



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

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11 June, 1991.

Mr. Dermot Gallagher,  
Assistant Secretary,  
Department of Foreign Affairs,  
Dublin.

1. CC PET: PMH  
H. M. M. M. M. M.  
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Conversation with Mrs Thatcher's Political Assistant

Dear Assistant Secretary,

I had lunch on 7 June with John Whittingdale, one of the small number who remained on Mrs Thatcher's staff following her departure from Downing Street. Whittingdale, who was selected last week to contest the Tory safe seat currently held by Energy Secretary John Wakeham, is responsible for her relations with Central Office and for assisting her on domestic political issues.

The talks

The absence of briefing and access was keenly felt. She has no automatic right to briefing although if she asks through the PM's office one will be provided on specific issues. She was, for example, briefed by the FCO before her recent trips to South Africa and the Soviet Union but, Whittingdale contended, these were as nothing compared to the accounts which she provided directly to her successor on her return.

According to Whittingdale, she is interested in the progress on the talks. On a personal level she had, for example, noted with interest the names which had surfaced in the media in recent days as potential chairmen.

From a nationalist viewpoint one could not have chosen a better candidate than Lord Carrington. In certain Conservative circles he was still remembered as the Foreign Secretary who "had given away Rhodesia and was ready to follow a similar course in respect of the Falklands." Once they thought about it the Unionists could never acquiesce in his appointment. Their rejection of him however would only be understood by the Tory right wing, and to the public at large it would appear as an insult to a prominent and respected man confirming the perception of narrow-minded intransigence.

Of the names on the Unionists lists some simply made no sense. Basic research for example would have shown that Lord Tonypandy was too old and ill. The most interesting was Baroness Warnock although given her political outlook she seemed a perplexing choice from a Unionist viewpoint.

Mrs Thatchers role and influence

My conversation with Whittingdale took place just as a further row was brewing regarding her public (and private) comments on the Government's performance.

In an interview, due to be published next week in a Japanese magazine in return for which the publishers paid £10,000 to the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, she defends the poll tax with characteristic vigour and leaves no doubt that she disagreed with the Government's abandonment of the tax's underlying principle - that everyone must pay something for local services. An interview with David Howell, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in which he describes her as "the Queen over the water" remarking that some of her supporters continue to nurture "empty hopes that she might return to Number Ten" adds further fuel to the fire. She is unrepentant about the Japanese interview, according to Whittingdale. Her view is that she cannot be expected to apologise for policies introduced while she was PM. Neither has she any intention of refusing interviews.

She is particularly keen to preserve her freedom to speak out on Europe. This is the issue about which she has the strongest views and, according to Whittingdale, depending on how the debate develops, will not be adverse to articulating views which may be seen by some as critical of Government policy.

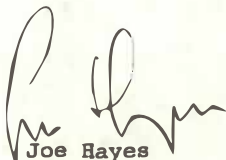
Those who are most critical of her outspokenness however misinterpret her intentions. Throughout her time in office, especially in the early years, she resented deeply the vengeful role played by Ted Heath. She is determined to avoid any hint of this and not to encourage the impression that she is looking over her successor's shoulder. Her principal difficulty is that she has yet to find a satisfactory role. She genuinely cannot decide whether or not to retire as MP for Finchley. Pressure is building up on her to make up her mind on this since candidate selections have now taken place for nearly all the seats where the sitting MP is standing down at the next election. Her majority at Finchley is not that great and there is a risk, albeit a slight one, that it could be further cut at the next election.

Her difficulties in adjusting to life after No. 10 have been greatly exaggerated and in many cases, especially in a recent American interview, which sought to portray her in a state of virtual collapse, seriously misrepresented. She is working on her memoirs assisted by Harris-Hughes - a member of her former

policy unit. These will take a considerable time to put together since she intends them to be comprehensive and scholarly. There is also the question of the Foundation which has attracted a lot of money but which still lacks a structure or clear objectives.

She has been greatly heartened by the level of support from the constituencies. This, according to Whittingdale, is very marked. There is a strong sense among the constituency associations that she was treated shabbily and there persists an extensive groundswell of loyalty to her personally. This may be the factor which most influences those supporters of John Major who view her occasional public statements, particularly at a time of renewed difficulty for the Government, as unhelpful interference which unsettles the nerves of the grassroots and ultimately plays into the hands of the opposition.

Yours sincerely,



Joe Hayes  
Counsellor