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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

BÉAL FEIRSTE

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BELFAST

14 March 1989

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

1. Dr. Brian Mawhinney, Minister of State at the NIO, came to dinner in the Secretariat on 13 March. He was accompanied by Mr. Oliver Miles and the Minister's Private Secretary, Ms. Ros Earnshaw. I was accompanied by Mr. Padraic Collins and Mr. Michael Gaffey.

2. At an early stage in the proceedings Dr. Mawhinney referred in very hostile terms to the Taoiseach's forthcoming US trip, wondering whether the Taoiseach's speeches would again create difficulties as they had done last year. We objected that the Taoiseach's speeches last year had been intended to marginalise extremist groups and were naturally couched in language his Irish-American audiences could relate to. They had been successful in that respect. This year's trip was of a different kind and aimed at a select audience of political leaders. Dr. Mawhinney could rest assured that the Taoiseach's remarks would be helpful and, as always, carefully chosen.

3. Dr. Mawhinney then attacked the Taoiseach's Ard-Fheis speech, again in vehement and intemperate terms. He singled out the phrase "that the future of Ireland could and should be left to all the Irish people to decide for themselves", suggesting that it violated the spirit of Article 1 of the Agreement and that the Taoiseach's general attitude had violated the spirit of Article 4. We pointed out that the Government led by the Taoiseach had not only accepted Article 1 but had gone to great lengths to defend it in the Courts. We recalled a recent interview by Dr. Mawhinney on the Radio Ulster Newsbreak program (12 March) in which he had gone out of his way to assert that his endeavours in terms of political dialogue were without any contact with or involvement of the Irish Government. This was undoubtedly flouting

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the spirit of the Agreement and in particular Article 4. We did not choose to view those remarks in the deliberately hostile and polemic spirit he had brought to bear on the Taoiseach's speech. We saw them in a fuller context and made allowances for the fact that he was perhaps compensating for particular difficulties he had with the unionist community. It was significant that the key unionist leaders themselves were positive about the Taoiseach's speech. As a way of easing what was an unpleasant confrontation we referred him to the Taoiseach's comments on devolution on his RTE "This Week" interview (which Dr. Mawhinney said he had read) and invited him to say what signs of progress he saw which we could report back.

4. Dr. Mawhinney made a number of diffuse comments on this point. There had been small but significant signs of interest on the individual level. He was deliberately being vague about his own intentions and keeping people guessing. He was not setting a deadline. He accepted there had to be a dialogue with Dublin on the issue. So did the unionists, and that represented progress, but such contact came at the later stages of the process. He challenged us to say what was meant by "something better or more acceptable" than the Agreement, or on another level, why the Taoiseach was not prepared to concede a temporary suspension for talks to begin.

*the
Mawhinney
policy*

5. We said that the Government's commitment to the Agreement had been repeatedly confirmed. At the same time everyone accepted that it was a weakness in the application of the Agreement that it met with such widespread hostility in the unionist community. It was axiomatic that the wider we could make the area of agreement between the unionist and nationalist traditions in Ireland the greater the prospects of peace. Anything which enhanced that area of agreement while of course preserving the essential features of the Anglo-Irish Agreement itself, would be a most valuable gain. We regretted that Dr. Mawhinney seemed to regard the different possible levels of dialogue as mutually exclusive rather than as potentially complementary. As regard suspension the Taoiseach had said it would amount to a sham. It could also be misunderstood as a political signal that the "Irish dimension", which the Agreement represented, could be jettisoned, and it was unlikely that talks based on those premises would prove successful. The Taoiseach's position seemed rather more consistent with the defence of the Agreement than the attitude implied in Dr. Mawhinney's question.

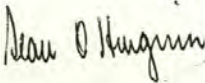
6. Dr. Mawhinney returned to his theme of the Taoiseach "needing to take account of the real world": Northern Ireland had to be governed; the British sentiments of unionists were real; there were problems with the perceptions of the Agreement among the Tory party. He dwelt on the difficulties which the Ryan case had caused in this latter respect and the growing impatience at the delay of the DPP in reaching a decision. We explained the processes involved and the likely and entirely understandable concern of the DPP to ensure that if a case was to be brought it should not be vulnerable to challenge on formal grounds. We also recalled long delays which had occurred in cases involving the Northern DPP.

7. Since the discussion of political developments seemed unproductive - if revealing - we turned to Dr. Mawhinney's educational brief, agreeing warmly with his assessment that he was conducting a major revolution in education. He said the thrust of his reforms was now accepted and people were concerned only with the details of their application. On the Irish language we said that we understood that the apparent downgrading of the language was an unintended by-product of his proposals and not a deliberate strategy. However it was important in the light of the fears which had been raised to give a signal to the nationalist community that this part of the Irish heritage was esteemed and cherished. Dr. Mawhinney affirmed his respect for the language and spoke warmly of his contacts with Dr. Sean MacMathuna of NUU who clearly has an influence on him. He said the opposition to his proposals on the language was "Freudian" and not well thought out. Even in private interviews no nationalist had taken issue with his proposals in a serious or convincing way. He said he would ensure that the working groups he had set up on cultural traditions and on education for mutual understanding came up with solid and workable proposals. His community relations initiatives would also contribute to progress in fostering mutual respect between the two traditions. He spoke in a resigned way of the widespread failure of people to appreciate the true import of what he was achieving, both in terms of his having secured one of the highest ever allocations for education and the qualitative impact of his proposals. We urged on him the value of ensuring that the Irish language did not become a monopoly of political extremists and said it would be an interesting challenge to handle it in such a way that it became accessible to those of both traditions with an interest in it. We thought the proposed institute or resource centre would be a valuable asset. Dr. Mawhinney cautioned that he had as yet made no decision on this and was reflecting on whether the Government should have a "pro-active" role on the

language or should stay at one remove from it in view of its potentially divisive nature.

8. Dr. Mawhinney spoke with warm anticipation of his forthcoming meeting with the Minister for Education, Mrs. O'Rourke, expressing regret only that her visit on this occasion would be relatively brief. At the end of the dinner he expressed appreciation of our meeting and accepted our invitation to join us on another occasion in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Sean O'Huigin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sean O'Huigin
Joint Secretary