

## Radio 4 goes ahead with Hutton satire but cuts 'liar Blair'

By Matt Born

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The BBC yesterday performed a humiliating U-turn after the Telegraph revealed that [a radio satire about the Hutton inquiry had been shelved](#) amid fears that it would "upset Downing Street".

Bosses at Radio 4 said Thursday's episode of Absolute Power, starring Stephen Fry and John Bird as nefarious spin doctors, would now go ahead as scheduled.

However, the corporation admitted that a key reference to Tony Blair being a liar had been edited out.

The climbdown has done little to allay fears about a new found political timidity following the Hutton inquiry.

Mark Tavener, the writer of Absolute Power, said he was alarmed by the BBC's cautiousness. "If they're getting this anxious about a little comedy, what are they going to be like about things that are far more serious," he said.

The Telegraph has learned that a Radio 5 Live programme about Alastair Campbell has also been postponed. The Real Alastair Campbell was due to be transmitted "on or near the date" of the publication of the Hutton report. But the station's bosses have now delayed it, saying it needs "updating" to reflect the fact that Lord Hutton cleared the former Downing Street spin doctor of any wrongdoing.

Radio 4 was in full damage limitation mode yesterday after the decision to pull Absolute Power sparked accusations of "editorial cowardice".

In a letter to The Telegraph, Helen Boaden, Radio 4's controller, said the comedy, which was written and recorded last year, had been "overtaken by events".

The plot for Thursday's episode, the first in a new series, involves the two spin doctors trying to sabotage attempts by the Government and the BBC to kiss and make up following the Hutton report.

Altogether about four lines of the script have now been edited from the programme. The first is a reference to "the director-general" - a position that is currently vacant following [Greg Dyke's enforced resignation last week](#).

The second involves Stephen Fry's character, Charles Prentiss, saying there was nothing he could "teach this prime minister about deception, manipulation and lying. Except how to do it properly".

Even though Mr Tavener said this was a general reference to New Labour's "culture of spin", the BBC insisted the word "lying" be cut. A spokesman said: "In our view it was a direct reference to Hutton and the report found that Mr Blair had not lied."

▶ [3 February 2004: BBC accused of cowardice as No 10 radio satire is dropped](#)

▶ [30 January 2004: Staff stage emotional farewell for Auntie's favourite boy](#)

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