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17 July 1989

Mr. R. O'Brien
Press Counsellor
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Dick

BBC series on "Families at War"

To mark the twentieth anniversary of the deployment of the British Army in Northern Ireland, BBC TV has commissioned a trilogy of programmes from Peter Taylor, the Panorama reporter responsible for two major NI features last year ("The Long War" and "The Long Peace"). Taylor, who has spent the best part of a year preparing the programmes, has also written a book to accompany them. The programmes, each an hour in length, are due for transmission on three successive Mondays - 7, 14 and 21 August.

Entitling his series "Families at War", Taylor decided to focus on the experiences over the past two decades of two NI families, one Catholic and one Protestant, and also of a selected Army regiment (which, Taylor suggests, is in a certain sense also a "family"). Commenting on the subjects of his series, Taylor told me last week that they were intended to represent, in very broad terms, "you... me... and them". He wanted to investigate what the last twenty years have meant to these three groups of people, not merely for the intrinsic human interest of their stories but also to draw certain conclusions about the relationships between nationalists and Unionists and also the broader Anglo-Irish relationship. The word "war" in the series title, furthermore, is to be understood not merely as a reference to the violence of the past two decades but also as a wider comment on the troubled relationship between the two islands over the past 800 years.

The first programme in the series, entitled "The Volunteer", chronicles the fortunes of the family of Shane Paul O'Doherty. O'Doherty, as you are aware, is a Derryman who joined the IRA in the early seventies. In 1976 he was imprisoned in Britain following a conviction on terrorist charges. While in prison, he had a change of heart about the IRA's campaign and his own activities. In 1985, following representations by

the Irish Government, Bishop Edward Daly, John Hume and others, he was transferred back to Northern Ireland. To complete the story, Taylor has had private confirmation that O'Doherty is one of the nineteen prisoners who were reported last week to have been given provisional release dates.

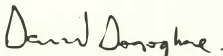
When Taylor first went to Bishop Daly (whom he knows well) to discuss his project, the Bishop pointed him in the direction of the O'Doherty family. He conducted extensive interviews with the relatives, including two who are now living in the US. He was also granted an interview with O'Doherty himself in Maghaberry prison, the first interview with a serving NI prisoner to be granted since the outbreak of the troubles. While he is not blind to the propaganda advantages which the NIO saw in publicising O'Doherty's change of heart, Taylor is nonetheless clearly pleased to have broken new ground with what he described as a "remarkable" interview. What interested him about O'Doherty and his family was that they did not come from a classic Provo background but were a middle-class family whose political involvement did not go beyond the civil rights movement. The discovery of Shane Paul's IRA involvement, therefore, was all the more traumatic for them.

The second programme, entitled "The Choir", deals with a family of Derry Protestants called Mooney. In 1969 six of the Mooney boys sang in a choir in the Church of Ireland cathedral in Derry. During the seventies, one of them joined the UDA and eventually blew himself up with his own bomb. The programme looks at the reaction of the other members to this death and at how they have fared generally over the past two decades.

The third programme, entitled "The Regiment", was filmed during a week spent with the Royal Greenjackets in Clogher, Co. Tyrone. The Greenjackets were chosen because of their long experience of service in Northern Ireland. Many have seen up to six tours of duty there and one or two interviewed on the programme are veterans of the regiment's very first tour in the early seventies.

In a book written to accompany the series, Taylor offers a much wider range of material - including interviews with the families of IRA and UDR members - which pursues the theme of families affected by the troubles. The book will be published on 7 August.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer