

Cable

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LINE3: R 101612Z MAY 96
LINE4: FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
OSRI: RUEHLO
DTG: 101612Z MAY 96
ORIG: AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO: RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2202
INFO: RUEHXP/ALL NATO POST COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
SUBJ: BRITISH MAINTAIN BAN ON GAYS IN THE MILITARY

TEXT:
UNCLAS LONDON 005724

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: MARR, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: BRITISH MAINTAIN BAN ON GAYS IN THE MILITARY

1. THE BRITISH HOUSE OF COMMONS VOTED MAY 9 TO UPHOLD THE EXISTING BAN ON GAYS IN THE MILITARY. AN AMENDMENT TO THE ARMED FORCES BILL TO LIFT THE BAN WAS SPONSORED BY CONSERVATIVE MPS EDWINA CURRIE AND MICHAEL BROWN, LABOUR MP GERALD KAUFMAN AND LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MENZIES CAMPBELL. THE AMENDMENT WAS DEFEATED BY A VOTE OF 188 TO 120.
2. DAVID CLARK, LABOUR'S SHADOW DEFENSE SECRETARY, COMMITTED THE PARTY A YEAR AGO TO WORK TO LEGALIZE GAYS IN THE ARMED FORCES. BUT THE PARTY WAS ALLOWED A FREE VOTE ON THE ISSUE AND EIGHT LABOUR MPS VOTED TO KEEP THE BAN (EIGHT TORY MPS VOTED TO LIFT IT).
3. TONY BLAIR, LABOUR PARTY LEADER, DID NOT VOTE (AN ABSTENTION WHICH WILL INDOUBTEDLY ENGENDER SOME INTERNAL LABOUR CRITICISM). IN A RADIO 4 INTERVIEW ON MAY 10, BLAIR SAID HE SUPPORTED THE RIGHT OF GAYS TO SERVE IN THE MILITARY AND WOULD WORK TO FIND A WAY FOR THEM TO DO SO IF LABOUR WINS THE NEXT ELECTION. A CLOSE AIDE TOLD US BLAIR'S ABSTENTION AND HIS DECISION TO ALLOW A FREE VOTE STEMMED FROM THE CRITICISM RECEIVED BY PRESIDENT CLINTON WHEN HE ATTEMPTED TO LIFT A SIMILIAR BAN IN THE U.S. MILITARY. THE AIDE ADDED THAT NOTWITHSTANDING BLAIR'S SUBSEQUENT PUBLIC REMARKS SUPPORTING GAYS IN THE MILITARY, THE LABOUR LEADER HAS NOT DEFINITELY MADE UP HIS MIND ON THE ISSUE.

4. MICHAEL BROWN, A SPONSOR OF THE AMENDMENT AND THE ONLY OPENLY GAY TORY MP, SAID THAT WHICHEVER PARTY WAS IN POWER IN TWO OR THREE YEARS' TIME WOULD BE FORCED TO LIFT THE BAN BY THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS. WE HAVE HEARD FROM BRITISH MILITARY OFFICERS THAT THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THE BAN WILL REMAIN IN PLACE FOR MORE THAN A FEW YEARS.

5. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN ATTEMPT TO LIFT THE BAN BY AMENDMENT TO AN ARMED FORCES BILL. THE BILL ONLY COMES UP FOR CONSIDERATION EVERY FIVE YEARS. THE PRECEDENT FOR ALLOWING A FREE VOTE IN PARLIAMENT ON A GAY ISSUE WAS SET WHEN THE AGE OF CONSENT FOR HOMOSEXUAL ACTS WAS LOWERED FROM 21 TO 18 LAST YEAR. CROWE

BT

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SECT: SECTION: 01 OF 01

SSN: 5724

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DIST:

SIT: NSC