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[« Back to home](#)

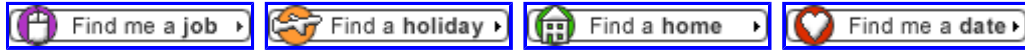
Main sections

- [News](#)
- [News headlines](#)
- [World news](#)
- [City news](#)
- [Mail comment](#)
- [Photos & video](#)
- [Mac cartoons](#)
- [News alerts](#)
- [E-editions](#)
- [Message boards](#)

Partners

- [Elizabeth Arden](#)

- [Diet centre](#)
- [Dating](#)
- [Money shop](#)



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- [Dream Cottage](#)
- [Eurostar breaks](#)
- [Summer super prize](#)
- [Free Royal Doulton set](#)
- [All promotions »](#)

News galleries

- [Disney in China](#)
- [9/11 remembered](#)
- [Royals at wedding](#)
- [Katrina clear-up](#)
- [All galleries](#)

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- [Peugeot 1007](#)
- [Save with Vodafone](#)
- [Direct Line](#)
- [FREE room fragrance](#)

Quizzes

- [Test your spelling](#)

- [Chocaholic quiz](#)
- [More quizzes »](#)

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- [Mac cartoons](#)
- [Free newsletters](#)
- [Book club](#)

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Blair 'relished sending British forces to war'

By SIMON WALTERS, Mail on Sunday 08:56am 18th September 2005

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For the full article and the serialisation of the most explosive political diaries since Alan Clark buy the Mail on Sunday

An explosive political row erupted last night after Downing Street tried to censor a book by one of Tony Blair's most senior former aides, revealing shocking details of how the Prime Minister runs the country.

Price claims Blair appeared privately to 'relish' sending British troops to war in Iraq

Ex-No 10 spin doctor Lance Price has enraged Mr Blair by publishing the first-ever first-hand account of the inner workings of New Labour.

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And he has defied the Cabinet Secretary's attempts to prevent the publication of his devastating memoirs, *The Spin Doctor's Diary*, serialised in *The Mail on Sunday* today.

They give a blow-by-blow account of endless backbiting, tantrums and rows between senior Ministers and officials and lay bare the cynicism of Blair's team.

But there are further claims which Price was told to remove from the book after intervention by the Government and which we can now reveal, including:

- That Blair appeared privately to "relish" sending British troops to war in Iraq as his "first bleeding", while publicly claiming he did it "with a heavy heart".
- That the Government promised media mogul Rupert Murdoch it would not change its policy on Europe without telling

him first.

- That the Prime Minister repeatedly bawled out in rage 'f***** Welsh' when an election in the principality was going against Labour.

Two leaked letters obtained by The Mail on Sunday show how the diaries by respected former BBC journalist Price have thrown the Government into a panic. The first, sent by Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell to Price's publishers nine days ago, angrily accuses him of "betrayal" for refusing to be gagged.

The second, sent by one of O'Donnell's senior officials on Thursday, secretly warns up to 20 Ministers that they feature in Price's exposé, and tells them how to protect their reputations.

Copies of the deleted sections of Price's manuscript have been circulated around No10.

Astonishingly, Downing Street hit back last night by launching a campaign to smear Price, who remains a staunch New Labour supporter.

One senior civil servant told The Mail on Sunday: "Officials in No10 met last week and decided to go for Price's jugular by claiming he is a liar and fantasist. They know he isn't, but they have read the book and are horrified at what people will think."

In a bitter irony, the dirty tricks targeted at Price are almost identical to those he exposes in his book.

As deputy to Alastair Campbell for three years, he uses his diary to reveal how Labour was prepared to lie and cheat to get its message across. Price candidly admits that at times he was involved, if not always willingly.

He paints a damning and chaotic picture of a Government that makes major policies on the hoof, sometimes minutes before Blair goes on TV; of Ministers constantly at each other's throats; and of a Cabinet reduced to the role of impotent bystanders as Blair, and sometimes his spin doctors, make the big decisions.

The media is bullied, browbeaten and bribed with favours to report Labour favourably and the BBC is cowed into revealing its questions in advance to Blair at Press conferences in return for having the chance to pose them first.

The diaries are the most sensational political memoirs since those of the late Tory MP Alan Clark. Nearly every page is packed with colourful and shocking anecdotes. And it reveals how two Labour officials were caught having sex on a sofa in Mr Blair's office on Election night, yards from partying Ministers.

Under Civil Service rules, Price, 47, was obliged to submit his manuscript to the Government for clearance. He was then pressured into making cuts.

Three items deleted from the book at the last minute - and obtained by The Mail on Sunday - were clearly not taken out to protect national security. It is unclear whether they were removed because the Government disputed their accuracy - or simply to spare Mr Blair embarrassment.

The first relates to the first time Mr Blair sent British forces into Iraq when the UK and US launched air strikes at Christmas 1998.

Price's diary entry written at the time said: "I couldn't help feeling TB was rather relishing his first blood as PM, sending the boys into action. Despite all the necessary stuff about taking action 'with a heavy heart', I think he feels it is part of his coming of age as a leader."

But the censored account reads: "I couldn't help feeling TB had mixed emotions about sending the boys into action. He said he did it with a 'heavy heart', but at the same time he must have known it would happen sometime and maybe it's part of his coming of age as a leader."

The diary is also littered with examples of the close links between Rupert Murdoch, owner of News International, which publishes The Times and Sun newspapers, and Mr Blair.

But Price was pressured into changing the entry relating to the Government's stance on whether the UK will join the euro. His original diary said No 10 was "very edgy" after pro-euro comments by Peter Mandelson "because apparently we've promised News International we won't make any changes to our Europe policy without talking to them".

The Downing Street censors demanded that Price change the entry to: "... apparently, News International are under the impression we won't make any changes without asking them."

Any hint that the virulently anti-euro Mr Murdoch has a veto over any changes in policy will outrage Labour's pro-European supporters.

Countless stories that escaped the censor are just as controversial and shocking.

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