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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

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M. Kavan

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PSS
Mr Nally
Joint Secretary
Councillor A1
Box
8/10*

6 October, 1991.

Mr. Sean O hUiginn,
Assistant Secretary,
Anglo-Irish Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
Dublin.

Labour Party Conference - Brighton
29 September to 4 October 1991

Dear Assistant Secretary,

The Ambassador, Mr. McMahon and I attended this years Labour Party Conference in Brighton - the last before the General Election. The Ambassador hosted a reception on 2 October which was attended by several members of the Shadow Cabinet, a considerable number of the Parliamentary Labour Party, representatives of Labour's National Executive Council, senior trade unionists and the media.

The Irish Labour Party was represented by Ruairí Quinn T.D., International Secretary Tony Brown and by a number of other delegates. The Workers Party was represented by Proinsias De Rossa T.D. and several others, including a number from the NI Workers Party. The SDLP was represented by Mark Durkan. Chris McGimpsey also attended although more in his capacity as a supporter of the New Consensus movement rather than as a representative of the OUP.

General Overview

This was one of Labour's most successful conferences, a fact borne out by the post-conference opinion polls which put Labour once again decisively ahead - a lead which Labour HQ insists will not be affected by this weeks Tory conference.

The Brighton conference was a personal triumph for Neil Kinnock. Only a month ago his leadership was the target of sustained criticism. An excellent conference address, one of the best he has ever made, delivered on the day on which the Government had bungled its attempt to upstage him by ruling out a November election, restored confidence in his leadership. In his speech he implicitly launched the election campaign, appealing directly and forcefully to the floating voter. He set out, in impressive detail, Labour's programme for Government and it was a source of satisfaction - and reassurance - to his closest advisers that his speech drew grudging editorial approval even from the Tory press which, a few weeks previously, had been canvassing scenarios for the succession.

NORTHERN IRELAND ISSUES

1. The Conference debate

The conference arrangements committee composited the original motions on Northern Ireland into two (copies of which are attached.) The National Executive asked Conference to support one - Composite 47 - and reject the second - Composite 48.

Composite 47 identified two objectives for a Labour Government viz. political and social reform especially in the areas of human rights where the PTA in particular must be repealed and the integration of social and economic structures North and South. It also pointedly noted that the Unionist veto cannot be allowed to block progress.

The call for a declaration of intent to withdraw during the lifetime of a Labour Government was the key feature of Composite 48.

McNamara spoke well and was well received by the Conference, receiving tributes from the platform and other speakers from the floor. I attach a copy of his speech. Repeal of the PTA and EPA, criticism of Unionist intransigence and strong support for reunification were the principal themes of the short debate. Composite 47 was duly carried and Composite 48 defeated in a card vote.

Northern Ireland also featured obliquely in the important law and order debate where a number of critical references were made to the PTA. Roy Hattersley avoided any reference to the PTA in his conference speech. However, in a section making clear his personal opposition to PR and his belief that political parties should stick to their manifestos after they are in power, he said "I do not want to negotiate our policies away in return for a handful of Liberal or Ulster Unionist votes".

2. The Campaign for Labour representation in NI

As at previous conferences, this was the most vocal and determined of the many groups lobbying on the conference fringe.

The group's meeting early in the week was not well attended. Their mentors, NI born Vauxhall MP Kate Hoey and Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate for Greenwich, Nick Raynsford, were the principal speakers but, as an embarrassment factor for the Labour establishment, the most effective presence was that of a delegate from Kevin McNamara's constituency who told the meeting that Hull North had just passed a motion - in McNamara's absence - in favour of Labour organising in NI.

Hoey managed to engineer a brief debate on the issue at conference. It was slotted in directly after Kinnock's speech when most delegates were recovering from the euphoria. Hoey chose to construe this as yet another example of the leaderships efforts to stifle debate on the issue. Inevitably, a motion in support of organising was heavily defeated although there is some evidence from the vote in

favour that Hoey's efforts with the trade unions are bearing dividends.

3. The Parliamentary Party Committee on NI

The main focus of the platform speeches at the PLP's NI Committee meeting was on civil liberties. Kevin McNamara was joined by Andrew Puddephatt, Director of the left wing human rights group, Liberty. Attached you will find a copy of McNamara's address.

The meeting was packed with some of the more objectionable representatives of the campaign for labour representation who sought to disrupt the proceedings. Exchanges between the platform and the floor and between supporters and opponents became quite heated. Both Ruairi Quinn and Mark Durkan got drawn into the debate both handling themselves well in the face of provocation.

4. The Labour Committee on Ireland

This left wing "troops out" fringe meeting was addressed by Ken Livingstone and by Annie Marjoram, the prospective Labour candidate in Mrs. Thatcher's Finchley constituency. The other two platform guests were Billy Power of the Birmingham Six and Damien Austin who told the meeting at length about his ill-treatment at Castlereagh RUC station and Amnesty's urgent action appeal on his behalf.

5. The Labour Party Irish Society

This is the vehicle for garnering Labour support among the Irish Community in Britain put together by Kevin McNamara with the support of Labour's campaign director, Jack Cunningham. The current president is a young London teacher Lisa Murphy who was active in the campaign to gain recognition for Irish teaching qualifications. Their main event during the week was a concert at which the Furey Brothers played.

The evening was marred, however, by the efforts of the MC to associate the Irish Society with the cause of Terry Fields and Dave Nellist, the two militant MPs who had been expelled from the party in the week before the conference. McNamara let it be known that if the Society drifted toward the hard left he would withdraw his support.

6. The Labour Committee for peace and progress

This is a loose amalgam of Workers Party supporters and representatives of the New Consensus led by the MP for Derbyshire East, Harry Barnes. They held one very poorly attended meeting which was addressed briefly by Chris McGimpsey. For the remainder of the week McGimpsey, looking increasingly out of place, was shepherded about by representatives of the NI Workers Party.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Hayes
Joe Hayes
Counsellor

Composite 47

Conference welcomes and reaffirms the Labour Party's commitment to the policy objective of a united Ireland.

Conference recognises the historic opportunity that the next general election offers to return a Labour government which will be the first government since partition to be committed to Irish unity and the promotion of peace and reconciliation within Ireland and between Britain and Ireland.

Conference recognises that reconciliation requires a bold and imaginative programme of action to promote dialogue between all sides to the conflict and actively to seek the agreement of all to a settlement which guarantees human rights and fundamental freedoms. Conference believes that there can be no historical ties to block such progress.

Conference believes that such a programme must include:

- (1) measures to promote systematic political and social reform within Northern Ireland, e.g. repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the use of strip searching etc;
- (2) a progressive integration of structures north and south of the border in the form of greater social and economic harmonisation within Ireland.

Conference notes the failure of the Brooke talks, because of the transience of the Unionists, and believes that the Labour Party could promote its own policy objective for a united Ireland to secure peace and reconciliation.

Moved by: Sheffield Brightside CLP

Seconded by: Hammersmith CLP

Composite 48

Conference believes that the election of a Labour government at the next general election, recognising the political roots of the crisis in Northern Ireland and committed to Irish unification, will be a unique opportunity to bring peace and reconciliation to Ireland.

Conference concurs with the judgement of the TUC that "Congress does not believe that increased military activity, tighter security, special judicial procedures or the removal of civil liberties offer any hope of stabilising a just and peaceful society for the people of Northern Ireland."

Conference believes the attempts of the present government to deal with the situation in Northern Ireland by restricting civil liberties and increasing censorship have failed and have simply undermined democratic liberties in Britain as well as Northern Ireland.

Conference notes the documented failure of 19 years of direct rule since 1972 to end systematic religious and political discrimination in Northern Ireland.

Conference notes the breakdown of the Brooke talks.

Conference believes that at the root of the prolonged crisis and injustice in Northern Ireland is the partition of Ireland by Britain against the democratically expressed wishes of the great majority of its people. The key to overcoming the crisis is therefore to correct that historic injustice by Irish unification, which is the policy of the Labour Party.

Conference believes that Irish unification presupposes the ending of British jurisdiction over Northern Ireland and that the next Labour government should declare its intent to complete a programme of British withdrawal from Ireland and in line with this adopt a policy of restoration of civil liberties and demilitarisation of the situation.

Conference believes that a Labour government must make clear its commitment to the release of a "peace dividend" with the goal of convincing all sides of the economic benefits of peace and reconciliation based upon:-

- (1) transforming Britain's present input to the economy of Northern Ireland into a programme of economic aid for peace and reconstruction;
- (2) redeployment of resources from military to economic construction;
- (3) the growth potential of re-establishing the unity of the Irish economy.

Moved by: Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Seconded by: Croydon North East CLP