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**Transcript**

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**Council blocks SF London HQ plan**

From Frank Millar

London Editor

SINN Féin was searching for al-

ternative premises last night

after Labour-controlled Camden

Council blocked the party’s plans

to open the first headquarters in

central London.

 The decision taken earlier this

week followed the intervention of

the Labour frontbencher, Mr

Frank Dobson and a fellow MP,

Ms Glenda Jackson. Ms Jack-

son told the council Sinn Féin

was “an organisation that has

refused to condemn violence.”

 The council, suggesting the

building itself might become a

target, defended the decision in

term of concern for residents’

safety and the likelihood of in-

creased insurance premiums.

 The decision, taken privately

by council leaders, was deplored

by the Camden Irish Forum. But

despite Mr Dobson’s involvement

as a constituency MP, the

Labour leadership avoided direct

comment on Camden’s reversal

of an earlier decision to lease one

of its properties to Sinn Féin.

 The property in question, at

Theobalds Road in Holborn, is

located just yards away from a

police station and Ministry of

Defence buildings.

 Ms Tony Blair’s office de-

flected queries to Dr Mo

Mowlam, the shadow Northern

Ireland secretary. Dr Mowlam

said: “I am not familiar with the

details of the case. In the end it is

a matter for the members of

Camden Council,”

 Asked if she would expect or

wish other Labour councils to fol-

low the Camden example, Dr

Mowlam replied: “It must be a

decision for the local authority,

wherever it may be.”

 A Sinn Féin spokesman, Mr

Frank O’Neill, who said the de-

cision “speaks for itself really,”

confirmed that the party was now

considering a number of alterna-

tive locations.

 But there was little doubt

about Sinn Féin embarrassment,

and Labour Party sensitivity,

about the controversy. Mr Blair

and Dr Mowlam have already

come under fire from the party’s

pro-nationalist wing for what is

seen as uncritical support for Mr

Major’s conduct of the Northern

Ireland peace process.

 And there was speculation last

night that Camden – which has

previously extended invitations to

Sinn Féin speakers, and has an

official policy supporting a united

Ireland – had come under pres-

sure from the Labour hierarchy.

 In line with Mr Major’s posi-

tion, Mr Blair has yet to meet the

Sinn Féin leader, Mr Gerry Ad-

ams. However, Dr Mowlam and

her frontbench team have had

talks with the party.