

The Man Who Should Be Prime Minister

In a Parliamentary system, wartime presents special challenges to the Opposition party. The present Leader of the Opposition in Britain (Iain Duncan-Smith – 'IDS') has sadly failed to meet these challenges. He has engaged in pointless, opportunistic sniping at the Prime Minister's conduct of the war that has no effect but to undermine the policy that they both agree on, without bringing to bear any coherent criticism either on that or most other issues.

For instance, at the last Prime Minister's Question Time, IDS devoted his questions to speculations based on a leaked report of a Parliamentary Committee which, he said, was "another nail in the coffin of this government". On this, as on other occasions, he not only indulged in meaningless pomposity, but came very close to endorsing the idiotarian/villepinist conspiracy theory that the government had lied about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction: "the lying and the spinning won't stop until we get rid of this Prime Minister". The following day the report was published and, although it made some minor criticisms, **cleared** the government of any such wrongdoing.

Here, for comparison, is how the man who *should* be Leader of the Opposition (or, indeed, Prime Minister), Michael Portillo, responded to the same challenge (Sky News, September 14 2003), when an interviewer tried to trip him up on this very tricky ground:

"The question that is being debated here is trust in the Prime Minister. I'm one of these people who feels that the Prime Minister outrageously span and manipulated information for five or six years at the beginning of his premiership. I also feel that he was more straightforward and more honest over Iraq than he'd been over anything else. This is like a man who was unconvicted for five years and is now accused of a crime he didn't actually commit. And correspondingly my sympathy at this outrageous miscarriage of justice is somewhat limited."

A near-perfect statement combining full-hearted opposition to the Prime Minister's style of government in general, with uncompromising support for him, not only on the issue of the war, but against the scurrilous conspiracy-theoretic bandwagon with which IDS had not been able to resist associating himself and his

party, to the detriment of all.

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