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**Reference Code:** 2021/50/274

**Creator(s):** Department of Foreign Affairs

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Conversation with Kevin McNamara MP

Belfast 7 February

1. McNamara is very much reconciled to a position as part of Old Labour and is alienated from the New Labour of Blair and Mowlan.

Any residual reticence in criticising the present Labour leadership is fast disappearing. He predicts, however, that dissidents within the party will support the leadership at least until after the next general elections. McNamara intends to remain active on Northern Ireland and while refraining from direct public attacks on the Labour leadership feels free to express his own views on developments.

2. McNamara considers that the position being adopted by the Labour Party on Northern Ireland will lose them Irish votes and in certain areas seats at the next election. He has no confidence in Blair and Mowlan's approach to Northern Ireland and he reminded me that more progress had been made in the past under Conservative Governments. He made no attempt to hide his dislike of Blair and Mowlan seeing them as having undermined his work in developing a distinctive Labour Party policy on Northern Ireland and having mobilised the support of the Irish community in Britain behind the Party.
3. He was very pessimistic regarding the willingness of the UUP to make any concessions whatsoever in the absence of pressure from the British Government. Both Unionist parties are now, he argued, under very hardline leadership, the only difference being that the UUP are more educated and more clever than the DUP. He dismissed any suggestion of moderates within the UUP. "I sit beside them in the House and have to listen to their heckling when I speak - Maginness being particularly nasty".
4. He described the pro Unionist/integrationist wing within Labour (as represented by Kate Hoey and Harry Barnes as growing with support coming from Scottish Labour MPs who are Unionist in a Scottish context.

Mairtin Ó Fainin

Anglo-Irish Division

9 February 1996

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