

A decisive majority, 56% of respondents, however, believed that 'Lord Hutton as a member of the "establishment" was too ready to sympathise with the Government and in the end produced something like a whitewash.' (*Telegraph*, 30 Jan., p. 2)

At the same time, an NOP poll found only 49% of people thought Hutton was a whitewash. (*Express*, 30 Jan., p. 10) Perhaps because of the difference between the phrase 'something like a whitewash', and a straight 'whitewash'.

Views divided on party lines. 71% of Labour voters had a rosy view of the Hutton Report, only 19% of them thinking it was a whitewash. In contrast, 81% and 71% of Tory and Liberal Democrat voters agreed with the 'whitewash' verdict. (*Telegraph*, 30 Jan., p. 2) 'Nearly a half of Tory and Liberal Democrat supporters say they have a much less favourable view of Mr Blair after Hutton'. (*Times*, 30 Jan., p. 6)

AN OWN GOAL

Andrew Gilligan's immediate reaction to the Hutton Report was: 'It's so bad, it's good.' (Rod Liddle, 'My Week', *Independent*, 31 Jan., tabloid p. 45) This may be true for the anti-war movement. The *Guardian*/ICM poll found that support for the war on Iraq fell by 6% after the publication of the Hutton Report, from 53% a week before, to 47% on 28 Jan. 2004. Opposition to the war rose from 41% to 46%. (*Guardian*, 30 Jan., p. 1)

'One astute Minister remarks, "I don't think the vast majority of people wanted Tony to be destroyed by Hutton. My feeling is that they think the Government should suffer some sort of reprimand for what happened with Kelly, the dossiers, all that. I fear that the sight of us walking away from this entirely unscathed offends people's sense of fair play. It could even make some hate us more."' (Andrew Rawnsley, *Observer*, 1 Feb., p. 29)

Alistair Campbell famously wrote in his diary, admitted in evidence to the Hutton Inquiry, that he wanted a clear 'win' over the BBC over the Gilligan/Kelly report - 'not a messy draw'.

It seems that instead we have a Blair/Hutton own goal.

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OWN GOAL

The British Public Rejects The Hutton Report JNV Anti-War Briefing 53 (1 February 2004)

'BLAIR NOT TO BE TRUSTED'

After the publication of the Hutton Report into the events surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly, polls showed that more people in Britain believed their Prime Minister had lied about his role in the affair than believed he had told the truth, and there was less rather than more support for the war against Iraq.

This was despite the fact that Lord Hutton's report exonerated Tony Blair, Geoff Hoon, Alistair Campbell and the British Government in general of any wrong-doing. In particular, Hutton focussed on whether the Government had contributed to Dr Kelly's death by leaking his name to the media as the source for Andrew Gilligan's critical report broadcast on BBC radio's 'Today' programme on 29 May 2003.

It hardly needs to be said that this is not the most important question in relation to the war on Iraq. As the *Sunday Times* observed a few days before Hutton came out, 'After the week is over and the Harry Houdini of British politics escapes yet again, we will still be in the dark on the substantive issues.' (25 Jan., p. 1.18) (Matters to be examined in future briefings.)

MR BLAIR LIED

Nevertheless, going back to what Lord Hutton actually said, the law lord decided on the main issue before him that the September 2002 weapons dossier issued by the Blair Government had not been 'sexed up'. The public did not accept this interpretation. Asked in a *Sunday Times*/YouGov poll, 54% disagreed with Hutton, and only 27% agreed. (1 Feb., p. 1.13) Hutton also concluded that there had been no 'dishonourable or underhand or duplicitous strategy' to cause Dr Kelly's name to come out. The public did not accept this interpretation of events. Asked in a *Guardian*/ICM poll whether they believed Mr Blair

when he denied leaking Dr Kelly's name to the press, 45% of voters said they did not believe him. (*Guardian*, 30 Jan., p.1)

However, in two polls, before and after publication of the Hutton Report, the *Telegraph* asked whether people believed that Mr Blair was, or was not, telling the truth when he said last summer that he had not authorised leaking Dr Kelly's name to the media. Before Hutton, 27% had believed the Prime Minister. After publication, this rose to 40%. Before Hutton, 50% of people had believed the PM to be lying. After Hutton, this fell to 44%. ('Don't knows' fell from 23% to 16%.) (*Telegraph*, 31 Jan., p. 4)

In other words, the Hutton Report has had an effect, convincing significant numbers of the waverers and of the hostile that the Prime Minister told the truth. But this effect is fairly minor compared to the fact that, even after being found entirely 'not guilty' by Hutton, more people believe that Mr Blair lied about his role in the Kelly affair, than believe that he told the truth.

THE NAMING STRATEGY

This is not surprising. Four days after the death of Dr Kelly, Tony Blair was asked about his role in authorising the naming of the weapons scientist. Mr Blair said, 'In reply to what was being said earlier – did I authorise the leaking of David Kelly's name? – that is completely untrue.' As pointed out in the *Telegraph*, this was a question about authorization, not about leaking. (27 Jan., p. 9)

Alistair Campbell, then Mr Blair's right hand man, wrote in his diary before Dr Kelly's name came out, 'GH [Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon] and I both wanted to get the source up but TB [Tony Blair] was nervous about it.' (*Sunday Times*, 25 Jan., p. 1.14)

'The approach to naming Dr Kelly as the source had been driven by a small group of Tony Blair's advisers, whose crucial meeting on 8 July was chaired by the Prime Minister himself. Sir Kevin Tebbit, the Permanent Secretary [top civil servant] at the MoD [Ministry of Defence], was briefed afterwards. Sir Kevin would later tell the inquiry his MoD colleagues felt there was nothing to be gained by naming Dr Kelly. But the decision of the meeting at No 10 made public disclosure inevitable.' (*Independent on Sunday*, 25 Jan., p. 14)

The Prime Minister chaired the meeting that authorised the process that would lead to Dr Kelly's name coming out.

BLAIR 'DAMAGED'

There is an odd inconsistency in the public's attitude to Tony Blair. Despite the fact that almost half the British people believe he lied over his role in the Kelly affair, and over half the British people believe he acted 'improperly' during the events leading up to Dr Kelly's death, less than a third of voters believe he should resign.

The Times carried out a poll on 28 and 29 Jan., asking, 'Have the issues surrounding the Hutton report made you feel more favourable, less favourable, or made no difference to your view of Tony Blair?' Only 11% felt more favourably towards the Prime Minister. 36% of respondents felt less favourably towards him, despite Lord Hutton's report. (*Times*, 30 Jan., p. 6)

Asked in a *Telegraph* poll to identify those who had behaved properly or improperly during the events leading up to the death of Dr Kelly, 52% of those questioned said that the Prime Minister had behaved 'improperly'. Only 37% thought he had behaved properly. (*Telegraph*, 30 Jan., p. 2)

SHOULD BLAIR RESIGN?

Yet at the same time, when asked who should resign in the light of the Hutton Report, only 28% of respondents in an online poll thought Mr Blair should go. 64% of people thought he should definitely stay. (*Telegraph*, 30 Jan., p. 2) A telephone poll, on the other hand, found that 37% of respondents wanted Mr Blair to resign – with 24% of Labour voters agreeing with this position. (*Guardian*, 30 Jan., p. 1) It is possible that people are more honest online because it feels more anonymous.

Apparently 54% of people feel Mr Blair has been damaged by the Hutton Report (30% 'seriously'). (*News of the World*, 1 Feb., p. 13) But, as we saw earlier, a significant number of people (around 13% of voters) have actually been persuaded by the Hutton Report that Mr Blair was telling the truth after all, about his role in leaking Dr Kelly's name. And only 28% or so feel he should resign!

WHITEWASH

The *Telegraph* asked the most pertinent question in its poll, conducted by the online pollsters, YouGov. Voters were asked to choose between two views of the Hutton Report. 34% opted for 'It represents a thorough and impartial attempt to discover the truth behind the events leading up to Dr Kelly's death'.