

1st April 2010

# Portland



## Political Notebook by George Pascoe-Watson

Enjoy the Easter break - because General Election 2010 starts next Tuesday.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown will go to Buckingham Palace on Tuesday morning and ask The Queen to dissolve Parliament.

There'll be a one week "wash up" to finish outstanding Parliamentary business and then a gruelling three week election campaign.

Political leaders are now wrangling over the details of the forthcoming televised election debates.

The PM has been given permission to stand on the left of the stage for each one because he is blind in his left eye.

This will allow him to keep David Cameron and Nick Clegg in his vision at all times.

The Tory and LibDem leaders will draw lots for the middle and stage right positions for each of the three TV clashes.

The Chancellors' debate on Monday night proved how important stage positioning can be for the dynamics and result of each showdown.

Whoever bags the centre stage position can appear to carry more authority than those on either flank.

There is little doubt the TV debates will play a major role in the 2010 campaign with huge numbers of voters still undecided.

These are the swing voters Mr Cameron needs to sweep him into the Commons with a working majority.

Remember: the Tories need to win an extra 117 seats on May 6 to give him a majority of just one.

Britain's bookmakers are braced for a Tory majority of around 12 seats right now and that's before the election battle begins.

The bookies are often a good guide to the true feelings of the nation.

The polls are showing a seven to 10 point lead for the Conservatives as Easter begins.

But it's in the marginals that the real battle is to be won - and in the south of England and parts of the north, the figures are much stronger for Team Cameron.

A key moment to focus on will be the New of the World poll of marginal seats expected over the next month.

Their marginal survey stopped Mr Brown from holding a snap election in October 2007.

Here we will discover a far more accurate picture of what's likely to be the outcome of election 2010.

Cabinet ministers I know are already preparing for a return to public transport, saying farewell to their government drivers and Jaguars.

It is a brutal transition to those who have served as ministers of the Crown for the last decade or so - to discover there is no car waiting for them morning, noon and night.

Some are clinging onto the mild hope they might remain the largest party but most are already considering their next moves and filing business cards with a view to taking on extra work in the commercial world.

Mr Cameron and the Tory secret weapon, his pregnant wife Samantha, will be visible over the Easter weekend on visits to social projects.

Labour have taken the weekend off.