

Secretary of State (L&B)

① Mr Bell 160/12
② POL 10/12
PS/Ministers (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Mr Bell
Mr Blelloch
Mr Marshall
Mr Wyatt
Mr Harrington

MEETING WITH CARDINAL O'FIAICH: FRIDAY 4.12.81

I paid a call on Cardinal O'Fiaich last Friday when I was in the Armagh area to visit a number of health facilities.

2. The Cardinal seemed in general better disposed towards HMG and said that he was looking forward to meeting Lord Gowrie on Monday 7 December to discuss the situation in the Maze. He told me that from what he had been told, the atmosphere in the prison seemed to have improved "beyond all recognition" and that HMG appeared to him to have "kept its side of the bargain as far as he knew". The Cardinal had heard favourable reports that the Prison authorities were showing flexibility in applying the rules on, for instance, association between wings. But he was concerned that there were still a number of protesting prisoners and he hoped that HMG might be able to show more "low key flexibility" in applying the rules, which would progressively wean the protesters off their protest. The Cardinal also said that he did not think that the hunger strike could be used as a weapon again. (These comments have already been passed on to Lord Gowrie.)

3. On political development, the Cardinal said he was keen to see some kind of devolved assembly established although only as a stopping-off point on the way to Irish unity. He himself raised the problems of using the term "power-sharing", given its associations, and seemed conversant with some of the alternative methods of ensuring the participation of the minority in a devolved Government, such as weighted majorities.

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He also referred to "symbolic" ways in which the minority might be reassured under a devolved Government, such as increasing the numbers of Catholics in the security forces.

4. On the question of homosexual law reform, the Cardinal was aware of the ECHR judgment and the probability that HMG would have to respond to it in some way. The Cardinal was non-committal in his attitude to possible legislation and did not give any real indication of his Church's likely public stance if legislation were introduced.

5. Finally the Cardinal mentioned that Bishop Philbin would have to offer his resignation to the Pope next spring since he would be 75, but since he was still fairly fit, there was some chance that he might stay on. Educational matters were not discussed but the Cardinal did say that he looked forward to meeting Mr Scott soon to discuss Chilver etc.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'J' and 'P' joined together in a stylized, cursive manner.

JOHN PATTEN