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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

22 July 1998

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

*Ms. McLaughlin
passed on to the
Tasineau*

*[Signature]
24.7.98*

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Catherine W1
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4/27/98*

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Dear Secretary,

Meeting with Joe Pilling, PUS, Northern Ireland Office

I met Joe Pilling, Permanent Under Secretary, Northern Ireland Office, for lunch today. Following are the main points.

Northern Ireland Bill

Pilling admitted that the Bill had been hastily drafted and would need amendment from the Government side to correct what he called "errors" that had crept in during the drafting process. He himself was proud of what they had done in the time available although the Parliamentary Draughtsman had warned that the pressure to produce the Bill in such a short space of time would entail "years of trouble". Pilling did not envisage the bulk of Government amendments being introduced in the Commons; they would be tabled during its passage through the Lords in the Autumn. This was in some respects unsatisfactory since it meant that the Commons would need to consider the amendments that came back from the Lords, but it had the advantage that it gave the British Government more time to reflect on its amendments and on any suggestions that the Irish side wished to make. I said that we were very concerned on two main counts. One, that the British side had not given us the full-scale meeting on the Bill that we had requested. Two, that the Bill failed to reflect the balance of the Agreement, in particular in relation to the North/South Council, the Human Rights provisions (review of the operation of the Human

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Rights Commission, and stronger provisions for the North/South Human Rights Committee) and the Irish language. Nationalists were particularly concerned at this lack of balance which was out of keeping with the spirit and substance of the Agreement.

now agreed!
On the first point Pilling said that he envisaged a full scale meeting with us next week in Belfast. It had proved impossible to organise one earlier because all the main officials involved were tied up with the Commons. In any event, since the Government's main amendments could not be introduced until the Lords consideration of the Bill, we could be assured that there would be sufficient time for the British side to consider our views.

In regard to the specific points I had raised Pilling said that he would take them under consideration. The British approach to the Bill (which reflects their general approach to the drafting of legislation) had been to include only such matters as required legislative action. Neither the NIO nor the Parliamentary Draughtsman wished to include material on which legislation was not regarded as strictly necessary. Indeed the Draughtsman had warned against the inclusion of such material as potentially reducing the flexibility of the Government in the future - on the operation of the North/South Council for example. Pilling noted that we had used similar argumentation about necessity in relation to prisoner release legislation, although we had accepted the desirability of such legislation in the end. He could see what he called the presentational arguments in relation to the balance of the legislation on the nationalist side, and he suspected that the Secretary of State would also.

Minister's Meeting with the Secretary of State

Pilling said that the idea of a second dinner with the Minister next week had come from Mowlam herself. She felt that the atmosphere and substance of the last meeting at the Embassy on 9 July had been particularly good and she wished to follow up on it. She also wanted to say thank you to the Minister for the way in which he had listened and responded to her views on Drumcree and the Ormeau Road. Pilling expects that he and Bill Jeffrey will accompany Mowlam on the British side.

Mowlam's Position

Pilling expects Mowlam to stay on as Secretary of State to see through the passage of the legislation and the bedding down of the Agreement. There was

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some risk of a move owing to what he called "pull factors", i.e. her usefulness to Blair elsewhere, but overall he thought that the Prime Minister would wish to keep her on as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland until into the New Year. He put the chances of her moving at one in five. As we know, Mowlam played an active and key role in convincing the Tories to change tack on the Prisoners legislation when it moved from the Commons to the House of Lords. Pilling revealed that in her lobbying efforts Mowlam had a lengthy meeting with Thatcher, and apparently the two had hit it off. Pilling also confirmed that the most difficult person on the Conservative side was (as we also know) Michael Howard, and it was he, more than Andrew Mackay, that had determined the Conservatives' negative strategy in the Commons. (I spoke to Howard recently and intend to see him again in the Autumn).

Pilling added that Mowlam would miss John Steele, who is leaving the Northern Ireland Office on Friday, and whose judgment and friendship she particularly valued. He thought, however, that Bill Jeffrey had won her confidence in a way that his predecessor Quentin Thomas had not.

Adams/Trimble Meeting

As you suggested, I emphasised the importance of as early a meeting as possible between the David Trimble and Gerry Adams in order to ensure that the next phase of implementation, and in particular a successful meeting of the Shadow Executive, could take place. Pilling agreed and said that consideration was being given on the British side on how to orchestrate this. Some, and this included himself, were advocates of a step by step approach under which a series of moves would take place (including a declaration that the war is over) culminating in a face to face meeting. Others felt that there was little that Adams could give in a step by step strategy and that they should work towards what Pilling called a big bang - a full scale meeting without too many preliminaries. In either event he felt that there would be key roles for the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister. He was somewhat doubtful about a potential role of the Americans, although he speculated as to whether, in line with his own views on a step by step approach, the Clinton visit could be used to bring Adams and Trimble together, say at a reception, in a manner that would pave the way for a subsequent face to face meeting.

In this connection Pilling said that he was unsure how to read Trimble's intervention on the Northern Ireland Bill in the Commons on Monday night. One reading might see his speech as setting down a number of preconditions

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that needed to be met before sitting down with Sinn Fein in the Executive. In this view Trimble was in danger of impaling himself on a hook from which he would find it difficult to extricate himself. Another, more benign view, was that Trimble was giving a list of examples rather than preconditions thus leaving himself leeway for a future meeting with Sinn Fein. I said that Trimble was difficult to read on the matter and the best that we could hope for was that he was keeping his options open. I was struck for example by Trimble's qualifications in his speech "as things stand" and "if such a situation were to arise today" which may have been deliberately inserted to give him room for manoeuvre later on.

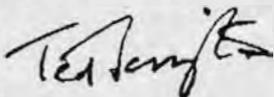
Decommissioning

I said that we were concerned at the speculation in British newspapers, attributed to British sources, about imminent moves on decommissioning. Sinn Fein could only see this as a manoeuvre to put public pressure on them on the issue. If this was the intention, it could only be counter productive. Pilling, without referring to the Minister involved, said that the episode was best regarded as a "cock-up". He took our points on the matter.

Drumcree and its aftermath

We discussed the events surrounding Drumcree and I have mentioned above Mowlam's appreciation of our position and assistance on the parades question. Pilling did however say that "as a negotiator" he could see that Drumcree would be seen as a win for nationalists, notwithstanding the march on the Ormeau Road, which, even for those involved, was a desultory and dreary affair. He implied that Unionists would need a win, and in particular that Trimble would need something to bolster his position in the Unionist community. I challenged this, arguing that the winner had been the rule of law, and that the abiding difficulty in Northern Ireland had been the perception of zero sum games. While we appreciated Trimble's difficulties, and indeed would wish to help him in whatever way we could, a strategy that every step on one side had to be met with concessions to the other, irrespective of the principles involved, could not be a basis for policy.

Yours sincerely,



Edward Barrington
Ambassador