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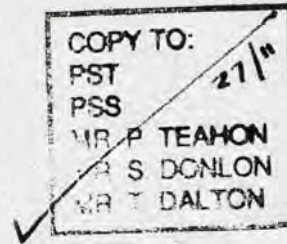
Telephone: 0171-235 2171

Direct Line: 0171-201 2

Fax: 0171-245 6961

27 November 1996

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

*Ms O hUiginn*

Dear Secretary,

Conversations with Mo Mowlam and Nigel Warner

Mowlam and Warner telephoned me at home yesterday evening (Tuesday) and Warner contacted me again this morning. Mowlam's purpose in calling was to seek advice about the family holiday she is planning in Ireland at Christmas and New Year, but she turned then to the contacts between the British government and John Hume. Mowlam had previously spoken to Hume both to have his view and to commiserate with him on the Daily Telegraph's recent attack (Saturday's editorial).

Mowlam said that Blair and his advisers - and by implication she herself and Nigel Warner - will be meeting John Chilcot and an NIO team for dinner tomorrow Thursday. Mowlam hoped that this meeting will be helpful.

At the same time, she recognised that Thursday evening may be too late to influence the present initiative. The Prime Minister may wish to publish before then. He is vulnerable to the accusation that confusion about a possible statement is in itself a barrier to progress in the political talks. News management might be another, lesser factor in his thinking, especially if the public reaction to the budget is unfavourable.

Mowlam recognised that there could be advantages in postponing any British initiative. A natural break in the talks may be imminent if it is true, as Labour has heard, that President Clinton will take a decision this weekend on whether to

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appoint Mitchell as the new Secretary of State.

Mowlam was also inclined to believe that Adams' comments last night were designed to leave doors open.

Mowlam returned to what she sees as the Prime Minister's fundamental problem: he is afraid to be seen to discriminate in some way against the present talks process in order to help Sinn Fein. If, for example, an early recess or a very long recess is brought about in Belfast, as part of a scenario helpful to Sinn Fein, the British government may wonder how to justify a subsequent refusal to create a long recess in advance of the general election, as sought by the Unionists.

Mowlam asked me whether I could see Sinn Fein accepting a hiatus in negotiations lasting right through to the general election. I said that progress might be very slow between now and the elections but that the position of the two governments and the international Chairmen should remain one of encouraging the process to move ahead.

Nigel Warner offered some analysis which I repeat for what it is worth:

- * If a long recess over Christmas is to be an important part of a ceasefire scenario, could Sinn Fein facilitate matters themselves by offering a holding response to the Prime Minister's statement when it is published. Sinn Fein/IRA could then complete their "study" of the conditions for entry into negotiations once the nature of the Christmas break becomes clear. In offering this observation, Warner acknowledged that he may be failing to take into account the "knife edge" atmosphere in which decisions are taken in the Republican movement.
- * Warner believes that it would be significant if a statement by the Prime Minister avoided any direct reference to Paragraph 2(3) of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 - the paragraph which makes the Secretary of State responsible for inviting delegations to the talks and which is supposedly subject to judicial review. As long as this paragraph is kept in the background, Warner wonders whether there is scope for the international chairmen to invite Sinn Fein to a meeting very soon after a ceasefire to pledge acceptance of the Mitchell principles, but leaving it open to the British government to say to the Unionists that as far as they are concerned the formalities of Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations would need to be completed in due course.

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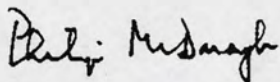
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- * Warner sees no reason why the British Government would refuse to say of any entry-to-negotiations scenario, "this could be completed by X date." For example, 'X' could be the date of the resumption of talks after the Christmas break.

Both to Mowlam and Warner I underlined that the gap between Hume and the British government is capable of being bridged and that it would be regrettable if too much haste by Downing Street were to produce unnecessary acrimony and misunderstanding.

Yours sincerely,



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor