

21/12/09

From:
To:
Date: Thu, December 17, 2009 10:39:20 AM
Subject: Fw: Blair, Iraq, the Labour Party & the Chilcot Inquiry

Sir John Chilcot Esq
Iraq Inquiry
35 Great Smith St
LONDON SW1P 3BQ

Dear Sir John,

TONY BLAIR, IRAQ AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

In the run up to war in Iraq, there were three mechanisms in Government to hold the Prime Minister to account; the Cabinet, the Parliamentary Labour Party and the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party. To my knowledge, only the minutes of three key NEC meetings at which the Prime Minister was present, intervened and spoke, are available to the public. These meetings were also attended by amongst others, Government Ministers, Charles Clarke, Jack Straw, John Reid & Hilary Armstrong.

In recent weeks your Committee has interviewed many in Whitehall who were involved in key decisions and meetings in the run up to the war in Iraq. To my knowledge you have not interviewed any of those who were active from the beginning in opposing the drift to war, on both grounds of legality and a belief that there were no WMD.

I led the campaign on the Labour Party National Executive Committee to press the Prime Minister and Government to take the appropriate international legal advice, and throughout this period, I was working with the President of the UN General Assembly, Jan Kavan. In early 2003, while reporting for the BBC inside Iraq, I interviewed the then Iraqi Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, who asked me to convey a message to Tony Blair. The message, which I delivered to Tony Blair at the January 28th 2003 NEC meeting from Aziz was that a) Iraq had no WMD, and b) Tony Blair could send his own weapons experts to Iraq.

I now have the minutes and the verbatim record of what was said by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair and others at three key Labour NEC meetings in Sept 2002, Jan 2003 and March 2003. These can be corroborated by those present and were drawn up by NEC member Ann Black. I also have copies of the resolutions I submitted. these are attached to this letter.

*I submitted resolutions at each of these three meetings; each explicitly saying that Britain should only act in accordance with international law, in an attempt to force the Labour Party's hand and exert pressure on Tony Blair.

The NEC matters because a) it remains the sovereign policy making body of the Labour Party and the Leader is answerable to it, b) and because recorded votes took place.

From the minutes alone, we now know that Tony Blair was committed to unilateral action against Iraq if necessary with the United States and by-passing the UN Security Council if necessary by at least 30 Sept 2003.

In summation:

Labour Party Conference: NEC meeting 29th Sept 2002

From the Minutes:

'Tony Blair argued passionately for keeping the option of unilateral military action by the US and Britain in case other countries blocked the move in the UN Security Council'

My resolution 'Unless military action is explicitly endorsed by the UN, the UK will not take military action against Iraq' was voted down. The Resolution that Blair successfully proposed to replace it 'stopped short of requiring an explicit mandate for military action'.

Blair said that the 'NEC statements would be studied around the World and Saddam would exploit any signs of division'

He said 'Regime change is not US policy. It is ridiculous, absolutely and totally absurd to claim that oil is involved'.

*The statement agreed by the NEC at Tony Blair's direction 'stopped short of requesting an explicit UN mandate for military action'. Labour Party Chairman, Charles Clarke pleaded with some of us not to pursue the issue on the conference floor.

NEC Meeting 28th Jan 2003

My second resolution once again demanding that Britain proceed only in accordance with international law was voted down and dismissed as 'a curates egg'.

Tony Blair announced that he was 'Optimistic for a second UN Resolution. Backing down would make it more difficult to deal with others, such as North Korea'.

Dennis Skinner MP told Blair 'This will be the biggest mistake you'll ever make'

Defence Secretary, John Reid told the NEC that a serving soldier had told him that 'anyone who disagrees with Blair on Iraq should be kicked out of the Labour Party'.

NEC Meeting 25th March

My 3rd emergency resolution, drawn up with Jan Kavan, President of the UN General Assembly, who had also been in close contact with Robin Cook the Resolution demanded that advice be sort from UN

Secretary General, Kofi Annan as to the legality of the war.

On this occasion we were prevented from having a vote on the resolution on procedural grounds and I walked out of the meeting in protest.

*Tony Blair said 'The Government's own Attorney General has ruled that this war was lawful'

*On 26th March, a day after the meeting, (according to a leaked memorandum published in the New Statesman) the Attorney General told the War Cabinet in Downing Street would be unlawful without specific authorisation from the UN.

He said: 'My view is that a further UN Security Council resolution is needed to authorise imposing reform and restructuring of Iraq and its government'.

'It will become difficult to justify the legality of the continued occupation of Iraq'.

I hope that you will accept this evidence in good faith, and I am prepared if necessary to be questioned by your Committee.

Yours sincerely,