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Miramar Hotel  
Bournemouth

11 October 1996

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MR. P. TEAHON	
MR. S. DONLON	
MR. T. DALTON	

Mr Sean O hUiginn  
Second Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division  
HQ

Dear Secretary

**Northern Ireland at the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool  
29 September - 5 October 1996**

This report is to summarise what we reported by telephone in the course of the Labour Party conference.

On Northern Ireland as on other issues, the visible product of the Labour Party Conference was shaped by Blair himself and his staff. The policy was set by a couple of paragraphs in Blair's own speech. Fringe meetings had a low impact. There was no plenary debate. Mo Mowlam, summing up for the National Executive in a debate on a range of other subjects, included several paragraphs on Northern Ireland, but these were no more than a restatement of existing positions and were abbreviated in delivery.

Ministers Burton and Gilmore each attended part of the conference. On the Tuesday evening, Ambassador Barrington hosted a dinner at the Imperial Hotel for Minister Burton. Tony Worthington MP (Mo Mowlam's deputy), Clive Soley MP (Chairman of the Select Committee and of the Agreed Ireland Forum), Roger Stott MP, and Kevin McNamara MP were among the guests. Minister Gilmore was present at the Ambassador's well attended reception at the Imperial on the Wednesday.

Alex Attwood and Denis Haughey participated in a total of three fringe meetings on behalf of the SDLP. David Trimble, who was attending a Labour conference for the first time, made no head-way with the proposal that Labour should organise in Northern Ireland, an issue which was much less discussed this year than, for example, two years ago.

The Embassy was represented in Blackpool by the Ambassador, Colin Wrafter, Leo Sheedy, Helen Blake and the undersigned.



**Blair's speech**

At a small drinks party on the Sunday evening at her room in the Imperial, Mo Mowlam told me that she was to see Blair for five to ten minutes at 7.35 pm to discuss the Northern Ireland section of his speech. She invited me to remain in the vicinity for a debriefing.

Mowlam and her adviser Nigel Warner eventually returned with a piece of paper containing the material on Northern Ireland as drafted in Blair's office. It consisted of two paragraphs which were to be placed after a section on Palestine at the top of the speech ("better Palestine than Scotland", Mowlam joked). *W*

|| The first of the two draft paragraphs emphasised the Labour Party's commitment to continuity in the peace process. The second paragraph was a warning to Sinn Fein which concluded with the sentence, "fail in that duty and I swear to you, I will be as hard as flint. ||  
The choice is yours."

Mowlam and Warner were evidently disappointed at the draft. They emphasised, however, that there was only a limited scope for amendment and that the "hard as flint" phrase corresponded directly to Blair's own feelings.

*Why was this done?*  
|| I suggested that the "cyeball to eyeball" address to Sinn Fein represented a disappointingly narrow approach and what was missing above all from the draft was an indication of the thrust of Labour's policy in government. Where, for example, was the language of the pre-manifesto or a reference to the need for an accommodation between the two communities?

Mowlam, Warner, and I prepared a number of amendments of which the two most important were (i) to introduce a reference to the Irish government and (ii) to make the "I swear to you" remark lead into the phrase "the search for justice and reconciliation will carry on without you".

These amendments were submitted in writing by Nigel Warner to David Miliband of Blair's office. Warner followed up on this with a meeting with Jonathan Powell. I had the impression from Warner that Powell's views on the speech might well be decisive.

*submitted on whose behalf?*  
*Why?* || In the event, both of our written amendments were accepted. It was also agreed to soften the confrontation with Sinn Fein by including a reference to the Loyalist groups as well.

The text as delivered on the Tuesday afternoon is at annex 1 below.

In a number of low key interviews with the Northern Ireland media, Blair stuck carefully to the line that had been discussed between Warner and Jonathan Powell, referring to the Irish Government and "both sides of the community".

**Comment:** My impression is that the two key ideas in the original draft, of continuity and of not bowing to violence, reflect above all Jonathan Powell's sense of what middle England would wish to hear. The speech as delivered would appear adequate from our point of view



and we were careful not to criticise it to Labour Party members. It is noteworthy that Northern Ireland appeared in the international section of the speech and not as in the Road To The Manifesto, as part of Labour's overall programme for devolution and constitutional reform.

### *The fringe*

There were altogether seven fringe meetings relating to Northern Ireland, as follows:

- \* a questions and answers session with the frontbench team on the Sunday afternoon
- \* an Agreed Ireland Forum fringe on the Sunday evening chaired by Clive Soley
- \* a Labour Party Irish Society/Labour Committee on Ireland meeting on Monday evening addressed by Joan O'Connor and Francie Molloy of Sinn Fein [comment: Sinn Fein were refused official accreditation by the Labour Party and could appear only at fringe meetings]
- \* also on Monday evening, a Northern Ireland Committee of the PLP/Labour Party Irish Society meeting chaired by Jeremy Corbyn
- \* at Tuesday lunchtime, a Labour Committee on Ireland fringe meeting on anti-terrorism legislation
- \* a Council for Labour Representation meeting on Tuesday evening
- \* a meeting sponsored by New Dialogue and the New Statesman on the Wednesday evening (preceding the Embassy reception) chaired by Harry Barnes and addressed by Minister Gilmore, Denis Haughey of the SDLP and David Trimble.

Helen Blake has reported on the first six of these meetings. The best attended and most broadly representative event of the seven was that of the Agreed Ireland Forum on the Sunday evening at which the participants were Clive Soley MP, Kevin McNamara MP, Colm O'Kane, ex-Deputy Secretary General of UNISON, Alex Attwood of the SDLP and Henry Haughton of the Irish Labour Party.

The New Dialogue/New Statesman meeting attracted an audience of 60-70 and a number of television cameras. The MPs present included Tony Worthington, Clive Soley, Kevin McNamara, Roger Stott, and Kate Hoey.

David Trimble called for Labour to organise in Northern Ireland. As to the talks process, he said that the issue is how easy it should be for Sinn Fein/IRA to enter the negotiations: "elements in the Irish Government want Sinn Fein to be there with or without a commitment to peace". As to the goal of the talks there is scope for "improvements in the quality of our democracy". 97% of public expenditure is in the hands of NIO Ministers and quangos, 3% in



the hands of local authorities. What is done for Scotland and Wales should also be done for Northern Ireland.

Minister Gilmore said that despite the temptation to despondency, we should "keep hope alive". The Minister drew a detailed comparison between the situation two or three years ago and the situation today to argue that the present picture can be seen as more positive than negative. The Irish Government has invested heavily in a balanced approach to the talks process. Unionists often don't appreciate the degree to which the South has changed. It is unhelpful to paint the role of the Irish Government in a negative way. The cause of democracy is not served if those who have been elected fail in their responsibility to make quick and effective progress in the talks. The two Governments have published proposals on decommissioning which demonstrate a willingness to move to the substantive phase by mid-October.

Denis Haughey described the conflicting expectations of the "British community in Northern Ireland" and the Nationalists whose rights have been neglected and who would expect redress from a Labour government. Neither side will agree to be "an ethnic minority in their own country". There is a Unionist illusion that through integration of Northern Ireland with the United Kingdom, the Irish national aspiration will wither and die for lack of hope. But violence is caused not by hope but by despair. The issue is whether there can be "a sufficient accommodation". While there can be no fundamental constitutional change without the consent of a majority, the status quo is also unacceptable. Their position on decommissioning suggests that the UUP is prepared to contemplate a breakdown in the talks. The SDLP will be as helpful as possible in getting the UUP "out of a corner" but this is only possible on the basis of the Mitchell Report. Ultimately the British Government in concert with the Irish Government must achieve a better balance in Northern Ireland.

Most of the questions from the floor, which were taken in sequence and answered at the end of the meeting, put Trimble under pressure. Clive Soley, mentioning the precedent of Richard Nixon, asked whether Trimble would help the Unionist community to break out of its crisis of confidence. Kate Hoey asked about progress in breaking the link between the UUP and the Orange Order. Roger Stott asked whether leaders of political parties should back the operational decisions of the Chief Constable. Tony Worthington said that he was appalled by Drumcree and asked what changes in the law or changes in behaviour should be encouraged with a view to avoiding a repetition. Kevin McNamara asked what the Governments should do if the talks fail. David Ervine asked whether the speakers accepted without reservation the Mitchell Report "on all issues". There were some impassioned interventions from individuals who are not "names" in the Labour Party about the role of the Orange Order at Drumcree. One such individual congratulated the Dublin Government on its economic achievements and asked Trimble, "what can the Unionist Party be proud of over the past year?"

It was inevitable that at the stage of answering questions the attention should focus on Trimble, who was drawn into a detailed, almost day-by-day explanation of his actions over Drumcree. **Comment:** While this was done forcefully enough, it left the impression that Trimble has no vision of an accommodation in Northern Ireland which would appeal to the ordinary members of the British Labour Party.



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Apart from the organised fringe meetings there were a number of Irish social evenings. At one of these the Ambassador had long and friendly discussions with representatives of the Loyalist parties, including Spence, Ervine, and English, and with Chris and Michael McGimpsey of the UUP. Chris McGimpsey told me that as the party was still going on he was contacted by the Newsletter for confirmation that "the Loyalists were having a secret meeting with the Irish Ambassador". McGimpsey was able to head off the story by giving his word of honour that the meeting was being held in public and that Ken Reid of UTV was sitting at the same table! The Ambassador also attended a meeting of the Labour Party Irish Society where he had a conversation with Francie Molloy of Sinn Fein.

I have already reported in detail on my own conversation with the McGimpsey brothers on the Thursday afternoon.

*The question of a "debate on Northern Ireland" and Mo Mowlam's speech*

The practice is for the Conference Arrangements Committee to provide for a debate at conference on any subject in which the constituencies have demonstrated a sufficient interest. Over many years - one informant said for the last seventeen years - there has been a debate on Northern Ireland, although as regards last year, in an attenuated form.

As we reported in August, the initial motions on Northern Ireland appearing in the conference Agenda, and having their origin with (essentially) Kate Foley of the Labour Committee on Ireland, were deemed by Blair's office to be too "green". The leadership prevailed on the activists of LCI and LCIS to refrain from pushing for a debate this year under pain of a possible open confrontation between these lobby groups and the party leadership - with negative results for the Nationalist case within the Labour movement.

Nevertheless, contacts continued in Blackpool between Kate Foley and Mo Mowlam apparently on the basis that as Mowlam would be taking the floor on the Thursday afternoon on behalf of the National Executive, it would be strange if nothing were said in that debate about Northern Ireland. In the event, Mowlam's speech contained a section on Northern Ireland which flagged in an uncontentious way a number of issues highlighted in the LCI draft resolutions. This text is at annex 2 below.

In delivering her speech Mowlam to the disappointment of the LCI/LPIS activists skipped over or abbreviated certain passages in her speech, in particular reading "unity of the people in Northern Ireland" for "unity of the peoples of Ireland" [comment: in itself an inaccurate quotation from the manifesto] and leaving out the phrase about "replacing the status quo".

I am told that when questioned on this by Kate Foley, Mowlam insisted that no significance should be read into any minor departures from the text and that the text as circulated is valid and should be used for media purposes. It was also evident to Foley that the text in its written form had been approved by Blair's office.



*Mowlam's position as Secretary of State - designate*

In Blackpool, the Embassy came across certain rumours that Mowlam may not be the Secretary of State if Labour is elected. These rumours fell broadly into two categories. From Nationalist-oriented MPs, there was a whisper that Mowlam may not be considered a "safe pair of hands" and may be moved to somewhere like National Heritage to make way for Jack Cunningham: this line was given to the Ambassador by Roger Stott and to me by Kevin McNamara. From Unionist sources, there was speculation that Mowlam is upwardly mobile and may be replaced by her deputy Tony Worthington.

Neither of these rumours seemed to us to achieve "critical mass". Mowlam's conduct and manner and that of people round her, including her adviser Nigel Warner and Clive Soley, strongly suggested that she expects to be the Secretary of State.

As it happens Blair Hall of the US Embassy tells me this week in Bournemouth that because of rumours - and because of a slight intuition that Trimble's New Statesman article may have been intended in part to put Mowlam's position under pressure - the American Embassy has taken soundings this week both with Jonathan Powell and Peter Mandelson about Mowlam's standing in the Northern Ireland job. From the reactions received, the Americans are convinced that Mowlam has a "lock" on her present job and will be the next Secretary of State.

*Conclusions*

The Labour Party is probably as united now on its Irish policy as ever before. The core of that policy is bipartisanship. As to Labour's intentions in government, the language in the Road To The Manifesto is the key and implies a disposition to work towards a settlement along the lines of the Framework Document. The Agreed Ireland Forum (Mowlam/Soley/ McNamara) has helped to foster a consensus to the effect that a balanced constitutional settlement respecting certain principles is the natural objective of a party with Labour's traditions. Figures like Kate Hoey and Harry Barnes are careful not to position themselves in stark opposition to this consensus. Jeremy Corbyn chaired a mainstream fringe meeting without himself expressing a view.

The other lesson from Blackpool, however, is that Blair and his advisers have given themselves tremendous room for manoeuvre, on Northern Ireland as on every other area of policy. Blair's personal instincts remain difficult to discern. What is clear is that he continues to relate well to Mowlam, whose personal understanding of the nature of a balanced settlement is reassuring from our point of view.

Yours sincerely

*Philip McDonagh*

**Philip McDonagh**  
**Counsellor**



*Blair 1/10 ( Annex I )*

This year we meet as the Opposition.

Next year, the British people willing, an end to 18 years of Tories and we will meet as the new Labour government of Britain.

"A chance to serve, that is all we ask"

John Smith's final words from his final speech the night before he died.

We owe a debt of inspiration to John Smith.

And a debt of honour to Neil Kinnock.

I didn't begin New Labour. Neil did

I intend to repay them both in full.

All I ask is the chance to serve.

At the time of the next election, there will be just 1000 days until the new millennium. 1000 days to prepare for a 1000 years.

As a father, as a leader, as a member of the human family I ask this question of the future. We live in an era of extraordinary, revolutionary change. At work. At home. Through technology and the million marvels of modern science.

The possibilities are exciting. But its challenge is clear.

How do we create, in Britain, a new age of achievement in which all of the people not just a few can share?

For all the people. Or for a few. That is the choice. That is the challenge of the 21st century.

I want to lead Britain into this age of achievement and today I set out how.

But first we welcome all the representatives and Ambassadors from around the world. I want to welcome in particular both the Israeli Ambassador and the Representative of the Palestinian people.

You are here together. You have our prayers that the tears and the bloodshed of the past few days can once again be ended and peace restored.

Here too are those from all communities in Northern Ireland.

I want to say this to the people there.

No leader, with this nation's interest at heart, could do anything other than see this peace process through with the Irish government and the parties in Northern Ireland.

It will be every bit as much a priority for me as for John Major.

All the force and energy I have will be bent towards it.

We have been responsible in our actions over the peace process from the outset. We will continue to be so now.

And I say this to Sinn Fein and with what has happened in the last 24 hours to loyalists groups as well, you have your chance to take the path of peace.

It is your duty to take it as members of the human race. Honour it and you shall play your part.



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From that duty and I swear to you the search for justice and reconciliation will carry on without you.  
The choice is yours.

Let me also give apologies for one absentee.

The NEC invited Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma to be our guest here this week.

For reasons that everyone will understand, she cannot be with us. Let me invite her to come next year, a free citizen and an example to democrats all over the world.

Now about this nickname business.

First it was Stalin. Then it was Kim Il Sung. Now it's the devil with the demon eyes.

Can't we just go back to Bambi?

Or maybe Kim Il Sung's official title? "The Great Wise Leader, President for Life, Dearly Beloved and Sagacious Leader."

Why not? That's what John Prescott calls me.

Sometimes.

I'll tell you: the best Deputy a Leader could have and if I'm fighting in the jungle there's nobody I'd rather have with me than John Prescott.

And if John Major is fighting in the jungle, there is nobody I would rather have with him than Michael Heseltine.

Has there ever been a government in our history that has put itself before the British people with less to merit its re-election?

Just mouth the words: "Five more Tory years," and feel your senses and reason repulsed.

The tax cutting Party that gave us the biggest tax rise in peacetime history. The law and order Party that doubled crime and gave us a Home Secretary in court more often than the people he's supposed to be locking up.

The farmers' Party that gave us BSE.

The Party that set up the Scott Report, then when it found ministerial deceit just ignored it and would have got away with it but for the brilliance of Robin Cook.

And then Nolan. Cash for questions. And this morning, more revelations.

The Tories changed the law to let Mr Hamilton put his case.

We will change the law to make the Tories clean up their act.

To coin a phrase, we will be tough on sleaze and tough on the causes of sleaze.

We will ask the Nolan Committee to investigate political funding and we will legislate to make the Tories tell us where their money comes from.

John Major wants to be seen as an honest man, let him fight an honest campaign.

And by the way, Matthew Harding sends his regards.



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*Mowlem 3/10/96*

*Annex II*

*AA13/10*

That means creating a more inclusive - a more cohesive - society.

But crime pulls our communities and our society apart.

Today Jack spoke of our plans to make this country a safer place to live in. And we will ensure that protecting people from the effects of crime stays top of the agenda.

We should ban the private ownership and possession of handguns.

Everyone who listened to Ann Pearston from Snowdrop earlier will agree that's the only decent common-sense way forward.

Our society and our communities are pulled apart too by prejudice.

That's why we fought the Asylum and Immigration Bill. We see the Tories as they really are when they play the race card.

That's why 20 years on from Labour's 1976 Race Relations Act we're determined to carry on the fight against discrimination.

~~Discrimination and division are the malign forces that have long contributed to the suffering of the people of Northern Ireland.~~

They are a root cause of the problems there.

Sadly Northern Ireland has not been debated today, but a lack of debate does not mean a lack of commitment by this party.

Tony Blair this week pledged to continue in government to devote all the force and energy he has to seeing the peace process through.



AA13/11

Can I thank Kate Foley of the Labour Party Irish Society for her comments to Conference this morning, and add my personal commitment to that today.

I know how important it is to people throughout these islands, and especially to Irish people living in Britain.

In a Labour government, I will maintain the search for a just and fair settlement for both communities in northern Ireland.

I could not have spent so much time with people in Northern Ireland, could not have witnessed the tremendous hope and awful despair of the last two years without being moved and without being determined to see this through.

I was appalled at the events this summer. When, in those few days of madness, the forces of might and intimidation over-ran the rule of law.

It should not have happened.

And, in a Labour government, I will do all in my power to ensure that it cannot happen again.

The anger and bitterness aroused by Drumcree has been compounded by the spiteful and damaging boycotts and the spectacle that turns my stomach, of people being stopped by pickets from entering their church.

The Government failed in July through fudge and indecision to do their duty and protect decent, law-abiding people.

A new Labour government must start with clarity and determination.



AA13/12

That is why I am grateful to the Labour Party Irish Society that they have agreed to remit their motion. There was a lack of clarity in parts in a motion that otherwise contained much that we support.

As called for in the motion, we will realise Labour's commitment to justice and fairness and to equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland.

by reforming policing;

by creating a new framework of civil rights;

and by striving in our policy and in law to make religious discrimination in employment a thing of the past.

These reforms will take place.

Our values of fairness and justice must be at the heart of a new political settlement too.

Today, I renew Labour's commitment, on the basis of consent, to reconciliation between the two communities and unity of the peoples of Ireland.

We will work closely with the Irish Government and with the Northern Ireland parties to replace the status quo - which pleases no community - with a just and balanced settlement both can support.

I will continue, as I have done, to talk with people across the board in Northern Ireland - applying the rule of 'fairness not favours'.

While we've been here in Blackpool, anxiety has been raised about the future of the loyalist parties in the talks process.



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Annex II contd  
AA13/13

I met with loyalist politicians yesterday and I welcome their continued commitment to the maintenance of the cease-fire and to progress through negotiation.

We all know that the greatest boost to their efforts - and to all parties joining seriously in the talks - is for real, substantive progress to be made.

And I say to the IRA, why continue to rob Sinn Fein voters of their voice in the talks?

You know that the restoration of the cease-fire, is the only way to put that right.

The British and Irish governments must now - more than ever - continue to work closely together.

Build on your agreements together.

Build on you shared commitment to the principles and proposals in the Mitchell report.

And we continue to be grateful to Senator Mitchell for helping to provide the only sensible and practical way forward.

Thank you George Mitchell.

We say there has to be change in Northern Ireland, but we do recognise how difficult and unsettling change can be.

It is true in Northern Ireland and it is true in Britain today.

We are living through times of tremendous change - in our work, in our families, in our communities and even in our very identity as a country.

If people are to cope with, and even thrive on these changes, they need confidence in a government they can trust.