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PRIME MINISTER

**GULF DEBATE: PARLIAMENTARY HANDLING**

You have agreed that the House should debate the Gulf next Tuesday. Only colleagues most closely involved know this so far. The Labour Party have indicated through the usual channels that they will not be pressing for a debate immediately the House returns and that they will seek to discourage the Speaker from granting an SO20 on the subject. The Shadow Cabinet will be meeting at 10.30am on Thursday. We have given absolutely no indication about our intention to have a debate in Government time, nor has there been any leak so far.

There are two questions. First, despite the Opposition's view, should we still initiate a debate next Tuesday? In our judgement we should. We have already agreed that a debate would be better from the Government's point of view than a Statement from you on your return from the Gulf. The worst thing from our point of view would be a Statement followed, say, a week later by a debate forced by Opposition pressure. They would have had a week to put more intellectual rigour behind the position Gerald Kaufman set out in Monday's Guardian on giving sanctions more time to work. We, on the other hand, would have already deployed our case the previous week and might have little new to add. Better to get the Opposition signed up as far as possible behind us now. It will be harder for them then to disentangle themselves.

Second, what form of motion should the Government table to ensure the most positive all-Party backing for the Government's policy?

We have a few minutes to discuss this in OPD(G) before Cabinet on Thursday.

There are three possibilities:

- first, a 'take note' motion. That is amendable, so the Labour Campaign Group (or indeed their front bench) could table an undesirable amendment. We see little attraction in that course;
- second, a debate on a substantive motion - for example: 'that this House reaffirm its support for the UN Resolutions and the actions being taken by the Government to ensure their speedy implementation by Iraq'. Again, the motion would be amendable. The Labour front bench could be expected to table an amendment calling for more time for sanctions to work. The Liberals would very probably support the Government. It would provide a clear indication of the strength of opinion in the House for immediate military action should that prove necessary. And it would allow the weaknesses of the Kaufman arguments to be heavily exposed and put Kinnock on the defensive. Against that, the Press are already doing that job very effectively for us and it risks uniting the Labour Party behind a position which is distinctive from the Government's and which would have superficial appeal to some elements in the country;
- third, a debate on the adjournment. That motion is not amendable. The Foreign Secretary favours this course, which we followed in December. At that stage it was the Opposition front bench's favoured course because it allowed them to paper over the cracks in Labour's position. The Campaign Group would still vote against. But we doubt that the number of votes against would rise significantly above the 42 last time. The larger body of Labour MPs, unhappy with their front bench line, would simply abstain. It leaves their front bench with the flexibility to signal the Kaufman line without overtly breaking the all-Party approach to the Gulf at this stage. By the same token, they would almost certainly have to vote with the Government at the end of the debate or imply a repudiation of the all-Party consensus across the board. That would damage them. If

they vote with the Government this time, it makes it more difficult for them to continue to develop a distinctive Labour Party approach at least in the short term. A secondary consideration is that an adjournment motion is more flexible in accommodating any diplomatic developments between now and Tuesday.

The merits of a substantive motion are at least worth considering. But we have come to the view that an adjournment debate is the best course. If, contrary to expectations, the Shadow Cabinet were to seek a substantive motion for debate, we would offer to do so only in words we could accept and on which they undertook through the usual channels not to table a front bench amendment.

As to whipping, we propose a three line whip on the same basis as last time.

We would also suggest, if you agree this approach, that immediately after Cabinet on Thursday you should inform Mr Kinnock of the Government's intentions at the same time that we inform the Opposition through the usual channels and Douglas Hurd and Tom King contact their opposite numbers. That would be in keeping with the courtesies which have worked well so far.

The Press Office would then be instructed to put out the decision through their own channels.

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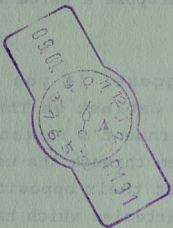
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They have used the Government this time in order to make it more difficult for them to develop a distinctive Labour Party approach at least in the short term. A secondary consideration is that an adjustment action is now possible in reworking any financial developments between now and Tuesday.

The nature of a representative action is at least very important, but we have gone to the limit of adjustment in the past. It is contrary to expectations, the Labour Party were to seek a representative action for balance in their order to do so. In order we could agree and on which they would work through the usual channels not to take a final decision.

As to the other, we propose a new line on the same basis as last time.

We would also suggest that you have this approach, that immediately after the meeting you should inform the Director of the Government of the new line that we inform the Director of the new line and Douglas Hurd and the Director of the new line. That would be in keeping with the course which have worked well so far.



The Press Office would then be instructed to put out the decision through their own channels.

L.A.R.

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