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UNDER/ SEC 772/12  
18 DEC 1992  
CENT SEC

FROM: PS/MR HANLEY  
17 DECEMBER 1992

ASST SEC 21 DEC 1992  
CENT SEC

- cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Atkins (L&DOE) - T
- PS/Mr Mates (L&B,DFP) - B/T
- PS/Lord Arran (L&DHSS) - T
- PS/Mr Hanley (L&B,DENI) - B/T
- PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas *in Hanley* - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Hamilton (DOE) - T
- Mr Wood (L&B) - B
- Mr Allsop - B
- Mr Cornick - T
- Mr D J R Hill *my/28* - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Maccabe *Ms Maccabe* - B
- Mr Rickard - B
- Mr Caine - B

Mr Stephens - B

**MEETING WITH NI POLITICAL PARTIES ON ELECTORAL MATTERS**

Mr Hanley and you together with Messrs Hill, Maccabe and Brook met representatives from the NI political parties on 15 December to discuss electoral matters generally, in line with usual practice following a general election. The parties were represented by Peter Robinson MP and Councillor Newton (DUP), Cecil Braniff and Valerie Kinghan (UPUP), David Forde (Alliance), Leonard Fee and David Harte (NI Conservatives) and for the latter part of the meeting Mark Durkan (SDLP). The UUP representatives had made it known on 14 December that they would not be able to attend because of other pressing commitments and the Minister hopes to meet them in the New Year to take their views.

2. The Minister began the meeting by explaining that it was an opportunity for the local parties to air their concerns on electoral

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abuse in Northern Ireland and to make their views known on any other electoral matters. Peter Robinson responded by saying that his party's principal concern was over HMG's failure to proscribe Sinn Fein and the inadequacy of the broadcasting restrictions placed upon them. He also criticised the Elected Authorities (NI) Act 1989 as he said that the requirement to make a declaration against terrorism was ineffective. Turning to specific electoral matters he said that unless anomalies were removed from the specified documents system, large sections of the electorate could continue to be disfranchised. He recognised the problems of personation but said that more flexibility was needed. Valerie Kinghan supported this and added that there seemed to have been some confusion over the eligibility of certain social security payment books.

3. Mr Robinson said that his party remained concerned about decisions being taken as to the mental competence of residents of nursing homes to vote. He said that those taking decisions were not medically qualified to make such judgements. Mr Robinson also took the opportunity to enquire if there was to be a new candidates' expenses Order in time for the local elections in May 1993. Mr Fee intervened at this point to say that as far as he was concerned the bottom line was that all candidates must contest seats under the same electoral rules. He felt that if expenses were increased it would allow those parties with more financial resources to benefit to a greater extent. Cost effectiveness should be the watch word. In reply you suggested that any increase would be in line with inflation. The Minister added that officials would contact the Home Office and report back to the parties.

4. In response to Mr Robinson's opening statements the Minister said that the DUP's document on the proscription of Sinn Fein was being considered by the Secretary of State. However, this issue and the other two points regarding Sinn Fein were not directly linked to the meeting's agenda. On identification of voters the Minister said

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that the NIO was always prepared to consider changes to the list of specified documents. In response, Valerie Kinghan said that it was the UPUP view that everyone should be issued with an identity card. Although the DUP and NI Conservatives concurred, David Forde reacted strongly saying that his party would oppose such a move as it could infringe civil liberties. David Harte suggested that new style medical cards should be issued to counter the wide spread fraud involved with the current versions. Cecil Braniff agreed and suggested that the card should feature a photograph of the holder. Leonard Fee indicated that he would be in favour of allowing presiding officers and poll clerks discretion to accept alternative means of identification but it was pointed out that this would be open to misuse and could lead to intimidation. In closing this topic of discussion, you asked if more could be done to inform the public of the requirement to produce a specified document when voting. All parties agreed.

5. The Minister then raised the subject of postal voting. Peter Robinson said that both the UUP and SDLP relied heavily on this arrangement and could have different opinions, but it was his view that the system was open to abuse. Mr Robinson also referred to the fact that candidates got copies of the final postal voting list. He suggested that Sinn Fein would have little difficulty in identifying members of the security forces as, by and large, they were required to work on polling days and therefore had to register for postal votes. He felt that publishing lists of absent voters placed members of the security forces at a considerable disadvantage. You confirmed that lists of postal voters were given to candidates as this was a legal requirement. The Minister said that this was a subject which he hoped to discuss with the Chief Electoral Officer when they next met. Mr Robinson welcomed this but encouraged the Minister to examine the issue within the office before hand. It was at this point that Mark Durkan (SDLP) joined the meeting. He confirmed that the SDLP were in favour of postal

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voting and, on balance, favour the publication of postal voting lists. Peter Robinson added that he felt an anomaly existed in the distribution of postal voting forms. In some constituencies the electoral office said that they would pass on forms to anyone the parties informed them of, but in other areas the parties were given bundles to distribute themselves. He also said that deadlines for returning completed forms were too tight and that the forms were over complicated. The Minister noted his concerns.

6. The Minister asked if parties were aware of intimidation being a problem. Peter Robinson confirmed that his constituents who voted at St Matthew's Church in the Short Strand had been subjected to abuse and he had already written to the CEO requesting that they be allocated a different polling station in the future. Mark Durkan also confirmed that intimidation was a problem in some parts of the Foyle constituency. It was perceived to be such a problem that they estimated that a large number of people did not bother to turn up to vote.

7. Peter Robinson questioned the Minister on the distribution of election material. For Westminster and EC elections, candidates were not required to address each leaflet but they were required to do so for local government elections. He wondered if the local election rules would be brought into line. Peter Robinson also enquired about the count. For Westminster elections Belfast constituencies began counting as the polls closed but at local level there was a delay. The Minister undertook to raise both matters with the CEO.

8. Leonard Fee raised the subject of party workers being present in the polling station and asked what the law required. It was confirmed that polling agents could be present but they were not allowed to canvass for votes. Peter Robinson indicated that his party would be in favour of no one being present but this view was

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countered by Mark Durkan who said that his party found that their workers were much more effective at identifying personation than the CEO's staff.

9. The Minister drew the meeting to a close by thanking the party representatives for making themselves available. He undertook to discuss all the issues raised with the CEO and report back to the parties on the outcome.

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OAB EXTN 6488  
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