

Britain: Duncan Smith wins easily in Conservative Party leadership contest

Julie Hyland
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Right winger Iain Duncan Smith has won a decisive victory in the Conservative Party leadership ballot. Duncan Smith beat his opponent, former chancellor Kenneth Clarke, by a three to two margin in the ballot of 328,000 Conservative members. With a 79 percent turnout, the final result was 155,933 votes (61 percent) for Duncan Smith to 100,864 votes (39 percent) for Clarke.

Voting concluded on Tuesday, but former Tory leader William Hague announced that the result would be postponed for 24 hours as a “mark of respect” for those killed in the bombing of the World Trade towers and the Pentagon.

Just three months ago Duncan Smith had been a virtual public nonentity. But the 47-year-old former army officer had quickly become the preferred choice of the Thatcherite wing of the party, who are looking to recast the Conservatives as the party of populist nationalism along the lines of Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia*. They argue that this is the only way in which the Tories can recover lost support. According to a report published Thursday by the Centre for Policy Studies, in the last nine years the Conservative Party has lost six million votes—a figure which the pro-Duncan Smith *Telegraph* newspaper described as “one of the most serious erosions of electoral support in modern history”.

Dismissing calls for the Tory Party to reposition itself on the “centre-ground” of British politics, Duncan Smith spelt out that the party, under his leadership, would intransigently oppose British membership of the European single currency, the euro. It would also elaborate policies aimed at drastically reducing public spending—from 40 percent to 30 percent—expand the privatisation of health and education, tighten up anti-asylum laws and maintain anti-homosexual legislation.

The pro-euro, “One Nation” Tories, grouped around Clarke, had warned that a Duncan Smith victory would place the Conservative Party on the political margins, destroying it as an electoral force. Clarke’s charge of right wing extremism against his opponent was underscored by revelations of links between the fascist British National Party (BNP) and several supporters of Duncan Smith. Just a fortnight ago, Duncan Smith had been forced to sack one of his campaign manager’s, Edgar Griffin, after he was caught out answering a telephone call on behalf of the BNP. Griffin, whose son Nick leads the BNP, had answered a call to his home with the words, “British National Party, good afternoon”.

At any other time, announcement of the leadership result would have immediately laid bare the bitter factionalism rife in the party. In the event, however, the final announcement was overshadowed and deliberately downplayed due to US events. In place of the usual triumphal victory speeches and photo-calls, the two candidates issued only brief statements. This led some news commentators to describe the events leading to the muted announcement as a type of “grim salvation” for a Tory Party that now has its third leader in four years.

A denouement has only been postponed, however. In an interview with the *Telegraph* at the weekend, former Tory Foreign Secretary, Lord Douglas Hurd, had warned Duncan Smith that he would face an internal rebellion if he beat Clarke and adopted a hard-line anti-euro policy. Duncan Smith’s own disloyal behaviour towards his party during John Major’s premiership—he had voted against the government on signing the Maastricht Treaty establishing the Single European Market—meant that he could not count on the “automatic loyalty” of pro-European MPs during his

own leadership. Conflict could only be avoided if Duncan Smith moderated his policies, Hurd said.

Other leading Tories, such as Francis Maude, have said they will set up a think-tank “with attitude” to press for a more liberal Tory agenda, of the type advocated by former minister Michael Portillo, whose own leadership ambitions were scuppered early in the campaign by the Thatcherites.

This will not hold the right wing in check for long. The “One Nation” agenda has been revealed as a minority tendency within the party—the vast majority of Tory members turning out in force to back Duncan Smith’s hardline agenda, and to signal that they have no problems at all with being labelled extremists.

Already the Thatcherites have made clear that they are in no mood to compromise. Duncan Smith immediately awarded leading positions in his team to eurosceptics such as former Home Secretary Michael Howard and former minister Oliver Letwin. David Davies, an early favourite of the right wing when the leadership contest first began, landed the post of Conservative Party chairman, where he will play a key role in policy making.



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