

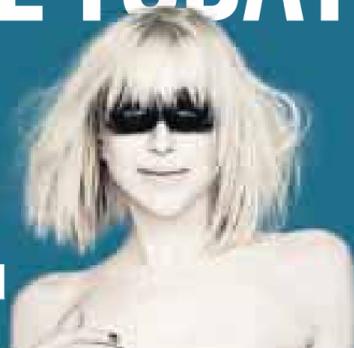


THE SUNDAY TIMES



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Mandelson: I would work for Tories

Jonathan Oliver
Political Editor

LORD Mandelson has disclosed that he is ready to accept a job under a future Conservative government.

In an interview with The Sunday Times magazine, the business secretary said he would be willing to put his "experience at the disposal of the country", if Labour lost

power. "As I grow older, I can imagine more ways of serving my country than simply being a party politician," he said.

Asked whether he might use his experience in business and world trade under a future government, he said: "If I was asked to do something for my country using that asset base, of course, I would consider it."

On the specific point of whether he would consider

requests from a Conservative government, he said: "Of course, it wouldn't be serving the government, it would be serving the country and I wouldn't be doing it by becoming a member of that government."

Mandelson, who will be 56 next month, said he was "too tribal" ever to become a Tory minister and insisted he was focused on helping Labour win the election.

The former EU trade commissioner, who is now regarded as the most powerful figure in Gordon Brown's cabinet, made the remarks on the eve of the Labour party's make-or-break annual conference.

The prime minister arrived in Brighton yesterday facing questions about his fitness to remain in office amid fresh disquiet among Labour rebels who want him to quit before the election.

Mandelson's willingness to work with the Tories will dismay cabinet colleagues, who regard this as unacceptable.

Speaking to The Sunday Times, Peter Hain, the Welsh secretary, said he would never accept a job under the Conservatives.

"I would be working to get them out as soon as possible," he said.

In a rallying cry to "defeat-

ist" colleagues, Hain warned that Labour faced a "really bad defeat" unless the party's senior figures improved their performances.

The Tories yesterday did not rule out making an offer to Mandelson. However there remains deep mistrust between the Conservative leadership and the colourful business secretary.

Mandelson was blamed for last year's so-called "Yacht-

gate" scandal — the disclosure that shadow chancellor George Osborne had solicited a party donation from Oleg Deripaska, the Russian oligarch.

"We are building a broad coalition but including Peter Mandelson may be stretching it," said a Tory source.

In the interview, Mandelson likened the possibility of his taking a new job in public life to the case of the Conservative MP

who was appointed as high commissioner to Australia by Tony Blair. Alastair Goodlad — now Baron Goodlad — a former chief whip, forced a by-election in 1999 to take up the new diplomatic role.

The appointment was made at the height of the era of Blair's "big tent" politics and caused embarrassment to the Tories, who struggled to hold on to

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A photo with Tony Blair? £180, please...

Jon Ungoed-Thomas

ADMIRERS of Tony Blair have paid £180 a time to have their photographs taken with him.

It is the latest gimmick to boost the former prime minister's earning potential on lecture tours. As many as 100 people will be whisked through in a one-hour session in which they will meet, but barely greet, Blair while the cameras flash.

"It's a unique souvenir," said Norman Stowe, one of the organisers of an event that Blair is being paid to attend in Canada next month, which has sold out.

The 100 premium tickets for the Surrey Regional Economic Summit in British Columbia on October 6 cost about £420. This buys a "photo opportunity with Tony Blair" and the best seats.

For £180 less, there are 500 tickets but, the promotional material states, "photo opportunity not included".

Stowe said: "We only have 100 of the top-price option, with a photo opportunity with Mr Blair. The people who are

doing this are quite keen and obviously follow his career.

"There is a process where you can put a lot of people through in a very short amount of time for the photographs. It doesn't take more than three or four seconds per person."

Blair is attending the event for about two hours and will speak for 30 minutes. His fee has not been disclosed, but is likely to be more than £100,000.

Blair is said to be concentrating his efforts on his unpaid role as a special envoy in the Middle East, on climate change and on his charitable work. He presented a new report on climate change to the United Nations in New York last week, urging faster action to cut carbon emissions.

In parallel, appearances on the lecture circuit and corporate work are building up his personal fortune. In March this year he earned nearly £400,000 for two speeches in the Philippines.

It is thought Blair has been paid at least £15m since he left Downing Street two years ago, helped by an almost unrivalled network of political and business contacts. He is also raising funds for his faith foundation.

He has a series of speeches planned in the autumn with at least three in the United States and Canada.

Tom Kenyon-Slaney, director of the London Speaker Bureau, said: "Blair is revered in north America. They perceive him as a combination of the Queen, Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher."

GIORGIO'S GIRLS

MATTEO BAZZI



In the pink: Giorgio Armani bounces back from a battle against hepatitis over the summer to deliver a candy-coloured Emporio Armani collection for next spring at Milan fashion week yesterday. 'All's well,' the designer told guests

Crunch victims sell their kidneys to pay off debts

Sarah-Kate Templeton
Health Editor

BRITISH victims of the credit crunch are offering to sell their kidneys for £25,000 or more to help pay debts, an investigation by The Sunday Times has revealed.

At least a dozen adverts have appeared on the internet offering kidneys for sale from British "donors". Five of the sellers corresponded with undercover journalists, who posed as friends and relatives of sick patients to negotiate sales.

One person willing to sell a kidney is a 26-year-old mental health nurse who said he needed the money to pay debts after a business he set up went bankrupt. Another is a 43-year-

old taxi driver from Lancashire, who wants to raise cash to pay off some of his mortgage and buy a new kitchen.

Both men said they wanted to help those in need of kidney transplants at the same time as relieving their financial difficulties. A leading doctor said the phenomenon highlighted the need for a public discussion of the issue of selling organs.

Professor Peter Friend, a former president of the British Transplant Society, said: "The West has outlawed it for all sorts of good reasons, but the result is it goes underground. It is really important to have a debate." Nearly 7,000 people in the UK are waiting for kidney transplants and 300 died last year while on the waiting list.

Offering to sell an organ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is an offence under the Human Tissue Act even if the seller is planning to travel to another country for the transplant operation.

Yesterday William Henderson, the taxi driver, justified his offer to sell a kidney by saying: "I thought I was going to give another man a chance of life. I wanted to help myself at the same time. We are in the middle of a giant credit crunch." He added: "A guy from Pakistan wanted one, but I turned him down. I think he was more buying it to sell it on. I'd rather... it's got somewhere good to go."

I've got debts: please buy my kidney, page 8

Russians' £100m London palace

Maurice Chittenden

A FAMILY of Russian oligarchs is creating the biggest house in London after Buckingham Palace at an estimated cost of £100m.

An underground labyrinth planned for Witanhurst, a decaying mansion in Highgate, north London, will provide one of the biggest basement areas

in Britain. The house was bought for £50m using a company registered in the British Virgin Islands but sources say the real purchaser is Yelena Baturina, Russia's richest woman and the wife of Yuri Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow. His rule has been blamed for the destruction of a third of the city's historic buildings.

Plans submitted to Camden

council call for a labyrinth to be dug in front of the house. It will include a 33-seat cinema, a beauty parlour, swimming pool and parking for 24 cars with a lift to take the vehicles up two flights to street level.

The excavation is likely to take six months and the total conversion cost about £50m.

London's bunker billionaire, page 3

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