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21 October 1996

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

COPY TO: *46*
PST
PSS
MR. P TEAHON
MR. S. DONLON
MR. T DALTON

Dear Secretary,

Northern Ireland at the Conservative Party Conference, Bournemouth
7 - 11 October 1996

The attack in Lisburn on 7 October not surprisingly caused a wave of anti-IRA feeling in the Conservative Party. This was reflected at fringe meetings.

The Prime Minister, Mayhew and Ancram manoeuvred skilfully to respond to the mood of the party without introducing explicit new conditions for the participation of Sinn Fein in negotiations.

David Trimble spent two full days at the conference seeking to change the direction of British government policy. He did not call into question the UUP's commitment to the talks process.

From the Embassy, the Ambassador, Colin Wrafter, Helen Blake and the undersigned attended the conference. The Ambassador's reception was particularly well attended (e.g., Mayhew, Ancram, Mawhinney, Gummer, Trimble). David Trimble also attended our dinner afterwards for journalists. The Ambassador has already reported separately on this and on his conversation with the UUP leader. On the final evening of the conference, as we have already reported separately, the Ambassador and I had dinner with the Chairman of the Backbench Committee on Northern Ireland, Andrew Hunter.

This letter complements reports you will already have received on a number of specific aspects of the conference.

Fringe meetings

There were three fringe meetings on Northern Ireland:

- * a Tuesday lunchtime meeting addressed by David Trimble and David Wilshire MP and held under the auspices of the Freedom Association and the Friends of the Union

2

- * also on Tuesday lunchtime, a meeting addressed by Norman Lamont MP under the auspices of the Conservative Integration Group
- * on Wednesday lunchtime, a meeting organised by the Unionist Information Office and addressed by Trimble, Andrew Hunter MP, and the journalist Simon Heffer

(I) Wilshire/Trimble

The Trimble/Wilshire meeting attracted 90 people into a small room and generated a mood which would be fairly described as tribal and belligerent.

Opening the proceedings David Wilshire spoke of "an orchestrated campaign" involving "Dublin, the Prime Minister, and the Pope" to persuade David Trimble "to do what he doesn't believe to be right". The present process, said Wilshire, is doomed because it gives rise to unrealistic expectations in the Nationalist community and alienates the Unionists. Drumcree was a consequence of a mistaken policy. There was a "truce" in 1994 because "more Nationalists than Unionists were being murdered". In a real peace process, one would stop pretending to a distinction between terrorists and their political wings, it would not be argued that the absence of a ceasefire is "the only obstacle to progress", there would be no "one-sided concessions", there would be no "fudging" of fundamental issues (no united Ireland, decommissioning non negotiable, prisoners to be treated as criminals), policy on Northern Ireland would be "repatriated to our country" ("Dublin is a foreign government like Peru or Thailand", "Dublin willingly signed up to partition and should be reminded of it"), the Framework Document and the Downing Street Declaration would not be the basis of the agenda, the British government would be "persuaders for the Union", as in Scotland and Wales.

Summing up, Wilshire [comment: somewhat against the run of his own rhetoric] said that in "starting again", we should build on the majority on both sides and in the Republic who favour a just and lasting settlement. It will be a "different process" without Sinn Fein and without vetoes.

Trimble said that Lisburn was not a surprise because the peace process was "never genuine". We have been witnessing the tactical use of armed struggle. We must now hope for restraint from the Loyalists. The British government must have a "good hard think" about its posture if another "complete cessation" is announced.

Up to now, the Irish government with assistance from the British government has been trying to "bury decommissioning". But if the Republicans have a commitment to peace, decommissioning will be an insignificant issue. It must be a "genuine conversion on the republicans' part", not an ambiguous form of words.

If the decommissioning issue were out of the way difficulties would melt away. The UUP is willing to "move the talks on" with the present parties. Could the same be said of the Irish government and the SDLP? In a negotiation based on "democratic mandates", the outcome will be "a local administration for Northern Ireland within the UK".

3

What is also needed is a "security response". There are examples in the US and Italy of what can be done.

There should be the same quality of democracy in Northern Ireland as elsewhere in the UK. At present, only three percent of public expenditure is in the hands of local authorities.

By way of peroration, Trimble sought to offend the NIO. He alleged that the "people in Stormont" have been "captured by officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs". Whereas the leader of the Labour Party wants to be "the facilitator of the will of the people in Northern Ireland", Mayhew and Ancram are "against the spirit of this party". There is a need for a rethink in that regard. We should stop reacting to "the designs of terrorists and their allies".

Questions and answers followed in a taut atmosphere broken by sporadic shouts. One of the dark-suited young men called out at one point "kill them first", referring to the Provisional IRA.

On his voting intentions in the coming session of parliament Trimble said he would "take each issue as it comes". On security co-operation with the Republic, Trimble was not satisfied: the material found recently in London was "all from the Republic", the Irish police are not "well funded or equipped", President Clinton should consider giving to the Irish the kind of help he is giving to Israel. David Wilshire added that whereas the individual Garda officer does his best but lives in fear of retaliation, Irish police officers from Superintendent up are appointed by the government: to which he added, "need I say more?", to fresh waves of indignation.

Following calls from the floor for internment and attacks from the platform on the United States of America, the speakers were bundled urgently from the room by their handlers to leave the audience with an unpalatable choice between returning to the conference centre or roaring into the forests of Dorset in search of raw prey.

(ii) **Lamont**

Helen Blake has reported on Norman Lamont's meeting. Lamont denied that there is a middle ground between Unionism and Nationalism and called for "certainty" on the Union so as to avoid "unrealistic aspirations" among Nationalists and a backlash from Unionists.

(iii) **Trimble/Hunter/Heffer**

Helen Blake has reported in detail on the third of the above-mentioned fringe meetings. It was less well attended than the Trimble/Wilshire meeting on Tuesday, no doubt because it did not appear in the original conference programme. Andrew Hunter was more restrained from the platform than Wilshire. Trimble in turn was more circumspect than on the Tuesday, concentrating on the central theme that the negotiations must proceed without Sinn Fein. I reported at the time on my conversation with Trimble in the margins of this meeting.

4

Two other fringe events are worthy of note from our point of view.

On the Tuesday morning, there was a debate in conference on the Union which culminated in the adoption of the following motion:

"This Conference strongly endorses the Prime Minister's support of the Union, recognising the great benefits brought to all the British people through its continued preservation, and fully supports Her Majesty's Government's policy of total opposition to devolution."

The Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales replied to the debate and held up a Union Jack on stage at the end of the proceedings. Both of them made some side -references in their speeches to Northern Ireland, especially Michael Forsyth. There was one speaker from Northern Ireland, Ian Donaldson of the Northern Ireland Conservatives. It was clear, however, that the party leadership was doing its best to de-emphasise the Northern Ireland aspect of the debate. It was much commented on by Unionists that Sir Patrick Mayhew was on his way back from America as the debate was taking place.

The second additional event worth mentioning is the reception offered on the Thursday evening by the Northern Ireland Conservatives. This event was on a much smaller scale than our own reception - it was perhaps one fifth or one sixth as large. Mayhew and Ancram and two or three backbench MPs were present. Mayhew said a few words of introduction, looking forward to the day when it would be possible to imagine Northern Ireland sending a Conservative member to Westminster. When I was introduced to the Secretary of State shortly afterwards, I had the impression that he was surprised to find me among the audience: in racing parlance, he was not striding out with his usual freedom.

David Trimble's tactics

During last year's Conservative Party Conference, David Trimble was absent in Romania.

On this occasion, Trimble devoted two full days to the conference, the Tuesday and the Wednesday. As mentioned above, he addressed two fringe meetings. An effort was made by the Unionist Information Office to circulate a magazine called "The Unionist", containing an article by Trimble, to everyone attending the conference.

Trimble's argument was consistent in the different fora and could be summarised as follows:

- * the peace process as conceived by John Hume has failed
- * the UUP is committed to making a success of the talks without Sinn Fein
- * will the Irish government and the SDLP be willing to strike a deal in the absence of Sinn Fein?

5

- * without Sinn Fein, the all-Ireland dimension of a settlement will be scaled down and the Framework Document will be irrelevant •
- * there is a "democratic deficit" in Northern Ireland to do with the power of British Ministers and "quangos" in the absence of a local assembly
- * the models for a settlement in Northern Ireland are provided by (a) Scotland and Wales in the plans of the Labour Party and (b) the treatment of national minorities within the OSCE
- * Trimble also supported a Bill of Rights and called for additional security measures based on the fight against organised crime in Italy and the United States.

At his first fringe meeting, Trimble was openly critical of Mayhew and Ancram, as stated above. In context, his use of the word "rethink" was clearly intended to suggest their dismissal. In my presence the following day Trimble explained that Mayhew taxed him with these remarks at their meeting on Wednesday morning, saying, "I hear you want the Northern Ireland Ministers to go". To this Trimble replied, according to his own version, "I never mentioned Sir John Wheeler".

Norman Lamont and David Wilshire in their respective fringe meetings clearly supported the idea of recasting British policy and in particular limiting co-operation with the Irish government. Andrew Hunter was somewhat more measured, in effect calling for a balanced settlement minus the Framework Document and with a renewed emphasis on the value of the Union to the British people.

The Lisburn bombing in principle created a favourable backdrop to Trimble's efforts to change the direction of Conservative policy. But not much headway was made. Although judgements are difficult, it seems fair to say that Trimble failed either to equate the Northern Ireland and European issues in the minds of the right wing of the party or influence significantly the overall policy emerging from the structured debates of the conference.

The combined weight of Major, Mayhew and Ancram played a role in this area analogous to the role of Major, Riskind and Clarke on the European issue. Another difficulty for Trimble was the sense among many Conservatives that he may be willing to precipitate the fall of the government before next May in order to build up credit with Tony Blair. Finally, Drumcree has left its marks on Conservative opinion as on British opinion generally.

Major's speech

The Northern Ireland section of Mr Major's speech is annexed below.

Northern Ireland was taken towards the end of the speech, between "law and order" and "Europe and the wider world". Major devoted more space to Northern Ireland than Blair had done in Blackpool. Like Blair, Major kept Northern Ireland on the one hand and Scotland and Wales on the other hand, safely apart.

6

With evident emotion, Major referred to the death on the morning of 11 October of Warrant Officer James Bradwell as a result of the Lisburn bombing. This drew a deep sigh from the audience. Major went on to

- * urge the Loyalists to preserve their ceasefire
- * promise legislation to allow for decommissioning in parallel with talks ("no hiding place for those arms, missiles and explosives")
- * promise to enhance the role of the Grand Committee
- * affirm that "no one will take Sinn Fein seriously ever again until they show a serious commitment to end violence for good"
- * promise "as long as there is a political breath in my body" to "fight for a secure way of life in Northern Ireland and for a settlement fair to all".

A key paragraph of the speech read as follows:

"But I know that there can only be a peace in Northern Ireland if all its citizens - Catholic and Protestant alike - feel their traditions have a welcome place in the United Kingdom. And there will only be peace of mind if we remove the causes that have given rise to so much conflict."

Comment: Mr Major achieved an emotional resonance with his audience. At the same time, he preserved freedom of action within the political negotiations and secured the backing of conference for accommodating the two traditions. His remarks about the Grand Committee were an expansion of an announcement made in a written PQ some months ago.

It is regrettable that there was no direct reference in the speech to the Irish Government. However, the Taoiseach - unlike chancellor Kohl and President Chirac - figured prominently in the short film shown before the leader's speech.

Conclusion

This was my third Conservative Party Conference, and it is tempting to see a pattern as far as the treatment of Northern Ireland is concerned.

The mood in the "shires" is more Unionist than the policy of Conservative Government. To preserve their room for manoeuvre, the leadership limits debate on the conference floor and avoids activity on the fringes. This puts an onus on elements on the right of the party who might wish to see a change in policy.

This year, as in previous years, the Government's line prevailed. Mayhew's political adviser, David Campbell-Bannerman, sat beside me at the Wilshire/Trimble fringe meeting and seemed

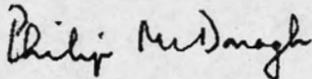
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as much out of sympathy with what was happening as I was. He asked me to convey to Dublin as strongly as I could "what the Secretary of State has to put up with".

Although the pressures on Major's policy are real, it is arguable especially in the run up to the General Election, that the Conservative Party has "nowhere else to go on Northern Ireland". For the time being at least, there is no credible alternative policy.

As to what might happen after an election defeat, it is perhaps not to be assumed that the party will move drastically to the right on Irish affairs. For one thing, the welcome given to Clarke and Rifkind suggests that the centre left of the Conservative Party is still very much alive. For another, there are indications that not all Euro-sceptics want to make an issue of Northern Ireland in the manner of Norman Lamont. We have already reported on the attitude of Andrew Hunter. Another example of restraint is provided by James Cran, who resigned as PPS to Mayhew in the weeks before the conference but issued no statement, allowing the media to conclude that policy on Northern Ireland was not the reason for his departure.

Yours sincerely



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor

Northern Ireland

“Earlier this week, the IRA once again spat their hate at the British nation.

This morning, as a result of that attack, a British soldier died. For many months, Sinn Fein leaders have mouthed the words of peace. Warrant Officer James Bradwell was 43, with a wife and with children, Mr Adams. He joined the Army prepared to lose his life defending the British nation. Soldiers do. But he was murdered in cold blood in the United Kingdom. I sent him there Mr Adams. So spare me any crocodile tears. Don't tell me this has nothing to do with you. I don't believe you Mr Adams, I don't believe you.

(sustained, loud applause)

I hope his family can find tranquillity and peace. And I'd just like to say to James Bradford: Well done for all you've done for our peace and our security. It was in the best and most honorable traditions of the British Army.”

(applause)

speech continues as in text with some amendments

- 11 -

But today, let me tell you of our plans for young tearaways who are out of control.

We only want them in institutions if it's really necessary.

But if they don't deserve that punishment - severe for young people - they mustn't think they can offend and get away with it.

Over the last year, we've been testing an electronic way of tagging offenders so we can confine them to their homes, and know that that curfew is being kept.

It's worked. We think it will work on younger offenders as well - so, we'll try that too.

If we know a young trouble maker is out there, night after night, disturbing the peace and committing crimes, we'll make sure the courts have the power to order him to stay put. At home - off the streets.

And the tag around his ankle - that can't be removed - will raise the alert the moment he tries to go out.

If he can't go out on Friday and Saturday nights with his mates it might cool him down a bit. If he can't watch his football team on Saturday, let me say it plain. That's his fault. Not mine, not yours, his. And it's time the buck stopped where the responsibility lies. No-one will miss the hooligan on the terrace.

And he might just learn the lesson.

And that will help him - as well as us.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Earlier this week, the IRA once again spat their hate at the British nation.

Many good people tell me I shouldn't bother with Northern Ireland. "No votes in it" they say. Maybe not. But there are lives in it.

And that's why I bother.

I don't believe Northern Ireland will leave the United Kingdom, nor do I wish it to.

But I know that there can only be a peace in Northern Ireland if all its citizens - Catholic and Protestant alike - feel their traditions have a welcome place in the United Kingdom. And there will only be peace of mind if we remove the causes that have given rise to so much conflict.

This is a political task. Grindingly hard, I know. But that is what the multi-party talks are for.

Progress has been slow - painfully slow. But progress has been made. And there is no other show in town.

Bombs will not bring Sinn Fein into the talks.

All they mean is that Sinn Fein has slammed the door on themselves.

- 12 -

I applaud the way the Loyalists have maintained their ceasefire in the face of the IRA's provocation. Their political leaders have gained in influence and standing as a result. I urge them to stand firm and not to throw away what they have achieved.

The IRA's latest betrayal of Northern Ireland means the demand for decommissioning of illegal arms is justified ever more clearly.

We must have decommissioning in parallel with the talks.

And so that there's no hiding place for those arms, missiles and explosives, Paddy Mayhew will introduce legislation into Parliament this autumn to set out how they can be taken out of circulation.

I want those weapons off the street.

And I want to remove the false excuses peddled by the men of violence for keeping their weapons. Let us expose these men to the world for what they are.

I also want to make government in Northern Ireland more accountable and give MPs more responsibility. We have already given the Scottish and Welsh members greater ability to question Ministers.

This autumn, I shall do the same for Northern Ireland. MPs from there should be able to question the Ministers and scrutinise Government policies directly in the Grand Committee, meeting sometimes in Northern Ireland. I will consult the parties about how best to achieve that.

The IRA has always believed that Britain can be deflected by terrorism. They've always been wrong. And they're wrong now.

No-one will take Sinn Fein seriously ever again until they show a serious commitment to end violence for good.

I believe in the politics of reason - backed by strong law enforcement. I know in the end it will prevail.

And I promise the people of Northern Ireland this:

For as long as there is a political breath in my body, I will fight for a secure way of life in Northern Ireland and for a settlement fair to all.

EUROPE AND THE WIDER WORLD

Earlier this week, Ian Lang, Malcolm Rifkind and Ken Clarke set out exciting new possibilities for Britain as a global trading nation with interests around the world. Wonderful speeches, all of them.

We have links and influence on every continent.

We have given birth to a whole family of nations.

I never forget that as I contemplate our future role in Europe.

The sharpest element of the European debate is the possibility of a Single European Currency.