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ASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

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A very interesting
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Confidential

26 June 1989

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Richard Ford, The Times

Ford, who spent six years in Northern Ireland for the Times, is currently the paper's legal affairs correspondent.

The following were the main points of interest:

Sir Patrick Mayhew

- In a conversation with Ford about a fortnight ago, Sir Patrick Mayhew indicated his very strong desire to replace Tom King. He seemed, in fact, "desperate for the job". In Ford's view, Mayhew senses that Northern Ireland is his best, and probably only, prospect of getting into the Cabinet. He may also be calculating that, with Sir Peter Brooke's reputation dented by the Tories' disastrous election campaign, he now stands a better chance of realising his ambition.
- Speculation in the Independent some days ago that he might resign over the Lord Chancellor's proposed legal reforms originated with Mayhew himself. From the conversation Ford had with him, it was clear that Mayhew sees such a threat as a means of pressurising the Prime Minister into offering him a Cabinet post.
- Asked why he wants the NI job so badly, Mayhew replied: "Wouldn't you want it if you were given an opportunity to push things along there, even infinitesimally?" He made it clear that, although he is not enthusiastic about the Agreement, "it is there" and he will work it to the full if appointed as Secretary of State.
- Mayhew dwelled at some length on his Anglo-Irish family background and longstanding interest in the Irish question. He seemed to Ford to be at some pains to imply distance between himself and the

Unionists. He recalled, for example, the aversion towards the "black Protestants of the North" which was regularly expressed in the Anglo-Irish circles of West Cork in which he moved as a child. He was also strongly critical of the present Unionist leadership.

- Mayhew also sought, in a number of ways, to minimise the distance between himself and the Irish Government. He stressed how much he values the close relationship he has built up with the Irish Attorney General. Recalling the Ryan affair, he commented that the Belgians had a lot to answer for but that he had some sympathy for the Irish, in whose laps the problem had been landed. At the same time, however, it was he (Mayhew) who had to "carry the can" vis-à-vis the Prime Minister and in Parliament following the refusal of Britain's extradition request. Under great pressure from the back-benches, he found this a frustrating and uncomfortable experience and one he would not like to repeat. He hopes very much that, as long as he remains Attorney General, there will be no further Anglo-Irish rows over extradition.
- Mayhew also reflected on his own manner, which, he commented, can sometimes seem lofty and overbearing, and he volunteered to Ford the view that he may on occasion have gone down badly in Ireland because of this. He claimed, in fact, to be far more sensitive to Irish concerns than people realise.
- Asked for his views on the Ryan case as it stands at present, Mayhew indicated that he is "playing it strictly by the book". It is entirely a matter for the Irish DPP and the British authorities will say or do nothing which might prejudice the outcome.

Frank Millar

- Ford told me in confidence that Frank Millar met Gerry Adams recently when Millar visited a West Belfast social club in connection with a TV programme on the twentieth anniversary of the "troubles" which he has been preparing. Adams indicated that he would like to be interviewed by Millar for the latter's Irish Times series. Millar undertook to think about this but is, in fact, worried about the political implications of conducting such an interview and, according to Ford, will probably not proceed.

Conservatives in Northern Ireland

- Ford expects that, despite Laurence Kennedy's unimpressive showing in the EP elections, the Conservative branches in Northern Ireland will receive official recognition by the end of the year. He dismissed the Conservative initiative, however, as "a diversionary exercise". While it ostensibly seeks to break the mould of Unionist politics, its real purpose is to divert the attention of Unionist voters from the unfinished business of seeking an accommodation with the nationalist community.

Conor Cruise O'Brien

- In conclusion, Ford mentioned that the new Times correspondent in Belfast, Edward Gorman (a freelance staff member of Irish background who has taken the job on a three-year contract), was contacted last week by Conor Cruise O'Brien. O'Brien, whom Gorman had never previously met, suggested that the controversy between himself and the Editor of the Irish Independent might make an interesting news item for the Times. Gorman turned down the suggestion.
- Ford commented in general terms that O'Brien is seen by many Times staff as hopelessly prejudiced in his analysis of Irish political events. As long as he remains a favourite of the Editor, however, his position on the paper will be secure.

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer