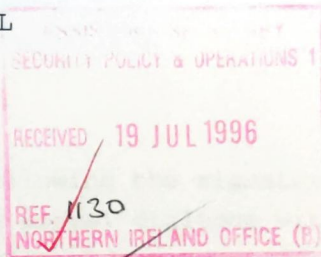


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FROM: P N BELL
JOINT SECRETARY
17 JULY 1996

PK

cc Mr Leach (L&B) - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Stephens - B
Ms Checksfield - B

MRS SEAR - B

FIRST DAY BRIEFS - ANGLO IRISH RELATIONS

The paper attached to your minute to me of today's date displays a serendipity unjustified by the current state of both Anglo-Irish relations and Unionist opinion. It also tendentiously (mis?) represents a key provision of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In short, it would do an incoming Minister, especially one with no knowledge of Northern Ireland, no service - and accordingly requires very careful editing. (The devil is in the detail.) This I do not think can reasonably be done until we are a little clearer as to how, or whether we shall emerge from the present hole we are in.

2. However taking two important points, with the Anglo-Irish Agreement first; Article 1 says nothing about the "Constitutional status" of Northern Ireland (let alone recognise that Northern Ireland is part of the UK) a point the Unionists picked up within half an hour of its publication, and you paraphrase the deeply ambiguous single sentence of Article 1(a) at your peril. I suggest, especially in present circumstances, you also spell out that Article 9(b) provides "the Conference shall have no operational responsibilities; responsibility for police operations shall remain with the heads of the respective police forces...."

2. Second, I suggest you re-write the penultimate paragraph in page 3 of your paper on the following lines:

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"It took the better part of 6 years following the signature of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to restore a normal dialogue with the Unionists and, even today, it remains widely resented and its influence on Northern Irish affairs (eg on operational policing matters) grossly misrepresented. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Anglo-Irish Secretariat have blended over the years and become less prominently controversial, while the institutions of the Agreement generally have provided both Governments with a means of effectively transacting a great deal of business directly and avoiding, most of the time, damaging "megaphone diplomacy". Meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference are less frequent than formerly, though the Irish continue to attach importance to them as an outward and visible sign of their privileged role in respect of Northern Ireland. In practice, however, regular and frequent bilateral meetings between the Secretary of State and the Irish Foreign Minister, the 'Liaison Group' comprising senior officials from both sides, and day to day contacts within the Secretariat - to say nothing of the link between No 11 and the Taoiseach's Office - are, of greater value. In moments of crisis, however, the Irish insist on their right to convene meetings of the Conference as they did in respect of the last Conference, on 18 July, to discuss the implications of the civil disorders accompanying the 1996 Marching Season".

3. I will let you have on Friday morning a copy of your paper with some manuscript suggestions.

[P N BELL]

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