



## PRESS NOTICE

9 April 2010: for immediate release

### After the Rotten Parliament comes the Reform Parliament, says Constitution Unit. But how much reform will there really be?

The opening shots of the election campaign saw a growing raft of political reforms as both the Conservatives and Labour sought to woo the Lib Dems in anticipation of a possible hung Parliament. The parties led off their campaigns this week with promises for bold new political reforms: voting reform, an elected Lords, cutting the number of MPs, a right to recall MPs, fixed term parliaments.

'It's encouraging that all parties are so interested in constitutional reform' said the Constitution Unit's director Prof Robert Hazell. 'But there are two big questions left hanging in the air. Are they promising more than they can deliver, and over-selling some of these reforms? How much will the reforms help to restore public trust?'

The likelihood of the reforms being implemented increases as the parties converge in supporting many of the same reforms.

- **All three parties** support a power to recall MPs, an elected House of Lords, and a British bill of rights
- **Labour and Liberal Democrats** support a referendum on electoral reform, fixed term parliaments, and developing a written constitution
- **The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats** support reducing the size of the House of Commons (Cons to 585, LD 500), and greater decentralisation.

If there is a hung Parliament in which the Lib Dems hold the balance of power, the chances of reform increase. A Conservative minority government supported by the Lib Dems would move swiftly to reduce the size of the House of Commons, and to hold simultaneous referendums on elected mayors in large cities. A Labour government with Lib Dem support would legislate to hold a referendum on electoral reform and an elected House of Lords, and for fixed term parliaments.

'But many of these reforms are difficult to agree and implement' said Prof Hazell. 'Labour found it very hard to agree the details of an elected House of Lords, because the Cabinet were divided. The Conservatives are similarly divided on Lords reform. The Lib Dems may help to concentrate their minds'.

Other planned reforms risk having little or no effect. The power of recall in some other countries has proved to be a power of harassment which has rarely led to recall. A citizens' right of initiative to put issues on the agenda has not led to a single law being changed in other Westminster parliaments. And the Conservatives' plans to require referendums for all future EU treaties can be ignored by future parliaments, because no parliament can bind its successors.

'The parties need to be careful not to promise too much' warned Prof Hazell. 'If the reforms are oversold, they risk provoking further disillusionment. Constitutional reforms are not temporary bits of sticking plaster. They need to be planned and implemented very carefully if they are to endure'.

#### Notes for Editors

- The Constitution Unit has published an analysis of the parties constitutional reform proposals, and the likelihood of their being implemented, which can be viewed at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/election2010.htm>

- The Constitution Unit has also done research on hung parliaments and minority government, which can be viewed at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/in-the-round/minority-government.htm>
- Robert Hazell is available for interview and can be contacted on 0207 679 4971 (office). Vicki Spence is the Unit's Administrator and Prof Hazell's PA ([v.spence@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:v.spence@ucl.ac.uk), 0207 679 4977) and Brian Walker is the Unit's Press Officer ([williambrianwalker@gmail.com](mailto:williambrianwalker@gmail.com), 07802 176347).
- The Constitution Unit is an independent and non-partisan research centre based at University College London ([www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit)).