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(27)

20 December 1996

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

COPY TO: 48
EST 24
PSS 12
MR P TEAMON
S. DONLON
MR. T. DALTON

Dear Secretary,

Mr. Blair's statement of policy on Northern Ireland, 13 December

In case it has not already reached the Department, I attach a copy of Mr. Tony Blair's statement of policy on Northern Ireland last Friday.

I believe that to a considerable degree the statement reflects the approach which the Embassy has been promoting with the Labour Party. Mowlam's understanding of our position is already fairly clear. In this instance the role of Jonathan Powell, with whom as you know I discussed the speech in early December, was clearly also influential.

In particular, it is reassuring that Mr. Blair has stated the following:

"We will work on the basis of the agreements that have been reached in recent years - the three stranded approach, the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework Documents".

Those wishing to move Labour policy in a more Unionist direction have of course focused their criticism on the Framework Documents. Mr. Trimble recently described Mowlam as the only significant British politician who still talks about the Frameworks.

Other themes which the Embassy has emphasised and which are reflected in Mr. Blair's speech include the centrality of British-Irish co-operation, our analysis

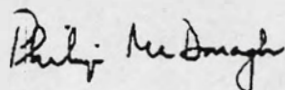
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based on the need to avoid domination of one tradition by the other (as opposed to an analysis based on the vindication of individual rights), and the two-way application of the principle of consent.

In consultation with the Department, but on a personal basis, I recommended to Powell that Mr. Blair makes clear his position on Harryville, avoiding in particular any specious linkage of that situation to the marches issues in general. The relevant passage on page 7 of the speech is clearly intended to be helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor

23/12 '96 15:53

13-DEC-1996 17:30

FROM JONATHAN POWELL

SECURE-FX TRANSMISSION

IRISH EMBASSY

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PRESS

EMBARGO 14.30hrs

SPEECH BY THE RT HON TONY BLAIR MP

LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY

TO THE GROUP OF SEVEN

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST

FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER 1996

Please check against delivery

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I am delighted to be in Belfast today and to have the opportunity to speak to the Group of Seven. This is a partnership organisation and partnership is at the very core of what new Labour stands for. I know that George Quigley and others have done a great deal of work to bring this organisation together and I very much support the partnership between business, trade unions and economic development organisations that you are trying to build.

Today I want to set out Labour's approach, to say to the people of Northern Ireland what you can expect from a Labour government both on the peace process and on the economic and social issues which affect your lives.

The Peace Process

First of all I want to explain the bipartisan approach we have adopted in Opposition. I believe that the British Government has been serious about making progress in Northern Ireland. Working with the political parties here, and with the Irish Government, it is trying to map out a stable, enduring peaceful future for Northern Ireland.

Mo Mowlam and I took the view that it was Labour's duty as the official Opposition to support it in its efforts. Of course there have been times when we have raised questions, but let us remember that the government have been in charge of this process, not the Opposition, and I believe it has acted in good faith.

I believe our attitude has been mature, responsible and right. It has enabled the government to take risks for peace. If there is a change of government after the election, we look forward to the same responsible bipartisan approach from a Conservative opposition.

Let me repeat what I said at this year's Labour Party conference about the importance I place on Northern Ireland:

No leader, with this nation's interest at heart, could do anything other than see this process through with the Irish government and the parties in Northern Ireland. It will be every bit as much a priority for me as for John Major.

The people of Northern Ireland have suffered a great deal in recent decades. Thousands of lives have been lost, thousands more shattered by grief or by terrible injuries. A whole generation has grown up in the shadow of the gun. A new

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Labour Government will work with all our determination to create a new and peaceful future for Northern Ireland, to try to ensure that the next generation enjoys the peace that the present one has only had a glimpse of.

A great deal has already been achieved. We want to build on that progress. People in Northern Ireland should expect continuity on the peace process if there is a change of government. We will work on the basis of the agreements that have been reached in recent years - the three stranded approach, the Downing St Declaration and the Framework Documents.

Several principles will underpin our approach:

The British and Irish governments have to work together to make progress. That does not compromise or change the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom in any sense. It is a recognition that close relations with Dublin have been helpful in recent years and a recognition too that the Irish Government have played a positive role.

Domination by one tradition or the other is not the way forward. All the people of Northern Ireland have rights and identities that deserve to be treated fairly and with respect.

And there should be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. That is the overriding principle that now defines the policy both of the present Conservative Government and any incoming Labour Government and indeed is the position the vast majority of people in the Republic of Ireland.

Consent is a crucial principle. The British Government has made clear that it has no selfish strategic interest in Northern Ireland and made clear its commitment to consent. And at the same time the Irish Government has made it clear that they too accept that there can be no unity without consent.

The acceptance of the principle of consent provides crucial guarantees for the people of Northern Ireland. It means there is no question of the people of Northern Ireland being forced into a new constitutional arrangement they have not accepted. That would not be desirable even if it was possible.

Consent also means that one community cannot simply ride roughshod over the other. It means creating new institutions agreed between parties representing both

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communities.

That is the basis for the present talks process.

Let me be clear about Labour's position with regard to the talks.

It is essential that these discussions take place in an atmosphere of trust and confidence - commodities which are scarce in Northern Ireland and sometimes for very understandable reasons. The legacy of violence will not disappear overnight. But if a new peaceful future is to be built for Northern Ireland then those who can help to build trust and confidence have a duty to do so.

I want to see an inclusive talks process. I want all parties including Sinn Fein to be represented and take part fully. But if the talks are to succeed, everyone has to be fully committed to the democratic process and to peaceful methods.

No one can expect to use bombs and bullets to make others sit down with them. That is why I say to the IRA, if you want to talk then you have to give up violence, not just for a week or a month but for good.

If that happens, then as the Prime Minister said, there should be no need for undue delay before Sinn Fein come into talks. What matters is that there is an unequivocal ceasefire backed up by actions which show it is genuine.

It remains for Sinn Fein to say and to do what is necessary to convince us all that they have chosen the path of peace and democracy for good.

Let me just emphasise this. When the IRA ceasefire was called originally, we all took this as firm evidence that there was a real desire on the part of Sinn Fein to put the past behind it. When it ended, renewed violence did not just cause dismay. It caused fundamental doubts about the desire for peace. All the way through this process people ask this question: is participation in the peace process a tactic in an otherwise unbroken armed conflict; or is it a genuine search for a new way forward? If it is the latter, then the door is open. But only if it is the latter.

The fact that the loyalist paramilitaries have maintained their ceasefire is welcome. Who knows how many lives have been saved by their actions? Democratic politics has a duty to reach out to those who genuinely shun violence and I am glad that politicians reflecting their viewpoint are included in the talks.

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It is not for a Labour Government to dictate what the final outcome should be. That has been part of the change in all our attitudes. The participants have agreed to work towards an agreement which deals with relations within Northern Ireland, relations between north and south and relations between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. In that they will have our support.

So far progress has been difficult and slow. Agreement is not easy to reach when divisions run deep but I hope there can be real evidence of momentum developed in the months ahead. The election of course creates uncertainty but I say to the participants in the process that if we are elected we will do everything we can to carry this process on and to help the talks succeed.

Economic progress

The legacy of recent decades has not just been appalling death and destruction but also high unemployment and poor opportunities. Mo Mowlam has rightly made a priority of addressing those issues in her time as Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary. And I know she shares my firm view that a lasting peace has to be underpinned by a just society, by greater openness and accountability from public institutions and a more prosperous economy.

The potential is enormous.

Just look at the benefits that came to the economy when the IRA ceasefire was in place.

During those months, manufacturing output and employment increased twice as fast as in Britain.

Northern Ireland was the fourth most attractive region in the UK to inward investors.

Tourism rose by over 50 per cent.

And business noticed an improvement on almost every front.

And let us be clear. Northern Ireland has real economic strengths:

A dedicated workforce.

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Energetic and innovative business people.

A tradition of industrial excellence and innovation in fields as diverse as food processing, aerospace, electronics and computer software.

But in spite of those strengths a great deal remains to be done to realise Northern Ireland's true potential. Unemployment is still the highest in the UK and education and training standards still need to be raised.

The old days when the left would try to succeed by centralised planning are over. And the 1980s showed in the starkest terms the limits of laissez faire. What is needed in the 1990s is a new partnership of public and private sectors working together for the common good.

First of all we need a stable low inflationary economy. The cycle of boom and bust we have experienced in recent years is deeply damaging. Government has a responsibility to control spending, to encourage low interest rates and create a healthy climate for investment. We have placed that commitment at the heart of our economic thinking.

Government must also strive to improve educational standards for every child. The importance of education cannot be overstressed in today's world. Education will be the passion of my government. A good education is the very best start we can give to any child.

And a flexible and adaptable workforce is essential in any modern economy. That does not mean a labour market without rules - our commitments on the minimum wage, the Social Chapter and minimum standards are clear. And we must ensure there is no place for discrimination and sectarianism of any kind in the workplace. But in place of the old divides that held us back and set worker against manager we now need active co-operation between workers and managers to make firms more competitive.

One of our early pledges is to get 250,000 young people off benefits and into work, paid for by a windfall levy on the privatised utilities. I believe that will be particularly welcomed here in Northern Ireland where youth unemployment is so high.

A Labour government will also encourage sensible cross-border co-operation. There is no reason why more economic co-operation should imply any sort of

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hidden political agenda. Increased trade is a fact of life for any modern economy, and there can be real advantages in co-operation over areas such as research, promotion and marketing.

Many businesses here already carry out extensive trade with the Republic and with other countries in Europe. They know the value of a positive relationship with the European Union. Northern Ireland has benefited from the European structural funds and the special package for peace and reconciliation. Europe is a crucial market for Northern Ireland's businesses and access to the European market a key attraction for potential inward investors.

John Major goes to today's European Council with his hands tied behind his back by his own party. This is no way to represent the United Kingdom's best interests. A new Labour Government offers positive engagement in Europe. The real dividing line in European policy is success or failure. Too often in the last few years we have been on the side of failure.

Take BSE. Agriculture is crucial to the Northern Ireland economy and more than half the beef produced here is exported. Today I visited a farmer near Portadown. Like many farmers in Northern Ireland he has suffered badly because of the beef ban through no fault of his own. Indeed some farmers have never had a case of BSE in their herds.

Of course the first consideration has to be public safety, and we have urged the government to ensure that all necessary procedures are in place to safeguard human health. Only when consumers have confidence in our beef will the market return to its usual level and within the UK that is beginning to happen.

We have made clear all along that the beef ban should be lifted. The reason it hasn't been is, in part, down to the incompetent approach of the government.

The Prime Minister promised after Florence that the ban would be lifted by November. It is now December and still no progress has been made. The Prime Minister will raise the matter at the Dublin Summit. In return for the decision to implement the selective slaughter agreed at Florence we should get a lifting of the ban on certified herds. Given the low incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland and the exceptional cattle database which already exists here that would mean Northern Ireland leading the rest of the UK out of the ban with Scotland and the rest of the UK following as soon as possible. It is of course important that any agreement to lift the ban in Northern Ireland must not include conditions that mean other parts

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of the United Kingdom have no prospect of having the ban lifted in the short to medium term. And this time the Prime Minister must come back with a firm timetable for lifting the ban. Nothing less will be satisfactory.

Individual Rights

Side by side with our economic measures we will work to deepen and broaden democratic rights in Northern Ireland.

We will ensure that the government bodies which operate in Northern Ireland - and you are not short of quangos here - do so in a fair, open and accountable manner.

As part of our programme of political reform we will incorporate the European Convention of Human Rights, to which Britain has already been a signatory since the days of Atlee's government, into UK law. That will allow people to take cases to court here in the United Kingdom - and have them judged by British judges - rather than going through the lengthy and expensive process of taking cases to the European Court in Strasbourg.

We will introduce measures to make the police more accountable and representative.

And we will take action to reduce tension over parades.

People have a right to march, but they also have a responsibility to heed the concerns of those living in the areas marches pass through.

People also have a right to attend their church in peace.

The scenes from Harryville in Ballymena in recent weeks have horrified decent opinion. They do not reflect the decent majority in Northern Ireland. That is why we must support the freedom of the people of Harryville to worship in peace, and we must pay tribute to the Unionist Mayor of Ballymena who bravely stood up for that right last weekend.

I am under no illusions about how difficult it is to overcome these conflicts. There are real and deeply felt divisions between people in Northern Ireland. But I also sense among the people a weariness with division, a yearning to bring up children without fear of violence, a great desire to draw a line under the past and

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FROM

JUNIAHON FURILL

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to get on with life.

The first time I came to Northern Ireland as Labour Leader was two years ago, just after the calling of the ceasefires. The joy on the streets was tangible. The first peaceful Christmas for 25 years was on everyone's mind.

Then last year President Clinton brought thousands onto the streets in an atmosphere of celebration.

I want that feeling to come back to Northern Ireland, and this time, I want it to stay.

Everyone has a responsibility to resolve this conflict.

First and foremost, those who use the bomb and the bullet must give them up and give them up for good. Then we must all work together to make peace last.

Today I make a pledge to the people of Northern Ireland. A Labour government will be a determined champion of a peaceful, just and democratic society in Northern Ireland and we will work with you to make a new future.

It will not be easy. But any decent government should have that as its aim. It will be ours, and we will pursue it with all our might.

Ends