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16.7.96

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FAX

SEEN BY [Signature] 16.7.

To: Paddy Teahon

From: Seán Ó hUiginn

12 July, 1996.

Copy

Pages: 1 + 6

Please see attached report from London, for information.

Tos, each

There is some material here on the mood of John Hume and Seamus Mallon, relevant to this evening's meeting; also on the mood in the British parliament and in the Labour Party there

hvk

15.7.96

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12 July 1996

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

COPY TO:
PST
PSS
MR. P. TEANON
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MR. T. DALTON

Dear Secretary

Impressions of the political mood in London, 12 July

The Labour Party

As I have reported in connection with my discussion with Tony Worthington on Tuesday, the Labour Party was content with the original decision to ban the parade on the Garvaghy Road and assumed that it would be upheld for the sake of the credibility of the RUC. Nigel Warner reiterated this as late as yesterday morning when I had breakfast with him. Warner was confident that NIO Ministers would uphold the Chief Constable's decision. He hoped that the Garvaghy residents would "give something" to the Orange Order, without necessarily permitting a march on the Garvaghy Road.

In their contributions in Northern Ireland Questions yesterday, Tony Worthington and Mo Mowlam concentrated on

- * their proposal for an independent commission on marches
- * the intimidation and lawlessness which has taken place over the past week.

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But they took a political decision not to criticise the RUC because of the danger that RUC men would be attacked, because of the impossible situation in which Ammesley was placed, and because for reasons of politics, the Labour Party must stand behind the police.

Mowlam remarked to me after Questions that Mayhew, to her disappointment, had been careful to avoid any criticism of Unionist lawlessness. She added that Mayhew was adamant in private that the RUC had acted independently. She mentioned that her visit to Drumcree on Tuesday led her to believe that the role of Jeffrey Donaldson behind the scenes was more constructive than that of Trimble and that the Orange Order itself (Gracey) was notably intransigent.

I subsequently had a lengthy discussion with Nigel Warner, Mowlam's adviser, about Labour's position. Warner's analysis of events in Portadown centred on three points:

- the majoritarian basis of Northern society has been exposed
- there is a need to review public order legislation and to establish a framework within which marches can be agreed in advance
- in Portadown, Unionist pressure "gave the RUC no choice" because of the "utilitarian" basis - namely the balancing of one risk against another - on which the legislation is constructed.

I had a difficult discussion with Warner on his third point. I argued in particular that (a) although the RUC was in a very difficult position it did have a choice, (b) there must be a presumption that a decision on a parade taken on the merits of local circumstances will be upheld in the face of pressure, (c) the composition of the RUC will obviously spring to the mind of nationalists as they try to understand the events in question.

SDLF

I spent some hours in the company of Seamus Mallon and John Hume after Questions and eventually accompanied John Hume to Stansted Airport. Hume was afraid of missing his flight to Derry. Mallon was certain that he would be unable to reach his home from Belfast because of roadblocks.

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Mallon and Hume, in the teeth of some braying on the Conservative benches, had asked forceful questions relating to the authorities' surrender to a display of force. They were speechless with depression as they sat on the terrace of the House of Commons afterwards. It was noticeable that their Parliamentary friends were Roger Stott and Kevin McNamara, although Mo Mowlam joined the group briefly. Stott, capturing the sense of loss, told the group that his granddaughter had recently asked him, "what's a comrade?" to which Stott had heard himself replying, "its something we used to say to one another in the old Labour Party".

Mallon said that in the present state of opinion among even moderate nationalists, there is no prospect of an IRA ceasefire. There may even be IRA attacks in Armagh in the next 48 hours. Mallon believes that the events of the past week may have been organised by a submerged element in the Unionist community, heavily armed, built around elements of the former B Specials and with a foothold in various public institutions. He himself had seen 30 armed men "digging in" in Markethill and had reported this to the police with no hope of anything being done. Although bitter about the Unionist leadership and despairing of the prospect of negotiating a settlement on the lines of the Framework Document or anything like it, Mallon insisted that as long as there are negotiations to go to, he will be there.

Hume, who spoke much less than Mallon, was focussed on the single point that events of recent days are making it extremely difficult for those who want to see another IRA ceasefire. He was adamant that Adams is working to that end with - at least up to a few days ago - some chance of success.

Hume's mood lightened on just a few occasions.

At Prime Minister's Questions, Michael Heseltine, standing in for Major, who was involved in the Mandela visit, answered a well-phrased question from Dennis Canavan about South Africa and Northern Ireland. Hume smiled when Heseltine came to the point in his reply at which he said that an outstanding feature of Mandela's contribution to South Africa is that "it was achieved entirely within the rule of law."

Hume was also delighted to talk about David Armstrong, Nicholas Frayling, and other clergy who have contributed to public debate on Northern Ireland.

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The mood in Parliament generally

The Manchester bomb and related incidents have caused many Members of Parliament to adopt a bleaker assessment of IRA intentions with all that that implies.

As I have reported, relative liberals such as Robert Jackson on the Conservative side and Lord Williams of the Labour front-bench team have put it to me that it is time to face up to what they see as the incurable reality of IRA fundamentalism. Others, whom I would consider even more sympathetic to ourselves, such as Chris Smith of Labour's Shadow Cabinet, who was our guest to dinner a week ago, and Roger Stott, with whom I spoke in detail yesterday, are left with very little to say about Northern Ireland at the present time.

Roger Stott, whose constituency is near Manchester, said yesterday that he stretched out one arm to Sinn Fein and it was cut off at Canary Wharf. He stretched out another arm, but it was cut off in Manchester, where "half of his constituents were doing their shopping". He has "no arms left". Stott also pointed out that the time he devotes to Northern Ireland is a matter of personal commitment and is of no obvious advantage in his constituency.

Pat McFadden, Blair's adviser on Northern Ireland, with whom I spent an hour and a half on Wednesday, probed me as to the timescale within which John Hume will make up his mind whether or not to abandon his relationship with Sinn Fein. I will report in more detail on this. My point here is that it is a further indication of the colder climate in which the nationalist case has been heard at Westminster since the Manchester bomb.

However, there were signs yesterday afternoon of a certain renewal of sympathy for nationalists. Several Labour MPS, David Alton on behalf of the Lib Dems, and Hugh Dykes of the Conservatives, asked questions sympathetic to the nationalist point of view on the disturbances. Hugh Dykes told me over lunch today that he believes that most of his colleagues on the Conservative benches had not yet caught up with developments as of yesterday afternoon. He believes that there may be more sympathy for the Nationalists than was apparent. As I write, Andrew Hunter has telephoned to express great dismay at the "ghastly" turn of events and to enquire about the possibility of meeting representative figures in Dublin next Thursday (on which I will be approaching the Department separately). Hunter's question yesterday, about returning with

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renewed determination to the negotiating table, was positive enough.

These indications, as well as the tone of media coverage - for example today's Economist editorial and today's article in the Financial Times which refers to the "ritual humiliation of Catholics" - suggest to me that in the event of an IRA ceasefire, British sympathies, despite the Manchester bomb, might once again be on the side of making it easy for Sinn Fein to enter the negotiations.

Unionists

One of the young Unionists with whom the Embassy has had dialogue over the last two years has phoned us three or four times this week to disassociate himself from the behaviour of the Orangemen at Drumcree. It was especially moving that he phoned at 1 p.m. yesterday, as the march was getting underway, to say that he had been speaking to a colleague on the ground in Drumcree and that some of his fellow Unionists seemed "to have taken leave of their senses". This same young Unionist, whom we have invited to a drinks party at home on Monday, 15 July, asked me whether he could bring along two Unionist colleagues who like himself are "not terribly keen" on the Orange Order.

This same young Unionist informs us that Patricia Campbell, the Catholic who was refused a job at Unionist HQ and was threatening to sue, has been appointed to run the Unionist Information Office in London. Unionist HQ also decided - before Drumcree - to reinstate the Unionist Graduates Association of Great Britain, which was folded last March. One of the possible reasons for the change, for which we have been thanked, is that Irish official sources may have spoken well of the Unionist Graduates in the right quarters.

We have also had several phone calls this week from the Rev. David Armstrong, the Presbyterian Minister who left Northern Ireland in 1985 because of Orange harassment and whose Ministry is now in Cambridge. Armstrong phoned us initially because of anxiety about his son who is currently in East Belfast but he has also taken the opportunity to explain at length that he is proud "as a Protestant Minister" to call himself Irish and that he completely disassociates himself from the Orange Order. He is looking forward to speaking this autumn at a Pax Christi Conference alongside Fr. Nicholas Frayling and Fr. Gerry McFlynn.

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Mayhew's role

Andrew Hunter, who spent 40 minutes with him yesterday afternoon, remarked to me that Mayhew has put on weight, has bags under his eyes, and shows signs of being under enormous stress - in Hunter's opinion, comparable to the stress visible in John Hume and Seamus Mallon.

Hugh Dykes, over our lunch today, was of the view - based on instinct rather than inside information - that Mayhew and Major must have shifted their ground over Drumcree, whatever they choose to say publicly about the autonomy of the Chief Constable. Mayhew on this view is still the lawyer following a brief more than the statesman taking a stand. Major, for all his virtues, has a record of surviving through bowing to immediate pressures. Dykes feels profoundly that for all their goodwill, Major and Mayhew, through their retreat at Drumcree, have lost an opportunity of historic proportions.

I had breakfast this morning with a friend who works at 10 Downing Street. He said that the standard wisdom among Conservative Party workers, of whom he is one, is that the Prime Minister's public defence of Douglas Hogg, the most vulnerable Minister in the Cabinet, implies a fortiori that other Cabinet Ministers will hold their positions in the reshuffle likely before Parliament breaks on 25 July. Changes can be expected only at sub-Cabinet level. Hugh Dykes shares the view that Mayhew will remain as Secretary of State until the General Election. He mentioned as an added reason for this that the obvious successor, Ancram, is needed for the day-to-day management of the talks at Stormont.

Yours sincerely

Philip McDonagh

Philip McDonagh
Counsellor