



Tony Blair: Prime Minister

By John Rentoul

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John Rentoul's first biography of Tony Blair appeared in 1995, not long after the politician's election as leader of the Labour Party. Two years later Blair presided over the party's landslide election victory—a tremendous affirmation of his popularity and a great vindication for the modernizers he led. But as New Labour settles into its historic second term, is that popularity still there? Has Blair and the party he helped reinvent delivered on their promises? What sort of government does he lead, and is Britain anything like the country he claimed he could create? These are the questions at the heart of John Rentoul's searching new biography. Not just an updated version of the earlier work, but an entirely fresh approach to his subject, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* includes a wealth of new material and represents the definitive account of a man whose potential has now been put to the biggest test of all—power.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this splendid biography, Rentoul begins his tale with Blair's father, a socialist who later became a Conservative. His son would prove every bit as difficult to pin down ideologically. Young Blair, Rentoul says, was a public school rebel "of a strongly anti-Establishment cast of mind." Before attending Oxford, Blair spent a year in London promoting rock 'n' roll acts; while at Oxford, he became the lead singer of the band Ugly Rumours. He was profoundly influenced by the Christian socialism of an Anglican priest named Peter Thomson. After graduation, Blair became a barrister and joined the Labour Party. He won a seat in Parliament in 1983 and spent the next 14 years, a time when Margaret Thatcher dominated British politics, in opposition. As a "soft left" member of Parliament, Blair met the two most important acquaintances of his political career: fellow MP Gordon Brown and media "spin master" Peter Mandelson. With Labour losing election after election, Blair became a leading proponent of party reform, advocating a move away from social permissiveness and toward moral responsibility; he also lessened the influence of trade unions within the party. From Bill Clinton, he learned the importance of seizing the political center. In 1994, Blair became the leader of the Labour Party, and in 1997, he defeated John Major to become prime minister. His first term was marked by historic progress toward peace in Northern Ireland, by fiscal conservatism, an emphasis on education, and skillful media spin control. Rentoul has written the definitive biography of Blair for the present, one that should be read by anyone with an interest in contemporary British politics. *Illus.* (Jan. 15) **Forecast:** Thanks to Blair's unflinching support of the war against terror, he may have a newfound popularity here that could result in increased sales.

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From [Booklist](#)

Tony Blair's ascent up the "greasy pole," in Disraeli's memorable metaphor, was the most rapid of any British prime minister in the twentieth century. That fact, combined with the way Blair's UK is currently lauded as America's most stalwart ally, may prompt readers to search for a biography of its leader. Hand them this one, whose thorough research and readability pierce the inherent blizzard of political detail. In the account of Blair's youth, Rentoul detects little calculating ambition, even though he grew up in a political house: his father was a Communist turned Conservative Party MP. A dedication to Christianity is what Blair's friends and mentors remember most, leavened by heavy-metal rock 'n' roll. After a footloose year as an impresario for local London bands, Blair became a barrister and married Claire Booth, and in the early 1980s, they each stood as Labour candidates, she less victoriously. Recounting Blair's subsequent rise and ending with his reelection in June 2001, Rentoul opportunely fulfills the informational demands of the moment. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"The book is readable journalism with a political point of view, which will interest students of British politics." -- *Choice*

Users Review

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