

Report to the Australian Political Exchange Council

United Kingdom Study Tour

27 June to 28 July 2005

Jim Chalmers

Summary

Following this summary is a chronological list of the formal meetings, briefings and other events* I participated in while on the APEC study tour, and a general outline of the topics covered in each of these meetings.

During the study tour I met with senior advisers to Prime Minister Blair; Members of the House of Commons; New Labour officials; journalists; private sector consultants; Australian expatriate former advisers; a Queensland trade representative; a senior academic from the London School of Economics; and the Chaplin of a major London food and shelter service for the homeless.

The major issues and themes of my discussions were as follows.

London Bombings and Other Events

The terrorist incidents of 7 and 21 July dominated discussions with officials and journalists. Other significant events also took place that month, including the G8 summit in Scotland and Live 8 concert in Hyde Park, the successful British bid to host the 2012 Olympics, the Tory leadership campaign, and the debate over the possible introduction of ID cards. These were the contemporary issues and events most discussed during my trip.

The 2005 British Election Campaign

The campaign to re-elect Labor and Prime Minister Blair only months before my visit also dominated conversations with Party staff and advisers. Campaign techniques and strategies were discussed, as was the Conservative Party's performance and the

* Note that, due to the London bombings of 7 July and the attempted bombings of 21 July, some meetings were cancelled and could not be rescheduled in the remaining time.

role of the Australian consultant, Lynton Crosby. Comparisons with Australia and lessons for the ALP were also discussed at length.

The Economy and the Economic Debate

Central to the success of the British Labour Party has been their dominance of the economic debate, and the strength of the British economy. The trip provided the opportunity to look closely at the economic debate in Britain, and at the economic pitches of the major parties at a time of prosperity. Useful lessons for Australia and the ALP were gleaned.

The New Labour 'Project'

The New Labour project is entering an interesting phase after more than a decade of Blair's leadership. A debate continues between the traditionalists in the Party, spurred on by the PM's decision to go to war in Iraq, and the modernizers. The future is unclear – while the Third Way appears to have lost its gloss there's not been a set of alternative principles to take its place. The traditionalists in the Party look to Gordon Brown as their saviour, but he's unlikely to betray the modernization themes he's pursued as fervently as Blair.

Blair and Brown

Ever-present in the political media is this likely handover of the prime ministership from Blair to his Chancellor Gordon Brown. This overlays all considerations of politics and policy, and is a key discussion point for all Party staff and advisers to the Government. The tension at the very top of the Government seems to do little to harm Labour's electoral prospects, and the eventual handover may even secure an unprecedented fourth term in Government.

The Prime Minister's Office and Structures of Advice

The mechanical aspects of the British political system, including the advisory structures relied on by the PM, were another common theme for discussion.

The British Media

The British media is markedly different from Australia's, largely because of the overtly partisan nature of their print media. This was of interest to me, and I included meetings with journalists on my itinerary to get a better insight into this difference.

Poverty

I was able to observe close up the activities of a major soup kitchen and hostel run by the Catholic Church and based at Westminster.

British – Australian Comparisons

In addition to the specific issues listed above, the trip also provided a useful opportunity to make general comparisons between political systems, media organisations, and political personnel.

I'd like to thank the Australian Political Exchange Council for allowing me to participate in the study tour, and the Secretariat for assisting with logistics.

Chronological List of Meetings

Matthew Taylor

Senior Advisor – Strategy

Office of the Prime Minister

Number Ten Downing Street

Thursday 30 June 2005

Matthew Taylor is a very senior and trusted adviser to Prime Minister Blair, and one of only a handful of those to enjoy daily contact with the PM. Prior to taking up his current job, Matthew was Director of one of Britain's most successful think tanks, the IPPR. He also has senior contacts in the ALP and a comprehensive knowledge of Australian politics.

During our first meeting we discussed a number of issues, including: the 2005 election campaign; media management and communications undertaken by the PM's office; preparations for the upcoming G8 meeting in Scotland; the structure of Number Ten and the Prime Minister's advisory structures; information technology policy; and the ID card debate.

At the conclusion of our meeting I was introduced to key political staff in Number Ten; **Ruth Taylor** and **John McTernan**. A briefing with John followed, as did another meeting with Matthew.

Michael Stephenson

Director

Hawker Britton UK

Caxton Street, London

Friday 1 July 2005

Michael Stephenson runs the London office of the Australian consultancy firm, Hawker Britton. Prior to that he was a political adviser to Prime Minister Blair, and Chief of Staff to Queensland Premier Wayne Goss. As a result he has an intimate knowledge of both political systems, and many political contacts in both countries.

My discussions with Michael covered a wide range of topics, including the future of the British Labour Party; the structure of the ministry; prime ministerial advisory structures; and Australian politics.

Michael also put me in touch with journalists and political operatives in London, and agreed to meet up again at regular intervals throughout my trip.

John McTernan

Political Secretary

Office of the Prime Minister

Number Ten Downing Street

Monday 4 July 2005

Briefing for staff

John McTernan is the senior staffer in Tony Blair's office responsible for oversight of all political functions, including liaison with a large backbench. John's is an important "fixer's" role, and to do it he's backed up by Number Ten's political office.

John conducts a regular briefing for Labour staff members, in Number Ten on Mondays. At the briefing I attended, he spoke at length about, and took questions on, the following issues: the G8 summit; Olympic bid; Presidency of the European Commission; protests against education reform; legal aid issues; NHS and dental health; and an upcoming National Policy forum to be attended by the Prime Minister. He also pointed to assistance for backbench MPs provided by New Labour's campaigning unit in the House of Commons.

Simon Banks

Former ALP shadow ministerial adviser

Red Lion, Westminster

Monday 4 July 2005

Simon Banks is a former adviser to a number of senior Australian shadow ministers who, at that stage, was traveling through Europe. Along with Senator Stephen Conroy and his staff, I met with Simon in London to discuss general political issues in Australia and the UK.

Fraser Kemp MP

Member for Houghton and Washington East

Deputy Director of Labour's 2005 Election Campaign

Former Government Whip

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 July 2005

Fraser Kemp is a senior British MP, a former Whip, and the Deputy Director of the successful 2005 New Labour campaign. He has long standing and close ties with many Australian political figures, and traveled with Prime Minister Keating for part of the 1996 ALP campaign. He remains one of the British Party's most respected strategists.

My discussions with Fraser at the House of Commons concentrated on marginal seat campaign tactics; a detailed debrief on the 2005 British election campaign; entitlements issues in the UK and the public funding of elections; relations at the top of the Government; and other analysis of New Labour and its future in Britain.

Fraser introduced me to **Michael White**, editor of the *Guardian* newspaper, and **Tom Watson**, Chief Whip of the Parliamentary Labour Party. He also arranged the following meeting with **Albert Kello**.

Albert Kello

Business Development Manager

Queensland Trade and Investment Office - Europe

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 July 2005

Albert Kello is a former Queensland Premier's Department bureaucrat and now the Business Development Manager at the European branch of the Queensland Trade and Investment Office.

I discussed with Albert the relations between London business and the Queensland Government; trade policy under Premier Beattie; and the structures of the state's overseas representation.

Annabel Crabb

London Correspondent

The Age

West End

Tuesday 5 July 2005

Annabel Crabb is an Australian Fairfax journalist currently on assignment in the UK, and the author of a book on Labor in Opposition which will be released in September 2005.

I discussed with Annabel her book, her work in London, and general comparisons between the two political systems and media cultures.

Also present at the meeting were **Catherine Wolfhuizen**, formerly of the Australian Consumers' Association, and former Labor advisers **Ryan Heath** and **Jo Fox**.

Chris Fry

Australian Consultant

Former shadow ministerial adviser

The Embankment

Wednesday 6 July 2005

Chris Fry currently represents Telstra and AMP as a consultant, and previously advised Labor leaders and shadow ministers. I had a general discussion with him about his impressions of politics in the UK.

UK ALP Society Meeting

Australian ALP members in London

Addressed by Senator Stephen Conroy

Wednesday 6 July 2005

The UK ALP Society is a vibrant organization that meets regularly to discuss Australian and UK politics, and to listen to guest speakers. On this occasion Senator Stephen Conroy addressed the assembled Australian Party members.

Following Stephen's speech, there was a question and answer session and then an opportunity to mix informally with the members.

Rosy Bennett

Political Columnist

The Times

Portcullis House

Tuesday 12 July 2005

Rosy Bennett is a senior and highly regarded political correspondent for the Times newspaper, a successful conservative broadsheet.

I discussed a number of topics with her, including the Tory leadership ballot; Australian party politics; the operations and culture of the press gallery in the Commons; New Labour; and the London bombings.

Rosy was also good enough to take me on a tour of the parliamentary Press Gallery and to also organise for me a subsequent meeting with **Ed Miliband MP** (see below).

Nick Rowley

Senior Policy Advisor

Office of the Prime Minister

Number Ten Downing Street

Wednesday 13 July 2005

Nick Rowley currently advises Prime Minister Blair on climate change and associated issues, after spending many years as an adviser to former NSW Premier Bob Carr.

I discussed with Nick the G8 summit, climate change, the London bombings, and the structure of the PM's office compared with what he was used to in Premier Carr's office. He was also able to give me a brief tour of Number Ten.

Luke Bruce

**Assistant General Secretary
Policy and Political Development
British Labour Party**

**New Labour headquarters, Westminster
Wednesday 13 July 2005**

Luke Bruce is New Labour's Assistant General Secretary, responsible for policy coordination and the political development unit at Party headquarters.

I discussed with Luke his recent trip to the United States to observe the Democratic Party, the various policy processes of British Labour including the Policy Forum and committee structures, preparation for annual conference in Brighton, and sought his impressions on the recent campaign.

Luke also organised for me an invitation to a **Labour Staff Network** function and a meeting with **Jo Murray** (see below).

Tania Branigan

**Political Correspondent
The Guardian**

**Portcullis House, Westminster
Tuesday 19 July 2005**

Tania Branigan writes for the left-wing paper *The Guardian*, and has completed a short work exchange with the *Australian* newspaper in Sydney. Her round includes race issues and policies to combat anti-social behaviour.

In the course of our meeting we discussed at some length the operations and orientations of her paper, race issues, the London bombings, and the 'respect' agenda promoted by the Blair Government.

Luke Foley

Assistant General Secretary

Australian Labor Party, NSW Branch

Westminster

Tuesday 19 July 2005

I met with Luke Foley, who was also on an APEC-sponsored trip, to discuss a program for the trip and to divide up responsibility for organising further meetings.

Professor George Jones

Emeritus Professor of Government

London School of Economics

Senior Common Room, LSE

Tuesday 19 July 2005

Professor George Jones is a very distinguished semi-retired academic whose area of expertise is Prime Minister's and executive government. His work informs much of the current literature on prime ministerial power and leaders' relations with cabinet and the bureaucracy.

I discussed with Professor Jones the contrasting styles of Prime Minister Blair and Chancellor Brown, recent academic literature on prime ministers, and structures of advice, and sought his views on what a Brown Prime Ministership would look like.

Labour Staff Network

End of Term Function

St Stephen's, Westminster

Wednesday 20 July 2005

At this function I met with a number of Labour Party staffers, including **Will McDonald** from the office of Rosie Winterton MP, Minister of State (Health), and **Oliver Davey**, the Network's secretary. I was accompanied by **Luke Foley** and **Anthony Albanese**, an Australian shadow minister.

Ed Miliband MP

Member for Doncaster North

Former Chief Economic Adviser, Treasury

Former Special Adviser to Chancellor Gordon Brown

Portcullis House

Thursday 21 July 2005

Ed Miliband is one of the Blair Government's rising stars. A former adviser to Gordon Brown and chair of the Council of Economic Advisors, he is now the MP for Doncaster North and one of the most-talked about backbenchers.

In my discussions with Ed we talked about the economic debate in Britain, how New Labour went about restoring its economic credibility in Opposition, emerging issues in the world economy, and various other issues. He also agreed to supply me with a collection of key speeches and position papers from the past decade.

Jo Murray

Acting Director of Media Unit

New Labour

New Labour headquarters, Westminster

Thursday 21 July 2005

Jo Murray is a New Labour staffer working in the media unit at headquarters, and an expert on gender-specific communications and new technologies. When I met with Jo, she was acting as the Director of the unit, and was seeking formal promotion to that role.

I discussed with her many campaign-related issues, including gender and ethnic targeting, internet media, gender-specific media, the upcoming annual conference, and the London bombings.

Father John Concannon

Pastor

'The Passage'

'The Passage' Centre (soup kitchen and hostel), Westminster

Sunday 24 July 2005

Father John Concannon is the resident Pastor at a large hostel and drop-in centre for the homeless in London. He offers counseling and other services, and celebrates Catholic mass daily in the centre's small chapel.

Father John gave me a tour of The Passage, introduced me to some of the 40 staff, and also discussed with me homelessness in Britain and Australia (where he has also worked).

Michael Stephenson

[2nd meeting]

Director

Hawker Britton UK

Jolly St Ermin's Hotel, Westminster

Monday 25 July 2005

I met again with Michael Stephenson for a de-brief on the trip, and to thank him for his assistance with meetings. I was accompanied by Luke Foley.

Matthew Taylor

[2nd meeting]

Senior Advisor Strategy

Office of the Prime Minister

Number Ten Downing Street

Monday 25 July 2005

I met again with Michael Stephenson for a de-brief on the trip, and to thank him for his assistance with meetings. I was accompanied by Luke Foley and was fortunate to run into and exchange pleasantries with the Prime Minister, **Tony Blair**.

Hom Paribag

Editor

***Society Today* magazine**

Red Lion, Westminster

Monday 25 July 2005

Luke Foley and I met with Hom Paribag, who edits a new glossy magazine catering to multiculturalism and diversity in Britain.

In our discussions with Hom, we were able to garner an impression of the community media industry, and the challenges of starting a new media outlet.

John Watts

Special Adviser – Events and Visits

Office of the Prime Minister

Number Ten Downing Street

Tuesday 26 July 2005

John Watts is a senior adviser in Number Ten, responsible for advancing the Prime Minister's trips and overseeing major events such as Labour's annual conference. He has significant links with the ALP in Australia, having assisted with the 2001 election campaign and preparations for the 2004 national conference in Sydney.

In time I spent with John and Luke Foley, he was able to give us a detailed run down on the recent G8 summit in Scotland and, in the process, describe some of the world's most powerful figures, including President Bush.