

A Boulton
First
25 April 2012
Exhibits TABB1-7

**IN THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURE, PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE
PRESS**

EXHIBIT TABB6

This is the exhibit TABB6 referred to in the first witness statement of Thomas Adam Babington Bolton dated 25 April 2012.

'A vivid, and often gripping first-hand account of life at the very heart of events . . . a lively account of kitchen cabinet turmoil'
David McKie, *Guardian*

'Throughout Tony Blair's ten years in power, Adam Boulton, Sky's political editor, reported every row, revolt, reshuffle and resignation . . . His book about Blair is an eye-opening behind-the-scenes tour of contemporary history. Fair-minded and sympathetic, he's quick to praise Blair's many achievements, but also reveals in shocking detail the lengths to which Downing Street – and sometimes the PM – would go to lie, bully and cheat. Invaluable for understanding the political world today' *Daily Mail*

'On the air-Sky News is an absolute paragon of respectability and Adam Boulton is perhaps the most respected news presenter on any channel' Gerald Kaufman

'There are, I freely grant, many journalists who do not think that all politicians are criminals, and still cling to the old-fashioned belief that the political process is important. They want to tease out the truth rather than batter politicians to death. Adam Boulton of Sky News is one example' Stephen Glover, *Spectator*

'Adam Boulton is admirably well-informed and non-partisan'
Martin Bell, *Independent*

TONY'S TEN YEARS

Memories of the Blair Administration

ADAM BOULTON



this was at the suggestion of Derry Irvine during a preparatory brainstorming session and, conveniently, the programme's broadcast happened to coincide with a BBC television adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's classic. He also regularly played tennis with the coach at the nearby RAF Halton base and sat in the sunshine if there was any.

On Sunday evenings, Blair's advisers and political friends got used to receiving handwritten faxes, and subsequently retyped emails, from the prime minister outlining action plans developed from his weekend cogitations.

During one of his last weekends, on Sunday 6 May, Blair confounded his technophobe reputation by recording a YouTube message to the French people, congratulating them on the election that day of their new president, Nicolas Sarkozy. Dressed in an open-necked blue shirt against a soft background of wood panelling, the prime minister spoke in French for nearly four minutes, passing on '*mes félicitations*' and warning the French of the consequences of electing a reformer in the Blair mould: '*Le changement n'est jamais chose facile*'. (Over the next year the clip received nearly half a million 'hits' but the website — usually an open forum for comment and the exchange of opinion — stopped anyone 'answering back'.)

Chequers also provided a base for some solo socialising by the prime minister. Friends would drop by or he could nip out to the houses of other weekenders in the area, including Sir Jackie Stewart, the world champion motor racing driver, and, a bit further away in Woodstock, Rebekah Wade, and Matthew Freud and Elisabeth Murdoch.

Big-house hospitality is not the easiest thing to pull off. However born to the role the hosts may be, in my view anyone invited for 'a weekend' should have their escape routes well planned in advance.

I went to Chequers once as a guest during Blair's ten years, one chilly Eastertide early in the premiership. The invitation had come unexpectedly to four journalists: Elinor Goodman of Channel 4, Andrew Marr of the BBC, John Sergeant from ITN and myself. None of us knew why we were there and we weren't any clearer after we'd been greeted warmly by the prime minister, open-necked, at his front door. Alastair Campbell was the only other guest present.

Our small talk over drinks in the drawing room was pretty stilted, grasping gratefully for the English landscape paintings on the walls. A quick check of the labels on the way into lunch showed Mr Blair to be a bit shaky on his attributions between Turner and Constable.

The dining room was solid and dingy, the atmosphere that you'd expect on an infrequent visit to distant but affluent elderly relatives. The occasion was not a glittering soireé. Neither a convivial social occasion nor a regular media encounter, it can best be described as an awkward working lunch with political editors from television news on one side and Blair and Campbell on the other. Things didn't get any easier when the prime minister broke the ice with 'Well, how am I doing?' Television reporters broadcast live opinions for a living, but it's much more difficult to opine straight into the face of your subject while you are eating his food. Far from lecturing us, Blair's instinctive approach was to try to assimilate us into his big tent, all sitting together swapping views as like-minded adults.

The government was then in its 'post-euphoria, pre-delivery phase' and we babbled unhappily about the public services and public indifference to the changes being made. As always on schools, health and delivery to the public, Blair showed himself the master of statistics and the latest think tank policy. Campbell looked on silently from the end of the table. After lunch came the tour of the house. He must have done it hundreds of times, but Blair was an enthusiastic guide, stocked with anecdotes about the books, and the old master Churchill had 'improved' with his own paintbrush.

I was still wondering what that had been about as we bade our farewells. While the ever-obliging Blair posed for a picture with Danny, my mini-cab driver, Campbell engaged us in some banter about some of our colleagues in the parliamentary lobby. None of us was particularly kind about the minority of political journalists, almost all working for newspapers, whose main interests were gossip and scandal rather than reporting Westminster. Even such mildly disobliging remarks about colleagues were a mistake. Campbell would soon teach us that there was indeed no such thing as a free lunch at Chequers.

What we had said could be used as cover, passed off as informal consultation with senior reporters on a plan Campbell was determined

to execute. When the Easter recess ended he moved immediately to distance Number 10 from the lobby. Campbell stopped giving briefings himself – given his intimacy with Blair, he had always been a highly informative and valuable official source. Now he shut himself off and created a new civil service post of PMOS, prime minister's official spokesman. Crucially, unlike Campbell, the civil servant spokesmen could credibly plead ignorance about what was going on and give out less and lower-quality information. At Chequers, Blair and Campbell had drawn us into sympathising with some of their complaints against some journalists without telling us what their plans were. Now, in their view, our comments had provided at least some of the justification for changes in the briefing system, which disadvantaged the media as a whole.

The Blairs took full advantage of Chequers to throw farewell parties. On Saturday 26 May, Tony and Cherie invited several hundred of those and their partners who had worked with them to a Saturday-night party. Given the numbers involved, this mostly took place in tents pitched on the lawns.

A week later, on the night of Saturday 2 June, Blair hosted a dinner which was very much a 'no partners' event. Cherie was not present. This was Blair's private celebration for the team of '97 – those who had been closest to him, and most involved in political evangelism on his behalf, during his time in power. His original plan had been to have a dinner for Peter Mandelson and those of Mandelson's friends who had stuck by him, notably Roger Liddle and Patrick Diamond, who had worked on policy for both Mandelson and the prime minister – a remarkable gesture of friendship on a par with the invitation Blair had issued immediately after sacking Mandelson from the cabinet for the first time, to stay at Chequers with his partner Reinaldo Avila da Silva. But Campbell and Sally Morgan got to hear of the plan and invited themselves along to the Mandelson tribute. Blair gave in and converted the event into a 'last supper' – although there were rather more than twelve disciples. Gathered round the table were those who saw themselves as Blair's loyal team from the days of opposition onward: Jonathan Powell, Anji Hunter, Sally Morgan, Kate Garvey, Alastair Campbell, Tim

Allan, Philip Gould, Peter Mandelson, James Purnell, Geoffrey Norris, Liz Lloyd, Pat McFadden, Peter Hyman, David Miliband, Sarah Hunter and Ben Wegg-Prosser, plus Mandelson's friends Diamond and Liddle.

As an ice-breaker, Kate Garvey – who had left the events team at Number 10 after the 2005 election for Freud Communications – organised a short video. This was entitled *Guide to the Real World for Tony, the Prime Minister*. Based on the premise that a 'severely damaged' man had been kept away from ordinary living for a decade, this featured a series of 'how to' introductions: Kate Garvey on checking-in at airports and using the telephone (dialling, and finding numbers rather than always having the Downing Street 'switch' on the other end); Sarah Hunter on walking around in public; Anji Hunter on using money and driving (opening the door yourself, sitting in the front seat, stopping at red lights, etc.); Philip Gould on using a credit card ('as you can see mine's gold – yours won't be because you haven't got enough money, but you will in time'). Verisimilitude was provided by links from Jon Sopel in the BBC News studio, and a location stand-up by me, recorded while the Blairs and Mandelas were posing for the cameras in Johannesburg. Intriguingly, Alastair Campbell was the only one to take on another persona, wearing glasses and assuming a cod Viennese accent, to give his diagnosis as 'an expert in psychological flaws'. (Perhaps private recognition that despite his denials he had been the source of the notorious quote about Brown.)

Then came the speeches. Anji Hunter burst into tears and said, 'Didn't my old friend do well?' Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell competed to be the dominant male after Blair, but the prime minister had the final say. Looking around the table, he lavished praise on his followers: 'If these people were working for anyone they could win any election, anywhere around the world. Without you guys we'd never have achieved what we've done . . .' Then he gave more than a hint that, in his view, they had signed on for a life of service: 'We have achieved a great deal but I also know that we have still got a great deal to do together.'

Immediately after they left Downing Street, Gordon Brown allowed the Blairs to enjoy a final stay at Chequers, which lasted into the