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## Man with a plan: Blast from past?

By Gavin Stamp  
Political reporter, BBC News

**As an old Etonian skilled in the arts of political presentation, David Cameron has often found himself being compared to Harold Macmillan.**



Hugh Gaitskell's "plan" was rejected at the 1959 election

But following his conference speech in Birmingham, a more unlikely parallel is being drawn between the Tory leader and the man that Macmillan defeated in the 1959 election - Hugh Gaitskell.

When Cameron told the Tory faithful that he was a "man with a plan", he was - deliberately or not - echoing a phrase that Gaitskell employed almost 50 years ago.

Trying to unseat Macmillan in 1959, Gaitskell declared himself the "man with the plan" to make Britain both a more prosperous and a fairer society.

The historical connection may be unsettling for the Tory leader as Gaitskell was soundly beaten in the 1959 election, Macmillan romping home with a 100-seat majority.

### Phrase from the past

Historian Keith Flett says: "The man with a plan sounds quite nice but the history of it is rather chequered."

Like Labour right now, the Tories were in the doldrums in the wake of the 1956 Suez crisis and facing a rejuvenated opposition led by a younger and seemingly popular leader.

"It was assumed Gaitskell was going to win," Flett says of the 1959 election.

As it turned out, the strength of the economy and consumers' new-found spending power, memorably encapsulated by Macmillan's "never had it so good" slogan, helped the Tories easily win the day.

"Voters thought do they really want to replace the person in power with someone they are not entirely sure what they are going to do - it's not just a question of planning. It is a question of doing," says Flett.

### 'Risks'

But what of the slogan itself?

The Conservatives said the fact that David Cameron had used a phrase once used by a Labour leader was a "total coincidence".

"Right now the country needs a plan and there are only so many phrases one can use," a party spokesman said.

Cultural branding expert Dr Alex Gordon says it is designed to be a memorable phrase that conveys strength and reassurance but also shows Cameron has a detailed agenda for government.

"It is high-risk," he says. "It captures the headlines and significantly differentiates him from his opponents, but it does leave him open to risk because he is duty bound to deliver on the promise.

"It also places enormous weight on him as a personal brand rather than the master plan of the Tory party."

Gaitskell failed to convince the majority of voters that the economic boom they were enjoying, and associated with the Tories, was not the good thing it seemed and should be entrusted to somebody else.

Cameron knows he will have to assure the voters that, in a time of economic troubles, that he is better qualified to guide people through than Labour.

In Wednesday's speech, Cameron argued character and judgment were more important strengths in an aspiring leader than experience - pointing to Margaret Thatcher's defeat of Jim Callaghan in 1979.

But, as references to 1959 seem to show, the qualities needed to win an election can never be said to be clearcut.

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