

When the going gets tough, blame a woman

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It seems Deputy PM Harriet Harman is going to get [dumped on](#) over the cash-by-proxy donor screw-up. The fact that Gordon Brown denied giving her his support seven times yesterday in one press conference made him look shifty, indecisive and finally, weak. Surely he knew before he walked in to that clash with the media whether he was going to back or sack her?

A couple of interesting presentation/media points on this developing farrago. Especially in the light of the way that the media keeps trying to compare it with the 'sleaze' that helped bring John Major's Conservative government down back in the mid-90s. The two stories are light-years away from each other in factual terms but journalists like to find these parallels – especially if it raises the prospect of a similarly dramatic denouement. (It won't – not yet).

1. Brown keeps trying to distance himself from what is going wrong. He implies that it is Darling or Harman's fault. This didn't work for Major either who was personally seen as honest and trustworthy. People expect the PM to run his Government.
2. Sleaze doesn't bring you down, economic incompetency does. The public isn't that bothered about the 600 grand. They are more bothered about the Northern Rock billions, but it doesn't hurt them (yet). What will kill Brown is when wages are not rising and house prices are falling. John Major actually lost an election when the economy was improving but he had already lost his reputation for sound economic management. Has Brown?

Meanwhile, the excellent [Ben Brogan](#) of the Daily Mail is floating a theory that Michael Ashcroft, the Conservative's campaign funding guru is behind the latest revelations from Labour – or is that just Labour's last-ditch attempt to spin the blame elsewhere?

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