



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/102/40

Creator(s): Department of Justice

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

AMBASÁIO NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

Fax to (1) H.G.
(2) Secretariat.

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR
Telephone: 071-235 2171
TELEX: 916104
Fax: 071-245 6961

Confidential

13 May 1992

Mr S. O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary,

Conversation with Frank Millar, Irish Times.

Millar had the exclusive on the leak of the SDLP's paper in that morning's edition. While he was obviously not about to reveal the source of the leak, from what was a fairly lengthy and relaxed conversation, I deduced that the leak had originated in Belfast and not from official (NIO) sources. He received a copy of the actual proposals but not the introduction which had contained a reference to the common principals paper - he told me that this section and one other section of the paper had been read to him over the phone but excised from the actual document which he had received.

He had been worried that Jim Dougal might have got the story ahead of him. However, a Belfast contact had phoned him while Dougal was broadcasting and it was apparent to Millar that Dougal did not have the actual document. He surmised that Dougal had probably been briefed by official sources in order to pre-empt his own piece in the Irish Times.

As to the papers submitted by the other parties, he maintained that he had not had sight of any of the other three party papers which have been submitted.

On the substance of the paper itself, he felt that there would be no way that the unionists would wear the SDLP's formula. For that matter, he doubted whether the British Government could wear the formula. He wondered whether the unionists would have the good sense to leave it to the British to shoot it down. However, such a strategy might have to await Strand Two and he suspected that the unionists will probably not have the nerve to allow the proposal to run that distance. He suspects that they may yield to the temptation to reject the formula outright - collapsing the talks before they can move to Strand Two. Paisley's reaction at Friday's Plenary meeting, will be crucial.

In his view, the proposals contained in the paper finally knocked on the head any notion which unionists might have had that the SDLP might be prepared to settle for a minimalist internal deal of the type favoured by Molyneux. He had always felt that "Molyneux and Hume were on two parallel tracks - though going in different directions"! He is now of the opinion that the divergence is even greater and commented that "he now felt that the two men lived on entirely different planets"!

He felt that the conclusion which a significant number of unionists would draw from all of this is that the existing Agreement is probably more acceptable than any alternative which they might be able to negotiate - "the devil they know is probably better than any new devil which might conceivably emerge from the current talks process".

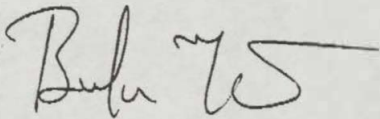
From his contacts with unionists he has the impression that they are all over the place and that they have no agreed game-plan for the talks. He finds it bizarre that once again Molyneux is able to enter the process; profoundly disagreeing with its entire intent and purpose; and with a team practically all of whom have an approach at variance with his own.

Millar felt that Molyneux had ample opportunity to weasel out of the process on a number of occasions since last July. Rather than weasel out however, Molyneux allowed himself to be propelled once again into the process. Millar could only conclude that Molyneux continues to take comfort from the fact that Paisley and McCrea can be relied upon to collapse the talks at the appropriate moment - "all Jim has to do is push the button".

Millar assumes that Molyneux shares his own assessment of Paisley's profound political cowardice. He could not envisage Paisley ever taking the responsibility of putting his name to any deal which might be broadly acceptable. To do so would be to deny his own political history and to disown his own core support on the extreme fringes of unionism.

He felt that Paisley could however live with an imposed solution possibly involving some form of power-sharing devolution. This would allow him to continue to play the rebel by denouncing it, while at the same time utilising it to try to shore-up his party's declining electoral fortunes.

Millar doubted whether the British will follow the road of an imposed power-sharing solution in the event of a collapse of the talks. The more likely scenario is that Molyneaux will use the opportunity to again renew his traditional demand for increased powers for local Government coupled with the reform of procedures at Westminster - notably the establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland. Millar had no view as to whether Molyneaux would be successful in his endeavour. However, unlike the last Parliament where no Scottish Select Committee was appointed, it is now widely expected that a Select Committee on Scotland will be appointed in The current Parliament - a development which Millar felt could prove helpful to Molyneaux's case.



Brendan McMahon
Press & Information Officer