

Mr Cornick PA  
13/10/89

402/87(c)

From; JONATHAN MARGETTS  
Parliamentary Clerk  
29 September 1989

cc Mr

Mr

Mr I

Mr I

Mr FG McConnell

Mr Kirk

Mr Bell

Mr J McConnell

Mr Shannon

Mr Maccabe ✓

Mr S Hughes (Cent Sec)

MR BURNS

#### BRIEFING FOR PM'S QUESTIONS

1) Although the attached copy letter (Annexe A) was addressed to all Parliamentary Clerks, I thought that it would prove to be a useful reminder to all those who are likely to be asked to prepare material for PM's (Oral) Questions.

2) What the letter does not say is that Departments should not wait for requests for briefing from No 10. NIO Divisions and NI Departments might wish to put forward briefing on subjects, the importance of which No 10 might be unaware. This, in moderation, would be welcomed by No 10 - indeed you will remember that we scored points last term when we spontaneously briefed on that business that Ken Maginnis raised about the Deputy Chairman of PANI and the Chief Constable.

3) Meanwhile Parliamentary Section will continue to supply No 10 with regularly up dated "Bull Points"; the latest copy of which is at Annexe B. We will also be keeping an eye on the names of early (and thus likely to be called) questioners to identify those who could be expected to raise an NI supplementary and we will alert appropriate officials to that fact.

*Jonathan Margetts*  
JONATHAN MARGETTS  
Parliamentary Clerk  
29 September 1989

*cc* *Mr McMullan*  
*Mr McVeigh*  
*Mr Quinn*

*CM 9/10*

*3-OCT 1989*

*164*



27 September 1989

## 10 DOWNING STREET

Dear Parliamentary Clerk

Briefing for Prime Minister's Questions

As there have been a considerable number of staff changes in departmental Parliamentary Branches, I thought it would be helpful to issue a reminder of how briefing for Prime Minister's Questions should be set out and how crucial the timetable is for receiving it.

a. Briefing should have a clear title, in capitals at the top of the first page.

b. The first page should comprise a "Line to Take" which should be typed in capitals and bold type 1.5 or 2 line spacing and should normally consist of a statement in plain and unequivocal language stating the Government's policy or attitude towards the issue concerned. Ideally it should take the form of three or four short "bullish" sentences suitable for oral delivery. This cannot be over-emphasised - it has to be something that can be read out as it is on the floor of the House.

c. The Prime Minister likes to make her responses as substantive as possible. Referrals of an earlier answer to a questioner are not appropriate, and statements such as "this article is nonsense" should be avoided. By contrast the Prime Minister has found it helpful in the past to have briefing which contains useful statistical comparisons between what the Government are currently doing and what was done 5 or 10 years ago; or how the UK fares in the league table of developed countries. Such material is helpful to sustain the argument or to make positive points which have not hitherto emerged in the debate. Though please remember if the statistical point is part of the line to take it has to be in the form in which it can be read out.

d. On a following separate page there should be a Background Note, detailing all the information the Prime Minister will need to consider when answering questions on the topic. Lines to take should under no circumstances be classified; this is sometimes unavoidable when compiling background notes, although it would be preferred if they were not classified. (If background notes are classified, the classification should be clearly marked). Briefing requested will sometimes have been occasioned by a published report (eg of a Select Committee). In such cases whilst a precis of the key points of the report in a background note is very helpful, it is essential that we receive, no later than 12.30pm on a Tuesday or Thursday the Source document itself. The same holds true where a brief refers to a published document.

e. The Prime Minister's preparation time is restricted, especially considering the amount of briefing requested, therefore when No 10 specify that briefing should take a particular form and is received by a stated time, it is vital that these requirements are adhered to. (We do not make the deadlines up to make departments sweat it out!)

NB. If a Parliamentary Section receive briefing before the required time, please do not hesitate to send it through to us, as departments that 'store' up more than two pieces of briefing clog up our fax machine for a considerable length of time.

f. Revises

These can cause us immense problems but are inevitable on some occasions. It would be helpful if departments could adopt the following procedures:

BEFORE 1300 ON TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS

- i) If the revision comprises the alteration of one or two words it should be telephoned.
- ii) Lengthy revisions must be retyped, clearly stating at the top that it is a revise and sent to arrive before 1300 on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

AFTER 1300 ON TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS

- iii) Only revisions which materially affect the Line to Take should be passed to No 10. Revisions of syntax are not acceptable.
- iv) Material revisions should be clearly marked on retyped briefing with a sideline, so that the Prime Minister can see where the changes have occurred.

Revisions of material sent for 1600 on Mondays and Wednesdays should be sent as soon as possible the following morning.

Thank you all for your co-operation.



Roy Stone  
Parliamentary Clerk

All Parliamentary Clerks

NORTHERN IRELAND BULL POINTS

20 SEPTEMBER 1989

**General**

Government remains committed to Anglo-Irish Agreement, dialogue between Northern Ireland's constitutional politicians is essential if local elected representatives are to assume greater responsibility for practical business of running Northern Ireland. Government to consider any constructive proposals which have a chance of working.

Determined to ensure fair society, with full equality of opportunity in employment. New legislation strengthening law against discrimination received Royal Assent on 27 July.

**Industry, Trade, Energy and Employment**

In 1988/89 Industrial Development Board and Local Enterprise Development Unit promoted almost 11,000 new jobs.

Unemployment at 15.5% (Seasonally adjusted August 1989) has been on a downward trend for the past 3 years. Seasonally adjusted unemployment now stands at lowest level for over six years since March 1983.

At the end of July 1989 there were an estimated 31,500 benefitting from special employment and training measures.

**Privatisation**

Heads of Agreement have been signed, and further progress made towards the sale of Harland and Wolff to a management led team with backing from Fred Olsen companies, and the sale of Shorts to Bombardier Inc.

**Housing**

Over 62% of householders own their own homes. Over 40,000 houses have been sold by the Housing Executive.

Unfitness levels in the housing stock have fallen from 14% in 1979 to slightly over 8% in 1987.

The Housing Executive's urgent waiting list has been reduced by almost one-half since 1981.

### **Education**

Spending on Education has increased by £130m (17%) in real terms since 1979.

### **Health**

Health and Personal Social Services expenditure increased £168m (23.8%) in real terms between 1979/80 and 1988/89.

### **Agriculture**

Farming income is forecast to have risen by 6% from £113.8m in 1987 to £120.5m in 1988.

### **Belfast**

£55m recently allocated under Making Belfast Work for the 3 year period 1989/90 to 1991/92.

Current and programmed private sector investment in city centre now totals £450m.

### **Law and Order**

No acceptable level of terrorist violence. Government not complacent. Number of measures introduced recently to increase effectiveness in combatting terrorism .

A number of significant finds of weapons and explosives so far this year.

So far this year, 195 people have been charged and 258 convicted with serious terrorist offences.

Cross border security co-operation good. Working for further improvements. Both Governments determined to strengthen co-operation where possible. Terrorism will not be allowed to win.

The strength of the RUC has increased by 27% since 1979. As at 31 July 1989, the RUC consisted of 8261 full-time officers, 2991 full-time reserves, and 1601 part-time reserves.

The cost of funding the RUC during the 1989/90 financial year was £415m.