

Tony Blair cashes in on Iraq War

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Channel Four's *Dispatches* documentary, "The Wonderful World of Tony Blair", is a devastating exposé of the lavish life-style enjoyed by Blair, who has amassed more money since leaving office than any other former British prime minister.

Aired September 26, the documentary was the result of efforts by Peter Osborne—a journalist for the Conservative-supporting *Daily Mail* and *Telegraph*—to uncover the source of Blair's wealth since he was forced to resign as Labour leader and prime minister in 2007.

Getting exact details of Blair's wealth and business dealings was extremely difficult, Osborne said. But public speaking engagements alone had brought in £9 million for Blair, who was paid £240,000 for a single speech in China. In addition, just seven months after leaving office, Blair was hired as an advisor to the investment firm J.P. Morgan bank, for which he is paid £2 million per year, and has a number of other lucrative contracts.

Tony Blair Associates (TBA), an international consultancy set up by Blair with significant dealings in the Middle East, is calculated to have earned £13.8 million in three years.

The same day he left Downing Street, Blair was made envoy to the "Quartet"—the United Nations, United States, European Union, and Russia—supposedly tasked with "fostering peace between Israel and Palestine". While this job is unpaid, it enjoys "substantial expenses" Osborne said, and is part-funded by British taxpayers.

In sum, Blair has lucrative contracts in the Middle East, while advising a major US bank with interests in the region. On the one hand, the former prime minister claims to be a man of "peace", but on the other he is receiving millions from "one of the major autocracies in the region," *Dispatches* charged. Osborne noted that, in Britain, the invasion of Iraq was the most "controversial act" of Blair's premiership but it was excellent news for Kuwait. Blair enjoys much prestige in the country, which he regularly visits.

The programme cited a particular trip on January 26, 2009. Blair was in the country in his official capacity as

"peace envoy". Accompanying him, however, was Jonathan Powell, Blair's private secretary at the time of the Iraq war, and now senior adviser to TBA. Shortly afterwards, TBA won a contract with the Kuwaiti regime to produce a "review" of its economy, rumoured to be worth £27 million.

As the quartet envoy, Blair is a frequent visitor to Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, and the Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. TBA gives advice to the Crown Prince's sovereign wealth investment fund for a reported £1 million a year. Much of that fund comes from investment in oil and gas exploration, including in Libya. Blair is also reported to have advised the UI Energy Corporation for an undisclosed sum. UI Energy is part of a consortium in Iraqi Kurdistan.

It had been extensively reported that Blair had six face-to-face meetings with Libya's Colonel Gaddafi after leaving office. This was in the run-up to the release in August 2009 of Abdelbaset Al Megrahi, jailed for the Lockerbie bombing. The meetings also came at a time when Blair's employer, J.P. Morgan, was trying to broker a deal between the Gaddafi regime and Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska, a friend of Peter Mandelson, a Labour minister and a close adviser to Blair.

Dispatches asked several people if this was ethical method for a former premier. Dr Nicholas Allen, an expert on standards in public life at the University of London, said, "It is not altogether clear that Blair is separating his work as the representative of the Office of the Quartet and his business interests.

"Clearly if he was holding a ministerial office in Britain, that kind of conflict . . . wouldn't be tolerated."

Blair denied any conflict of interest.

The programme turned to Blair's work in Israel and Palestine. He visits for one week a month. An entire floor of a luxury hotel is put aside for his use. His office in Jerusalem is part-funded by British taxpayers, and his staff includes three civil servants seconded from Whitehall.

Oborne claimed that Blair has visited Gaza only twice. In December 2008 Israel invaded Gaza. Some 14,000 Palestinians were killed. Blair issued a press statement calling for calm, and then went on holiday. It was only on January 6, 2009—when 14 children were killed as Israeli forces shelled their school—that Blair spoke up again. He did not condemn Israel's actions.

Dispatches asked just what it is that Blair does in Palestine. An Israeli economic spokesman said that he was there to “help create a climate of law and order to encourage growth,” which he is doing by “negotiating business contracts” while significantly “reducing the number of security gates”.

The documentary showed just one of the hundreds of attacks by Israeli settlers, in which a Palestinian farmer's olive groves that had been burnt. It complained that Blair “never raises anything publicly about these attacks.”

One of the operators of a Coca-Cola franchise explained how companies in Gaza are not allowed to grow past a certain size. They are told the materials they employ in the process can be used for making bombs, so Israel limits supplies. Blair has done nothing about this, the operator claimed.

More damning still, *Dispatches* accused Blair of using his post to promote two contracts in Palestine that raise serious conflict of interest issues. He championed the development of a £6 billion gas field operated by British Gas off the coast of Gaza, and brokered a deal with Israel for it to supply the enclave. The British Gas group is a major client of J.P. Morgan.

Blair is also credited with helping open radio frequencies, so that Wataniya Telecom could operate a mobile phone network in the West Bank. Wataniya is owned by the Qatari telecoms giant Qtel.

Wataniya Mobile's chief executive officer, Bassam Hanoun, said that although the network had been built, it was “dead” until Blair's “forceful intervention with Israeli ministers” to allow the use of radio frequencies, controlled by Israel. Qtel is another major client of J. P. Morgan, having brought Wataniya with a £1.3 billion loan from the bank.

In a telling interview, Anis Nacour, a senior French diplomat who worked for Blair at the quartet's Jerusalem office, described the quartet as a “smokescreen” for the actions of the US and Israel in Palestine. It was a “device” to represent Washington and Tel Aviv interests without appearing to do so, he said.

Whenever Blair's offices were approached for an answer to any of the questions raised by Oborne and the

Dispatches team, they were met with the words, “No Comment”.

One presumes the contents of the programme are true, as there was no attempt to prevent it going out as scheduled. It was shown during the Labour Party's annual conference last week. Notwithstanding the revelations, Blair's name was cheered by the majority of delegates, with only a dozen or so booing—proving yet again how proud Labour is of its role in exploiting and oppressing the working class—whether in Britain, the Middle East or elsewhere.

The documentary is an indication of growing tensions in the political establishment under the impact of the global crisis.

The anti-European Union wing of the Conservative Party is now raising its profile, and Oborne is one such euro-sceptic. His new book, written with Frances Weaver, *Four Guilty Men*, takes its title from the 1940's pamphlet written by Michael Foot and Lord Beaverbrook, which named and shamed those in leading circles that had supported the “appeasement policy” with Hitler's Nazi Germany prior to World War II.

Oborne attacks the Confederation of British Industry, the BBC and the British political establishment, for “selling out” the UK's independence to the European Union.

What Oborne conceals is that the corruption revealed in the programme speaks to the putrefaction of the entire British ruling elite, and its class system. It is up to the working class to deal with Blair, and the other political representatives of this system.



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