

Blair's big U-turn over Livingstone

By GEORGE PASCOE-WATSON, Deputy Political Editor

TONY Blair was last night forced to swallow his words as he praised Ken Livingstone and backed him for re-election as Mayor of London. The pair were pictured at a rare joint public appearance — where the PM claimed he was “proud” of Red Ken and joked: “I always said Ken would make a good mayor.” But four years ago Mr Blair lobbied against Ken’s campaign to head the capital’s assembly.

Back then he warned: “I believe passionately he would be a disaster — a financial disaster, a disaster in terms of crime and police and business.” Yesterday in Kilburn, North London, Mr Blair admitted: “I changed my mind. The reason is I was able to judge on a record that he had, and I have talked to Londoners.”

The PM was forced to welcome Labour outcast Mr Livingstone back to the party when it emerged he was favourite to win.

I always said Ken would make a very good Mayor

YOU'D BE A FUEL TO FILL UP FROM HIM

UK's dearest petrol

BRITAIN'S dearest garage charges a whopping 94.9p A LITRE — £4.31 a gallon, The Sun can reveal today.

Refuelling a Ford Mondeo with unleaded petrol on the Gulf Oil forecourt would cost nearly a tenner more than the UK average.

Staggered Paul Watters of the AA said: “It must be a misprint. It's incredible they sell any fuel at that price.” The cheeky West End Garage on Hayling Island, Hants, slings motorists for 16.3p more than the 78.6p average for a litre of unleaded.

Half a mile away Esso sells it at 78.9p a litre.

Paul added: “Hayling Island is connected to the mainland — even filling stations in the Scottish islands don't charge that.”

Mondeo man stopping at West End would pay £9.54 over the odds to reload his 58.5-litre tank.

Caned

Mark McArthur-Christie, of the Association of British Drivers, said: “This is another example of drivers getting caned.”

“But we do have some freedom of choice and should shop around for cheaper fuel.”

“It is in an incredible price and I can't see what the justification would be.”

Cabbie Alan Raymond, 42, revealed he boycotts the garage. He said: “It's a rip-off price. I wouldn't pay that. I don't see why anyone does.”

Even West End boss Nick Balchin, 52, ADMITTED his customers are turbo-charged.

But he claimed 94.9p is the

minimum he needs to glean a profit from the 30 motorists he sees a day. The dad of four argued he does not have the benefit of a multinational's backing.

And he said his “select clientele” — including OAPs who cannot easily leave their cars — happily pay for him to tend pumps. Nick makes £800 gross a month on petrol.

He added: “We make in a year what Esso get in an hour.”

His main income is drawn from his caravan business on the forecourt.

Nick said: “I'm often tempted to close the pumps but it would cost a bomb because there is a lot of work involved.”

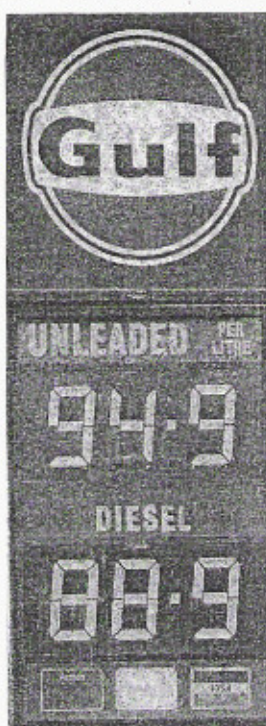
● TONY Blair gave a stark fuel warning yesterday — as oil hit its highest price in 13 years.

He predicted it would clobber motorists and have a “severe impact” on the economy. Prices rocketed amid fears of a terror campaign against Middle East oil wells and a production cut.

The PM said: “We're in discussion with oil producers.”



Tanks but no tanks... Nick Balchin mans pumps



Sto
cri
Zir

FURY
after
refuse
Englan
Zimba
Fore
Straw
the
ground
But
Secret
ram -
goes
sham
and
ment
once
to Ro
his evi
Engl
lion fi
pension
tour In
could
oricket

W

SUN
terea
heav
in the
rain.
para
late

SUN
rise
Englan
rates
to 4.25
Su

INT

More
rise
Englan
rates
to 4.25
Su