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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

23 June 1994

Mr Pat Hennessy,
Anglo Irish Division,
HQ

Tony Blair and Northern Ireland

Dear Pat,

Tony Blair will publish later today (23 June) a manifesto setting out his personal vision for the Labour party. According to a conversation which I had this morning with Ros Preston in Blair's team it will contain the following statement on Northern Ireland; " The conflict in Northern Ireland is the greatest and most protracted problem facing the British and Irish peoples. The pursuit of peace and reconciliation in Ireland should be one of the highest priorities of the British Government. The Labour party is committed to tyhe aim of Irish unity by consent and to the principles contained in the Downing Street Declaration."

The text of the above was furnished by MacNamara some days ago although his draft has been reduced very considerably. Preston assured me that this was purely for editorial purposes. Macnamara has also provided Blair with a draft reply to a letter from the Labour Party Irish society seeking Blair's views on Northern Ireland. MacNamara's draft contains nothing new and essentially re-affirms Blair's committment to Irish re-unification by consent.

MacNamara declared his support for Blair at an early date and has every hope of being retained by him as Front Bench spokesman. His feeling is that in the first months of his leadership Blair will wish to concentrate mainly on the economy and domestic issues and that Northern Ireland will not be high on his priority list. He is also of the opinion that Blair will stick closely to existing policy if for no other reason that his awareness of the need to cultivate the support of the Irish community.

MacNamara has always made much of the fact that in several key marginal constituencies especially in London the Irish vote could be a crucial factor in the next general election. Personally I believe that this factor has been greatly overstated and is based on several flawed assumptions about the homogenous nature of the Irish vote and its continued exclusive attachment to the Labour party. Nevertheless it carried weight with John Smith and while Blair may be more sceptical he is also unlikely to discount it entirely. Tony

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR
Telephone: 071-235 2171
Fax: 071-245 6961

cc PST
ESS
A/Sec of Legation
F Manning D/7
M. Manning L/1
P. Dalton D/3
C/O. A-1
J. Lee
Amb. White

Blair has also shown himself in the past to be aware of the political value of cultivating the Irish community. I recall for example his attendance at a rather modest lobbying meeting organised by the Action Group for Irish Youth in 1992 where he was happy to be seen among the audience. Those close to him, including for example Derry Irvine, the shadow Lord Chancellor, in whose chambers Blair and his wife did their legal pupillage, point to the fact that Blair's wife is from a Catholic Liverpool Irish background.

Organisation of the election

The leadership contest on this occasion will be conducted in accordance with the new rules agreed at last years Labour party conference which effectively abolished the block Trade Union vote.

Nominations closed on 16 June and there are as you know two other candidates in the race with Tony Blair - John Prescott, shadow employment secretary and Margaret Beckett, acting Leader.

A postal ballot will be held on 30 June among two of the three sections of the electoral college - party members, and MPs and MEPs. The Trade Unions will hold their own ballot among political levy paying members. Each section will be entitled to a third of the vote. The single transferable voting system will be used and as soon as a candidate wins more than 50 per cent of the vote he or she will be declared the winner.

The new leader will be announced on 21 July.

The other candidates

I happened to get a first hand account of life in the other challengers' camps some days ago when I met some of Prescott's and Beckett's supporters at a social gathering. Despite the carefully cultivated image of public affability between the three contenders - loving each other to death as Prescott describes it - there is plenty of old fashioned competitive needle behind the scenes. Both Prescott and Beckett are laying claim to the left wing of the party - a key factor in determining which of these two will emerge victorious in the contest for the Deputy Leadership.

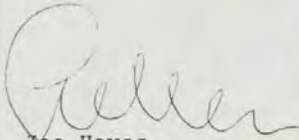
This clearly will be the more closely fought contest with Blair's supporters divided evenly between Beckett and Prescott. While Blair has been personally careful to avoid any hint of endorsement for either he is, according to Derry Irvine, anxious to see the back of Margaret Beckett. Irvine's view is that Beckett cannot be trusted entirely as a deputy as John Smith found to his cost when she opposed him on removal of the block vote. He reminded me of Beckett's past as an active member of Militant and repeated his firm belief that she will be defeated by Prescott.

Apart from the competitive edge between Beckett and Prescott over the Deputy's job there are among their supporters plenty who are also ready to criticise Blair and the values his

leadership is likely to stand for. Their concerns reflect a familiar dilemma within the British Labour party which boils down in its essentials to a battle between the pragmatists and the purists, the modernisers and the ideologues. It resurrects again the behind the scenes dramas of Kinnocks time when the left wing felt that principle had been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency and that all that mattered to the leadership was winning the next election at any cost.

The Beckett and Prescott camps have plenty of evidence to support their view that the party will go down the same road under Tony Blair. They point for example to the resurgence of Peter Mandelson, MP for Hartlepool, the party's image maker during the Kinnock era and a fervent Blair supporter. John Smith had kept Mandelson's modernising zeal at bay. In particular Smith had no time for Mandelson's calls for wholesale dismissals of Labour's old guard from entrenched positions on the second tier of the Front Bench and the promotion of young blood. MacNamara would have been one of the first to go in Mandelson's image revolution although nowadays Kevin professes to have developed a close and warm relationship with him. It is likely that Mandelson will have a much greater say under Tony Blair and it remains to be seen whether Kevin's confidence in his new found friend will stand the test of political necessity.

Yours sincerely,



Joe Hayes.