

# Tony Blair 1997-2007 Labour



**Born:** 6 May 1953 in Edinburgh, Scotland

**First entered Parliament:** 9 June 1983

**Age he became PM:** 43 years, 361 days

**Maiden Speech:** 6 July 1983, when he spoke about the unemployment problems in his Sedgefield constituency.

**Total time as PM:** 10 years, 56 days

## Facts and figures

**Education:** Fettes College, Edinburgh and St John's College, Oxford University

**Family:** Tony Blair is the second of three children. He married Cherie Booth QC, a barrister, in 1980. They have three sons and one daughter.

**Interests:** Spending time with his children, reading (mainly literary classics and biographies), watching thrillers, swimming, playing tennis and playing guitar.

## Biography

### Pre-1997

Tony Blair was born in Edinburgh, but spent most of his childhood in Durham. At the age of 14 he returned to Edinburgh to finish his education at Fettes College. He studied law at Oxford, before going on to become a barrister.

After standing unsuccessfully for the Labour Party in a by-election in Beaconsfield in 1982, Mr Blair went on to win the seat of Sedgefield in the General Election the following year, aged 30.

Tony Blair made a speedy rise through the ranks until the Labour leader, John Smith, promoted him to Shadow Home Secretary following the 1992 election.

John Smith died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1994 and, in the subsequent leadership contest, Tony Blair won a large majority of his party's support.

He immediately launched his campaign to modernise the Labour Party and re-claim the political centre, which he saw as essential for victory. Party members showed their support for his project when they voted to remove Labour's historic commitment to public ownership, helping Mr Blair to create what he coined "New Labour."

## **1997-2001**

The Labour Party won the 1997 General Election by a landslide, after 18 years in Opposition. At the age of 43, Tony Blair became the youngest Prime Minister since **Lord Liverpool** in 1812 and moved into Number 10 with his family.

The new government immediately began a far-reaching programme of constitutional change. Following referendums in both Scotland and Wales, a range of powers was devolved to the new Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales.

An elected post of Mayor of London was established at the head of a new capital-wide authority, and all but 92 hereditary peers were removed from the House of Lords in the first stage of its reform.

Big investment in health and education was promised following Tony Blair's election and, in 2000, major plans were announced to overhaul the NHS, including extra beds, new building schemes and more staff.

New literacy and numeracy strategies were introduced from 1998 and as part of plans to transform secondary education, particularly in troubled cities, the first academy projects were announced in September 2000.

One of Mr Blair's most radical reforms came in when, in 1998, following means testing, many university students in England paid tuition fees for the first time.

On 10 April 1998, Tony Blair led the UK government's team that negotiated the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. It set out plans for devolved, inclusive government, the early release of terrorist prisoners, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and the reform of the criminal justice system.

In 1999, Mr Blair played a large part in resolving the Kosovo crisis, persuading NATO to take a strong stance against Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milošević.

The following year, Mr Blair sent troops to Sierra Leone to make a vital contribution to restoring order and disarming rebel forces during the country's civil war. In May 2000, British armed forces stopped rebels taking the capital and saved the elected government from near collapse.

## **2001-2005**

Tony Blair was re-elected with another landslide majority in the 2001 General Election. By 1 August 2003, he had become the longest continuously serving Labour Prime Minister, after surpassing Harold Wilson's 1964-1970 term.

The attacks in New York and Washington of 11 September 2001 meant that much of his second term focused on foreign policy issues - notably the 'war on terror', which began in Afghanistan following the attacks, and the war in Iraq.

Africa was an increasing priority for Mr Blair during his second term. In February 2004, he helped to launch an international commission to examine the situation in Africa and policies towards the continent. The following year it recommended that wealthy nations double their aid to the continent. Also in 2005, the UK pledged to pay 10% of developing countries' foreign debts, beginning with Tanzania's, to try to combat poverty.

The issue of climate change also became increasingly important. Having previously pledged the UK's support for the Kyoto Protocol, Mr Blair made a speech in September 2004, where he warned that action was essential to avoid "catastrophic consequences".

Mr Blair's government pushed through a series of major domestic reforms during this period too, including increased investment in public services, especially health, education and transport.

The reform of the NHS continued with the launch of the first NHS foundation trusts - NHS hospitals with increased financial and managerial independence - in 2004.

In 2004, the Higher Education Bill was narrowly passed in Parliament, meaning that instead of a flat rate, universities would be able to charge up to £3,000 per year from 2006. To support poorer students, the reintroduction of means-tested maintenance grants and loans to cover fees were also planned.

## **2005-2007**

The Labour Party went on to win a third term for Mr Blair in May 2005, albeit with a reduced majority.

In July 2005, Tony Blair chaired the G8 summit at Gleneagles. The two biggest issues discussed were climate change and Africa. G8 nations agreed to cancel the debts of 18 countries and to a \$50 billion (£28.8 billion) boost to aid.

On 6 July 2005, Mr Blair was pleased when London won the opportunity to host the 2012 Olympics. However, the next day, the nation's mood went from joy to sorrow, as a series of bomb attacks on London's transport network killed 52 people and injured 700. Mr Blair returned to London from the G8 summit to condemn the terrorists and pay tribute to the people of London.

Later that year, the UK held the EU presidency, where a new EU Budget deal was made.

At home, Mr Blair's government made further proposals to reform the NHS, including placing a greater emphasis on community services. Further reforms to education were also promised when Mr Blair's controversial education bill, which aimed to increase parental choice and allow maintained schools in England to link with independent trusts, was supported in Parliament.

New proposals were made on the reform of pensions too. These included encouraging personal savings, linking basic state pensions to earnings, widening eligibility and increasing the pensionable age.

And, in May 2007, Mr Blair announced that the UK would have to increase its use of nuclear energy if it was to reduce carbon emissions and meet the need for renewable energy.

In 2006, Mr Blair declared that the "IRA's campaign is over" after the publication of a report by the Independent Monitoring Commission. In May 2007, a new executive in took power in Northern Ireland, almost five years after the previous institutions were suspended.

Tony Blair announced his resignation on 10 May 2007 and left office on 27 June 2007, to be succeeded by **Gordon Brown**. He continues to be interested in inter-faith issues and the promotion of inter-faith understanding.