

How Harman won the day

Harriet Harman's successful campaign for Deputy Leader focused on her profile as a "champion for women." Harman assured voters that she would be strongly dedicated to improving the lives of women, families, children, and the elderly. Harman aims to provide aid for families, particularly working mothers, through initiatives that will improve nurseries and after school programmes and provide flexible working hours for families with children. She also focused on equality and international development. During the campaign, Harman did not just hope to win the female and minority vote but used her appeal to voters and her track record over twenty years of pursuing women's rights in Parliament as her unique selling points. She also worked to broaden her appeal among all members of the Labour Party, indicating that her two decades of experience and popularity among many voters would guarantee the Party's success in the upcoming general election.

Harman narrowly beat Alan Johnston in the fifth and final round of the Deputy Leader election. She secured 50.4% of the vote, while Johnston commanded 49.6%. In the first round, Harman was first choice among Labour Party members, second choice among MPs and MEPs, and the fifth choice for union members. Harman was able to emerge victorious in the fifth round, after Jon Cruddas had been eliminated, because many of Cruddas's supporters had put Harman as their second choice in the preferential voting system. Not only is Harman set to become the next Deputy Leader, but she will also be Chairwoman of the Labour Party, Leader of the Commons, and Minister for Women in the Cabinet.

Responses to Harman's win in the media and among voters have proved mixed. Supporters of Harman contest that she is the best person for the job and will not only champion the women's movement, but will bring the Labour Party to victory in the next election. Harman's dedication to the family is appealing to many who feel that two-income homes have great difficulty working and raising children. As an advocate for the elderly, ethnic minorities, workers and the environment, Harman attracts a broad spectrum of voters. Many Labour supporters believe that Harman will work to protect their interests.

Commentators have not failed to notice that her profile as an Englishwoman complementing Gordon Brown's Scotsman. Harman's election has also been well-received because of the recent cabinet reshuffle. Brown failed to include more women in the cabinet than Blair had previously and also failed to include as many women as did David Cameron in the Conservative reshuffle. Harman's appointment to these significant posts could detract attention and demonstrates that Labour is still committed to the promotion of women in

politics. Others may say it's not just about giving one woman lots of jobs in government, but about having more women promoted to the highest levels.

There has also been some criticism of Harman's win. Critics maintain that she is a poor administrator with little knowledge of economics and world affairs. Several leading papers also overlooked Harman's key victory, reporting only that she had been "snubbed" for the role of deputy premiership. Others remarked her victory was a surprise, despite a strong campaign and indications from polls.

The negative responses surrounding Harman's election can be blamed to some extent on the fact that women in politics typically receive more media abuse than men in similar positions. Certainly Harman's dedication to women's and Labour issues alike make her a favourable new Deputy Leader. However, it remains to be seen how much attention Harman will give to her position as Minister of Women in the Cabinet, given her other responsibilities as Deputy Leader and Chairwoman of the Labour Party. Yet, undoubtedly, Harman's election as Deputy Leader demonstrates that particularly party members want to see more women occupying prominent posts at the heart of government.

For more information:

<http://www.labour.org.uk/leadership/>

<http://www.harrietharman.org/>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,,2117970,00.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/06/25/nbrown325.xml>

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article1980533.ece>

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/janice_turner/article2007574.ece

Peter Wilby. "The Macho Response to Harman's Victory." The Guardian Unlimited. 2 July, 2007.

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