

Introduction

Political power in the UK is concentrated in No. 10 Downing Street and Whitehall. Yet the daily theatre of parliamentary politics makes further political analysis difficult, not least for parliamentarians. When it has to be viewed through the distorting lens of the media — whose interest is to play up the sensational, the trivial and the personal, it becomes ever more awkward for any of us to take serious stock of where Britain's political development has got to and where it is going. This is particularly so when trying to discuss seriously such a politically loaded and heavily caricatured concept as “Presidentialism”. *I use the term UK Presidency as a description not an accusation.* Equally I write of the Prime Ministership as a concept and not of individual Prime Ministers unless pertinent.

I will attempt to step back and see the big picture — whenever possible without a partisan eye. Having served in the Labour government for the past four years has, hopefully, helped with some insights. Often those inside government who are most in need of an open discussion on these issues are those most inhibited, not least because they are fearful of the random nature of Prime Ministerial patronage, I am happy here to serve as a proxy for many of them.

I have attempted to write, not for any party advantage, but more in the spirit of an open letter to the current and future Prime Ministers to help light a way forward and in a small way assist the progress of British politics so that electors, and perhaps even some practising politicians, might better understand their democracy, and its potential. The continuing trend towards lower turnouts in UK elections and deeper political cynicism as well as external threats to democracy make it ever more important that we understand our own, unique democracy, constantly maintain it and develop a wish and a will to sustain and develop it.

Summary

Those who have a limited attention span may wish just to scan the text for the *italics*. For journalists, MPs and other such bluffers the summary is:

- The UK has, in effect, a Presidency
- We should recognise it
- We should welcome it
- We should democratically control it