

Labour's Election Game-Plan and why the Tories Won't Win.

An interview with Jim Brent of the No.10 Election Strategy Team.

Mr Brent talked to John Problem.

38 year old Jim Brent, a lifelong political researcher, was appointed by Gordon Brown to his newly formed Election Strategy Team last September. The Team is a large one and reports uniquely to the Prime Minister, once a week, with appraisals of the past week and plans for the upcoming two weeks. The whole is reviewed against the agreed overall strategy.

'Yeah, we do have a fixed overall strategy,' said Mr. Brent. 'It has four main props. Firstly, attacking Cameron. And that's not difficult. Look at him. He looks as though he's never done a day's work in his life, Not a line on his face, not a worry frown anywhere. He looks a real Eton toff. Doesn't grab the voters, no charisma. An easy target. It kills me that half of all our Prime Ministers came from Eton. Not this one, I can tell you.'

So the class-war approach is part of the strategy? 'You bet it is.' But didn't Lord Mandelson say he didn't approve? 'You have to understand that Peter likes to kick up a little dust now and then. Of course the class thing is going to be a big factor in this election. And maybe more.' I asked him what he meant by this intriguing comment. 'Well, politics is not the Chelsea Flower Show, is it? It doesn't smell sweet all the time. If there's any dirt comes up about the opposition, well, we're going to use it.' Was he actively looking for 'dirt'? 'We keep our eyes and our ears open.'

How is the election strategy agreed on and who is the final decider. Gordon Brown? 'Absolutely. Gordon's in full control. He's a better listener than he used to be but he calls the shots. You should see the Cabinet Meetings. They're almost entirely given over to election matters. Everybody comes up with their views. One after the other and sometimes together! Takes hours. Then he closes down the meeting and off we go with him for another few hours to thrash out the tactics. Once a week. Hard work, I can tell you.' Does Lord Mandelson get involved? 'Yeah. Look. I know Peter's a big fascination for you guys in the media but, you know, he's just a contributor, like the rest of us.'

And what is the second prop? 'Ridiculing everything they do. Like that stupid, poncey poster - "we can't go on like this." Where did they dream that up? Sounds like two old dears at a social. And they're all over the shop with their economic policies. Actually, on second thought, they might have some policies, but they sure as hell don't know how to get them across. Pathetic. Anyway, they can't win. We've got the benefit vote - all those voters on benefits, we've got the old labour vote that wouldn't vote tory for a million quid. Then there's a lot of people who've done well out of us. All the people we got jobs for in the public sector, plus dentists, doctors, IT consultants, and a ton of managers everywhere you look in the NHS, the police, education, and so on.' But what about the marginal seats where labour won last time by a small majority? 'Yeah, well. We've

organised our big guns to give them their best. Peter and Ed and Harriet and Two Jags and, well, they've all been told to get out to each of the marginals and work the hell out of them. Not sure about Tony. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we're organising what we call 'statesman events' for Gordon. Half the world's leaders have been invited to London between now and next May so that Gordon can look statesmanlike, and in charge, and a world leader, himself. That'll take the shine off Cameron's chops. And, to top it all, the economy's looking good. Well, so far.'

Clearly, you're very confident. 'Absolutely. Our only worry is that, you know, that it might rain all day or some other stupid thing to stop the voters coming out. And you get a hung parliament. But if that happens, well, we've got a real killer. We've stitched up a deal with the LibDems! They'll do anything for a ministerial seat or two. Neat, eh? Hell, it's three o'clock. Gotta run. See you.'