



10 DOWNING STREET

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LOBBY BRIEFING MONDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2002TEACHERS RECEPTION

The Prime Minister's Official Spokesman informed journalists that the Prime Minister would be hosting a teachers' reception at Downing Street in the evening. The reception was an opportunity for the Prime Minister to thank those working in primary and secondary education and was one of a series of receptions for public sector workers. Around 200 teachers and teaching assistants from all parts of the UK were expected to attend.

IRAQ - MEETINGS

The PMOS told journalists that the Prime Minister had seen Bruce George, Chairman of the Defence Committee, this morning as part of the series of meetings he was holding with Commons figures. He would see Ann Taylor, Chair of the Intelligence Committee, later in the week. And had seen the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Donald Anderson, last week. Asked if there were any plans for the Prime Minister to meet Labour backbenchers, the PMOS said no but that MPs would have an opportunity to have their say during the debate next week.

IRAQ - RECALL OF PARLIAMENT

Asked to clarify the position regarding a vote at the end of next week's debate given Jack Straw's words on Sunday in which he talked about the Commons "reaching a conclusion", the PMOS said there had been no change at all in the position. It remained the case that it would be an adjournment debate. Asked what time the House would be meeting, the PMOS said 11.00 am until 10.30 pm.

IRAQ - DOSSIER

Asked whether the timing of publication of the dossier, on the very morning of that Parliament resumed, was deliberate in order to do everything on one day, or whether it was because the dossier would not be ready before then, the PMOS said that the publication had been moved onto a faster track than originally intended and that had caused some difficulties. The intention was, as Jack Straw had said yesterday, to give people as good an insight as possible without comprising intelligence. It was expected to take up until the morning of September 24 to get the dossier ready. Asked if the Cabinet would have it when it met on Monday September 23, the PMOS said it was unclear whether a version would be available for that meeting since we were working to very tight deadlines.

Asked for details of the publication process, the PMOS said it would be published at 8 am on Tuesday September 24. Asked if there would be a news conference, or if it would be given to newspapers the night before, the PMOS said plans had yet to be finalised. Asked how MPs would get copies, the PMOS said precise arrangements were still being settled. Asked how many pages it was likely to be, was it more likely to be 50 or 500 pages, the PMOS said he couldn't go for 500 but it was quite a detailed and comprehensive document.

IRAQ - INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Asked whether the Government saw the latest comments from the Saudi Foreign Minister as a toughening the Saudi position and if so were did it welcome them, the PMOS said the Government welcomed the acceptance that the issue had to be dealt with and that the UN was the next stage. This was a common view and one that was widely shared. It was recognised that the decision by the President of the USA to go down the UN route was welcomed but it had to be so that UN dealt with the issue rather than avoided it. Pressed on whether the apparently more positive stance taken by the Saudis for the use of their territory for military operations, the PMOS said it was for the Saudis to speak for themselves but we welcomed their acceptance that this was an issue that had to be dealt with.

Asked his understanding of whether that there would have to be two UN resolutions before any action was taken, one to set a deadline and another to "press the trigger", the PMOS said we were getting into hypotheticals. The Government had an open mind, but what was important was that Saddam got the message that he either had to co-operate and let the UN inspectors in or face the consequences. It was up to him to decide. The important point, whatever procedural route was adopted, was that he got that message loud and clear.

Asked if there were any plans for the Prime Minister to visit European capitals this week, in particular whether he had plans to see President Chirac, the PMOS said no but reminded journalists that on Friday the Prime Minister had spoken to President Chirac, Prime Minister Balkenende of the Netherlands, and Danish Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen. Asked if

the Prime Minister had spoken to Chancellor Schroeder recently given on his views of the prospective war, the PMOS said no. No doubt Mr Schroeder was busy campaigning in Germany. Asked for the Prime Minister's view of Mr Schroeder's campaign strategy which appeared to be having some success, the PMOS noted that the journalist had not changed in his ability to try to tempt him into areas he would not go.

Asked if the Prime Minister had any views on George Galloway making another visit to Iraq, the PMOS said that Mr Galloway was free to do whatever he wanted to do.

### A'LEVELS

Asked whether the Government in any way had instructed the exam board to be tougher on candidates, the PMOS said no. Asked for a lengthier answer, the PMOS said it was utter rubbish to suggest that the Department had instructed the QCA or OCR to downgrade exam papers. Asked whether there had been any other informal contacts from the department, the PMOS said no. Invited to knock the story down completely, the PMOS said he already had.

Asked if the Government had any plans to clear up the 'cock-up' of 16-18 year old education, including the worthlessness of A/AS levels and the problems with university admissions, the PMOS rejected that characterisation of the 16-18 year education. The specific allegations of downgrading results were being investigated by the QCA and the Secretary of State wanted to see the results of that investigation as soon as possible.

Asked if he thought it was a coincidence that the schools which had complained were the over-priced schools which had always fared worse in a meritocratic examinations, the PMOS said once again he was being invited to comments on the motivation of people who were perfectly capable of speaking for themselves.

### DAVID BLUNKETT'S REMARKS ON SPEAKING OF ENGLISH

Asked whether the Prime Minister agreed with David Blunkett on the speaking of English by immigrants, the PMOS noted that it was still the summer and he still expected the people to dig through essays and pick out one paragraph, and take it out of the context of a 3,000 essay. He said the Home Secretary had not said anything different from what had been said in the White Paper. It did not dictate to people what they should do. It simply pointed out the advantages for children if English were spoken at home as well as their mother tongue - but that it was a choice for families. Asked if the Prime Minister shared that view, the PMOS said the Prime Minister agreed it was an advantage for children to grow up in a home which was bilingual.

### ERM/EURO

Asked what the lessons of the ERM were for the Euro, the PMOS said that the Euro was an issue which would be judged on its own merits and would be done so against the five economic tests. He would not however, act as a commentator in relation to questions on the ERM.

### TAX CREDITS

Asked whether the abysmal up-take of tax credits showed that the system was too complicated to work properly, the PMOS said that people had to know what was available and that was the point of today's event, to make sure people did know what was available. He expressed the hope that it would gain wide coverage in the morning's papers. Pressed on the complexity of the system, the PMOS reiterated that it was important people were made aware of what was precisely available and that it took a while for that to be communicated.

### BRITISH ENERGY

Asked if the Government was willing to extend the bail out loan, the PMOS said that the DTI was still in negotiations and he would leave it at that.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

Asked if the Prime Minister would have any further role or make any announcements in connection with the cease-fire or paramilitary monitor this week, the PMOS said it was more likely to be done by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Asked whether Gerry Adams was expected to see the Prime Minister on Wednesday, the PMOS said he wasn't disagreeing but wasn't precisely sure of the timing.

### STEPHEN BYERS

Asked what Stephen Byers was doing in Downing Street last Thursday, the PMOS repeated what we had said at the time, Mr Byers had had a meeting with an official and not the Prime Minister.