

**TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH AND Q&A  
GIVEN BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, MR NICK CLEGG  
IN LONDON  
ON WEDNESDAY, 19 MAY 2010**

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

I spent my whole political life fighting to open up politics. So, I would like to make one thing very clear: this government is going to be unlike any other. This government is going to transform our politics so that the state has far less control over you, and you have far more control over the state. This government is going to break up concentrations of power and hand power back to people because that, quite simply, is how we can build a fair society.

This government is going to persuade you to put your faith in politics once again. I am not talking about a few new rules for MPs, not the odd gesture or gimmick here or there to make you feel a bit more involved. I am talking about the most significant programme of empowerment by a British government since the great reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The biggest shake up of our democracy since 1832 when the Great Reform Act redrew the boundaries of British democracy, for the first time extending the franchise beyond the landed classes. That was landmark legislation from politicians who refused to sit back and do nothing while huge swathes of the population remained helpless against vested interests; who stood up for the freedom of the many, not the privilege of the few.

It is that spirit that this government will draw on as we deliver our programme for political reform: a power revolution, a fundamental resettlement of the relationship between the state and the citizen that puts you in charge.

Now today, I want to talk about how we will get there, three major steps that will begin immediately. One, we will repeal all of the intrusive and unnecessary laws that inhibit your freedom. Two, we will reform our politics so that it is open, transparent and decent. And three, we will radically redistribute power away from the centre into your communities, your homes, your hands. Big sweeping change: not incremental, not bit by bit.

Our democracy has suffered at the hands of encroaching centralisation and secrecy for decades. Take citizens' rights: eroded by the quiet proliferation of laws that increase surveillance, quash dissent, limit freedom. Take executive authority: consistently increased by successive administrations to the point that we now have a muted Parliament and government enjoys almost untrammelled control over precisely the people who are meant to keep it in check. Take the welfare state: one of modern society's greatest liberators but now so different to that envisaged by Beveridge because it has been distorted by excessive centralisation and micro-management.

Britain was once the cradle of modern democracy. We are now, on some measures, the most centralised country in Europe bar Malta. So, no,

incremental change will not do. It is time for a wholesale, big-bang approach to political reform and that is what this government will deliver.

I am a liberal. My starting point has always been a basic optimism about people. The view that most people, most of the time, will make the right decisions for themselves and their families. That you know better than I do about how to run your life, your community, the services you use. So this government is going to trust people.

We know that when people see a real opportunity to shape the world they live in, they take it. Just think of the election we have just been through: thousands of young people rushing to register to vote before they missed the deadline. When people have power they use it, and when they are denied it there is anger and disappointment. We saw it two weeks ago when across the country hundreds of people were turned away from polling stations on election night. I am eagerly awaiting the findings of the Electoral Commission's review into that fiasco, not least as an MP representing a Sheffield constituency where it happened. We must make sure that this never, ever happens again. You must be confident that come polling day your voice will be heard, and more than that, that the only choice to be heard does not happen every few years on election day. You should be able to exercise your voice, use your power, every single day, and under this government's plans you will.

So, three steps to new politics. First, sweeping legislation to restore the hard-won liberties that have been taken one by one from the British people. This government will end the culture of spying on its citizens. It is outrageous that decent, law-abiding people are regularly treated as if they have got something to hide. It has to stop. So, there will be no ID card scheme, no national identity register, a halt to second-generation biometric passports. We will not hold your internet and email records when there is no reason to do so. CCTV will be properly regulated, as will the DNA storage database with restrictions on the storage of innocent people's DNA, and Britain must not be a country where our children grow up so used to their liberty being infringed that they accept it without question.

There will be no ContactPoint children's database; schools will not take children's fingerprints without even asking their parent's consent. This will be a government that is proud when British citizens stand up against illegitimate advances of the state, that values debate, that is unafraid of dissent and that is why we will remove limits on the rights to peaceful protest. It is why we will review libel laws so that we can better protect freedom of speech. And as we tear through the statute book we will do something that no government ever has: we will ask you which laws you think should go, because thousands of criminal offences were created under the previous government, yet taking people's freedom away did not make our streets safer. Obsessive law making simply makes criminals out of ordinary people, so we will get rid of the unnecessary laws and once they are gone they will not come back because we will introduce a mechanism to block pointless new criminal offences.

We will, of course, introduce safeguards to prevent the misuse of anti-terrorism legislation including a review of existing powers and legislation. There have been too many cases of individuals being denied their rights and whole communities being placed under suspicion. This government will do better by British justice, respecting great British freedoms, which is why we will also defend trial by jury.

Second, reform of our politics: reform to reduce the power of political elites and to drag Westminster into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, starting with the House of Lords. Did you know that we have been talking about reforming the House of Lords for over 150 years? It is one of the areas where all of the parties agree, so the time for talk is over. This government will replace the House of Lords with an elected second chamber, where members are elected by a proportional voting system. There will be a committee charged specifically with making this happen. Make no mistake: that committee will not be yet another government talking shop. It will be a dedicated group devoted to kick starting real reform, and the same haste will be applied to fixed-term Parliaments. It is just wrong that governments can play politics with something as important as a general election, cynically picking the date to maximise their own advantage. So, this government has already set the date we think the next election should be, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015, no matter who is where in the polls at that time, unless that is Parliament votes to dissolve itself first.

As we legislate to fix Parliamentary terms, the details will of course need to be worked out but we believe that the support of 55% of MPs or more should be required for Parliament to opt for an early dissolution. That is a much lower threshold than the two thirds required in the Scottish parliament, but it strikes the right balance for our Parliament: maintaining stability, stopping parties from forcing a dissolution to serve their own interests.

**[Party political content]** This is a new right for Parliament, additional to the existing powers of no confidence. We are not taking away Parliament's right to throw out government. We are taking away government's right to throw out Parliament. Parliament's power will also be strengthened, as we bring forward the proposals of the Wright Committee, published in November, starting with provisions to give MPs much more control over the business of the House of Commons.

In addition to strengthening Parliament, we will of course make sure we have cleaned it up, which is why I have already commissioned work on introducing the power of recall. If your MP is corrupt, you will be able to sack them. You will need the support of 10% of people living in the constituency in your area, and your MP will have had to have been found guilty of serious wrongdoing. It happens in Switzerland, in Canada, and in eighteen US states. It is going to happen here. We will regulate lobbying in Parliament. It is wrong to present all of lobbying as sleazy. Much of it is entirely legitimate, allowing different organisations and interests to make representations to politicians, but it is a process which must be completely transparent. Lobbying is a £2 billion industry where, according to some estimates, there are MPs who are approached by lobbyists one hundred times every week. That activity needs

to be regulated properly and made transparent, which we will do, for example, by introducing a statutory register of lobbyists.

More broadly, as long as money plays such a big part in our politics, we are never going to curtail the influence of vested interests in politics. That is why David Cameron and I are determined to reform party funding. All of the parties have had their problems, and governments have been stopping and starting on this issue for years. So long as big money continues to hollow out our democracy, everybody loses. So, we will pursue a detailed agreement on limiting donations and reforming party funding in order to deal with this once and for all. In our big clean up, we will act to tackle electoral fraud too, speeding up the implementation of individual voter registration.

No programme to reform our political system is complete without reform of our voting system. This government will be putting to you, in a referendum, the choice to introduce a new voting system called the alternative vote. Under that system, MPs will have to secure the support from at least half the people who vote in their constituency. Hand in hand with that change, there will be new constituency boundaries, reducing the number of MPs overall and creating constituencies that are more equal in size. David Cameron and I are very relaxed about the fact that we may be arguing different cases in that referendum. My position is clear: the current voting system, first past the post, is a major block to lasting political change. According to some estimates, the present system ensures that over half the seats in the Commons are safe, giving hundreds of MPs jobs for life, meaning that millions of people see their votes simply go to waste. Is it any surprise that with a system like that, we end up with politicians who are seen to be out of touch with the people they serve? New politics needs fairer votes, and this referendum will be our opportunity to start to make that happen.

The third and final step is the redistribution of power away from the centre. It is something the Prime Minister spoke about yesterday, and it is something we both strongly believe in. All politicians say they want to give people more control over their lives; this government is going to make it happen. **[Party political content]** So, rest assured: you will get more control over the hospitals you use, the schools you send your children to, the homes that are built in your community. In our legislative programme, we will be setting out plans to strip away government's unelected, inefficient quangos, plans to loosen the centralised grip of Whitehall bureaucracy, plans to disperse power downwards to you instead.

We are serious about giving councils much more power over the money they use, so they depend less on the whims of Whitehall, and can deliver the services and support that their communities need. We know that devolution of power is meaningless without money. Our plans to disperse power also include strengthening devolution to other parts of Britain; working with Holyrood to implement the recommendations of the Calman Commission; working with the Welsh Assembly on introducing a referendum on the transfer of further powers to Wales; supporting the continued success of the devolved

government in Northern Ireland; and, of course, asking what we can do about the difficult issues surrounding that old question, the West Lothian question.

So, the repeal of illiberal laws, the reform of politics, and the redistribution of power: our very own Great Reform Act. Not everyone will like it: not every MP, not the vested interests that want government to stay closed, opaque, easily captured. But this new government, this new kind of government, creates an enormous opportunity for those of us who have spent our lives fighting for political reform. This is a moment to step back and look at every shortcoming in our democracy, before we launch the most radical programme of reform and empowerment in over a century, a shake-up so important to me that I will be taking direct responsibility for seeing it through. As I do, I will be open, I will be ambitious, and I will listen. I will still be holding my town hall meetings that I have been holding for the last two years around the country, where you can come and ask me whatever you want. The next one is actually in Sheffield on Friday, if you want to come. As I lead the transformation of our political system, I want you to tell me how you want your politics to be. Power will be yours: that is new politics. Thank you very much for listening to me.

QUESTION (Guy Aitchison, Take Back Parliament)

You said that the new politics means fairer votes. You are obviously constrained by the coalition agreement to the second alternative vote, which is not a proportional system. Will the Liberal Democrats keep on fighting for a proportional voting system being on the referendum paper? Will you wear purple to show your support?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

I have a nice range of purple ties, which I wear on appropriate occasions. The referendum will be on AV. That is what the referendum will be. You are right: we can disappear into the undergrowth of all the acronyms of different voting systems. AV is not as fully proportional as other systems. That is what we are going to put to the vote. That is what I will argue for, and that is what many people in government and across parties and beyond, I hope, will argue for, because it will be a major step in first, ensuring that the old first past the post system is put behind us, if we are successful, and secondly, by ensuring that MPs have to secure more than 50% of the vote in their constituencies. That is a huge step forward, combined with the redrawing of the boundaries so that constituencies more equally represent the same number of people. I think that will be a major, major breaking, if you like, of a deadlock which of course has prevailed for so very many decades.

QUESTION (Nick Robinson, BBC News)

You mentioned the rights of terror suspects. You did not mention the rights of the law abiding – you don't feel that the people in their midst, who are regarded as threat to Britain, who the courts would like to deport, and the government would like to deport – are you saying we are stuck with that, because your part of the coalition at least simply will not countenance any change in the human rights laws to stop that?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The law is very clear, which is that it is wrong to deport people for which there is serious concern that they are going to be seriously mistreated, or tortured, or indeed killed. We, like any other civilised nation, abide by the very highest standards of human rights, and we abide by the very highest standards of the protection of those rights. However uncomfortable it might be to defend them from time to time, this government will continue to do so. However, there is a way forward. We will be pursuing, and this government will be pursuing, agreements with those countries – we will be pursuing actively negotiations with those countries where we presently to the court's satisfaction deport people where we want to do so. There are a number of these bilateral agreements which already exist. They need to be properly verified so that the assurances given are not just paper assurances, but that they are proper assurances.

The fact that those assurances have not existed in that form from the Pakistani government is of course a source of great regret, because that has prevented these two individuals from being deported and being deported in line with our law. That is the way forward. That is the way that we will be making sure that deportations can take place where they should take place. At the same time, of course, as the Home Secretary announced yesterday, every single measure will be taken to make sure that as these two individuals are released from custody and from the courts they are nonetheless kept under surveillance, and controlled in a manner which means that they cannot do any harm to the British people. That is, of course, an absolute priority for this government as it is indeed for any government.

QUESTION (Brian Walker, Constitution Unit, UCL)

Is this doable in one term? Is it a programme, all of this, for one term? Do you hope for AV in time for the next election? When we are about it, could I just ask you: is the Times correct in reporting that you intend to appoint over a hundred peers of both parties to the Lords? When we are in the present situation, it works well, and the Lib Dems hold the balance.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

On the latter point, no. We are not suddenly going to – I want to reform the House of Lords; I don't want to stuff the House of Lords. Any transitional arrangement – where the coalition agreement quite rightly said that in that transitional arrangement you want some greater proportionality in the appointments made to the House of Lords – is just that. It is a transitional arrangement. I would like to reduce that to a heartbeat. If we could reform the House of Lords tomorrow and just get on with it, that is what I would like to do. We will do it as soon as we can. We are not going to start orchestrating some great stuffing of the House of Lords. The most important thing is to allow this group of people, who will report by the end of this year, to deliver a plan, which of course would need to take the form of legislation which will lead to the wholesale reform of the House of Lords, which we have been discussing as a country for over a century.

Do I think this whole programme, the much wider programme, is ambitious to complete during a five-year term? Yes, it's very ambitious indeed – it is extraordinarily ambitious. Will there be setbacks? Will there be blocks? Will there be arguments? Yes, there no doubt will be. I just think the shortcomings in the way in which we run politics, the way in which government and the machinery of government has become over-centralised, the way in which freedoms and privacy have been increasingly abused, is now so great that there is no alternative but to be as ambitious as we possibly can be.

Yes, of course, the referendum – we haven't decided on the timing of the referendum yet, but when we do so, of course the assumption is that the referendum – if that referendum is successful, that the next election will be held under the new system. That is certainly the intention. Of course, there are several hurdles to navigate: the timing of the referendum, the precise wording of the referendum, and then of course, as I said earlier quite openly, you have a government which won't be united on the question on the referendum ballot paper. I hope people will take the opportunity to grab that opportunity of change, and then see that change happen when they next go to the ballot box in the general election in 2015.

QUESTION (George Parker, Financial Times)

Can I just pursue that point on the timing of this, and the House of Lords reform in particular? I am not sure that David Cameron shares your sense of urgency about this. He said this was a third term priority for a Tory government before the election. Have you got any undertaking that House of Lords reform will be completed before the next general election?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

I think as you probably have noticed, what both David Cameron said and I said when we were not in coalition, has of course evolved as we have come together in a coalition. The clear understanding that we have reached in the coalition agreement is that House of Lords reform will be a priority, that it won't be kicked into long grass. If there is any undertaking, the undertaking is, certainly for my part, that I am going to be very pragmatic about making sure that it happens, not sort of standing rigidly on ceremony and sort of digging my heels in on this part of reform or that part of reform.

I think we want to be pragmatic as reflected in the coalition agreement. That is why the coalition agreement refers, for instance, to grandfathering arrangements to sort of smooth the way from one arrangement to the next. There are certain principles which are established in the coalition agreement, namely that it will a second chamber which will be elected on a proportional basis. But beyond that pragmatism, the timetable is one which we want to see pursued as quickly as possible, and that is why both of us – both David Cameron and myself – have specified that the date for which this group will report on actually moving towards House of Lords reform is fixed at the end of this year.

QUESTION (John Higginson, Metro)

Can I just ask – you're saying that you would like to give more power back to people. How will that work? Will that be signing up a petition, say? Are there a certain number of signatures that you would get, and are you going to announce how many that would be before someone – for instance, if the people wanted to repeal the Human Rights Act, or any other law, would you then accept that?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

I hope I have sketched out at least many, many areas where we people will have more power, whether it is the power of recall, which is a very specific power of people to recall their MPs if their MPs have been shown to be corrupt. We will, in the coming days and weeks, be unveiling more and more specific ideas about how we want to see patients, pupils, families and communities more empowered in the way in which schools and hospitals are run and organized. I have talked about how local authorities will have much, much more power, over which you have control, over how money is spent in your local area, and of course, the many reforms that I have talked about: having power over people who at the moment make the laws of the land in the House of Lords without any accountability to you in the House of Lords – that will change. Repealing all of those areas where your power has been taken away: your power to protest where and when you like, your power to keep your own details about your own DNA or your own emails private if that is what you wish. Those are all acts of empowerment, and they are all very radical indeed.

We will also be unveiling over the coming period some specific ideas about how you could have local referenda on issues which local communities feel very strongly about. Yesterday, David Cameron, the Prime Minister, talked about the ideas the government has got on allowing people to intervene locally to take over parks, or even try, if they can, to mobilise to take over post offices which are otherwise threatened with closure. There are a whole range of issues which will allow people to take far greater control over their own lives.

QUESTION (Shami Chakrabarti, Liberty)

Deputy Prime Minister, you can imagine how welcome so much of your speech was to us at Liberty and to other human-rights campaigners in this country. Just to pin you down though, on the Human Rights Act, which was conspicuous by its absence from your speech: Mr Robinson, who preceded me, is very well informed about these things, and he was reporting various information yesterday on the BBC. Can we just put it all beyond doubt now – you, above all, leaders of political parties in recent times, during the election campaign, vowed to defend and promote the Human Rights Act. The Conservative Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor Mr Clarke called attacks on the Human Rights Act 'xenophobic legal nonsense'. Will you protect and promote it in government as you vowed to do in opposition?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

You will see the full text of what this government will say on that point and indeed on a whole range of other issues in the coalition agreement, which we



will be seeking to publish in full fairly shortly. What you will see in that agreement is three things. Firstly, we will be seeking to actively promote greater public understanding of the rights that they already enjoy. You and I have talked about this in the past. One of the things that – I think you and I share this view – has gone wrong, is that people simply aren't aware of the rights which every single citizen in the United Kingdom enjoys under the legislation in force.

Secondly, yes, there will be a commission which will look into the case for a British Bill of Rights. It will, however, incorporate and build on all the obligations of the European Convention of Human Rights and the way that those rights are enshrined in British legislation.

QUESTION (Rethink)

I am from Rethink, a charity supporting people with severe mental-health problems. You have talked about change in the House of Lords and constituents being able to get rid of their Members of Parliament. Could you please comment on the present system where an MP is automatically removed from being an MP if they have a mental-health problem and are detained under the Mental Health Act for six months but if they have a severe physical problem, for example a stroke, they are allowed to remain in power?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

I am not aware of the detailed provision so I want to look at it, but I have campaigned long and hard on removing the stigma around mental health and the taboos which have too long attached themselves to mental health. It sounds like that rule is very much in keeping with a very outdated approach to mental health which is totally out of any proportion to the varying mental-health conditions that people can suffer from and indeed how easily they can be both handled and, indeed, fully recovered from. I will undertake to look into it if you could perhaps give me some of the information that you are referring to yourself.

QUESTION (Michael Crick, Newsnight)

If you are serious about decentralising power, shouldn't you restore the budgetary rights of local councils and in particular democratically elected councillors' rights to set council tax at whatever level they see fit?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

We are looking at this in the round. As I said, what I am establishing today is the principle of more fiscal devolution, greater autonomy for local communities to raise money and spend money. There are 1,001 ways in which you can do that and it gets extraordinarily complicated because of the highly geared state of distribution of money from Whitehall to local communities. I think with the exception of Malta we now have the most over-centralised fiscal distribution of money from central government to local government anywhere in the developed world.

So we want to look at it and we do understand – I have established the principle today – that if you are serious about localism, if you are serious

about devolution, you have got to be serious also about devolving greater control over money. That is what we will do; how we will do it, Michael, is something that I am not going to suddenly invent on the back of an envelope. It is something that needs to be looked at a lot more carefully. I am just going to take one more question.

QUESTION (Abigail Lock, Scope)

I better make it a good question then! You have said a couple of times about the opportunity to look at every shortcoming in our democracy; from Scope's perspective one of the main shortcomings in the underrepresentation of disabled people in Parliament, but I know the same would apply to women, people from black and minority ethnic populations as well. If we are moving towards an elected second chamber, how are we going to ensure representation of people from diverse backgrounds? That has been one of the benefits of having People's Peers because you have got a number of disabled peers that might not have got through the electoral system.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

First, I agree with and I speak – probably especially about the Liberal Democrats – about the woeful underrepresentation of women, black, Asian and minority ethnic politicians in Parliament and the disabled too. **[Party political content]**

As for the House of Lords, one of the hidden virtues of having a more proportional system is that there is very, very strong evidence that proportional systems tend to draw on a more diverse pool of candidates putting themselves forward. There are various complex reasons for that but it tends to be the case that the hoops which people feel they have to jump through are not quite as restrictive as in our existing electoral system for the House of Commons. So I think it will lead to a much, much more diverse intake than has traditionally been the case in the House of Commons, and that is why I am excited that one of the specific conditions for the House of Lords reform, as specified in our coalition agreement, was that it would be elected on a proportional basis. Thank you very much.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)