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PS/Secretary of State (L)

cc: PS/SofS(B)
PS/Mr Stanley (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir K Bloomfield (C) *24/*
Mr Burns
Mr Stephens
Mr Chesterton
Mr Elliott
Mr Spence
Mr Hewitt
Mr Masefield
Mr Wood (L&B)
Mr George, RID, FCO

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS - SPOTTING ICEBERGS

The Need for a 'Forward Look'

Recent events have highlighted the need to ensure that announcements are not made by other Government Departments without the foreknowledge of the NIO or FCO on matters which may provoke hostile reactions in Dublin, and add to our difficulties in steering the Anglo-Irish process back onto course. (Conversely, we want to have sufficient warning to take the maximum credit from forthcoming measures which the Irish are likely to welcome.) You accordingly asked me to provide a draft which the Secretary of State could send to his colleagues asking them personally to ensure that in future we were given the maximum advance warning of other Ministers' policy initiatives with an Irish dimension, and thus at least to be able to give consideration to their most effective handling.

Work already in Hand

2. Officials are already taking steps to ensure that a more effective 'forward look' is henceforward available to Ministers. You will also have seen my interim report of 22 February briefly identifying measures in the pipeline, and prepared in consultation with colleagues in Belfast and the FCO. The Secretary of State's

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proposed initiative would provide invaluable Ministerial support for our work.

A Joint Approach

3. It seems to both NIO and FCO officials, however, that the effect of the Secretary of State's proposal would be enhanced if he and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary could issue a joint minute to colleagues. Such a combined approach would include the following advantages: it would:

- (a) enlist the support of a senior Cabinet colleague;
- (b) preempt any mistaken suggestion that these issues were only of concern to our own Secretary of State or that he was writing in pique; and
- (c) reinforce our central contention that we are, rightly, concerned about the whole spectrum of our relations with the Republic. (The NIO responsibility is primarily 'North/South' although East/West issues, and events in GB itself manifestly affect that relationship. It is, however, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary who is responsible for the totality of our bilateral relationship with the Republic, and who has therefore a direct interest in aspects of Anglo-Irish relations with which the NIO is rarely or normally only obliquely concerned)

The Draft Joint Minute

3. The attached minute has therefore been drafted on the assumption that it will be a joint minute. The FCO, at official level, is content with the proposed approach. I accordingly recommend that the Secretary of State should agree to a joint demarche with Sir G Howe. If Mr King agrees, the FCO will put the

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text of the minute, subject to any improvements the Secretary of State may wish to make, to Sir G Howe. Assuming he is content, and there is no reason to believe that he will not be, it would then be for the respective Private Offices to ensure that the joint minute issued as soon as possible.

(Signed by P N Bell)

P N BELL

23 February 1988

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D r a f t

From: Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

To: All Members of the Cabinet and the Attorney-General

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS - EARLY WARNING OF POLICY INITIATIVES

Anglo-Irish relations are under strain. The immediate causes are the decision not to institute prosecutions in the wake of the Stalker/Sampson report and the Appeal Court verdict in the case of the Birmingham Six. The Irish have reacted strongly and emotionally to these issues, and have put forward demands which we cannot meet. Other issues such as the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act have a particular potential for irritation at this time. The present chill in our relations may hinder the achievement of important objectives in our bilateral relations, and in particular the negotiation in the next few weeks of acceptable procedures over extradition, following unilateral changes enacted by the Irish at the end of 1987.

We hope that normality will soon be restored to Anglo-Irish relations. The disciplinary measures announced by the Northern Ireland Secretary on 17 February and the vigorous prosecution of matters of common interest should help. But some damage is likely to persist for some time. Accordingly we need at this stage to be particularly careful to ensure that the Irish dimension is taken fully into account in all fields so as to avoid exaggerated Irish reaction. This does not mean shading decisions to suit the Irish. But experience does show that the impact of measures likely to provoke hostile comment in the Republic of Ireland can often be significantly reduced if the Irish are briefed in advance, either through the Anglo-Irish Secretariat in Belfast (set up under the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985) or normal Diplomatic channels.

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The actions most likely to exercise the Irish are by no means confined to law and order, security and defence areas. They include energy and environment questions (especially those affecting nuclear issues and, geographically, the Irish Sea); matters of concern to the Irish community in Great Britain. But it would be wrong for us to essay an exhaustive list.

The conduct of all our Anglo-Irish relations falls within our field of responsibility. We have asked our officials to take steps to ensure that we are briefed of all measures currently planned which may impinge on our relations with Dublin. The purpose of this minute is to ask you personally to bear in mind the impact on the Republic of policy initiatives within your own fields of responsibility and to ensure that we are given as much advance warning as possible of what you have in mind and of the timing. Our departments will then be able to discuss any problems of substance or handling which may arise. Security and International Division, London (NIO) and Republic of Ireland Department (FCO) are responsible for these matters in our own departments; and you may find it convenient to nominate officials within your own who could get in touch with them and act as contact points thereafter.

I am sending a copy of this minute to all members of the Cabinet, to the Attorney General and to Sir Robin Butler.