

'The best political diarist of our time'
MALCOLM RUTHERFORD, *FINANCIAL TIMES*

The Last Diaries

TONY BENN

A Blaze of Autumn
Sunshine

Edited by Ruth Winstone

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About the Book

In this, his final volume of diaries, Tony Benn reflects on the compensations and the disadvantages of old age.

With the support of a small circle of friends and his extended family, he continues his activities on behalf of social justice, peace and accountability in public life, against the background of political change and the international crisis of capitalism.

Following an illness in July 2009, the diaries, kept for over sixty years, cease. Published here alongside these final years of entries are Tony Benn's personal insights into the challenges of growing older, the loneliness of widowhood, the upheaval of moving from the family home of sixty years to a nearby flat, and the problems of failing health.

Finally, we share in Tony's hope for a better future based on his experience and optimism.

About the Author

Radical statesman and Member of Parliament for over fifty years Tony Benn is the pre-eminent diarist of his generation. His political activity has continued after 'retirement' through mass meetings, broadcasts and in more recent years through social media. A widower since 2000, Tony Benn lives and works in London and has four children and ten grandchildren.

Also by Tony Benn

The Regeneration of Britain
Speeches

Arguments for Socialism

Arguments for Democracy

Parliament, People and Power

The Sizewell Syndrome

Fighting Back: Speaking Out for Socialism in the Eighties

A Future for Socialism

Common Sense (*with Andrew Hood*)

Free Radical

Years of Hope: Diaries 1940-1962

Out of the Wilderness: Diaries 1963-1967

Office Without Power: Diaries 1968-1972

Against the Tide: Diaries 1973-1976

Conflicts of Interest: Diaries 1977-1980

The End of an Era: Diaries 1980-1990

The Benn Diaries: Single Volume Edition 1940-1990

Free at Last! Diaries 1991-2001

Dare to be a Daniel

Letters to my Grandchildren

TONY BENN

A Blaze of Autumn Sunshine

The Last Diaries

Selected and edited by Ruth Winstone



HUTCHINSON
LONDON

Editor's note

This, the last volume of Tony Benn's *Diaries*, opens in May 2007 with Kofi Annan inviting him to join Jimmy Carter, Richard Branson, Desmond Tutu, Peter Gabriel, Mary Robinson and other international 'Elders' at a gathering in South Africa. In July 2009 the dictated diary ceases, as Tony Benn having just had an operation muses on an uncertain future with the words 'That's all there is, for my diary, unless something sensational happens tonight.'

Because these years are so full of personal reflections by Tony in his eighties - on ageing, on failing health, on widowerhood - as well as a record of dramatic and unexpected political and social developments, I have kept the editing to a minimum, retaining, I hope, the personality of the diarist as he dictated, sometimes falteringly. I have also left uncut a greater proportion than usual of the original text, to give the reader a fuller picture of Tony Benn's life as he approaches the 'autumn sunshine'.

The latter part of the book is a reconstruction by him of the period July 2009 to the present, with his insights of a personal and political nature on these extraordinary times.

As ever the book could not have been completed without the work of Alison McPherson, who has transcribed millions of words with great empathy, the copy-editing of Mandy Greenfield on whom I relied so much this time, and the editorial advice of Emma Mitchell of Hutchinson. Georgina Manley stepped in to assist at the early stages of the editing during my mother's illness and death in 2012, and Lucy Quinn and Laura Rohde helped to research, correct and edit

the account of the latter years 2009–2013 which Tony Benn had to reconstruct from memory.

It has been a great privilege to be associated with the *Diaries* over the course of twenty-seven years, and to count myself one of Tony's closest friends.

Ruth Winstone
June 2013

Illustrations

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Who's who

Caroline Wedgwood Benn (Pixie) (wife of Tony Benn) d. 2000

Children

Stephen Benn (m. Nita Clarke)

Hilary Benn (m. Sally Clark)

Melissa Benn (Lissie) (m. Paul Gordon)

Joshua Benn (Josh)

Grandchildren

Michael (m. Penny Brough)

James (m. Dr Blake Pritchard)

William

Jonathan (m. Zohreh Khairoldin)

Caroline

Emily

Daniel

Hannah

Sarah

Other Family

BENN, David Brother, b. 1928

BENN, Piers Son of David and June Benn

NESTOR,
Frances Daughter of David and June Benn

NESTOR,
Michael Husband of Frances Nestor

NESTOR,
Michael (Little Michael) Son of Frances and Michael
Nestor

Friends and colleagues

BAILEY, Roy	Retired professor, folk singer
BICKERSTAFFE, Rodney	Former General Secretary of UNISON, President of War on Want
BRAGG, Billy	Musician and political activist
BURROWS, Saffron	Actress, political activist
BUTLER, David	Political historian
BYRNE, Tony	Builder
CAMPBELL, Barbara	Helped care for Caroline during her illness and continued to help TB
CARTER, Peter	Architect, close friend of Caroline and the family (known as PC)
CORSTON, Baroness	(Jean Corston) Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party; former MP for Bristol East
GABRIEL, Peter	Musician and activist
GERMAN, Lindsey	Leading campaigner of the Stop the War Movement and coalition of Resistance
GRICE, John	TB's driver
HERBERT, Grahame	Architect, designer of the 'Seat Case'
KAPLINSKY, Natasha	Television presenter
McDONNELL, John	Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington
MILIBAND, David	Labour Minister for Education and Skills; Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Affairs; Foreign Secretary
MILIBAND, Edward	Leader of the Labour Party
MILIBAND, Marion	Socialist writer, mother of David and Edward, widow of Ralph Miliband
MITCHELL,	Publicity director and associate editorial

Emma	director, Hutchinson, Random House
MULLIN, Chris	MP for Sunderland South 1987-2010; Minister in Departments of Environment, International Development and Foreign Office
REES, John	Leading campaigner of the Stop the War Movement and Coalition of Resistance
SHALLICE, Jane	Former deputy head, Holland Park School
SILVERTON, Kate	Journalist and presenter
SIMPSON, Alan	Labour MP for Nottingham South 1992-2010
WHITTOME, Tony	Editorial director, Hutchinson, Random House
WILLSMER, Basil	Long-time family friend; Essex builder. Died 2009
WINSTONE, Ruth	Editor of the Benn Diaries since 1985; senior clerk, House of Commons; close friend
<i>Political figures</i>	
ANNAN, Kofi	Secretary General of the UN
BLAIR, Tony	Prime Minister 1997-2007, Labour MP for Sedgefield
BROWN, Gordon	Prime Minister 2007-2010, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1997-2007
CAMERON, David	Conservative Prime Minister 2010-
CAMPBELL, Alastair	Prime Minister's Official Spokesman 1997- 2003
CLEGG, Nick	Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister, 2010 -
HAYES, Billy	General Secretary, Communication Workers' Union
MAJOR, John	Conservative Prime Minister 1990-1997

MANDELSON, Lord	(Peter Mandelson) Former Labour MP, Cabinet Minister and EU Commissioner
REID, John	Secretary of State for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Health, Defence, Home Secretary
SHORT, Clare	Secretary of State for International Development
STRAW, Jack	Home Secretary; Foreign Secretary; Leader of the House of Lords 1997-2007; Lord Chancellor
THATCHER, Baroness	Conservative Prime Minister 1979-1990
WOODLEY, Tony	General Secretary, TGWU (part of UNITE)

Abbreviations

AIPAC	American–Israeli Public Affairs Committee
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
BNP	British National Party
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CWU	Communication Workers’ Union
Defra	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DFID	Department for International Development
FBU	Fire Brigades’ Union
GMB	General Municipal and Boilermakers (Union)
LAP	Labour Action for Peace
LSE	London School of Economics
NEC	National Executive Committee
NFU	National Farmers’ Union
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
PCS	Public and Commercial Services Union
PKK	Kurdish Workers’ Party
SWP	Socialist Workers’ Party
TGWU	Transport and General Workers’ Union (now part of UNITE the Union)
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

UN United Nations

UNISON The public service union

UNRRA United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation
Administration

WBAI American listener-supported radio station based in
New York

Foreword

Concluding his penultimate diaries, Tony Benn wrote in July 2007:

When my dad was my age, in 1958, just before he died, I took my eldest two boys to parliament to be with their grandfather. In a broadcast describing his political and family life for the BBC, my dad ended with these words, 'So you will understand that I live in a blaze of autumn sunshine.' I too am enjoying that autumn sunshine now with my grandchildren, and although I may never publish another volume of diaries, if I ever did, I think the best possible title would be just that: *A Blaze of Autumn Sunshine*.

Tony has had the good fortune to see *A Blaze of Autumn Sunshine* in print, but it is a book of two halves which needs some explanation. From June 2007, when the previous volume ended as the premiership moved from Blair to Brown, until July 2009, Benn continued his life-long habit of recording events in his own life, in parliament, in Britain and on the international stage. These included his participation in the early formation of the 'Elders', his presidency of the Stop the War movement and his patronage of a number of campaigning groups at home. He also maintained a busy schedule of meetings and lectures. The two years were dominated by the banking collapses which precipitated a wider international debt crisis affecting the Western world.

In July 2009, Tony Benn suffered a health collapse and, at the age of eighty-four, after sixty-nine years of writing, typing or dictating almost every day, he stopped keeping his

diary altogether although, once recovered, he continued to maintain a formidable programme of public engagements. Further highly significant changes and dramatic events occurred both in Tony Benn's own life and in the world at large between July 2009 and the present year, 2013, and these are recalled in the latter part of the book.

Chapter One

May–October 2007: Brown’s honeymoon

Friday 11 May 2007

While I was snoozing, Kofi Annan rang. He said he very much hoped I would be able to come to Africa at the end of May. I had previously had a phone call from Richard Branson about a meeting of the ‘Elders’ in South Africa, but with no other details. Mandela’s going, Carter’s going, Mary Robinson’s going, and also somebody called Hernando de Soto Polar, a right-wing economist. Oh, Desmond Tutu is also going to be there, so it is very tempting.

To the Victoria and Albert Museum, where I gave lecture on slavery. Huge attendance! It’s a maze going round all the stuff that had been stolen from our colonies!

Three young women drove me home, in a tiny little French car.

So, there we are – that’s the first day of my new diary: *A Blaze of Autumn Sunshine*.

Monday 14 May

Up at six, after a good eight hours in bed.

Ruth Winstone suggested that Josh should come to South Africa with me.

I decided to write to Gordon Brown enclosing a draft legislation, which I introduced twenty years ago, that would transfer all the royal prerogatives to the House of Commons. Among the sponsors in 1987 was Dawn Primarolo, who is of course Brown’s Financial Secretary to the Treasury. I also sent a copy to Ed Miliband, and referred in my letter to

Gordon to the fact that Ed had worked in *my* office as a young student twenty years ago.

Josh is very happy to come to South Africa.

Tuesday 15 May

I did receive, in the course of the day, a formal invitation from Richard Branson and Peter Gabriel to go the founding meeting of the Elders' conference. I must say, it's a wonderful opportunity to meet Carter and Mandela, Tutu and Mary Robinson, and King Hussein of Jordan. I'm getting quite excited about it.

In the evening, I went by taxi to the Soho Hotel to see a film called *Taking Liberties*. Michael Mansfield and Shami Chakrabarti were there. It was a wonderful film, amusing in the way it was presented, but terrifying - it was the Blair legacy. It made my blood run cold watching how all our civil liberties have been eroded.

Wednesday 16 May

There was a rattle on the basement door, and I opened it up and there was Saffron Burrows! So I gave her a huge hug, and then another hug, and then a kiss and another hug, and she gave me a hug. She said she was going to the Cannes Film Festival and would be back next week, and hoped to see me before I went to South Africa, so I hope that will be done. She's so sweet, I must say!

Thursday 17 May

A mass of papers were emailed through about the Elders - I thought my printer was going to run out. This organisation has been planned for years, so the idea that I thought of it first is an illusion. I'm only an adviser, I'm not one of the Elders themselves, but I wouldn't be sorry if they let me in on the discussions.

Of course what I also realise is that it's a very high-level group and it has a top-down perspective on the world,

whereas my contribution – in so far as it's of any value – will be more historical, philosophical, religious and visionary, and I don't know how easily it's going to fit in. They've sent briefings on Darfur, on Zimbabwe and all sorts of other things.

In the evening, I finished picking twelve items for *With Great Pleasure*, which is going to be broadcast on 13 June on Radio 4.

My God, I have a heavy programme! Whoo! I just hope my health stands up. I've got to go and have my pacemaker checked next week, and if the hospital veto the trip, then it's off.

Saturday 19 May

Jimmy Carter, in a BBC broadcast today, described Blair as 'abominable'. Of course, yesterday or the day before Blair was in Washington, receiving a warm tribute from Bush – so humiliating for everybody! I think he's overdone it. I think he's turning people off, and now he has no patronage, no authority; I think it's the beginning of the end of Blairites – he won't find many of them soon.

Up at 5.45, was collected at 7.30 and taken to Burford. I arrived there early, talked to a few people, and then there was the interment of Alan Hicks's ashes in the churchyard. Alan Hicks was a factory worker, went into the army, was captured, was used as slave labour (working in Germany for IG Farben, who made the equipment used in the Holocaust), then came back, became active in the Workers' Educational Association. He is a keen member of CND; at the heart of the Levellers' movement when it started again in 1975; he ended up with a BA from Oxford Brookes. His wife, Hazel, was at the church. It was a lovely family event – I said a word or two.

I was freezing cold. There were rain showers in Burford and I hadn't taken a coat, or hat. I was also very hungry, so

when I got back I had a huge meal, turned on all the heaters and tried to have a bit of a sleep for half an hour.

Oh, Kofi Annan rang this afternoon and said, 'Is everything all right for Africa?' so I had a lovely talk to him.

Sunday 20 May

Not a word in *The Sunday Times* about the fact that Jimmy Carter said yesterday that Blair's support for Bush was abominable.

Monday 21 May

Bad, troubled night.

It's a nightmarish time for the next few days: hospital, a lecture, then a broadcast tomorrow; on Wednesday up to Southport to speak to the prison officers, plus a lecture (on 'Living after seventy' - I want to make it thoughtful, but I haven't had time to think about it yet). On Friday I'm off to South Africa ...

Josh and I are planning the trip. He rang round a number of insurance companies to see if he could get me insurance, but when he told them I had chronic leukaemia and that I had a pacemaker, they said 'uninsurable'. Age Concern wouldn't insure me! In the end he found an insurance company that would give me year-long insurance for £1,800 or something, but wouldn't cover me if I had a heart attack or died of cancer. So I am now uninsurable! It was what you might call a reminder, by means of market forces, that I am legally almost dead.

Tuesday 22 May

Took a 148 bus to the House of Commons and was so early that I had time to have a cup of tea on the Terrace, before going over to St Thomas's for my pacemaker check. They adjusted it a little bit. The registrar said there was a bit of a risk, with high blood pressure and high cholesterol, of a

stroke. We discussed medicines like warfarin, but they didn't want to give it to me before I went to Africa.

Friday 25 May, visit to the 'Elders', South Africa

We were greeted at Heathrow airport by a young Virgin official called Nyree, who took Josh and me to the Clubhouse in Terminal 3. The cabin was called Upper Class: it had beds, and Josh and I were next to each other. He was immensely helpful, sorting me out, and then the air hostesses starting coming round with everything you could want. One young woman, absolutely immaculate, said, 'I'm your therapist', so I said, 'Thank you very much, but I'm fine.' By eleven o'clock I was sound asleep. The fact that I had a proper bed meant there was no strain from the travelling at all.

Saturday 26 May

Arrived at Johannesburg, and met again by someone from Virgin. Taken to a little, federal airport, and caught a flight, in a twin-engined jet, which landed at an airstrip where we had to get out and wait. Then another little plane came in, this time with a single engine, and flew us to the airstrip at the game reserve - Richard Branson's land - which is called Ulusaba.

Discovered, when we arrived there, that Nelson Mandela had left that morning and that I'd only missed him by a matter of hours - that's a pity.

First we sat in a round-table arrangement, and Archbishop Tutu led a discussion about the Elders' project: whether they should go to Darfur, intervene in Zimbabwe, and so on - all sorts of issues. I said something about nuclear power - I forget what it was now. Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland, was there; and Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States.

Then we were driven to Rocky Lodge, up a huge hill, and had dinner (with an African woman singing in the background). I sat with Richard Branson and Peter Gabriel

(who lives round the corner from me in London), and with Carter and Tutu. After dinner we just talked about things generally. It really was a fantastic day, and to think it started about midnight in London and ended here, in Africa!

Sunday 27 May

Up at about quarter-past five and went on a game drive, in a little open-topped jeep. We saw lots of animals: impalas (look like little deer), antelopes, hippos submerged in water, a beautiful lioness - would be about five years old - sitting watching wildebeest, which looked so thin. The lion began approaching them and they began to scatter. Spectacular!

Then we got back, and at eight o'clock there was a service led by Desmond Tutu in the hotel. He conducted it in a very informal way, with lots of jokes, and took the Bible round for people to read from. Carter read one bit. Then we had bread and wine, and an African woman sang a song, (the same woman who had sung at the dinner last night). Afterwards, everybody hugged - it was quite happy-clappy (except Desmond Tutu is much more serious than that).

At breakfast I sat next to a Professor Kiang from Beijing University. It was very interesting, talking about China and capitalism. He himself is a Buddhist. Seventy per cent of the wealth in China is now owned by 4 per cent of the people - it's a real capitalist country. But, he said, socialism is coming back, through young people. They are now beginning to complain about the inequalities.

At 10 a.m., we had Kofi Annan address us on a video link. He said the Elders may be attacked for what they do, and that we've got to contact the real players, who are not necessarily the most important people; that we've got to make the case for the Elders, and to choose members very carefully. I intervened a few times and said that we're looking for self-government for the world. I talked a little bit about the history of Zimbabwe, and said we must be prepared to speak to everybody.

We had a report by Ray Chambers, who is one of the (very wealthy) founders. He was talking about the need for a strategic plan. A woman told us that McKinsey were advising us.

We had a long presentation on Darfur by Gayle Smith, who had worked in Africa for twenty years and was an adviser to Clinton. She said it's partly a tribal conflict, partly a conflict between central power and local power, partly a conflict between the farmers who find their farms being eroded by the nomads, and partly because the central government is so awful.

The question of China and its interest in oil came up. Then Zimbabwe. Obviously the Elders want to get rid of Mugabe. That came out quite clearly in the video we saw yesterday.

We then came to Burma, and Desmond Tutu raised the question of Aung San Suu Kyi, and burst into tears. He obviously knew her very well. We came on to the Nigerian elections, and a young Nigerian man spoke. He stressed the importance of African leadership, that African institutions should be taking the lead, which I agree with of course.

The Middle East: Carter, who has played an active part there, intervening all the time, said that we must talk to Hamas. It is a scandal that since Hamas was freely elected in Gaza in 2006 (his own Carter Centre verifying that the elections were free and fair) the Middle East Quartet - the UN, the US, the EU and Russia - had refused to recognise the elections. The Elders must intervene.

Then we had lunch, and I was put at the Elders' table. Actually, it wasn't just Elders. I sat opposite Richard Branson.

About six o'clock we went over, in the Land Rovers, to have dinner in the bush. We drove for ages and then came to an area where all the trees had lights in them and there were masses of tables with heaters over them. There were African drummers and dancers - a tremendous noise - and it was a sort of glorified global barbecue!

I had a word with Scilla Elworthy, whom I have met before, a very nice woman, and she discussed with me the appointment of new Elders and gave me a little handbook of all the potential Elders and, to my delight, I was listed there. I was pleased about that.

After dinner, Josh and I came back and went to bed.

Monday 28 May

Josh went off on the game drive this morning, and he saw leopards and rhinos. I stayed back because I had to pack, and I wanted to prepare my final points.

Had breakfast at 8.45 with Jimmy Carter and Mary Robinson. I mentioned to Carter how my officials at the Energy Department had been very suspicious of his strict attitude to proliferation, and that I was very much on his side. I told him about materials supplied to Israel without my knowledge, and about the way in which our plutonium had gone to the Pentagon for their nuclear-weapons programme, and so on.

Just before the session began at 9.30 I said to Desmond Tutu, 'If there's a chance of allowing me to say something, I'd like to.' He said my request was registered.

Then, at 9.35, Jean Oelwang (Branson's organiser) and Richard described the project's plans. I'm not an Elder, though I'm on the list of possible Elders; among the other names was Oprah Winfrey, the American interviewer, who has a worldwide reputation now; and possibly Bill Clinton and Al Gore.

A discussion took place as to when the Elders could be officially announced - should it be on Human Rights Day on 10 December, or earlier, on Nelson Mandela's birthday, 18 July? If the latter, it could be in Johannesburg.

Then Carter made his contribution about the importance of the Middle East and healthcare.

Before that, Graça Machel (Nelson Mandela's wife) said, 'Whatever you do, don't oversell it', and I agree strongly

with that. I said the Elders are about hope and that's enough. It will arouse great excitement, but don't be too detailed to begin with.

We went back to issues again: Israel, Zimbabwe, Darfur, Burma, Nigeria, Iran, and so on.

I took my opportunity. 'If I may say something about the things that have moved me over the years: in Rhodesia, during the war, an eighteen-year-old pilot said to an African who was sweeping the path, "Voetsek!", which is a very rude word for *Get out of the way!* The African stood up and quoted Rousseau: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Tom Paine said, "My country is the world; my religion is to do good." And Reinhold Niebuhr - I know President Carter is interested in Niebuhr - said: "Man's capacity for evil makes democracy necessary, and man's capacity for good makes democracy possible." '

Shortly afterwards Desmond Tutu said, 'Tony, you wanted to say something?' I replied, 'Archbishop, I've said it already.' He said, 'You are restored!' Such a lovely guy.

Mary Robinson said that whatever we do, we mustn't mention that we're going to intervene in Zimbabwe because it would make it worse.

'Leave Zimbabwe entirely to Kofi Annan,' said Tutu.

Then a brief discussion of Darfur again, and Burma, and it was decided to invite Aung San Suu Kyi.

I said I thought we should consider including Mordechai Vanunu, and Tutu said, 'We can't take up every civil-liberties case.' I said, 'It's not quite that - it is a question of his campaign on Israel's nuclear weapons.' Anyway it was brushed to one side.

Professor Kiang, whom I've got to like very much indeed, suggested that the Elders might meet in China.

Carter said that we've been working with Sam Nunn and Henry Kissinger on nuclear proliferation (I thought: God, is the old American Establishment being brought in!). And then, believe it or not, Richard Branson said, 'I think I'll have

a word with Gordon Brown – I think I can persuade him to abandon Trident.’ Whoof!

Tutu called on me again, and I said, ‘Well, it is really the old question of war and peace. During the war we realised we could rebuild society by planning for peace, instead of killing Germans, and that’s how the Welfare State came about.’ Tutu said, ‘Tony, it is for that contribution that you were asked’, which was very nice of him. He said, ‘You bring such passion to it.’

There was a brief discussion about members. There are three vacancies and it was agreed that two of them should be women. It was finally agreed that the Elders would meet on 17 July in Johannesburg, on the eve of Nelson Mandela’s eighty-ninth birthday.

We had a collection for the staff, said our goodbyes and headed home.

Tuesday 29 May

We landed at Heathrow airport just after seven. Met by someone from Virgin, cleared customs and everything, and were given a limousine home.

It was really a very remarkable event. My impressions (I’ll put them down now) were, first of all, about Josh – I mean, he was fantastic! I couldn’t have done it without him, and I now realise my limitations. Virgin helped, but even so, I couldn’t have done it on my own.

But what I felt, on balance, was that it was as if I had been invited to attend a drafting committee for the Sermon on the Mount, under Archbishop Tutu, and another drafting committee on the Declaration of Independence, with Jimmy Carter.

There were a couple of funny things. I did feel that a lot of rich white men, living in a very wealthy game reserve, discussing poverty, was a bit odd – but there you are. They have the resources and, as Josh says, ‘He who pays the piper calls the tune.’ I think what will emerge from the

Elders is really a sort of global House of Lords, with all their political feelings. I was almost certainly the only socialist there, although I suppose Mandela had been a socialist. But they let me take part, and of course I would be very honoured if I was made an Elder, but the main thing is actually having been there.

So, that's it - that's my Africa diary.

Wednesday 30 May

Taxi with Ruth to Paddington, and caught the 1.52 to Malvern. I left my anorak on the train and it had the lovely woolly cap Ruth gave me, in one pocket, and the red neck-scarf that Stephen gave me in the other, and I was really sorry about that, but I'll try and get it back.

Malvern was just like the railway station in *Brief Encounter* - fantastic! Anyway, from there we changed trains for Hereford and went to the Swan Hotel.

Thursday 31 May

Hay-on-Wye. Up at 5.45, had tea, breakfast and then went to give my lecture to 1,254 people.

A few photographs were taken by *The Guardian*, and then I gave a *Guardian* podcast. In the afternoon, to the live Sky TV feed: Mariella Frostrup was interviewing someone called David Crystal (who is a great expert on language) and Harry Hill (who was a doctor and is now a comedian). I was asked to pick two books that I hadn't read and would like to, so I chose *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel and *Small Island* by Andrea Levy. Ruth had briefed me on them, of course.

Then we were driven to Hereford, caught the train to Newport, and from there missed the London train by two minutes. As we waited in Newport, lots of people came up - for example, a lawyer who'd written to me years ago about Chomsky and Niebuhr. Then an older man, who said his wife had been to some of my lectures ... quite a few encounters like that.

Tomorrow Hilary and I are doing a joint interview with *The Observer*, and I've agreed to do an interview with Chomsky over a satellite link, at Loughborough University.

Friday 1 June

The Observer interview was at 9.30, and Hilary and I talked about our family influences and then moved on to how politics really worked. At the end we discussed Iraq.

Took the train to Loughborough and was met by Will Learmonth, a very imaginative twenty-six-year-old who had arranged this link-up with Noam Chomsky. I sat in a chair in Loughborough and Chomsky sat in a chair in New York, and we could hear each other quite clearly. In the course of the hour I had about one-third of the time, because he spoke at great length. I didn't disagree with him, but I added dimensions that he'd left out and made points that I wanted to make. As we approached the hour, I had to chip in to thank him very much and call it off. He treated me as a distinguished professor might treat an intelligent student who keeps interrupting. But I think it was worthwhile. I think it was a great success actually. I think either Al Jazeera or Channel 4 will take it.

It's been a killing programme for eight days really - an incredible week. I'm absolutely whacked!

Sunday 3 June

I had nine or ten hours' sleep.

Thursday 7 June

I prepared for *Question Time*, which I'm doing in Truro tonight. I hate doing it at short notice, because I don't have time to do all my research. They pay £150, and since it takes about twenty-four hours' preparation and travel, it's only just about the rate of the minimum wage! So I might mention that to David Dimbleby.

Well, I worked at home, and then was picked up and taken to the station to catch the 2.05 train to Truro, which arrived at 6.44 – that’s four and three-quarter hours, but it was a lovely journey through the West Country. A beautiful day, through Taunton, Exeter, St Austell and Plymouth. On the train I met Julia Goldsworthy, the Liberal Democrat MP for Falmouth and Camborne, a bright, young, not particularly radical Liberal.

On the panel: Melanie Phillips (journalist and author), Francis Maude (Chairman of the Conservative Party) and Boris Berezovsky (one of the Russian oligarchs; he was allowed by Yeltsin to buy state assets for a song, became a multi-multimillionaire and used the money to fund Yeltsin’s election victory, then Putin’s election victory; he fell out with Putin, successfully applied for asylum in the UK, and has recently called for a coup to oust Putin.)^{fn1} So that was the panel!

I had rightly guessed all the questions: on the new Cold War, on the Olympic logo, on terror laws, on Britishness and on the environment, and I did quite well.

Came back on the 10.44 sleeper.

Friday 8 June

Arrived at Paddington about 5.30 a.m. There was to have been a BBC car, but it didn’t turn up, and so I caught a cab home and went to bed for two hours, I was so tired.

Saturday 9 June

I have bad backache and I’m exhausted. I wonder whether it’s psychological?

I caught the bus to Central Hall Westminster, for the Compass conference. Compass is a sort of left-wing, soft-left Fabian Society group that has attracted the attention of a lot of people in the centre of the Party, though not the so-called hard-left or the Stop the War Coalition. It indicates that there is, within the Party, an unease about New Labour.