

Establishing the criteria to assess May's Tories by

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The Conservative manifesto has effectively abandoned the aim of closing the deficit. The earliest date when a balanced budget is now anticipated is 2025. For all practical purposes that means never: setting economic goals for the parliament after next is meaningless.

Three issues are worth noting. The first is how temporary political influence is, even without a change in ruling party. George Osborne's budget obsession departed with him for all practical purposes.

The second is how fickle the electorate is. David Cameron won in 2015 with his 'long term economic plan'. It died in 2016 and has been buried in 2017. And the electorate are not punishing the Tories for that.

Third, the question has to be asked as to what this plan was really all about. Was it really about the deeply undesirable goal of a balanced budget that strips money and growth out of the economy whilst leaving it economically unstable and subject to excessive private debt? Or was it simply about shrinking the state?

I always suspected that this so called 'plan' and the supposedly necessary austerity that went with it was really all about slashing the size of government and nothing at all about any supposed need to balance the books, which anyone who had ever been anywhere near the Treasury knew to be wholly irrelevant.

But if this is the case, let's be clear that the gloves are now off. May can no longer claim an over-arching economic necessity to justify cuts to services. Any such cut is now by choice.

She says in the manifesto that she 'abhors social division, injustice, unfairness and inequality' and that she sees 'rigid dogma and ideology not just as needless but dangerous'. They are the criteria for assessing what she does then. And she 's going to have a tough time justifying much of what she will propose on that basis.