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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

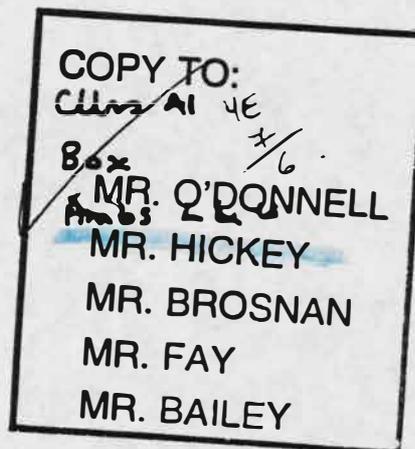
BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

Confidential

6 June 1996

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



Dear Second Secretary

Dinner with the Chief Constable

The Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Annesley, came to dinner in the Secretariat last night. He was accompanied by Ronnie Flanagan, the Deputy Chief Constable, and by his personal aide, Gerry Sillery.

Mr. Magner has already reported on a detailed discussion of the parades issue. The following are a number of points of wider interest which arose in the course of a generally relaxed and friendly discussion.

The Chief Constable emphasised the importance of the two Governments reaching a concerted view of how next week's talks should unfold and, in particular, of how the decommissioning issue should be handled and of the role to be played by an Independent Chairman in this regard. An open rift between the two Governments at this stage would, he suggested, destroy the best chance in fifteen years of achieving a settlement in Northern Ireland. It would not merely impose fresh suffering on the people of Northern Ireland but would greatly increase the prospect of Loyalist violence in the South.

On the basis of a summary account of the discussions this week which we provided, Sir Hugh indicated broad approval for the approach being pursued by our Government and little tolerance for the efforts being made to minimise George Mitchell's role. He was, however, noticeably relieved when news came through later in the evening that agreement had been reached between the two Governments.

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The Chief Constable was warm in his praise for Senator Mitchell and for the International Body's report (a model of balance, judiciousness and sensitivity). He also spoke in positive terms of General De Chastelain - but had clearly formed a low opinion of Holkeri.

In a general discussion of the decommissioning issue, Sir Hugh recalled his own consistent reservations about the British Government's posture from the Washington speech onwards. On all practical grounds, the "Washington Three" demand made no sense and was explicable only in terms of the symbolic comfort which it offered to right-wing Conservatives and to Unionists.

While he did not come down firmly in support of it, Sir Hugh indicated that he saw the parallel decommissioning approach in the Mitchell report as the best way forward. He readily accepted, however, that this would only be contemplated by those concerned in response to perceived political progress.

He believed that Senator Mitchell would not take on a chairmanship role if he saw no prospect of a political settlement being achieved on the basis of the approach outlined in his report.

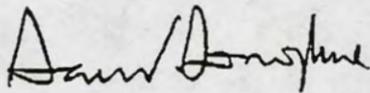
The Chief Constable saw little likelihood of a restoration of the IRA ceasefire in the near future. He was not persuaded by the suggestion by Suzanne Breen and other journalists that last week's election result would strengthen the trend in that direction within the Republican movement. He believed that influential members of the Army Council remain firmly opposed to a restoration of the ceasefire. He also had nothing to suggest, from the intelligence available to him, that Sinn Féin are actively preparing their people for political engagement or the ideological compromises which this will inevitably entail.

However, he is equally confident that the IRA will not resume its campaign in Northern Ireland. He expects targets in Britain to be chosen for the foreseeable future, primarily in order to avoid Loyalist retaliation here but also in the belief (in his view profoundly mistaken) that British public opinion will succumb to this pressure. Operationally, the IRA are "ready to go" at a moment's notice in Northern Ireland - but, in Sir Hugh's view, they will not do so. He anticipated, accordingly, the continuation of a "phoney war" for quite some time.

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On the other hand, recent activities on Sinn Féin's part might lend themselves to another interpretation. The appointment of Martin Meehan to lead agitation in Portadown during the forthcoming marching season suggested to the Chief Constable that there might be some in the Republican movement who would hope to orchestrate confrontations with the RUC and street violence with a view to supplying a pretext for an eventual resumption of the IRA's campaign.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Joint Secretary