

## **ORIGINAL TEXT OF ARTICLE published in the *Northampton Chronicle & Echo* 26 August 2010**

So the Lib-Con coalition has survived 100 days. It is only 100 days? It feels like almost a year since the General Election, so much has happened.

I've been asking people in Northampton what they think of the Lib-Con coalition. People of all political persuasions. The general response I get is that they like it – much to their surprise. Many people thought it wouldn't last, many people thought that the Lib Dems would be swallowed up and wouldn't get their ideas implemented, but they now acknowledge that they were wrong.

As a Lib Dem I'm thrilled to see so many of our manifesto pledges being carried out, and being carried out so rapidly. Dumping the expensive and useless ID card scheme. Tick! Implementing the pupil premium – more money being given to schools, frequently in deprived areas, targeted at children who need extra help to catch up. Tick! Increasing the tax threshold, taking more lower-paid people out of tax altogether. Tick! Increasing capital gains tax on the wealthy. Tick!

The one worry I have is that people will forget that these were our ideas. Ideas debated in Party Conference years ago, worked up into policy, voted through and then put forward to the voting public in our manifesto. These were the ideas that got us into power, but in 2015 when the next General Election is held (another Lib Dem manifesto pledge, fixed-term Parliaments. Tick!) will the voters remember who came up with the policies and will they reward us with more votes?

As I have commented in a previous column, the Lib Dems are being blamed for the pain of the forthcoming spending cuts. Not the coalition, the Lib Dems. It will be ironic if we get the blame for all the bad things the coalition has to do, and the Conservatives get the credit for all the good things, even though they were our ideas and wouldn't have been implemented without our determination.

It reminds me of the sub-plot in *Miss Congeniality* – did you see that film? The main story is Sandra Bullock as an unfeminine cop transformed into a beauty queen to catch a criminal. The subplot is the fact that throughout the film she's the one that has all the ideas and insights, and suggests ways to catch the criminal, but as she's a woman the other cops ignore her, and her ideas are only implemented when her male partner suggests them. He's ultimately promoted. It's a funny film, but it exasperated me that her character didn't get angry at being completely ignored. And she had to fetch the coffee for the men all the time.

I've also described us in the past as the Cassandra Party. For those of you that don't know the story, I don't mean Rodney's girlfriend from *Only Fools and Horses*, I mean the woman who was cursed by the Roman Gods. She had the gift of always seeing the truth, but her curse was that she was never believed. All those years when Vince Cable was protesting vigorously in The House of Commons about excess credit being given to private individuals, no-one believed him. Following the crash I've heard commentators saying "Why didn't anyone warn us?". We did buddy, we did, but you weren't listening.

Still, no point in worrying now about the next General Election. What matters now is pushing for more and more of our policies to be implemented, and it's great to have Nick Clegg as Deputy Prime Minister with the power and influence to do this. You see that's the main difference between us and the Conservatives. At the 2010 General Election the Conservatives felt that it was 'their turn' to rule this country, they wanted power for its own sake, in fact they felt they were entitled to power. The Lib Dems wanted power not for its own sake but to change things, to get our policies implemented, to make this a better country. We don't mind sharing power as long as our ideas to improve lives and decrease the gap between rich and poor are implemented.

Nick Clegg has been close to Northampton for many years. When I first joined the Party I worked hard to help him get elected to the European Parliament in 2009. Once elected he tried to use his influence for us, supporting our bid to get city status in ....- here he is pictured with me and Councillor Richard Church all those years ago. Anyone who has met Nick and spent any time with him knows that he is an honourable man, who cares passionately about life chances and equality of opportunity. The Lib Dems may have been ignored in the past, but with Nick in such a pivotal role I believe that Lib Dem ideas will continue to resonate throughout the next 5 years of this coalition Government. Just don't forget whose ideas they are.