



News from Westminster

11th May 2007 Phil Hope MP

Tony Blair steps down as leader of the Labour Party

The Prime Minister announces that he will step down as PM on 27 June in a speech made at Trimdon Labour Club in Sedgefield

On Thursday Tony Blair MP, Leader of the Labour Party, and John Prescott MP, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, announced they will step down from the leadership of the Labour Party.

Tony Blair further announced that on 27 June he will step down as Prime Minister.

The Labour Party will now begin the process of selecting a new leadership team with the new Leader and Deputy Leader being announced at the Leadership Conference on Sunday, 24 June.

I'm sure, like me, you sat and watched this speech on TV - but thought you would like a record of this historic day.

Speech by Prime Minister Tony Blair in Sedgefield, Co. Durham

10 May 2007

I have come back here, to Sedgefield, to my constituency. Where my political journey began and where it is fitting it should end.

Today I announce my decision to stand down from the leadership of the Labour Party. The Party will now select a new Leader. On 27 June I will tender my resignation from the office of Prime Minister to The Queen.

I have been Prime Minister of this country for just over 10 years. In this job, in the world today, that is long enough, for me but more especially for the country. Some times the only way you conquer the pull of power is to set it down.

It is difficult to know how to make this speech today. There is a judgment to be made on my premiership. And in the end that is, for you, the people to make.

I can only describe what I think has been done over these last 10 years and perhaps more important why.

I have never quite put it like this before.

I was born almost a decade after the Second World War. I was a young man in the social revolution of the 60s and 70s. I reached political maturity as the Cold War was ending, and the

world was going through a political, economic and technological revolution.

I looked at my own country. A great country. Wonderful history. Magnificent traditions. Proud of its past. But strangely uncertain of its future. Uncertain about the future. Almost old-fashioned. All of that was curiously symbolized in its politics.

You stood for individual aspiration and getting on in life or social compassion and helping others. You were liberal in your values or conservative.

You believed in the power of the State or the efforts of the individual. Spending more money on the public realm was the answer or it was the problem.

None of it made sense to me. It was 20th century ideology in a world approaching a new millennium. Of course people want the best for themselves and their families but in an age where human capital is a nation's greatest asset, they also know it is just and sensible to extend opportunities, to develop the potential to succeed, for all not an elite at the top.

People are today open-minded about race and sexuality, averse to prejudice and yet deeply and rightly conservative with a small 'c' when it comes to good manners, respect for others, treating people courteously.

They acknowledge the need for the state and the responsibility of the individual. They know spending money on our public services matters and that it is not enough. How they are run and organized matters too.

So 1997 was a moment for a new beginning: for sweeping away all the detritus of the past. Expectations were so high. Too high. Too high in a way for either of us.

Now in 2007, you can easily point to the challenges, the things that are wrong, the grievances that fester.

But go back to 1997. Think back. No, really, think back. Think about your own living standards then in May 1997 and now. Visit your local school, any of them round here, or anywhere in modern Britain. Ask when you last had to wait a year or more on a hospital waiting list, or heard of pensioners freezing to death in the winter unable to heat their homes.

There is only one Government since 1945 that can say all of the following: More jobs, Fewer unemployed, Better health and education results, Lower crime; and economic growth in every quarter.

This one.

But I don't need a statistic. There is something bigger than what can be measured in waiting lists or GCSE results or the latest crime or jobs figures.

Look at our economy. At ease with globalization. London the world's financial centre. Visit our great cities and compare them with 10 years ago. No country attracts overseas investment like we do.

Think about the culture of Britain in 2007. I don't just mean our arts that are thriving. I mean our values. The minimum wage. Paid holidays as a right. Amongst the best maternity pay and leave in Europe. Equality for gay people.

Or look at the debates that reverberate round the world today. The global movement to support Africa in its struggle against poverty. Climate change. The fight against terrorism.

Britain is not a follower. It is a leader. It gets the essential characteristic of today's world: its interdependence.

This is a country today that for all its faults, for all the myriad of unresolved problems and fresh challenges, is comfortable in the 21st Century. At home in its own skin, able not just to be proud of its past but confident of its future.

I don't think Northern Ireland would have been changed unless Britain had changed. Or the Olympics won if we were still the Britain of 1997.

As for my own leadership, throughout these 10 years, where the predictable has competed with the utterly unpredicted, right at the outset one thing was clear to me.

Without the Labour Party allowing me to lead it, nothing could ever have been done. But I knew my duty was to put the country first. That much was obvious to me when just under 13 years ago I became Labour's Leader.

What I had to learn, however, as Prime Minister was what putting the country first really meant. Decision-making is hard. Every one always says: listen to the people. The trouble is they don't always agree.

When you are in Opposition, you meet this group and they say why can't you do this? And you say: it's really a good question. Thank you. And they go away and say: its great, he really listened.

You meet that other group and they say: why can't you do that? And you say: it's a really good question. Thank you. And they go away happy you listened.

In Government you have to give the answer, not an answer, the answer.

And, in time, you realise putting the country first doesn't mean doing the right thing according to conventional wisdom or the prevailing consensus or the latest snapshot of opinion.

It means doing what you genuinely believe to be right.

Your duty is to act according to your conviction. All of that can get contorted so that people think you act according to some messianic zeal.

Doubt, hesitation, reflection, consideration and re-consideration these are all the good companions of proper decision-making.

But the ultimate obligation is to decide.

Sometimes the decisions are accepted quite quickly. Bank of England independence was one, which gave us our economic stability.

Sometimes like tuition fees or trying to break up old monolithic public services, they are deeply controversial, hellish hard to do, but you can see you are moving with the grain of change round the word.

Sometimes like with Europe, where I believe Britain should keep its position strong, you know you are fighting opinion but you are content with doing so.

Sometimes as with the completely unexpected, you are alone with your own instinct.

In Sierra Leone and to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, I took the decision to make our country one that intervened, that did not pass by, or keep out of the thick of it.

Then came the utterly unanticipated and dramatic. September 11th 2001 and the death of 3,000 or more on the streets of New York.

I decided we should stand shoulder to shoulder with our oldest ally. I did so out of belief. So Afghanistan and then Iraq. The latter, bitterly controversial.

Removing Saddam and his sons from power, as with removing the Taliban, was over with relative ease.

But the blowback since, from global terrorism and those elements that support it, has been fierce and unrelenting and costly. For many, it simply isn't and can't be worth it.

For me, I think we must see it through. They, the terrorists, who threaten us here and round the world, will never give up if we give up.

It is a test of will and of belief. And we can't fail it. So: some things I knew I would be dealing with. Some I thought I might be.

Some never occurred to me on that morning of 2 May 1997 when I came into Downing Street for the first time. Great expectations not fulfilled in every part, for sure.

Occasionally people say, as I said earlier, they were too high, you should have lowered them.

But, to be frank, I would not have wanted it any other way. I was, and remain, as a person and as a Prime Minister an optimist. Politics may be the art of the possible; but at least in life, give the impossible a go.

So of course the vision is painted in the colours of the rainbow; and the reality is sketched in the duller tones of black, white and grey.

But I ask you to accept one thing. Hand on heart, I did what I thought was right. I may have been wrong. That's your call. But believe one thing if nothing else. I did what I thought was right for our country.

I came into office with high hopes for Britain's future. I leave it with even higher hopes for Britain's future.

This is a country that can, today, be excited by the opportunities not constantly fretful of the dangers. People often say to me: it's a tough job. Not really.

A tough life is the life the young severely disabled children have and their parents, who visited me in Parliament the other week.

Tough is the life my Dad had, his whole career cut short at the age of 40 by a stroke.

I have been very lucky and very blessed.

This country is a blessed nation.

The British are special.

The world knows it.

In our innermost thoughts, we know it.

This is the greatest nation on earth.

It has been an honour to serve it. I give my thanks to you, the British people, for the times I have succeeded, and my apologies to you for the times I have fallen short.

Good Luck.

New era starts in Northern Ireland after power sharing returns



On Tuesday DUP leader Ian Paisley and Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness took their pledge of office as devolution returns to Northern Ireland in a historic day.

Labour's Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern witnessed the ceremony.

Mr Paisley said that "I believe we're starting on a road which will bring us back to peace and to prosperity."

Mr McGuinness said that he was confident that he and the DUP could work together.

Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams said that it was a "big day" for the people of Ireland and that his party and the DUP had opened up "the potential for a new beginning."

Speaking after the ceremony Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party Tony Blair said that devolution marked the transition from conflict to peace and was "the visible expression of the fundamental principle of the peace process - that the future of Northern Ireland can only be governed successfully by the two communities working together."

The progress in Northern Ireland held a lesson for conflict resolution around the world, he added, and had done a "power of good" for optimists everywhere.

The first meeting of the new power-sharing executive is scheduled for later this week.

The return of devolved government follows a historic power sharing agreement in March between DUP leader Ian Paisley and Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams.

Watching the ceremony made me stop and think how much has changed in the last 10 years after tireless work by a Labour Government committed to bringing lasting peace to Northern Ireland. The progress made has been one of the proudest achievements of our Labour Government.

We all remember the dark days of the past, the almost daily reports of violence in Northern Ireland and the catastrophic attacks on mainland cities.

The security situation in NI is now transformed from where it was even three or four years ago. The IRA have ended their 'armed campaign' and decommissioned their weapons.

Last year I and fellow Labour MPs voted in Parliament to give the parties in Northern Ireland the tools they needed up to restore devolution.

I am so pleased that they have taken this historic opportunity to move from a divided past to a shared future