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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR

Telephone: 01-235 2171

TELEX: 916104

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18 September 1990

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

A conversation with Frank Millar

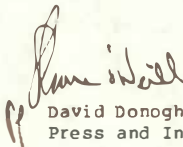
In a conversation today, Frank Millar made a number of points of interest about the prospects for political progress in NI:

- Despite Molyneaux's public welcome for the Secretary of State's Ballymena speech, the key element in the speech will not appeal to the OUP leader.
- In conversations with Millar and others, Molyneaux has always indicated that he envisages a four-stage process before talks can get underway in NI. First, a declaration by the two Governments of their readiness in principle to negotiate an alternative Agreement. Second, the suspension of the Conference and Secretariat. Third, bilateral talks with the Secretary of State. Fourth, the opening of full negotiations with the SDLP and, later, the Irish Government.
- Molyneaux refuses to depart from this sequence. Earlier this year, John McConnell suggested to Jack Allen that the third and second stages could be reversed. His argument was that bilateral talks between the Unionists and the Secretary of State might naturally lead to certain understandings about the Conference and the Secretariat (on the lines of those since agreed to by the Unionists). However, when Allen put McConnell's idea to Molyneaux, the latter rejected it emphatically.
- In his Ballymena speech last week, the Secretary of State took a similar line, urging that priority should now be given to addressing the substance of possible negotiations. This will again make Molyneaux uncomfortable and Millar speculated that the OUP leader would find an early opportunity to rebut the new approach.

P.S.M. /
MR. NALLY; PSS ✓
MR. MATHEWS; MR. BROSNAN ✓
COUNSELLORS A.I. ✓
Box.

- Molyneaux is out of hospital following his hernia operation but is expected to spend the next few weeks convalescing. His trip to Australia has been postponed, probably till the New Year.
- Millar reiterated his basic scepticism about the prospects for serious negotiations getting underway in NI. He sees no likelihood of the OUP seriously committing itself to talks about devolution as long as Molyneaux is leader. He is somewhat encouraged by the recent evidence of a constructive attitude on the part of the DUP. However, as any settlement will have to be acceptable to both Unionist parties, he does not attach undue significance to this development. The Robinson/Paisley relationship, furthermore, is so volatile that the development may be a purely temporary one.
- In this respect, Millar referred to a conversation which he had with Robinson several days ago. Robinson told him that he has decided against attending the forthcoming BIA Conference because he and Paisley are currently "on the same wavelength" and he does not wish to jeopardise this entente by going to the Oxford meeting. He believes that Paisley would object to his attendance on the grounds that it is DUP policy not to talk to the Irish Government until "substantial progress" has been made and DUP contacts with Irish Government representatives at the BIA would undermine this position. When Millar pointed out that the Oxford meeting is not a negotiating forum but merely a conference, Robinson said that he could only contemplate attending if he was asked by Paisley to do so. (He hinted, however, that "stranger things have happened").
- On the OUP side, John Taylor has pulled out of the BIA meeting, telling colleagues that the timing is inopportune. Ken Maginnis, David Trimble and Raymond Ferguson will represent the OUP. Millar observed that Maginnis has, at best, a confused understanding of the Brooke initiative and that Trimble is openly opposed to it. Both may be expected to pursue their "obsession" with Articles 2 and 3 ("as if there is no other issue in Unionist politics") at the Oxford meeting.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer