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SECRET

4 July 1989

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

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Frank Millar

Millar, who is keen to remain in British journalism, has been appointed producer of the next series of Brian Walden interviews for LWT. The programme marking Mrs. Thatcher's tenth anniversary in office, on which he had been working for some time, was transmitted a month ago. He was also involved in the production of last week's Channel Four special on Northern Ireland (see below).

The following were the major points of interest which arose:

Aftermath of the Task Force report

- Millar spoke at some length about his involvement in the preparation of the Task Force report two years ago and the disappointment caused by its rejection. In the course of this, he mentioned that the report's call on Unionists to redefine their relations with, respectively, the British and Irish Governments was an attempt to mask a disagreement between himself and Peter Robinson over the ultimate fall-back position for Unionists. While Robinson favoured independence, Millar's own preference was for a federal Ireland in some form.
- Any chance of achieving the shift in Unionist attitudes at which the report aimed has disappeared over the intervening period. The Unionist community today, Millar believes, is more defensive and introspective than ever before, completely unwilling to contemplate

budging from traditional positions. The overwhelming majority of Unionists believe that their interests are best served by doing nothing - "battening down the hatches and waiting for the storm to blow over". Paisley and Molyneaux sense this and feel more justified than ever in their intransigence.

- Paradoxically, a factor encouraging this immobility on the part of the Unionist leaders is the failure of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to live up in full to nationalist expectations. The very fact that delivery on the reforms sought by the Irish Government has been so modest demonstrates to Molyneaux and others that Unionism is not under serious threat and, accordingly, that significant concessions to nationalists can be postponed for a bit longer. The British Government's slow rate of delivery on the nationalist agenda has encouraged Unionist complacency and has undermined those, including himself, who have been trying to steer the Unionist community towards concessions.

British Government initiative

- Millar believes that, if (as rumoured) the British Government decides to move on the devolution front in the autumn, it should present the party leaders with a concrete proposal of its own and should insist that this proposal be tested in a referendum.
- He indicated that he favours a devolution model involving the creation of three regional administrative authorities, i.e., greatly-enhanced local government with central powers reserved for the Secretary of State. One of these authorities would be located west of the Bann and would be effectively under SDLP control. In further discussion, acknowledging that nationalists elsewhere would lodge objections, he suggested that the answer might be a single authority based in Belfast. The British Government might make the plan more acceptable to Molyneaux by giving him some of the things he has been looking for at Westminster (such as an end to the present Order in Council arrangements).
- I indicated our general assessment of the prospects for devolution, contrasting the readiness of the SDLP to talk with the absence of encouraging signals from the Unionist camp. Millar agreed with this assessment, admitting that "there are almost no devolutionists left" in the Unionist community. Peter Robinson, however, remains a committed devolutionist: he favours a regional government of some kind in NI and wants to be part of it. Robinson trusts Hume completely and believes that the SDLP leader is seriously committed to seeking agreement on devolution. He expects that private contacts will resume in the autumn.
- In Millar's view, however, Robinson cannot become a major player until he joins mainstream Unionism. He told Robinson recently that, had he left the DUP some time ago and joined the Official Unionists, he (Robinson) might by now have been a candidate for the succession to Molyneaux. As it is, however, Millar believes that Robinson may have "missed the boat".

The succession to Molyneux

- Millar regards John Taylor as the front-runner to succeed Molyneux. Though personally without much charisma, he is perceived within the party as a solid, heavyweight type who is "no push-over". Martin Smyth is viewed as insipid. Harold McCusker is ruled out because of his (now seriously) deteriorating health. Ken Maginnis is considered to have poor political judgement (though, in his defence, Millar described Maginnis as "the least sectarian of all Unionist politicians").

Tories and Labour

- Despite Laurence Kennedy's unimpressive performance, the Conservative Party will probably extend recognition to the NI branches later this year. Seeing this as part of a continuing effort on the Tories' part to undermine Unionists, Millar referred critically to Ian Gow's attempt to "keep a foot in each camp". Gow told Molyneux some time ago that his ideal would be a reunited Conservative and Unionist Party - though, of the present Unionist MPs, he would only like to see Molyneux and Willie Ross in it.
- According to Millar, Molyneux quietly hopes that a hung Parliament on the next occasion will encourage Labour to seek a deal with him. Millar is also aware that Labour, in turn, is keeping its lines open to the Unionists.

Dialogue with Dublin

- Millar strongly favours a dialogue between Unionists and the Irish Government and is anxious that the momentum built up in this respect should not be lost. Having "prised Molyneux out of his cubby-hole" with his own Weekend World programme a year ago, he does not want the OUP leader to "slip back into the hole". Dialogue is the only way forward for Unionists and Molyneux must be forced into it.
- Molyneux will, of course, pursue his own agenda in such talks. In this respect, Millar was dismissive of the alternative Agreement sketched out some time ago by the OUP leader. Channels already exist for the Irish Government to raise matters such as the Birmingham and Guildford cases and there was never any likelihood that Dublin would find Molyneux's suggestion attractive.

Channel Four programme

- Millar wrote the original script and conducted most of the interviews for last week's Channel Four special on Northern Ireland (my report of 29 June 1989 to D. O'Brien refers). Arising from disagreement over the final content of the programme, he is suing the producer for damages.

- The basic theme of the programme (the legacy of political, economic and moral damage caused in NI by the troubles) was Millar's own. He tried to balance this negative view, however, with a number of elements which were not used in the final cut. In particular, he recorded interview material with Hume and Robinson which revealed an interesting convergence of views and held out the prospect of political progress. Hume's emphasis on the need for a redefinition of all relationships within these islands was matched by a similar declaration from Robinson. From different perspectives, therefore, both politicians seemed to be "heading towards the same agenda". Millar wanted to bring this out in a concluding comment highlighting the readiness of politicians on both sides, even after 20 years of violence, to pursue a political solution. In the event, the programme's only acknowledgement of political prospects was a brief reference to the European dimension.

Interviews in the Irish Times

- Millar hopes that Bishop Cathal Daly will agree to do the next interview in his Irish Times series. He also recalled the request he submitted in the same context (some time before the election) for an interview with the Tanaiste. In conclusion, he indicated that Gerry Adams recently asked to be included in this series but that he will probably turn him down.

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer