

Goodbye to "spin & split"?

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spin or split?

Does the new coalition government herald a new approach to political communications? Yes, but don't think it is any less political.

The Nick 'n' Dave Garden press conference was a triumph because whenever they were challenged they responded honestly and positively. They were charming to each other, the media and the public.

Channel 4 News' Gary Gibbon asked the first question and typically he put his finger on the real strategic issue that this love-in represented. We thought, said Gary, that this Lib-Con deal was going to be an 'arrangement' but it seems it is actually a 'mission'. Are you serious about changing the landscape of politics?

Well they say that they are and we should take them at face value. I think Dave (and Nick) has realised that this is actually an advantage during a period when they will have to make brutal cuts and decisions where no-one wins, not even their own supporters.

The new-found transparent and collaborative politics allows them to level with the public. And when things get sticky they can play down rifts by citing the natural disparities of coalition. So in effect, the media will have to stop playing the game of trying to find fractional and factional differences.

Journalists will not be able to dredge up some bitter backbencher to 'slate' his leader in the expectation that the government will be 'rocked'. The coalition government has built into it a kind of suspension system that will allow it to ride those bumps.

Compare that to the bright sunny optimism of Blair and '97 or the strident politics of fear practiced by Howard, Hague and Iain Duncan Smith over the last decade.

Of course, people like [Polly Toynbee](#) are right to point out much deeper strategic strains within the coalition, but even she acknowledges that this is a genuine partnership:

"this coalition may be an Ikea flat-pack with vital screws missing. Looking glossy in its box, it plainly is a bold step into better politics entered into in good faith by both leaders, but once assembled it will wobble"

Nor does it signal the end to choreography from government. The Nick and Dave presser was a masterclass in effortless political presentation. The use of humour and body language was so post-Brown, post-Campbell, post-New Labour.

But then Health Secretary Andrew Lansley spoils it all by going on to the Today Programme and refuses to answer simply straight questions. Given a chance to match his leaders' candour he sought to square various health spending circles and left the listener bemused and unenthused.

So the media (and the opposition) should be tougher and more rigorous than ever in its oversight of this complex coalition. The public deserves nothing less at this critical phase in British history. But if it only seeks splits it will miss the real stories about the policies.

