

FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B+L) whose salary, Pat Parcell, is a
 24 NOVEMBER 1998

cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
 PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)
 PS/Mr Ingram (L&B)
 PS/PUS (L&B)
 PS/Mr Semple
 Mr Jeffrey ← MR BROOKER
 Mr Watkins
 Mr Stephens
 Mr Bell
 Mr Daniell
 Mr Leach
 Mr Harbison (DOE)
 Mr Kelly (L&B)
 Mr Hill
 Mr Maccabe
 Mr Lindsay
 Ms Scholefield
 Mr Beeton
 Mr Waiver
 Mr Cosgrave (DFP)
 Mr Fergusson (RID)
 HMA Washington
 HMCG Boston

Mr Brooker

VISIT TO BOSTON - 23 - 22 NOVEMBER: POLITICAL CONTACTS

The Secretary of State's visit to Boston yesterday was primarily in support of the Belfast Trade Show (on which I have reported separately); but thanks to the good offices of the Consulate, she also had a number of political contacts, either over lunch or on the phone.

Media

- Other than the Trade Show Launch itself, and a brief early morning interview with WRKO-AM, a local radio talk show, the main media event was the

Secretary of State's meeting with the Boston Herald, whose editor, Pat Purcell, is a prominent Boston Irish-American. The questioning was reasonably well-informed and focused predictably on decommissioning, policing and prisoners. Martin Ferris of Sinn Fein had seen them the previous week, and the Secretary of State's interview should have acted as a corrective to some of the ideas planted then. The tone of the interview was positive, but there were hints of a growing anxiety about the political stand-off in Northern Ireland, and a readiness to accept Sinn Fein's version of events (including the idea that HMG should be able deliver the Unionists) which has already been articulated by Niall O'Dowd and others in the Irish-American press, and which also permeated some of the other conversations the Secretary of State had.

Lunch

3. Jim Poston hosted a lunch for the Secretary of State which was attended by Congressman Richard Neal. Joe Leary (Irish-American Partnership), Cathy O'Toole, Bishop Murphy and Father Leahy (Boston College). The discussion until Congressman Neal's early departure concentrated on the decommissioning impasse and policing, with Neal enquiring whether decommissioning and policing should be linked (vigorously rejected by the Secretary of State), and the extent of David Trimble's room for manoeuvre. The Secretary of State explained where the decommissioning issue now stood, and also emphasised the importance of the Patten Commission's task and the need not to make it any more difficult than it already was. Neal appeared to acknowledge this, but the Secretary of State came away more convinced than ever that an unhelpful initiative on policing is being cooked up by some Irish-American politicians. She believes that, to avoid the pressure on this increasing, we need to project the positive developments in policing, in a manner which does not cut across Patten, over the next few weeks, particularly after Christmas. [Mr Lindsay - grateful for a word].

4. Another issue, raised by Bishop Murphy, was the extent to which the NI churches were, or might become, directly involved in programmes for the rehabilitation of prisoners and for victim support. The Secretary of State thought this suggestion had merit and would be prepared to follow it up with the church leaders. **[Grateful for advice from Mr Daniell, with an input from PAB, on how this might be pursued].**

5. Joe Leary described his unsuccessful attempts to encourage cross-community projects in Portadown and Lurgan, and the sense he had picked up from his community and voluntary sector contacts of growing concern over future funding. **[Mr Harbison to note]**. Father Leahy spoke enthusiastically of Boston College's transitional programme for members of the Assembly. **[Mr Cosgrave, grateful for details of members and parties on the course currently attending the College, and the programme they have been provided with]**. All those present seemed relieved, if slightly surprised, to hear the Secretary of State's confident message that a way through the current difficulties would be found.

Phone calls

6. While in Boston, the Secretary of State took the opportunity to ring a number of prominent Irish-American politicians, including [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] The first two in particular rehearsed an essentially Sinn Fein analysis of the situation, with an underlying assumption that HMG could and should be doing more to shift the Unionists. [REDACTED] also asked HMG either to "assist" in halting proceedings for the deportation of Republican sympathisers from the US, or to drop objections which would prevent their subsequent re-admittance (it wasn't clear exactly which he meant). **[Mr Beeton: grateful for advice]**.

Conclusion

7. The Secretary of State came away from Boston with her earlier feeling confirmed that, after a relatively easy passage in recent months, opinion at the greener fringe of Irish-America is showing signs of slipping away from us. It is clear that Sinn Fein have been busy selling their message hard to their US contacts, and that while considerable goodwill towards HMG remains, there is an increasing readiness (a) to put all the blame for the current impasse on Trimble; and (b) to believe that HMG should do more to deliver the Unionists.

8. She believes that we need to react vigorously to halt this shift in opinion. Next month's NDI dinner, and the event the day before at the Kennedy School in Boston, provide an opportunity for some intensive lobbying: but she would be grateful for early advice on how we might set about projecting our position more effectively, perhaps in concert with the Irish and US administrations.

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