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Edited by Anthony Seldon and Dennis Kavanagh
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THE BLAIR EFFECT 2001–5

Tony Blair's strong start to his third term, with his pivotal role in capturing the 2012 Olympic Games for Britain, his statesmanlike handling of the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on London, his promise of a fresh start to the European Union and his leadership of the G-8 summit at Gleneagles, has brought his relatively lacklustre second term into sharp relief. The foundations of his premiership having been laid in the first term, the second should have been the time when New Labour fulfilled its manifesto promises. The government enjoyed the tremendous benefits of a strong economy, a rock-solid majority in the Commons and a quiescent labour movement. So what changed between 2001 and 2005 and what was achieved? How far was Blair himself responsible, and what was Gordon Brown's influence? Were the benefits enjoyed in any way wasted? What was the impact of the Iraq war? And what of Blair's policy towards Europe? In their fourth book on the political impact of British prime ministers, the editors have gathered together leading academics and journalists to provide an authoritative assessment of Blair's second term, including a review of the 'Blair effect' from the first New Labour term in 1997 to the present.

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Anthony Seldon is the co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary British History, and is the author or editor of over twenty-five books of contemporary history.

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PREFACE

This is the fourth volume in the series which analyses the impact of contemporary government. The earlier volumes, *The Thatcher Effect*, *The Major Effect* and *The Blair Effect 1997–2001*, were published in 1989, 1994 and 2001 respectively.

The approach has been the same as in the earlier three volumes. Leading authorities from academe and the media address common themes in their specialist area:

- What was the state of the area at the June 2001 general election?
- What was the state of that area at the May 2005 general election?
- What had changed and why?
- How successful or effective have any changes been?
- To what extent was change driven by the Prime Minister himself, or from Number 10 in general, by ministers, departments, think tanks or any other factors?
- What was the net ‘Blair effect’ in that area between 1997 and 2005?

Within this framework, authors were encouraged to develop their own particular approaches. Inevitably some stuck closely to the guidelines, others were freer in their interpretation of their brief. The aim has been to cover only the areas where the second Blair government made a significant fresh impact. Some chapter areas were dropped from the volume on the first Blair government, such as on the civil service, the constitution, defence and Northern Ireland, because little fresh happened to merit writing a separate chapter. The aim in this volume also was to write a shorter, more targeted book than *The Blair Effect 1997–2001*, which was over 650 pages. In the concluding chapter I examine which areas saw the most significant changes and assess how effective the changes have been. I also examine Tony Blair’s personal impact, and look at why more was not achieved, and examine whether opportunities were indeed wasted during these four years. Blair’s spectacular start to the third term – with his pivotal role in winning the 2012 Olympic Games for Britain, his masterly

handling of the national mood after the 7/7 bombings in London, and his promise of fresh hope for Africa and over global warming and a ‘new’ European Union – highlight the pace of progress in 2001–5.

The series overall seeks to be studiously non-party political. Where an individual author has a particular viewpoint, the aim is to balance this with a contribution from an author of the opposite persuasion.

Because this book was completed after the election, it forms a comprehensive view of what happened and was achieved between the two general elections. The hope is that the book will still have value in 2025, and even 2055. By those dates, all the main evidence will be available and the full consequences of the decisions taken in those years will have been played out. But my guess is that many of the conclusions in this book will still stand, and, even where they do not, it will still be interesting to know what an eclectic group of commentators thought on the cusp of the events being described.

I am delighted to have Dennis Kavanagh back on board as co-editor for this volume. It was his proposal to produce a shorter volume and his ideas and scholarship have been, as ever, *sans pareil*.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues at Brighton College yet again for their support for my work, including Lord Skidelsky, my chairman, Simon Smith and Louise Kenway, the deputies, Debra Lewis and also Dorcas Sherwood, my personal assistants, Julia Harris for all her work on typing, Elizabeth Jones for support in the early stages and David Farley for help with research. Cambridge University Press has proved to be an outstanding publisher, calm, decisive and genuinely interested in the book for its own sake. All these qualities are comparative rarities in modern British publishing.

ANTHONY SELDON