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Reference Code:	2022/47/401
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NA BREATAINE-NA hÉIREANN
BÉAL FEIRSTE

BRITISH-IRISH
INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECRETARIAT
BELFAST

SECURE FAX 616

15 June 2000 **No. of pages including this one: 2**

To: HQ **From: Belfast**
For: Secretary O'Ceallaigh **From: Joint Secretary**

Policing Bill and Related Issues

I met Fr. Alex Reid and a number of other people at the reception for Victims of the Troubles, hosted by Secretary of State Mandelson at Hillsborough on 13 June.

Fr. Reid

While Fr. Reid said that the peace process had finally found the right run-way and had taken off, he was troubled by the potential for the policing issue to damage or even to de-rail the peace process, describing the situation as "dangerous". Commenting on the dilution of Patten, he drew a very worrying analogy about the way in which the first hunger strike had initially appeared to have been resolved and then unravelled over the application of the resolution of the clothing issue - and a further thousand people died. He expressed the hope that the SDLP in particular - who had the credibility and track-record credentials - would remain resolute in ensuring that the Policing Bill was faithful to Patten.

In that context, there appears to be a real concern that the IRA may decide to link Patten and their envisaged Confidence Building Measure - in other words, that there would be no inspections of IRA arms dumps until the Policing Bill is sorted out. Well-informed observers would regard any such linkage as unhelpful on the basis that there is a need to build confidence in the process on the Unionist side also - and especially for Trimble - before the marching season (and all that goes with it) gets fully underway. (see my SF614 today).

Fr. Reid also mentioned to me that he had obtained additional information - towards the end of the last search - about the location of the body of one of the IRA victims. He proposes to continue searching on that basis - quietly and without contacting the families, so as not to raise expectations yet again, without result. His overall message to families has been to seek their acceptance that the bodies are indeed buried in the named locations, and will remain there in peace. (John Wilson, who was also a guest at the reception, was present and is fully aware of the situation.)

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Police Ombudsman

At Tuesday's reception, I also met with NI Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, who had been at the Police Federation meeting held earlier in the day. She was very critical about Les Rogers' heated rhetoric about the RUC name and symbols. Indeed, she quoted approvingly critical comments of the Head of the RUC Disabled Association to her, privately questioning when Rogers was going to focus on "the real issues" (i.e. money). Her own belief is that for the Federation it will finally come down to money issues and she urged that a generous approach be adopted by the British Government.

O'Loan referred again to her request to visit Templemore which is being arranged (see Val O'Donnell's SF572 of 31 May). She underlined the considerable importance which she attaches to this request and to the potential for Templemore to be of profound assistance to her in her work. She also said that she would ideally like to obtain agreement on some suitable form of secondment or temporary assignment of Garda officers.

In response to my query as to her own position on Patten, O'Loan said that she was pleased to have obtained the support of Mandelson in addressing most of her concerns - "four out of five ain't bad". However, she had not yet seen the actual text of the amended version and agreed fully that it would be best to suspend final judgement until the detail of the text has been examined.

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