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Messrs. Murray, Teahon,
Mansergh & Dalton:
Ambassadors London &
Washington: Joint Secretary:
Counsellors A-I

22 APR 1998

*cc PSM/PSMS
Theimer file*

22 April 1998

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

Ms McLaughlin

*passed on to the
Tadiseach*

25th

*McK...
22-4-98*

Dear Secretary,

Conversation with Minister of State Paul Murphy

At a reception yesterday evening at the residence of Cardinal Hume, I spoke for fifteen minutes with Minister of State Paul Murphy.

Murphy was hopeful that pro-settlement elements will continue to gain ground among both Nationalists and Unionists. He expects Paisley's vote to fall a few points below its current level of sixteen to seventeen percent. McCartney has commissioned posters superimposing pictures of Adams and McGuinness on scenes of devastation. Murphy thinks this is likely to prove counterproductive.

Murphy met Trimble yesterday to prepare for today's parliamentary business, which Trimble will miss owing to his visit to the United States. Trimble remarked that Jeffrey Donaldson continues to oppose the agreement. Murphy and I discussed possible reasons for this: his religious beliefs, political positioning, the emotional impact of having lost relatives through violence.

Labour and the Conservatives have effectively reached agreement to guillotine today's Commons debate on legislation to provide for Assembly elections, the referendum, and the winding up of the Forum. There are fears that Ross and McCartney may try to filibuster. Murphy used the term "backwoodsmen" about some of the Conservatives who intervened in Monday's debate. A contrast was

implicitly drawn between these individuals and the party leadership.

Murphy said that he hopes to visit Dublin in early May for political discussions. He spoke of keeping up the momentum and underlining that the two governments are working together. Ambassador Sutherland has been asked to be in touch with you about a possible programme.

I asked Murphy about the decommissioning issue in the light of the intention of the Conservatives, signalled in Monday's Commons debate, to seek legislative provision for excluding Sinn Fein from the Executive in the absence of "substantial decommissioning". Was this an issue which will come to a head in the second half of the year? Murphy said that the best solution would be for the decommissioning issue to fade away. The elections to the Assembly and the work of putting the Agreement into practice may generate enough good will and political momentum to enable the Unionists to de-emphasise decommissioning. (Murphy's comments were in keeping with Mowlam's determination in her replies in the House of Commons on Monday to treat decommissioning as one of several objectives to be pursued in parallel, but without linkage, under the terms of the Agreement.)

Murphy spoke warmly of several participants in the negotiations, including Hume, Mallon, and Trimble. He referred to the "latest speculation" that Mallon rather than Hume would be the SDLP's nominee as deputy first minister. (I had dinner with Seamus following the Commons debate on Monday and found him very far from pushing himself for a role of this kind.)

The Taoiseach's reference to Murphy in his speech on Good Friday has led to a number of letters and messages. Murphy was extremely grateful for the recognition he was given.

Yours sincerely,

Philip McDonagh

Philip McDonagh
Counsellor

This is not a good guide! He's fluctuating!