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Mr Boys Smith

- cc:-PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - M
- PS/Mr Scott (L&B) - M
- PS/Mr Patten (L&B) - M
- PS/PUS (L&B) - M
- PS/Sir Ewart Bell - M
- Mr Brennan
- Mr Bourn - M
- Mr Angel
- Mr Merifield - M
- Mr Gilliland - M
- Mr Reeve - M
- Mr Wood
- Mr Bickham

① Sir Ewart Bell

② Mr Gove

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 1315
 1-FEB 1984
 MINISTRY ROOM
 STORMONT ANNEX

X received this morning - below page 2/2

RIA

SECOND BOSTON SYMPOSIUM ON NORTHERN IRELAND

x | The Secretary of State has seen your note of 31 January about the possibility of Ministerial attendance at this Symposium.

2. The Secretary of State recognises that there are arguments for and against such attendance, and there are likely to be difficulties either way. On balance, however, he considers that a junior Minister should be present. He would not want the UK Government's political position not to be represented at the Symposium, and given the likely membership, he attaches importance to this being put over by a Government Minister with responsibility for and some experience of Northern Ireland.

3. The Secretary of State would be grateful if Mr Patten were able to attend the Symposium for the Government. Perhaps you could consider this further with Mr Patten's Office, and consult the Embassy about a suitable programme. The Secretary of State would be glad to be involved in establishing the Government's line at the Symposium nearer the time.

J. M. Lyon

J M LYON
 Private Secretary
 1 February 1984

HEAD OF THE N.I.
 1 FEB 1984
 CIVIL SERVICE

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37/2

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B)

cc: PS/Mr Scott (L&B)
 PS/Mr Andrew (L&B)
 ✓ PS/Sir Ewart Bell
 Mr Brennan
 Mr Bourn
 Mr Angel
 Mr Merifield
 Mr Gilliland
 Mr Reeve
 Mr Wood
 Mr Bickham

SECOND BOSTON SYMPOSIUM ON NORTHERN IRELAND

1. This Symposium, like its predecessor in 1982, is being organised by Professors Paddy O'Malley and Catherine Shannon. It will take place on 14-15 March, soon after the publication of the Irish Forum Report. Dr FitzGerald may be attending and the Irish will undoubtedly use it as an opportunity to press their views. Given the imminence of elections, the American politicians attending will be more than usually susceptible to lobbying. This submission considers whether a Northern Ireland Office Minister should attend.

2. The Symposium will be ambitious, with a wide spread of responsible opinion. NORAIID and Sinn Fein are excluded, though we believe that Massachusetts State Representative Marie Howe (whom the Secretary of State will remember from his last visit to Boston) will probably be present. The Symposium has not defined itself in terms of the Forum, which makes it easier for Mr McCusker (who with Mr Napier and Mr Hume has been invited) and for representatives of HMG to attend. I attach a draft programme for the Symposium indicating who is being invited.

The Case for Ministerial attendance

3. It can be argued that it would be wrong to let an opportunity to explain the Government's policies to a relatively fair minded and undoubtedly influential audience go by default. The pressures on and sensitivities of Irish-American politicians in an election year make this more important than usual; and the intense lobbying which the

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Irish government is certain to engage in following the publication of the Forum Report make it the more dangerous to leave the field free for Dublin. The absence of any Government representative at the Symposium might not be well understood by the organisers or the American participants, many of whom are those whom we seek to cultivate and on whose relative open-mindedness we strongly depend. The presence of Irish government representatives - and perhaps the Taoiseach - could make our absence at a corresponding level all the more obvious. Sir Oliver Wright has suggested that Mr Scott should attend.

The Case Against

4. The period immediately after the publication of the Forum Report is going to be very delicate in terms of Anglo-Irish relations. We would have strong reservations about any meeting on general political topics at a ministerial level with the Irish during this period, and particularly before (as may be the case) the Government has formulated its reaction to the Report. There would be added difficulties if that meeting were to take the form of a public debate, even under "Chatham House" rules.

5. The impact in the United States of our arguments on Northern Ireland is always closely related to how closely they seem to fit in with the arguments put forward by Dublin. Conversely, we are always at our weakest in US eyes when we are not in step with Dublin. We may well have to part company from the main thrust of Dr FitzGerald's arguments when he is in the middle of a tour designed to promote the Forum Report, though we cannot of course yet say what the Report will contain. Any NIO Minister would therefore have to defend HMG's policies against a background in which we were at our most vulnerable. It would be awkward if a Minister were forced into outright opposition to Dublin in front of the participants of the Symposium; and could have implications for Anglo-Irish relations. There would also be difficulties domestically in being seen to have "talks" in the US with Irish Ministers specifically on Northern Ireland, and perhaps particularly in relation to the Forum. The proceedings are not likely to remain confidential.

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6. A visit to the Symposium is not likely to be the best time for a general Ministerial visit to the US, though there will very probably need to be one later in the Spring; but in practice, if he goes a Minister will need to perform other duties, and to see US politicians. There is a case for letting eg Mr McCusker and Mr Napier have a relatively free run with them during this particular week, and not try to compete for attention with them or with an Irish Minister especially if he is the Taoiseach.

Conclusion

7. There are arguments on both sides. I believe that the risks in attending outweigh the risks in not going, and that no Minister should attend. If the Secretary of State agrees with this there are two ways in which it could be ensured that our viewpoint was not overlooked:

(i) Sir Oliver Wright might attend: it would not be advisable for any other member of our diplomatic staff in US to take on a role other than that of observer (as happened at the last Symposium) but Sir Oliver could speak to outline HMG's position without getting drawn too far into debate with Dr FitzGerald (or whomever other Irish Minister may be present).

(ii) a Government back-bencher might also attend - perhaps Mr Mates or Dr Mawhinney. While it would be necessary to stress that whoever went in this capacity was not for the Government spokesman, he could ensure that our general position was heard. This could be complimentary to (i).

8. I understand that the Secretary of State does not plan to meet Professor O'Malley, one of the two Symposium organisers, who is currently visiting Britain and Ireland. He is nonetheless likely to be anxious to know whether a Minister will be attending (the organisers would like a Minister to go) and it is therefore possible that he may try to make contact. We will be guided in our dealings with him by the Secretary of State's response to this note.

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9. I will submit separately on the general question of our US posture following the Forum, and on ministerial visits and other steps we will need to take.

S. W. Boys Smith

S W BOYS SMITH

31 January 1984

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