

Chapter Six

January–July 2009: Brown’s nemesis

Friday 2 January 2009, Stansgate

Looking back on the Christmas holiday, it was a lovely three-day family holiday, and they do everything for me! They buy the food, cook the food, serve the food, wash up after the food, and I’m a complete visitor. My only contribution is that I paid about £700 for the food and for the petrol for Josh, so at least they’re not out of pocket, but considering how many people were here – I think fourteen for three days – it’s pretty cheap when you consider the facilities at Stansgate.

Saturday 3 January

March to Trafalgar Square. It was very, very cold.

Bianca Jagger was there, with a young assistant; Annie Lennox, who was a very famous pop star from a group called Eurythmics, and George Galloway; Jeremy Corbyn; John McDonnell; Clare Short; Lindsey German and John Rees; Brian Eno. We marched right down the Embankment, to the House of Commons, turned right and then right again, up Whitehall to Trafalgar Square. I was stuck at the front, so lots of people came up to see me.

All the young Palestinians from behind were pushing and pushing and pushing, and they were kicking my heels and I thought my shoe was going to come off, and then, hanging onto this banner, we surged – I don’t know what it was like – it was really quite incredible, and I was pushed and shoved, and by the time we got into Whitehall, I had decided to detach myself. Yvonne Ridley, I think, and a man sort of made me their special charge and walked each side of me. I did feel I had reached the absolute limit of my physical strength. I do not think I could do a march like that again. I can walk – I could have walked it quietly, but I couldn’t cope with the pushing and the shoving, and it really quite frightened me.

What was so wonderful about it was the friendship shown. I did God knows how many interviews: Al Jazeera, BBC Radio 4, BBC TV News, United Press International, Press TV.

I finally walked, with great difficulty, back to the Embankment. On the Tube I ate my cheese bun, and a mince pie and a banana, and tried to sip from my thermos, which was absolutely cold. When I got back I sat with my hands over a fan heater, trying slowly to defreeze.

I just felt it was the world public opinion beginning to shape itself, and of course the Internet keeps us all totally informed about what’s happening.

Sunday 4 January

Overnight Israel invaded Gaza, with troops and tanks, and more and more people are dead. It is now, quite obviously, a hideous war crime that people understand.

I had lovely thank-you notes from Hannah and Sarah for the money I gave them at Christmas.

Melissa brought along Sarah’s paper on the China one-child policy. I photocopied it and gave it back to her, and I wrote Sarah a little note, saying:

Thank you so much for allowing your mum to bring along your really excellent thesis on China’s one-child policy, which I photocopied and read with great interest. It explains the background, the effect and the consequences in a way that makes it all so clear and readable. Your research is also very impressive. But best of all was your own judgement of the programme, with the conclusions that you reached about it, which gives the thesis a great deal of authority. In all, I think it was a first-class piece of work, and I’m not surprised your teacher liked it so much. I felt very proud to have a granddaughter who could produce such good work. I hope you make a point of keeping the best things you write, because future generations will be interested to read them all.

Lots of love, Dandan.

So maybe, I’ll break through to those children. They’re very young, but they’re very subtle.

Monday 5 January

Bitterly cold.

Tuesday 6 January

Well, the Israeli attack on Gaza has gone out of all proportion. They’ve bombed a mosque, they’ve bombed the Islamic University, and today they bombed a school run by the UN or UNRRA. World disgust is really reaching a new peak. Even Blair – and I can hardly bear to mention his name – said that, at some stage, you’d have to talk to Hamas. Here are the Israelis, getting weapons from America, pouring in high-tech weapons, and they’re bombing the tunnels which allow the Hamas fighters to get a few rifles and bits of equipment through from Egypt.

Wednesday 7 January

I’ll just listen to the news – it’s Gaza, Gaza, Gaza all the time! And the crudity of Blair, saying whatever happens, the tunnels to Egypt have got to be closed, Hamas must not be allowed to rearm – Hamas is an elected government, for God’s sake!

Thursday 8 January

Some UN negotiations are going on, but I don’t know that much will come of it really. But I think they have been forced to

recognise that Hamas has got to be brought into the negotiations; just as we can't say Hamas can't be armed when Israel is being armed all the time. Of course the real problem is that the puppet states of Egypt and Saudi Arabia just do everything Washington tells them to do, just as the maharajas and rajahs did when we ran India.

Friday 9 January

The news overnight is that the UN Security Council did pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire, and Britain voted for it, and the United States abstained, so it's the first time that Britain has voted differently to America on Israel, and that's a very important bit of news.

Meanwhile the Israelis have rejected it, and the bombing continues, and Hamas said: we weren't consulted, so it doesn't bind us.

Saturday 10 January

To the Royal Overseas League for Dave's eightieth birthday just before twelve, which was the time it was due to start.

I was freezing cold! Ruth arrived from Bideford safely, and all the family were there, except Daniel, Hannah and Sarah.

There were about 120 people. I had a talk to Peter Hennessy, and to Derek Andrews, who used to be Harold Wilson's Private Secretary. He said his uncle, Sam Andrews, had lived in Bristol. I said, "You mean Sam Andrews the baker?" "Yes." "Oh," I said, "I remember Sam so well" "he was a lovely guy!"

Then I talked to Zdenka, the Croatian friend of Dave's from his BBC days.

So it was a memorable day, and Dave enjoyed it so much.

Monday 12 January

A rather disturbed night "cramp and coughs."

I got the bus to St Thomas's and was looked after by a very nice New Zealand doctor, Sarah Hill, who is married to a lieutenant commander in the New Zealand navy. She wanted to do a biopsy on the unhealed wounds in my leg, in case I had skin cancer. Then I went to the Mycology Department, where they checked for eczema.

Turned on the telly and saw a programme on Islamic culture and its contribution to Western European culture, pointing out the fact that the Muslims captured Sicily and got halfway up Spain, and left behind this fantastic architecture. There was a Muslim Empire, just as there was a British Empire, a French Empire and an American Empire, and there will be a Chinese Empire.

Thursday 15 January

The parliamentary news today is that the Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon announced that they are going to go ahead with the third runway at Heathrow. John McDonnell, who has Heathrow in his constituency, got up and said, "Will there be a vote on it?" and Hoon said, "No, it's a national issue." So McDonnell got up, went to the Mace, picked it up and threw it on the Government front bench, and he was suspended. You've got to be careful when you do something like that; on the other hand, he felt so strongly, and Parliament is no longer a place where people have any say "they're just told what to do by ministers. Something's got to happen."

Friday 16 January

Ruth arrived early, and we drafted, together, a press release for my speech in Trafalgar Square tomorrow, listing six things that ought to be done: that we should expel the Israeli Ambassador and withdraw our Ambassador; recognise Palestine as a nation and a member of the United Nations and start talking to Hamas; use the Royal Navy to protect ships carrying food and medicines to Gaza; use RAF aircraft to fly into Gaza those engaged in humanitarian work and include representatives of the world's media, now excluded; ban all Israeli airlines from landing in British airports until Israel withdraws from Gaza; and ask for more balanced reporting from the media.

Saturday 17 January

After going to Trafalgar Square briefly for the rally on Gaza, I was collected by John Grice, in his very comfortable Mercedes-Benz, and driven to the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford: my show was sold out. Excellent questions. I signed books afterwards, and who should come up but a man who couldn't get into the theatre, John Downham, who'd been with me in Rhodesia, in the RAF, flew up with me to Cairo in '45, and came with me to the kibbutz in 1945 on the day that war ended. He and his wife had come, even though they couldn't get in. I had a lovely talk to them!

Sunday 18 January

Up at six. Got a cab to Euston, and a train to Manchester, to visit the Working Class Movement Library. They have a new centre funded by the Heritage Lottery Board. Among the many people I met was Frank Allaun's widow, and also, Ceri Saklatvala, the daughter of the early communist MP for Battersea North, Saklatvala known as "Sak". They were so friendly, and the museum shows that there is a history that's been suppressed by the British ruling class.

When I told Josh about Ceri Saklatvala, he said he'd taught her how to use a computer when he set up Communitech, which was a training programme for people using computers. It was such an interesting connection. Sak was the nephew of Tata, the great Indian industrialist; Tata now owns Jaguar and everything else.

So, that's the end of Sunday 18 January.

The Israelis, yesterday, stopped bombing Gaza; so that's called a ceasefire.

Monday 19 January

Very, very cold.

I heard an interview I gave for BBC Radio 4 about Sir Keith Park and the campaign to give him a statue in Parliament Square.

I collected Ruth from Paddington. She's really worried about her mother, who's at the moment in a sort of cottage hospital in Bideford and is moving to a care home in Braunton, which is about twenty-five miles away. She's very distressed.

Anything else? Oh yes, the Government announced a second huge bailout for the banks. I mean, really, itâ€™s ridiculous! Brown says you have to do it. Whatever the banks want, we have to do. But if pensioners need money: oh, you canâ€™t do that, thatâ€™ll lead to inflation, you know.

I think the Government is going to be defeated. Now that Kenneth Clarke has been brought into the Shadow Cabinet, he and Mandelson could work perfectly well in a coalition government.

Tuesday 20 January

This is the day that President Barack Obama is inaugurated as President of the United States, and much of the news rotates on that.

Got in the car to go to the House of Commons, because I thought at least I can smoke in the car [laughing]. And in Birdcage Walk I was stopped by the police, beckoned aside. â€˜Weâ€™re stopping you and searching your car under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act.â€™ So I didnâ€™t argue. I gave my name and address and telephone and date of birth, and so on. The woman who stopped me didnâ€™t know who I was, and why should she? She was very young, but I did think to myself: Will that be on police records for ever? Will those police records be accessed through an ID card? Iâ€™m going to write to the Home Secretary about it.

I went up to Room 14 for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, organised by Third World Solidarity, and Gore Vidal was there. I introduced myself. â€˜Oh,â€™ he said, â€˜of course weâ€™ve met.â€™ I donâ€™t think we ever have actually.

There were a few speeches and afterwards I said to Vidal, â€˜We must be the same age.â€™ He said, â€˜1925?â€™ So I said, â€˜Yes.â€™ He said, â€˜October?â€™ and I said, â€˜No, April, so Iâ€™m six months older than you.â€™ I found him strange. Heâ€™s a brilliant literary figure. I think heâ€™s gay. Heâ€™s been attacked for all sorts of things. He made a very interesting and amusing speech.

So it was a busy day, and I came home by car. When I got home there were nine phone messages to deal with and, oh God, about fifteen emails.

To live through the day that President Barack Obama was inaugurated was the really big thing, and thank God there was no assassination attempt.

Wednesday 21 January

News today â€˜Well, the pound is falling. The banks are bankrupt. Lloyds Bank, the bank where Iâ€™ve banked, has lost a huge value of its shares. Iâ€™m wondering whether Iâ€™ll take my money out and put it under the bed, but I mean it really is â€˜the whole British economy is in â€˜a desperate situation! Unemployment touching two million â€˜ I donâ€™t think people realise quite the political implications of this, because there are terrible dangers. Iâ€™m not saying Brown can do much more, but instead of pouring money into the banks, he should take them all over, give them instructions as to what they should do. Every local authority should be told to prepare a plan of things they want to do locally, and be given the money to do it. That would employ people; and similarly industry should say: if you come up with an idea that meets our needs, we will invest in it. Itâ€™s a very dangerous situation.

Thursday 22 January

Obama is sending George Mitchell â€˜ Senator George Mitchell, who did the negotiations in Northern Ireland and knows the Middle East a bit â€˜ to Gaza and the test really is: does he talk to Hamas or not? I watched it on Al Jazeera, which I must say is so much better than the BBC, and of course made up of former BBC Arabic Service people.

Friday 23 January

Wrote to Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary, asking: will the record of my interrogation under the Terrorism Act be on a database; will it be available if I have an ID card; will it be shared with the Americans and the Europeans; and, if Iâ€™m asked have I ever been interviewed under the Terrorism Act, what am I to say? That should put her in a difficulty.

The BBC have banned an appeal by the Disaster Emergency Committee for humanitarian aid for Gaza, on the grounds that it could be controversial and compromise their position of impartiality, which is an incredible decision to take! Douglas Alexander, the International Secretary, said the same.

The BBC rang and asked if I would do the *Today* programme in the morning, about the BBC ban on the appeal. So Iâ€™ve got to be up at the crack of dawn tomorrow! Iâ€™ve also got the conference for the TUC, â€˜Progressive Londonâ€™, and then Iâ€™m going off to the demonstration outside Broadcasting House. God, itâ€™s a killing programme at the moment!

Saturday 24 January

I dug out, from the Internet, the postal address of the DEC Gaza Appeal, which the BBC wonâ€™t broadcast. So when I got to the *Today* programme studio I read out the address, twice. It had an absolutely electric effect, and Edward Stourton and Sarah Montague were perfectly courteous â€˜ they tried to interrupt a bit, but not too much. As I left, everybody poured round me and shook my hand.

I got back home and then was asked to do BBC TV News, so I went to the television studios and did exactly the same thing there.

I got a cab to the TUC for the â€˜Progressive Londonâ€™ conference â€˜ lots of people I knew there â€˜ and took part in a special session about the Gaza crisis. Back to a demonstration outside the BBC in Portland Place. Then we walked all the way to Trafalgar Square, I should think about a couple of miles. I did speak again there.

I walked to the Embankment, because I couldnâ€™t even get a cab. I found the District Line and the Circle Line were closed, so I had to get on the Northern Line to Tottenham Court Road, and by the time I got home I was absolutely exhausted.

It was disgusting to hear the BBCâ€™s argument.

So, anyway, a good dayâ€™s work, and tomorrow I have nothing whatever to do, but I will go and buy all the papers and see what they say.

Came home and went to bed about quarter past eleven. It was a fantastic day: up at five; two major speeches, outside the

television interviews; and a two-mile march, in the bitter cold!

Sunday 25 January

The *Sunday Telegraph* had a leading article demanding the BBC reverse its decision, because of course ITV and Channel 4 and Channel 5 have agreed to broadcast the Gaza appeal.

The Sunday Times had a picture of the demonstration outside the BBC.

Josh looked at my new TV system, the Freesat, added two new channels "Sky and CNN" and made it possible for me to record on VHS and on DVD from it.

There were about forty-five messages of support for my broadcast appeal to the BBC to allow the humanitarian aid to Gaza to go through, and about four against "one extremely obscene and abusive. So, that's been a success.

Monday 26 January

I was picked up and taken to CNN, when Caroline Thomson, who is the daughter of George Thomson, Lord Thomson of Monifieth, was there. He died last October, aged eighty-seven. She's the Chief Operating Officer of the BBC, and she explained again why the BBC had banned the humanitarian appeal about Gaza. It was disgusting!

I was then interviewed, and the guy played it absolutely fair. I had worked out very carefully what I wanted to say. I said: let's compare this crisis in Gaza with two others. I said: in 1940 there was a Blitz in London, with a population of seven million people, and 30,000 were killed; then in 9/11 in New York, with a population of eight million, 2,900 were killed; and in Gaza, with a population of just over a million, just over a thousand were killed. Putting it in that way did sort of silence him a bit.

Anyway, then I was driven back to the House of Commons, and I saw Lissie. We were going to meet inside, but I sat outside and we went and had a cup of tea. She's been filming all day with Richard and Judy for her novel, *One of Us*; there are 25,000 copies in the bookshops, and I think it's going to do very well, and God, if anyone deserved that success, it's her!

Anyway we went together to Lincoln's Inn, for the "Forgiveness" Project, sponsored by Anita Roddick of the Body Shop and Emma Thompson. We listened to examples of people who had forgiven those who had committed crimes and had been forgiven; those who had had crimes committed against them and had forgiven; and it's a very moving and Christian idea. I thought it was wonderful.

As I left I met General Ramsbotham, a very progressive independent peer. I've always been a great admirer of his, and he said when we first met and shook hands, he hadn't washed his since. His wife said, "I shook hands with him after you shook hands with him, and I haven't washed since!" All rather silly, but very friendly.

Then I got a lift home with a Professor of Global Hygiene and his wife who was a hospital administrator.

Tuesday 27 January

I must say this: I have been getting emails from all over the world "from Thailand, from America, and so on" from people who've seen the interview I did on BBC TV News about the BBC's refusal to broadcast the Gaza appeal, and so that has sort of gone across the world. People stop me in the street; I went to buy some bananas at Marks & Spencer, and a woman said she was an art collector and she was one of my great fans. I think moral questions and human questions make politics more real.

Wednesday 28 January

I took a couple of Crampex pills last night, and I had no cramp and I slept very, very well.

Thursday 29 January

Didn't come down to the office till a quarter past eleven, and Ruth was there already. I dictated a new section for *Letters to my Grandchildren* on Palestine; and she took out the stitch in my leg where they had taken a biopsy.

Then Stephen collected me, and we drove to Oxford, to New College. While he was unpacking the car I sat there and puffed my pipe, and the porter came out and said, "You can't smoke in the College anywhere." So I said, "Well, I'm a Fellow of the College." So he said, "Oh, Tony Benn!" He had a cigarette in his hand, so I said, "Come and sit down and have a smoke." He was from Durham, he was the son of a miner, he was possibly sixty-two, he'd been made redundant many times, and he said he loved the job he had. Emily joined us and we had a cup of tea and a talk, and then we walked over to the Union.

I made my maiden speech there sixty-six years ago this month, on the Beveridge Report.

We talked to a few people, and then we went to the dinner. I was sitting opposite Bob Marshall-Andrews, whom I've always greatly admired as a lawyer. Next to Bob was a secretary, a very sort of scatty girl, who was just giggling all the time, and on the left was a beautiful English teacher from St Hilda's. And across the table was Count Nikolai Tolstoy, whom I seem to remember is a historian. He had accused Lord Aldington of war crimes during the enforced return of Soviet prisoners of war to Russia where many were killed.^{fn4}

After the debate, I drove back with Stephen and Emily, and Peter Tatchell.

I heard the following day that the motion "that this House has no confidence in the monarchy" was defeated, by 155 to 114. I thought we'd lose, and I suppose not bad to get that percentage.

Friday 30 January

At 3.30, Simon Fletcher came to see me. He's forty now. He used to work here when he was a student, under Ruth's wing, and then he worked with Ken Livingstone for the whole of Ken's eight-year term. We had a talk about the future of politics, the way the left would develop, what he might do now "he's a lovely guy, and wants to bring Compass in, which I think is quite sensible.

The news tonight is very important: strikes all over the country because a refinery in Lincoln has brought in Italian contractors, who'll be living in a ship and doing the work more cheaply than British workers. This has exploded exponentially across the country, which gives the BNP the chance they want.

Also, the second thing is that, at the Davos Summit, when Hilary was speaking and warning and warning and warning against protectionism – we must make globalisation work – having said, a week or two ago, he wanted British jobs for British workers! So, he hoisted (or foisted) on his own petard, as they say.

But what's good about the argument is: it's against Italians and not blacks, so there's no racist element; but also it's an argument about whether the company should have undercut British workers by employing contractors who pay less. So it's a trade-union and a democratic point, and if we're told that, under the European Union, we have to accept it, then that will raise again the whole question of the role of the European Union. It's a dangerous issue, but an important one, and one that's got to be very cleverly and carefully and honestly handled.

Saturday 31 January

Kate Jarvis and a photographer came to do an interview in advance of my visit to Bath on 4 March. She had read all my *Diaries* and *Dare to be a Daniel*, and she had done fantastic research; it was the best interview, in terms of the knowledge of the interviewer, that I've ever had. I liked her very much, and she gave me a book when she left, *A Pacifist's War* by Frances Partridge, who was one of the Bloomsbury Group.

Gordon Brown, at the Davos Summit, has said: whatever we do, we must avoid protectionism. Well, protectionism in the old sense that you don't want to get into trade wars, yes. On the other hand, government is there to protect you, and this concept of globalisation is that the market must preside globally, just after it's failed us nationally, and we've got to think about that very carefully. I think governments should do whatever is necessary to protect their own people, and negotiate with other countries to find a way in which everybody can defend themselves, because the global economy is not going to correct itself. I think I read somewhere that the global economy is \$51 trillion in the red, or something – an enormous deficit, and we're heading for incredibly hard times.

Monday 2 February

I woke up this morning to find six inches of snow over the garden – what Caroline would call – "fairlyland" – and it was lovely!

I didn't go to the hospital, and when I rang to cancel my appointment there was nobody there. I think the hospital was struck by the snow.

A television crew didn't turn up.

I cleared the snow from the front gate up to the front door, and a very nice young Indian came up to me and said, "Would you like some help?" He was holding a snowball about the size of a football, and I said, "I can manage okay." He said, "I'm from India. I've never been in England before – I've never seen snow before." So interesting – "Are you a student?" I asked him. "No, no, I'm a doctor."

Later a woman came from right across the road and said, "Can I help?" It was very sweet of her.

Thursday 5 February

I got on the Tube at Holborn and the driver said, "I don't know where this train is going" – he said this over the loudspeaker – "but if you want to go somewhere else, get off at North Acton" and at every station he said, "I don't know where this train is going." There's been complete disruption on the Central Line, and he was just told to drive a train westwards. It was quite funny actually, and everyone on the train was laughing.

Oh, interest rates have been cut to 1 per cent, the greatest cut ever in the history of the Bank of England. I don't think the governments of the world have any idea what to do, but of course Mandelson and Brown are sticking to – no protectionism. Although, as the global markets have got us into the mess we're in, why should we worship them now? I mean, it's totally illogical, and I think there will be strikes, and if the Government were to try and use Thatcher's legislation to repress the strikes, I think they'd be in big Trouble, with a big – "Ta!" So, we'll see.

Friday 6 February

Brian Denny of the RMT union came to the house at half-past eleven about the European elections. To cut a long story short, he told me that Bob Crow had decided that he would put up a list of candidates who would stand in European elections, would not take their seats if they were elected, like Sinn Fein didn't take their seats in Westminster, and it would be against the Lisbon Treaty. They would stand as – "No2EU – Yes to Democracy" candidates.

They have produced a little manifesto, which says: reject the Lisbon Treaty; no privatisation from Europe; defend manufacture; no to social dumping and anti-trade-union rules of the European court; no to racism and fascism, to differentiate it from UKIP and others; no to militarisation; restore democracy; abolish the Common Agricultural Policy and VAT; scrap the economic policies designed to stop member states from implementing reflationary policies; and keep Britain out of the euro.

Anyway, we had a lovely talk and, in effect, Bob wants me to stand as a candidate. I suggested a slogan: "No to Lisbon" – yes, we can! – the Obama slogan. Of course the whole question is that I'd be expelled from the Labour Party, I presume, but could I get round that because I would be defending Labour policy to have a referendum? I'd have to think of Hilary, of course, and I'd have to think of family and all that, but it is an exciting idea and I was really quite thrilled by it.

Oh, at one o'clock, John Rees and Lindsey German came and we had a talk about what's happening to them, and in effect the Socialist Workers' Party think they have spent too much time on Stop the War and Respect and that has been at the cost of building the SWP. So they're in exactly the same position vis-à-vis the SWP that I am vis-à-vis the Labour Party. We had a lovely talk, lots of jokes, and went over to the pizza parlour for a meal. I told them about the European-election idea, and they were very keen on that as well, particularly about keeping out the racists and UKIP people, and so on.

I looked up on the *Mail* online, and there was this wonderful coverage for Melissa's book, with Richard and Judy's comment, and Sam West and other people. I mean, if that book doesn't hit the headlines, I just don't know what will! It was really, really exciting.

Saturday 7 February

Josh looked in at nine; he cleared the gutters, which had led to more leaking into the house.

We talked about the Euro-elections proposal, and he discouraged me. It brought me down to earth with a bump. His advice

is very good â€” heâ€™s a shrewd guy.

I spoke to Hilary on the phone, and I mentioned to him this proposal and he was terribly upset. He said, â€”Dad, youâ€™ll be expelled from the Labour Party, and anyway, the Lisbon Treaty isnâ€™t the same as the constitutionâ€™” â€” the official Brown position. So I realised also that if I did go ahead with it, it would be a big break with him and might embarrass him.

Sunday 8 February

Read *The Sunday Times* â€” just rubbish again.

I rang Brian Denny of RMT to tell him that, although Iâ€™d been very excited by his project, I really couldnâ€™t get expelled from the Labour Party just for the purpose of helping this campaign, and he understood, to my delight.

Then, in the course of the afternoon, I rang Hilary and told him that the question of my candidature was completely gone.

Monday 9 February

At twelve oâ€™clock John Grice collected me to go to Gateshead. I thought the weather might be bad, particularly coming back, so we agreed to leave an hour earlier than intended. I slept part of the way, and woke up as we got near Gateshead and saw the Angel of the North, which Iâ€™d never seen before. Itâ€™s all rusted over now, and we passed it with the sun just under the wing â€” it was beautiful.

It was a very strange feeling in the car â€” as I passed Peterlee, named after the minersâ€™ lawyer, and Consett and Sunderland and Durham. I had a dream last night that I was dead, and I felt, in the car today, as if Iâ€™d come alive and was finding my old life again. I have such warm feelings about the North-East, because of the miners and others.

Got to the Sage Gateshead, which is a beautiful place. Norman Foster, or one of his people, designed it. I was given a liaison officer, called Madeleine, who was about twenty-two, a music graduate I think, and she kept an eye on me all the time. She was very nice. While I was waiting for the lights and sound, I asked one of them backstage where I was sitting, â€”Whatâ€™s the origin of the word â€œGeordieâ€?â€™ They looked it up on Google, and the answer was they were people in Newcastle and Durham who, in the mid-eighteenth century, supported King George II. It rather confirmed my memory â€” I donâ€™t know if itâ€™s true or not, but it confirmed my memory of the idea that the Geordies, although very radical, are also very loyal.

After the show, at about 10.30, John and I left. On the way down to London there was snow, but not heavy, and I got home at three oâ€™clock, and went to bed at 4.30.

Wednesday 11 February

To the Channel 4 Awards. Iâ€™d been told in advance that my *Diary* was going to get a Lifetime Achievement Award. Jon Snow was in charge.

When we got there, Hilary was there and, to my amazement, Stephen, Nita and Emily, and the whole table was a Benn table, except for the Labour MP Mick Clapham and his wife.

At the very beginning the first award was to me, and I discovered that Emily had been asked to present it. I didnâ€™t even know they were coming. Anyway, she presented it to me, and I made a two-minute speech, paid a tribute to Ruth, and then Jon Snow also made a reference to Ruth, which was very nice.

Among the other people who got awards were: Peter Mandelson; Lord Adonis; John Prescott. Somehow, the whole thing reminded me of the Oxford Union. It was a grown-up version of students laughing about politics. My speech was a serious one. I didnâ€™t like it, funnily enough.

Thursday 12 February

I think I forgot to mention yesterday that I had some socks from Saffron, so I rang her up and she answered the phone. Sheâ€™s still with her partner. Sheâ€™s hoping to come back for a few days in late March, so Iâ€™ll see her then.

Went to Joshâ€™s house, and we watched Lissie on Sky Arts, with Mariella Frostrup; and we watched the programme about her on *Richard & Judy*, with Alastair Campbell taking part, and a little vignette about Lissieâ€™s life.

One thing Josh drew to my attention is that Vicky Pope, who is the head of climate change at the Met Office, said that a lot of scare stories were being published about Arctic ice melting; I still find the general panic which is going on about climate change a bit of a puzzle.

I gave Ruth my award which I got from Channel 4. Iâ€™m going to photograph it, and sheâ€™ll have the original, which she richly deserves!

Saturday 14 February

Got up early. Caught the bus to Hyde Park Corner for this convoy of 110 vehicles going to Gaza, organised by George Galloway and Yvonne Ridley. Among the vehicles were five or six old ambulances and an old fire engine. They came from all over the country, and all absolutely packed with Muslims. And of course George Galloway was there, and Andrew Murray and Lindsey German from Stop the War.

There was tremendous affection from all the Muslims who came up and gave me such a hug â€” theyâ€™re very affectionate, much more outgoing than the English with their stiff upper lips. I did endless interviews: Al Jazeera, Press TV, Sky TV, BBC TV and various Muslim channels.

Andrew Murray spoke, I spoke and George Galloway spoke, then the convoy went off.

Sunday 15 February

The world news is so grim. The Israelis are now making really serious threats to Iran.

The Afghan war is absolutely unwinnable, and the Russians are offering to help the Americans. They lost 15,000 troops in Afghanistan, and that means America cannot win. The method theyâ€™re using, of sort of air power to bomb villages, is creating an enormous number of civilian casualties, which is making Karzaiâ€™s position impossible.

Monday 16 February

A French and British submarine have collided in the mid-Atlantic, because both had switched off their radar so as not to be spotted, and they just hit each other â€” I mean, a chance in a million, but still, it throws yet another doubt upon the sense of

having nuclear deterrence in submarines, and I think it will help the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Tuesday 17 February

In *The Guardian* today David Cameron, the Leader of the Opposition, wrote an article about the need for decentralisation of power from Westminster to local authorities and other bodies, and began by citing me, in my phrase about "securing a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families"; and he developed this to mean that local authorities should have more power, which I agree with "indeed, I introduced a bill on it.

It was an interesting idea, and I had an email from somebody saying, "What do you think of that?" So I sent them an email back saying, "Give him a peerage."

Thursday 19 February

I faxed through, to *The Guardian*, my letter to the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, on my having been stopped and searched under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act. I think, at this moment, civil liberty is a big issue.

Friday 20 February

Lissie is fifty-two today.

News today "40,000 people have been repossessed in the last year; that is 100 a day. The more I think about it, I mean, it's like war" this crisis is a war crisis, but it's a crisis at home, not a foreign enemy, and 100 people a day thrown out of their homes is unacceptable. I dare say many people would like to buy houses, but can't get a mortgage; just as many people would probably like to get a car and can't get a loan.

Had a bit of a doze, and then I drove up to Lissie's for her birthday. That "I drove" is very important. For the last few months Josh and Lissie and Stephen and Ruth have all said, "You've got to give up your car", and it did have a very demoralising effect on me. I wondered whether, when I got in my car, I wouldn't be able to drive, I'd have a nervous breakdown. But I did drive, quite safely, there and I drove, quite safely, back, at night; and I don't think I'm ready to give up the car, because it is that little bit of independence, as today, going up to see Lissie. I couldn't have done it otherwise.

In the news today: Hazel Blears has made a statement saying that she's very worried by the number of members of the Cabinet who are planning leadership bids when Brown goes. Whether it's true or not, and it may be, it's created a great sense of unsettlement, rather like six months ago over David Miliband.

Saturday 21 February

Wrote fifteen letters, because I've been so lazy about tackling my correspondence. Among them, I wrote to Sir Michael Lyons, the Chairman of the BBC Trust, enclosing a letter I had received from the Chief Executive of the British Red Cross thanking me for speaking up for the Gaza appeal. I gave four reasons why I didn't accept the arguments that Sir Michael had given for upholding the BBC ban, and said now that the armed conflict is over "there are, I think, 100,000 homeless people, including 56,000 children, and they need help now" why won't you give instructions to lift it now?

Clinton is in Beijing, and to see an American Secretary of State almost pleading with a Chinese Head of State on the economy and climate change is quite an interesting reflection on what's happened over the years since Mao's revolution succeeded.

Sunday 22 February

Up at six because, bless his heart, Josh turned up at seven to try and sort out my broadband and my Internet connection. He stayed for nearly three hours and fixed it. So I've now got 170 messages to deal with.

To Marks & Spencer to buy some sandwiches, and who should I see there but Norman Lamont, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer under John Major, responsible for Black Wednesday in 1992. He's probably seventy, with whitish hair. I said to him, "Norman, what would you do if you were in charge now?" and he said, "Nobody has the slightest idea what to do." I said, "Well, in eighteen months there'll be a coalition." "Oh no, there won't" "there will be an election and a Tory Government." I said, "Yes, yes, of course, but you might want to have Labour there to reassure the nation", so he gave me a funny look. Anyway, it was an interesting exchange.

Thursday 26 February

At three o'clock I was picked up by John Grice and driven to the Severn Theatre in Shrewsbury, a brand-new theatre. The audience was interesting. I've never been very comfortable in the Midlands. Of course, Birmingham was a huge town that grew at a fantastic rate at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, and people came from all over the country and worked in the factories there, so they didn't have any local roots or local pride, as they do in Scotland or in Bristol or in London, for that matter, though London's changing. Birmingham, in a funny way, has always been Britain's version of America: cynical, brassy "I don't know, no collectivity about it.

Some of the questions were very cynical. One man said, "Why should we vote for anybody? All the MPs are a bunch of crooks just trying to make cash!" I turned on him, and I said, "Well, that's what Hitler said about democracy." I kept this theme of cynicism in mind, and trying to give people some hope.

But somebody left some shortbread and tea for me, and a man came up with a big book of Martin Rowson's cartoons. Got home and to bed about two o'clock.

Friday 27 February

Ruth arrived early this morning and sat on the bed, and she said she wondered whether Mandelson actually wanted the Communication Workers' Union to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. It was a very interesting point. She pointed out that in his book, *The Blair Revolution*, Mandelson had said that he thought it would be better if there was state funding of political parties and the unions were not affiliated to the Labour Party, which of course says it all. It was Mandelson who said he was "utterly relaxed about people getting stinking rich" in respect of the £633,000-a-year pension that Fred Goodwin, the disgraced Chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland, was getting.

At lunchtime Marion Miliband arrived, and Melissa, and I went over to the Pizza Express. She's very pessimistic about the political situation, but then she was born in Poland in the 1930s, so I'm not surprised. She's very detached politically from David and Edward, and she has retained her own political position, and I think she quite appreciated the friendship from us. She thought Melissa's book was wonderful, and she likes Ruth, so we had a lovely lunch.

My new photocopier, a Samsung, was delivered, and it looks very good.

I had a snooze. Ruth went off.

Sunday 1 March

I went and bought the *Mail on Sunday* to read the serialisation of Chris Mullin's book. Also there was a very interesting comment by Clare Short, who said the reason that they didn't release the Cabinet minutes on the Iraq war, under the Freedom of Information Act, was that there was *no* debate about the war in the Cabinet – Blair came, handed out little bits of paper from the Attorney General saying it was a legal war, and therefore there was no discussion about it. That is another reason for keeping things secret: because you don't want to reveal how little discussion there is about a crucial matter.

I drove over to have lunch with Hilary and Sally. Hilary had been in Berlin with Jonathan, and had visited the Nazi headquarters where Goebbels worked, and so on. It would frighten me, even to think about it.

I had a word with Carrie, who's going to be a fashion photographer – she's going to do a course in that.

James was there with Blake. Blake is moving from general practice to psychiatry. Then, afterwards, Hilary showed a video he'd made in Antarctica – fantastic!

I came home and at five o'clock Josh arrived. Then Lissie arrived, with Sarah, who was working on her school paper on Henry VIII. Then Stephen turned up. We had a long political talk, and he's very worried, as I am, about the police state.

Before Stephen went, Josh sorted out Internet domain names and reserved them, for Daniel and Stephen.

He also booked me a first-class ticket to Manchester next Sunday, which I've never done before on the Internet.

Before he went, Josh fixed the security light above the front door.

Rang Dave. He said there was a report on the Internet (in Russian) that a man had set fire to himself in Parliament Square, and there was no reference to it in the British press. He didn't know whether it was inaccurate or whether it had been suppressed. Of course it's exactly the story in Melissa's book, *One of Us*, so I rang her and told her.

So today I saw nine members of my family, out of eighteen. Apart from a very few letters, I did no work and the main priority now is of course the book. I've got to go on giving material to Ruth. She is a brilliant editor!

I had two emails this morning. A very sweet note from a Muslim saying: "I just want to say how much I love you for the reasons you always stand up for justice, and then: had I thought of becoming a Muslim? I wrote a very friendly note back. Then one from a Buddhist and a great believer in yoga, who told me her father had died. She said how much he had appreciated the message I had sent before he died, which she read to him.

So anyway, that's the mixture of life.

Monday 2 March

I dreamed last night that the house was covered in green slime and fungus, and I went upstairs and in the bedroom was Caroline lying on the bed, and the bed was a complete mess of papers and things. She was absolutely white, her eyes were red, and a fattish woman was cutting huge chunks of bloody meat and giving it to her to eat. I said something and the woman replied, and I said, "Never speak to me like that again – get out!" and she shouted at me. There was Caroline, with all this meat around her – and I woke up and Caroline was gone. Strange!

BBC London Radio rang about my meeting in Catford on Thursday.

I went to the City Temple, where I used to go as a child; it used to be Leslie Weatherhead's church, was bombed in the war and rebuilt. A thousand or more students were in the hall, for one of these sixth-form politics conferences. I had been asked to speak about the crisis. I said that my generation had made a hash of everything and, coming out of the hall, lots of the kids came round. It was lovely.

Got back and Ruth arrived for lunch, but she said she'd had a bit of a heart flutter and was going to see the doctor, quite rightly, I think.

Anyway I had a bit of a snooze, and then I think I may have dictated a couple more bits for the book, and Ruth went off.

At five o'clock, I did a half-hour international discussion on American radio/TV networks with correspondents from America, Ireland, France and Germany, and the theme was: why aren't the American unions doing what the European unions are doing and demonstrating about the crisis? Because I was a bit late I had to get a cab to a meeting in the East End.

Mandelson has made further attacks on Labour people – if they want to lose the election, this is the way to do it, but why should he object to the Tories coming in, because they support all his policies? Oh! I think if I did have a video blog, it might be that I could plant a few ideas into people's minds.

Tuesday 3 March

The big story this morning was a little bit of detective work – Dave had told me, a day or two ago, that *Izvestia* had reported that a man had set fire to himself in Parliament Square, and Dave was very surprised that it hadn't been reported in the British press. So first I rang the Metropolitan Police Press Bureau and a woman said, "Yes, I'll send you the statement that we issued after it happened":

At approximately 16:00 on Friday, the 27th of February, a man was seen alight in Parliament Square. Police officers came to his aid, the fire was extinguished, the Ambulance Service attended this 43 year old, taken to a South London Hospital, with superficial burns, not life-threatening. We do not believe anyone else was involved.

Brian Haw has been camping in Parliament Square for years as part of the anti-war demonstration, and so I spoke to him and he told me he was there at the time, and the man was a Tamil; that seven Tamils were going to set fire to themselves all over the world, on the same day, as a protest at the way the Sri Lankan Government had treated them. Brian said, "We saw him, rolled him over, put the fire out, the Police said it was awesome." Why did *Izvestia* take an interest? The only

I guess I can make it that a Sri Lankan may also have set fire to himself in Moscow.

I rang the Press Association and they said they might have reported it, but nobody picked it up.

So that was a bit of very interesting detective work. I told Melissa, who sent a note back saying that he was just about the same age â€“ forty-three â€“ as Jack, the person in her novel who set fire to himself.

Bought Chris Mullinâ€™s *Diaries*, which I will read this evening.

Then I had a doze in the office. Iâ€™ve got this very simple white-plastic reclining garden chair, and Iâ€™ve attached to it a fairly thin layer of foam rubber, and I can sleep on it. I must say, I think it is a really useful invention.

Chris is a very skilled writer, wrote the novel, *A Very British Coup*; he used to be very much on the left, but he is a journalist at the heart of government, observing, rather cynically, what goes on. Itâ€™s not self-justification, just reflections.

Thursday 5 March

Slept reasonably well, and woke up to hear Nicholas Jones, the former Industrial Correspondent of the BBC, talking about the minersâ€™ strike, which began twenty-five years ago today. He said heâ€™d gone to the NUM in Barnsley to see Arthur Scargill â€“ nobody answered the door. Then heâ€™d been to Arthur Scargillâ€™s house and nobody came out. Then heâ€™d talked to someone from the NUM. He just repeated all the rubbish about Scargill. I thought it was ghastly! I must say, it shook my respect for Nicholas Jones.

Ruth arrived, and I dictated something on the Labour Party for the new book â€“ she thought it was very old and unimaginative; then I tried to dictate something on immigration, and she took the view that immigration really should be limited, because of the cultural effect of it on England. I find myself in disagreement with her about this, so I did another piece on cultural identity to try and show her I understood the point.

After lunch I went and caught the Tube to Cannon Street, and the train to Catford Bridge. Sir Steve Bullock, the elected Mayor of Lewisham, had invited me to meet some of his colleagues, and there were Labour councillors there. He got a knighthood from Blair, and apparently heâ€™s the man who rescued Lewisham from a hard-left council, so it is an interesting story.

Anyway, as we walked back to the Catford Broadway Theatre I did feel, as Ruth would have said, very much in the white minority â€“ masses of people milling about, I had the impression that perhaps 80 per cent were immigrant, and I could see how people there might feel. At the meeting itself there were about 450 people, who each paid Â£17 â€“ the questions were serious. There was one on race and immigration, about Labour and New Labour, and so on. There were quite a number of young people there, that was noticeable. I should think the average age was probably not more than forty. So I got the impression it was a community that had integrated well, and no racial problems of any kind.

Friday 6 March

Grahame Herbert turned up with his prototype seat-case for backpacks and demonstrated it, but it needed modifications. He and Ruth went off to buy a suitcase to try and see if it could be fitted to that.

I had a meal, and had a bit of a snooze, and did emails and letters.

I have put my bus pass inside the right sleeve of my suit, attached with a little clip, and so all I have to do is to press my arm on the Oyster pad â€“ instead of having to find my bus pass whenever I go. It works like an absolute dream!

I caught the train to Bristol, to a packed meeting organised by Stop the War, and caught the 8.30 train home.

Wednesday 11 March

To the Jubilee Room at the Commons for the launch of the Peopleâ€™s Charter, a very imaginative idea. It sets out a series of clear aims.

It was quite well attended. Imran Khan, the solicitor, was in the chair. John McDonnell and Alan Simpson and some trade-union leaders were there. I donâ€™t know whether there will be any press coverage â€“ itâ€™s too interesting for the political correspondents. I linked it with the Chartistsâ€™ demands in the 1830s: annual parliaments, universal suffrage, and so on. If we got a million signatures, which we could do, I think it could be an influence, and it is absolutely the right way forward: issues instead of personalities; and even issues instead of parties. John McDonnell is a really bright guy.

Sitting on the Terrace with my lunch, a rather nice omelette, I went back into the building for a moment and, when I came back, I found the seagulls had eaten most of it. In the afternoon there was a big Gaza lobby on and I met a couple of MPs from Gaza â€“ Hamas MPs.

Tuesday 17 March

I got the 148 to the House of Commons, and it was diverted just past the Army & Navy because of some road blockage, and the guy would not let me get off the bus until we got almost to the Elephant & Castle â€“ it was bloody awful!

So I had to get a taxi back to the Communication Workersâ€™ Union for their meeting calling for a Post Bank: a coalition of local businesses and sub-postmasters and the New Economic Foundation, whoever they are, and the Communication Workersâ€™ Union. There was the Labour MP Jon Cruddas; Billy Hayes, head of the CWU; Roger Gale, the Tory MP; Vince Cable, the Liberal Democrat. I tried to give a bit of historical background about the Giro.

And then I went over to the Annual General Meeting of Labour Action for Peace. There were about, I donâ€™t know, thirteen people there, average age probably seventy: masses of bureaucracy and no substance! For the first hour: whoâ€™d be chairman, whoâ€™d be secretary. I was asked to speak, and so I said there are three areas of a peace campaign: one is throwing yourself into the activities on a day-to-day basis, like the Stop the War movement; secondly, working with other Labour organisations, like Labour CND and Labour Against the War, to influence government policy; and the third thing is looking ahead a bit â€“ Russia should be brought into Europe, we should be thinking of some world government that is more democratic than just handing over all the economic powers in the world to the IMF, which is not elected; and they took one or two of those points up.

After an hour and a half, and I slipped out. I came home in a cab.

Wednesday 18 March

Looking at the world today, itâ€™s quite clear that the Establishment, the people in power, are desperately trying to safeguard their own position so that the crisis, which is coming, doesnâ€™t destabilise them in any way â€“ make a few little

concessions here and there, but, otherwise, just carry on as before" and they're terrified of any serious change.

Oh, Natasha Richardson, Vanessa Redgrave's daughter, married to Liam Neeson, the actor, has died, or is dying, following a skiing accident in Canada – very sad for Vanessa – Jemma Redgrave, who is married to Lissie's old boyfriend, Tim Owen, is first cousin.

One thing I forgot to mention: Ruth arrived with a birthday card – "I AM 84", to which she added "4" – and a lovely chocolate cake, which she'd decorated herself. As I'm not going to see her on my birthday in April we sat down and ate the chocolate cake at lunch.

Friday 20 March

Up early, and I went to Guy's Hospital, to the Urology Department, to see Mr Glass, the consultant. Josh came with me, bless his heart. I decided to have a prostate operation in July. It's a bit of a nuisance, I don't want to do it, but the prostate problem means getting up three or four times in the night. The only anxiety Josh had was whether the anaesthetic would be bad for me, but we'll see anyway.

Later I caught the train to Coventry, and was met and driven to the Methodist Central Hall, where I'd been before. Outside were some people representing the Campaign for a New Workers' Party, which the former MP Dave Nellist is associated with – I've always been very friendly towards Dave, who was expelled from the Party in the 1980s.

I went there, and Geoffrey Robinson introduced me, and I paid a tribute to him. I did my *Evening with Tony Benn*. As they were Labour Party people, they were a bit quiet. They weren't anything like as enthusiastic as people at an ordinary public meeting. I can't say it went badly – and I hope I didn't say anything that upset Geoffrey Robinson. But, I thought: If that's the local Labour Party, then I am a bit out of touch with it.

Anyway, afterwards I was picked up and driven, by Colin French, who is Geoffrey Robinson's chauffeur, to the Commodore Hotel in Instow, North Devon. Ruth was there – it was about one o'clock in the morning, I guess – and she took me to my room, Room 15. I don't think I even had a cup of tea, I was so tired.

Saturday 21 March

I got up at six. It was a lovely day! I sat on the little balcony outside the room, overlooking the River Torridge, towards Appledore and the shipyard. Had breakfast with Ruth and her sister Di. James Woolaway, the grandson of Bruce Woolaway (the owners of the hotel), looked after us.

Then we were driven to the Town Hall for the "Manor Court"; the Mayor was Caroline Church, a Liberal Democrat who fell out with her colleagues over something or another. I met Geoffrey Cox, the MP. The Manor Court is a medieval institution, and I don't suppose there was much Labour support there, but anyway they laughed at my jokes!

Over to visit Ruth's parents, Joan and Victor Winstone. Joan looked much, much better after her terrible accident in December, which everyone thought would kill her. Then, after that, Ruth and Di drove me to Tiverton Parkway, and I sat on the platform and smoked my pipe and caught the 3.13 back, and was home by about 5.30.

Monday 23 March

I don't put a lot about world news in today, but Obama has decided to buy all the toxic debt of all the banks in America for another trillion dollars. The whole situation is quite incredible! I mean, capitalism is being rejected everywhere. It's a funny way to put it, but I think it is.

Tuesday 24 March

I spoke to Lissie this morning, and told her that the film about the lion called Christian being reunited with his early owners was to be on television tonight, so the girls could watch it. Two Australian lads in London bought a baby lion from Harrods, kept it as long as they could and then released it in Kenya, with the help of Joy Adamson of *Born Free*. They went back, a year later, and the lion came out and slowly recognised them, and just jumped up and hugged them and licked them – oh, it was heavenly! And then Christian introduced them to his "wife".

At four o'clock Stephen Kelly, who'd sent me an email about my work as Minister of Technology, wanted to come and talk about a new project for IT software developments in Britain. He brought somebody called Tim Brill, who's a Communications Director of his company, Micro Focus. In effect they wanted me to head up, or join, a campaign to get more government money and support for development of software, involving the universities and adult education. I said I was out of touch with day-to-day developments, but I gave them a steer: I said don't ask for money at the beginning, put it at the end; link it with Europe and America; point out that it's got great export potential and introduce a green element, because, after all, software is very green. They were much struck, and sort of half-hinted they'd like me and Michael Heseltine to launch this campaign. Well, I'm not prepared to do that, but I said I'd give it any support I could.

Mervyn King, the Governor of the Bank of England, has made it clear that he doesn't think any further financial stimulus by the Government is appropriate. Inflation has dropped to zero. So Gordon is under some difficulty, because if the Governor of the Bank of England says you shouldn't do something that he obviously intends to do, it weakens Gordon Brown. On the other hand, it may be the right thing to do. But the more I think about this whole economic thing, the more I think the approach should be to develop projects that will benefit society, that won't necessarily be profitable – build council houses, and so on. But just funding the banks I think is a dead loss. The pound is slipping, and that will have an effect on our economy.

Obama has talked, for the first time, about an exit strategy from Afghanistan, which is good news.

Otherwise, the stories from Gaza are horrific now: Israeli soldiers admitting that they shot children and bombed hospitals. I think the war-crimes charge against Israel is now very strong. I think it is a very dangerous state, and I just hope that we can build up support for a better policy and the recognition of Hamas.

I'm thinking a bit about blogging. Josh is going to come at the weekend with a new high-quality camera, and then maybe I shall be in a position to get on with this project.

I've been thinking a lot about dying. One day I will find myself in hospital – what can I do in hospital that would be useful? I thought: Well, why don't I take a tape-recorder and a lot of blank tapes and go round and talk to the patients in their beds, if they're ready to do so, about their lives. I would put a microphone on them and then record their life story, for

their children or grandchildren. It would keep me from dying and it would be a useful thing to do. It means I've got to be mobile enough to move around the ward, whereas I might be absolutely incarcerated in bed, but it's nice to think of something to do when you're dying.

I think it would make my death more agreeable, and will also be a way of being useful at that stage.

Wednesday 25 March

Just after nine Anita Bromley, a solicitor, picked me up in a taxi and we went to Wormwood Scrubs for the Phillip Trusty parole-board hearing. I've been interested in his case for some time, we have been in contact " he writes me letters " for ten or fifteen years.

We had to queue up with everybody, had to produce a passport or photograph. I had to hand in my tobacco, my cash, my penknife; I don't think I handed in my keys.

We were taken through the prison, with every door being locked behind " six, seven or eight locked doors " into a sort of open space, where I met the barrister, and someone who was his probation officer at one stage.

Then a man was brought up to me, and it was Phillip Trusty. I didn't realise at once it was him " I've never met him before.

We went into the hearing. Judge John Lindsay was in charge, a man in his mid-sixties I think, white hair; I had looked him up on the Net, and I think he was quite a fair-minded judge. The other two members of the panel were an Indian psychiatrist and an English woman with red hair, I suppose in her late fifties.

Phillip Trusty gave evidence first. He said the whole government's corrupt, they're all Freemasons, and then something about the world's energy problems. He was quite serious, perfectly clear, and the psychiatrist pursued him and brought more of it out. But Trusty was doing himself no good at all. And then the psychiatrist said, "Well, in the light of that, if you ever met any of these people, would you attack them?" " i.e. to imply he was violent.

The woman asked about his wife (he was sentenced to life imprisonment, escaped, went to Cyprus, married, then came back to England and was re-arrested and had to continue his life sentence). It's a very complicated case.

Anyway, I asked to be heard next. I said I had no special qualifications, but I had been moved by two things: I thought there might have been a miscarriage of justice; and also, on the question of humanity, I thought he was being treated very badly. I said he'd written to me, and I'd written to the Home Secretary, and I'd raised it with Chris Mullin at the Home Office. I said I know it's said that he has a conspiracy theory but, in my profession, I said, with a slight smile, conspiracy theories are rampant " communists, Muslims, left-wing, right-wing conspirators " And, I said, as to delusions, in my profession there are people with delusions; and there's one man, for example, who thinks he saved the world.

I don't know whether they took it well, but I think it was the right thing to do, and then I went on to say that the real question of probation is: is he safe in public? You've got to check that, with probation after release, but I said actually Trusty spent five years in Cyprus where he was safe.

I was then released and came home on a bus. I rang Anita this evening, and she said that my evidence had been exactly what they wanted. They had not reached a judgement today, though she had told me when I went there was no hope at all of anything other than a rejection. Of course, today the big news was that Trusty said he would accept probation and be released in Britain on condition that he stayed in Britain, which is a complete change, because previously he'd said, "If I leave, I'll abscond and go back to Cyprus", so he did make that concession. And, originally, he said he wouldn't come to the hearing, but he did, and I'm glad because I met him.

I had a bite to eat, had a snooze, and then went by Tube to St Mary-le-Bow in Cheapside to initiate a series of lectures called "Just Share". It's a Christian initiative in the City of London to persuade City people to have some moral responsibility for the poverty of others.

Friday 27 March

The big news today is that Gordon Brown has suggested that the constitutional role of the royal family should be altered, so that it wouldn't be an offence for a member of the royal family to marry a Catholic, and also that the eldest child " even if it was a girl " would succeed to the throne, rather than the first boy. Of course this opens up all sorts of possibilities, which I've thought about.

Polly Steele came to lunch; and she explained her brilliant idea of video portraits. You ask somebody to sit absolutely quietly for two minutes and you film them, and then you could, if necessary, have what they were thinking about underneath. It might be their wedding, it might be the birth or death of a child, it might be anything. She had already filmed me. I was thinking about the Armistice, because I'd just been discussing the death of my brother Michael. It was a brilliant idea, because you do like to stare at people, but you can't. A silent face, just thinking and reflecting " I think I had a tear in the corner of one eye, and she wanted to use it to launch the idea, and we had a lovely talk.

Sky TV asked me to do an interview about the monarchy and I had worked out (I thought rather cleverly) what I'd say about it: that I would strongly welcome the Prime Minister's initiative, and that of course the royal family should be able to marry anyone they like " it would liberate them, and it would have an effect on the Church of England, because a Catholic might be appointing a new Archbishop " even a Muslim Prime Minister. I said it would alter the whole question of the prerogatives and the oath, and it would mean the Commonwealth might redefine the title Head of the Commonwealth, so that it rotated round Canada, Australia, India, Pakistan, New Zealand, just as it does in Europe. I think they were a little bit surprised, but anyway I got my case across.

Then I went over to the BBC and I said the same thing again. If the Palace was watching, it would absolutely make them determined not to make any changes, because the last thing they want is to open up the British constitution based on the oath to a monarch.

Saturday 28 March

I had an idea to take the Parliamentary Standards form on the Declaration of Members' Interests and have it sent to every potential election candidate, saying, "Will you fill it in before you're elected?" " There's not much point in knowing what the interests of Members are after you've elected them " you want to know before. It might influence you. That's an idea I've had for a long time, but it's something somebody else has got to do " I can't do it.

So, that's how I spend the day, sitting and thinking â€

Very, very depressed this morning, then very, very cheerful, and then sinking into a bit of gloom this evening. I do go up and down like a yo-yo.

Sunday 29 March

The clocks go forward.

According to the news, Jacqui Smith's husband used her parliamentary allowance to buy pornographic videos; it puts her in a real difficulty. That, plus the fact that she says her home is with her sister in London, while her husband and children live somewhere else â€ I think it could be the end of her.

Josh came with a high-quality camera and set up my blog. It's frightfully easy! Beautiful quality. I did a few blogs: one on the G20; one on torture; one on the need for Russia to be in the European Union â€ about a minute, ninety seconds maybe.

Monday 30 March

I was picked up at seven and taken to BBC Television News to talk about pensioners' bus passes.

These free passes were extended to allow them to be used on other bus services across the country, but the Treasury has insisted they now be cut back, saving a billion pounds. I said, "Isn't it wrong that the Government should be taking a billion pounds from eleven million pensioners, which is Â£90 per pensioner per year? Isn't it wrong that this money should be given to the banks to allow their bonuses to be paid? Isn't it better for tourist areas to have pensioners visiting, because it creates jobs in hotels and shops? Isn't it better to build more buses to accommodate the pensioners because that would create jobs? Isn't it a good idea to keep cars off the road?" I did it in a jolly way.

Kate Silvertown has got an engagement or a wedding ring â€ I think she married a Marine.

Wednesday 1 April

The G20 summit is meeting in London and I joined the march to Trafalgar Square. My legs just wouldn't do it, so I got a bus. A number of people spoke and at the very end I said, "When you're my age, eighty-four, as I am the day after tomorrow, you'll look back on this as a very important demonstration." As a result of that Julie Felix, the singer who'd performed just before me, began singing "Happy birthday to you", so 8,000 people sang "Happy birthday" â€ it was lovely!

It's been a very important day because of course the world's media are here today to cover Obama's visit, so all the demonstrations will be broadcast worldwide. Also, because of the political crisis and the economic crisis coming together, and the continuing war, the Establishment at the top is trying desperately to re-create the old system under regulation, talking about a reformed capitalism. But people want something different, and I think, if we carry on, it will be rather comparable to what happened in the middle of the nineteenth Century and it will lead to change â€ not quite the ones we want. There may be a bit of bloodshed. But otherwise, it's an important change, and it gives you a feeling of excitement.

Thursday 2 April

I watched the television, and I saw the Summit in which Obama and Brown spoke, and they've come out with a trillion-dollar plan, mainly channelled through the IMF. I mean, it was so obvious really that their plan is to re-create capitalism on a global basis, with no protectionism, and to make it work; and that's what I doubt. Obama had met the Chinese Prime Minister and the Russian Prime Minister and they'd had discussions on the reduction of nuclear arsenals.

Obama is a nice, decent guy, but what you feel when you look at Obama is he's just an ordinary guy, in charge of a rapidly declining empire â€ because the Americans are overstretched militarily and politically and economically, and now the Chinese and the Russians are talking about a new international currency to replace the dollar. So, I sort of felt for the Americans. I remember the British Empire declining and how awkward it was for the British when they realised they were no longer top dogs.

Friday 3 April

My 84th birthday, with masses of emails, phone calls, cards â€ and flowers from Saffron.

Lissie had her big day at the British Book Awards. She dressed up, and was brought round to the front of the hotel in Park Lane in a Rolls-Royce and walked along the red carpet. Stephen was there, with his video camera, and he went into the Green Room to film.

Monday 6 April

To St Thomas's and visited the Dermatology Department. The treatment they gave me for my eczema on my legs seems to have worked, so I thanked them very much, and came home.

Then the BBC's *The One Show* arrived and did an interview in the garden about Paul Stephenson, the Bristol friend of mine. He's getting an OBE at the Palace tomorrow.

I went off, at 3.30, with John Grice, who drove me to Colchester to a Clive Conway lecture at the Mercury Theatre. I'm getting clearer and bolder in my presentation of the argument. John lives in Colchester, so when he dropped me home in London, he had to drive back there.

Tuesday 7 April

Alice Mahon rang today, the former MP for Halifax. She's left the Labour Party, or she's just about to, she's out of sympathy with so much of what it's doing; but also, the Welfare Reform Bill, which is driving unemployed people, women with young children, back to work and so on, is just back to the Poor Law and she can't take it.

Anyway, John Grice picked me up again at three and drove to Newark for a lecture. I saw Glennys Sanders there, who founded the Guillain-Barré Syndrome Support Group. I had met her years ago, at the anniversary meeting at the House of Commons; I suffered from it in 1981.

Wednesday 8 April

I have been asked to do the BBC's *The World Tonight* on the death of Ian Tomlinson, this newsagent who happened to be knocked down by the police last week, over the demonstrations in the City of London. I think he was completely innocent, he wasn't even political. The police hit him, he fell to the ground, they hit him again and he died of a heart attack. When I did it, George Monbiot was in another studio and he hogged the whole programme, but I wasn't looking for saying more.

Saturday 11 April

I had a very funny voice-message from a man who's absolutely bats. He made no attempt to hide his telephone number.

Message: Friday, April 10th, at 7.59 p.m.

Good evening, Tony, AKA Speaker of the House of Gentlemen – Tony, there's only one thing left on my checklist today. The RAF confirmed we did have an early warning stage two of the little moustaches – If you would be so kind as to call me on that matter, Tony, I would be most grateful. [Then he gave his phone number.]

– It would seem a rough calculation that Room 101, Orwell, Big Brother, 84, Animal Farm, was the [unclear] Politburo and Pentagon in order to spread fear at the Fed and the FTSE – in other words, we know what you're doing, and we've also filmed you turning up at your secret meetings – Not long now, when you consider an eight-billion-year opportunity condensed to sixty-five million years' worth of dinosaurs, cavemen, killing animals, and finally, Tony Benn. Got that.

Well, that was the crazy phone call I had on Saturday 11 April. The children listened to it. Some thought it was serious; some thought it was a spoof; some thought it was threatening; some thought he was mad. He has rung before and since. – God bless you, Tony – you're my main man.

Selina Scott wrote an article about her legal campaign against Channel 5 for not allowing her to take Natasha Kaplinsky's place when Natasha was on maternity leave, and she mentioned the fact that I had supported her.

Tuesday 14 April

Tony Whittome from Hutchinson arrived, at six. He's sixty-five this year, and he's retiring. It really was quite weird, in a way. When people twenty years younger than I am are reaching retirement age – I realised something very obvious: that, although Hutchinson and Random House are my publishers, my real dealings of course have been with Tony Whittome, who's been wonderful, and he's now thinking: What will I do after I retire? So I said to him, – You should write a book called – More Time for Publishing! – Of course, he does want to retain the connection with me. But the financial situation in Hutchinson and in publishing is very tight. They can't have all those trips they had before. Emma Mitchell, whom I adore, doesn't get to many of the festivals.

When I talked to him about the new book, I thought: I'm a very privileged person. I've got a parliamentary pension, I can earn money, my children are all privileged, you know – they went to comprehensive schools, but they're privileged. So I wonder whether my book isn't going to be too soft, sort of a good, kind man doing good works and saying good things. Has it got the cutting edge that a socialist should have? So, I've got to think about that a bit.

Anyway, he gave some very good advice and went off on his bike.

Wednesday 15 April

I have this strong feeling that I'm coming to the end of my life. I'm not ill. I've got this operation in July – don't think there'll be anything in that. But gradually, inevitably, you become detached from day-to-day politics – Also, things get much more complicated now – simple things bother me. I can use the computer, but if I don't use it for a few days, I forget how it works. I had to fill in a form for the Labour Party Conference on the computer, and I filled it in several times and, each time, I lost it, and so I've got now to get somebody from the Party Headquarters to send me a form that I can post off. Everything just becomes more difficult. I'm not confused, I don't think, but young people take it all for granted, and I can't.

Thursday 16 April

At 10 o'clock Grahame Herbert came with his prototype seat-case and, I must say, it looked very good. So Ruth's taken on the job of starting the marketing process, possibly with an airline that might be interested. But it's fun working with Grahame – I like him very much.

The police have dropped charges against Damian Green, charges which must have been endorsed by Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary, who's in deep trouble.

Friday 17 April

I read a piece the other day in the paper saying that, in view of the alleged threat of Barack Obama, there were people in Texas saying Texas should be independent, and that gave me the thought that it's not impossible, looking ahead, that the United States could break up, and so could China. On the one hand, you've got the move towards greater units – e.g. Europe; on the other hand, there is the disintegrating tendency, and God knows what the world would be like if China broke up and India broke up and America broke up. Indeed, the United Kingdom might break up – you can't rule it out.

Anyway, these are random thoughts at the moment, and unless anything happens, I'm going to bed shortly.

Wednesday 22 April

Jack Jones died last night, ninety-six. I felt really, really bereaved. He was a lovely man, absolutely true, had an incredible life –

The *Today* programme rang me up and asked me for a comment on Jack, and of course all they did was say Jack Jones was – the most powerful man in Britain – he brought Thatcher to power. I said, – Mrs Thatcher destroyed trade unionism, and killed off local government, and privatised everything, and now we have the mess we're in. – They described him as a boss. Now, bosses are not elected. In the old days, they used to talk about trade union – barons. Well, they're not elected, either. And so I think I turned the argument, and at the same time said how much I loved Jack.

Rodney Bickerstaffe rang to say that he was actually with Jack when he died yesterday.

Later, I phoned Mick Jones, his son.

Ruth arrived, and at nine o'clock Grahame Herbert turned up, with his prototype seat-case, and we went off, taking photographs: started in Notting Hill Gate, in front of a luggage shop, so it looked as if I'd just bought it there; outside a bus-stop; we got a taxi to Paddington and he photographed me next to Isambard Kingdom Brunel; on the Heathrow Express, at Terminal 5. It was just great fun.

Alistair Darling carried the Budget off very well. He also announced that there would be a change in the procedure for paying MPs, so second-home allowances would be replaced by a daily attendance allowance, which is ridiculous. I don't know whether the Budget will work, or whether this will work.

Thursday 23 April

Up early, and went to collect a package from the local post office: and it was ten cartridges for my computer, each of which lasts about two weeks, and the total cost was £279. Boy, that is a racket!

Friday 24 April

I caught the bus to the House of Commons, to meet Saffron, and getting on the bus was an elderly lady with white hair and a stick and a bag, and it was Shirley Williams! She sat right in front of me, didn't see me, got out before me. When I think of the glamorous young Shirley that I spoke for when she was the candidate years and years ago, and then the Shirley with me in the Cabinet, the Shirley who joined the SDP, and the former Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords – it's strange, just strange!

Anyway, I got to the House of Commons; there was a huge crowd outside the public entrance, and it was the Gurkhas, and in the middle was Joanna Lumley addressing them – she espoused the cause of the Gurkhas – and lots of television cameras.

Saffron appeared – just the same. She's thirty-six, very tall, no make-up of any sort, her hair down her back, looking very relaxed, and we went through the new security entrance together. I'd never been through before – it's very efficient – then we went to the shop and I bought her various presents. We went on the Terrace: I just had a cup of tea and a banana, and then she got me a second cup of tea, and we talked from about 10.30 till about 12.30, a couple of hours. I asked about Hollywood, about her life, about her plans, about her writing. She's a nice girl – I like Saffron. She persuaded, or I persuaded, a policeman to take pictures of us. She put her head on my shoulder and it was all very sort of friendly and jolly. She is going to Venice tomorrow for a wedding.

I like her in a way, but there's something unreal about Saffron – I don't know how to describe it. Politically, she keeps up-to-date, very pro-Obama, is progressive in a generalised way, and it was nice to see her.

Once I was home, Gary from Midpoint Services just up the road turned up with three Freesat boxes, which he installed: one in the basement; one on the ground floor; and one in the bedroom. He freed my video machine in the bedroom, which had jammed, which was a great relief. He's going to bring me a DVD for the bedroom as well. Watching him, I just felt totally out of touch, as I do when Josh works on my computer. I suppose, if I sat down, worked hard, I could learn it all and understand it, but I don't particularly want to – too time-consuming. But I felt as my grandmother must have felt when she saw her first motor car: This is impossible, incredible, how can anyone drive it? Or how can anyone fly a plane? Well, I did fly a plane!

Saturday 25 April

I got up at six, got on the tube to King's Cross and walked to the Annual General Meeting of the Stop the War Coalition. Jeremy Corbyn was there, and he whispered to me, – I think it's possible that John McDonnell and I are going to be expelled from the Labour Party for voting against the Government so many times. He said, – Keep it to yourself – , which I will. But if that is true, it's a serious development. It reminds me of the 1930s, when Attlee was trying to build up a credible opposition, and they expelled Stafford Cripps from the Labour Party for working with the communists; and Michael Foot, Aneurin Bevan, and also Jim Mortimer, who later became General Secretary of the Labour Party, for working with Peace for China or something.

Monday 27 April

This flu from Mexico, this bird flu, which has already killed sixty people, might be a global pandemic. It is terrifying to think about – nothing you can do, but it may wipe us out.

At ten o'clock a man called Eric Brownsmith arrived. He sent me an email saying he'd read all my *Diaries* and wanted to have a talk about them, so I said yes. I didn't know what to expect. I thought he might be a student. He was a sixty-nine-year-old retired prison governor, and he arrived with a box containing the most beautiful scale model of a Spitfire, which he presented to me. We had a talk for about an hour and a half, about the *Diaries* and about politics. He couldn't have been nicer really. He's a Scot. I said, – Why did you come to London? – – Mainly to see you. –

Thursday 30 April

At eleven o'clock Professor Matthew Jones, from Nottingham University, came on behalf of the Cabinet Office to do an interview with me about the history of the Chevaline project – that was the Polaris upgraded to Trident. I gave him some uncut diary extracts, and he left a list of other things he'd like. I was a bit suspicious of him before he arrived – I thought he must be an intelligence man – but actually he's a clever academic who's concentrated on American and Canadian studies and written a lot about nuclear weapons, so they asked him to undertake this job.

Then the man with the aerial arrived. This is part of the new equipment – he extended the aerial up a few feet, because I am getting a poor signal, and reconnected the new recording device. To be candid, I can't make it work. I wanted to watch a DVD, but I couldn't make it work, and so Josh will have a look at it on Sunday, bless his old heart.

This evening, I've got the job of preparing for Jack Jones's funeral, and also my speech for May Day. When I'm at full bat I'm happier than when I'm gazing at a huge pile of unanswered letters and dozing off because I'm so tired.

Friday 1 May
May Day.

I got a cab to the Honor Oak Crematorium in South London for Jack Jones's funeral. It was a beautiful, beautiful day. Neil Kinnock and John Prescott were there.

Harriet Harman came up to me and said, "I just want to let you know that I'm trying to model myself on you." I said, "That's a bit of a mistake, because I was a great failure." But anyway she was trying to be friendly, and obviously her Leadership campaign is well advanced.

Rodney Bickerstaffe presided over the whole thing. Derek Simpson was there; I remember he said to me at Durham, years ago, "I'm just a simple Sheffield communist." There's something funny about him.

We went into this chapel - small, but packed. Mick Jones, Jack's son, had got a lot of recordings organised and pressed buttons, and so on. Another son, Jack, looked just like his dad! It was quite extraordinary. To look at him, you wouldn't believe Jack was dead! Tony Woodley spoke; Geoffrey Goodman; Marlene Sidaway, Secretary of the International Brigade; Manus O'Riordan, from Ireland; and then I spoke.

I was very emotional. I began by saying, "I'm utterly bereaved" and I ended by sort of half-singing, "I dreamed I saw Jack Jones last night, alive as you or me, says I; but Jack, you're two weeks dead; I never died, said he." Anyway, there you are, that's what I did, and I was a bit tearful.

I got a lift back with Tony Woodley, and got a bus up to Trafalgar Square, sat on Nelson's plinth for the May Day rally. Jonathan has been offered a place at the London School of Economics to do an MA in the philosophy of science, if he gets a 2:1, which I'm sure he will.

Really sensational news: Phillip Trusty has been released on parole. I went and gave evidence for him a few weeks ago. He's written to me for fifteen years. I'm so thrilled. He is to be released to live with his sister.

Then Ruth and I went off to Marion Miliband's for dinner, and Ed Broadbent, the former leader of the New Democratic Party in Canada, was there, with his friend Ellen Wood, a writer. We had a lovely talk, including talking about the future of the Labour Party, and left about a quarter to eleven.

Sunday 3 May

Hazel Blears, in *The Observer*, said something about the Gurkha decision and the MPs' expenses, which was being interpreted as an attack on Brown.

We've had Charles Clarke saying that the expenses scandal had made him ashamed to be a member of the Labour Party; and David Blunkett, who also said something very critical.

So it looks to me as if there is a build-up to try and get rid of Brown. I don't think it can possibly succeed, because getting rid of Brown would be very messy and would damage everybody. Secondly, the leadership election would lead to bitterness and would damage everybody. Thirdly, whoever did win the leadership election would have to call an immediate general election, and that would be messy. So I think Brown will just stumble on till polling day. The Blairites - because Blears and Blunkett and Clarke are all Blairites - are trying to destroy Brown, and then, if Labour loses the election, they'll say, "We told you so" - only Blair could win an election, and the Blairites will try to resume control of the Party. That's the situation we're in at the moment.

I have come to the conclusion that the trade-union leadership in Britain is part of the Establishment, and they don't want strikes. Strikes are illegal, would get the leaders into trouble if they supported them. It embarrasses the trade-union leaders, just as when Keir Hardie proposed that there be a Labour Party he was described as "an irresponsible man, bringing division to our ranks". So, one mustn't think that Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson and all that are going to help the left, because they aren't. They don't even like John McDonnell and the Labour Representation Committee. I've got to put it in a delicate way, or it is going to get me into a lot of trouble.

But you see, Tony Woodley is absolutely locked in with Derek Simpson. Derek Simpson, this old Sheffield communist (as he always tells me), doesn't want to take any action. Unite, the union, has actually employed Charlie Whelan as their Chief Press Officer - Charlie Whelan, of all people, who worked with Gordon Brown!

So one has to see the trade-union leadership quite clearly in that light and try and explain that everything comes from underneath, not just politically, but also in the trade-union movement, and I hope that makes sense.

Monday 4 May

I think I'd better go to the dentist because my teeth are worrying me a bit, and I think I'd better have my ears dealt with because my deafness is getting worse - all the problems of old age!

I turned on the television and found on the *Parliament* programme that they were re-broadcasting, in full, the BBC coverage of the general election of 1979, when Jim Callaghan was defeated and Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister. It was absolutely riveting! First of all, seeing all sorts of faces: Robin Day, who's now dead; Bob McKenzie, who's now dead; David Butler, who now isn't used any more; a young and rather pompous David Dimbleby; John Sergeant as a young reporter, standing behind Mrs Thatcher on the day she was elected, just as he was there eleven years later, on the day that she was removed.

There's no doubt whatever that a contemporary programme shown again is so much more effective than these retrospectives. What you want to see is the raw material again.

It also reminded me that, thirty years ago this very day, my job as Secretary of State for Energy ended. I don't think I went back to my Department - I might have done. But that's my last glimpse of office, and Hilary is now near, possibly, the last year of his ministerial experience.

The other thing that I was impressed by - and it's so obvious it's hardly worth mentioning - is that the whole British Establishment is about public schoolboys and successful upper-middle-class people. And although Tom Jackson, the General Secretary of the Post Office Workers' Union, was shown talking to some industrialist, the working class, the trade-union movement, is hardly ever mentioned on the media. It's almost revolutionary or way-out even to suggest talking about it. Jackson, who was very right-wing, was sitting there, with his big moustache; the trade unions were discussed a bit more then, because they were seen to be powerful, but now you hardly ever hear them mentioned.

It made me wonder whether the whole democratic process isn't some sort of a fraudulent device for pretending to

people can change things, whereas, actually, all they can do is to replace one government with another government, with the same policy under another name, which gets there by abusing the previous government and attacking it for the very things they would have done if theyâ€™d been there at the time. These are very pessimistic conclusions, but Iâ€™m thinking about how you do change things, and thatâ€™s going to be my task over the next few years. I have just got to think it out afresh, and thatâ€™s one of the themes coming out of my book, *Letters to my Grandchildren*.

Tuesday 5 May

Political news â€¦ Lady Uddin has been accused of claiming that her home is a flat in Maidstone, which apparently she never visits. So thatâ€™s going to damage the Labour Party because sheâ€™s a Labour peer, but also the House of Lords. Corruption in the Commons is bad enough, but when itâ€™s in the Lords, and none of them have been elected and theyâ€™re getting tons of money â€¦ I think this is going to lead to some sort of constitutional change.

Friday 8 May

The *Daily Telegraph* has bought, I presume quite illegally, a list of Cabinet Ministersâ€™ expenses, and it does look terribly bad â€“ people have claimed for all sorts of things. Hilary comes out absolutely bottom with a small claim for food. He phoned, and we talked a little bit about it. But the expenses affair has done deadly damage to Parliament and the reputation of Members of Parliament, just before the European elections, the local-government elections and, of course, the coming general election. Itâ€™s just possible that this is a major crisis for democracy.

Tuesday 12 May

Saffron arrived, and she drove me to the Cuban Ambassadorâ€™s residence, where I was presented with the Medal of Friendship, which had been signed by RaÃºl Castro. It was a great honour.

The left and trade-union movement were there in force including Benjamin Zephaniah, Helena Kennedy, Michael Mansfield, Ken Loach, Yvette Vanson. Saffron met a lot of old friends, and of course she speaks Spanish.

The Ambassador made a very elaborate speech, a wonderful sort of obituary.

I was picked up by *Newsnight* later to do an interview on MPsâ€™ expenses. Cameron has said to Tories, â€“If you donâ€™t repay your expenses, youâ€™ll be sacked.â€” Brown has said people should repay their expenses.

Hazel Blears, who did not pay capital gains tax on the sale of a home, produced, on television, a large mock up of a cheque which she said sheâ€™d sent to Inland Revenue.

I made a few points, and I did say to Paxman, at one stage, casually, â€“Well, youâ€™re a public servant too â€“ I donâ€™t know what you earn, but youâ€™re paid for by the licence-payer, just as I have been by the taxpayer.â€” He looked very uncomfortable. I said, â€“You should simply publish your income-tax returns, and your pay and allowances should be settled independently and all expenses claims should be published, so everybody knows what they are.â€”

Thursday 14 May

Ruth is working on the new book, *Letters to my Grandchildren*. Tony Whittome had made a few suggestions, and she checked one or two of them with me, but I was so tired! I donâ€™t think Iâ€™ve ever felt so tired before.

Elliot Morley has been suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party. Andrew MacKay, who was Cameronâ€™s close friend and his adviser, has resigned because he was caught doing something or another.

I feel utterly dejected and disgusted by it. I canâ€™t tell you! And the fact that I was an MP is now a source of embarrassment really!

Hilary is absolutely in the clear, as youâ€™d expect. I am arguing that all expenses claims should be published as soon as they are made, and then they can be scrutinised, and the Register of Membersâ€™ Interests should become a Register of Candidatesâ€™ Interests, so you know all about your parliamentary candidates before you vote for them. And that democracy is the transfer of the peopleâ€™s power, on trust, to an MP for five years, for a parliament, and when that MP is elected, he owes an obligation to his constituents, to his colleagues in the Party and to his conscience, and those three loyalties have to be made clear and public.

Itâ€™s no good paying back the money youâ€™ve improperly taken. I mean, itâ€™s like robbing a bank and then, when youâ€™re charged by the police, you give them a cheque for the money you stole and hope itâ€™s all over! I donâ€™t want to sound censorious, I donâ€™t want to get into muck-raking and I donâ€™t want to discuss individuals, but I think certain principles can be established.

Saturday 16 May

The MPsâ€™ expenses story goes on and on. Gerald Kaufman asked for Â£8,000 for a TV.

Sunday 17 May

John Grice picked me up at 11.30, got me to the Warwick Arts Theatre at the university campus in Warwick at about quarter past one, and I did the sound-check and the lights and all that. Then I went and sat in the open and smoked my pipe and met people as they came in. Itâ€™s a lovely way of doing it! A guy called Steve, whoâ€™s an Associate Professor of Politics at Warwick, sat on stage and repeated the questions to me. I began with my opinion of the expensesâ€™ crisis â€“ I feel so angry and disgusted and disappointed, and also I see this now is being developed into a major attack on democracy â€“ oh, everyoneâ€™s corrupt and all that. I rang Ruth when I got back because, when I was there, one of the people who asked me to sign their book was the actress (Patricia Gallimore) who plays the part of Pat in *The Archers*, so I thought Ruth would be pleased about that, which she was, being an *Archers* addict.

I began reading the proofs of the new book and, I must say, itâ€™s not bad â€¦ it isnâ€™t bad â€¦ I think itâ€™s going to be all right.

Monday 18 May

The car was returned after its MOT: Â£701! I think this is my last year of the car, because Iâ€™ve had a lot of taxis, and I still have to pay the tax, the insurance, the parking permit, the petrol.

I had lunch, and was so tired after lunch I had a bit of a snooze.

The Speaker was confronted today. He made a statement and was confronted with eighteen Members of Parliament who've put down a Motion calling for him to resign. He said as it was an Early Day Motion there is no requirement to debate it. Well, my understanding was: if you put down a Motion of censure on the Speaker or the Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, it automatically is debated. So I think he's been advised wrongly about that. But the question is: what will the political parties do? If Gordon Brown threw his weight behind it, the Speaker would have to go, but I think a lot of people may feel, as I do, that he's being made the scapegoat to take attention off MPs and their fiddles. Anyway, we shall see.

The NEC is meeting in the morning to discuss reselecting candidates. The Party is thinking of expelling candidates, and that's right. We're in a state of complete confusion, and it's frightening. It's a turning point in British parliamentary history of that I have absolutely no doubt.

I heard today that Esther Rantzen might be standing against Margaret Moran, and if that sort of thing were to happen if the end product is that serious political parties are replaced by stars and entertainers, like Arnold Schwarzenegger in California then it would be the end of the whole democratic system as we know it. I think the whole parliamentary structure is now simply collapsing.

Tuesday 19 May

At 2.30 the Speaker announced his resignation. It was a brutal treatment of him by the House of Commons, but he hasn't been handling the difficulties as well as he might. But it's partly class prejudice and partly that they've got to find a scapegoat.

We've entered a new era. Politics are never going to go back to where they are now. What the outcome will be, I don't know, but the total discrediting of Parliament is a major feature of it all. I'm going to try and come out with positive ideas, and go further and say get rid of the Lords and have an English Parliament and a Federal Senate.

Monday 25 May

Well, it's about quarter past ten, and I'm just going to post my letters, and I hope to get to bed by 10.30 or 11.00, but if I get time I might read a bit more of Chris Mullin's *Diaries*, which are a perfectly amusing account really of the corruption of a New Labour Government. But he writes very well and, to do him credit, his expenses were absolutely zero.

At 6.55, on Channel 5, I watched the "No 2 EU" broadcast by Bob Crow's group, who are putting up candidates in the European elections. They had a lot of comments from a lot of people against the EU, including mine.

Alan Johnson, in what is widely interpreted by the press as a leadership bid, called for proportional representation in elections the list system. Ed Miliband has been joining in discussions with Helena Kennedy. It takes people's minds off the economic crisis a bit, but of course the hatred of MPs that is being stimulated is really quite frightening, and in a way it's a hatred of the democratic process, which the powerful have always hated because it challenges their power. So we'll have to watch this one very, very carefully.

Thursday 28 May

I haven't been reporting the Expenses scandal news but, today, Julie Kirkbride, Andrew MacKay's wife, decided not to stand again. Margaret Moran also decided not to stand again she was a former Whip. It's simply ghastly! But I don't think anything very serious, by way of reform, is being contemplated by the people at the top.

Friday 29 May

The Guardian this morning reports that fifty-two Labour MPs have asked for peerages. These are the ones who think they'll be defeated. I don't know whether or not any of them are involved in the scandals about expenses, but fifty-two Labour MPs! They just regard a peerage as something they're entitled to, and it's all part of the whole racket. I don't think Brown could do it. I suppose the Speaker will be made a peer, because that's part of the tradition, but I think all that will end, which means there'll be a lot of bitterness among Labour MPs who thought they were entitled to peerages.

Sunday 31 May

Well, it was another perfect summer day, absolutely beautiful! It was yesterday, and is forecast for tomorrow.

If Brown goes, I think Alan Johnson would succeed, with Ed Miliband as Number 2. Things might improve, but I doubt it.

Tony Byrne turned up this morning, bless his heart, and he put up a rail along the path so that I won't slip on the ice and break my hip.

Monday 1 June

The first day of summer today. I set the alarm for four, woke up at three and had breakfast and a bath and shaved and slowly dressed, and came downstairs and packed for Hull and Middlesbrough. It's now half-past seven in the morning.

John Grice picked me up at eight and took me to the Ramada Jarvis hotel to address the Humberside Institute of Directors there must have been 300 there, sitting around tables. I spoke. I was a bit nervous, made a few jokes it went down very well. There was a very nice guy called Philip who looked after me.

Then John drove me up to Middlesbrough, to the Crypt of the Town Hall about the same number of people. It looked rather like a miners' welfare, with people sitting around tables. I spoke there, and that went well.

We got home in four hours, so that was a 23.5-hour day, and I was absolutely exhausted!

Tuesday 2 June

Stephen told me that David Miliband has refused to move from the Foreign Office to make room for Peter Mandelson, and if that's true, it's another example of the failure of Gordon Brown. I think it must be quite likely now that Brown will have to introduce his reshuffle just after the European and local-election results are announced, and if he can't force it through because people won't go, then I think he's going to go, and then we're going to have Alan Johnson and a September election. So I think that's the way that New Labour will finally die.

Alan Simpson rang. He was so infuriated by the way that Ian Gibson had been treated! Ian was called to a "Star Chamber" of three members of the Executive and two officials, told he couldn't bring anyone with him except a silent

witness, so I brought the chairman of his local party; and the witness wasn't allowed to say anything. Ian said that what he'd done had been specifically and explicitly approved by the Fees Office; but the "tribunal" ruled that he couldn't stand again as a Labour candidate. Alan was absolutely incensed by this, and said that he felt inclined to support Ian, if he forces a by-election and fights the seat as an independent, which he might just do.

Wednesday 3 June

Hazel Blears has resigned from her Cabinet post. I must say, I personally was very delighted because I greatly dislike her, but of course it has started a new explosion of rumour and gossip and stories in the media on eve-of-poll for local elections and Europe.

I was picked up about ten o'clock and taken to the Skinners' Hall by a cab driver. The Worshipful Company of Skinners in medieval times used to trade in fur – only the aristocracy could trade in fur, common people traded in rabbit or wool. Of course that all disappeared, but they're very, very wealthy, and I was told when I was there they are actually funding two academies: so medieval money is still distorting the cause of democracy – so interesting.

Anyway, it was a beautiful place, like a palace! Glorious, and apparently it's used now for events. I was there to be filmed by RTE, about the Irish crisis in '69. I did about a half-hour interview with them. What was interesting, and I never knew it before: documents have come to light that Jack Lynch, the Taoiseach, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, had said that he might possibly intervene militarily in Northern Ireland. I didn't think for a moment that the British would have wanted to go to war; the Americans would have intervened, and so on. I gave the best answers I could.

To College Green opposite the Commons, where I found Jack Straw and Michael Heseltine giving interviews. I developed the argument that I thought the power of anger to get rid of MPs was a very positive thing. People were angry, not just about this, but about the Lisbon Treaty, about the war, about bailing out the bankers and not helping industry.

I said I didn't think Gordon Brown would go (I've changed my mind since yesterday!), because the Tory Party give all their Leaders a ten-minute standing ovation and then put a knife in the back when they fail, but in the Labour Party we elect Leaders, argue with them till the day they go, and they go the day they want to go.

At the end of it Jon Snow said to me, "I agree with every word you said."

Oh, I had an email from Gordon Brown – just a standard email, sent to everybody. It said "Dear Tony", and how all the money I'd given to Party funds had humbled him and so on.

Tomorrow is polling day and, at the moment, I think I'm going to vote for Bob Crow's "No 2 EU, Yes to Democracy" candidate. I think this really is a vote I should have been allowed to give in the Lisbon referendum, which they wouldn't allow me to do. So, I put it in my diary, honestly and truthfully. I feel guilty about doing it because I'm a Labour man through and through, but that betrayal on the Lisbon Treaty is an outrage and I don't have any option.

Thursday 4 June

Today was the day of the European poll and some local elections, though not in London.

Walking in the bright sunshine to the polling station and back, my thoughts were on democracy and how important it is and how it's being eroded.

I had two letters today. One was a long manuscript letter from a woman who said that, in the Sixties, she worked for the Post Office as a telephonist, got married and then gave up the job. She was then divorced and applied for it again, and they said they couldn't give it to anyone who'd been employed before. So she raised it with Derek Page, her local MP, and he raised it with me, and apparently it was all sorted. She said she'd never written to thank me. It was a lovely letter!

The second letter was from a man somewhere in England, signed John Bull, bitterly attacking me and Parliament, and saying Enoch Powell was driven out, and ending up with "You are a traitor".

The BBC ignored the election almost completely. Tomorrow, when we know the results, the whole thing will be covered: another crushing blow for Brown. It is not a good public-service organisation.

Friday 5 June

The press are going berserk about Gordon Brown: could he survive, will he go, who'll take over.

The reshuffle is going on today, with more resignations – I forget who they all are. Caroline Flint has gone. Geoff Hoon has gone.

All the speculation today is: can Gordon survive? When I was asked, I simply said, "Well, if you've just lost your job, your home might be repossessed, you've got a son in Afghanistan – do you really worry who's in or out of the Cabinet? What's wrong is the policies are wrong. We don't want to change the leadership, but change the policies." Of course all the journalists knew it was true, but they didn't like my saying it.

Saturday 6 June

Up about six. Went to get myself breakfast and forgot to light the gas. It was quite funny.

I then got a cab to the Central Hall Westminster – I shouldn't have done, but I was so bloody tired – for the Liberty seventy-fifth anniversary (that's the old National Council for Civil Liberties). I was invited by Shami Chakrabarti, who is the Chief Executive, an old friend of mine.

Lord Bingham was there; he is a former Lord Chief Justice and a very strong supporter of Liberty. He made a very powerful speech in support of the Human Rights Act – pointed out how the police had treated the unemployed in the 1930s, and the miners and so on. I suppose he's a bit younger than me because, when I spoke to him afterwards, he said that, as a student, he'd come to hear me present my case on the House of Lords, in court in 1961. So he probably is seventy now, I should think, just retired.

In the order of speaking: Jack Straw; Dominic Grieve, who is the Tory Shadow; Ken Macdonald, QC, who is a former Director of Public Prosecutions; Kevin Maguire; and, finally, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown. Each spoke for only about five minutes. Jack Straw said to me, "You and Caroline founded New Labour", which I thought was a load of rubbish, but still!

Sunday 7 June

European election results are not in yet, but it's obvious that Labour is going to do badly – low turnout. It will give

another great surge to the anti-Brown campaign. And Monday, tomorrow, the Parliamentary Party is meeting, and there will be criticism. Brown is entirely dependent on Mandelson now. He brought Mandelson in to save him from Miliband. Heâ€™s now promoted Mandelson, as a compensation for not making him Foreign Secretary, which David Miliband would not agree to, so Mandelson is now Lord President of the Council, First Secretary of State, and heâ€™s taking over another department. If Mandelson, at this stage, were to say publicly that Brown should go, he would go. Brown has to do everything Mandelson wants, so the Post Office part-privatisation will go ahead, and Mandelson is on all the bulletins, looking very confident, whereas Brown looks worried. Some people booed him when he arrived in France for the D-Day celebrations.

The way I look at it is: the Tory press wants, obviously, to have a Tory Government following right-wing policies, and if they canâ€™t have that, and couldnâ€™t at the end of the Major Government, theyâ€™d rather have a Labour Government introducing Tory policies. But now, when the Labour Government is unpopular, they donâ€™t want to support that, so theyâ€™ll go back to the Tory Party and hope that, if Tories get there, theyâ€™ll get Tory policies again.

Iâ€™ll never see a Labour Government again in my lifetime, but itâ€™s an interesting period, and my *Diaries* will cover quite an interesting period: the beginning of Brown, after Blair goes in 2007, right up to the development of British politics after a couple of years of the Tory Government, and that will be a very interesting period to record.

Monday 8 June

There were programmes all night about the European elections. Labour was behind UKIP and the Tories, and, in the West Country, was virtually assassinated. Two BNP candidates were elected. We got 15 per cent of the vote cast, but only 35 per cent of the electorate voted, so the Labour vote, as compared to the whole voting population, was 5.3 per cent! Quite incredible!

I had a phone call, just after eight, from Jean Corston, saying that Peter Townsend, her husband, died at midnight, and she just wanted to let me know. She said, â€˜I canâ€™t speak now.â€™ But she married him in 1985 and â€˜he was a great and a most distinguished socialist, thinker and progressive â€˜ a remarkable man.

Then Ruth went off, and my grandson Jonathan came to lunch. Heâ€™ll know his final results on Monday.

At the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting tonight, where Brown was supposed to have been removed, only two people spoke against him: Charles Clarke and Fiona Mactaggart. He got thunderous applause from the PLP because they realise that, if they ditch him now, they are absolutely finished. So, undoubtedly, we will go on to an election next May, when I imagine we will be very severely defeated, and then thatâ€™s a whole new era in British politics.

Tuesday 9 June

I had a phone call that my car was impounded this morning. I had to go to the Chelsea Car Pound to collect it. It cost Â£260. The guy who took all the particulars was reading the Bible, so I commented upon that, and he was a Nigerian Pentecostal. He said the Bible is absolutely true, and gay activities are condemned in the Bible, and the Bible is the spirit. I said, â€˜Who created God?â€™ and he said God was a spirit that had always been there, and God didnâ€™t create the world in seven days, he created it in six days, and on the seventh day he rested. Quite an interesting theological discussion.

Then, a Ghanaian, who took me to my car; he was a Catholic and told me that, in Accra, there was an exhibition commemorating Kwame Nkrumah. So a little theology in the middle of a horrible experience of having your car impounded made it more tolerable.

Thursday 11 June

I rang Miriam Karlin, the actor, who had written to me. She was terribly low. She said she wanted to die. I think sheâ€™s had mouth cancer, and she broke her hip; a couple of days ago she said she had a duodenal ulcer that burst, and she was absolutely desperate to die. She said one of the doctors whose signature is required to go to Dignitas or whatever has refused to sign, so I cheered her up as best I could.

Friday 12 June

Tony Whittome arrived, just after 9.30, on his bike, on his way to work, and we gave him the typescript of *Letters to my Grandchildren*. I was so relieved! Ruth has done a phenomenal job. Itâ€™s not ghostwritten, because I threw the ideas at her, but sheâ€™s shaped them up in a fantastic way, and I said in the acknowledgements that Ruth is my very best friend, which is true.

The next â€˜possibly last â€˜ volume of *The Diaries* is going to be called â€˜The Dawn of a New Eraâ€™, a suggestion Ruth made! It was lovely, and we had lunch.

Then, in the afternoon, at two oâ€™clock, Grahame Herbert came to discuss the Benn safe-seat. Heâ€™s so charming and friendly, and we did agree, in effect, that the prototype he had made need not include a little pull-up handle because most modern suitcases have them, so it would then be a more simple attachment to a suitcase. I said we should have five prototypes made: one to attach to a very decorative suitcase; one for a backpack; and so on. It is a very slow business.

Then Hilary rang this morning on his way back from the Cabinet and said theyâ€™d had a good two hours.

Oh, wait a minute â€˜ one thing! Hazel Blears appeared on television tonight apologising for resigning just before the elections, which might have damaged the Party. She apologised for so many things, and I think the reason that sheâ€™s done so is that thereâ€™s a lot of criticism of her in her own constituency, among Party members, because they feel that she let the Party down, which of course she did. Although she may have some support among the officers locally, it could damage her in the next election if she stands, so I thought that was amusing. It confirmed what Iâ€™ve always thought about Hazel Blears, whoâ€™s a complete empty-head.

Saturday 13 June

Miliband gave an interview, in *The Guardian*, in which he said he very nearly left the Cabinet but decided to stay. Peter Mandelson, in the *Telegraph*, said there would be a new threat to Brown in the autumn. What Mandelson was really saying was, â€˜You still need me.â€™ And what Miliband is saying is, â€˜I really agreed with Purnell, but didnâ€™t leave the Cabinet.â€™ I think, probably, the Blairite plotters said to Miliband, â€˜Donâ€™t you resign â€˜ stay in the Government, because we will need you for our Leader later.â€™ I imagine thatâ€™s what itâ€™s really about.

Hazel Blears, meanwhile, is in terrible trouble because, as a result of resigning when she did, and wearing that brooch that

said â€œRocking the boatâ€™, sheâ€™s really annoyed her local party. Next week she faces a vote of no-confidence, so sheâ€™s now all over the media, regretting and apologising.

Anyway, I went and caught the 148 to the House of Commons, met Ruth, and Alison McPherson, whoâ€™s typed all my *Diaries*, joined us with her husband, Ross, and their ten-year-old daughter, Jade. We had arranged to take them round the House of Commons, but found it was shut and locked, so I had a word with the police and they said, â€œYouâ€™re always welcomeâ€™, so we got through! When we went through the security, there were about eight or ten plain-clothed men in a group and I asked, â€œWho are they?â€™ and they said, â€œTheyâ€™re armed policemen who are going to do service in the House and theyâ€™re being trained in security.â€™ It was rather weird. Anyway, we couldnâ€™t get into the Lordsâ€™ Chamber or the Commonsâ€™ Chamber, but we wandered round and saw quite a lot. Then we went and had lunch in a restaurant in Whitehall where, when I went to pay, they said, â€œWe donâ€™t take plasticâ€™, so, fortunately, I had enough cash. Caught a taxi and dropped them off at Regentâ€™s Park because they were going to a play, and came home and sat in the garden.

Sunday 14 June

I didnâ€™t come down till nearly eleven this morning.

Read the papers. *The Observer* is rubbish! Itâ€™s just gossip, gossip, talk, talk â€œitâ€™s an awful paper! I think Iâ€™d rather have the *Sunday Telegraph*.

The Iranian elections got good coverage this morning, and of course all the media coverage was that the elections were fixed; people shouting in the streets of Tehran. If it had been people shouting at the G20 of course, in London, it would be â€œviolent behaviourâ€™. But I then watched Al Jazeera, which was much more balanced. It did say there were critics, there had been incidents, but it said that 24 per cent of the GDP (the Gross Domestic Product) in Iran goes to food subsidies for the poor, so I expect Ahmadinejad does have substantial support and the people you saw demonstrating are all middle-class people.

I rang Mrs Mac because sheâ€™s eighty-one today.

I watched *Notting Hill*, which Iâ€™ve watched a million times!

Monday 15 June

Ruth led a clean-up of the kitchen and the hallway. We went through it meticulously together and threw out tons of stuff, and it was really successful.

At 3.30 I heard the Prime Minister announce there would be an Iraq Inquiry, which is really a secret Iraq Inquiry, with four civil servants and academics; theyâ€™re going to deal with the whole history of our relations with Iraq, over about ten years. Itâ€™s just a commissioned official government history, and doesnâ€™t deal, critically, with why we went to war with Iraq. Itâ€™s in secret â€œa complete fraud.

I heard that Jonathan has won a first at Oxford Brookes â€œitâ€™s absolutely fabulous! I rang Hilary.

Tuesday 16 June

The Iranian crisis is developing in a very interesting way, because there now seems to be some indication of a recount in some areas, although nobody is disputing that Ahmadinejad has won. Well, people are disputing it, but, worldwide, itâ€™s accepted that he is the President. Iâ€™m â€œlooking at it quite independently, I think a lot of this may be a resistance of the people to the Islamic revolution, which leaves the clerics in charge of everything, although the elections allow presidents to emerge who have political power, but the overall control is in the hands of the clerics, and I think that may be being challenged. Itâ€™s very interesting.

Wednesday 17 June

Turned on the telly, and I saw Michael Martin making his farewell speech as Speaker, and presiding over Prime Ministerâ€™s Questions, the last for him. He paid tribute to all the people whoâ€™d helped him in his office, and so on â€œheâ€™s like a shop steward â€œ and then he did make one or two critical comments of the way the House had handled the expenses business. Later in the day, I rang to see if I could pop in and see him, but heâ€™d already gone home to Glasgow.

I was collected by car and taken to the Islam Channel to have a discussion on the Iraq Inquiry, announced by the Government. Anas Altikriti, a Muslim whom I know very well, was in the chair. Jonathan Freedland from the *Guardian* was in the studio with me, and Frank Judd was at a remote interview, and somebody called Professor Miller, whoâ€™d written a book about distortion by the media â€œ a very interesting discussion, and we reached complete agreement.

Taken to the Commons. Went to Portcullis House and had tea with Ruth and Paul Flynn and his assistant, Jayne. We were sitting right next to my portrait, which has been put in the atrium of Portcullis House.

Thursday 18 June

I wrote a letter to the Speaker, Michael Martin, and thanked him very much for his friendship.

I also did a draft letter to the Iraq Inquiry, offering to give evidence, which Iâ€™ve got to think about.

Wrote a letter to *The Times* supporting John Bercow as Speaker. He rang me about it and I thought about it, checked it with him and sent it to them, telling them it was exclusive. Itâ€™ll go in on Saturday.

I did a letter in support of Chris Knight, whoâ€™s been sacked by the University of East London for his activities during the Alternative Summit.

I got a Tube to Tottenham Court Road and walked to the Groucho Club, to a dinner for the award of the Martha Gelhorn Prize to the Best Journalist of the Year. John Pilger had asked me, and I was sitting next to him, between him and Christine Lamb, who is a correspondent whoâ€™s reported from Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. Alan Rusbridger, the Editor of the *Guardian*, was there; Don Macintyre, now from the *Independent*; and a lot of other people â€œ Sandy Matthews and his wife, who said weâ€™d met over the years in the peace group down in Devon, where they live.

At one stage Don Macintyre from the *Independent* said to me, â€œIf you were Speaker, what would you do?â€™ So I made the point about strengthening the Legislature against the Executive; and simple points, that I was supporting Bercow, and Rusbridger picked that up.

Came home, coughed a lot.