Coalition Update: 1-7 March

Legislation

**Ministers announce major climbdown on quangos** *(Times, 1 March)*
A major climbdown on laws giving the coalition widespread powers to merge and abolish quangos announced: a section allowing the government to abolish any quangos listed on the schedule through secondary legislation rather than having full parliamentary scrutiny in the Lords or Commons will be dropped.

**A nasty case of deja vu** *(Mark D'Arcy's blog, 2 March)*
Mark D'Arcy notes that the Lords are now hearing the Fixed Term Parliaments Bill: relations are prickly; and there is a technical issue in that this is not a bill which the Commons can force through by invoking their power to override the Lords via the Parliament Acts. Bills to extend the life of a parliament are exempt.

The Barnsley By-Election

**Humiliation in Barnsley fuels critics of Clegg** *(Independent, 5 March)*
Clegg engaged in a series of last-minute talks with senior Liberal Democrats in an attempt to head off a rebellion at the party's spring conference in Sheffield next week.

**This by-election was a warning to the Tories, too** *(Independent, 5 March)*
John Curtice notes: the Lib Dems did badly, but so did the Conservatives.

The Lib Dems need to whistle their way through these dark days *(Observer, 6 March)*
Andrew Rawnsley discusses the plight of the Lib Dems: notes Clegg's insistence on having ownership of all the coalition's policies; and his reluctance to trumpet behind-the-scenes victories.

The Conservatives, the Coalition and Conference

**Look at what the Conservatives are achieving** *(Telegraph, 3 March)*
Michael Fallon MP speaks: Interesting not least because there is no mention of the Lib Dems.

**Cameron's battle plan** *(Telegraph, 6 March)*
Tim Montgomerie explains what Cameron ought to do: Keep the Lib Dems in the Coalition; Dramatise the Immigration, Welfare, Pensions and Education policies; Defeat AV and then restore law and order credentials; jettison the NHS and HiSpeed rail plans; go for growth; look after Pensioners.

**The Coalition must clarify what it stands for** *(Telegraph, 6 March)*
The most fundamental problem is that the Coalition has not succeeded in articulating, in a clear and comprehensible way, what else it stands for. Curious conflation of Coalition and Conservative here.
The Party Manifesto, not Coalition Agreement, should most guide voting of Tory MPs (ConservativeHome, 7 March)
Tim Montgomerie comments on a recent ConHome poll

The Lib Dems

Greg Mulholland is first convenor of new Backbench Group (Mark Pack's blog, 28 Feb)
A rebellious Lib Dem MP is now convenor of the Lib Dem Backbench Group

Multicultural society row splits Clegg and Cameron (Independent, 4 March)
Clegg takes different view to multiculturalism to Cameron in public speech

Liberal Democrat rebels to challenge Clegg over 'damaging' NHS reforms (Guardian, 4 March)
Evan Harris and Baroness Shirley Williams to challenge plans to hand GPs control of more than 80% of NHS budget at the Lib Dems' Spring Conference

Everything you ever wanted to know about... Policy and the Parliamentary Party (part 3) (LibDem Voice, 3 March)
Mark Valladares continues his discussion of how policy is made in the Lib Dem party: this post focuses on the impact of being in a coalition on policymaking, and the potential role of the Lords

Miscellaneous

Nick Clegg provides a model and a warning for Ireland (Guardian, 1 March)
Experience of Liberal Democrats shows Irish Labour party will need to retain a distinctive voice to avoid a collapse in support

The town hall finance battle gets messy (Guardian, 2 March)
The 'free council' concept raises more questions than it answers, with the Lib Dems and Tories bitterly divided