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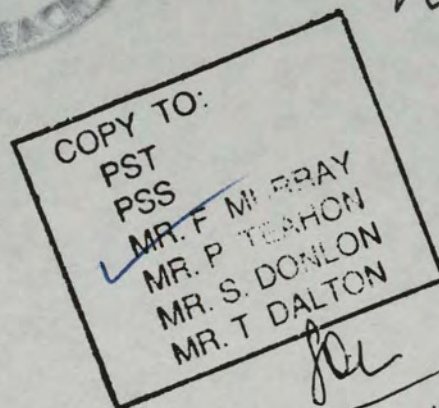
BELFAST

Confidential

13 November 1995

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

Dear Second Secretary

**Background to NIO press response to Taoiseach's speech**

As indicated in our earlier message, the NIO press response to the Taoiseach's London speech was dictated personally by the Secretary of State in the course of Saturday evening.

From conversations here this afternoon with our British colleagues, it is clear that there is a general view in the NIO that the Secretary of State "went over the top" with the vehemence of his response.

It appears that Sir Patrick has since been asked by the Prime Minister to calm things down and to defuse any impression of a rift between London and Dublin over the speech. NIO officials, who had their own reservations about the emotive terms of Saturday's press line, noted at once the contrast between the latter and the Prime Minister's more restrained comments on the Frost Programme and in other interviews yesterday.

The indications today are that Sir Patrick has been told to "rein things in" and to limit as far as possible the public fall-out from his remarks. The line which the Prime Minister has apparently been taking with his colleague is that there may be some elements in the Taoiseach's speech which are problematic for the British Government but that there is nothing to be gained from fuelling a public controversy over the matter.

Some more emollient comments which the Secretary of State gave when door-stepped by the media in Larne today suggest that he is taking this message to heart. When asked whether he still adhered to his description of the Taoiseach's speech as "extraordinary", he initially tried to avoid replying altogether. When the question was put to him a second time, he gave a low-key response to the effect that there had been "some surprising things" in the speech.

It happened that the Secretary of State was the Minister on duty in Northern Ireland over the weekend. In addition, the Prime Minister was on the other side of the globe and the Secretary of State apparently took the view that, in these circumstances, he would have to

provide the British Government's public response to the speech.

As to the terms of that response, he made what his officials consider to be a fundamental miscalculation of what the Prime Minister would expect, opting for a strongly-worded rebuke when the Prime Minister in fact took a more balanced view of the speech.

The emotive reference to Remembrance Day is regarded as "pure Mayhew" (nobody else would make the connection with yesterday's ceremonies - and nobody else would recognize this connection as of any relevance). The incongruity of Sir Patrick imputing insensitivity in this area to the Taoiseach of all people (against the background, notably, of the Islandbridge initiative) is also recognised.

Although the impetuous terms of his response would imply a hasty reading of the speech (or, indeed, none at all), the signs are that the Secretary of State had plenty of time in which to absorb it before he dictated the media line to his press officer.

He asked the British side of the Secretariat to obtain a copy of the speech around 5.30 pm on Saturday. According to the British side, reports of the speech and its general thrust were at this stage circulating in media circles (and featured in the 6pm news bulletins); they presume that the Secretary of State heard about it at this point. We furnished a copy within an hour or so (via Secretary Teehan).

The Secretary of State's conversation with the NIO press officer (Colin Ross) took place around 8.00-9.00 pm. The press officer asked the Secretary of State if he "really wished to say some of the things" contained in the response (e.g., the reference to Remembrance Day), to which Sir Patrick replied brusquely, "Yes - that's the line I want to put out". The response was initially given out on an oral basis to journalists. At a later stage, it was typed up and a copy, it would appear, was handed to the Taoiseach in London. We received a copy, on request, around 11 pm.

We took the opportunity of today's conversations to reinforce the key points made by the Taoiseach in his speech and their consistency with everything which the Government has been saying both in public and in private. We emphasised, in particular, the fair and balanced terms in which the Taoiseach addressed the needs of the peace process and the challenge now confronting the British Government. The reasonableness of his approach, we observed, had been brought out fully in an editorial in today's Guardian (which is by no means an automatic supporter of Irish Government positions). Hopefully, the note of urgency which the Taoiseach struck would be matched by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State over the coming days.

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
Joint Secretary

(Apparently, the NIO was also dismayed - as probably PM Major may have been for different reasons - that Mayhew's comments were ascribed to Downing St.)
JDE
14/11