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Chris Patten

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Messrs Murray, Feahon,
Mansergh & Dalton:
Ambassadors London &
Washington: Joint Secretary:
Counsellors A-I

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To: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Mini 27/4/98

Subj: Conversation with Peter Bell

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MR. COLE
MR. HICKEY
MR. BOUGHTON
~~MR. ...~~
MR. CALLAGHAN
MR. BLAFKEY

A number of points of interest arose in a conversation with Peter Bell this afternoon:

Chairmanship of the Policing Commission

- The British Government have made informal approaches to Chris Patten to take on the chairmanship of the new Policing Commission and Patten has agreed in principle;
- It is likely that, as a result of a media leak, news of this will appear in tomorrow's Daily Telegraph;
- The British are inquiring informally about any names which we would like to propose for the Commission and hope that we may be able to supply these fairly soon.

some notes

Prime Minister's intervention with Parades Commission

- Bell confirmed that a principal reason for the Prime Minister's intervention at the eleventh hour with the Commission was that the Secretary of State decided several weeks ago that the Commission's independence should be respected and she was unhappy with the idea of pressure being applied by the British Government to achieve a (further) postponement of the "preliminary view";
- However, when "signs of discord" from the Unionist community appeared early last week (Bell would not say how but did not challenge the suggestion that Trimble had

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signalled unhappiness via a Labour backbencher), the Prime Minister and his officials decided that an intervention was necessary in the overall interest of a successful outcome to the referendum:

In discussions with NIO officials last week, Alastair Graham made clear that it would take a public request from either the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for the Commission not to go ahead with its planned publication last Thursday;

The Secretary of State spent much of last Wednesday in intensive consultation with No 10 on whether she or the Prime Minister should make this request, the choice falling eventually on the latter;

The NIO recognise that the resignations of Barr and Cheevers, which the Prime Minister's intervention had been intended to avert, leave the Commission in a parlous state. Efforts are being made as a matter of great urgency to find replacements. I gather that a number of Methodist Ministers and community workers are being considered and that the Secretary of State instructed her officials, not entirely in jest, to "give me two names within the next two days".

Meeting with the Orange Order

The Orange Order were initially offered a meeting with the Secretary of State but turned this down, insisting on seeing the Prime Minister instead;

One of the issues which they intend to bring up at the meeting later this week (I gather Thursday) is the role envisaged for the Irish Government under the Good Friday Agreement. They will be claiming that, although Maryfield is to close down by the end of this year, it is to be replaced by something very similar. (You may have noticed a complaint made by Willie Ross at a Tandragee rally on Saturday night that paras 2 and 8 of the section dealing with the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference show that Maryfield is to be "recreated");

According to Bell, the response which the Prime Minister is likely to give is that the future IGC will not have the exclusive focus on Northern Ireland which characterises the present Agreement, that in addition the Irish Government no longer has a locus

standi in relation to devolved matters and that the possibility of responsibility for security matters being devolved to the Assembly in due course is not excluded.

Leaked security document

There is near-fatalism in the NIO about the apparently endless succession of leaks to the DUP. An internal inquiry which has been continuously in progress since the first leak last summer has failed to produce any leads, to the intense irritation of the Secretary of State;

This particular document, however, does not carry a particularly high security classification. It bears the imprint "Restricted". Bell tells me that anything which is genuinely sensitive would be classified "Secret". The details of the document as indicated by the DUP to the media, he observed, are not in themselves sensational.

It could be assumed, for example, that plans might be made to begin a gradual withdrawal of Army units in the months following a successful referendum and, in particular, once the marching season is out of the way. Much of this has featured in earlier speculative articles about normalisation measures to underpin a comprehensive agreement;

He was predictably reticent on the subject of the alleged bugging of Gerry Kelly's home (but did not rush to discount this claim).