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TO: G. Ansbro.

FROM: Paul Hickey.

Copied directly to B. Callaghan, DOJELR.

Mr Griffin

Taoiseach 17.4.2000

13.4.2000

SUBJECT: Secretary of State's Statement on Patten Motion

Further to our telephone conversation earlier today, I made the following points to the British Side arising from the Secretary of State's statement in the House of Commons on the Opposition Day Motion on the Patten Report:-

- We were surprised and disturbed at the comments on the PSNI "badge" issue, viz. the statement that he had not decided what the new badge should be and that he was not convinced that it need be entirely neutral in terms of free of association with either tradition as recommended - against the background of Mr. Gallagher's letter to Mr. Jeffrey of the previous day.

- We continue to believe that any approach inconsistent with the Patten recommendation that the police service should be free of overt association with either the British or Irish State would be damaging to the process and drew attention, in particular, to the arguments put forward in the third and fourth paragraphs of Mr. Gallagher's letter.

- We therefore viewed the suggestion made in the speech as a potential departure from a fundamental aspect of the Patten Report.

Those concerns were noted and were, I understand, subsequently fed into the NIO system at both ministerial and official level. I also took the opportunity of the contact to inquire as to when we could expect a substantive response to the matters raised in Mr. Gallagher's letter.

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12 APR 2000

Ambasáid na hÉireann
Londain

Embassy of Ireland
London

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
DFA

7 April 2000

Dear Secretary,

House of Commons: Unionist-led Debate on Patten, 6 April 2000

It may be of interest that Helen Jackson, MP and Parliamentary Private Secretary to Peter Mandelson, told me during the Unionist-led debate on Patten in the House of Commons yesterday evening that she will not be attending this weekend's Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, following a discussion on the matter with the Secretary of State. She had intended to go (Martin McGovern, the Sinn Féin representative here has been actively encouraging attendance by Labour MP s) but she says that the Secretary of State feels that this would not be appropriate, apparently because of the refusal of Sinn Féin to invite the British Ambassador in Dublin to the Ard Fheis. Jackson was not inclined to elaborate further but she did say that she thought other Labour MP s, such as John McDonnell MP, would still attend (my report of a conversation with Norman Godman MP on 29 March 2000 also refers).

I was in the Gallery of the House for the duration of the debate on Patten (Bob Patterson has reported separately). Apart from the large turnout for the vote at the end, there were roughly sixty MP s in the chamber for the debate itself, including, of course, a near full turnout of all the various shades of unionism (I did not see John Taylor). A number of other Labour Members approached me, including Jim Dowd (Whip), Norman Godman (Chairman, Backbench Committee) , Stephen Pounder (Northern Ireland Affairs Committee) and Martin Salter (who, as chairman of the All-Party Group on Banking, was rushing off to do a Channel 4 interview on the closure by Barclay's of 171 rural

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branches today). Andrew Mackay MP, leading the debate for the Tories, also made a point of coming over for a chat during the debate.

While discussion was necessarily brief in the context, the general view among MP s of all parties is clearly that the prospects for early movement on a restoration of the institutions are not good, particularly in the aftermath of the vote in the Trimble-Smyth contest. Jonathan Caine, principal adviser to Mackay, to whom I also spoke, summed up the situation by remarking that "Trimble survived, but he can't do anything".

Helen Jackson and the other Labour MP s, despite Mandelson's comments on the RUC badge which are widely interpreted in the media this morning as a gesture to unionism and about which I expressed an appropriate degree of concern, took the view that the Government were holding the line on Patten. As you know, Mackay made clear in the debate that the Conservatives will divide the two Houses of Parliament on the issue of the name of the new Police service when the Patten legislation is debated. Jonathan Caine, given his unionist sympathies, was clearly looking forward to this. He remarked that with the new complexion of the "reformed" House of Lords, which has led to a number of recent defeats for the Government, they might not have an easy time there on the question of changing the name in particular.

Finally, it may be worth bringing to attention again that the Secretary of State will be in the North with the Queen next Wednesday, 12 April, for the George Cross ceremony. It was noted in the House of Commons during last night's debate that he will not be taking the scheduled Northern Ireland questions on the same day.

Yours sincerely,

Colm Ó Floinn
Counsellor

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