REVIEW

The Mail ON SUNDAY 2

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POLITICAL ANIMAL: Mandelson at a friend's home with his dog Jack in a scene from Hannah Rothschild's documentary

Lord Mandelson's trousers drop to the floor revealing a pair of long, toned legs. He's the…

Betty Grable of British politics

Film-maker and family friend **HANNAH ROTHSCHILD** spent six months shadowing Peter Mandelson for a fly-on-the-wall television documentary. This is her gloriously indiscreet – and VERY off-message – account of what happened…

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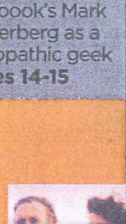

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'And who would play you in a film?' 'George Clooney of course.' Peter hesitates and then adds: 'I wish I was George Clooney'

by **Hannah Rothschild**

OCTOBER 19, 2009
I have just finished a film for the BBC and am practising a little displacement activity on the internet. I can't remember the clicks that lead to Business Secretary Peter Mandelson's speech to the Labour Party conference. I'm not a political anorak; I'm not even a political headscarf. I don't really know Lord Mandelson (he's a friend of my brother, Nat) but without even thinking about the consequences I start to write an email: 'Dear Peter, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about the possibility of making a filmed profile about your life…'

I send the email and go to pick up my daughter from school. I don't expect a reply.

OCTOBER 20
My mobile phone rings but not recognising the number, I don't answer. Later I listen to the message. 'Hannah, it's Peter. I got your message. Why wait till March, there's so much happening now. Call me. Bye bye.'

Flipping heck!

NOVEMBER 16
I turn up at the Department of Business, Innovation And Skills for my first meeting with PM. I am, to put it simply, terrified.

The PA asks me to wait in an outer office. 'Peter is running 12 minutes late,' she explains. Exactly 12 minutes later I am shown into his office. He sits in a leather chair surrounded by five men. From this point I will have to get used to being the only woman in many rooms.

'You've lost weight,' PM says. The aides look at each other nervously. He asks me what I want to do and why. I stammer my way through some compliments.

'What would you want out of a film?' I ask. He explains that he regrets not having a crew to record the 1997 General Election campaign and that he'd like a record of New Labour's swansong or the most unexpected political victory. Within minutes there is a consensus that the film is happening.

NOVEMBER 25
I am freezing on the steps of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, waiting for PM who is to address the Society Of Motor Manufacturers And Traders. He arrives and, without a flicker of acknowledgement, opens his jacket to reveal a special pocket just the right size for a radio microphone. I slip one in and clip the microphone to his jacket. He still hasn't said hello. Buttoning up his jacket he strides towards the stage.

His speech starts promisingly for the layperson when he points out that he was born the same year as the Triumph Herald. Soon, though, I am lost in a quagmire of statistics and figures.

Back at the office I am given a seat in the no-man's-land area between the special advisers and the civil servants, with Kathy and Danny who are in charge of co-ordinating the mountain of interdepartmental paperwork, committees and meetings. They are helpful and friendly. The rest of the office isn't. I ring a Labour MP friend, who must remain nameless. He explains why I am a problem.

'The civil servants don't want you around with a camera because they know they'll have to work for another Minister from May and they don't want to be associated with either New Labour or Peter. The special advisers are worrying about their next job and in the meantime their power is entirely linked to proximity to Peter. The last thing anyone wants is another body coming between them and him.'

I say: 'You seem to have accepted that you've lost the Election.'

'I don't know what's worse right now – losing or winning,' he says, 'but we're all so tired. Besides, I want my life back.'

What advice did he have for me in this new venture?

'Being with Peter is like landing a helicopter on a vast rubbish tip. From the air it looks almost beautiful, an array of bright colours and shapes, but as you descend…'

DECEMBER 11
It's late on a Friday evening and PM is standing in the bedding section of John Lewis trying to decide which pillows to buy for his brother and sister-in-law who are coming to stay for the weekend. Dressed in a well-cut suit, a tailored shirt, Hermes tie and dark cashmere overcoat he looks, next to the ordinary shoppers, like a matinee idol.

His BlackBerry chirrups constantly. First it's Ed Balls [then Education Secretary] worrying about a spate of bad Press.

'The problem is, Ed, that you suffer from the same condition that I experienced under Tony – being the Prime Minister's confidante. It's a position of privilege that creates certain problems,

Peter and the Rothschild family

The Rothschild family is one of Europe's wealthiest dynasties, synonymous with investment banking, but Hannah is a film-maker and journalist. Her younger brother Nat is a friend of Lord Mandelson.

In 2008 the friendship came to public attention after Mandelson was invited to a birthday party in Corfu at the house of Jacob and Serena Rothschild, Nat and Hannah's parents. During the trip he stayed on the yacht of Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska, along with George Osborne, then Shadow Chancellor. The evening after the party, Mandelson and Osborne had a conversation that would subsequently be at the centre of a major political row.

According to Press reports of this conversation, Mandelson was said to have dripped 'pure poison' about Gordon Brown in to Osborne's ear. Much was also made of the fact that Mandelson had been enjoying Deripaska's hospitality. Osborne denied leaking this story.

Nat Rothschild, angry at the embarrassment caused to his friends, wrote to The Times claiming Osborne had sought a donation for the Conservatives from Deripaska. Osborne denied this. Mandelson was widely viewed as having bested Osborne in this battle of spin.

'Are you the agony aunt to the whole Cabinet?' I ask. 'Oh yes and Red Adair, their exercise instructor, their sleep manager and a cheerleader,' he says

DRESSED TO IMPRESS: Mandelson prepares for his speech at Mansion House. Below left: Going shopping on his fold-up bike and at a photoshoot at Westminster

rtain resentments.' Peter
/es a hypo-allergenic cushion
disdainful squeeze before
oving on to duckdown. Balls is
spatched.
People ask me if I hate Ed
alls…' he pauses, dramati-
lly, while surveying the linen
ction. 'I always reply…',
other pause; Peter thinks for a
cond, '…of course I don't hate
l Balls.'
another call from another Cab-
et Minister comes through.
ter listens patiently. 'Gordon's
ed. He's just having a little
out. He's had a long week, don't
ke it so personally,' he advises.
ow just go home to the family
d have a glass of whisky.'
Are you the agony aunt to the
hole Cabinet?' I ask.
Oh yes and Red Adair, their sleep
anager, exercise instructor and a
eerleader,' he says.
The BlackBerry chirrups again.
journalist.
The problem with Cameron is,
ll, he's a smoothie, a mummy's
y…' And off he goes on a round of
ry-bashing. The problem with
ve and George [Osborne] is that
ey are like a couple of schoolboys
a sweet shop who find they don't
ve the money to pay for what
ey've got.
What do you think people's percep-
n of you is?' I ask. Peter hardly
uses. 'The public have always
ought of me as being sort of mean
d tough. I mean, some people like
because they say, "Well he's very
cisive and he can really get things
ne and really knows his own mind
d he doesn't let anyone stand in the
y." Other people read it as so very
anipulative, sort of, "He's a bully,
ry authoritarian, very cold."'
Would you rather be a mummy's
y or Prince of Darkness?'
Oh Prince of Darkness, no
estion.'
ater we play a casting game. He
cides that, in any feature film,
avid Cameron would be played by

NEALE HAYNES / TILLEN / DOVE

Val Doonican. And who would play you? 'George Clooney of course.' He hesitates and then adds: 'I wish I was George Clooney.'

He buys four pillows and we move down to the food section. 'What am I going to cook?' he asks no one in particular. 'I have a nice pot of caviar at home. Do you think my brother would like that?'

JANUARY 22, 2010
Like her colleagues, Jo, who works for PM, is the soul of discretion. If she minds working from 8am until 10pm most days, she doesn't say. When her inbox groans with some 120 emails, each needing detailed replies, she doesn't sigh. When PM hands back a cogently argued, well-informed brief on a piece of proposed legislation with the complaint that an infinitive has been split, Jo simply smiles and retypes the document.

'Being with Peter is like landing a helicopter on a rubbish tip. From the air it looks beautiful, but as you descend…'

The team meets at St Pancras, early on Friday morning. The trip to Cumbria [where there has been disastrous flooding] will last for less than 36 hours but Jo has brought detailed notes to cover all eventualities.

There's a meeting with the townspeople of Cockermouth (flood brief), then with the local Regional Development Agency (Government reaction to flood brief), interviews with local journalists (details of grants given, Government initiatives in specific areas), visits to relocated businesses and finally a delicate negotiation with the manufacturers of a nuclear submarine (colossal brief).

At the end of the day, Jo needs to catch a 6pm train to make connections on three other services to get across England to see her mother. She arrives with a lot of luggage for a day trip.

'I've brought two spare copies of the briefings. I've brought paracetamol, ibuprofen and Gaviscon,' she says. 'I've brought enough food for about three days. I've brought my lunch and a replacement lunch, in case Peter wants my lunch, and in case he doesn't like the lunch that is provided there.'

'What about tea bags?' I tease. PM drinks green tea that can be difficult to find. 'I have green tea, and lots of chocolate,' she confirms. 'When I got home last night at ten, there was only a Costcutter open and I was panicking because he drinks only posh apple juice, which I eventually found. But the one thing he'll need is the one thing I've forgotten, whatever that might be.'

In Cockermouth PM tours an auction house that now houses some 40 marooned businesses. I get my first insight into an essential qualification for those wanting a life in politics. The ability to remember people's names and to sit through endless meetings.

At the end of a lightning tour he's on first-name terms with everyone. A few hours later we meet many of the same delegates at a Regional Development Agency meeting. 'Hello Ted.' 'Hello again, Martin.' 'Thanks for that delicious cake, Agnes.'

As we leave he announces that Jo will follow up all meetings with a detailed brief. Jo gulps and smiles.

It's 5pm by the time we arrive at the submarine plant. My camera is confiscated and we have to pass through three checkpoints. Two half-built subs lie side by side like whales.

'Would you like to see inside one?' It's 5.20pm. I need to get back to my children and Jo to her mother.

'Oh, yes please,' says PM.

We descend via ladder into the sub's belly.

'Do you want to see a missile?'

'Yes please,' PM answers. I feel like firing him out of the missile tube.

At 6pm, they finally sit down to talk defence. These are important issues, not only for the workers of Barrow-in-Furness but for the security of our nation. Jo's hand flies across her notebook as she records the intricacies of the conversation about defence policy versus the Treasury, foreign policy versus domestic needs. If this is new ground for Peter he doesn't show it.

It's 6.15pm. Jo has missed all her connections but if I leave now I can be back in London by midnight. I slip away.

FEBRUARY 23
Apparently members of Brown's team had rung a bullying helpline. The Prime Minister, it seems, loses his temper regularly, pushes and shoves people and bangs chairs around. How will PM spin his Prime Minister out of this one? Surprisingly, for someone so controlled and experienced, he wags a finger

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threateningly on camera at a room full of journalists.

As we leave the Global Investment Conference at the Saatchi Gallery and head to Downing Street, I ask how he can defend Gordon. He tries to deny that Gordon loses his temper. 'Oh come on Peter, I've heard him shout at you,' I say. I have sometimes been able to hear the Prime Minister bellowing down the phone to PM.

Without missing a beat PM replies: 'Is that getting angry? He's just saying, "Hear my pain."'

MARCH 1
8am. PM is cruising towards Westminster in his Ministerial Jaguar. The day before a Sunday Times poll put the Tories a mere two points ahead of Labour, but the man leading his party's Election campaign is far from jubilant. 'We're doing better, but not well,' PM says.

He explains that the national polls aren't representative. What really count are the votes in the 50-plus marginal constituencies – Lord Ashcroft runs and finances the Tory operation to win these 'target seats'. 'It's the biggest affront to democracy that I have known in my life but nobody it seems will or can do anything about it,' says PM.

8.20am. The Jaguar stops outside Labour Party HQ, PM slips out of the car and through the doors and into his daily strategy meeting.

11am. Lord Ashcroft releases a statement on his website confirming that he is a non-dom [the tax status allowing a person to avoid paying tax on international earnings].

6.40pm. Mandelson has 55 minutes to get from the Cabinet Office to his Ministry, change into black tie, give an interview to ITN, clarify a few matters on Iranian foreign policy with David Miliband and drive across London to Mansion House, where he'll deliver a speech to leaders of trade and industry.

With trademark insouciance he saunters into his office and turns up the volume on the television to catch the latest on the Ashcroft story. Most of the team are still at work: the Private Secretaries rarely leave before 10pm. It's like a highly organised stable yard with a team dedicated to keeping the champion horse in peak condition – feeding, grooming, encouraging.

'He enters the media room flanked by his aides. 'Oh Jesus, Norma Desmond has arrived,' says A.A. Gill

'Aren't you going to film me getting ready?' he asks undoing his suit trousers. I hesitate. Does the First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Business, Innovations and Skills, President of the Board of Trade and Lord President of the Council really want the nation to see him in his underwear? I turn the video camera on. His trousers drop to the floor revealing a pair of long, toned legs. He can add 'the Betty Grable of British politics' to his long list of titles.

Slipping his feet into highly polished shoes and fixing a cummerbund, Mandelson heads into the outer office. The episode is a perfect moment of Mandelsonia – the talent to surprise and the ability to multitask. 'When am I going to have time to pack for New York?' he asks no one in particular.

'After finishing your box tonight and before your trainer arrives at 6.30am,' replies his Principal Private Secretary.

PM returned from an official visit to Paris the day before. He'll spend 12 of the next 46 hours crossing the Atlantic but will be back in time for a state dinner and meetings with South Africa's President Jacob Zuma on Thursday. He likes this kind of pace.

Since starting this documentary, the only time PM appeared rattled was late one Friday afternoon when he had a spare 95 minutes.

'I'm not achieving anything,' he'd said in despair. 'Where am I going to find this kind of pressure outside politics? I will probably start to look old.'

7.34pm. During the journey from the Ministry to Mansion House, PM, his Permanent Secretary Richard Abel and Press Officer Peter Power discuss where to insert a couple of Ashcroft jokes in his speech.

10.34pm. Leaving Mansion House. There was a fairly muted response to the keynote speech. We arrive back at PM's house and suddenly he gets excited. 'There's my boy, Jack. Jack, come here.'

He hops out of the car and a black-and-white dog leaps from the pavement into his arms. They cover each other with wet kisses.

MARCH 11
PM and his entourage travel to Hartlepool, which used to be his constituency when he was an MP and where he'll be made an Honorary Freeman. I ask him why a native of Hampstead Garden Suburb would want to be so far North?

'It was next door to Tony's constituency in Sedgefield. So we could all be together,' he answers. He remembers staying with the Blairs.

'I used to sleep in the same room as his daughter Kathryn who was one or two years old in those days. I would wake up and she would be standing up in her sort of playpen, just looking at me waiting for me to open my eyes. And when I did and I saw her, she would give me a big beaming smile.'

Many in Hartlepool remember PM and his astonishing recall serves him well. He greets many by name.

That night, PM and his entourage stay at Wynyard Park, once the seat of the Marquises of Londonderry. It is now owned by Sir John Hall, a working-class boy made very good. PM sleeps in the Mount Stewart suite, named after another Londonderry estate in Northern Ireland. I ask if he'd visited that house or its famous gardens when he'd lived there. 'Never had time.'

The following morning Sir John and Peter discuss politics and the campaign over a full English at a table used by a former marquis and Disraeli more than a century before.

MARCH 20
I ask PM if I can ride into work with him to get a soundbite on the Unite saga [a dispute between the Unite trade union and BA had led to a strike].

The day before he'd been to Aberdeen and back, and dined with two journalist friends before returning to Downing Street to discuss the strike with Gordon until 1am. No sooner had he woken up on this Saturday morning than he was phone-bashing on BA's behalf.

I had bought Peter some jelly babies. One evening, having finished in the Cabinet Office, Peter had taken me out of the building via No10. We went into the Cabinet room and he sat in Gordon's chair.

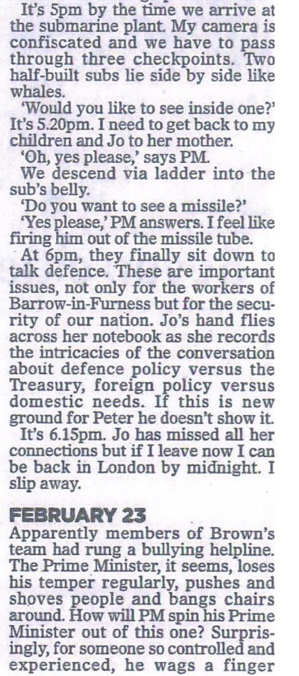
'Tell me you are not going to be sitting there one day?' I asked.

In typically Mandelsonian fashion he refused to answer but instead launched into a lament for Werther's Original toffees, which used to be placed in glass bowls beside each Minister. Nowadays Fox's Glacier Mints had replaced these, which PM didn't like much. Perhaps the jelly babies would be some kind of substitute.

A leitmotif of this documentary is PM eating. Perhaps it's politeness or the knowledge that he won't get to sit down for a proper meal, but he invariably grabs a snack on arrival at an engagement and often on departure. His assistant Maree Glass frets about what he's going to eat and often follows him around with a pot of grapes or a small apple (Cox's preferred). PM counteracts all this food with 6.30am boxing sessions and sprints up Primrose Hill.

'Most people think I don't eat. You think I eat all the time,' he says slightly defensively when I tease him. 'I'm not like a Tory Minister, you know. Michael Heseltine and Ken Clarke make their private offices schedule in three-course lunches.'

As always, PM looks expensive and elegant, wearing a tweed jacket and brown cashmere jumper. Jack the dog tries to get into the car.



CURTAIN CALL: Mandelson on the phone and, right, toasting his staff on Election Day

'Should I bring him to the Cabinet Office? He's going to be alone all day,' PM worries, before deciding against it.

An earlier dog had been named Bobby, at Tony Blair's suggestion, PM tells me, because during the 1994 leadership campaign, Tony Blair and PM had been nicknamed Jack and Bobby, after the Kennedy brothers. I refrain from pointing out that both those two had long since met a nasty end.

Naturally, Peter's next dog was named Jack. Jack, it turned out, was out of control so a friend recommended castration. Did it work? 'No.'

It is an odd kind of Saturday morning conversation. Nutrition. Assassination. Castration.

We arrive at Downing Street and PM, clutching his bag of jelly babies, disappears through a side entrance. Later he texts me:

PM: 'Prime Minister just eaten eight jelly babies in so many seconds…'

HR: 'Hilarious! Have they made him sweeter?'

PM: 'They have certainly disappeared, every one.'

HR: 'News Of The World headline … Gordon ate my babies.'

PM: 'Probably in paper tomorrow.'

MARCH 27
It's a Saturday night and one of the few that PM has off so we decide to record an interview. The interruptions, however, are constant, mainly from Gordon who wants to discuss the second Unite/BA strike, and what he sees as a massive stitch-up by the BBC on Jon Sopel's Politics Show.

Eventually PM and I sit down and I turn on the camera. For once his defences are down thanks to a fair quantity of red wine.

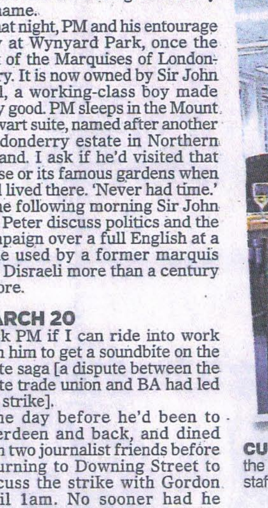
HR: 'I have a theory about you that one of your great strengths is that you are both an outsider and an insider.'

PM: 'Well presumably I am an insider because I am a member of the Government. I am also an outsider because I am sort of slightly different.'

The phone rings again. It's Gordon. Unite again. PM finally advises: 'It's 10.30, a little late to ring them again.'

Peter and I keep talking. The phone rings yet again. Peter answers wearily: 'Now what, Prime Minister?'

Thompson



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There was only a Costcutter open and I was panicking because he drinks posh apple juice

'Would you rather be a mummy's boy or Prince of Darkness?' 'Prince, no question.'

MARCH 30
So-called 'Duffygate' [the Prime Minister was overheard referring to a Labour Party supporter as a 'bigoted woman'] has finally extinguished Labour Party hopes.

Gordon didn't sleep at all the night before, or so the sleepmeister PM tells me as we board the train at Euston, bound for Birmingham University for the last of the three leaders' debates.

The team convenes at a Birmingham factory and waits for Gordon and his wife Sarah to arrive. She looks beautiful. He looks a total wreck, as if his waxen face had been left on a radiator overnight and had melted.

The entire fourth floor of the Marriott hotel is guarded by policemen. GB and Sarah have a suite. PM has a double room. PM paces around in his yoga trousers. Sue Nye [Gordon Brown's loyal 'gatekeeper'] lies on his bed. His shirt is blotted with a huge black ink splodge. Will anyone notice, he asks? Why not change it? 'Because this colour looks better on television.'

We go to the debate in GB's convoy. Police motorcyclists snake around the cars, stopping the traffic. I wonder if GB and Sarah are counting their last rides. In a few weeks, this life will suddenly stop. It's not only GB who's staring into the abyss. With him he'll bring down scores of MPs and hundreds of special advisers and party workers.

7.50pm. The despondent mood has spread into the war room. Alastair Campbell looks at me and says: 'Where's your f****** camera?'

Yvette Cooper is, apart from PM, the only Minister here. She pads around in bare feet on the telephone. To her side is a morass of fried food and electric-pink taramasalata.

During the first debate, Campbell led the rallying cries against the television, stabbing his finger at Nick Clegg or barracking Cameron. Now Cooper corrects the other leaders on a few arcane statistical points, but mostly everyone just watches.

9.30pm. PM gets up and combs his hair. Checking his reflection in the window, he straightens his shoulders and walks out. Grabbing my camera I run after him. The debate isn't over, I point out.

'Better to do this before the results come in,' he says. 'That's the way to do it. Get my bit in.'

He enters the media room flanked by aides. 'Oh Jesus, Norma Desmond has arrived,' A. A. Gill from The Sunday Times comments. 'And look how much smaller the pictures got.'

So why are you watching him, I ask? 'Doesn't everyone want to visit the most poisonous animal in the zoo?' Gill says.

The televised debate is forgotten and the Press pack charges towards PM. Only a few older journalists stay in their seats, staring resolutely at their screens. I can't get near PM but I can hear him through the radio mike. You have to admire the spirit of the man. While his leader is still talking on 50 screens around him, PM is informing the journos that the Prime Minister has won on substance over style. The familiar messages from the campaign are replayed in case anyone hadn't heard them: granite over plastic; experience over youth; Gordon the workhorse; be afraid, be very afraid, of the alternative. And the scribblers hang on his words. Few even register when the debate finishes.

Soon after, phalanxes of MPs, spin doctors and apparatchiks appear, unaware that their thunder has just been stolen by PM.

He, George Osborne and Vince Cable film a spot for Newsnight. To the casual observer, PM and Osborne put on a show of easy bonhomie but I pick up their off-air conversation through my radio mike.

'How is your film, Peter?' Osborne asks.

'I'm having it extended.'

'When are we going to see it?'

'I'm taking it to Corfu.'

'Oh, to Kassiopi?' George says. PM smirks. Both men presumably are remembering the last time they met, at my father's house in Corfu.

'How was George?' I ask PM later. 'Smug,' he replies. 'Very smug.'

'How was George Osborne?' I ask Peter later. 'Smug,' he replies. 'Very smug'

Our exit route takes us past a junior common room. The place erupts: 'Peter! Peter! Peter!' People throng around him. Campbell gets blocked behind the scrum and elbows his way through, knocking me to one side. It hurts. Later I tick him off.

'I didn't know it was you,' he says. Should that matter?

Peter is in high spirits. Is he demob-happy? Is this the last hurrah? Or does one take literally his claim that nothing ever gets him down?

Back at the hotel we go to Gordon and Sarah's room. Only the inner team are there, about eight people and me. I leave my camera at the door, feeling like a gatecrasher at a funeral. Gordon is slumped on a sofa looking exhausted. Sarah is still ethereal. Gordon thanks his team profusely for their help and again apologises for letting them down. It is genuinely touching and heartfelt. Suddenly I see why the faithful like him. 'I really am sorry,' he says, yet again. There's an air of forced jollity but everyone knows it's over.

MAY 6, ELECTION DAY
Most MPs have returned to their constituencies leaving a clutch of Lords, including PM, and the advisers at Labour Party HQ.

5pm. PM goes to the Ministry to say goodbye to his team. His belongings are packed into two cardboard boxes. He gives a wry speech.

'Win or lose, I could just stay,' he teases, 'and keep handing out money like a Bourbon king.' Everyone laughs, but he cries as he sinks a knife into a large fruitcake.

Midnight. PM does the round of television stations, spinning up Labour's results and Brown's attributes. We return to the 'Bombay Call Centre' as PM has nicknamed Labour HQ due to its overcrowding during the campaign.

PM, with Alastair Campbell, Philip Gould and their children monopolise an eerily quiet boardroom. Hoi polloi – the juniors and volunteers – are across the corridor in an open-plan room. Every time Labour wins a seat the flimsy walls reverberate with mighty cheers.

The mood lightens as it becomes clear that Labour won't be kicked into third place behind the Lib Dems. Gordon and Sarah Brown return at 5.20am, clapped home, possibly for the last time.

Most people begin to drift off. LHQ is full of the detritus of a campaign: the 'wall of glory' – photographs of Peter, Gordon and Tony tacked to a board; empty Weetabix cartons; deflating balloons. The lights are dimmed and on the computer screens, the Election slogan, 'Labour, a future fair for all', flickers forlornly.

JUNE 14
I should sack myself: despite following PM around for nearly eight months I had no idea that he was writing his memoirs or that he was going to hole up in my brother's house in Switzerland to finish them. 'You must have known,' people say. I didn't. What else did I miss?

The day he hands his book in we meet for a final interview in London. For the first time I get a dose of darkness. Halfway through our interview he announces he's bored. I try to engage him.

'Is politics showbusiness for ugly people?' Not a flicker of amusement.

'Why is a week a long time in politics?' Another lead balloon.

'Are you ever alone, Peter?' I ask, shortly before he walks out, followed by an aide.

'I am a serious politician, not a mannequin,' he says.

I still can't work out what he meant.

Mandelson: The Real PM? will premiere at the London Film Festival on October 24 and will also be shown as part of BBC Four's Storyville next month.