

# The Brown supremacy

by Irwin Stelzer

*Gordon Brown is odds-on to be prime minister by 2008. How different from Blair would he be? What are his foreign policy ideas? What about his adamant personality and his Scottishness? Admirers and critics speculate*

---

## Statist but prudent

by Irwin Stelzer Rupert Murdoch's unofficial ambassador to Britain sees little to fear in a Brown premiership. It is not certain that Gordon Brown is headed for No 10 - the only person who might know when the job will be open is Tony Blair, and he isn't saying. Besides, Blair is not in complete control of the timing: even if he decides that he needs another full term to accomplish his goals, there is always the possibility that events might intervene to put Brown into No 10 at some point during the next parliament.

At present Brown has no serious rival. But he is essentially a one-issue politician - he has delivered a robust economy, one that appears to have reduced unemployment and, along with a rapid-fire series of tax increases, has provided a big supply of funds for the expansion of the public sector. If there is a recession - and at some point there will be one - the chancellor will become vulnerable to the many enemies he has made among his colleagues by making clear the gap between their IQs and his. (The inevitability of a recession is also a reason for Brown wanting to get his hands on the crown sooner rather than later; inheriting the premiership with the economy tottering and the Tories rejuvenated would not be fun.)

But one would demand long odds to bet against the proposition that Brown will one day inherit Tony Blair's job. Blair will probably want to cap his career in another, global, job - UN secretary-general? - or secure his beloved family's financial future (the prime minister aspires to a higher material standard of living than does the son of a man of the manse).

To register an informed guess about how different Brown would be from Blair once in No 10, we must start by disposing of two popular misconceptions about both men. It is simply wrong to think of Blair as the sizzle and Brown as the steak. That underestimates both the former's substance and the latter's ability to charm. It is equally wrong to think of the prime minister as a waverer who panders to the popular mood, and the chancellor as a man steady in pursuit of an unchanging agenda.

The reality is that Blair has faced down the majority of his party, and the great mass of the voters, it seems, in pursuit of a foreign policy that includes an unpopular war in Iraq, signing on to the new, centralising European constitution, and fighting to replace the pound with the euro. Not a vote-winner in the lot.

Meanwhile, Brown, while certainly a man who knows the direction in which he wants to take Britain, has shown flexibility in getting there. There is no secret about his goals: redistributing income from upper and middle Britain to the poor; replacing welfare with work; setting macroeconomic policies that include quasi-independence for the Bank of England ("quasi" because he continues to set the Bank's inflation target) and a coherent fiscal policy built around his famous "golden rule"; raising taxes by stealth when possible and overtly when concealment is impossible; shovelling more money to the public sector than it can efficiently absorb, at least initially.

But, like Blair, Brown is not above the strategic retreats necessary for the successful realisation of his vision. If soaring oil prices make it politic to waive an increase in petrol taxes, the increase is waived. If handing more money to the department of trade and industry, which he detests, is necessary to buy peace and support in cabinet, the money is conjured up. As prime minister, Brown would remain the pragmatic ideologue that he has been ever since taking over the treasury.

The domestic policies of a Brown government are easier to discern than the foreign. The key, as now, will be policies that stimulate sustainable economic growth. That growth is necessary if the economy is to spin off the higher tax revenues Brown needs to fund his continuing expansion of the public sector.

The chancellor likes to point out that the 602,000 decline in the number of unemployed since 1997, and the fall in the unemployment rate from over 7 per cent to around 5 per cent, allows him to spend on the NHS and education money that previously went to finance the dole queues. He is less happy to note an increase of some 100,000 on disability benefit or that the 600,000 increase in public sector employment just about equals the decline in total unemployment.

This prompts a health warning that should be attached to all government statistics, including many of those cited here. My experience with private briefings on trends in crime and student performance has taught me that good statistical method is not a top priority of many in this government.

But even allowing for a bit of self-serving statistical hocus-pocus, there is no denying that the British economy has performed rather well since Brown set the macroeconomic framework. Yes, consumers have borrowed a lot of money, but the increase in the value of their homes has combined with low interest rates to keep their debt burden bearable. And yes, the government has been borrowing more, but (so far) not so large a portion of GDP as to call the soundness of its fiscal condition into question. And yes, the government is taking a larger share of the economic pie - at present, one out of every five workers is on the public sector payroll, but one out of every three new jobs created since 1997 is in the public sector.

But Brown has made clear that he does not believe talk of the dire political consequences of higher taxes; he believes that if more spending discernibly improves public services, the voters will be more than merely forgiving. So spend he will.

Data provided to me by the treasury show that Brown is planning to lift public spending as a portion of GDP to 42.3 per cent in 2007-08, well above its low point of 37.4 per cent in 1999-00. He likes to point out that 42.3 per cent of GDP remains a bit below the 42.4 per cent that prevailed in the last year of the Tory government (oddly enough, he seems to be wrong about that: in 1996-97, government expenditure came to 40.8 per cent).

The Brown upturn is partly a result of the increase in spending on the NHS, rising from 5.4 per cent of GDP when he took control of the public purse to a projected 7.8 per cent in 2007-08. Few deny that the NHS needed an infusion of funds, especially if capacity was to be expanded to permit the greater choice that is the prime minister's goal. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine whether the added funds for the NHS are being spent efficiently. The treasury claims that 90 per cent of the increase in staffing has been "at the frontline," and that the planned further near-term increase in staff, totalling some 143,201, will also augment the "frontline" fighters. But an examination of that figure shows that only 9,021 of the new positions will be filled by "consultants and non-consultant career grade doctors and junior doctors," 8,058 by GPs and GP practice staff, and 32,271 by qualified nurses. A group of 67,457 "support to clinical staff" makes up the bulk of the other positions.

Are all of these newcomers producing better results? We cannot know, for three reasons. First, it takes time to build up capacity in the system: money spent now cannot be expected to pay off for some time. Second, productivity in healthcare is notoriously difficult to measure. Third, the government has a history of changing definitions, selecting unrepresentative years for comparison, and warning healthcare providers when the inspectors are due to call, permitting a temporary sprucing up of the data. My guess is that Brown is making a political calculation: he does not believe that the money must be spent efficiently for the higher taxes to be acceptable - the public is not capable of exquisite cost-benefit analyses. All he needs in order to win votes is some improvement in services - even if the improvement is trivial compared to the money being spent to get it.

It is, therefore, not unreasonable to guess that, unrestrained by a prime minister who worries more about middle Britain's sensitivity to further tax increases, Brown will move public spending from its current level of about 41.5 per cent to 45 per cent of what he hopes will be an ever-growing GDP. That would give him a larger slice of a larger pie with which to fund his domestic agenda. It would also put him roughly where he is comfortable - midway between the US and EU models.

Brown famously sees much that he likes in the US model. He admires risk-taking, entrepreneurial America, which is why he was so keen to change the bankruptcy laws so that one failure did not forever sideline an entrepreneur, and to reduce capital gains taxes on small business. (His admiration is, of course, selective and he chooses not to see lower personal tax levels as a key part of US dynamism.) He abhors barriers to competition, not only because competition produces efficiency and cheaper goods, but because the removal of entry barriers is a key to the socially mobile, opportunity society he is trying to create - in place of what he calls "a closed circle of the privileged." Hence tough competition laws that include provision for the incarceration of price-fixers.

The chancellor also sees much that he dislikes in continental Europe. He believes that Europe's rigid labour markets are

responsible for the eurozone's persistent high unemployment. He is convinced that the stability and growth pact, with its requirement that deficits not exceed 3 per cent of GDP regardless of the phase of the business cycle, is a nonsense, and should be replaced with his own "golden rule" that permits more economically sensible and flexible responses to different phases of the cycle.

Still, he is not ready to accept a safety net as porous, or levels of inequality as great as those in America. Brown is a redistributionist to his core, and operating from No 10 he is likely to be a more aggressive one than the current incumbent. Free from any lust for fine clothes, large mansions or fast cars, he views income beyond a quite modest level with suspicion - to be left in the pocket of the person who earned it only to the extent that it provides an incentive to hard work and risk-taking. Brown believes that at least some of the current inequality in British society is a legacy of the class system. This justifies higher taxes on the well off, and an increase in transfer payments to the less well off. It justifies hostility to elite institutions such as Oxford, and a willingness to saddle private hospitals with uneconomic work rules. It justifies, in short, a government crusade to countervail the still enduring inequities created by class. Blair speaks the language of social justice with sincerity; Brown is a seething cauldron of resentment at the institutions and people that make life less than fair for many Britons.

Surrounding all of this is an emphasis on growing the pie that is to be redistributed and - an old-fashioned, Victorian twist - on redistribution only to "the deserving poor" to the extent that this group can be identified. Those who will not join the many training and job placement programmes that pour from the chancellor's pen are not the objects of his concern; those who work but cannot afford a holiday for their family, or nursery school for their two year old, are.

Would Brown as prime minister be willing to attack inefficiencies in the public sector with the same vigour with which he assaults the rigidities in the private sector? That boils down to the question of just where he stands on the role of choice, the only instrument capable of improving the quality and lowering the cost of provision of healthcare and education.

Blairites tend to portray the chancellor as an opponent of reform, and most particularly an opponent of allowing patients to choose their doctors, and parents to choose their schools. The truth is more complex. Brown has always styled himself a realist, opposed to announcements that are no more than photo-ops - which is how he regarded speeches about extending choice in the early days of Labour in power when the health and education systems did not have the capacity to permit the exercise of choice. Now that the flood of cash has added some capacity, and choice is becoming more possible, the chancellor has to consider just where he stands. His original position was that even if sufficient capacity did exist in the healthcare system, the gap in the information available to healthcare providers compared with that available to less informed consumers - the so-called "information asymmetry" - is so great that patients cannot be allowed to choose. Doctor and Westminster know best.

But in a demonstration of his capacity to assimilate new information, and incorporate it in policy, Brown has recently edged towards allowing greater patient choice. His reason: modern-day consumers are better informed about their treatment options, narrowing the information gap between them and their health care professional. Score one for reform.

But the chancellor cannot shed his statist skin completely. He still believes that the issue of choice remains more a slogan than a policy, and in this he has recently been backed up by many of the foundation hospitals themselves which have stressed the importance of capacity for making choice possible. Moreover, from the vantage point of a man brought up in a small town in Scotland, Brown believes that patients want to be near their homes and families, and will rarely take up the choice of superior treatment at a more distant facility. After all, argues Brown, two thirds of local hospital beds are devoted to emergency care and maternity cases, the first for which there is little choice but to head for the nearest hospital, and the second for which he believes patients do not even consider using a distant facility. Besides, as the man who is providing the money to the NHS, Brown wants to retain control of how it is spent. That means centrally determined targets rather than the chaos of free patient choice.

What about a Brown foreign policy? We know that his enthusiasm for further integration with the EU is slender. He has seen how the excessive regulation of product and labour markets, and the ill-considered fiscal policies of the EU, have stifled economic growth and swelled the dole queues. He knows that the euro and its one-size-fits-all interest rate have extended Germany's recession while at the same time fuelling inflation in other countries. And he can see the difference between the professionalism and performance of the Bank of England and the incoherence of the European Central Bank. So until he sees real economic reform in Europe and the adoption by the EU of something like his own fiscal rules, he is far less willing than Blair to put Britain's economic achievements at risk by tying its economy to that of the EU.

Another foreign policy difference is likely to be a shying away from Blairite-style interventionism. Brown would not want to abort the special relationship with America, but neither would he go as far as Blair to nurture it. Blair has made it clear that he is willing to take a lot of domestic and international heat in order to stand shoulder to shoulder with America, whether under

Bill Clinton or George W Bush. Blair is a man for whom the creation of a new world order - with Britain the bridge between America and Europe - is a compelling vision, Brown is rather more inclined to confine his America-loving to that nation's dynamic, entrepreneurial economy.

Whereas Blair sees many foreign policy issues as black and white, Brown sees them as black and red - as in ink. He wants to conserve his resources for use on the home front, especially since he is far from certain that the peoples of the world aspire to democratic institutions, a deeply held conviction of the prime minister and his American ally. Faced with the choice of ending a dictatorship by spending money on a military expedition, or ending poverty by spending money on aid to countries willing to introduce market reforms, Brown would opt for the latter.

Blair is more concerned about international terror, Brown about the world's starving. Both, of course, abhor both terror and poverty. But consider Brown's outbreak of parsimony when it comes to military spending, and his open-handedness when it comes to international debt relief and meeting the needs of the poor here and abroad. And everyone with any familiarity with military budgets knows that the hunt for waste massive enough to support a cut in funding with no reduction in capability is engaged in only by politicians who view almost all military expenditures as money diverted from more worthwhile projects.

Brown intends to create a Britain that is both richer and fairer than the one he will inherit. And who will be his chancellor on this journey? Ed Balls, his long time economic adviser is set to become a Labour MP at the next election, and is one of the few people who can stand up to him in argument. Becoming chancellor after less than three years in parliament would be a bit unorthodox, but why not?

In deciding whether a Brown premiership will serve Britain well, it is important to keep in mind his ability to absorb new ideas, and the fact that he has so far delivered an unprecedented run of prosperity. Irwin Stelzer is a director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute and a columnist for the "Sunday Times"

A Scottish historian

by Michael Gove The Scot who now seems to embrace Roger Scruton's Englishness could be Blair mark two Gordon Brown is the moderniser who lives in the past. Of all the incongruities that mark the chancellor out from his colleagues in this government, the most enduring is his fascination with history. The chancellor read history as a student at Edinburgh University. In 1986, during his first term in parliament, he published a work of history - a biography of the Scottish socialist James Maxton, a labour of love almost 20 years in the making. His favoured relaxation away from work is reading, and his favourite book a monumental work of history, Robert A Caro's three-volume (thus far) 2,600-page biography of Lyndon B Johnson. While Blair invites businessmen and management men, from Adair Turner to John Birt, to advise him, Brown takes counsel from historians, such as Linda Colley and David Cannadine.

This immersion in history is all the more striking when compared to the postures adopted by this government. New Labour, which the chancellor has as much right to claim as his creation as anyone, has proved almost comically determined to distance itself from the past. Early in the lifetime of Tony Blair's administration, ministers were ordered not to be photographed next to buildings of any antiquity. The word "heritage" was purged from government discourse. The Millennium Dome, a project which the chancellor, to his credit, hated, was built to celebrate 2,000 years of civilisation's achievements, but included next to nothing which commemorated the British nation's story. It treated 1997 as year zero.

The root of the chancellor's own personal history is his Scottishness. Much more than any Macmillan or Home, Rifkind or Steel - indeed, even more than John Smith - the chancellor is shaped by his background. On one level this is a matter of deliberate political positioning, designed to reassure two audiences, the voting public and the party faithful. A cultivated emphasis on his own Scottishness gives this chancellor, as it gave John Smith, the ability to pose as a prudent, even penny-pinching, guardian of the nation's finances. The stereotype of the Scot as skinflint is put to the service of the party of progress. And within the party itself there is a cherished place for Scotland as the heartland of real socialism. The home of Keir Hardie and James Maxton, the site of the struggles of red Clydeside, the land that launched the revolt against the poll tax, plays the same part in British socialist history as Kosovo does in Serbian nationalist mythology. It is the site of original struggle, the place of the movement's martyrs.

While both these strands can be exploited by the chancellor in his current position, there is an inherent tension between retaining the faith of middle England and the markets through Presbyterian prudence and rekindling the ardour of Real Labour by offering them the old redistributionist religion. Just as Scotland itself is historically divided between Protestant and Catholic, lowland and highland, quintessentially bourgeois Edinburgh and aggressively proletarian Glasgow, a phenomenon memorably described by Hugh MacDiarmid as the "Caledonian antiszygy," so Brown's own public deployment of his Scottishness has an inherent schizophrenia.

The chancellor has recently been at pains, however, to put himself at the heart of a different national narrative. Brown has

launched an audacious bid to make himself this government's champion of Britishness. In a wide-ranging speech to the British Council this July, the chancellor set out to provide a "clear and confident sense of who we are as a country." At the time of delivery, when the prime minister's tenure at No 10 appeared to be under threat, the address was seen as a spreading of the chancellor's intellectual wings, as he prepared to ascend to yet higher office. There was certainly, as with everything Brown does, an element of tactical positioning in the speech. The chancellor's emphasis on Britishness, his embrace of unionism, his co-option of English writers of the right such as Roger Scruton, were all intended to counteract the impression that his Scottishness somehow put him out of sympathy with the English majority in the UK. Conscious of the way in which his background held him back in the leadership race of 1994, when Blair's more obvious appeal to middle England secured the succession, Brown was seeking to close off an area of electoral vulnerability (see Peter Kellner, p31). But the chancellor's advance on to the contested ground of Britishness deserves to be read as more than a tactical feint.

The story of Brown's career has been a series of gradual, painful adjustments of ambition. The radical activist who in the 1970s demanded socialist transformation, and who praised James Maxton for finding a "third way" between Leninism and Ramsay MacDonald, was compelled by the changes of the 1980s to become a convert to markets. The heir apparent to Neil Kinnock and John Smith, who was Labour's towering intellectual figure in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was forced to adjust to playing second fiddle to the more lightweight Tony Blair by the demands of electoral politics. And now, as he moves to claim the prize so long denied him, another adjustment is required, one foreshadowed by the Britishness speech.

Throughout all the adjustments he has made, Brown has stuck to a particularly Calvinist, even covenanting or Cromwellian, set of egalitarian principles. In true Commonwealth style, the chancellor has displayed a marked aversion to what he considers the institutions of inherited privilege. He has shown little patience with the dignified elements in our constitution, shunning white tie at the Mansion House, scorning the chance to enjoy a grace and favour country home and, most notoriously of all, turning on Oxford University when one of its colleges denied a place to a girl from a comprehensive school. Brown's excoriation in 2000 of Magdalen College for rejecting Laura Spence's application to read medicine was a vintage piece of class war rhetoric, a levelling rant of admirable force but absolutely no accuracy.

Brown denounced Oxford for operating a system "reminiscent of the old-boy network and the old school tie." But Spence was in fact one of 23 candidates for five places, 12 of whom had exam results at least as good as hers. Of those accepted to read medicine, two were from state schools and three were from ethnic minorities. Spence herself did not protest discrimination and Magdalen's president, Anthony Smith, could point to Herculean efforts over previous years to attract more state pupils to Oxford.

The general reaction to Brown's sally was sceptical, not to say hostile, across the broad centre of the English political spectrum. While Oxford may look like a gothic haunt of privilege when viewed from Dunfermline, for middle England it is one of many historic institutions in which the country can take pride. Like the army, Oxbridge is a British institution which still owes the respect it enjoys across the world to virtues which are emphatically traditional.

It is in the light of that episode, and the damage that Brown sustained by it, not least in the eyes of middle England, that his Britishness speech should be viewed. For in it the chancellor went out of his way to stress that the admirable qualities which help make up British identity are indeed embodied in its historic institutions. The British Council address therefore marked another adjustment in Brown's journey away from his Scottish socialist past, and towards making peace with England's traditions.

And therein lies the danger for the chancellor. All his adjustments, including his turn towards Euroscepticism, are in the direction of conservative England. He has had to accept that the right was right on markets, that England's sensibilities must be respected by its leaders, that England's institutions embody cherished virtues and that English suspicion of the European project is well rooted. But if the chancellor acts as prime minister in the light of these adjustments, he will drive his party wild - far from being the anti-Blair they yearn for, the man who will give them back their party, he will be Blair mark two. Michael Gove is Conservative candidate for Surrey Heath

At least he's not Blair

by Clare Short Little differentiates the two men on big foreign policy themes, but Brown is more competent What would the foreign policy of a Gordon Brown premiership look like? How different would he be to Tony Blair? Despite Blair's recent offensive against Brown, the differences between the two men are quite small. New Labour was created by a tiny group: Gordon Brown, Tony Blair, Peter Mandelson and Philip Gould. Brown was the strategist and Blair the presentation man, so we should take with a pinch of salt the suggestion that Brown is an old Labour consolidator, and Blair/Milburn the New Labour radicals.

Blair's second term has demonstrated that he has no significant philosophy, analysis or values. He has centralised power on himself, and has demonstrated that New Labour is a ruthless, power-winning machine - but also that it does not know what it wants power for. This is the only possible explanation for the dramatic policy positions he has struck on foundation hospitals, top-up fees and Iraq. Blair is desperate to leave a radical legacy, but stumbles from one ill-thought-through proposal to another.

Blair showed little interest in foreign policy until he was briefed as a prospective prime minister. He made his first big foreign policy speech just before the 1997 election, stressing the quality of Britain's armed forces. He said British defence for the 21st century would continue to be based on our national nuclear deterrent and an internationally competitive defence industry. He also promised a leading role in Europe, a referendum on the euro, strong support for the UN and an increase in British aid.

Much has been made of Blair's attempts to position himself as a humanitarian war leader, but it is unlikely that the basic policies - on Desert Fox, the 72-hour bombing of Iraq in 1998; Kosovo, where Nato acted with Kofi Annan's support; Sierra Leone, where Britain backed up the UN in a former British colony; or Afghanistan, where there was worldwide agreement - would have been much different under a different prime minister. The real mistakes in Kosovo and Afghanistan came after the military action, and are partly explained by Blair's weakness on detail and unwillingness to stand up to a US administration which was elected on an anti-nation-building ticket.

On Europe and the euro, Blair is said to be more enthusiastic than Brown. In practice, it was Blair who turned his back on Europe and caused enormous ill will over Iraq. Brown is no more anti-EU than Blair, just more realistic about the economics of the euro.

On development and Africa, Blair showed little interest in his first term, but announced that he would make Africa a priority in his second. This was sincere, but in practice has not made much difference. Brown has shown an interest in debt relief and the work of development NGOs from the beginning. This fits with his commitment to social justice - part of his upbringing and his Labour identity. In the early days of power, Brown's incursions into this field were led by a wish to please the NGOs, but as the years have passed, his partnership with the department for international development has improved and his commitment to development has deepened.

Both Blair and Brown are strong Atlanticists. They were inspired by Clinton and the New Democrats, and modelled New Labour on them. Brown remains strongly pro-American and gives priority to reaching agreement with the US treasury in the G7 and IMF. But his holiday contacts are the Democrat establishment, he would not have followed an incompetent, Republican president as blindly as Blair.

So on most of the big themes, there is little to differentiate the two men. Brown scores over Blair on pure competence. He can handle detail and think things through; he could have been persuaded to attend intelligently to postwar Kosovo and Afghanistan. Brown was marginalised in the run-up to Iraq, but came in behind Blair in the final stages. Iraq was very much Blair's crusade and it is likely that Brown, indeed, most other leaders, would have handled it better.

But foreign policy under a post-Blair, Labour government will not depend solely on the whims of the Labour leader - who is still most likely to be Brown. The weakening of Labour under Blair is likely to produce a much reduced majority and a parliamentary party more committed to Labour values. So I hope that a Brown premiership will focus on a real internationalisation in Iraq, the creation of a Palestinian state and an agreement to remove all WMD from the middle east. This will require Britain to move away from the US and closer to Europe, China and Russia.

The US commitment to pre-emption and military force will not make it safe. The only way to hold the post-cold war world together is through strong multilateral institutions, a settlement of Israel/Palestine, international co-operation on al Qaeda and a stronger commitment to fair trade rules, development and action to tackle global warming. I suspect it will be growing catastrophe that brings this change. Britain could end up in years to come with a Labour-Liberal coalition trying to grapple with these problems. Achieving international and EU co-operation on these issues should be the centre of British foreign policy. Brown would be better than Blair, but there are enormous challenges ahead. Clare Short is Labour MP for Birmingham Ladywood

#### Fear and factionalism

by Derek Scott A Brown cabinet, like some of Harold Wilson's, would be characterised by factions and plotting Gordon Brown is a highly intelligent man and an astute politician who is driven by a genuine desire to improve the lot of the deprived and the disadvantaged. He would have merited a place in any Labour cabinet of the past and under his stewardship the British economy has performed well. Not a bad CV for the top job, for which he has been heir apparent since Tony Blair entered No 10.

As we know from history, the heir apparent does not always get what he wants. Attlee stayed on as Labour leader just long enough to deny Morrison; and Rab Butler was thwarted at least twice. Even when heirs do get the job, they can fail. Eden was groomed for the premiership for as long as anyone, but he left it a dismal failure.

Eden had been seen as Churchill's successor for about as long as Brown has been Blair's. Eden had no understanding of domestic policy and spent most of his life absorbed in international affairs. But, despite his apparent expertise, he was brought down by a foreign policy failure, Suez, which he initiated and ran from No 10. Gordon Brown's interest in foreign affairs appears slight, but there is little doubt that he would continue to run domestic policy, particularly economic policy. Prime ministers need to be appropriately involved in economic policy, but directing it from No 10 is not a good idea. Ted Heath did so when Anthony Barber was chancellor and the precedent is not a good one. There is some risk that with Brown at No 10, his chancellor would be a cipher.

The odd thing about Brown is that for a man with a powerful intellect and interest in ideas, he is reluctant to discuss policy beyond a very narrow circle of people until he has made up his mind on something, often very late in the day. Some, including Geoffrey Robinson, claim that this shows great inner strength and self-reliance, and this may be the case, but it is very different to the way most of us come to decisions. Denis Healey, for example, a man of undoubted intelligence who I was privileged to work for, used vigorous and sometimes heated discussions with officials and outside advisers to clarify his own views. Others taking part in this process might have been bruised, but they rarely felt excluded from the process, and taking contrary views never led to personal antagonism. This is not Brown's method, and contrary opinions are not welcomed.

Another feature of Brown's working methods will be put under strain at No 10: he takes a great deal of time to make a decision and prefers to focus on only one thing at a time - something which creates notorious logjams of work at the treasury. Of course, at No 10 some issues do require prolonged deliberation, but other decisions have to be taken swiftly and there are lots of them on a variety of subjects. A prime minister who can't handle this would soon gum up the works. Tony Blair has been criticised (by Lord Butler, among others) for his over-relaxed style of administration - government from the sofa - including the lack of properly recorded discussions and decisions. Brown's style could hardly be described as relaxed, but he does not like things written down either - there must be no paper trail - so those favouring a more traditional style of administration will be disappointed.

Brown has held sway on a much broader domestic front than most other chancellors, and one result of this has been to confuse the lines of authority within government. It doesn't take long for Whitehall or other ministers to pick this up. In some sense, prime ministers need to be feared. When Jim Callaghan was at No 10, no one, even big players like Denis Healey, doubted who was boss. I don't think Tony Blair is sufficiently feared and Brown would probably make a better fist of this aspect of the job. However, whatever the periodic differences with his chancellor, or between him and other cabinet ministers, Blair has generally maintained amicable relations with his senior colleagues. A Brown cabinet might be different. Gordon demands and engenders great loyalty from allies, but provokes great animosity from others. He has bigger enemies than Blair, and so a Brown cabinet might, like some of Harold Wilson's, be characterised by factions and plotting.

But who knows? Those who know Brown best say that he is relaxed, self-deprecating and funny among close friends. Outside that narrow circle he displays a different character, and since 1994, more has been seen of the brooding, gloomy Brown.

It is possible that if he were to become prime minister, Brown would be less anxious, more like the relaxed private man. People do change and grow into jobs in unexpected ways. Callaghan, given a very poor hand, was a much better and calmer prime minister than he was chancellor, home secretary or foreign secretary. In general, Britain is lucky with its politicians, and most are more impressive, and popular, when they can be themselves: Neil Kinnock and William Hague are two recent cases of men whose qualities have only been appreciated after they failed to get to No 10. Of course, the spotlight of the media imposes its own constraints, but if Brown, once at the pinnacle of power, were able to display in public the traits seen by his close friends, he might make a great and popular prime minister. On present evidence, though, you wouldn't bet the farm on it. Derek Scott is Tony Blair's former economic adviser. His memoirs, "Off Whitehall," are published by IB Tauris.

#### A patient politician

by Robert Skidelsky Brown's stance on Iraq is important for judging the sort of prime minister he would make What did Gordon Brown think of the Iraq war? "We stand full-square with the American government and people in fighting terrorism and will continue to do so," he declared in 2001. But his support for the prime minister's Iraq policy was scanty. According to Anthony Seldon, Brown had "serious misgivings." Had he made his disagreement public, Blair would have fallen. But Brown would not necessarily have inherited the throne, which may explain why he kept quiet.

Brown's stance on Iraq - both the disquiet he felt and his unwillingness to strike - is important for judging the kind of prime

minister he would make. It is in foreign policy that strong modern prime ministers make their mark. After a while, they usually find world issues more exciting than home affairs. So what does Brown's past tell us about the kind of world leader he would make?

At first blush, not much. According to the Blair-Brown "deal" of 1994, Brown would run economic and social policy, leaving Blair the world stage, and any domestic initiatives that didn't cost money. As chancellor, Brown has stuck to the economic underbelly of international policy - the "soft" power deployed by financial institutions, not the "hard" stuff beloved of presidents and prime ministers.

He takes the challenge of global poverty seriously. In 1999 he got the G7 to agree to a plan of debt relief for heavily indebted countries. He has agreed to increase Britain's aid budget to 0.4 per cent of national income by 2006. He has been pressing for a new compact whereby in return for the poorest countries entering the world economy and pursuing anti-corruption, pro-trade, policies the rich countries would spend an extra \$50bn on health, education and anti-poverty programmes.

Brown's main job as prime minister would be to manage Britain's ties with the US and Europe. The attempt to reconcile these has defeated every British leader since the second world war, and there is no reason to think Brown would do any better. Economically and culturally he is at home in America. He admires its spirit of enterprise, its work ethic, its meritocratic outlook, its social egalitarianism. Moreover, his awakening to America came at a time when the US economy had started to boom, and Europe's to slump. His struggle for ideological coherence has involved trying to marry American capitalism to British (or Scottish) socialism. He had little time for Blair's flirtation with German social democracy.

Whereas Blair has wobbled between America and Europe, Brown, as chancellor, has been consistently Eurosceptic in his one area of European responsibility: the single currency. Brown has not been prepared to surrender the fruits of the monetary and fiscal rules which have defined his chancellorship. It is highly unlikely that he would shift from this position were he to become prime minister.

Committed to globalisation, Brown has adapted his social philosophy to its imperatives. The insecurities of globalisation can be minimised by maximising opportunities for all. Britain can only improve its living standards by becoming more competitive. Efficiency and fairness go together. Brown's budgets have aimed to make the economy more competitive and raise the human capital of the "excluded" by means of training, work, and in-work benefit programmes and well funded public services. Redistribution becomes not the fruit of economic growth - the old Croslandite formula - but a means to it, by turning drones into productive workers.

Brown shares the prime minister's vision of a society bound together by reciprocal rights and duties. The "compact" he proposes for the very poor countries is of a piece with his New Deal for the unemployed at home, and the public service agreements he has insisted on for the NHS. In all these cases, funding is to be tied to the delivery of targets. The thinking behind these initiatives is coherent, but leaves open the question of what happens if the destined recipients - governments in Africa, the unemployed or public authorities in Britain - are neither willing nor competent to fulfil their part of the bargain. Brown is a champion of the target culture which David Marquand has criticised for destroying what is left of professional autonomy and the public service ethic, and which others - including possibly the prime minister - believe is no substitute for consumer choice.

There is a close fit between the character of the chancellor and the soundness and predictability which markets now expect of fiscal policy. Both are expressed in his favourite word: prudence. "Prudence" was not just a necessary slogan for a Labour government trying to rid itself of its spendthrift image; it expresses the innate caution of the man. He can make dramatic gestures - such as granting the Bank of England control over interest rates four days after taking office - but they are never reckless. They are made on the basis of sound intellectual preparation. Certainly Brown has shown a patience most unusual for an ambitious politician, both in postponing popular spending measures until they can be afforded, and in waiting for Blair to go.

He is a dour, adamant character, whose great charm rarely emerges in public (his prose has unfortunately become similarly adamant). Unlike Blair, he is not a gambler. In this, one can see both the source of his "serious misgivings" about Blair's war in Iraq and his reluctance to take risks with his political future, or, indeed, the nation's finances. Admirable qualities in a chancellor, they may yet prevent him achieving the summit of his ambitions. Robert Skidelsky is professor of political economy at Warwick and author of a three-volume life of Keynes

#### Views of the voters

by Peter Kellner Oddly, Brown is a more cross-party figure than Blair, but his Scottishness could be an issue What about Gordon Brown and British public opinion? Is his public profile that of a dour, tribal Scot, or of a national leader who can

reach across conventional political divisions? Prospect commissioned YouGov to find out. A representative sample of 2,004 electors throughout Britain was questioned online in early September.

First, YouGov repeated a question it has asked at intervals about Blair - is he doing well or badly as prime minister? 40 per cent said "very" or "fairly" well; 57 per cent "very" or "fairly" badly. These figures are similar to those that YouGov has found over the past year. A net score of minus 17 (the difference between 57 and 40) is not brilliant, but it is not bad for a prime minister at this stage in the political cycle. (Gallup found that John Major's rating fell at one point to minus 63, and Margaret Thatcher's rating in August 1986 was minus 38. She went on to win a 100-seat majority less than 12 months later.)

Gordon Brown's net rating is minus two: 38 per cent expect him to do well, while 40 per cent fear he would do badly. So Brown enjoys a 15-point advantage over Blair (minus two against minus 17) among the electorate as a whole. And far from alienating Britain's middle classes, Brown seems to appeal to them far more than his Downing Street neighbour. Brown's lead over Blair among ABC1 voters is 23 points - compared with just three points among C2DE voters. A strange role reversal seems to have occurred. To political insiders, Blair is the big-tent leader, while Brown is regarded as tribally Labour. But to the public, things are the other way round. Blair is liked by most Labour voters (and even has a higher "doing well" rating in Scotland than Brown), but loathed by almost all Conservatives. Brown enjoys a lower standing among Labour voters, but commands the respect of many people who voted Tory at the last election. Almost one in four of them think he would make a good prime minister.

What is it about Brown that makes him less repellent than Blair? One obvious reason is that he has not yet performed the top job and has not been able to disappoint expectations. And doubtless Iraq has played its part too. But is there more to it? YouGov explored this by listing eight possible beneficiaries of government support. We asked people which three or four they thought Blair and Brown most favour - and which they themselves regarded as the highest priorities.

The voter's two top priorities, pensioners and the poor, are not thought to be among Blair's top concerns. 28 per cent think he wants to help the rich (a concern for only 1 per cent of voters), rather more than the 19 per cent who think he wants to help the poor (a concern for 74 per cent of voters). Pensioners rank first for voters - but are thought to rank last for Blair. Brown is seen as closer - though still not that close - to the mood of voters. More people think he wants to help the poor (32 per cent) than the rich (19 per cent), though were I a Brown strategist I would be concerned that well under half the public reckons his priorities are to help pensioners, or people who use the public services, or to reduce poverty. On the other hand, fears (or hopes, depending on your view) that the chancellor is seen as close to the trade unions seem to be misplaced. The 19 per cent who think he wants to help the unions is not much higher than the 13 per cent who think this of Blair - which is just as well, as only 4 per cent of the public regard them as a priority (including just 6 per cent of Labour voters).

As for "the people of middle England," 41 per cent think they are one of Blair's top concerns - a higher figure than for any other group. Brown lags on 29 per cent. This gap may not matter much: middle England comes sixth out of eight on voters' scale of priorities. But if Brown's opponents can depict him as someone who will punish middle England with higher taxes than Blair would ever countenance, then the chancellor's rating could start to tumble.

Finally, we tested directly the issue of Brown's Scottish roots. Do voters agree or disagree with this statement: "If Gordon Brown became prime minister, one serious problem would be that, as a Scot, he does not really understand the people of England"? The public disagrees by a margin of three to one. Not surprisingly, Scots reject this view overwhelmingly with just 7 per cent agreeing and 81 per cent disagreeing. But in all the English regions just over 20 per cent agree that it is a problem, rising to 26 per cent agreeing and only 53 per cent disagreeing in southern England outside London.

The suspicion of his Scottishness is concentrated among older, southern Tories who would never vote Labour anyway. But there is a minority of people who are sympathetic to his politics but who are concerned that he does not understand the English. And, of course, Labour has few marginal seats in Scotland, but dozens in England's more prosperous suburbs. Peter Kellner is a political commentator and chairman of YouGov. ?

The Brown supremacy

[http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article\\_details.php?id=6487](http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=6487)

Prospect Magazine

<http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk>