

Political Notebook by George Pascoe-Watson

The shape of Britain's next government won't be clear for some hours yet but David Cameron will almost certainly become Britain's 53rd Prime Minister by Monday morning.

Mr Cameron could not muster enough seats to force Gordon Brown to call in the removal men and leave Number 10 Downing Street.

It was painfully close but in the end, he's fallen short of a majority by a mere handful of seats.

A few Tory candidates seemed more interested in seeking publicity than clinically winning their seats.

This has left him with no choice but to reach out to Nick Clegg's LibDems to cut a coalition deal.

Congratulations, though, to Portland's George Eustice who won his Cornwall seat by 66 votes for the Tories.

Only time will tell how the deal will materialise but it will be hard for the LibDem leader who knows the Tories won't guarantee a shakeup of voting reform.

So far it is exactly as Peter Kellner, President of YouGov, predicted in a Portland seminar a fortnight ago.

The only difference is that Gordon Brown has refused to leave Number 10.

My sources inside Downing Street tell me this afternoon the (current) PM is in no mood to leave, hasn't packed his bags and is hanging on to see what happens next.

He believes he can still form a coalition with the LibDems if Mr Clegg and Mr Cameron cannot come to a deal.

But well-placed insiders at Conservative HQ are confident Mr Cameron will be PM by the end of the weekend.

Indeed, the Tory leader joked to his Special Branch driver this afternoon "there's an illegal sitting tenant in there, you should sling him out" as he was ferried past Downing Street.

Mr Cameron knows it is vital for him to show forward momentum as quickly as possible if he is to force Mr Brown to call in the removal men soon.

That's why he was keen to hold emergency talks with Mr Clegg this afternoon which have now been completed.

But the LibDem leader is not going to rush into anything and may well try to string things out before speaking to his MPs tomorrow.

These talks will define what, exactly, will form the basis of an historic agreement between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

How much influence will Mr Clegg have over Cabinet ministers and policy? These details are far from clear at this early stage.

Certainly, the two leaders remain bitterly opposed on Britain's membership of the euro although Mr Clegg did begin to dilute his position during the last TV debate.

Mr Cameron, too, made it abundantly clear he will not budge on bringing in a cap on immigration - something which will incense all LibDems.

Some traditional Tories are already letting it be known they would not support any coalition with Mr Clegg and are horrified by what their leader appeared to offer this afternoon.

The Spectator, the Tory bible, almost instantly condemned Mr Cameron's offer to the LibDems.

But Mr Cameron was careful not to put electoral reform on the table.

And as I write, David Davis, the right winger Mr Cameron beat for the Conservative leadership four years ago, has publicly declared a coalition with the LibDems is the right thing to do.

The Tory leader is in an awkward spot because he cannot actually run a minority government whilst Mr Brown is refusing to leave Number 10.

That's why he is trying to cut a deal with Mr Clegg - because that appears to be the only way of shifting the Clunking Fist.

Forget all talk of Vince Cable becoming Chancellor under a Tory LibDem coalition - the job is so important in a recession that George Osborne will be the choice.

But there could be other senior figures in a Cameron Cabinet who hail from the LibDems. Only time will tell who they might be.

However, some LibDems are wary of a deal with the Conservatives. A deal in the 1970s with Labour left Liberals in the Cabinet forced to carry out the dirty work and pay the price at the next election.

Who wants to be handed the hospital passes involved in massive and brutal public spending cuts and tax rises?

As for Labour it is inconceivable that Mr Brown will last as leader of his party - expect a pretty furious battle for the Labour Party crown.

The serious money is on a David Miliband leadership victory in a straight fight with Ed Balls who has the unions on board but cannot command grassroots members and MPs.

Kingmaker Clegg will soon name his price for making Mr Cameron Premier and two questions remain: what are the details of the coalition - and for how long will it last before Mr Cameron calls a second election?

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