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## A mystery solved

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When the delegation of British MPs visited Sri Lanka earlier this month, the hostility of the Conservative Party representative was disconcerting. Reports in the Daily Mail indicating that John Bercow is Labour's favoured candidate for the vacant position of Speaker of the House may explain it, as the Peace Secretariat explains in a letter to the editor.

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The Editor Daily Mail London

Sir,

I must thank you for your article of May 24th entitled 'Brown's candidate for Speaker', since it helps to explain something that had worried us in Sri Lanka.

Earlier this month the Hon. Des Browne led a cross-party delegation of MPs to Sri Lanka. He told us he had selected them carefully, to avoid any difficulties, and certainly the representatives of the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the SDLP seemed without preconceptions in their approach. The exception was the Conservative, John Bercow, who was extremely confrontational from the start, and provoked a strong reaction from our President. This was surprising because we had assumed that the Conservative Party had a more positive approach to Sri Lanka in its struggle against terrorism. Certainly the pronouncements of those who have engaged closely with us, such as the Hon. Liam Fox and Lord Naseby indicated a sympathetic understanding of the position. Now however we can understand the strange attitude of Mr Bercow. It would be sad if he were rewarded with the position of Speaker because of hostility to his own party. It would be peculiar if an added attraction for the government were his acting as their hatchet man on the visit to Sri Lanka in which his other colleagues behaved so admirably, asking questions but making clear they did this with goodwill rather than animosity. Yours sincerely, Prof Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process

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The Daily Mail article referred to can be found here:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/>

An editorial on the subject from the Mail on Sunday can be found here: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/> Brown's candidate for Speaker: Right wing turncoat who is hated by many Tory MPs By Simon Walters and Glen Owen Gordon Brown is plotting to help a Tory MP succeed Michael Martin as Commons Speaker in an attempt to sabotage a future Conservative Government. The Prime Minister's decision to back John Bercow - who once campaigned to send immigrants back to their own country - has angered some Left-wingers who claim that his political background means he is not suitable for such a powerful post. Labour sources have told The Mail on Sunday that Mr Brown believes Mr Bercow would be a good Speaker - and, crucially, would cause major problems for Mr Cameron if he wins the next Election. Influence: John Bercow with his wife Sally, who is credited with turning the former Right-winger into a social liberal Mr Cameron snubbed Mr Bercow when he became Tory leader. Mr Brown then recruited him as a Government adviser in a move seen as a bid to lure him to defect to Labour. As the ex-leader of a Right-wing student group, Mr Bercow was once challenged by Labour to disown members of the organisation who brandished 'hang Nelson Mandela' slogans. In a remarkable political role-reversal, Mr Cameron is determined to stop Mr Bercow being Speaker because of his New Labour links. During Mr Cameron's leadership campaign in 2005, Mr Bercow launched an outspoken attack on his credentials, saying 'Eton, hunting, shooting and lunch at Whites' made Mr Cameron the wrong man for the job. One Tory source said last night: 'John has become something of a hate figure for many on his own side.' Mr Bercow emerged as the Labour-backed frontrunner in the race to be Speaker as: - Ann Widdecombe effectively threw her own hat in the ring, vowing to rid the Commons of 'thieves, liars and fiddlers'. - Tory MPs moved to support Mr Brown's Labour foe, maverick ex-Minister Frank Field. - Mr Martin's cronies called for his former deputy, Labour MP Sylvia Heal, sister of the party's 'expenses queen' Ann Keen, to be Speaker. Mr Bercow, the 46-year-old son of a minicab driver, was a precocious Young Conservative when he called for a halt to Commonwealth immigration. Aged 19, he became secretary of the 'immigration and repatriation committee' of the infamous Right-wing Monday Club. The Nelson Mandela poster made by Tory students Mr Bercow became chairman of the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS), which was accused of brandishing 'hang Nelson Mandela' slogans. Mr Bercow was in charge of the FCS when it was shut down by party chairman Norman Tebbit. When Mr Bercow stood for Parliament in 1996, Labour MP Brian Wilson challenged him to apologise for FCS members who had heaped abuse on Mr Mandela. In a carefully written letter, Mr Bercow said: 'I defy Mr Wilson to produce any statement abusive of Mr Mandela made or approved by me at any time. He will not do so, for none exists.' He became Tory candidate for Buckingham after arriving at the selection contest with seconds to spare in a helicopter, saying the ride was 'the best £1,000 I've ever spent'. Mr Bercow started shedding his Right-wing views at about the same time that he met Sally Illman, whom he married in 2002 when he was 39. A Labour supporter, who at 5ft 11in towers above her 5ft 6in husband, she is credited with turning Mr Bercow into a social liberal in favour of issues such as gay adoption. Tory MPs like to joke: 'The trouble with John is that he discovered sex and the Labour Party at the same time.' Mr Bercow, a county tennis champion player in his youth, was sacked as a Tory frontbencher in 2004 by Michael Howard after Mr Bercow told him to his face that Ann Widdecombe was right to say there was 'something of the night about him'. Mr Cameron, who was then an adviser to Mr Howard, did not recall Mr Bercow to the Shadow Cabinet when he became leader. On becoming Prime Minister, Mr Brown commissioned the out-of-favour Tory to carry out a

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Government inquiry into children with communication difficulties. Mr Brown's support was a far cry from Tony Blair's position - he once described Mr Bercow as 'nasty and ineffectual in equal quantity'. As Mr Bercow set his sights on the Speaker's chair, he reportedly bombarded Labour MPs with congratulatory notes about their speeches. It has served only to fuel Tory suspicions of him. 'If Bercow becomes Speaker, he could make life very difficult for Cameron - they are chalk and cheese,' said one Labour MP with glee. But one Left-winger said: 'We should not have someone who wanted to repatriate immigrants in the Speaker's Chair - however long ago it was.' There was a flash of Mr Bercow's former fiery student-leader self three weeks ago in a Commons debate when he backed an astonishing attack by a close friend, Tory MP Julian Lewis, on a Liberal Democrat activist who had abused Mr Lewis. Would-be Speaker Mr Bercow shouted: 'He's a nutter' - precisely the kind of unruly behaviour that a new Speaker will have to crack down on to restore the battered reputation of the Commons. Nor has he been immune from the expenses scandal. Mr Bercow has promised to pay back £6,508 in capital gains tax relating to the purchase and sale of homes in his constituency in 2003. Mr Bercow was unavailable for comment. Courtesy: SCOPP