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**Reference Code:** 2021/94/27

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*Handwritten notes:*  
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PST 24/7/93  
PSS  
Mr Murray  
22/7

SECURE FAX 917

IMMEDIATE 93

22 July, 1993

TO: HQ FROM: BELFAST Pages: 1  
FOR: A/Sec O hUiginn FROM: Joint Secretary

Tebbit Remarks (2)

To confirm:

1. Further to my SF 916, I raised Lord Tebbit's remarks with the Security Minister, Sir John Wheeler, who was here for dinner last evening, along the same lines as with Minister Ancram. I focused on the fact that Lord Tebbit had not withdrawn his remarks but indeed had sought to justify them and that the Prime Minister on Tuesday and the Secretary of State and Minister Atkins yesterday had not taken press opportunities to condemn or criticise the remarks in any way. They had simply said that they did not share his views which was weak and very disturbing to us. It was inconceivable that the Irish Government would take such an approach in the reverse circumstances.
2. On this side of the Irish Sea, people would not be aware of the nuances of Lord Tebbit's present role in British politics, they would simply see him as representative of the British Government and Conservative Party and they would associate his remarks with the threats and actions of the Loyalist paramilitaries. I thought the Provisional IRA would seek to capitalise on the Tebbit remarks. I would not be surprised to see them headlined in the next issue of An Phoblacht.
3. The Minister began by saying that Lord Tebbit was out of office, could not be put on a short rein, was not a person who retracted statements, was a media star who thrived on controversy etc. He did say, however, that he personally deplored the remarks. He hoped that the further questions of the media would cause Tebbit to "define his position". In relation to any further action by the Government on which I pressed him again, the Minister would only say "I hear what you're saying".
3. Last evening's Belfast Telegraph reported that John Smith had denounced Tebbit's remarks and that the Prime Minister had called for a transcript.
4. Comment: While the Minister was personally oncoming, we did not sense any great determination to change the Government's line. He unconsciously gave an indication why the Government have not taken on Tebbit, referring to him throughout in the clubby way of Conservative politics as "me noble friend" or "the noble lord". They will not care to publicly disown one of their own, who has been the victim of an IRA attack, on an Irish issue. More disturbingly, they may half-think Tebbit had a point.