



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/45/229
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR

Telephone: 071-235 2171

TELEX: 916104

Fax: 071-245 6961

Confidential

23 May 1991

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

A conversation with Frank Millar

I had a conversation with Frank Millar about the talks process over lunch yesterday.

The following were the main points of interest which arose:

- Millar's information is that the Unionist document copied to the Irish Government on Tuesday evening proposed to leave to the Secretary of State the choice of venue in Northern Ireland for the substantive talks in strand two. (Our conversation took place several hours before Brooke's announcement that agreement had been reached on Parliament Buildings at Stormont). Millar further understood that the Unionist parties were not presenting substantial difficulties in relation to the "standing orders" for the chairman of strand two.
- The major outstanding issue, therefore, would appear to be the identity of the chairman. He understands that the Unionist document may have suggested deferring the decision on this and letting strand one go ahead in the interim.
- In this respect, Millar observed a dilemma for the SDLP and the Irish Government. There is no doubt in his mind that Molyneaux and Paisley's intention would be to hold onto this "loose end" with a view to unravelling it in full at a later stage. It is clear to him that the SDLP and the Irish Government would have very understandable misgivings about going ahead with strand one while even one issue of

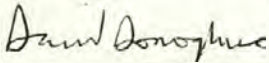
this kind remains to be resolved. On the other hand, there is the risk that, by insisting that strand one should not go ahead until the chairman has been agreed, they would be perceived to be holding up progress.

- Millar was puzzled by the discrepancy between Brooke saying on TV (on Tuesday evening) that he hoped the SDLP would be available at Stormont yesterday and SDLP assertions to Millar that they had received no invitation to meet Brooke yesterday.
- This led him on to a broad criticism of Brooke's approach over the past two weeks. It is clear to Millar that a firm understanding was reached between the Irish Government and Brooke in London on 10 May as to how Brooke would proceed with the Unionists on the following Monday morning. In the event, the Unionists presented Brooke with a counter-proposal and, instead of sticking to the game-plan agreed with Dublin, Brooke listened to this at some length and, according to one participant, described it as "the most constructive proposal that I've yet heard". Having consulted with Dublin overnight, however, he came back on Tuesday morning and rejected this proposal. As Millar sees it, therefore, Brooke managed to offend not merely Dublin and the SDLP (by delaying the "take-it-or-leave-it" approach) but also the Unionists (with his vacillation on their proposal, leading to claims of a "Dublin ultimatum").
- Millar was also critical, however, of the Unionist leadership. While their appeal to the Prime Minister may have paid off in a limited, short-term sense, their standing with British public opinion has undoubtedly suffered as a result of this tactic. It would have been much wiser for them to accept Brooke's "take-it-or-leave-it" proposition (which, after all, left open the key issues of venue and chairman).
- Millar suggested that Jim Nicholson's absence in Strasbourg last week may have been a factor in Molyneaux's decision to seek a meeting, on Privy Council terms, with the Prime Minister. Nicholson, Chairman of the OUP and a noted devolutionist, has identified himself clearly within the party as someone who wants the talks to succeed. While he knew of the decision to go to Downing Street, he agreed to it on the assumption that its purpose was to find a face-saving means of accepting the Brooke proposition. In the event, he was disheartened by the way in which Molyneaux and Paisley have since exploited the meeting. He would have preferred to see a clear Unionist acceptance of Brooke's proposition (rather than the leaders' questionable attempts to drive a wedge between Brooke and the Prime Minister).
- A contact told Millar yesterday morning that the Unionist leaders do not yet intend to propose a "renegotiation" of the 16 July date for the Conference meeting marking the end of the gap. An extension of the gap to accommodate the disrupted timetable would only interest those (i.e., the devolutionists) who wish the talks to succeed.

- 3 -

Molyneaux, Millar is firmly convinced, is not one of them. He could, however, find himself under pressure within his party if the strand one talks get underway and make encouraging progress. Millar did not exclude the possibility, therefore, that at some stage the Unionists would seek some flexibility on the length of the gap.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Donoghue". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "David" being more prominent than the last name "Donoghue".

David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer