

Flooding: Why is the taxpayer picking up the tab? There's an EU fund!

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Mike Sivier

2/14/2014



The Conservative response: David Cameron swans around the Somerset Levels in his wellies while local MP Ian Liddell-Grainger (second from left) tries to get a word in edgewise.

It seems that David ‘Money Is No Object’ Cameron is unnecessarily forcing British taxpayers to fork out for flood relief while European officials scratch their heads and wonder why he isn’t taking advantage of a huge EU fund that is available to us.

We should all know why the comedy Prime Minister is avoiding Europe – he doesn’t want to lose face.

Eurosceptics in the Conservative Party across the UK criticise our membership because we pay so much in and take so little out (in their perception); this argument would be defeated if Cameron actually used the fund in the manner for which it was created and he would then lose support from members of his Parliamentary party.

Also, at a time when the UK’s future in Europe is being questioned, it would be “politically sensitive” (as *Reuters* describes it) for Cameron to go there and ask for a handout.

But governments are judged on the way they deal with crises ([as the *Political Rant* blog put it](#)) – and this one has put Cameron, figuratively as well as literally, between the rock and the river.

[According to Reuters](#): “Asked whether Britain would ask for EU money, Cameron’s official spokesman told reporters on Wednesday the government was looking at every source of possible funding, playing down the idea that there was anything political behind it.

“Under EU rules, a country has 10 weeks from the first damage caused by a natural disaster to request aid.

“A person close to Cameron said there were technical grounds to do with spending thresholds that determined when to apply for a grant. Britain had no desire to get into a war of words with Brussels on the matter, he said.”

The news agency added that the government had deployed the armed forces to evacuate residents and shore up river defences, while under fire from critics for what ministers have acknowledged was a slow initial response.

Political Rant is less diplomatic (as you might expect): “Ken Clarke said it was just a normal winter and people complaining about flood defences were just a ‘lynch mob’. Eric Pickles criticised the Environment Agency while the Environment Agency criticised government cuts and Owen Paterson criticised Eric Pickles.

“David Cameron has undertaken several jaunts in his nice clean wellies, first to Kent just after Christmas where he was harangued by people left waist-deep in water without power for a week, then Somerset which he only visited after Prince Charles had been the day before, making it look rather silly the Prime Minister hadn’t bothered, and ... to Cornwall where, a friend tells me, Railtrack diverted engineers who were supposed to be fixing the washed-out rail line at Dawlish to shake hands with the PM at a rail depot.

“The same PM has talked sadly about how a power cut interrupted his viewing of *The Sound of Music* on New Year’s Day while staying silent about two SSE engineers who said they were diverted from reinstating the power for 11,000 people to locate his trip switch.

“When the floods recede, we are more than likely to find a few people who died.”

Yes, and they’ll be in rural areas because the increased funds Cameron has announced amount only to a slightly smaller *cut* than he had originally intended, and the funding formula for flood defences demands £8 of economic benefit for every £1 spent – meaning a concentration on densely-populated urban areas.

Add to that the fact that Cameron only bothered to act when Conservative-voting areas were affected – the Somerset Levels, Windsor, Reading, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Kent – and couldn’t care less when the waters were hitting places like Scunthorpe (as revealed on the BBC’s *Question Time* yesterday) and Cameron has put himself in a serious political mire.

He has made it clear that his is a government that only looks after its own supporters.

Everyone else can drown.

We won’t forget that.

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