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FROM: P N BELL
BRITISH SECRETARY
25 March 1998

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SEC 26 MAR 1998
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Mr Jones
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Mr Black
Mr Jones

cc: (as attached list)

W027/3

MR THOMAS

TWO CHEERS FOR ST PATRICK'S DAY RECEPTION

Last Wednesday, David Donoghue and I held what is now our customary, joint St Patrick's Day Reception. This is my report. Over 200 guests made it, drawn overwhelmingly but my no means exclusively from the public and voluntary sectors, plus a few judges and journalists. As many guests, including both the Ambassador and myself, can testify, it was both fun and a good opportunity to network. If I had to be critical about our own hospitality, it would be that it was dreadfully respectable following events at the last Christmas party (and at earlier ones before that). Both David Donoghue and I had taken pains to prune the guest list (including, I fear of some members of the NIO). Indeed, it was so respectable that we did not need to close the bar early, as we had planned and some well known hell raisers were seen meekly ordering taxis at around 8.00 pm. [REDACTED]

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2. Perhaps in fear of this respectability, some of our usual categories of guests were underrepresented. Many of the political classes and many journalists were, of course, in Washington; but it was sad that no British Minister could be present; nor could the most Senior NIO officials. I hope this will not be the case, assuming there at least the ghost of a Secretariat survives, when we hold our next Christmas party.

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3. We also noticed two other sets of conspicuous absentees; there were no Sinn Fein members there whom I recognised, while Alex Maskey told me only yesterday morning in Castle Buildings that he had 'forgotten', and the Security Forces were similarly underrepresented. I gather a farewell dinner for the GOC was taking place that evening, which might have taken away the most senior officers, but the absences of less exalted soldiers and policemen is slightly worrying. It may, in part, reflect the possibility of meeting Sinn Fein was (which we know worried the RUC at Christmas when, for the first time, they were invited), it may also show a reluctance to be, as the Chief Constable once expressed it to me, 'counted in' at Maryfield. Either way, I hope we can persuade them to attend our Christmas bash.

4. To sum up - a lively, enjoyable - and productive party - if more people had been able (or willing) to attend, it would have been still better.

Signed:

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