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FROM: P N BELL
 ASSOCIATE POLITICAL DIRECTOR (B)
 30 JUNE 1997



cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
 PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
 PS/PUS (B&L)
 PS/Sir David Fell
 Mr Thomas o/r
 Mr Steele
 Mr Leach
 Mr Stephens o/r
 Mr Watkins
 Mr Wood (B&L)
 Mr Brooker
~~Mr Canavan (CCRU) 2.7~~
 Mrs Collins o/r
 Mr Hill
 Mr Lavery
 Mr Maccabe
 Mr Perry
 Mr Priestly
 Mr Whysall
 Ms Bharucha
 Mr Tebbit via RID
 Mr Lamont, RID
 HMA, Dublin
 Mr Warner

*Julie
P. file
217*

*I have your dues as an
abuse of the BIA to continue
now to original thing - for
one of a benefit for the
inner circle (but the five names
been invited).*

*AC
217*

MR BEETON

THE RIGHTS AGENDA AND OTHER ISSUES - CONVERSATION WITH MARY KEAN

As luck would have it, I took out to lunch on Wednesday my old friend Mary Kean, the Secretary of the British Irish Association who is planning for this year's meeting of what the Secretary of State once memorably described as "toffs against terrorism", the British Irish Association on 12-14 September coming. She lamented that, myself apart, it was hard to find officials who would spare her the time of day.

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2. We had quite a lot to say about the merits or otherwise of various candidates for attendance. David Trimble, I learnt, had expressed to her great hostility for to the idea that the McGimpsey Bros, stalwarts of past BIAs, should be invited; his strong preference was that, for instance, in addition to himself, Jeffrey Donaldson and Reg Empey, David Burnside's aide in London, Patricia Campbell, should be invited - which tells you something about who is in, and out in UUP circles. Among worthy Protestants who might merit invitation under one heading or another, I tentatively suggested David Hewitt, most recently a member of the Parades Commission - not least because he had spoken with conspicuous cogency at a dinner I had hosted the previous night for a Palestinian visitor to Northern Ireland - and Joan Harbison, one of the [redacted] drivers behind SACHR's Fair Employment Review. As David Hill will tell you, many has written separately to the PUS on NIO official representation.

3. You may be more interested to know, however, that following this morning's stimulating discussion of the "Rights Agenda" I was bold enough to suggest to Mary, who still lacks a theme for this year's Conference, that this agenda, under some description or other, might be a useful organising theme: it raises matters of the first importance; it is an issue (or set of issues) the Government is committed to taking forward; it is an area more likely to produce genuine exchange (eg in Conference workshop format) than well regurgitated political issues, not least if only because there are real, and still partly unexplored issues on which members of all sides of the community in Northern Ireland (and none) can constructively engage; If not complement, rather than cut across whatever was, or was not then going on in the Talks. You may recall my suggestion this morning that we should be working to a key note speech on this subject by the Secretary of State in early September: but BIA which focus, at least so far as the formal agenda was concerned, on the set of issues might be a suitable platform. You may wish to ponder.

4. In this most recent visit to Belfast, Miss Kean had been particularly struck by what the Attwood Bros had said to her - and with the clear intention of onward transmission. First, how impressed they were with what the Government was doing:

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the pitch we had made on decommissioning; the May deadline for talks; six weeks for judgement on Sinn Fein's qualifications for entry - all these, as well as kind words on prisoner issues, were signs of refreshing new thinking in Government and more than welcome to the SDLP.

5. Who were, however, Alex Attwood reaffirmed, very worried indeed, it will not surprise you, about the future of their own Party. They had accordingly suggested that Mary mention the UUP, in her next round of contacts with them, just how important it was that the SDLP did the business as quickly as possible, on the basis of frameworks. The argument, which I do not know whether they are saying directly to any Unionists they may, or may not be meeting, is that both Parties need to hang together, or else hang separately. The SDLP are crumbling in the face of the Sinn Fein onslaught; the Unionists are generally negotiating from a position of historic weakness - however much sections of that community may still be in denial. Both Parties have a vested interest, therefore, in seizing the initiative now. I have heard worse arguments in the past, and it is quite interesting that this should be coming from another greener, and more Republican attuned sections of the SDLP.

6. Finally, by way of vinegar in the salad, I tried not to leave Mary firmly persuaded, as her mainly bien pensant and Committee had left her, about the imminence of an IRA ceasefire. There was at least an arguable case, on Republican assumptions, for believing it to be rational to persist with at least a carefully managed armed struggle: Sinn Fein would not have to face any major electoral challenges in these islands for some time; Brits, from a Republican point of view, "only understood violence"; and it was not clear why Sinn Fein should pay high admission price for a ceasefire to a Talks Process that would never deliver anything remotely near their strategic objective of a "united Ireland". My own personal view, I explained - which happens, incidentally, to be that of the outgoing Taoiseach - is that the very best anyone can hope for is a renewed "tactical ceasefire" which could, just possibly mutate into permanence given favourable dynamics in the Talks Process. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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This was not, I emphasised, any reason for not pressing on hard with the Task to which the Prime Minister has.

Signed

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