

# What went wrong with Gordon Brown: Dispatches

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Labour appeared to be committing political suicide on TV tonight. Andrew Rawnsley's [Dispatches](#) "Gordon Brown: Where Did It All Go Wrong" did not have a killer exclusive but the overall effect was devastating.

This masterly narrative of Gordon's bad year took us from the early weeks when the new Prime Minister was coping with terror and foot and mouth. But things went wrong when Brown had to make clear decisions about complex issues. Blair was always good at appearing decisive. Alastair Campbell's [diaries](#) make it clear that in reality Number 10 was full of fear and made mistakes. But Blair was good at recovering and giving the impression of a clear vision. With Gordon, each blunder just seems to confirm deeper doubts about his character and ability.

The terrible thing for Labour about this programme was that the parade of ministers and advisors who went on camera confirmed all this. They were far too candid [from Gordon's point of view], for example, about cabinet discussions about the election-that-never-was. God knows how they act off-camera.

Back in October I [wrote](#) that it would be madness for Brown not to go to the polls because he had himself encouraged the speculation:

*"by the beginning of this week it became clear that the Prime Minister would now look weak and indecisive if he fails to call an early election. By allowing Ministers such as Ed Balls to raise the prospect of an autumn poll he signalled his desire for one. It is one of those occasions where those who attempt to spin the media are spun."*

I was right on the politics, but wrong to think that Brown had decided to go to the polls. None of us knew how things would go from bad to worse thereafter but it is clear that this was the moment that crystallised people's doubts about the Prime Minister.

It was clear from Rawnsley's programme that people like Peter Hain, Jacquie Hughes, Hazel Blears and Jack Straw think the game is up. There was one telling moment when Peter Hain was asked whether Brown will win the next election. Hain said "only the electorate can decide that". Hardly confidence inspiring. But what made it worse was that he actually shook his head while saying it. It was one of those body-language moments when TV triumphs over the written media in revealing what politicians are really thinking.

Back in 1995 I made the BBC's obituary documentary about Harold Wilson. I interviewed various Big Beasts from the Wilson era like Tony Benn and Jim Callaghan. They took the opportunity to give their version of history while putting themselves in the best light and contradicting their rivals' accounts. But at least they were talking 30 years after the events in question. The politicians who accepted Andrew's invitation should be applauded for going on the record, but I bet Gordon wishes they had shown more discretion in their replies. Individually, none of them actually put the knife in to the Prime Minister but together they effectively took part in a media mugging.

Here's the [Guardian's Jackie Ashley](#) who says the same (but 9 hours later...).

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