



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

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*Mr. Collins
To see Mr. O'Brien
referred to me. I
have passed another
copy to private secretary
to inform the Taoiseach about
this.
Private secretary to the
Taoiseach
This reached me only today.
Enquiries made in Foreign Office
indicate it was sent to Mr. Mansel
and the Sec.
Mr. Collins
him
18.8.89*

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Confidential

17 July 1989

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

Dear Dick

BBC TV special on Northern Ireland

As previously indicated, BBC TV has plans for a ninety-minute special, to be transmitted on 13 August, which will mark the twentieth anniversary of the deployment of the British Army in Northern Ireland. I had lunch last week with David Wickham, the producer of the special, whom I gather you also met recently.

The programme, as yet untitled, will begin with a documentary section lasting roughly 35 minutes. This section will recall the events of 1968-69 which precipitated the decision to send in the Army as well as the key political and other developments over the intervening period. Relevant archival material will be interspersed with recently-recorded interviews with Jim Callaghan, Edward Heath, Willie Whitelaw, Humphrey Atkins, Merlyn Rees, Jim Prior and other political figures. There will also be interviews with Sir Kenneth Newman and Sir John Hermon; with former Army GOCs; and with Sir Oliver Wright and possibly another retired official.

For the purposes of this historical review, the makers of the programme have also sought the participation of an Irish politician who was close to the events of 1969 and could indicate to some extent the thinking of the Irish Government at that time. Having approached the former Taoiseach, Mr. Lynch, in the first instance, they were redirected towards Deputy Desmond O'Malley. Deputy O'Malley agreed several weeks ago to be interviewed for the programme and the date of 19 July was fixed. The BBC contacted him last Friday to confirm that he was still available and he said that he was. Jonathan Dimbleby, the programme's presenter, will therefore be travelling to Dublin on Wednesday of this week to interview him.

The second section of the programme will consist of a studio discussion before a non-participating audience which will last 45-50 minutes and will be chaired by Jonathan Dimbleby. The purpose of the discussion will be to consider what the future holds for Northern Ireland. It will be pre-recorded on 27 July.

Anxious to avoid the mistakes made in a recent BBC special (which brought together far too many guests for the short time available), the programme's makers want to restrict to eight or nine the number of guests taking part in the discussion. From Northern Ireland, they will have John Hume, Bernadette McAliskey, John Taylor and Peter Robinson. From Britain, they will have either Jim Prior or Humphrey Atkins and a senior retired Army figure (probably Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley). And from the Republic, they will have Deputy Garret FitzGerald.

As regards the NI contingent, the programme's makers hoped initially to have the nationalist and Unionist viewpoints represented by politicians who would not feel constrained by current electoral considerations and might therefore be able to speak more freely. However, acting on advice offered by four advisers to the programme (Frank Millar, David McKittrick, Mary Holland and David Gilliland), they accepted that there was no sensible alternative to Hume and Robinson. As regards Taylor, their view was that some alternative to Molyneaux and Smyth, both unengaging TV performers, was required. (I suspect that they were pointed in Taylor's direction by Frank Millar). Bernadette McAliskey was approached less because of her own prominence in 1969-70 than because she might contribute an alternative nationalist view to Hume's without, at the same time, infringing the ban on Sinn Fein interviews. In relation to the Sinn Fein ban, Wickham commented that it suited his purposes to some extent as the presence of Gerry Adams on the programme would undoubtedly have prompted most of the other participants to boycott it.

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For the reason indicated above (a desire not to involve politicians with current responsibilities), the programme's makers opted to have the British side represented by a former Secretary of State rather than by Tom King. By the same token, they ruled out approaching the Tanaiste or any other currently serving Irish Government Minister. Wickham told me that they at one point considered inviting Tom King and the Tanaiste to take part in a separate bilateral discussion on the programme but, realising that neither could say very much in a public exchange of this kind, dropped the idea.

The programme's makers are toying with the idea of using Deputy FitzGerald not merely for the studio discussion but also as a commentator - in an interview to be recorded for the opening documentary section - on the events of the past two decades as seen from the Southern perspective. They are also considering putting to Deputy O'Malley a number of questions of a more general nature about the Irish Government's

approach to the NI problem over the past twenty years. I gave Wickham a detailed briefing on the position taken by Dublin in relation to Northern Ireland over the years, highlighting the essential continuity and coherence of the policies pursued by successive Governments and, in particular, the debt owed by the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the process instituted by the Taoiseach with Mrs. Thatcher in 1980. He undertook to bring these points out clearly in the programme's documentary survey.

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer