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52

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15 July 1996

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

Dear Secretary

Conversations with Mo Mowlam, MP

As you know, Mo Mowlam contacted me very late on Friday night, and I was in touch with her and her adviser, Nigel Warner over the weekend.

As agreed, I emphasised three points to Mowlam:

- * the need to recognise the nature of what happened in Portadown, namely that the authorities backed down before the threat of violence. I pointed to the implications of this for nationalist perceptions of the administration in Northern Ireland and for the efforts of the Irish Government and the SDLP to argue the case of constitutional nationalism
- * the need for a clear approach to future parades. I said that the basic principle is that parades should not go where they are not welcome and are understood on all sides as an assertion of power. On this basis, it might be possible for an independent commission to establish the criteria under which decisions would be made in individual cases
- * the need for the two governments to work together. I emphasised in particular, the dangers I saw in the approach of the Daily Telegraph which seems to favour the abrogation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

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On a personal basis, I placed particular emphasis on the character of certain Orange parades. Unless limits are set to such parades, I could see no possibility of restoring the credibility of the administration in Northern Ireland within the nationalist community. I argued that the British Government which would know exactly how to deal with provocative demonstrations in Brixton seemed to have lost its compass in Northern Ireland. Did Sir Patrick Mayhew understand the implications of admitting publicly that a mob of more than 50,000 people might have descended on a Catholic housing estate?

I note that all three points put by me to Mowlam are reflected in her briefing of John Kampfner in today's Financial Times, although in diluted form (copy attached). Mowlam also drew freely on our arguments in a series of other interviews over the weekend.

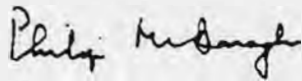
Mowlam and Warner made the following additional points in conversation:

- * Mowlam offered herself for interview to the BBC on Saturday but was taken only by Radio Five. She feels that the BBC may have been under political pressure having given an important platform to the Taoiseach on Friday evening
- * Viscount Cranbourne is felt to be behind the heavily Unionist agenda of the Daily Telegraph
- * Labour has been considering calling for a Royal Commission to investigate last week's disturbances
- * It is likely that a Labour Government would ensure that no parade takes place on the Garvaghy Road next year. However, the political path to such an outcome is not yet clear. The Quakers and other mediation groups have urged that the criterion that "a parade should be welcome" would rule out all nationalist parades and many Orange parades which have not hitherto given difficulty [comment: I responded to this that under the right circumstances local communities will want to exercise tolerance and forbearance but that the idea of the police forcing through sectarian demonstrations recalls the politics of Alabama and is impossible to reconcile with the existence of civil society in Northern Ireland].

Tony Blair has been exercising a direct restraining influence on Mowlam's comments

Warner has undertaken to give us some advance notice of the line to be taken in the House of Commons this afternoon, which is still, as of 12 noon, under discussion within the Labour Party.

Yours sincerely



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor

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