

RESTRICTED - POLICY

From: PS/Secretary of State (B)
30 March 1998

PA

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over paper to
BT July
1561

31 MAR 1998

cc: See Distribution List

Mr Watkins - O

July.

FLYING OF FLAGS AND DISPLAY OF SYMBOLS AT G

The Secretary of State was grateful for your submission of 26 March outlining the proposals on the way forward on the flying of flags and display of symbols at Government buildings. The Secretary of State has described this as a most useful paper.

2. She has noted that officials favour option (b) in paragraph (15). She would however like to hold this issue and revisit it in July.

John McKervill

J MCKERVILL
Private Secretary

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RESTRICTED - POLICY

FROM: P N BELL
 ASSOCIATE POLITICAL DIRECTOR(B)
 30 MARCH 1998

1557
 31 MAR 1998

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MR WATKINS

*G
 Hold with
 other papers.
 7/31/3*

FLYING OF FLAGS AND DISPLAY OF SYMBOLS AT GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Talks and other pre-occupations meant that I did not focus on your submission of 26 March until after it issued. Had I commented earlier, however, - and I apologise for not doing so, my advice, after congratulating you on the thorough and fair minded way in which you addressed these exceptionally sensitive issues, would have been to focus on your own conclusion (in para 16) that Unionists would dislike the proposal (even though it would be GB practice, but it would not be applauded by Nationalists. So why give this fitfully somnolent dog a flying kick now? If devolution were years off, then the same reasoning which led Merlyn Rees not to wait for an Assembly but to enact in Northern Ireland in the mid-70s the great social reforms of the 1964-70 Labour Administration (except abortion), would still apply. But our circumstances, happily, are different. So leave it to the Assembly, without compromising HMG and individual Ministers in what could be a particularly difficult summer.

2. As to your precise recommendation, I would only comment that the "British" tradition in Northern Ireland is no less worthy of respect than the "Irish", and that, you may think, includes flag flying on the Twelfth (especially as that is the abolition that will be most resented!). It also seems to me rather sneaky, even if our proposals did not leak, to introduce something of this kind after mid-July (or a deal), but before an Assembly (thus also denying it the opportunity to do whatever good, if any, it would do in the Talks).

3. In other words, this is an official who would support your option 15(c): leave this complex (indubitably divisive) issues to the new local political institutions.

Signed:

P N BELL

P N BELL

01232-427532 Ext 302

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FROM THE OFFICE OF:

**MR JOHN SEMPLE CB
ROOM 106
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
BELFAST BT4 3SS**

1543
30 MAR 1998

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TO:..... *Geraldine*

FROM:..... *Dawn*

DATE:..... **TIME:**.....

NO. OF PAGES TO FOLLOW:..... *3*

MESSAGE:

G. To file with other papers on BT/E?

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RESTRICTED - POLICY

FROM: R P LEMON
PS/MR MURPHY
30 MARCH 1998

cc as attached

PS/Secretary of State

FLYING OF FLAGS AND DISPLAY OF SYMBOLS AT GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Mr Murphy has seen Mr Watkins' note of 26 March to you about flying of flags at Government Buildings.

The Minister has commented as follows:

"I believe we should leave well alone until after the settlement and then leave it up to the Assembly".

(Signed)

R P LEMON

RESTRICTED - POLICY

jc/talks