

CONFIDENTIAL

PARLIAMENTARY
AFFAIRS

1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons from 14 June following the Whitsun Recess and in the House of Lords from 6 June. It was noted that Monday 13 June had been added to the Commons Recess because in some parts of the United Kingdom votes in the elections to the European Parliament would still be in the process of being counted on that day.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

HOME AFFAIRS

Necrotising
Fasciitis

2. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH said that there had been concern in the media about an infection known as necrotising fasciitis which in severe cases could lead to extensive tissue destruction involving amputation and sometimes death. The disease, whose existence had been known for some time, was very rare. The Government's Chief Medical Officer had issued a statement on the previous day to allay public concern pointing out that there was no evidence of any increase in the normal incidence of this disease. All appropriate action was being taken and the situation was being closely monitored. Further statements would be issued if necessary.

Northern
Ireland

Previous
Reference:
CM(94) 18.2

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND said that the Government's response to the list of questions from Sinn Fein about last December's joint declaration had been well received on virtually every side. It had been warmly welcomed by the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party, by the Irish Government and in the United States. The only criticism had come from the Reverend Ian Paisley, Leader of the Democratic Unionist Party. Sinn Fein had been left more politically isolated; their stated intention to settle their response after the elections to the European Parliament showed that they were uncertain how to proceed. It was now important that the British and Irish Governments should now prepare the basis for a resumption of the constitutional talks process. In order to ensure the constructive participation of Unionists the Irish Government needed to do more

CONFIDENTIAL

forthcoming about removing the territorial claims to Northern Ireland currently contained in the Irish constitution. He had put this emphatically to the Irish Foreign Minister, Mr Dick Spring, at a meeting on 23 May and the Prime Minister would be taking the matter up when he met the Taoiseach on 27 May.

The Cabinet -

1. Took note

Competitiveness
White Paper

Previous
Reference:
CM(94) 18.2

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE said that the launch of the Competitiveness White Paper on 24 May had received very wide coverage. There had been a good response from industry and commerce. Conservative Members of Parliament had also reacted positively. There had been predictable complaints from some sections of the media that the White Paper did not contain substantial new expenditure proposals. He would be making it clear to journalists from Sunday newspapers that these criticisms were misconceived. He would also draw attention to the much less substantial documents on competitiveness produced by other countries, as well as by the Opposition. It was noteworthy that the latter excluded any reference to the social provisions of the Treaty of Maastricht. He would be following up the White Paper with detailed discussions with industry and business.

In discussion it was noted that the media reaction showed that journalists tended to judge policies by the amount of public expenditure involved rather than by the outputs and benefits generated. Continued efforts would need to be made to shift the focus of debate, as well as to explain the detailed proposals in the White Paper, which were not yet well understood.