

Diaries

A View from the Foothills

Decline & Fall

Novels

A Very British Coup

The Last Man Out of Saigon

The Year of the Fire Monkey

Non-fiction

Error of Judgement: the truth about the Birmingham bombings

A WALK-ON PART

Diaries 1994–1999

edited by Ruth Winstone

P
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With love to Ngoc, Sarah and Emma;
in memory of Leslie and Teresa Mullin
and with gratitude to the people of Sunderland

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Preface

This is my third and final volume of diaries. It covers the period from the day of John Smith's death in May 1994 to the moment of my assumption into government in July 1999. Although published out of sequence, the complete work embraces the rise and fall of New Labour from the moment of its inception to the moment that Gordon Brown walked out of Downing Street.

Looking back to those early years, long before the shadow of Iraq fell across the New Labour project, several thoughts occur to me. First, how much Tony Blair got right. He was surely right about the need to seize the middle ground and stay there. His decision to rewrite Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution – implying as it did nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange – was in retrospect a master stroke, though it didn't feel that way at the time. His strategy of promising little and delivering more, in contrast to the over-promising and under-delivering of previous governments, was also surely vindicated. Likewise his determination to tackle the huge benefit culture (ironically, the new government's most enduring legacy from the Thatcher decade) and to reform public services, education in particular. And as we contemplate a Tory government, propped up by Liberal Democrats, laying waste to the public sector, who can say that Blair was mistaken in his desire to realign politics by bringing the Lib Dems into New Labour's big tent? Had he succeeded we might not be where we are today. The extent to which Blair had changed the political landscape was first brought home to me in January 2001 when I was invited to address the sixth form at Harrow, one of our most distinguished public schools. Afterwards I dined with several teachers and was amazed to discover that not one had voted Tory at the previous election. 'We think you will win by an even bigger margin next time,' said one.

'What on earth makes you think that?'

'Because we talk to the parents and they are no longer afraid of you.'

Most of the fault lines which would come to haunt New Labour in the years ahead – control freakery, a soft spot for rich men, the obsession with spin – were also apparent from the outset. One thing not apparent (at least to those of us outside the magic circle), however, was the dysfunctional relationship between the two most powerful figures in the government. Nor was it yet apparent that New Labour's love affair with the markets would end as disastrously as it did. Not that much could have been done, even had it been apparent. No amount of regulation could have protected us from the financial tsunami that came from America in the autumn of 2008.

Looking back at those early years I am struck, too, by the extent to which certain issues assumed an importance that many readers will find mystifying. The pressure to ban hunting with hounds is the obvious example. Even in terms of animal welfare, it was not a large issue. The difficulty was that expectations had been aroused, undertakings given. It became an issue of confidence. A test of whether a Labour government with a clear mandate and a large majority was capable of facing down the mighty vested interests and unlimited resources represented by the hunting fraternity. Such was the strength of feeling that this was one of the rare issues on which Blair was forced to back down, a decision he now says he regrets, though the polls continue to suggest that most of us don't.

The fate of Peter Mandelson is the other matter that crops up incessantly. Among colleagues in Parliament and in government, some of whom had been on the receiving end of his black arts, he was cordially loathed. I lost count of the number of people who warned Blair of the damage his evident dependence on Mandelson was doing. It is also apparent from the diaries of Alastair Campbell that

managing Mandelson occupied a good deal of time at the highest level. Yet Blair stuck with him through thick and thin. Even successive resignations do not seem, save for the briefest of interludes, to have diminished his access. How do we explain this extraordinary resilience? In part because Mandelson was a man of excellent judgement in every respect, except in relation to his own affairs. 'Peter goes gaga in the presence of rich men,' someone who once worked for him remarked. As a minister and as a strategist he was widely respected for his ability to make calm, clear, considered decisions. His third and final visit to government, in the autumn of 2008, arguably made the difference between mere defeat and annihilation. None of this, however, was apparent in the early days.

As in previous volumes, I have tried to inject a flavour of life as a representative of a northern working-class city which took quite a battering during the Thatcher decade. Entire industries disappeared – shipbuilding, mining, textiles, glass, the local brewery and a fair swathe of our engineering. The 1980s saw the growth of a huge, alienated underclass, trapped in a world of benefit, amid soaring levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, from which escape was difficult if not impossible. By the late eighties there were parts of my constituency where civilised life had broken down to such an extent that entire streets had to be demolished because they were no longer habitable. For ten years or more, at almost every surgery I was faced with people begging to be evacuated from the most blighted parts of the city. Although in opposition we had the luxury of being able to blame all bad news on the Tories, it will be apparent from these pages that the collapse of much of Sunderland's manufacturing sector continued into the early years of the Labour government when almost the only bright spot was the survival of Nissan, although there was a moment when even that looked wobbly. Hand on heart, however, I can say that, whatever the disappointments, thirteen years of Labour government made a significant difference to the lives of my least prosperous constituents. Unemployment, especially among the young, fell to levels not seen since the early seventies and, as unemployment fell, so did the epidemic of crime and anti-social behaviour that blighted the lives of my poorest constituents. Gradually, Sunderland reinvented itself. New businesses replaced old ones – Doxford International, a business park in my former constituency, was a green field in the mid-nineties. By the time I retired 7,500 people worked there.

Also as before, I have tried to inject a flavour of family life. I came late to fatherhood and watching my two daughters grow up has been one of the great joys of my life. As this volume opens my older daughter, Sarah, is just five years old and Emma, my younger daughter, is as yet unborn. They are now bright, attractive young women. Every day I count my blessings.

I am aware that I do not always come out well from these pages. That is the nature of an honest diary. First, because I have a tendency towards pessimism. Second, because I am a bit of an agoniser. On the advice of my esteemed editor, Ruth Winstone, much pessimism and agonising has ended up on the cutting-room floor, but enough has been retained to leave the reader with a flavour of my weakness in this regard.

The success of the two earlier volumes has come as a pleasant surprise. Readers of the previous volume, *Decline & Fall*, will recall that I approached retirement with trepidation. I am pleased to report, however, that it has worked out well. A small industry has developed around the diaries and, as a result, I am flooded with invitations. The political meeting is not dead, it has merely transferred to the literary festival. The Live Theatre in Newcastle has launched a stage version of the diaries which, who knows, may eventually find its way further south. Also, from time to time, my opinion is still sought on matters political – and even literary. Currently I am helping to judge entries for this year's Man Booker Prize. In the long term, of course, the test will be whether these diaries, like those of Alan Clark, Chips Channon or Jock Colville, are still read in twenty or thirty years by those wanting

flavour of our life and times at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century
On that, however, the jury is still out.

Chris Mullin
Sunderland, August 2011

Acknowledgements

As ever, I owe thanks to many people. My constituents in Sunderland South for having allowed me the honour of representing them for twenty-three years. Members of the Sunderland South Labour Party for having allowed me to be their candidate through five general elections. My friends and erstwhile colleagues in Parliament for the pleasure of their company.

My thanks also to Andrew Franklin and his cheerful and industrious team at Profile, to Trevor Horwood for his meticulous copy-editing and to my agent, Caroline Dawnay. Above all, to Ruth Winstone for her help in cutting the manuscript down to size and for offering much useful advice.

I take this opportunity, too, to remember my late good friends Jacky Breach and Joan Maynard, whose passing is recorded in these pages and whom I shall never forget.

Listed mainly according to responsibilities held for the period covered by this volume of the diary, May 1994–July 1999

John Smith, Leader of the Labour Party 1992–4

Tony Blair (aka The Man), Leader of the Labour Party 1994–2007; Prime Minister 1997–2007

Significant Others

Margaret Beckett MP, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party 1992–4; Cabinet minister 1997–2007

Tony Benn MP, former Cabinet minister, fellow diarist and friend of CM

Gordon Brown MP, Shadow Chancellor 1992–7, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1997–2007, Prime Minister 2007–10

Nick Brown MP, Chief Whip 1997–8 and 2008–10; Minister of Agriculture 1998–2001

Steve Byers MP, Minister of State, Education 1997–8; Chief Secretary to the Treasury 1998; Secretary of State for Trade and Industry 1998–2001

Denis Carter, Chief Whip, House of Lords 1997–2002

David Clark MP, Shadow Secretary of Defence 1992–7; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1997–8

Robin Cook MP, Shadow Foreign Secretary 1994–7; Foreign Secretary 1997–2001

Donald Dewar MP, Opposition Chief Whip, 1995–7; Secretary of State for Scotland 1997–9; First Minister, Scotland 1999–2000

Bill Etherington, MP for Sunderland North 1992–2010

Charlie Falconer QC, Lords 1997–; Solicitor General 1997–8; Cabinet Office minister 1998–2001; long-term friend of Tony Blair

Derek Foster MP, Opposition Chief Whip 1983–95

George Galloway, MP for Glasgow Hillhead, 1987–2005

John Gilbert MP, Minister of State, Defence 1997–9; Lords 1999–

Tommy Graham, MP for Renfrewshire West, 1987–2001

Bruce Grocott MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Tony Blair 1994–2001

Roy Hattersley MP, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party 1983–92; Lords 1997–

Commander Michael Higham, Secretary, Grand Lodge

Derry Irvine, Lord Chancellor 1997–2003

Neil Kinnock MP, Leader of the Labour Party 1983–92; EU Commissioner 1995–2004

Tom King MP, chairman, Intelligence and Security Committee 1994–2001 and a former Secretary of

State for Defence

Stephen Lander, director general, MI5 1996–2002

Ken Livingstone, MP 1987–2001; Mayor of London 2000–8

John Major MP, Prime Minister 1990–7

Peter Mandelson MP, close friend and adviser to Tony Blair, Cabinet Office minister 1997–8;

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry 1998 (July–Dec.); Secretary of State for Northern Ireland 1999–2001

Joan Maynard, MP for Sheffield Brightside 1974–87, close friend of CM

Alan Milburn MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury 1998–9; Secretary of State for Health 1999–2003

Mo Mowlam MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland 1997–9

Sally Morgan, political officer, 10 Downing Street

Sir Patrick Neill, chairman, Committee on Standards in Public Life 1997–2001

Frank Nicholson, managing director 1984–99

Paul Nicholson, chairman, Vaux Group 1976–99

Lord Nolan, chairman, Committee on Standards in Public Life 1994–7

John Prescott MP, Deputy Prime Minister 1997–2007

Stella Rimington, director general, MI5 1992–6

Jack Straw MP, Shadow Home Secretary 1994–7; Home Secretary 1997–2001

Ann Taylor MP, Leader of the House 1997–8; Chief Whip 1998–2001

Sir Humphry Wakefield, owner of Chillingham Castle, Northumberland, friend of CM

John and Sheila Williams, friends of CM

Audrey Wise, MP for Preston 1987–2000

Martin and Mori Woollacott, former *Guardian* foreign editor and GP respectively, friends of CM

Media Moguls

John Birt, director general, BBC 1992–2000

David Elstein, head of programming, Sky TV 1993–6; chief executive, Channel Five Television 1996–2000

Ray Fitzwalter, editor/executive producer *World in Action* 1976–93; head of current affairs, Granada Television 1987–93

Liz Forgan, managing director, BBC Radio 1993–6; director, Guardian Media Group 1998–

Michael Grade, chief executive, Channel Four Television 1987–97

Michael Green, chairman, Carlton Television 1983–2003

David Montgomery, chief executive, Mirror Group 1992–9

Rupert Murdoch, chairman and chief executive, News Corporation, whose empire includes the *Sun*, *The Times*, the *News of the World*, the *Sunday Times*, and a controlling interest in Sky TV and Fox News

Bob Phillis, deputy director general, BBC 1993–7

Stewart Purvis, chief executive, ITN 1995–2003

Gerry Robinson, chairman, Granada Group 1992–2001

*Members of the Home Affairs Select Committee**

1994–7

Janet Anderson, David Ashby, Gerry Bermingham, Peter Butler, Steve Byers, Jean Corston, Jim Cunningham, John Greenway, John Hutton, Jill Knight, Sir Ivan Lawrence (chairman), Chris Mullin, Walter Sweeney, David Winnick

1997–9

Richard Allan, Robin Corbett, Ross Cranston, Janet Dean, Nick Hawkins, Warren Hawksley, Douglas Hogg, Gerald Howarth, Beverley Hughes, Melanie Johnson, Martin Linton, Humfrey Malins, Chris Mullin (chairman), Bob Russell, Marsha Singh, Paul Stinchcombe, David Winnick

Parliamentary Committee July 1997–July 1999

Backbench Members of Parliament

Charlotte Atkins, Ann Clwyd, Jean Corston, Llin Golding, Helen Jackson, Andrew Mackinlay, Chris Mullin, Clive Soley (chairman), Charles Williams (representing the Lords)

Sunderland Office Staff

Pat Aston, Jacky Breach, Sharon Spurling

Family

Nguyen Thi Ngoc, wife of CM

Nguyen Thi Hanh, sister-in-law of CM

Sarah (b. 1989) and Emma (b. 1995), children of CM

Leslie and Teresa Mullin, parents of CM

Thursday, 12 May 1994

John Smith is dead. Carol Robertson at the *Echo* broke the news. A massive heart attack, she said. He had been rushed to Bart's Hospital. No announcement yet, but obituary material coming through on the wire. After I put the phone down I turned on the television just as the surgeon at Bart's was announcing his death.

The House met at 3.30 for tributes. The Prime Minister and Margaret Beckett spoke movingly. Margaret was with John until late last night. I don't know how she managed to keep control. I couldn't have done. The best line came from a Liberal, Menzies Campbell, who had known John since university – 'He had all the virtues of a Scottish Presbyterian and none of the vices.'

After the tributes, business was cancelled and the House adjourned for the day. People hung around in little groups discussing the succession in low tones.

I stayed upstairs working on a lecture I have to give at Hull in two weeks and at about nine o'clock I went down to watch the BBC news in the Family Room. By now the House was deserted and most of the lights were turned down. When I went back upstairs I found my office had been locked, containing the keys to my flat. Eventually I unearthed a security man and rescued my keys. On the way out I met Robin Cook in the gloomy corridor leading from the Members' Lobby to the Library. We chatted briefly about the succession. He says he hasn't made up his mind whether to stand, but I think he will. And why not? His problem will be getting support elsewhere since his talents are not as widely appreciated as they should be. Early days, but I could see myself voting for him.

We talked about Gordon Brown. I said that I used to be impressed with him, but he had been chanting the same old slogans for years and they were wearing thin. Robin said 'Gordon is intellectually lazy. With someone like Tommy Graham you know he is doing his best and you respect that, but Gordon is capable of much more than he is offering.'

Friday, 13 May

The report stage of Kevin Barron's Bill to ban tobacco advertising which the government is in the process of wrecking. Loads of amendments have been tabled in order to kill it off. I stayed for the first two votes and then headed north. Travelled up with Steve Byers, one of the brightest and most agreeable of the new intake. We agreed that winning the next election was paramount. We can't afford to take even a little gamble. That being so, he sees no alternative but to vote for Blair. He may well be right.

We're all under a vow of silence as regards the leadership to allow a decent interval to elapse until John is buried. The *Independent on Sunday* rang to ask how I would vote and I refused to say.

Saturday, 14 May
Sunderland

To a party at Bryn Sidaway's in the evening to celebrate his election as council leader. I asked

everyone who they would support for the leadership. Prescott was mentioned surprisingly often. He seems particularly popular with the northern working-class males. When you ask who is most likely to lead us to an election victory the answer was almost always the same: Blair.

Tuesday, 17 May

To the Home Office for a much-delayed meeting with the Home Secretary Michael Howard to hand over my dossier of alleged miscarriages. His room is massive. One enters from the far end and walks across acres of carpet towards a distant figure in shirtsleeves enthroned behind a long table. On the wall two large oils of battlefield scenes, one the Battle of Blenheim. Behind, laid out neatly, the day's newspapers. I sat alone on one side, facing him. On his side, a woman from C3 (the Division for the Perpetuation of Miscarriages of Justice) and a man from the press office.

Besides the dossier I raised with him the long delay in reconsidering the Carl Bridgewater case and his plans for an independent review tribunal. He was amiable but unhelpful. He didn't even glance at the dossier and repeated the usual bland assurances that all new evidence would be carefully considered. On Carl Bridgewater the woman from C3 said how difficult it was since the convicted men's representative kept making new submissions. I replied that the last one of which I was aware was dated 1 February and she confirmed that this was so. Three and a half months ought to be ample. What can they be playing at? As for the review tribunal, he could offer no estimate of a timetable for its creation, even though yet another Criminal Justice Bill is expected in the new year. The fact is, of course, there are no votes in it, so it isn't a high priority. I pressed him as hard as I could on the need for the tribunal to have at least a reserve power to conduct its own investigations, and not to be dependent on the police. He said he would think about this, although clearly he is minded to leave investigations to the police, which, I said, would be a fatal flaw.

Although all candidates for the leadership are staying impressively silent, everyone else is talking. Alice Mahon said to me, 'I'm in the Stop Blair camp.' To which I replied, 'I am in the Win the Next Election Camp.'

Later, coming out of the division lobby, John Gilbert invited me to his room. The proposition on which he was seeking my opinion was this: with the exception of Margaret Beckett, who held a junior post in the Callaghan government, none of the likely candidates for the leadership had Cabinet experience. Indeed none had ever set foot in a government department, except to protest at some aspect of government policy. This was going to be a serious handicap both in winning the election and, in the event of victory, of governing. There was, however, one person (not yet a candidate) who had the requisite experience. His name? Roy Hattersley. Apparently (and I am inclined to believe) this is not Roy's idea, although he has been consulted. He is understandably reluctant to run and would need to be convinced that there was serious support. Soundings are therefore being taken to see if the idea is a runner. If it is, a delegation led by Cledwyn Hughes would go to Jim Callaghan and suggest that he persuade Blair and the others to stand down in favour of Roy and in the interests of the party. The calculation being that Roy would only be likely to serve one term (I wouldn't bet on that, we won) and that by the time he went the others would be better equipped to shoulder the burden of office.

The idea has a superficial attraction. No one could ever allege that Roy wasn't up to the job. Indeed there were many occasions during the Kinnock years when one would have given a great deal to see Roy in charge. On the other hand, he is over sixty. His retirement has been announced. He represents

the past rather than the future. On top of which he has never been all that popular either with the public or with the party, despite his undoubted ability. I agreed to sound out friends and report back.

Wednesday, 18 May

A depressing meeting of the Campaign Group, always at its worst when discussing election slates. The gist of most contributions seemed to be that Blair must be stopped at any cost. Scarcely anyone mentioned issues or the desirability of winning the election. For a while it looked as though they were going to throw their lot in with John Prescott although Dennis Skinner, who knows him well, is very much against. I can't bear the thought of another phoney-left leader. Give me an honest right-winger any day. The division bell intervened before I could contribute and the meeting ended inconclusively.

Friday, 20 May

To Edinburgh for John Smith's funeral. I caught the seven o'clock from Sunderland and ran into Derek Foster, Ronnie Campbell, David Clark, Steve Byers and John McWilliam on the platform at Newcastle. John Prescott and a crowd of members from Yorkshire were further down the carriage and, to judge by the laughter emanating from that direction, in surprisingly high spirits.

We were in Edinburgh by 9.20 a.m. and walked together down the Royal Mile to the car park beside Holyrood Palace where coaches were waiting to take us to Cluny Parish Church, round the corner from John's home in the south of the city. Everywhere photographers with long lenses. The surrounding streets sealed to traffic. A rumour that the Israeli Prime Minister was coming, which was why security was especially tight. In the event, there was no sign of him.

We were in our seats an hour and a half before the service. I sandwiched between the Ulster Unionist John Taylor and Barbara Roche. The Prime Minister and his wife, who arrived about thirty minutes in advance, were five rows in front. John's coffin surmounted by a wreath of white lilies, rested before the altar.

For all practical purposes, a state funeral. The Queen was represented by Jim Callaghan. A frail, solitary figure in morning dress, he arrived in a Daimler flying the Royal Pennant, escorted by police outriders. The last to take his seat before the immediate family.

A lean, spare service, no kneeling, a few good hymns. Tributes from Donald Dewar and Derry Irvine, who had both known John since university, and acting Labour leader Margaret Beckett on the verge of tears. A psalm in Gaelic beautifully sung by Kenna Campbell. Finally, the coffin was carried out to begin its journey to Iona where he will be buried privately tomorrow.

So much grief for one man who never made more than the most minor impact in government. What we were mourning, of course, was promise unfulfilled. After years in the wilderness, a thoroughly decent man appeared from almost nowhere and offered us the hope of rebuilding our shattered social fabric, and then, suddenly he is gone.

Briefly I attended the reception at Parliament House. As I left, a pane of glass, half an inch thick, fell from a skylight about sixty feet up. My briefcase was smothered with fragments. A few feet more and the next funeral might have been mine.

Tuesday, 24 May

Tony Blair came to a poorly attended meeting of the Civil Liberties Group to tell us about civil

liberties under Labour, although none of us now expects that he will be Home Secretary in a Labour government. I asked if he would support a requirement that Freemasons in public office should be obliged to disclose. 'Yes, why not,' he replied, 'but don't expect me to make a major issue out of it.'

Wednesday, 25 May

Not many takers for a Hattersley ticket. Bruce Grocott, Dawn Primarolo and Tony Banks all said 'no'. I spied John Gilbert consulting Dennis Skinner, an unlikely duo if ever there was, and he told me afterwards that Dennis sounded interested.

Tuesday, 31 May

To Windsor Castle with Ngoc's friends, Mr and Mrs Thanh, whom we collected from Heathrow earlier this morning.

'What's this room?' asked Sarah as we entered an apartment stuffed with pictures by Rubens and Van Dyck.

'It's the Queen's Drawing Room,' I read from the sign above the door.

'Does that mean the Queen did those drawings?'

Sunday, 5 June

Brixton Road

After lunch, we loaded up the car and set out for Sunderland. As we passed Sherwood Forest, Ngoc explained to Sarah about Robin Hood. This prompted many questions. 'When did Robin Hood live? Before you and Dad were born? Before Granny and Grandpa? Did he ever visit Vietnam?' Finally, she remarked that Robin Hood wouldn't give us any money because we had a lot. In fact, he would probably take our money and give it to the poor.

Wednesday, 8 June

This evening I chaired a rally at Farringdon School for our European Parliament candidate, Alan Donnelly. Roy Hattersley was the main speaker. 'You will be fair,' he said. 'Why of course, Roy. What do you take me for?'

Like all Donnelly events, the rally was organised like an American convention – balloons, a band, a starlet or two, plus a couple of hundred ultra-loyal pensioners. The only hiccup came at the end when a net full of balloons was unleashed onto the band, who were struggling to play a tune suitable for our triumphal exit.

When I returned home, I found a message to ring John Gilbert. You'll never guess, I said, I've just spent the evening with Roy Hattersley. John was ringing to say that his little plan to install Roy in the leadership had come to nought. The great man had declared that he wanted none of it.

Friday, 10 June

A call from Giles Radice. Might I be persuaded to vote for Tony Blair? I could be, I said, but I hadn't yet made up my mind. 'You'd be a big catch,' he said. What he means is they'd like a left-winger to

show the breadth of their support and I'm the most likely sucker.

Saturday, 11 June

A call from Tony Blair. Could he count on my support? Possibly, I said, but I didn't want to commit myself at this stage. Also, I would like to hear his views on coping with the power structure. We left that I would call his assistant for an appointment next week.

Sunday, 12 June

Stella Rimington, the head of MI5, gave the Dimbleby lecture before an invited audience at the Banqueting House. She was full of assurances that MI5 didn't spy on politicians or on legitimate dissenters (no mention of CND, the National Council for Civil Liberties or the miners' strike). I'm inclined to believe her, if she is talking about the present, but she rather damaged her case by pretending that nothing of the sort had happened in the past.

Monday, 13 June

Ann Taylor rang to see if I would vote for Blair. I seem to be a prime target, but I can't think why they bother. Tony's going to walk it.

Wednesday, 15 June

An hour at the Campaign Group. Unsurprisingly, Ken Livingstone has failed to find the necessary thirty-four nominations and has withdrawn from the leadership election.

Later, I gatecrashed a meeting of the Tribune Group and listened to the leadership candidates. All very fluent, but a little thin on detail.

Thursday, 16 June

Northern Ireland questions. I asked why the RUC were still resisting the use of tape recorders at Castlereagh and refusing to admit solicitors to interrogations. Who better, I asked, to introduce these elementary reforms than a Secretary of State who, as Attorney General, had presided over a series of disasters in the English legal system? A pathetic reply from the Minister of State, John Wheeler. I flashed a smile at the Secretary of State, Patrick Mayhew, who was sitting beside him, but he was not amused.

Nominations for the leadership closed at 4 p.m. Blair has over 150 and Margaret Beckett and John Prescott about forty each. Given that there is no serious ideological difference between the three of them, it seems only logical to vote for the one most likely to help us win the election and that's obviously Blair. I decided not to nominate him, however, in order to distinguish myself from the jobseekers who are flocking to his banner.

Monday, 20 June

Ngoc delivered me to Durham for the 10.46. On the way down, I read a shocking article in the *Guardian* about a new famine in Ethiopia. ~~This one threatens to be worse even than the last.~~ It said that parents were having to choose which of their children to feed, in the hope that at least one or two would survive. Not for the first time, I find myself wondering whether I wouldn't be more use to the world if I worked for an aid agency instead of being a minor politician ministering to the generally sullen and relatively prosperous. The trouble is I have no skill to offer, except as a propagandist. I speak no foreign language, couldn't drill a water hole or administer medicine. I am entirely useless. Perhaps one day I shall be the Overseas Development Minister. Nothing would give me greater pleasure.

Thursday, 23 June

Tea with Tony Blair. We sat on the little terrace outside his office on the first floor of One Parliament Street. A lovely little enclave, but for the dust and noise from the building site next door. Tony confirmed that he was committed to a national minimum wage, which is, for me, the bottom line. I wanted to hear the words from his own lips, because it has been suggested that he is not sound on this issue. However, it is referred to in his statement of values published today (which, that apart, is a rather thin document).

I pressed him to think about how he was going to deal with the power structure. He confirmed that he will go for disclosure of political donations and also that he will disqualify hereditary peers from voting in the Lords. He also confirmed that he would make the intelligence services accountable to Parliament rather than to the executive. On the media, he was non-committal. I told him that we won't survive unless we tackle ownership. Tony listened, but said nothing except that they could do an awful lot of damage. I suspect he will err on the side of caution. I shall keep badgering.

I also tackled him about the kind of regime he envisaged. He confirmed that it will be broad-based. 'I am not bothered about left or right as much as competence.' He said one other interesting thing. 'There is a tradition in the Labour Party of talking big and acting small. It should be the other way round.' We should learn from the Tories, who always did much more than they said they would. Amen to that.

Monday, 27 June

To London on the 10.46. Alan Milburn, a strong Blair supporter, joined me at Darlington. I expressed concern that Tony was too close to Peter Mandelson. Alan said he had put this to Tony and that Tony had said he recognised that his association with Mandelson was damaging. Alan takes the view that Peter is hooked on manipulation. 'He just can't stop himself.' By way of evidence, he pointed to evidence of Peter's hand in some of the press speculation the weekend after John Smith's death. Alan agreed that Peter was bound to be a minister in a Blair regime, but doubts that he'll ever make the Cabinet. 'He's only got two supporters in the Shadow Cabinet – Blair and Brown.' Quite so.

Later, a drink on the terrace with Charles Clarke, who used to work for Neil Kinnock. He came to discuss the minority report on party funding, which I drafted for the select committee. He was very complimentary, said it would form the basis for legislation and advised me to get something drafted. He had one or two reservations: it would be unwise to exclude recent donors from receiving political appointments because that would include trade unionists and we were short of talent to take over

some of the Tory quangos. State funding, he said, could only be introduced with all-party support. The only way that could be obtained would be to introduce disclosure and then wait two or three years for the Tory funding to suffer, as it would be bound to. Then they might be more sympathetic. Good thinking, but I'd prefer not to have to introduce it at all.

It was apparent that, unlike many in the Labour Party, Charles had given serious thought to coping with the power structure. So, he claimed, had Kinnock. The problem, he said, had been Hattersley, with whom there had been considerable tension. Cledwyn Hughes had apparently drafted a two-clause Bill for Neil, which would have disenfranchised hereditary peers. He also said that Neil had been determined to do something about Murdoch.

This evening, to the Foreign Office for a drinks party given by Douglas Hogg for veterans of the Intelligence Services Bill. The spooks were out in force – the head of all three services, MI5, MI6 and GCHQ. I chatted to a man from SIS who has the responsibility of preparing the service for the dawning of what passes for democracy. I asked if he could cope with an oversight committee that was responsible to Parliament rather than to the Prime Minister. He went a bit red in the face and said it would be a matter for the politicians. (Maybe, but I bet they would fight it like hell.)

I asked the head of GCHQ if it was true that they bugged domestic as well as international telephone calls. Far from denying it, he said there was nothing to stop them, 'provided it was properly warranted'. I asked what there was to stop an employee on the nightshift indulging in a little freelance tapping. He said that the system of cross-checking was such that it would show up on the computer and could not easily be erased.

Tuesday, 28 June

A drink with the *Sunderland Echo's* new lobby correspondent, a young journalist called Tom Baldwin, who is hungry for stories. I explained to him that I was anxious to keep many of my more interesting activities out of the *Echo* since they only lead to a wave of anonymous letters demanding to know why their MP was taking an interest in matters beyond the roundabout at the end of the Durham Road. I must try to keep him supplied with local stories if he is to be kept out of mischief.

Thursday, 30 June

One of those rare days – there are about two or three a year – on which I am permitted to address the nation, albeit in sound bites. Sir John May's inquiry into the Guildford and Woolwich cases reported four years and eight months after it was set up. All very hush-hush, considering it was supposed to be a public inquiry. Most of his interviews have been conducted in private. The contrast with the judicial inquiry being conducted by Lord Justice Scott into the Iraqi arms affair is stark. Even finding out where and when the press conference was taking place proved difficult. My secretary, Jacky, rang the Inquiry number, but obtained no answer. I rang the Private Secretary to the Attorney General and he said the Home Office were dealing with it. I rang the Home Secretary's Private Secretary and he referred me to a civil servant who had worked for the Inquiry, but had now returned to another department. He turned out not to have come in because of the train strike. I rang the Press Association legal correspondent and she said she had been sworn to secrecy. Very odd. Anyway, I eventually tracked the press conference down to the Royal Institute of Mechanical Engineers, just over the road from Parliament.

I persuaded the Home Office to send me over an advance copy, which I received at 12.45. Having read the introduction and the conclusions, I drafted a short statement, made about twenty copies and wandered over to the press conference in good time to distribute my statement to the waiting hacks.

Just as well I did. The report was more or less a snow job, absolving just about everyone except the Guildford Four. There is mild criticism of the police and the DPP, but no names are named. No criticism of the forensic scientist who rewrote his evidence at the suggestion of the police and the prosecution. No view as to how the confessions were obtained – and you would have to have fallen on a Christmas tree to believe they were voluntary. No criticism of his fellow judges, no evidence indeed that Sir John has even interviewed them. And at the end he absolves the legal system as a whole.

At the press conference he was repeatedly asked to express a view about the guilt or innocence of the four and declined to do so, offering instead weasel words about their being entitled to be regarded as innocent. He added that his judicial training constrained him from expressing a view. Well it certainly hasn't constrained some of his judicial colleagues and they didn't have the benefit of an inquiry lasting four years and eight months.

While the press conference was still going on, I nipped downstairs and recorded interviews with ITN, BBC Television, BBC Radio, RTE, Sky and one or two others. I then returned to the House to finish a piece for the *Guardian* which I faxed over just after five. Finally, a quick telephone interview with the *PM* programme and then to King's Cross for the train to Sunderland. All in all, a good day's work.

Monday, 4 July

Sarah said to me at breakfast this morning, 'I know what you wish, Dad.'

'What's that, Sarah?'

'You wish you didn't have to go to your Parliament so you could stay here with me.'

As she was leaving for school, she said, 'Bye, Dad; I hope you won't be bored in your Parliament.'

A brief chat with Livingstone in the division lobby at ten. I put it to him that, if he had made more effort, he would have been a contender for the leadership by now. 'No I wouldn't,' he said. 'There has been an irreversible shift to the right. It always happens when we are in opposition for a long time. It happened in the fifties. Look at Tony Banks. He has worked hard in Parliament and where has that got him? Forty or fifty votes in Shadow Cabinet elections. Maybe I would have got a few more, but not many.'

Ken thinks everything will change when we get into government. He is very gloomy about the economy which, he believes, is in a worse state than anyone anticipates and, if so, that will be his chance. All I can say is he'd better start doing some ground work. Funnily enough he was optimistic about a Blair regime facing up to the power structure. 'They might be quite good on things like that, because they won't be able to afford to do anything else. We might even get some decent gay rights legislation.'

A few minutes later I was sitting scribbling in the Members' Lobby when Nicholas Soames and Tristan Garel-Jones bore down upon me. 'Tell me, Mullin,' boomed Soames, 'supposing Labour win the next election, what job are you going to get?' He added quietly, 'They'll put you in the Home Office, won't they?'

'I don't think I'll be allowed anywhere near the Home Office.'

To which Garel-Jones added, 'Of course he won't. When Labour becomes the government people like Jim Callaghan and Walter Harrison take over. People like Mullin will have to move from one

safe house to another under cover of darkness.’

Wednesday, 6 July

This evening I chaired a meeting organised by Amnesty International at the Friends Meeting House for an American nun, Sister Helen Prejean, who is campaigning against the death penalty. About 200 people attended. Sister Helen is over here to launch her book *Dead Man Walking*, a moving account of her work with death row prisoners in Louisiana. She held everyone spellbound for ninety minutes. ‘Only politicians benefit from the death penalty,’ she said. ‘It enables them to pretend they are tough on crime without actually addressing the causes of crime.’ She was in favour of public executions on the grounds that once the public knew the full horror, they’d react against it. An interesting thought, but I have my doubts. The best hope, she said, was that the Supreme Court would eventually put a stop to it, as they had done once before. Already President Clinton had appointed two Supreme Court justices who were more or less opposed and others were coming up for retirement. She also said that Hillary Clinton is against. Perhaps we should be lobbying her, rather than her husband.

Friday, 8 July

Sunderland

At this evening’s surgery, a young woman who said she had been summoned by a DSS fraud officer who had accused her of cohabiting. She denied this, but said he wasn’t interested in hearing her side of the story. Instead he propositioned her. He gave her the weekend to think about it and asked her to call back next week. I took a signed statement from the woman and rang the head of the DSS fraud section. He told us to tell her to go ahead with the appointment and he would arrange for the interview to be monitored.

Saturday, 9 July

This week’s *Tribune* carries my article on why I am voting for Tony Blair, accompanied by a simply awful photograph. I fear it is going to get me into trouble with some people.

To Durham for the Miners’ Gala. I walked in with the Wearmouth banner. Just before we reached the County Hotel we were joined by John Prescott and his wife Pauline and the cameras homed in on us. Pauline, I suspect, is not entirely at home in the world of politics. John introduced us but my name clearly didn’t ring a bell. Seeing the camera round my neck she inquired, ‘Are you a freelance photographer?’

Whereupon John hissed, ‘I told you, you should have stayed on the balcony’.

Wednesday, 13 July

To the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre for Mo Mowlam’s media conference. There was a lot of crap about information superhighways and the wonders of optical-fibre networks all designed to intimidate us into doing away with regulation and allowing the market to let rip. A dreary man from BT told us that it was already possible to transmit the entire contents of the Encyclopedia Britannica around the world in less than half a second and that optical fibre made possible a simultaneous two-way conversation between every man, woman and child on the planet. A fat lot of use if you are starving. A man from Sky told us that nothing needed doing about anything. A man from cable TV

said that they must be let in on the act as soon as possible. There was even a man from the *Guardian/Observer* who wanted to sweep away such limits as there are on cross-media ownership so he could get into television. He promised that the *Guardian's* high standards would be maintained, but as someone pointed out, the *Guardian* was already a big shareholder in GMTV which is junk television incarnate.

There was a session on ownership. David Glencross of the ITC said that the market share of advertising should be the determining factor. He suggested a maximum of 25 per cent. Greg Dyke made a good speech. Multichannel TV was coming whether the Labour Party liked it or. The key issue was not delivery systems, it was programmes. Sky is buying 93 per cent of its programmes from the US. Off-the-peg American drama can be bought in at \$50,000 an hour, whereas British-made drama cost \$600,000 an hour. We had to find a way of encouraging programmes. The EC rule about 51 per cent local content should be applied to Sky, together with the same quotas on news, current affairs and regional television that applied to terrestrial TV. He said the rules on cross-media ownership had been fixed by Thatcher for the benefit of Murdoch. News International must be prevented from controlling both the delivery system and the encryption, otherwise no one else would get in on the market.

I put my tuppence ha'penny worth in from the floor. We shouldn't be intimidated by all this technobabble, I said. We should be concerned about the social, political and cultural consequences. We already had junk newspapers, now we were faced with junk television and soon we would have a junk culture. We had to find a way of preventing a handful of megalomaniacs from taking control of everything we see and read. It went down like a lead balloon, although one or two people (including Bob Phillis, deputy director general of the BBC) came up to me later and said they agreed.

Afterwards I put it to both Greg Dyke and Bob Phillis that, in crude political terms, a Labour government had about six months after taking office to do something about Murdoch or else he would do something about us. They both agreed. Greg said go for the encryption system. Phillis said he would invite Murdoch to choose between his newspapers and his television interests. I asked if either of them were talking to Mo or Robin Cook. Neither of them are. I just hope someone manages to smuggle a message through to the top, otherwise we are doomed.

Thursday, 14 July

To John Smith's memorial service at Westminster Abbey and then home on the six o'clock train. For most of the journey I was alone in the carriage except for a party at the far end who seemed to be receiving an unusual level of service. Staff from the dining car were whizzing back and forth with food and gin and tonics. At first I assumed it was some British Rail bigwigs, but after a while curiosity overcame me and I went to take a look. It was the Duke of Edinburgh. There were three people with him, one of whom appeared to be a detective. He got off at Darlington carrying a battered briefcase.

Saturday, 16 July

My old friend Hugh MacPherson has used his *Tribune* column to denounce me for supporting Blair. He even suggests that I have done it in pursuit of a job, which is a bit low. Never mind, my back is broad.

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