' (Fox, 2010, p. 615). As a consequence only limited ministerial adjustments have taken place since the coalition was formed in May 2010. Those ministerial adaptations have been a reaction to enforced ministerial resignations. Two of them have been Liberal Democrat

Cabinet Ministers—David Laws and Chris Huhne—and two have been Conservative resignations—Liam Fox and Andrew Mitchell. On these occasions Cameron, ‘in order to maintain the agreed ministerial balance between the two partners, has agreed to operate by a “one-in, one-out” rule’ (Bennister and Heffernan, 2012, p. 782).

Having avoided reshuffles in May 2011 and May 2012, Cameron finally engaged in his only reshuffle thus far in September 2012. What were the implications in terms of renegotiating proportionality (the numbers) and portfolio distribution (prestige)? At a Cabinet level no renegotiation of numbers, portfolios or even personnel occurred. All five Liberal Democrat ministers were retained in the same portfolios. Beneath Cabinet there were no numeric changes. However, the spread of portfolios was altered. Liberal Democrats acquired a ministerial office within two departments—International Development and Agriculture—but sacrificed their positions within the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That such reallocations of responsibilities occurred below the Cabinet level meant that the dynamics of both proportionality and prestige remained relatively similar after the reshuffle.

While proportionality and prestige matter, two other issues shape the way we could interpret Cameron's only reshuffle to date—the gendered implications and the ideological significance of the dismissals and promotions. The constraints of coalition, and notably the poor record of the Liberal Democrats in selecting female candidates in winnable seats, will provide Cameron with the excuse for not hitting his target of one-third of his ministers being female by 2015 (Annesley and Gains, 2012, pp. 718–720). To hit his one-third target among Conservative MPs alone Cameron needed to dismiss none of the 12 female ministers appointed in May 2010 and promote a further 20 from a backbench talent pool of 257 of which 39 were female and 218 were male. However, the reshuffle saw him dismiss three female ministers, two from the Cabinet



(Cheryl Gillan and Caroline Spelman) and appoint six female ministers from the 2010 intake (Karen Bradley, Helen Grant, Esther McVey, Nicky Morgan, Anna Soubry and Elizabeth Truss) meaning that the increase was from only 12 to 15. To hit the target now requires 17 promotions to ministerial ranks in a hypothetical reshuffle before the general election, but from a talent pool of only 34 (or 31 if we assume that dismissed female ministers would not be reappointed).

However, the issue of female ministerial representation matters little to a socially conservative dominated PCP. These social conservatives, who are predominantly male backbenchers, find 'such quotas patronising', and feel that Cameron has created a 'box-ticking exercise when appointing ministers which is not the right way to go about forming a government' and that 'it has the potential not only to make female ministers feel patronised, but also to breed resentment among male colleagues who have not been promoted' (Isaby, 2011). Rather, they view reshuffles in terms of the extent to which their factions' representation is enhanced or diminished. The ideological disposition of those dismissed and those promoted matters. Of the ideological divides that define contemporary British Conservatism Cameron is part of the majority on the European divide, with his brand of soft Eurosceptism serving as the majority over the hard Eurosceptics within the PCP. However, on the moral divide the social conservative opponents of Cameron outnumber his socially liberal faction (for numeric details on the ideological balances within the 2010 PCP, see Heppell, 2013).

Cameron dismissed 22 Conservative MPs whom he had appointed as ministers in May 2010. Of these 13 were identifiable as social conservatives, 8 were social liberals and 1 was loyalist/non-identifiable. Of the 22 promoted to ministerial rank 8 were social liberally and 10 were socially conservative, with 3 loyalist/non-identifiable. This could be dismissed as inconsequential as the overall ideological disposition of the ministerial ranks remained almost identical, i.e. hard

Eurosceptics are not represented within ministerial ranks, and social conservatives (who tend to be older and more experienced) are slightly over represented within ministerial ranks, relative to the PCP as a whole (Heppell, 2013).

Media interpretations that suggest that the reshuffle constituted a ‘serious lurch to the right’ (a claim primarily driven by the removal of Ken Clarke at the Ministry of Justice and his replacing with Chris Grayling), lack substance (Wintour and Watt, 2012). Given the limited impact in terms of negotiating numbers and prestige between the coalition partners, and its limited gendered or ideological impact, the academic description offered by Beckett is more valid—that is Cameron was ‘unwilling to tip the balance’, and his reshuffle was about ‘fine tuning, compromise and caution’ and was thus nothing more than a ‘tepid tweak’ (Beckett, 2012).

### **Analysis and Conclusion: The impact upon the Conservatives of fewer reshuffles**

The critical question is what implications are there from having less frequent reshuffles? For Conservative parliamentarians there is a negative consequence in terms of their own career progression. Cameron's reluctance to reshuffle means that he has disappointed the following among his own parliamentarians.

First, there are those Conservatives who have received ministerial preferment but at a lower level than they would have expected. For example, Theresa Villiers was made minister of state in the Department of Transport, but having led the shadow transport team in opposition she would have expected to have been made Secretary of State. Nick Herbert was made a minister of state

in the Home Office having expected to have been made Secretary of State for the Environment, the portfolio that he had covered while in the shadow Cabinet in opposition. Chris Grayling went from shadow Home Secretary to minister of state in the Department of Work and Pensions. David Mundell entered the Scottish Office as a parliamentary under secretary of state, rather than as Secretary of State. Secondly, those who were expecting ministerial office, but instead found that the red boxes that they dreamed of holding were being opened by Liberal Democrats. Of the 21 who fell into this category many were older and more experienced and thus their best chance of ministerial office may have passed them by—for example, Julian Brazier (57 years old and elected in 1987); Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (54 years old and elected in 1992); James Clappison (54 years old and elected in 1992); Julian Lewis (59 years old and elected in 1997); Keith Simpson (61 years old and elected in 1997) and Laurence Robertson (52 years old and elected in 1997). Thirdly, and perhaps most interestingly, coalition has stalled the assumed meteoric career rises of the new entrants of 2010. Many of them will have noted with interest the rapid promotions offered to the likes of Ed Miliband or Ed Balls in the New Labour era, both of whom entered the Cabinet within two years of entering Parliament (see Cowley, 2012). Only 13 of the 2010 intake have managed to reach the lower reaches of the ministerial ladder after 3 years in power (as at May 2013).

Therefore, both longer serving and new entrants feel that their future ambitions are being limited by coalition and the reduced prospect of reshuffles. That frustration is manifesting itself in increased parliamentary rebellion. In the first two years there were coalition rebellions in 44 per cent of parliamentary divisions. This is the highest rate of rebellions in the post-war era and represents a significant increase on the rates within the New Labour era: 8 per cent (1997–2001); 21 per cent (2001–2005) and 28 per cent (2005–2010). When the data are broken down it reveals that Conservative MPs have broken ranks in 31 per cent of votes and Liberal Democrat MPs

have done so in 21 per cent (Cowley and Stuart, 2012, pp. 8–12). Thus, ‘resentment has built up early’, and given that usually rebellion rates tend to increase across the sessions of a parliamentary term, the likelihood is that the rebellion rates will increase (Cowley and Stuart, 2011, p. 405). The other trend being challenged is that new parliamentarians tend to be loyal and disciplined. A possible contributing factor has been the suspicion that there will be limited ministerial change which has stoked up resentment amongst the non-possessed (Cowley and Stuart, 2011, p. 405).

And an additional accusation made against Cameron is the supposed elitist nature of his ministerial team. This was famously expressed by Nadine Dorries when she complained that Cameron surrounded himself with a ‘narrow clique’ of like-minded ‘arrogant’ and ‘posh’ people (Orr, 2012). David Davis reinforced this sentiment by suggesting that ordinary voters ‘look at the front bench and feel that they are in a different world to them’, whilst the *Daily Telegraph* identified an unnamed minister, who backed the Dorries and Davis critique by admitting ministers were ‘too rich, too privileged, too southern ... how can they relate to working class voters, to people in the north west marginals?’ (Kirkup, 2012; see also Hill, 2013).

However, if one of the motivations for reshuffles is to fend off intra-party rivals then that motivation is altered by the dynamics of coalition. For Cameron the initial formation was about undercutting his coalition partners and enhancing the prospects for the Conservatives electorally. However, the need for Cameron to manipulate his powers of patronage to outflank rivals to his leadership may not be so significant given the leadership selection rules that the Conservative Party moved to in 1998. The comparison with the last Conservative Party leader who was Prime Minister, John Major, illustrates this point. Major engaged in annual reshuffles, which in part

sought to create balances within the party to avert potential challenges to his leadership (Heppell, 2005, pp. 144–152). And this was necessary most notably in the period between 1992 and 1995. At that time Major could be challenged each autumn if 10 per cent of Conservative parliamentarians wanted to back someone who wanted to initiate a challenge. Major was thus vulnerable to the threat of removal, and it was the speculation surrounding this that eventually provoked him into resigning the leadership of the Conservative Party, and standing in the self-created vacancy (June 1995), simply to end the constant rumours about a forthcoming challenge that autumn (Quinn, 2012, p. 54).

Cameron cannot be directly challenged for the leadership of the Conservative Party by an intra-party rival. Unlike the circumstances that contributed to the removal of Thatcher in 1990 (when challengers were permitted), the Conservatives now utilise a confidence motion, which is triggered when 15 per cent of the PCP demand that a ballot should occur. Once the confidence motion is initiated, Cameron would then need to retain the support of a majority of Conservative parliamentarians—i.e. 154 out of 306—in order to survive. Once a successful confidence motion was complete, the leadership would be vacant. That vacancy would then be filled by a series of eliminative parliamentary ballots, followed by a mass membership ballot. This could take approximately three months complete. Unless the Conservatives can agree on only one candidate standing, the costs associated with this—time, financial, and disunity—could make these procedures ill-suited to government.

Thus, Cameron has an increased security of tenure, relative to Thatcher and Major, and thus his incentive to reshuffle to protect his leadership from internal party threats is reduced. The primary reason to do so would appear to be to assuage the ambition of Conservative

backbenchers whose frustration is manifesting itself through backbench rebellion. However, as the above discussion demonstrates reshuffles create the opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to renegotiate on portfolio allocation. And the original arrangements on portfolio allocation work well for the Conservatives. The benefit that the original arrangements offered is that the Liberal Democrats have been bound on austerity; exploited on policy issues such as tuition fees and marginalised in the Scottish Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The allocation of portfolios left the Liberal Democrats without policy areas over which they could claim ownership. Undercutting the Liberal Democrats through portfolio distribution was sensible politics on behalf of Cameron. However, it is not something that ambitious, frustrated and now in some cases vulnerable Conservative backbenchers are willing to give Cameron much credit for.

## **Footnotes**

[1] Of 306 Conservative parliamentarians 152 were new entrants in May 2010. As new entrants were not considered for office immediately, this means that the 76 Conservative ministerial posts given to Conservatives within the House of Commons were drawn from only 154 Conservative parliamentarians.

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