

HARRIET HARMAN

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Page MAIN SECTION 22

Polly Toynbee We thought we were getting a new feminised politics. It didn't happen

What Blair needs to do to woo back the women

Testosterone rampant on Charlevoix streets made women feel smug. Women are better than men: feminist orthodoxy requires we think it. But sometimes believers' faith in the doctrine wavers. Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt's Fabian pamphlet this week lays out the growing gender gap between women and men's voting intentions. Yet again women are swinging against Labour. What's new? If women never had the vote, we'd never have had Conservative governments. Thank women's votes for Thatcher, Europhobia, the poll tax and the tripling of poverty. Think Molly in Animal Farm — airhead, fickle, silly moos.

A month before the last election the Fawcett Society and Mori reported that a quarter of women voters were still undecided. They put the best possible gloss on it: "These are the thoughtful voters," they said. Oh hum. Another Mori poll showed 63% of women proclaim themselves "not interested" in politics, compared with only 31% of men. Women are less well informed with 10% more men reading quality newspapers. The gender gap in voting habits has been pretty constant since the war, but in 1997 Labour cut it to just 2%. Now the Harman paper shows 13% more women than men expressing dissatisfaction with Labour. Women switch-voters threaten to switch back.

Ever since Margaret Thatcher there's been a feminist problem with women and politics. (Well, we used to ex-

plain unconvincingly, it's all because she was one woman alone, pushing her way into an all-male world, forced to cast herself in iron, tougher than the boys and so on.) Feminists are used to the standing-on-your-head posture to explain why women are always justified. But there are good demographic reasons to explain women's tendency to vote Tory. All over 55s are far more conservative than the young: there are many more old women, so women as a bloc are more conservative. The hope is for the future: women under 35 are the opposite. They are 10% more Labour than young men. But psephologists don't know whether women turn Tory as they get old or whether the current old women are a dying Tory generation. British Social Attitudes shows how higher education creates far more liberal attitudes and older women are the least educated. There's an old tradition of working-class women adopting conservative views along with higher social aspirations preferring to vote with the antimacassar not the cloth cap. But that's all dying out.

Politicians are not allowed to think voters are ever wrong, so this week Labour women have sought to explain women's bad voting habits. It's all the government's fault. Labour hasn't delivered. In the focus groups women who switched from Tory in 1997 complain that Labour hasn't come across on health, education, books in schools, A and E in hospitals, nursery places, class sizes and lots more. (The report does

not say whether these logical, rational creatures think the Conservatives are likely to deliver more of those things.) Ignorant or not, they are unaware of what the government has done for women. The billions spent so far have not bought their votes, not the minimum wage (mainly for women), the working families tax credit, (mainly to women), biggest ever rise in child benefit (all to women), childcare tax credits, part-time workers rights or increased maternity. The news hasn't permeated the thick heads of the fair sex. What went wrong?

First of all, the poorest women who benefited most are the least likely to vote. Doing them good was for its own sake, not to buy votes. Some other policies haven't worked yet. Childcare credits have been taken up by few, not enough childcare is available, the money isn't enough to pay for it. What women want are high quality nurseries, but there's no plan for the gleaming universal nursery provision taken for granted across Europe. On the de Tocqueville principle of revolution, giving women a little more but not enough may only have inflamed them. Nice to have a bit more maternity pay and a

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few more rights, but it only reminds them how almost unbearably difficult it still is to have a baby and go back to work, juggle work and home and stay afloat.

Most mothers have to go back to work at 18 weeks and they feel it is too soon. There is no right to demand to work part-time or a four-day week, such as all men and women have in Holland and Belgium. And £70 a week doesn't buy enough childcare when it costs about £150. Too little, too timid, the policies for women haven't worked. As with the reluctant introduction of part-time workers rights, the government is so frightened of alarming business that they forgot to tell women altogether. They whispered and they mumbled.

What this pamphlet describes is an aura that died. Women in these focus groups thought they were getting a new, feminised politics. Blair looked nicely non-macho. Even if some gag at the sight, these women voters liked that picture of Blair surrounded by his 101 women MPs. But where did all those women MPs go? None in the key spending cabinet posts, none visible, even Mo shut out. The all-male image is rebarbative and image matters. But it's politics as usual, men's stuff, by men, for men. Old versus New Labour may fight it out — Kilfoyle v Mandelson — but both miss the spot for women. Gordon and his boys have done quite a bit for women — but it doesn't feel like women's policy because they don't own it. It has simply passed women voters by.

Tony Blair isn't even going

to the Labour women's conference on Saturday. Maybe the WI have traumatised him, but he's going to have to learn how to talk to women — and not in the dreadful unctuous tones he used on the WI. The hand-claps drowned out reporting of his actual words. If you missed his misguided, tin-eared attempt to please those women, it was patronisingly awful — all about his mother's sense of duty in doing meals on wheels, "the moral guidance of churches", "the case for marriage", "the forces that hold communities together, the family, the church, respect for elders". Those Tory harpies didn't believe him and younger Labour-leaning women would hate all that too.

Today is the Commons modernisation committee's last chance to do what they should have done three years ago — abolish late-night sittings and programme bills for sensible debating times. It's a belated symbol of the power of women in parliament, growing restive at the anonymous misery of backbench life. Labour has so badly lost the plot on women that it risks having fewer women MPs next time — 11 men selected for vacant seats and only one woman. Harriet Harman, with the support of likely cabinet star Patricia Hewitt, has laid out the solution. Try putting women first in policies and pronouncements, women ministers delivering policies for women and they might find the best path back to where most voters are.

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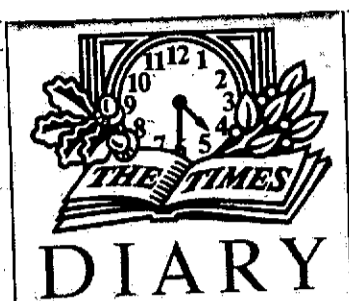
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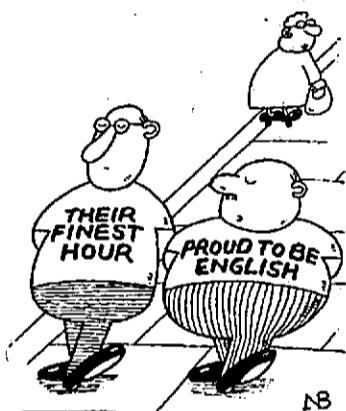
Tonge cheek

A LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MP has been mistaken for a lady of the night. Jenny Tonge, the party's International Development spokeswoman, who last week found herself ordered "off the streets" and accused of being a "bloody trollop" as she innocently went about her business in Westminster.

Jenny, 59, was relatively unfazed by her detractor, whom she dismisses as a "dotty old man". "I was wearing flat shoes and a long mac — so was he, now I come to think of it," she tells me. "I couldn't have looked less like a bloody trollop. I'm a late to middle-aged woman!" In fact, the Member for Richmond Park rather enjoyed the barracking. "I like being called a trollop," she adds. "I have a track-record in this, I'm afraid."

A sordid past, then? Happily, it is all quite innocent. Dr Tonge was referring to a meeting she had arranged with Paul Dacre, the Editor of the *Daily Mail*, in a Soho bar. "I spent an hour waiting for him in what turned out to be a knocking shop. I was getting very odd looks from people before I found out that I was supposed to be at the other end of the street."

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"Let us, at least, retain our English sense of irony."

□ Lord Donoughue, the Labour life peer and former business associate of Robert Maxwell, has written to his party's Chief Whip explaining why he will not be able to vote in the Lords on Tuesday. His excuse? He will be inspecting "equine facilities in Berkshire". That's a day's racing at Royal Ascot to you and me.

Designer brims with anger

PHILIP TREACY, the society milliner, has accused a Luton hatmaker of pinching one of his designs. Treacy, whose creations have graced the heads of Countess Deborah Von Bismarck and Kate Moss, has issued a High Court writ against the Whiteley Hat Company for an alleged breach of "copyright and design right" of his much-praised "asymmetrical hat".

"My client is concerned to protect the integrity of the design," explains Treacy's solicitor, Alison Murphy. "There will be an interim hearing in the next few weeks."

Peter Whiteley, who heads the small firm, is alarmed: "We are vigorously defending the action. The two shapes in question are not the same. It is the most outrageous allegation I've ever heard." He goes on: "The first we heard of it was the solicitor's letter. Our style is a fairly ordinary hat. It's nothing like one of his. It is a sloping crown on a small brim. The hat industry in the UK is small enough without someone trying to tear its heart out."

□ The Scots may despise England's success in Euro 2000. The Welsh, at least in the case of raunchy chanteuse Shirley Bassey, are more generous. On Saturday night, seconds after her concert at the Festival Hall had ended, she reappeared on the stage to inform her fans that England had beaten Germany. "How can I follow that?" she asked, before doing the encore with a rousing rendition of This Is My Life. No one cheered louder than John and Norma Major, who were among the audience.

Glenda takes on supporting role

WHO says Harriet Harman has no friends in the party? After the former Social Security Secretary's weekend attack on the Government's approach to women, Glenda Jackson, a fellow exile from the vipers' nest of the front bench, has also piped up about "women's issues".

"We still need to utilise women's talent and potential," declares Jackson. "Women are under-represented in all walks of life." What better than Harman's solution of ensuring that Labour employ a woman as deputy leader of the party?

Mark Inglefield

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Labour 'failing women'

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In a wake-up call to party strategists, the former Social Security Secretary said women felt that Labour's handling of the issues which really affect their lives had so far just been "more of the same".

Ms Harman was launching a package of female-friendly policies which she believes could turn Labour into the "natural party of women", after decades in which a majority of females have voted Tory.

In a Fabian Society pamphlet, Ms Harman calls for Labour to woo women by creating a three-person leadership team of one leader and two deputies, one of whom must be a woman.

The pamphlet, published yesterday and entitled Winning for Women, warns: "The vulnerability of Labour support among women is clear from polling evidence. Research reveals a widely-held view that the new approach to politics for which they voted has yet to happen."

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Women voters are no different from men: they want results

LAST WEEK, during House of Commons' Question Time, William Hague called Tony Blair, "Arrogant, opportunistic, remote". Tony responded by describing the leader of the opposition as, "A pathetic duplicitous nonentity." It's not quite up to the gladiatorial standards of Russell Crowe but it goes down well with the crowds, except, as a Fabian pamphlet published yesterday points out, in truth, such combat intensely displeases precisely that section of the audience who both politicians most desire: the floating female voter.

Winning for Women is written by Harriet Harman, the former Social Security secretary and Deborah Mattinson, adviser to the Labour Party for 15 years and director of Opinion Leader Research. Ten years ago, Mattinson co-authored a pamphlet called, *Women's votes: the key to winning*. It told the cloth cap and brown ale party, that if it didn't stop treating women as nothing more than tea ladies at its political meetings, it would never gain power.

Some of the advice was taken. In the Seventies, the gender gap gave the Conservatives a 12 per cent lead. By the last election, the gender gap had been reduced to 2 per cent. Women voted for New Labour because of the personal appeal of Mr Blair, because of his specific pledges on health, education, crime – and because a new style of politics was promised.

Winning for Women is damning in its criticism of how much New Labour has failed to deliver both in content and in image. "Women voters are not impressed by announcements about millions of pounds to be spent. The most important influence for women is their own experience," the report says. They also believe the much fêted new politics has yet to appear. The pamphlet sets out a number of valuable proposals, including improving the numbers of women MPs (since some will lose their seats at the next election) by reintroducing women-only shortlists for parliamentary candidates; changing Labour's constitution to ensure that it has a female deputy leader and strengthening policies on work-life issues.

Yesterday, on BBC's *On the Record*, Harriet Harman stressed that in this way, Labour could become, "the natural party of women..." as the



YVONNE
ROBERTS

'Some women are reluctant to push for change because they don't choose to be associated with feminism'

Democrats have done in the US. In their pamphlet, she and Mattinson further argue that Mr Blair does not need "to choose between an agenda for middle England and an agenda for its heartlands... whether in Worcester or Wigan, women have the same demands from government and feel the same impatience for change."

Of course, Labour needs a good kick up its masculine butt but still *Winning for Women* at times sounds like a female version of Tony's Big Tent – all inclusive, all embracing. While impatience for change might be universal, can it be true that all women have, "the same demands"?

In 1919, in the House of Commons, Lady Astor, arguing in support of giving the vote to women at 21, assured her fellow MPs that this would not mean members would combine into a single sex party. "We could not do it," she said. "We women disagree just as much as the men..." Women not only disagree but arguably now more than ever before, they have interests at odds with each other.

Women, for instance, run small businesses. They face an annual bill of £300 for every employee who claims the Working Family Tax Credit. Policies may appeal to the female employee but not necessarily to her woman boss. Again, at least 400,000 women are in the higher income tax bracket. If they are without any bent towards say, social justice why should they give a toss about the cost of giving a bolshie, teenage mother a hand



Tony Blair parades with female Labour MPs after the 1997 General Election

Andrew Buurman

up? Or extending maternity leave?

Even those women who support the radical overhaul of the male political world and its priorities, are ambivalent about precisely how that should be tackled, as Sue Tibballs points out in an excellent pamphlet, *The Sexual Renaissance, Making Sense of Sex Difference in a New Era*. In her research, she found little enthusiasm for campaigning in the name of women or men. "This is seen to create divisions between the sexes... Women have a particular dislike of products and activities being labelled as "female" because in the past women's activities are seen to have been devalued..."

This is the politician's dilemma. Namely, that gender differences do sometimes matter, but how do you take them into account without denying the diversity among women (for example, not all mothers want paid work) or implying that the issues they embrace don't also concern men (for instance, childcare)?

One area of consensus, however, did emerge among women, all which supports Mattinson and Harman's findings. They all complain of, "a persistent male culture resistant to their skills, contributions and needs... the reins of power are still overwhelmingly in male hands..."

Tibballs argues that, even so, some women are reluctant to push for change because they don't choose to be associated with a feminism in which, "women are the victims of oppressive men... if women's fortunes are up, men's must be down... women's interests are always seen as antagonistic to men's..." So, instead of working together collectively in the public arena on issues that matter, these women retreat back into the private sphere. They find their own solutions – manageable for those with the cash to cope – tough for the majority who don't.

This retreat not only adds to inequality, it also takes the pressure

off male politicians to change. Since, when women MPs look behind them to gauge the size of their support, the army is invisible. A tragedy since, as the hoot-out at the WI corral indicated, it takes only a handful and the weapon of embarrassment, to make a Prime Minister pause for thought.

Of course, women are divided not least in defining self-interest – but they do seem united in their objection to politics as a male empire to which they are invited to play by men's rules. So, where does that leave Mr Blair? He has to take a good look at the (male) make-up of Cabinet; the future dearth of women MPs and their continuing low-profile; he has to deliver on promises already made – and be more inclusive of women in those to come.

He then has to present this radical overhaul not as something patronisingly "special" for the floating female voter – but as the only way for a modern government to behave in the 21st century.

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Discarded Minister Harriet Harman warns Labour is out of touch

Why women are losing faith in Tony Blair, by a former admirer

HARRIET Harman joined the growing outcry against the Blair government yesterday, accusing the Premier of letting down women voters.

The former Social Security Secretary warned Labour's failure to match its rhetoric on schools and hospitals would result in women deserting the party at the next election.

Miss Harman's criticism came as she launched a campaign to change Labour rules to ensure there are more women both at Westminster and leading the party.

In a Fabian Society leaflet she argued that Labour should create a three-person leadership team with a leader and two deputies. One of the three posts must be taken by a woman.

Miss Harman, the most senior ex-minister to join the revolt against the leadership, warned Mr Blair that he won his landslide

By John Deans
Chief Political Correspondent

victory in 1997 largely because women were won over by his promises.

'Previously, women had persistently voted Tory, which is why we hadn't got in - and then they voted for us, for the first time, with a clear mandate to sort out the schools their children were in and the hospitals their elderly relatives were in, and also to be a new style of government, one which has got women in it as well as men - that's more balanced,' she told GMTV.

But critical that expectations raised three years ago have still not been met she added: 'What they are now saying is that they are impatient to see it on the ground and they're not interested in hearing about the rhetoric because they are judging from their own experience.'

Miss Harman was sacked in

1998 after just over a year in the Cabinet, but recently has been trying to revive her frontline political career.

She said disillusioned women voters were giving the party 'a sort of reminder call' and Labour had to 're-win' the support of those who had voted for the party for the first time.

Promoting the pamphlet *Winning with Women*, which was written jointly with Deborah Mattinson, director of Opinion Leader Research, Miss Harman said the Government had not managed to transform public services. This left women feeling they had endured 'more of the same'.

'The vulnerability of Labour support among women is clear from polling evidence,' she said.

'Research reveals a widely held view that the new approach to politics for which they voted has yet to happen.'

'Disappointment is felt by floating voters, and even more by long-term Labour voters and party



Harriet Harman: Women's support for Labour is wavering

activists.' Speaking on the BBC *On the Record* programme, Miss Harman called for changes in the law forcing parties to adopt all-women candidate shortlists for elections so seats could be 'set aside' for women MPs.

Her onslaught comes after several other disillusioned ex-ministers, including her former deputy Frank Field, Peter Kilfoyle, and

Mark Fisher, attacked the Prime Minister's leadership style.

Labour was quick to respond to Miss Harman's comments last night.

A spokesman said: 'This Labour Government has done more to improve the lives of women than any other government before it, although it knows there is still a lot to do.'



COMMENTARY

By Ann Carlton

Former adviser to two Labour Cabinet Ministers

THE woman Cabinet minister sacked by Tony Blair is worried. Labour has lost support among women voters and something must be done, says Harriet Harman.

But she has got it very wrong - again. Once she supported 'women-only shortlists', a quota system under which men were banned from being Labour parliamentary candidates in many constituencies.

Now she wants a sex quota system for Labour's leadership or deputy leadership, requiring that the holder of one of these offices must be a woman.

It seems Miss Harman still does not understand that what women want is the best person for the job, irrespective of gender.

However, she is right in other respects. Labour does indeed have big problems with women voters. Yet the wooing of female voters started so well and with such razzmatazz.

New Labour won the 1997 general election partly because it won women over to its cause. There were the 101 women MPs, the so-called Blair's Babes, proudly standing for a group photograph in Westminster.

Today, though, Tony Blair's smile, once perceived by women as friendly, is increasingly described as a ghastly grin. Well-intentioned words about community and family, which a year ago struck a chord, are now seen as condescending waffle.

An impression has developed

that New Labour does not care about the things women judge to be important. That is why Mr Blair was trounced by the Women's Institute the week before last - and why Labour is hemorrhaging support among women voters.

So where has it all gone wrong? The truth is that for all its talk about being modern, when it comes to women, New Labour's policies are passe.

Thanks to Harriet Harman and her friends, it has adopted an outdated feminist agenda for the new millennium. Its advisers on women's issues wear smart suits, rather than dungarees, but their policies derive from the paranoid feminism of Greenham Common, with a patronising Islington gloss.

Men are still considered a problem. There is still a fascination with rape and male violence, and a refusal to treat prostate cancer with the same seriousness as breast cancer. Women, we are told, still need special help to express themselves. New Labour

does not seem to have noticed that the majority of women do not have young children. Measures encouraging mothers to leave their children in nurseries and go out to work leave such women cold.

BUT almost all women are interested in health. They take children, elderly relatives and the disabled to hospital and doctors. They know from practical experience that things are very wrong in the NHS, and no government minister will convince them otherwise.

It is women who feel particularly strongly about the indignity of mixed sex wards, a problem still not solved. Two years ago I saw my elderly mother's frightened look when she became conscious in a high dependency unit, and saw a man in the next bed.

Women expected New Labour to show more compassion, understanding and a sense of urgency

about the NHS. Now they suspect much of Gordon Brown's new money for the health service will be wasted on headline-catching gimmicks, rather than on employing more nurses, doctors and physiotherapists.

When New Labour was young Tony Blair talked a great deal about rights and responsibilities. More recently the talk seems to have been just about rights. Community survives best when rights and responsibilities go together.

It is all too easy, for example, to encourage single mothers to go out to work. But is that right for the children, for their employers or for them? Nobody is expected to ask such a question publicly. It is not politically correct.

Yet most mothers who have tried to combine career and motherhood will, if they are honest, admit to occasions when a child has woken off-colour and should probably have been kept at home in bed, but maternal work demands meant they have nevertheless been sent to school or nursery. Parental leave is

meant to cope with such problems.

However, for every parent on such leave there are fellow employees - older or childless - who have to cover for the doting parents.

Of course, caring for elderly relatives can be just as time consuming as caring for young children; but, like a decent pensions increase, it is perceived as being way down New Labour's list of priorities.

In its pursuit of a dated feminist agenda, New Labour has not just ignored the needs of the elderly and the middle-aged, it has insulted them.

The talk about Britain being a young country, the briefings about the need to get rid of fusty 50-year-old civil servants and replace them with young, thrusting people with innovative ideas, has not gone down well with many over 45.

ALSO, there is a growing feeling that New Labour does not care about those who try to create a stable two-parent family. The abolition of the married man's tax allowance has highlighted this problem and upset women who think that mothers should stay at home when their children are young.

Tony Blair created a Women's Unit, appointed Ministers for Women (currently Baroness Jay and Tessa Jowell MP), and women MPs - Mo Mowlam, Clare Short, Margaret Beckett and Ann Taylor - as Cabinet Ministers.

This collection of office-holders needs to get a grip on the reality of women's concerns. Only then will Tony Blair stand a chance of winning back the trust of women.

These are the issues we really want the Premier to tackle

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Blair sends key staff to work at Millbank

BY PAUL WAUGH
Political Correspondent

THE GOVERNMENT faced fresh accusations of politicising the Civil Service yesterday at the same time as current and former ministers warned against the dangers of "spin".

John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, Frank Dobson, the former health secretary, and Harriet Harman, the former social security secretary, all spoke out as Downing Street announced key changes to its senior staff.

In a clear indication of preparations for the general election, Tony Blair's deputy chief of staff, Pat McFadden, and the No 10 press officer Lance Price will join the Labour team at Millbank. The two were employed as special advisers, appointed by the Prime Minister and paid from public funds, but will now be Labour Party employees.

The shake-up follows the decision by Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's official spokesman, to opt out of daily press briefings to take a more "strategic" role in government.

Michael Ancram, the Tory chairman, said: "Once again, this raises questions about the distinction between government press officers and Labour Party employees. The key question is which category does Alastair Campbell fall into? We will be demanding answers."



Harman: 'People do not like being manipulated'

Mr Prescott, who will have a key role in Labour's election campaign, told BBC1's *Breakfast with Frost* programme that the Government's message had become obscured by the repetition of slogans such as for the many not the few. "I have made some criticism about spin-doctoring because I felt we had a positive message, but you have to put it out with substance," he said. "These slogans can be very important, but they must have substance."

Mr Dobson said: "I think one of the problems can be when there is an effort to try to overdo things ... Things get exaggerated and if you make exaggerated claims for things, then you undermine what you are saying most of the time."

Ms Harman added: "People don't like being manipulated and unfortunately it breeds cynicism."

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Blair aides beef up election team at Labour HQ

**By Tom Baldwin
and James Landale**

TONY BLAIR has moved two of his key lieutenants from Downing Street into Labour's Millbank headquarters to strengthen the party's campaigning capability for the next election.

The decision reflects his concern that Millbank — once one of the most powerful political machines created — has lost its way since 1997 amid staff cuts, low morale and successive defeats in local and European elections.

The shake-up came soon after John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, became the latest senior Cabinet minister to give a warning that Labour was failing to retain "the confidence of the electorate" because it was putting too much gloss on its announcements.

Pat McFadden, formerly the Prime Minister's deputy chief of staff at No 10, goes to Millbank as head of "political co-ordination". His job is to highlight the work of the Government in Labour's campaigning. He will also act as a link between Peter Mandelson and Gordon Brown, the two Cabinet ministers expected to run the general election campaign, in spite of their longstanding personal antagonism.

Lance Price is being moved from his post as Alastair Campbell's deputy at the

Downing Street press office to become head of communications in the party HQ. Phil Murphy, who has been Labour's media chief for the past two years, moves to the No 10 press office.

The appointments made yesterday are expected to be followed by other moves from government to Millbank. They come days after Mr Campbell announced that he would be adopting a lower profile.

The Prime Minister is thought to be keen to shed the Government's image of being more spin than substance and the transfer of Mr Price, a former television reporter, to Millbank is a sign that the delivery of Labour's core message will increasingly be the job of the party instead of the Government.

The appointment of Mr McFadden, one of the last members of John Smith's team to be still working for Mr Blair, will be welcomed by those who believe that the party's high command has become out of touch. His arrival should help to stave off, until after the next election, the appointment of a full-time Labour chairman of Cabinet rank to link the work of the party and the Government.

Downing Street is thought to believe that there are "too many politicians already" in Millbank and that Mr McFad-

den has expert knowledge of Whitehall and the party that can prevent more of the "turf wars" that have hobbled the Labour Party in recent years.

The decision to move Mr Price and Mr McFadden also reflects the concern of Mr Blair's advisers, including Philip Gould, the Prime Minister's personal pollster, that Millbank was becoming too dominated by the allies of Mr Brown, the Chancellor.

Mr Brown, who will chair election strategy meetings, has already appointed his protégé, Douglas Alexander, to be head of election planning, while Nick Pecorelli, his former adviser, is in charge of campaigns.

Michael Ancram, the Conservative Party chairman, voiced concern about yesterday's changes, which, he said, raised fresh questions about the distinction between government press officers and Labour Party employees.

The Government also came under fire yesterday for failing to deliver on issues affecting women, such as health and education. In a Fabian Society pamphlet, Harriet Harman, the former Social Security Secretary, said: "Bluntly, women do not believe that the Government has delivered in these areas, most notably on the very specific pledges."

HARRIET HARMAN

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Harman calls for a woman at the top

DEBORAH SUMMERS

LABOUR should change its constitution to ensure it always has a female leader or deputy leader, former Cabinet Minister Harriet Harman has claimed.

The ex-Social Security Secretary also called for a change in the law to allow women-only shortlists for parliamentary candidates.

The proposals are among a package of female-friendly policies Ms Harman believes could turn Labour into the "natural party of women", after decades in which a majority of women have voted Tory.

In a Fabian Society pamphlet written with Deborah Mattinson, director of Opinion Leader Research, Ms Harman called for a three-person leadership team of one leader and two deputies, one of whom had to be a woman.

The pamphlet, entitled *Winning for Women*, outlines a 15-point action plan for Labour to make itself the natural choice for women voters.

Alongside specifically female-friendly policies, such as increased maternity pay and leave and help with childcare, it calls for a renewed emphasis on the "bread and butter issues", such as schools and hospitals which have a particular resonance for women.

Ms Harman said: "Labour now has a historic opportunity to become the natural party of women - just as the Democrats have been for many years in the US."

"One of the principal reasons for Labour's landslide in 1997 was that we closed the 'gender gap' which had given the Tories an advantage for decades."

"Now we have the chance to open up a gender gap in our favour. We must seize that opportunity by building the connections between Labour and women."

Former Minister urges Labour to ensure it always has female as leader or deputy

However, Ms Harman warned Labour had to do more to improve the National Health Service and the education system if it was to retain the female vote that helped to win the last election.

Ms Harman told BBC's *On the Record*: "I think particularly the women who had always voted Tory previously but for the first time voted Labour in 1997, were clear they were doing it above all because they wanted better schools for their children and because they wanted hospital waiting lists where their elderly mother was going to have a hip operation to be shorter, and that's how they are judging us."

"They're judging from their own experience, and that's why they feel more needs to be done. So far it still feels a bit too much of the same. Those women who voted for us for the first time were not giving us a blank cheque - they were giving us the benefit of the doubt and we've really got to deliver for them."

Initiatives such as the national childcare strategy and statutory unpaid time off work to look after children, allied with Labour's record number of female MPs, had given the party a unique appeal for

Britain's women, Ms Harman claimed. Another priority for aligning the party with female voters was new rules for women-only shortlists.

Despite the failure of an earlier Labour scheme for all-women shortlists for parliamentary candidates - which was dropped after it was ruled unlawful - Ms Harman insisted it was the only way to ensure there were more women in Parliament. She said: "We've got to change the law to make it possible to have all-women shortlists again, so that some seats can be set aside for women. That's the only way to guarantee women getting into the House of Commons."

A Labour spokesman said: "This Labour Government has done more to improve the lives of women than any other government before it, although it knows there is still a lot to do. Labour is putting money in women's purses and making balancing their busy lives easier, though we would all like the pace of change to be faster."

"We welcome any contribution that will help Labour continue to develop the best policies for women - the real debate about the women's agenda is taking place in the Labour Party. Far from there being a gender gap, women under 35 are the people who support Labour most, as Harriet Harman's own research shows."

"At the same time, women are deserting the Tory party, thanks in part to their utter failure, under William Hague, to deal with the massive under-representation of women in their ranks. Only one in 60 of Tory members are women under 45 - the age group that is the crucial talent pool from which MPs, councillors and activists are drawn. Women can see that there is no future with a Tory party which does not value them."

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Page 8

Publicity machine is failing says Prescott

By ANDREW WOODCOCK

Special Correspondent

Deputy Prime Minister Mr John Prescott has launched an attack on Labour's publicity machine, saying it had failed to convince voters that the Government was delivering results.

He called for a return to traditional politics, away from spin doctors and often-repeated soundbites that, he said, devalued Labour's message and left voters thinking they have "heard it all before".

Mr Prescott also demanded an end to the ceaseless repetition of approved phrases like "for the many, not the few" and "boom and bust" in favour of an effort to enthuse Labour supporters into spreading the Government's message personally.

He said he would personally "bust a gut" in a campaign to sell the Government's message around the country.

Mr Prescott said that pensioners' anger over their 75p-a-week pension increase was an example of Labour's failure to make people aware of the benefits to them of Government actions.

He said: "It's no good walking away saying 'Well, we've done you okay'. If they don't feel it, then they will stay away. That is the big priority in the campaign."

He added: "When you keep on saying 'the many and not the few', it becomes a soundbite that people use and you devalue it and it becomes spin."

"It's not that the message isn't right, but as soon as you start with it, people say 'Oh, I've heard this before'."

"They think 'Isn't this spinning, and spinning is about lying'."

But later, Mr Prescott said that he was prepared to use spin to get the Labour message across.

He said: "I am looking forward to going round - spinning, if you like - to make the point that what we have done is put more people in work, more people are treated in hospitals, we are getting better standards for our education, more people out of poverty, and that is a good Labour message."

"I have had some criticism about spin-doctoring because I felt we had a positive message, but you have to put it out with substance."

"If you say we are going to get people back to work and improve education, you must do so, and we have done that."

● Women are disappointed with Labour's performance and the Government must do more on issues like health and education if it is to retain the female vote which won it the last election, former Cabinet minister Ms Harriet Harman has warned.

Ms Harman was launching a package of female-friendly policies which she believes could turn Labour into the "natural party of women", after decades in which a majority of females have voted Tory.

The policies were included in a Fabian Society pamphlet written with Ms Deborah Mattinson, director of Opinion Leader Research.

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Ex-Minister tells Blair: Win over more women

THE Government must do more to improve schools and the health service if it is to retain the support of women voters who helped to put Tony Blair in No 10, a former Cabinet member said yesterday.

Harriet Harman, who served as Social Security Secretary, said many women were disappointed with Labour's performance and felt its handling of issues which really affected their lives had so far only been 'more of the same'.

Ms Harman, the Labour MP for Camberwell and Peckham, said she had compiled a list of women-friendly policies which, she believed, would turn Labour into the 'natural party of women' after decades in which the majority had voted Tory.

In a new pamphlet for leading Labour think-tank, the Fabian Society, Ms Harman called for Labour to woo women by creating a new leadership team of one leader and two deputies, one of whom should be female.

Her report, called *Winning for Women*, warned: 'The vulnerability of Labour support among



Loyalty: Harriet Harman

women is clear from polling evidence. Research reveals a widely held view that the new approach to politics for which they voted has yet to happen.'

Ms Harman said education and health were the keys to regaining women's loyalty, adding: 'Bluntly, women do not believe the Government has delivered in these areas.'

'Women are impatient for change. Because they are on the practical, receiving end of these services, no amount of rhetoric

will convince them that improvements have taken place if their own experience in the playground or hospital tells them otherwise.'

She also called for a change in the law to allow women-only shortlists for parliamentary candidates, despite the failure of a previous scheme which was ruled unlawful.

Last night, however, a Labour spokesman insisted the Government had done more to improve the lives of women than any Government before it.

He added that only one in 60 Conservative Party members were women below the age of 45 – a crucial age group for recruiting MPs and councillors.

Tory leader William Hague claimed women voters had been turned off Labour because of the Government's patronising attitude towards them. He added: 'Actually, it is the women voters who can most readily see the promises on hospitals are not being delivered and promises on schools are not being delivered.'

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Harriet Harman claims that, for women voters, New Labour has put spin before delivery in the areas of health and education Photograph: Richard Kille

Harman: Labour has failed women

with 30% recycled fibre

Harman: Labour has failed women

By **James Cusick**

Westminster Editor

LABOUR has failed Britain's women voters who put their faith in the party to deliver on health and education, according to Harriet Harman, the former social security minister. She adds that women voters also know Labour is putting spin before delivery.

Harman has become the latest senior Labour figure to severely criticise the government's record, adding to the recent dissent by former ministers Frank Field and Peter Kilfoyle. In a clear attack to be broadcast today on the BBC's *On the Record* programme, Harman said women who supported Labour at the last election, especially former Tory supporters "voted for us to sort out the health service and the education system and so far it still feels a bit too much of the same".

In the interview, Harman says that those women who voted Labour for the first time in 1997 "were clear that they were doing it above all else because they wanted hospital waiting lists – to where their elderly mother was going to have a hip operation – to be shorter, and that's how they are judging us".

'Those women who voted for us the first time were not giving us a blank cheque – they were giving us the benefit of the doubt'

In an unclouded reference to the over-emphasis on spin, which has now been accepted as a problem by Downing Street, Harman says women "are not interested in what politicians are telling them, about what the government's done, they're judging from their own experience, and that's why they feel more needs to be done".

Coming after last week's leaked memo from Labour's focus group guru, Philip Gould, which said middle Britain believed that Tony Blair ("TB") was "all spin and presentation" Harman's comments will be seen as inflicting further damage at a difficult time.

Her views will also be seen as being in tune with many disaffected traditional Labour supporters. Grassroots women in Labour had high expectations that New Labour would break new ground, especially on women's issues.

Harman, as a former minister, is now echoing their concerns. She told *On the Record*: "The issue of women's votes which was so critical to our election success in 1997, remains critical. Those women who voted for us for the first time were not giving us a blank cheque – they were giving us the benefit of the doubt."

Harman is clear that the contract with Labour has not been honoured. She adds: "We've really got to deliver for them."

Although on the backbenches since her high-profile dismissal from the Cabinet, Harman has continued her career-long interest in ensuring women are not discriminated against in either routine life or inside politics. She now believes that Labour should radically alter its constitution.

In a new pamphlet written for the Fabian Society along with Deborah Mattinson, the director of Opinion Leader Research, she argues that Labour should always have a female leader or deputy leader. She also calls for the return of women-only shortlists for parliamentary candidates and believes that such reforms, which fell foul of legal complications when they were introduced by Labour while in opposition, would turn New Labour into the "natural party of women".

To quickly win back valuable votes from women, she suggests Tony Blair immediately address the issue of paternity leave and further extend the rights to maternity leave. She told the BBC: "There's a new agenda which is a very radical agenda for extending maternity pay and leave so that people can take time off with their babies before they go back to work."

Her call for Labour to re-fight the courts on the issue of women-only candidates lists, however, is likely to fall on deaf ears. However she insists: "We've got to change the law to make it possible to have women's shortlists again. But that probably won't help us at this election because we're already in the current round of selection."

She suggests late selections could be used to increase women's numbers and it is still possible for the NEC to intervene.

In a campaigning call to a constituency in the Labour party that still regard her as an important voice for women she says: "Some seats can be set aside, that's the only way to guarantee women getting into parliament."

Sixty Labour MPs, including four former ministers, are to sponsor a conference to develop policies to "reconnect" the party with its traditional voters.

The conference to be held in London on July 15 will be attended by ex-ministers Gavin Strang, Mark Fisher, Peter Kilfoyle and Frank Field. Maria Fyfe will argue that the party has stifled debate at its annual conferences.

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So what do m

You'd expect Gisele and Liz Hurley to be high on men's wish lists – b

By Peter Howarth (left), editor of *Esquire*



Sally Phillips:
great frown



Kelis: we love you so much right now

15 UNCONVENTIONALLY SEXY WOMEN MEN FANCY



Sara Cox: ballsy, outspoken, tells it like it is



Harriet Harman:
politics made appealing



Jane Leeves:
despite the
ludicrous accent



Sarah Jessica Parker: she's funny ha-ha, she's funny peculiar



Caroline Quentin: stop chasing Alan Davies **Zoë Ball:** motormouth, unselfconscious **Caroline Aherne:** when not in the Mrs Merton mufti



Jennifer Saunders: playing herself, she's strikingly attractive



Philippa Forrester:
the
appliance
of science

My friend Alice once explained to me the difference between male and female sexual attraction. Women, she said, needed narrative, they needed to fill in the gaps. 'It's all about the detail and circumstance, the seduction, more than the actual sex. For you the fantasy starts when Eva Herzigova walks into the room and says, "Hello boys", and is pretty much over when she takes her Wonderbra off.'

I protested, but knew she was right. The notion that a woman's attractiveness is no more than the sum of her parts is, I'm afraid to say, alive and well and fuelling the sales of men's magazines. Modern-day men's mags – and I speak as the editor of one (though *Esquire* is the only one to eschew buttock- and cleavage-driven covers) – are built around images of fantasy women. The models are only the raw material, whose images are sent off for the retouchers to mould and stretch and airbrush into a male vision of perfection. That's why so many of the girls look vaguely orange. Software has altered their skin tones beyond recognition.

But mercifully for both sexes, things do improve with age. As a man grows up he has ample opportunity to measure his fantasy idea of sexiness with reality, and guess what? He finds that things are far more complex once you get beyond the initial visceral tug. She may have the body of a goddess, but what if she has the personality of a door? And similarly, many women who don't measure up to the two-dimensional appeal of a magazine picture of Gisele in a bikini will actually seduce you with their three-dimensional wit and good company.

Why was it that Ulrika Jonsson became a national obsession only when she appeared on *Shooting Stars*? The fact that she had a sense of humour and a sense of irony transformed our previous impression of her as a predictably dizzy TV personality. Equally, why is it that I do not find Gwyneth Paltrow sets my pulse racing? She's undeniably beautiful, but there's something cold and mannered about her which makes me think of fish. Give me Caroline Aherne or Cerys Matthews any day.

A survey among the men at *Esquire* magazine has revealed that, while individual tastes differ, there are some things we agree on, regarding what makes a grown woman sexy to a grown man. Number one is that she shouldn't try too hard. Formula One driver Jenson Button recently revealed that the reason he didn't find Christina Aguilera as attractive as Britney Spears was that 'she wears too much make-up'. That's why, in the supermodel stakes, it's Kate Moss over Linda Evangelista every time – the one looks as if she's made no effort, the other that she's been grabbed by one of those scary department-store beauty consultants.

Men seem to have less of a problem with plastic surgery than women do. While women are gossiping madly about which movie star has had a breast job, silicone safety and the niceties of operation technique, we're thinking, well how nice of them to do that – for our benefit.

We like it when there's something left to the imagination. Geri Halliwell's

Helen Baxendale: classic English rose



Fay Ripley:
northern soul



Denise Lewis:
muscles and femininity



Martina Hingis:
service with a smile



Claudia's new look and how to get it

- Dab gloss on lips and brows and smooth along the upper curve of the cheekbone for a sleek shine. Choose Elizabeth Arden's Eight Hour cream or Vaseline.
- Stain your cheeks and lips with Benefit's Benetint – a rosy colour wash.
- Run Aveda hair serum through your hair for a glossy, unstyled look.
- Slather on Nuxe's Huile Prodigieuses for a buff, shimmery golden glow.
- Wash hair with John Frieda's Blonde range.
- Finger-dry hair.
- Hit Knightsbridge: J P Tod's for flatties, Jimmy Choo for heels.
- Find lace pieces at Elspeth Gibson, Chelsea, and Virginia's, Notting Hill.
- Low Pressure does the best range of funky board 'n' blade T-shirts. The F*** Golf range is a best-seller.
- Notting Hill's Dolly Diamond and Vent specialise in the trippy-hippie vintage look.



confections New York–Paris–Milan have to offer. At the Golden Globes in February, she wore a pillar-box red chiffon Valentino number, and at Cannes last month, she eclipsed Andie MacDowell and the sun in a shimmering gown in pale gold filigree lace. In both instances she played on her greatest strength. Taking a cue from Elizabeth Taylor, who dresses to match her eyes, Claudia dresses to highlight her hair, preferring a shock of scarlet (Valentino's red is always best) or pale toning neutrals that have the suggestive effect of making her appear nude.

'She looks like a fresh, young girl now,' says Mme Brandolini of Balmain, at whose show in October Claudia made her return to the catwalk. 'We wanted Claudia because her look now is more simple, and we loved that she looks less sophisticated.' Her low-key new look made headlines around the world as Tim, spellbound, presented her with a rose at the finale. But then with her hair twisted in a cheeky rasta style and wearing skimpy vests and rainbow-coloured chiffons, she probably looked exactly as she had on Valentino's yacht when they fell in love last summer. 'People stare at her, much more than the other girls,' Mme Brandolini continues. 'She's incredibly sexy, in a very earthy way.'

The return to a bubbling, healthy look – led by the new wave of Brazilian girls, like Gisele – has had a stratospheric effect on Claudia's career, but though her scrubbed skin and kinked hair looks fresh and bare and right again, her look's not so innocent now. 'I'm delighted that she's showing a more ironic, modern blond image,' says Kathy Phillips. There's an erotic side to her wholesomeness that wasn't there before. 'She's got a sparkle in her eye,' says Ramona Rainey, a freelance stylist who has previously worked for Karl Lagerfeld. 'Claudia looks like she's really being loved now. And when people feel loved, they don't have to put on armour and be someone else. She's her own woman now. And she's never looked better.'

Men find sexy?

Caroline Quentin and Dawn French are there too. So, you see, it's not that simple...

post Spice Girls toned down look, for instance, seemed like a very smart move, but her recent U-turn at the Brit awards made her look too obvious.

It may sound like a cliché, but there's nothing more off-putting than a woman who seems desperate, too. The reason men don't find Calista Flockhart's Ally McBeal sexy has little to do with her supposed weight problem and everything to do with her character's obsessive man-hunting. Bridget Jonesism has encouraged women to think their neuroses are charming. Men find them scary. Liz Jones, editor of *Marie Claire*, writes a newspaper column in which she bemoans the fact that she cannot get a boyfriend, and reveals her insecurities in mesmerising detail. I've met this bright, attractive woman and can only conclude that the column is a crafty publicity stunt. If it's really intended as an advertisement for prospective partners, she might as well send out copies of *Fatal Attraction*.

Perversely, a bit of a dark side is very beguiling, as is angst (in moderation – and only as long as it is not about not having a boyfriend); think Anna in *This Life*. Her flatmate Millie had the conventional good looks, but it was messed-up Anna with her deadpan delivery and crooked smile who won our hearts.

We may not be knowledgeable about how women dress, but we do notice when women dress too old – or too young. I once went out with a girl who dressed like her mother. She was very attractive, but her sensible shoes, skirt and blouse succeeded in extinguishing my ardour.

And women can forget about the dieting thing. A straw poll in the office revealed Dawn French and Caroline Quentin as among the women we would most like to...er...meet. The idea that men like women with boys' figures is not true. The real joke about *The Fast Show*'s Arabella Weir is that we didn't care whether her bum looked big in this or that – we just wanted to reassure her that it didn't matter (over a quiet glass of wine).

It's worth remembering that men find some women sexy because they're conventionally attractive and some because they're not. This may sound strange, but consider Zoë Ball. Nothing she does or says or wears seems calculated to titillate. Instead she comes across as exuberantly spontaneous, slightly uncoordinated in appearance and manner, and not afraid to put her foot in it. The effect on men? Sheer fascination – and the inkling that this is the kind of woman you'd find endlessly stimulating.

And finally, stop worrying about what we think. Because ultimately sexiness, like everything else, is subject to the pendulum swings of fashion. When you realise that each generation produces its own type of pin-up, and that these can go from Marilyn Monroe's voluptuous breathlessness to Twiggy's androgynous street-sharpness in a mere decade, you start to understand that any attempt to pin down universal appeal is doomed to failure.

15 CONVENTIONALLY SEXY WOMEN MEN FANCY



Andrea Corr:
smiles with
her eyes

Dervla Kirwan:
sweet sentimentality
or gritty realism



Cameron Diaz:
beautiful, often
quikily humorous



Jennifer Lopez: a renaissance woman –
chanteuse and a good actress (see *Out of Sight*)



Sophie Marceau:
the epitome of
the smart, chic
Frenchwoman



Angelina Jolie: really dangerous



Uma Thurman: feline
Shania Twain: man, we feel like a woman
Gisele: model looks which almost hurt



Liz Hurley: first there was *That Dress*, and now she's
showing herself to be a very smart film producer



Thandie Newton: very
clever, very
beautiful



Julianna Margulies:
resuscitation



Anna Kournikova:
so fit we put her on
Esquire's cover

Lucy Liu:
dangerous



Tyra Banks: supermodel
without the attitude



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HARRIET BLASTS PM FOR FAILING MUMS

SACKED minister Harriet Harman has launched an astonishing attack on Premier Tony Blair for failing women voters.

She accused him of letting down mums on the key issues of health, education and parents' rights, saying: "Women do not believe the Government has delivered."



WARNING: Harman

Ms Harman, ousted as Social Security Secretary and women's minister in 1998, is the highest ranking ex-minister to savage the PM publicly.

She says in an article: "Maternity pay is too

By MATTHEW TEMPEST

low, maternity leave too short and work too inflexible."

The former Blair loyalist warns: "Women who voted Tory until turning to Labour in 1997 did not give us a blank cheque."

Her blast comes after Mr Blair was heckled at the WI conference.

She also urged him to have a woman deputy alongside John Prescott.

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Page MAIN SECTION 16

THE SPIN DOCTOR'S HANDBOOK

1 When in trouble, make a big announcement.

To try to limit damaging coverage of Blair's awful speech to the Women's Institute a fortnight ago, the government leaked the news that Jack Straw was to publish an anti-hunting bill, which should have been announced first to parliament.

2 If you can't lie your way out of trouble, disclaim all knowledge of the matter in hand.

After the leak of the anti-hunting bill, Alastair Campbell was asked at a lobby briefing to confirm its existence. Had he done so, he would have been in trouble for bypassing parliament, so he expressed ignorance. This is not a reliable ploy, however, as nobody believed him. He had to admit that he did know what was happening but would not say.

3 It's easier to lie off the record.

Shortly before the 1997 election a Sunday newspaper reported that Blair was spending time with Roy Jenkins, who is hated by Labour traditionalists. A Blair friend now in the cabinet quietly quashed the story. But once safely in power, Labour conceded that it was true.

4 Don't make an announcement once if you can make it twice or even three times.

A dangerous trick. Alistair Darling

appeared live on Radio 4 a week ago and "announced" that he was moving 3,000 staff from the social security department's headquarters to frontline duties in order to cut fraud. Asked if this was a genuinely new announcement, Darling replied:

"Yes, it is." It was

not. As a sharp interviewer pointed out, Darling had made the announcement in February. Had a single person been moved out of headquarters since then? No, but they would be in the coming weeks. We wait to see whether he then announces his "new" initiative yet again.



Darling:
repeat
offender

5 Exaggerate announcements to get them onto the front page.

The chancellor "treble counted" the spending increases resulting from his 1998 spending review, claiming they amounted to £40bn for health and education. An extra £1bn per year in spending, beginning in 1999, was recounted as an extra £1bn in 2000 and 2001. The Treasury has now dropped the trick, because it inflated voter expectations.

6 If a policy is going to earn you bad headlines, dump it.

Last month John Prescott's official spokesman confirmed to The Sunday Times that proposals for road tolls on congested motorways would be included in his 10-year blueprint for transport. But when he alerted Downing Street, the road-toll plan was suddenly cancelled.

7 Give difficult stories to a friendly newspaper.

When a Sunday newspaper asked Harriet Harman to comment on its discovery that she was to send her son to a super-selective grammar school, she alerted Downing Street, which placed the story in that Saturday's Mirror.

8 When in trouble, put Tony on television.

Even before he was famous, focus groups showed that Blair had a political magic. People who did not like Labour trusted him. When the Formula One row broke - Labour had taken a £1m donation from Bernie Ecclestone and held talks with him about changing its policy on banning tobacco advertising - a crisis threatened. The story died when Blair went on television to promise he was a "pretty straight guy". His magic may be waning, though, as members of the WI made clear a fortnight ago.

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Women voters turn away from Blair over his broken promises

WOMEN voters feel "let down" by Tony Blair's failure to make bigger improvements in public services, according to new focus group research carried out by a former colleague of Philip Gould, the prime minister's pollster.

Interviews by Deborah Mattinson, who carries out occasional research for the Labour party and the government, also found "disgust" over National Health Service waiting times.

Mattinson's findings are contained in a Fabian Society report on the women's vote published today and co-written by Harriet Harman, the former social security secretary.

Harman and Mattinson warn that women voters are less satisfied than men with the government's performance. They argue for a range of policies intended to target the women's vote, but also support a central tenet of new Labour thinking — that there

Michael Prescott Political Editor

is no difference in the demands placed on government by female voters in "middle England" and in the party's working-class heartlands. All want better public services.

"Women who had always voted Tory until they turned to Labour in 1997 did not give us a blank cheque, only the benefit of the doubt," warns

the report. It backs up the assertion with a series of unpurged focus group findings.

"I thought they [Labour] were going to be so different," one woman told Mattinson. "Now I worry that they are just like all the others — out for themselves without any interest in the likes of us ... I feel a bit let down."

A woman member of the Labour party was even more critical: "They've been quite dishonourable — all those broken election pledges. They said they'd listen, but now they're in power they know best."

Harman and Mattinson say that women are less taken in by government claims than men, and judge the government by the state of the schools and hospitals.

The verdict on the ground is not good. "My mother's operation has been cancelled twice due to shortages and I think it's disgusting," said one woman. Another agreed: "The NHS is failing people now as before."

Middle-class women felt especially aggrieved by the government's charging of university tuition fees, with one complainant saying: "It's the likes of us, people in the middle, that get hit. The poor get everything handed to them and the rich can afford it anyway."



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Page Main 4

'Giggly' Hague's debating style fails to impress women voters

Lucy Ward
Political correspondent

William Hague's point-scoring at the Commons dispatch box is turning off women voters, who dismiss him as a "cheeky schoolboy" with a "giggly voice", according to new a study.

Research on focus groups over the past fortnight shows that, far from being impressed by the Tory leader's forceful debating style, female floating voters see him as self-satisfied and uncaring about the concerns of real people.

The criticisms are bad news for the Conservatives, who lost their traditional hold on women voters at the 1997 general election after a push by Labour to close the long-established gender gap in its own support.

But there will be only small comfort for Labour in indications that the Tories are failing to win back women's support. The same research suggests

that female voters are increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of perceptible improvements in health and education.

A Fabian pamphlet to be published tomorrow calls on Labour strategists to try harder to direct policy and style towards women, citing focus group evidence of a 13 percentage point "dissatisfaction gap" between men and women.

The research, by Deborah Mattinson, director of Opinion Leader Research and co-author of the pamphlet with the former social security secretary, Harriet Harman, indicates that women are frustrated at government pronouncements of "telephone number" public-sector spending figures when they have seen no real change in schools and hospitals.

Mr Hague, however, is a much bigger target of criticism than Tony Blair, according to the study. One floating voter dismissed him as "awful — out of touch, pompous — terrible".

Amid general criticism of the "jumping up and down, shouting and yelling" in the Commons, women say Mr Hague seems interested only in childish point-scoring, while the prime minister is seen as taking a more measured and consensual approach.

"I can't stand him [Hague]. He's just like a cheeky schoolboy — dead pleased with himself because he's pulled one over on the other side. It's pathetic," one woman observed.

"That giggly voice — he doesn't care about us or take us seriously," said another.

Conservative strategists, buoyed by opinion polls showing the gap between their party and Labour narrowing, dismiss suggestions that their leader is a liability.

"We think William's robust approach, speaking out candidly on issues that affect ordinary people, is getting through, whatever Harriet Harman might say," said one.

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Wider rules on 'family friendly' working

Lucy Ward

Political correspondent

Millions more parents will get new rights on family friendly working after ministers opted to extend proposed improvements to include mothers of all children up to 16, rather than just under-fives.

Ministers have accepted that the difficulties of balancing work and home life are as great or greater once children go to school, and so will widen the application of proposed new rights, such as an entitlement to work part-time, to parents of pre-school and school-age youngsters.

The decision, made at the first meeting of a ministerial review group on maternity rights and flexible working, will be warmly welcomed by campaigners for a better deal for working parents.

However, the extension is certain to anger business, which already argues that government regulation increasing workers' rights is excessive and burdensome.

If the review opts to take a tough line and enshrine new rights in legislation, firms could be forced to allow all mothers of school age and pre-school children to switch to part-time working.

Companies are unlikely to be appeased by government pledges to make a powerful business case for more workplace flexibility.

The review group, which is chaired by the trade and industry secretary, Stephen Byers, and includes women's ministers Lady Jay and Tessa Jowell and equal opportunities minister Margaret Hodge, is charged with finding ways to help parents, particularly women, to combine work and family life.

So far, the government has launched a work-life balance campaign to urge companies to introduce flexible work policies, but is relying on persua-

sion rather than legislation. Ministers have already privately indicated that the right to return to a job part-time after having a baby is being considered as a manifesto proposal for Labour's second term.

However, the review group's implications now go even further by dramatically increasing the proportion of parents affected.

The group, which is due to report in the autumn, will decide whether to make the option of returning to work part-time or on a flexible basis — perhaps including home working — a legal right, or whether to offer weaker options such as a strong presumption of flexible working unless a company can prove it would be difficult to offer it.

Alternatively, companies could be offered incentives to introduce better family-friendly policies.

A primary reason for change, ministers believe, is that women at present leave work altogether after having children, or go back too soon because of inadequate maternity pay and then swiftly leave their jobs anyway.

However, campaigners for new family-friendly rights are wary of the move to apply any changes to a wider group of parents.

The former social security secretary Harriet Harman, campaigning from the backbenches on family policy, said: "What would be totally unacceptable would be to do too little to improve maternity pay and leave, which were the initial focus of this review."

"The government must also be wary of talking up issues such as family-friendly working and then failing to back that up with legislation."

She added: "Working groups, accreditation schemes and management handbooks will make absolutely no difference for the vast majority of Britain's women."

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Page MAIN 6



Frank Field is convinced the time has come for the Government to get back to basics and to abandon its scattergun approach Mike Moore

Manufactured with 30% recycled fibre

Voters smarter than spin-doctors think, says Field

BY ANDREW GRICE
Political Editor

FRANK FIELD was remarkably prophetic when he listed the problems he feared were about to engulf Tony Blair: too much spinning, acting more like in opposition than in government, and fighting on too many fronts rather than delivering in the key policy areas.

The Labour MP for Birkenhead was speaking to *The Independent* on Tuesday, the day before Mr Blair's ill-fated speech to the Women's Institute. Yesterday, as Downing Street surveyed the damage to the Prime Minister's reputation from his humiliating handbagging at the conference, Labour MPs were queuing, with the benefit of hindsight, to echo Mr Field's criticism.

The former minister for welfare reform is convinced that the time has come for the Gov-

ernment to get back to basics. It should, he believes, abandon its scattergun approach and focus on what he calls "the big four" issues which concern the electorate - school standards, the National Health Service, welfare and law and order.

Mr Field added: "There is a real difference between the role of spinning in opposition, when the task is to use the press to get coverage. In government, the task is to follow through with actions. While spinning has a role, it ought to take a secondary role behind delivering on policy."

Mr Field senses a backlash against Labour's once-invincible media machine. "We should never underestimate the intelligence of the electorate. They don't want to keep being told the same things."

"They pick up messages very quickly - quicker than some MPs, and they don't need pagers to know what to think."

Only three years after winning power, Mr Field fears Labour is showing the same symptoms it took the Tories about 17 years to develop. "The political process is speeding up all the time," he said.

"We don't want to get into the position the Tories are in where people cease to believe what is being said. Everything they say still comes with a health warning."

Mr Field cites three recent examples of where the Government has strayed off-message: the Prime Minister's vague "opportunity for all" theme; Gordon Brown's attack on Oxford University for refusing a place to Laura Spence, the Tyneside comprehensive school pupil, and the spinning ahead of the three-year spending programme to be published next month.

Mr Field said that he was "slightly puzzled" by the Chancellor's broadside. "What really matters to parents is to raise standards in all state schools. That is where all our efforts should go," he said.

"The one lesson to be learnt from the last few weeks is that the more areas you cover, the less clear your message can become." Mr Field predicts that Labour's 177-strong majority will be cut to fewer than 40 at the next general election, partly because of low turn-out. He says that we are now in an era in which people do not decide until polling day whether to vote rather than which party to support.

The man asked by Mr Blair to "think the unthinkable" on welfare lasted little over a year as a social security minister - sacked at the same time as his boss, Harriet Harman - after falling out with Ms Harman and Mr Brown, who was deter-

mined to set the Government's welfare reform agenda.

Mr Field seems happier with the freedom of the back benches than the constraints of ministerial office. He acknowledges a "difference of strategy" with Mr Brown, who is extending means-testing "even though he calls it tax credits" rather than following the Field blueprint for an insurance-based system.

The Birkenhead MP accused the Chancellor of undermining the vision of "community" set out by Mr Blair in his Women's Institute speech. He believes means-testing will dissuade people from saving and taking out pensions, and that in the long term it will encourage the middle class to turn its back on providing help through welfare state for the bottom 20 per cent in society.

Entrenching the national insurance system would lock in the middle classes, Mr Field believes. It would also allow the



Harman: Departed with her troublesome deputy

Government to spend more on the National Health Service, through raising national insurance while cutting income tax. He said: "People want to pay more for the NHS. The Chancellor talks of national insurance as taxation; no one else in the country views it as tax."

Despite losing the argument in government, Mr Field remains a respected figure on the issue of welfare.

In response to the outcry over this year's paltry 75p a week rise in the basic state pension, Mr Field has put himself at the head of the backbench campaign for a big rise next year. He wants a £15 a week rise for the over-80s.

But all roads lead back to delivering in the "big four" issues. That, Mr Field said, was the best way to answer the criticism that the Government was out of touch. "The more successful we are in those four areas, the more people will think we are close to the electorate."

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Model M&S makes its mark in pesetas

TEARING down Madrid's smart Calle de Serrano in a frenetically driven cab the other day, Lucre was bemused to espy a 20ft poster of a near-naked young man prominent in the window of a major store.

Admiring the model's barely concealed parts was a gaggle of locals — all of them women, all of them pointing excitedly at the young man's obvious photogenic qualities.

Nothing unusual in that, you may feel. After all, this is the Spanish capital post-Franco, a liberal place even by the standards of our Continental neighbours. And is this not the year 2000?

Perhaps slightly more out of the ordinary, however, was the name of the store in question — Marks & Spencer.

So is the hanging of gigantic pictures of virtually naked young men a cunning ploy to attract the fairer sex into the store?

"We have different displays according to the location — this one is obviously a European-style picture," reasons a spokeswoman for the firm, which last week unveiled dreadful results.

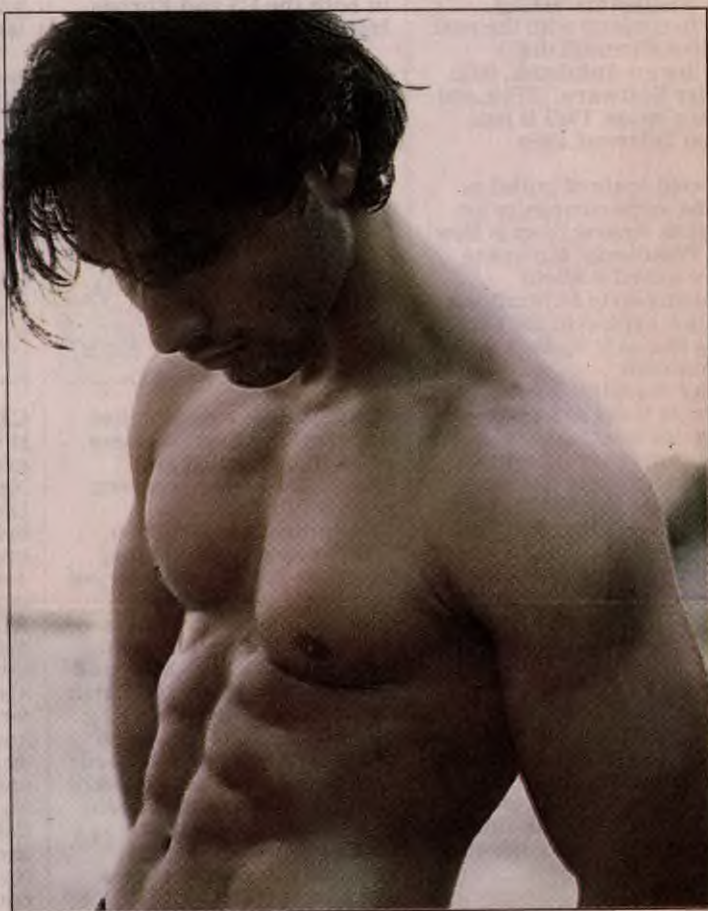
Perhaps I should add one other curious thing about the Madrid branch. It appeared to be full. British branches may wish to take note.

Called to account

THE INSTITUTE of Contemporary Arts in London's swish Pall Mall usually plays host to pony-tailed film makers and the like.

Except for one night last week, when a contingent of about 200 sombre NatWest staffers descended on the bohemian venue to mark the bank's handover to the enemy, known as Royal Bank of Scotland.

Spirits gradually lifted as the champagne flowed and by the time the speeches came round,



CROWD-PLEASER: The naked truth is nudity is good for business

even the most long-faced of guests, who included former chairman Bob Alexander and Harriet Harman — presumably reflecting new Labour's empathy with big business — entered into the party spirit.

I hear the biggest cheer of the evening was reserved for Terence Collis, outgoing director of corporate affairs, who delivered an emotional address to the troops.

"Are there any Scots here tonight?" Collis demanded as he rose to his feet.

There followed, I am told, a deafening silence, as the swaying NatWesters glared

around them in search of likely victims. When no sheepish Tartan arms were raised, the bankers stomped and roared in delight. Not that there's any animosity towards the new proprietors, of course. "Just as well they stayed away," mutters my source. "Otherwise we'd definitely have had a lynching on our hands."

Share in the future

ENTREPRENEUR Nick Leslau — one of the so-called Awesome Foursome behind cash shell Knutsford — is

clearly a man who thinks of the future. He has just gifted 350,000 of his Knutsford shares, worth £280,000, to the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation, linked to Stoke Mandeville Hospital. A generous gesture, though the shares are suspended and therefore unsaleable at the moment. But all good things come to he who waits.

The gift is in addition to the admirable £300,000 cash Leslau and chums raised by running this year's London Marathon. Sadly, the week before the event, Leslau slipped his disc, then struggled heroically round the course anyway in what he felt was a disappointing 5½ hours.

He says he has been suffering ever since. So if he has a crack at the 26.2 miles again next year, he may well need one of the Stoke Mandeville wheelchairs himself.

Low Standard

A POIGNANT missive arrives from Edinburgh — home to Standard Life — listing many local businesses proclaiming their pro-mutual support for the firm. It brought a lump to the throat. Curious to gauge the depth of this admirable loyalty, however, Lucre decided to put the claims to the test.

But a call to Harveys, one of the aforementioned companies, was a failure. The sandwich shop proprietor had never heard of Standard Life.

Undeterred, Lucre called the other Harveys in the district, a furniture provider. A chat with impeccably mannered boss Paul Dawson sadly proved less than illuminating. "I have nothing to say about Standard Life. Try head office," he advised.

And where might that be? "Rayleigh, Essex, I think."

Ah. So the "local" support is in reality 500 miles away. No joy there, either, incidentally.

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Blair aide sends his son to £8,175 Dulwich

BY JON CRAIG

POLITICAL EDITOR

LABOUR'S war on the old school tie is to be undermined by another member of Tony Blair's inner circle sending his son to a top public school.

As Gordon Brown condemned the "absolute scandal" of an Oxbridge elite, it emerged that No10 policy chief Roger Liddle is to send his son Andrew to Dulwich College.

Andrew is to become an £8,175-a-year day boy at the exclusive South London school in September, a month before his 11th birthday. Boarders pay £15,675 a year.

The school was founded in 1619 and old boys include former Tory Cabinet Minister Peter Lilley and writers PG Wodehouse, CS Forester and Raymond Chandler.

Mr Liddle, Mr Blair's chief adviser on Europe and defence, is the latest in a long line of leading Blairites to choose public school for their children. They include Mr Blair's close friend Lord Falconer, New Labour power couple Lady Symons and Philip Bassett and the Chancellor's close aides Gavyn Davies and Sue Nye.

Deputy Chief Whip Keith Bradley sends his son to a fee-paying grammar school and Blairite London mayoral contender Trevor Phillips sends his children to public school.

One of Labour's first acts after its election victory was to abolish the Tories' assisted places scheme which helped children from poor families go to fee-paying schools.

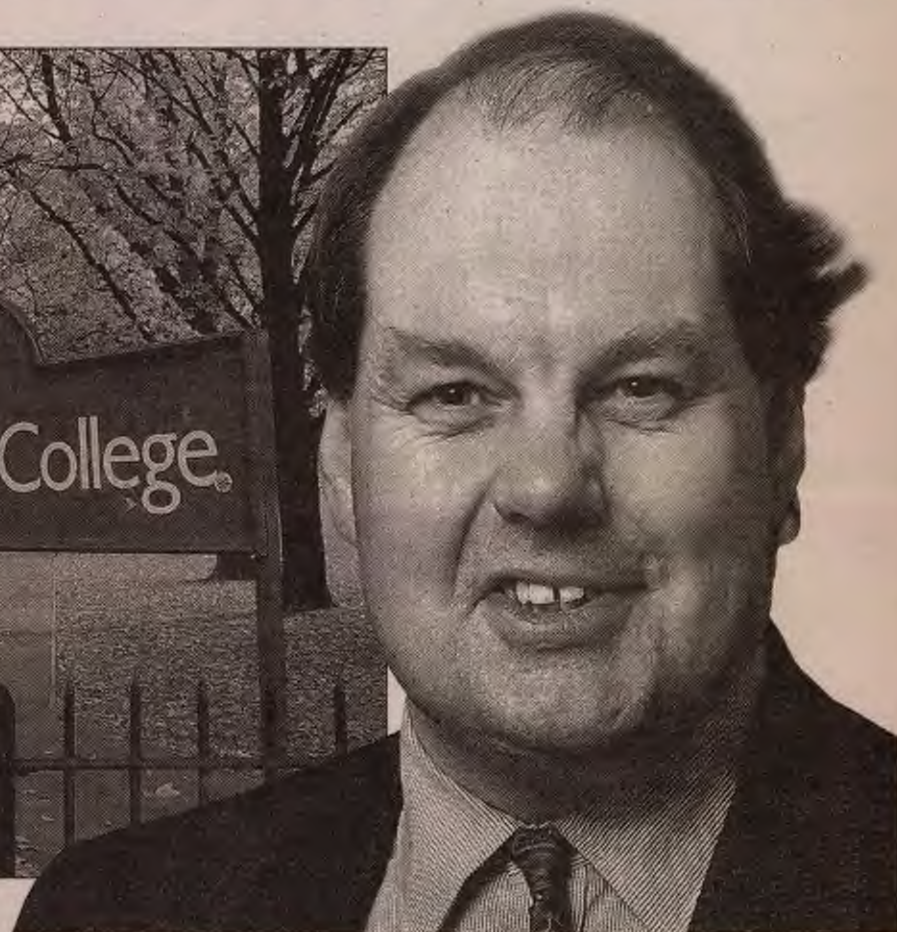
Despite Mr Blair's "education, education, education" pledge, Labour has also been severely embarrassed on school issues in recent years.

The Prime Minister's choice of the London Oratory School for his two boys and Harriet Harman sending her son to a grammar school in Orpington have been sharply criticised by Labour MPs.

Mr Liddle, 52, is already a controversial figure and has faced demands from Labour MPs for his removal from No10. The calls came two years ago when he was embroiled in the "lobbygate" scandal because of his links with disgraced lobbyist Derek Draper. He is



OLD SCHOOL TIES: Policy chief Roger Liddle was accused of hypocrisy by the Tories for sending his son to Dulwich



mistrusted by many Labour MPs because he left Labour with Roy Jenkins to form the SDP, then joined the Liberal Democrats and then returned to Labour in 1995.

He co-wrote the New Labour bible *The Blair Revolution* with his close friend Peter Mandelson and has been a parliamentary candidate twice for the SDP and once for the Lib-Dems.

During his time in the SDP he fought Vauxhall in the 1983 general election and the Fulham by-election in April 1986. When he fought North Hertfordshire for the Lib-Dems in the 1992 election he said state schools were "shockingly under-funded" and called for 1p on income tax to fund investment in education.

His wife Caroline, daughter of former Labour minister and Brussels commissioner Lord Thomson of Monifieth, is deputy

managing director of the BBC World Service and the family live in one of south London's smartest addresses, Cleaver Square.

Before his appointment to No10 in 1997, Mr Liddle ran lobbying firm Prima Europe, whose clients included Unilever, Glaxo Wellcome, Abbey National, British Nuclear Fuels, Rio Tinto, PowerGen and British Gas.

Mr Liddle yesterday confirmed that his son would be going to Dulwich but said he had "no desire to say anything". No10 would only say: "It's a private matter. We don't comment on the private arrangements made by members of the Downing Street staff."

But Dulwich College headmaster Graham Able told the Sunday Express: "Yes, Andrew is coming here in September. Politicians are entitled to their views, but they have no bearing on whether or not

their children are accepted here. It's unfortunate that the Laura Spence case has been reported in the way it has. But it works both ways. We had a boy turned down by Magdalen College and we think they made a mistake."

The disclosure about Mr Liddle, following the Chancellor's onslaught on Oxford, prompted accusations of hypocrisy from Tories.

"I had some sympathy with what the Chancellor was saying and sympathy for the girl," said the party's schools spokesman John Bercow. "But that's very different from the way Labour ministers and apparatchiks are behaving. They think they are a class apart, that they can propose one thing for everyone else and they are the new elite, superior beings entitled to spend their post-tax income just as they wish. I defend the right of anybody to

spend his or her money post tax and I would defend their right to send their kids to selective schools that are not fee-paying or to fee-paying schools. But the rights of everybody should be the same.

"Labour scrapped the assisted places in a cruel way so a number of people who depended on it were turfed out in a mean-spirited approach from the Government. It's absolutely disgraceful. They are utterly shameless."

As the row continued to rage, senior Tories turned their fire on Paul Kelley, outspoken head teacher of Laura's school, Monkseaton Community High School, North Tyneside. "We think he is a New Labour stooge," said one Tory insider. "He has raised this issue before and he has supported a number of Government initiatives."

HOW I FOUGHT FOR A PLACE: PAGE 36

HARRIET HARMAN

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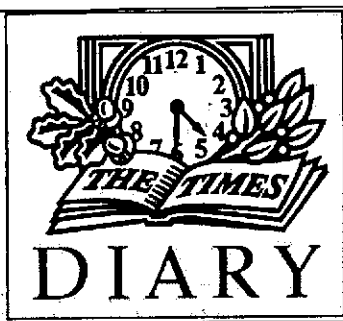
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A class act

EXCITING news from the London Oratory, home to the Prime Minister's two teenage boys: Harriet Harman's eldest son, Harry, whose place at the school triggered uproar in the party six years ago, has now been selected as Head Boy.

Harry, 17, has been told that he will take up the post in September, when he moves into the Upper Sixth — lending him disciplinary power over Euan and Nicky Blair (a position I'm sure he will treat responsibly, despite his mother's dumping from the Government two years ago). Ms Harman's decision to flout Labour's education policy by sending Harry to a grant-maintained school miles from their South London home sparked a long-running row in the party, and contributed to grass-roots antagonism towards the former Social Security Secretary.

Harry has impressed John McIntosh, the Head Teacher at the Roman Catholic school in Fulham, West London, with the way he refused to let the fuss distract him from schoolwork. "He has done very well in the debating society, which helped his case enormously," I am told by my source at the school. "And he is impeccably polite — always holding the door open for visitors." The appointment comes as Ms Harman has started telling friends — rather implausibly — that she feels her career in the party is on the brink of a revival.



At our recent Conference in Blackpool, the National Association of Ladies' Circles, welcomed Sue Foot as our new President. Sue, a Ladies' Circler from near Bridgend in Wales, is our first Welsh President. She rallied the AGM with her motto for the year – Don't Pussyfoot – Be Pawsitive !!

The National Association of Ladies' Circles was founded in 1936, and has over 6000 member's country wide, with 580 Circles in 48 Areas. Membership is open to women aged between 18 and 45 who are ready to have fun, make friends and raise funds. There is also a world-wide affiliation with 33 countries through Ladies' Circle International.

We are geared to helping others – locally and nationally, with either money or physical help.

We love having a good time and making new friends and wherever a Circler moves to, she will be in touch with Circle friends old and new.

During the last twelve months we have raised over £1/2 Million for various charities throughout the UK – including Imperial Cancer Research Fund (our national charity) The Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust, Sickle Cell Anaemia and Round Table Children's Wish. We try to organise a very varied range of fund raising ideas that have included Bungee Jumping, Bag Packing, Bed Pushes, Trekking over the Sahara and ICRF Race for Life. Actively raising money encourages our members to develop themselves and NALC provides them with a safe environment with the support of other women.

In recent years we have also supported charities overseas like the Brasov Fund in Romania and are currently supporting a clinic in Nepal.

We were delighted to welcome our Patron Jennie Bond to the AGM this year where she gave us a humorous insight into her job as Royal Court Correspondent.

Back in the early days of Ladies' Circle our members were happy to be Ladies, but we are now keen to be one of the girls.

We are young, motivated, energetic and determined to take a part in women's issues. We are a non-party political and non-sectarian group of friends who make sure our fund raising is FUN.

Unless action to reform working hours is taken swiftly, Tess Kingham may not be the last to go, writes Harriet Harman

Voices for change must be heard

Last week Tess Kingham, Labour Member of Parliament, announced that she would not be standing again at the next election because Parliament is an antiquated gentleman's club.

It would have been much easier for her to just quietly murmur "personal reasons" and stand aside as parliamentary hopefuls pile in to replace her as Labour's candidate for Gloucester at the next election.

But she didn't do it like that. She made a brave statement which inevitably opened her to sneering and scorn. Why did she stand for Parliament if she didn't like it? Or was she so stupid that she didn't know the rules? Of course she knew the rules. But she expected that with the influx of new Labour MPs – particularly the 101 Labour women – she would be part of a tide of change which would modernise the House of Commons and make it a legislature fit for the new century. And that has yet to happen.

But her departure has symbolised the row that is brewing over the way the House operates and the hours that the House sits. Change is long overdue. I want to deal with the bogus arguments against change.

First: "This is about Tony Blair wanting to neuter Parliament. Control-freak New Labour wants to stamp on the rights of the opposition." This is not about Tony Blair, and it shouldn't primarily be a matter for government. It's about how we in the House decide to arrange our business. It's Members of Parliament, not the government, who are driving this agenda for change. And so it should be. The government should run the government. Members run the House. Most of the time I've been in the House (shockingly, the best part of 20 years!) I have been on the opposition benches. And I have never seen the opposition able to change the government's plans just because we were able to stay up longer than they wanted to. Over the '80s and '90s we often "went through the night". It never made any difference to the government's plans. As a tool for opposition it doesn't work. And debates in the small hours guarantee that opposition arguments go unpublicised. Even if we are mad enough to stay up all night, journalists aren't. Timetabled debates, notified in advance to journalists, and held at a reasonable hour, are the way to expose the issues.

Second: "We'd like to change the hours but the public won't like it and will just think we are lazy and self-serving." Though columnists will undoubtedly use a change in the hours as their latest peg for their running theme that all MPs are lazy or corrupt or both, it is unlikely to feed through to the public. Women in particular regard it as conclusive proof that we are outdated and irrelevant when they see thinly attended debates in the small hours. For them, change would be popular because it would show that we are ourselves making the changes that we are urging on everyone else – that we must achieve a better

modernise. And anyway, we're not asking for fewer hours in the chamber – we're asking to start earlier and then finish earlier. But even if the public was somehow to become irrationally attached to the idea of all-night sittings, if they are – as I believe – inefficient and outdated, then we should just make out that argument confident that we can win it.

Third: "This is just an argument from middle class London-based feminists." True, this argument has been led by women. And I have to plead guilty to committing the sin of being both London-based and middle class. But we are not the only voices demanding change nor will we be the sole beneficiaries of change. Anne Campbell's letter to the Modernisation Committee demanding an end to all-night sittings has been signed by more men than women, by more MPs from the north than the south. Changing the hours will, of course, make it easier for women to combine their work in Parliament with their family

We hope to carry a piece from a Liberal Democrat spokesperson in a forthcoming issue

"The credibility of an institution that cannot attract men and women unless they are prepared to sacrifice their family life and, for no good reason, stay up all night, is on borrowed time"

responsibilities if their families live in London. That should be an argument *for*, not *against*, changing the hours. But most of those who support change do so because they know, as the debates in the small hours testify, that no one is at their best at 3am. That is not the time when legislation can best be scrutinised.

Fourth: "Tradition is Parliament's strength. Change it and you destroy its ethos." True, a change in the hours will change the ethos. But Parliament has always changed. We haven't always sat these hours. The House used to rise just before nightfall so Members could ride home on their horses. We should respect

our past, but we shouldn't have to live in it.

Fifth: "It would be unfair on the Members who are away from their families during the week. What would they do at night?" That is an issue that would have to be addressed, but not by keeping the House going till the small hours. The sparse attendance at late night debates show that it's not the chamber where MPs away from home gather.

The mood amongst backbenchers on all sides of the House gives the Modernisation Committee a major opportunity to step up the pace of change, and in particular end all-night sittings. They must seize the chance.

Tess Kingham was the first to go, blaming the "antiquated gentleman's club". But unless the hours change, she will not be the last. The credibility of an institution that cannot attract men and women unless they are prepared to sacrifice their family life and, for no good reason, stay up all night, is on borrowed time.



***Rt Hon Harriet Harman is
Labour MP for Camberwell and
Peckham***

Rape and Sexual Assault: Time for Change?

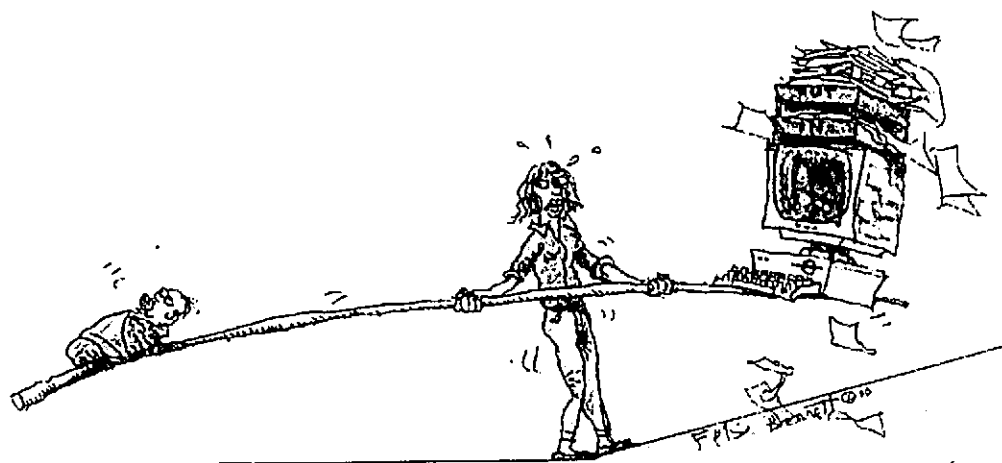
CONCERNS about rape and sexual assault are not new; and the extent that fear of rape constrains many women's daily activities has been well documented. They took on new urgency, however, following the publicising of the sharp decline in the conviction rate; from 1 in 3 reported rapes in 1977 to less than 1 in 10 in 1998. Indeed the Home Office's own research *A Question of Evidence* published in 1999, suggests the problem may be of even greater dimensions, since if cases 'no-crimed' by the police are included the conviction rate for rape was only 6%. There is clearly no room for complacency.

The attrition rate in rape cases was one of the motivations behind the review of sexual offences law (SOR), which will be published in June. There have been a number of unhelpful suggestions in the press suggesting that the review, prompted by women's organisations, will propose reversing the burden of proof in rape cases. Reporting of the content of the review suggests that this will not be the case, and Campaign to End Rape has never supported this proposition.

We are holding a meeting at the House of Commons, hosted by Sally Keeble on **June 21, at 1.30pm in the Jubilee Room** as an opportunity to clarify CER's position. Short presentations by two leading QC's Helen Grindrod and Vera Baird and a speaker from CER will make possible exploration of some of the complex and contentious issues involved in reforming the law on rape.


YWCA of Great Britain
Women Changing Lives

The government, it seems, will help you out with childcare, but isn't that keen on your doing any parenting yourself. Sarah Helm reports



It's easier to work than to mother

It is Monday morning on the eighth-floor labour ward at King's College Hospital, London, and Lynne Pacanowski, a senior midwife, is taking a call from Claire, another midwife. Claire, who has recently returned to work after having her fourth child, needs to juggle a shift. Her husband is a policeman. When she works, he cares for the children, and vice versa.

Pacanowski picks up a piece of paper on which she has mapped out the duty rota for the staff, taking into account the likely demands from expectant mothers, as well as the wish of every mother who works here to manage work and home. "I do it on paper. A computer wouldn't be able to handle it," she laughs.

Outside, midwives congregate in green overalls, while relatives come and go visiting the newborn, which are produced here at the rate of 11 every 24 hours. A leaflet at reception advises parents of Southwark's new "wrap-around" childcare services, and a poster shows a beaming woman wrapping her arms around a baby: it tells new mothers that breastfeeding is crucial to bonding and good parenting. On duty today is Jenny, who is doing two shifts in one day so that she can be at home as much as possible with her two-year-old. A colleague, Sue, works nights so that she can be with her daughter during the day.

Maggie Blott, a consultant, works full-time and has a nanny for her three children. "You cannot be a high-risk obstetrician part-time," she says. "But I always have breakfast with the children and I try to go home to put them to bed, then often return to the hospital afterwards."

"They all want a balance," explains Pacanowski.

Juggling childcare needs is nothing new, as Margaret Hodge, the minister for employment and equal opportunities – and a mother of four and grandmother of one – will tell you. "I have done my fair share of juggling," says the former Islington council leader, after rushing late into her office – a vision in pink – fresh from announcing new curriculum guidance for teachers of small children. She now tries to juggle giving an interview with chomping through a snack lunch of cold cauliflower salad. "Get me a knife. I need a knife," she yells through to her private office.

"I have had to make difficult choices, believe me. I was once sacked by the council two months after I returned from maternity leave. The bastards."

This is national childcare week – neatly timed to coincide with

the imminent birth of the new baby Blair – so new Labour's childcare strategy is on full public view.

In 1973, 27 per cent of women of working age with children under five were in jobs; by 1997, when Labour came to power, this had increased to 53 per cent. Two out of three women now return to work within 11 months of the birth of a child, and 73 per cent of mothers with school-age children have jobs.

In the past three years, the government has created more than three times the number of childcare places that were created ►

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► throughout the previous 18 years. With a budget of £300m, it has met targets for providing nursery places for all four-year-olds and is on track to double the number of places for three-year-olds by 2002.

But just as provision of childcare has become a target for public policy for the first time, the goalposts have moved. As the voices from the labour ward suggest, the need for formal childcare is no longer the most urgent cry: what mothers want today is to choose to do some of the caring themselves.

As women move in unprecedented numbers into full-time work, the importance of parental involvement in a child's early years is being emphasised as never before. "Criminals created at eight months," says expert, "Working mother warning" are just two headlines that emerged from a parent-child conference in London last month. The headlines are not alone in stirring parental anxiety in the workplace; an extensive US survey of more than 4,000 children has found that three- and four-year-olds have lower verbal ability if their mothers work during their first year. The study, carried out by the University of North Carolina, also found that five- to six-year-olds have worse numeracy and verbal skills if their mother worked during any of the child's first three years.

Yet the debate that most working mothers want is not about whether women should work. They do work. It is about whether government and employers will help them find a balance between work and life.

Does Labour's strategy take into account this new mood?

Scrambled across at least five departments, the strategy is in urgent need of some joining up. The Department of Trade and Industry runs parental leave, the Treasury runs tax credits, the Department of Health shares Sure Start with the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), which runs most of the rest. Meanwhile, the Home Office runs family policy as a whole, and thus takes the lead. Or does it?

"We take the lead in co-ordinating everything," said a press spokeswoman. "Pulling it all together. But we don't take the actual childcare lead.

That's the DfEE . . . I think. Let me just check."

To find where the government places its priorities, we need to look at tax and benefits. The most radical initiative has been the introduction of a childcare tax credit for lower-income families, allowing parents with one child to claim back up to £70 a week of the cost of childcare. But to qualify, both parents have to be working more than 16 hours a week, and their joint income should not exceed £29,000.

This has led to a much scoffed-at anomaly: a parent can pay government money to someone else to look after their child, but can't get money to do it themselves. Not only that, parents can't even get the money to pay a trusted family member, or friend, unless he or she is a registered childminder. The system is a clear incentive for both parents to work. The childcare tax relief rules are also heavily stacked against any parent who wants to stay at home or, even more unfair, work at home. A self-employed person can claim tax relief for an office assistant, or a secretary, but not for a childminder – even though he or she can't work without one.

Employers can claim tax relief on childcare facilities offered to their staff. So, absurdly, a home-working mother who hires a nanny or other in-house childcarer can claim tax relief only if that same carer needs childcare in the same house for her

own child. In other words, the employer-mother can claim tax relief on the cost of her carer's baby's playpen, but not for her own baby's playpen.

It is, however, the rules governing benefits for lone parents that send the clearest message to mothers to get out to work. The rules mean that lone parents are automatically invited for job interviews when their child is five. From the end of this month, the interview will be triggered when the child is three; next year, those interviews are to be made compulsory.

"The intention is not to force these mothers away from their children, but to ensure their family income is raised to help the children," says Margaret Hodge, but she doesn't seem convinced.

Parents have made significant gains since 1997: new rights for part-time workers are being introduced, and the UK has adopted the EU directive giving parents the right to three months of leave after a baby. Nevertheless, parental involvement in childcare is not a central plank in the government's scheme of things.

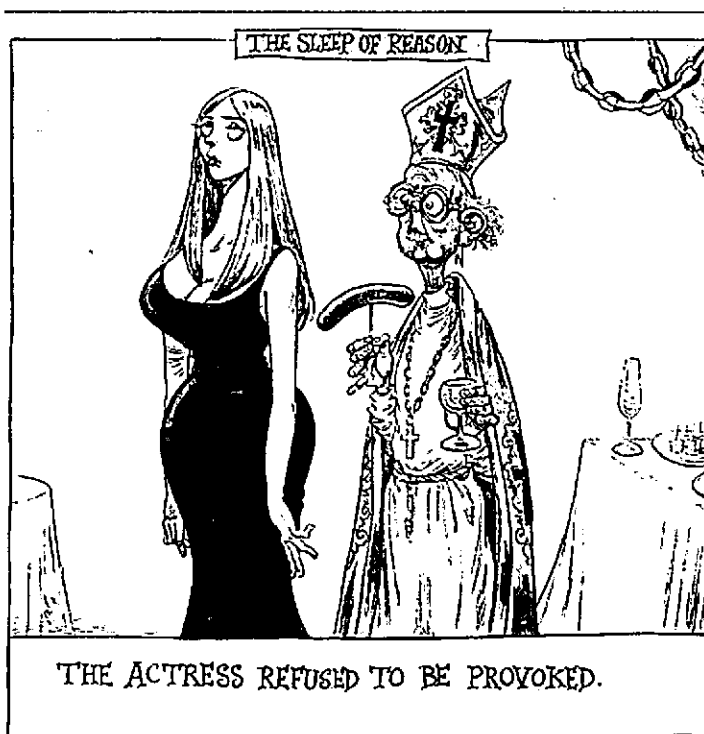
Indeed, the entire discourse of the published strategy is couched in the language of the workplace. Glossy documents pour off Whitehall presses announcing that "playworkers" in childcare "settings" must be given "goals" and "targets". The Cheeky Monkeys playgroup, the Little Fishes nursery, provide "services", and

those who run them are "service providers". Parents are "users" who play the childcare market.

So what does new Labour think of motherhood as a service provider? Could it make a comeback?

It is an awkward question for a party whose ranks are dotted with veteran Seventies feminists who valiantly championed the right to work – and who never thought that women would one day want the right to mother.

Tracy Wells, a 32-year-old mother living in a council flat in central Leeds, tried to pin down Gordon Brown and Tony Blair on the issue during a recent phone call into Radio Five Live. She described to me what happened. "I just wanted to ask them one question: 'Do



you believe motherhood is a profession?"

"Gordon Brown at first rambled on about opportunities and all that. So I asked him again and he refused to answer. Then Tony came in more softly, but it was a real lawyer's answer. He said: 'Listen, Tracy. Nobody has ever said it isn't.'"

Wells has her own agenda. A full-time mother by choice with a partner on job-seeker's allowance, she believes people like her should be able to get the childcare tax credit and choose how to spend it, arguing that she is discriminated against by the government tax and benefit rules. And she is probably right. According to the Family Policy Studies Centre, incentives for low-paid mothers to work may distort the labour market and "disadvantage parents who wish to care for their young children at home".

The idea that mothers should receive government money for the periods of time they care for their own children – that, in effect, they should be paid for being mothers – has always been something of a joke.

"It's just not on," says Hodge.

"Motherhood is a choice a woman makes. A private choice. It is not for the state to intervene."

Might such voices of conservatism soon have to give way? After all, the government does not mind stepping into the privacy of the home when it comes to teaching parenting skills to curb delinquency. And stamping right over the private domain is OK when it means ordering lone parents out of the house for job interviews.

Direct payments to mothers for the periods when they are doing the caring are, in truth, already on the agenda. Harriet Harman, an architect of the childcare strategy when she was the minister for women, and now the chair of the Childcare Commission which reports in January, has published proposals which will move in that direction. Her ideas spring directly from yet more research suggesting that mothers should be at home for at least the first year of a child's life.

Harman is proposing a "baby tax credit" which could be paid direct to the mother, replacing the present childcare tax credit in the first year after birth. And she wants to see an extension of maternity leave from six to 12 months, as well as a right to return to work part-time. "We do need a fuller debate on the balance. But raising the

subject is enormously complicated. We have to be wary of playing into the hands of *Daily Telegraph* editors who will just use the chance to argue that women should not be at work at all."

A growing body of academic opinion is calling for a far more radical reappraisal. Peter Moss, a professor at London's Institute of Education, believes that the government has failed to look at childcare in terms of what is best for the child. "Young children are understood primarily as dependants of their parents, in need of 'childcare' to enable their parents' employment, and as 'becoming' school-children and economically active adults."

There ought to be a rethink, because some government childcare initiatives have simply gone wrong. Under the law of unintended consequences, the creation of

new formalised childcare places has, in some areas, displaced existing informal places, thereby creating ever new demand and undermining community links. Old-fashioned playgroups, for example, have been unable to compete with their more target-orientated competitors; 2,000 have been forced to close. The number of registered child-minders has also fallen since the new childcare tax credit system came in – showing that some attempts to regularise the market are backfiring badly.

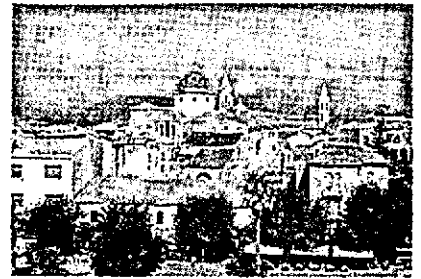
It goes without saying that, before women have a real choice about how to balance work and mothering, there will have to be more fathers at home doing the hard work, too. And, arguably, nothing can be really balanced until employers find a will to end the long-hours culture and try flexibility. If one of the busiest high-risk labour wards in the country can do it, so can they.

In the meantime, we should watch the birth rates. More and more women are choosing not to have children because they can't see how to manage mothering and work. Birth rates in the UK are already well below what is needed for long-term replacement of the population; and it is forecast that nearly a quarter of women born in 1973 will be childless when they reach 45. Perhaps when the labour wards fall silent, mothers will finally get paid for their work.

The writer is a former Independent foreign correspondent

No feminist thought that one day we'd seek the right to mother

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25 MAY 2000

Blair's babes at Westminster say the House is no place for mothers

LABOUR'S women MPs — initially the most loyal Blairites — are mounting a growing rebellion over long working hours, the absence of a nursery at the Commons and the refusal of the parliamentary authorities to allow breastfeeding during official proceedings.

It is a blow to a Labour government that had hoped to capitalise at the next election on the fact that the party managed to get a record 101 women MPs into the Commons in 1997.

More than 200 MPs have signed a petition demanding reform after the Labour-led Commons modernisation committee failed to come up with radical proposals. Many want to see Parliament starting and finishing earlier each day and an end to a voting system in which MPs and ministers wait around at night just to traipse through the lobbies in the small hours.

They believe that the facilities and conditions in Parliament compare poorly with the rest of the country, where many companies now provide creches and are forced by law to give generous paternity leave.

The MPs predict that other members frustrated at the long hours will follow in the footsteps of Tess Kingham, 36, the Gloucester MP and new mother of twins who announced on Friday that she is to stand down at the election.

Julia Drown, the Swindon Labour MP, who had a baby six months ago, said: "We could do our jobs much better for the benefit of our constituents if Parliament was orga-

FEMALE MPs

Labour women demanding better conditions, says David Cracknell



Julie Kirkbride: 'Tess's attitude is indulgent'

nised more efficiently. "Unless we change the way the place works, we won't get as many of the people in the country to come forward and be MPs."

Caroline Flint, the Labour MP and chairman of the Commons all-party childcare group, said: "These late-night sittings are just ridiculous, not only for people with kids but any MP who is trying to do an effective job."

Ms Flint has helped to organise the informal Commons debate, "This House is no place for families", to be held in a committee room on Tuesday. It coincides with National Childcare Week.

Her group, whose vice-chairman is the Conservative MP Caroline Spelman, has commissioned a study on

how many MPs and staff would use a nursery at Westminster. Meanwhile, the Commons administration committee will meet on Tuesday to reconsider letters from Ms Flint and Ms Drown calling for childcare facilities.

Harriet Harman, the former social security secretary, is also a leading campaigner for reform of Parliament. She said: "Some people are saying, 'If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen', but a lot of MPs came into the House expecting to change it."

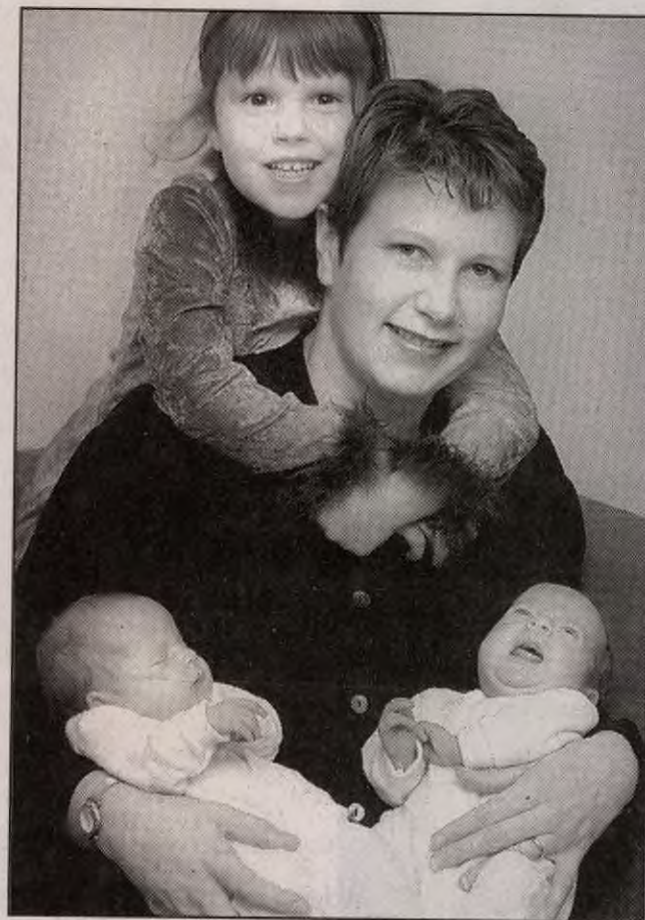
"There are good reasons for changing. One is that it is not efficient to try to hold the Government properly to account at 3am. It is also hard to combine being an MP with family life and that is an issue for men and women."

Miss Kingham is the third woman Labour MP to announce that she is standing down. Judith Church, who entered the Commons in the 1994 Dagenham by-election, is quitting; and Jenny Jones, who won Wolverhampton South West from the Tory MP Nick Budgen, indicated early in the Parliament that she would serve only one term.

Ms Kingham's stance was backed yesterday by a fellow Labour MP Peter Bradley, who called the House of Commons "a ridiculous parody of a parliament".

The MP for The Wrekin said: "Tess Kingham's is a courageous decision. We need more MPs like her, not fewer."

However, last night Julie Kirkbride, the Conservative MP for Bromsgrove who is expecting her first baby, said:



Tess Kingham is standing down because long hours rankled

"I think Tess has taken a rather indulgent attitude. We choose to be mothers and to be MPs — we know beforehand how the House works."

"It doesn't operate the way it does to emulate a gentleman's club but because its hours are the best compromise for 659 people from all over Britain to come together. "Of course, I accept there will be times when I will be torn

between my baby and my parliamentary duties — but the job of being an MP is not the only sphere in which mothers work anti-social hours."

"I do sympathise with her views on late sittings but Parliament is a special place, the forum of the nation, where laws are created, and I am not persuaded it should be obliged to change to suit a minority."

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25 MAY 2000

Convicted rapist to fight in Britain for second time

Rules review after Tyson allowed back

THE successful request by boxer Mike Tyson to fight in Britain for a second time will lead to a review of the immigration rules governing people with convictions, it emerged yesterday.

Announcing that the convicted rapist was being allowed back into Britain, Home Secretary Jack Straw described the immigration guidelines over criminal convictions as patchy and introduced proposals for their clarification.

Former world heavyweight champion Tyson, 33, is expected to fight Italian-American Lou Savarese on June 24 at either Hampden Park or Celtic Park in Glasgow.

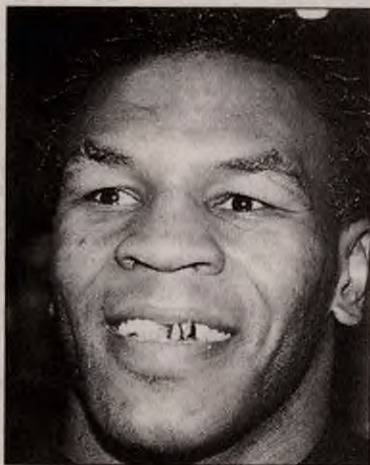
The decision to allow the fighter into Britain unleashed a storm of protest from women's groups and led to claims by some members of the Scottish National Party that London had ridden roughshod over the Scottish Executive.

First Minister Jim Wallace told Immigration Minister Barbara Roche on Wednesday that there was a clear feeling against Tyson visiting Scotland.

But, announcing his decision yesterday, Mr Straw said: "The way this immigration rule on convictions works is patchy."

"It is not clear whether the rule was designed to protect the public, further to punish people convicted of crimes or express disapproval at criminal behaviour."

"Mike Tyson's visit in January raised serious questions about the



Mike Tyson: Allowed into Britain for three-week second visit.

difficulty of applying this rule fairly and consistently.

"I am fully aware of the strong opinions which have been expressed on Mr Tyson's application, especially in Scotland - as I was when this matter last came before me in January."

He said the boxer was being allowed in for a single visit of three weeks' duration strictly for the purpose of a bout on June 24.

His first visit, to Manchester in January for a bout with Julius Francis, caused outrage among women's groups.

When speculation began to emerge that Tyson might return to Britain

to fight in Scotland, a wave of public opinion grew against the proposed visit.

As immigration is not a devolved matter, leaving Scotland with no power to refuse entry to Tyson, many Scottish politicians have accused the Government of ignoring public opinion north of the border.

Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond said: "Jack Straw has ignored the wishes of the Scottish Parliament and government, which will be deeply resented."

But last night the Scottish Executive denied any conflict.

A senior spokesman said that Mr Wallace was phoned by the Home Secretary before the decision was announced.

He said: "Jack Straw has gone out of his way not to slight the Executive. It is a difficult decision to make, and he has made it."

Women's groups reacted angrily to the decision on Tyson, convicted of rape in the United States in 1992.

Oona Hay, of the Rape Crisis Centre in Glasgow, said: "We are very disappointed by Jack Straw's decision and very concerned that the feelings of Scottish people have been ignored."

Former Social Security Secretary Harriet Harman, Labour MP for Camberwell and Peckham, said: "Anybody else with a rape conviction would not be allowed in. It sends a very bad message to women that this serious offence should be overlooked."