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HCS/3/91

FROM: SIR K P BLOOMFIELD
DATE: 12 APRIL 1991

cc PS/PMG (L&B) - B
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PS/Mr Needham (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Hanley (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
Mr Fell
Mr Pilling - B
Mr Ledlie - B
HM Ambassador, Dublin - B
Mr Archer, RID (FCO)

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) - B

A VALEDICTORY

1. As I prepare to leave the Northern Ireland Civil Service, in which I have spent more than 38 years of my life, and pass into other and very capable hands the posts of Head of that Service and of Second PUS, it may be helpful to leave behind me some reflections on events both recent and from the more distant past.
2. I want to begin by saying what a privilege it has been to have such an interesting, stimulating and challenging career. From beginning to end I have worked with many splendid people, both Ministers and officials, and I leave with a continuing conviction that, while the importance of the private sector and of wealth-creation must always be acknowledged, the public service continues to offer a career worthy of the best efforts of any individual. It is a source of satisfaction to me that, during my term of service, the NICS has become progressively more professional in its approach and methods. In some respects, of course, we have echoed or paralleled developments in Whitehall; but

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DH19420

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in addition the comparative smallness of the scale of activity, the intimacy of the administrative system and the context of all departments working (under direct rule) to a single Minister have all made it possible to establish and progressively to develop good and efficient systems for the co-ordination of activity across departmental boundaries. In spite of all the changes it has endured and the dispiriting circumstances in which it has had to operate over the past two decades I believe that the NICS is in good condition and good heart, and that it remains one of the principal forces working for stability in this community.

3. Nevertheless I leave with a real sense of sadness. I have lost too many friends and seen the wreckage of too many familiar places to be content with the state of affairs in which violence has persisted for over twenty years and is continuing. Alongside this I, as a native Ulsterman, take little satisfaction from a situation in which locally elected politicians play so small a part in the government and administration of our own community. Lest it be inferred that this is simply an implicit criticism of the failure of local politicians to agree, I want to make it clear that I see the way of the local politicians as hard. Someone who helped to draft the resignation statements of all the last three Prime Ministers of Northern Ireland is not likely to underestimate the difficulties which democratic leaders face in hard and confused times. In spite of all the conventional talk about "mutual interest" and "common ground", the basic political division in Northern Ireland remains a fundamental one. English people, whose sense of identity is so assured, do not always appreciate how sensitive it is to live on an ethnic frontier. Lord Salisbury took a gloomy view of all of this when, speaking of Ireland, he said in 1872:- "There is no precedent, in our history or any other, to teach us that political measures can conjure away hereditary antipathies

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which are fed by constant agitation. The free institutions which sustain the life of a free and united people sustain also the hatreds of a divided people".

4. I would identify, in the events leading up to the situation in which Northern Ireland finds itself today, a number of critical errors (some at least of which I helped to perpetrate myself):-
 - a. During the premiership of Terence O'Neill (the late Lord O'Neill of the Maine) reformist rhetoric outran the will and particularly the capacity to deliver. The rising expectations of a disadvantaged community floated off on the flood tide of dissent which swept many countries in 1968.
 - b. Thereafter, while the unionist establishment increasingly perceived a need to reform, the reluctance of its political machine to deliver without prolonged and agonising debate meant that, in an inflating market, they found themselves always trying to buy stability at the previous year's prices.
 - c. Direct rule should certainly not have been held back until 1972, but should have accompanied the commitment of troops on a substantial scale in 1969. The intervening years were eaten by the locusts of confusion and ambiguity.
 - d. In the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 the concept of executive functions (however exiguous) for a Council of Ireland represented "a bridge too far" for the unionists.

CONFIDENTIAL

file 11

C O N F I D E N T I A L

- e. The distinction between a "legal" Provisional Sinn Fein and a proscribed PIRA which has existed since Merlyn Rees de-proscribed the former has been seen to be farcical in principle and effect.
5. In addition, I believe that the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 has been from the outset seriously flawed in a number of fundamental respects. In saying this I do not underestimate the benefits which the signing of the Agreement conferred in terms of wider Anglo-Irish relations and the perception of the Irish situation in the wider world particularly in the United States. There is, however, something which should to my mind always be kept clearly in view. This is the reality that the strain in Anglo-Irish relations, and the repercussions of that strain beyond these islands, exist because of the division between communities in Northern Ireland. Anything which does not serve to reduce that division is not likely in the long-term to contribute to peace, stability or reconciliation.
6. It will never be easy by persuasion, negotiation and the deployment of influence to bring about that reduction of division. Because of this it is perhaps understandable that sentiment both in London and Dublin veers from time to time in the direction of "knocking their heads together" in terms of trying to produce an ideal, unboycottable model which will not have to depend on the tediously-obtained consent of prickly and contentious parties. However, the stance adopted by the Irish Government in the Agreement - that it is particularly the advocate for the nationalist community - is the antithesis of that which will begin to reconcile the unionist community to the rest of Ireland.
7. On the same broad theme, I must also say that I find it difficult to understand why better use has not on occasions been made of local knowledge, experience and political

C O N F I D E N T I A L

file. HCS 1

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"feel". I was held at a considerable distance from the negotiations and discussions leading up to the conclusion of the 1985 Agreement, for reasons which I can to some extent appreciate. It is striking, however, that on not one occasion since then has any attempt been made to engage me in the periodic exchanges which take place between very senior British and Irish officials - and this in spite of the fact that I have known the leading figure on the Irish side, Dermot Nally, longer than anyone else involved, and that alongside this I have had regular involvement in the work of the Intergovernmental Conference itself.

8. Finally I would wish to express the view that the curse of Northern Ireland has been the concentration on symbolism and ultimate constitutional destination alongside the comparative neglect of substantive issues. It must surely be obvious by now that early consent from the majority in Northern Ireland to the unity of Ireland is not foreseeable, and I believe government of any complexion would be making a fearful and very costly mistake if it were to assume that the dying of the post-Agreement hubbub represented any kind of tacit consent to the inevitability of such unity.
9. I make the assumption, then, that whether with revived local political structures or without them the United Kingdom government will continue to carry an ultimate responsibility for the good government of Northern Ireland into the foreseeable future. I hope that a steadily increasing effort will be concentrated upon the real problems confronting members of the minority here which are not that a "foreign flag" flies over them, but rather that they still suffer in too many respects from apparent disadvantage. Nothing has given me greater satisfaction over the last few years than to see the Making Belfast Work exercise beginning, as I believe it is, to restore some measure of confidence and faith in our bona fides to areas of the city

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too long without hope. The idea of Targeting Social Need should be driven forward with great vigour. Shifts in public expenditure are not capable of providing the answers to all our problems. Hearts and minds are not to be bought on the open market. Nevertheless too great a share of resources has, I believe, been locked up in what I might call "the momentum of ongoing programmes", and it would take courage and perseverance to alter course.

10. I conclude by expressing my profound gratitude for the courtesy and consideration invariably extended to me by Ministerial and official colleagues. While it was not a pleasant experience, as a long-standing servant of the outgoing Northern Ireland administration, to undergo the traumatic changes of 1972, I have been more than happy to see mutual confidence rapidly built up between the Whitehall and Stormont cadres of the office. This mutual confidence is a precious gift, to be well protected. As a last word, like so many others I could not have survived the stresses and strains of a lengthy career without the support of my wife and family. I owe a debt to them which can never be repaid.

K.P. Blam

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P E R S O N A L



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Head of the Northern Ireland
Civil Service
Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, KCB

HCS/2/49

HE Richard A Neilson CMG LVO
HM Ambassador
Santiago
CHILE

8 February 1991

My dear Dick.

First of all, can I apologise for replying in the apparent formality of typescript rather than manuscript, but I find over recent years that both my personality and my handwriting have become ever more crabbed, and I would hate to think that you would need to refer a letter of mine to those whose task it is to de-code messages!

It is very good news that you are going to pay us a visit later in the year and indeed that the Neilson family is going to relate even more closely to the local community.

Both Jack Hermon and David Gilliland are still up and doing, although each has retired from his post. Moreover, the chap you remember as Mayor of Coleraine, Alderman R J White, who is indeed a pharmacist, is still a Councillor up there and would be easy to contact through the Town Clerk's office - (0265) 52181.

I myself am due to retire at 60 in the middle of April, and will be succeeded as Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service by David Fell who also succeeded me some years ago as Permanent Secretary in the Department of Economic Development. Do let me know through his office when your plans are firmed up, because it would be very nice to have a chance to meet again.

Elizabeth and I had to re-build our lives substantially after our house was bombed over two years ago. We took quite a while to find somewhere suitable, and in the meantime were lodged in the very attractive surroundings of Hillsborough Castle - feeling a bit like Nelson Mandela on Robbin Island!

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However, last July we were able to set up house again on a more normal basis - or at least as normal as a full-scale security system with all its alarms and beams and automatic gates will allow. However, you will be only too well aware of these constraints from your own professional experience.

I must say I am very touched by the extent to which so many people who have passed through the Northern Ireland Office at one time or another retain a deep attachment to the place and the people. It was always great fun working with you.

The Prime Minister and others had a very narrow escape in Downing Street yesterday. As it happens, I was talking to the Secretary of State and others in London on the Video-conferencing facility which we now operate between our two centres, and quite clearly heard the explosion and then the alarms going off in the NIO - pretty dramatic stuff, and I am afraid giving PIRA precisely the kind of publicity coup they were looking for. Alas, it is not very easy to protect democratic societies against such outrages.

Yours sincerely,
K. P. Bloomfield

K P BLOOMFIELD

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