

The role of a Shadow Cabinet Minister

I was a Shadow Cabinet Minister after the big election defeat of 1997. A Shadow Cabinet Minister does not draw an additional salary above the MP pay, unlike a Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, select committee chairmen and some other office holders. It is nonetheless an important second job for an MP, and crucial to proper scrutiny and Parliamentary debate of the main government departments. I think we need to hear more from various Shadow Cabinet members, given the actions of the government.

I found it a demanding seven day a week job as is being an MP. I set out to directly shadow the department I was responsible for. With my team of shadow Ministers and helpers we sought to anticipate the statements, problems and policy announcements of the department. Sometimes we would state in advance what we would do, sometimes we would warn against likely government actions. We aimed to be well briefed by the time the government made a decision or a statement. We also developed our own distinctive alternatives to government actions, identified problems they needed to solve and gave positive advice as well as criticism.

A volunteer joined the team and did a great job briefing the press. I generated a daily story or comment or proposal and she talked to the main newspapers every day on an individual basis, offering follow up material and direct quotes from me. I did additional weekend briefings on the phone with a ring round every Saturday morning. The press developed confidence in the accuracy and news content of what we were doing, particularly wanting stories about Ministerial mistakes and bad conduct. There was plenty of material. When we shadowed John Prescott's super Ministry we had all of transport, the Environment, the regions, local government and housing to comment on which made for an exciting agenda.

The leadership candidates for the Conservatives need to set out this week as Parliament returns what is wrong with this new government's approach and how they would take control of our borders, avoid tax rises, raise productivity and quality in public services, lift the growth rate, restore law and order and uphold freedom of speech.

The elections in Thuringia and Saxony

The Success of the AFD and a new so called left wing anti migrant party in the two latest German regional Parliament elections confirms a pattern of voters despairing of traditional parties. In the U.K. the two main parties got just 58% of the vote in the General election. In Germany despite a revival of the Conservative CDU the two main parties were way below 50% together with the Chancellor's SPD slumping to just 6%. Their national poll

standing for next year's federal election is only 15%. The three parties of the governing coalition struggled to get to a combined 10%.

Chancellor Scholz announced a reduction of benefits for illegal migrants and more deportations too late to win back lost votes and with many people cynical about whether the government will in practice do anything effective on migrant numbers. Germany of course has to accept free movement from any EU country so it is dependent on border enforcement in other countries.

There has been a growing gap in many countries between the pro immigration policies most governments and public wishes. There are similar schisms over various net zero policies. The traditional German parties refuse the enter coalitions with the AFD though they have not said the same against the other new anti migrant party. Meanwhile the CDU has gained support by shifting to a tougher stance on the issue.

What many Conservative and Reform voters want.

This is an amended version an article commissioned by the Telegraph in 2022

Many of us believe people should keep more of their own money to spend on themselves and their families. We want to help people on their individual journeys to success and greater prosperity. We want government to make life easier for all those who can make their own way in the world, with lower tax rates and sensible rules. We want to live in a successful economy where low tax rates generate more tax revenue from the extra incomes and business they bring. Then we can be generous to those who need help and cannot earn their own living and we can afford great quality public services. We want everyone to have the opportunity to own their own home. We would like many to own a share in the business they work for or be able to set up a business of their own. Government should not tell people how to live their lives, but should help people with great education and with public order. Government interfering and investing in business usually wastes money, racks up losses and makes things worse. Ask the postmasters a nationalised company sent to prison, or rail travellers in the north waiting for an HS 2 train.

We are against those who glue themselves to the roads to stop people getting to work or to prevent ambulances getting to patients, to be on the side of those who leave home early in the dark to ensure the rest of us have milk, bread and emergency services that morning. We oppose the politicians who want to prevent us getting out more of our own gas and think of the needs of the rest of us who have gas boilers and want to keep our families warm over the winter.

There is indeed an anti growth coalition. It is a coalition which despises all those who go out to work in the private sector to make and

deliver life's necessities and to keep our utilities running. It sees the businesses that supply us with clean water, heating fuels and broadband as the enemies that should be taxed more than nationalised. When they were nationalised they were starved of investment as it all had to compete with the cash demands of the NHS. The anti growth protesters seek to impede or prevent new homes, new factories and above all new energy supplies, whilst backing ever more illegal economic migrants who of course will need new homes, and more utility supply to have a decent life here.

The protesters who try to disrupt the lives of those who work hard to keep our society functioning are backed by an army of left wing party politicians. They include the nationalists that want to bust our country apart. They use devolved government not to help their electors but to grandstand against the national government. They include the Lib Dems who do not ever want us to get out more of our own oil, gas or coal. They blocked more nuclear power as well when in government. They would leave us without heating or hot water on days when the wind does not blow. They of course include the Labour party, bound to the Trade Unions who think now is a good time to engineer as many strikes as possible. These strikes on the railways threaten their own members jobs. The railway needs more passengers, not less, to generate the extra fare revenue to be able to pay their wages. Striking means more people do without the trains so more trains run empty yet the Unions expect yet more subsidy for a service people do not want to use or are prevented from using

We favour freedom and fairness. We need a new balance in policy between those who do and those who complain. We need to let all those who turn up for work, undertake the training and look for promotion to keep more of what they earn. We need to say No, not give in, to all those who want to block every new private sector idea, impede the new investments, the new mines and gas wells, the new fields of food and new factories to make products for the NHS and other customers. The world does not owe the UK a living. We are too dependent on imports and therefore on the goodwill and loans of foreigners. The new UK can be a shining example of enterprise and freedom, where people will want to invest more and create more jobs, because we have a government that believes in the power of enterprise to help people to more prosperous lives.

[Too much Taxing makes a country poorer](#)

Governments tax tobacco to stop people smoking. They tax alcohol to limit people drinking. They tax petrol and diesel because they want us to use less. They tax plastic waste to get rid of it. They tax flying to reduce it. You get the idea. Government knows better than people what is good for us and imposes taxes to restrict us. It imposes VAT on non food purchases, as it thinks we should make do with fewer purchases. This can lead on to an outright ban as it will soon impose on new petrol and diesel cars. It is government's puritan tendency. Keir Starmer represents this tendency well,

displaying his inner Malvolio all too often.

Government also loves taxing work, saving and investing. This government seems to see work as an unreasonable interruption to people's lives as it looks at giving rights to people to four day weeks and more flexible and home working. It may be readying a new tax attack on anyone who works long hours and earns more than the government thinks desirable. They will reinforce the bias in the tax system to penalising success and enterprise.

The bias against so called unearned income is particularly damaging. If you work hard and save some money from taxed income you will then face higher taxes on the income and gains that generates. This is not unearned income. This is twice earned income. You first had to earn the savings, then you have to work at choosing and managing the savings.

Of course government needs to collect some tax and will rightly get more of that from better off people. All the time we opt for free at the point of use for health and education, and all the time we need to defend ourselves as we do there needs to be sensible taxes. The aim should be to keep the rates of tax down and the number of taxes under control, as that is the best way to grow the economy. It is important to stop undue spending growth on everything from falling productivity to bigger losses by services like trains and the Post Office where customers should pay. It's not core public services or pensions we cannot afford. It's Bank of England losses, the world's dearest new railway, the bungles of the public sector which lead to big compensation bills, the arrival of so many illegal migrants needing hotels and the £30 bn loss of productivity.

[The productivity collapse in the public sector](#)

The ONS put the loss of productivity at 6.5% 2020 to 2023. The Treasury say we lost £20 bn that way. It looks more like £30 bn.

How did it happen? There was of course a loss of productivity in schools when they were shut for Covid, but that bounced back when lockdowns ended. There was a loss of output in the NHS when many dedicated staff worked hard and at risk fighting Covid but other NHS activities were paused or reduced to avoid cross infection. That too bounced back.

What stayed was the large recruitment of extra civil servants and public sector administrators across many departments and public bodies. No resource was spared in fighting the pandemic, but normal business did not resume thereafter. Civil service numbers rose from 445,480 in 2019 to 519,780 by 2023, an increase of 74,300 or 17%. Total public administration numbers rose by a fifth to 1.2 million.

I tried to get the government to slim administration back down to 2019 levels by imposing a recruitment freeze on new employees from outside the public sector. That way no one would be sacked, and employees would gain more promotion opportunities. Every time someone left to retire or take a job elsewhere the management would decide whether they could eliminate that post, or promote someone into it whilst eliminating theirs. they could be guided by the staffing numbers and organisation chart for 2019 in where they were trying to get to, adjusted to any changed priorities. Only a few Ministers insisted on this. The government as a whole was persuaded to try to do one in one out, which of course does not restore lost productivity. I expect the new government will drop any idea of trying to get back up to 2019 levels of achievement.

Many large government functions like welfare benefits and grant allocation can be done with fewer people and more use of the many computers the state owns. Why isn't this happening?