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To: Mr. Brendan Ward, Private Secretary to the Taoiseach

From: Dermot Gallagher

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Pages: 1 + 10

Conversation with Peter Mandelson, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

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ɔort from Ambassador London on his discussion with the Secretary of State

is undoubtedly very self-assured and self-confident.
that this could lead him into taking up fixed and firm
ly conscious of all the nuances and subtleties of Northern
Mitchell has been concerned about the Secretary of State
file during the Review; yesterday, the Senator complained
to Bill Jeffrey about the Secretary of State having given an
ıstle Buildings to three journalists (including Eamonn
ing the level of tension in the place.

ate's comments in the report, especially on the Patten
ying.

Business Network
ıis address is attached. I
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being back in Cabinet. He
he issues from his
l in the Cabinet Office,
y Agreement he was in
me Minister's mind on the
between the main parties
He said, without revealing
o Sinn Féin and thought
culty in selling it to his
blems with a successful
hat Trimble would need
ary of State he had

Mansergh

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deliberately tried to overcome the Unionist belief that the cards were stacked against them and to counter Unionist perceptions that they had no friends in court. The reason for this was, not that he necessarily agreed with the Unionist analysis, but that for the Agreement to work no party could feel that the other side had an advantage over them. (Mandelson did not once mention Mowlam's name, but it was clear from the discussion that he felt he had to redress somewhat the Unionist view that policy under the previous Secretary of State was seen as sympathetic to the Nationalist position).

Review Process

Mandelson thought that the atmosphere inside the review process had improved considerably over the past two weeks, and was encouraged by the better relationship between the Unionist and Republican leadership, the fact that both sides were maintaining the confidentiality of the discussions, and the fact that neither side had indulged in public point scoring. He said that this had been one of his objectives when he took over as Secretary of State and claimed some credit for the improvement. In particular he said that he had gone public in a careful manner at various points to fill the media space that might otherwise have been filled, with potential detrimental effect, by the parties. At the same time he wanted in his public presentation to maintain a relatively calm political attitude, to as he put it "take some steam" out of the issue, and to take it down from the media frenzy of the Summer. He was returning to Northern Ireland immediately after the breakfast to maintain contact with the review as it drew to a conclusion - "my place is in Belfast, not in London." He would want to maintain close contact with us in the coming period.

He thought that implementation of the Agreement held significant attractions for Sinn Féin, not least participation in the government of Northern Ireland and the operation of the North-South bodies. He had no doubts about Adams's and McGuinness's commitment, but he thought that it would be in the interest of the Republican Movement to do the deal now. As he saw it the risk of movement of personnel to the Real IRA became all the greater the longer the political vacuum continued; young people could become disenchanted with Sinn Féin if the Agreement were not implemented and the promises held out after Good Friday were not held to. To some extent he saw the recent drift of support as resulting from these factors. His conclusion was that Sinn Féin should, in their own long term interest, move quickly. All the elements were there; there was really very little new of substance that anyone could bring to the negotiations; and to a

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considerable extent the issue was one of trust to enable the parties to go the extra mile to agreement.

Patten Report

We discussed the Patten Report. Mandelson's first comment was that implementation of the Agreement was essential to full implementation of Patten. I queried him on this but he took the consistent view that, quite apart from the technical difficulties over the Board, it would be almost impossible to find political agreement to proceed with Patten outside of implementation. Even with success on the Agreement the report contained many proposals of great difficulty for many people in Northern Ireland. He had discussed it recently with the Chief Constable and he had visited a number of police barracks in Northern Ireland. He thought the issue of the badge was of less importance than the question of the name. But the most common fear presented to him from RUC officers was that they might have to work alongside people who until recently were killing and targeting members of the force. He sees police reform as a huge political issue, and he clearly feels that even if the agreement is implemented Patten will require careful handling. When I said that implementation would "help" with a range of other issues, he challenged me saying that implementation was "essential" for a range of other issues.

Mandelson also voiced his fears about the campaign against Patten in Britain led by people like Cranborne and the Daily Telegraph. The campaign had a certain momentum and those involved were deeply committed to preventing change in the RUC. He was particularly concerned at the recruitment of Roy Mason to the anti-Patten cause, demonstrated by his letter in the Daily Telegraph today which warns the Government against changing the badge and name, and particularly against Sinn Féin representation on the policing board and local committees. Mandelson said that, whatever about one's view of Mason, Mason's letter would allow the organisers to claim that they were not just a Conservative movement, that they had supporters in the Labour Party, and that the campaign was a bi-partisan one.

Comment

The conversation would not cause me to change the basic assessment in my report of 11 October. Mandelson is a pragmatic politician, keenly aware of the uses of power, with the confidence and authority that come from being close to

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the Prime Minister, but also with the knowledge that success on Northern Ireland will carry bigger prizes for him in British politics. However, his comments on the advantages to Sinn Féin of agreement now and on the RUC suggest that he may be more inclined to use leverage, particularly with the Republican movement, than his predecessor. If the Review does not produce a success we may have difficulty persuading him to proceed with Patten, and even if it succeeds my instinct is that he will need to watch carefully his response to Unionist, RUC and domestic political concerns on aspects of the police reform. We agreed to meet again soon and to keep in contact by phone.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Barrington
Ambassador

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