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WEEKEND WORLD

PST

PSS

Mr. Gallagher
(2 copies)

Sunday 15 May 1988 at 12.00 noon

Mr. O'Brien
Councillor A-1

G P S

ULSTER'S LONG WAR

and Press Section
(2 copies)

A WINDOW FOR PEACE?

Phoned 17.5.88

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MATTHEW PARRIS

Hello and welcome to Weekend World. Today we bring you some exclusive and surprising news from Northern Ireland. News which indicates an important shift on the political agenda. Any sign of political movement is important, since hope of progress within Northern Ireland has sunk further and further since last Autumn, when an IRA bomb at Enniskillen began the appalling catalogue of violence which has continued ever since. In just the last few weeks, the shooting by the SAS of three IRA members in Gibraltar was followed by days of rioting in Belfast. Then, Catholic mourners at a funeral were murdered by a loyalist terrorist. At the same time, the IRA continued their brutal campaign of murdering British soldiers anywhere they appear as an easy target. As a result, in Britain there have been increasingly strident calls for draconian measures in Northern Ireland against the IRA. Hope on all sides is at rock bottom, but amid all this anger and despair, Weekend World has pieced together the beginning of a new political initiative emerging in Northern Ireland. Frank Millar brings us his report.

FRANK MILLAR

In West Belfast, the cockpit of Northern Ireland's troubles, political solutions seem as far away as ever. It's three years now since London and Dublin signed a Treaty supposed to reconcile the divided communities in Northern Ireland - the Anglo Irish Agreement. Through it, the Nationalist community here was supposed to gain faith in the impartial administration of justice and security. The signing of the Treaty was an historic event, for many Nationalists the most hopeful in decades. In exchange for co-operation with Britain on security, the Irish Republic would have a say in running the North, and for the first time, Northern Catholics would have an effective political voice through the Dublin government.

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But now, as the Agreement comes up for its first review, the optimism has faded. The Nationalist and Unionist communities seem as far apart as ever. The Unionists still say no to the Agreement, and in the Nationalist community, the political path is still rejected by many in favour of violence.

After the Gibraltar killings of three IRA members, the Catholic ghettos have new martyrs, and yet another generation is being raised in the Republican tradition of seeking to force the British out of Ireland at the point of a gun. Support for the IRA and Sinn Fein, its political wing, is deep-rooted. Father Matt Wallace's parish is not far from Milltown Cemetery, scene of the recent murders of three mourners at a Republican funeral, and of two British soldiers.

FATHER WALLACE

I would say the Anglo Irish Agreement almost has had the opposite effect to what it set out to achieve, and that was to take people away from Sinn Fein and set up a challenge, but the challenge has backfired. People - they can only become alienated, and their anger is deepened even since the Anglo Irish Agreement because, as I said, it has added another frustration to them, where they thought there was hope, there's only darkness. There is no hope, there is despair, and I would say anger is deepening, especially amongst the young people in the community, and certainly I can understand why young people are turned towards the IRA and away from legitimate authority in this country because, coupled with the police and army and injustice in the courts, they see not only injustice on the part of those who govern, and those who control the country, and that - and the Irish Anglo Agreement as well - that has not addressed those problems, and it's understandable why young people would be naturally attracted to those who are opposed to those who they see as unjust in their community.

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FRANK MILLAR

These youngsters in West Belfast are on community work schemes at the cemetery. The Agreement hasn't lessened their support for Sinn Fein, nor their resentment of British soldiers.

MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY WORK SCHEME - VOXPOPS

They shouldn't be here - this is Ireland - not Britain. They shouldn't be here at all. This is an island for Irish people, Britain shouldn't even be here, coming over here with their soldiers and their guns, they've no right to be here, the sooner they leave the better.

You're walking down the street, they just walk up to you and grab you, ask you questions, like where are you going, and all that there. If you say anything damaging, they bring you inside in the station, and beat the hell out of you.

First you try and talk with them, but where does it get you - nowhere. The only way you can get anywhere is try and bruise somebody up, then people start listening to you, and what you want to say, because for years here people have been trying to talk their way out, people have been trying, that's a fact, nobody listens, but when you go out and do something, show that you mean it, then they start listening to you, then they take heed.

FRANK MILLAR

The litany of recent violence shows the IRA's continued capacity to capitalise on its bedrock of support in West Belfast. Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, is the MP for the area. His constituents' lack of faith in the working of the agreement reinforces his own view that no political solution that continues to involve the British will ever work, and that as long as the British remain, so does the need for the military wing of Sinn Fein, the IRA.

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GERRY ADAMS - President, Sinn Fein

We have a military situation here, it was militarised by the British; they have thousands and thousands of armed men and the whole apparatus of war and depression and prisons and so on, on our streets, so we recognise that, and we accept the legitimacy of armed resistance to their presence. In the meantime, we will continue to try and build popular support, that's our job, there is unarmed political struggle and armed political struggle. Now in terms of there being no military solution, I have said on many many occasions that there can be no military solution, there must be a political solution, the only people who are trying to bring about a military solution and military arrangement, are those who militarised the situation in the first place, that's Thatcher, her murdering executive, some of the more right wing unionsists. That isn't going to work, that's why we've had 20 years of conflict, and the political solution, the democratic one which we must strive towards, is one which leaves the Irish people free of British interference.

FRANK MILLAR

Many Catholics find these views repugnant. Never the less, the hopes the Agreement once raised are overcast by widespread disillusion. Geraldine Cosgrove is a moderate Catholic who supports the constitutional Nationalist party, the SDLP. She welcomed the Agreement as a step forward for Nationalists, now she too is pessimistic about the British Government's intentions.

GERALDINE COSGROVE

I think the problem that I see with the Agreement up to now has been the administration of justice; I feel that with the Stalker affair and incidents, you know, of that nature during the year have not helped the Agreement, and I think that's basically the British Government's fault. They, I think, have not played their full role in the Agreement.

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FRANK MILLAR

These perceptions have led Dublin to question the value of a political strategy based solely on the Anglo Irish Agreement. On a recent trip to the United States, the Republic's Prime Minister Charles Haughey said:

"It is with sadness that I tell you that I cannot report any improvement in the situation in the North of Ireland. A number of events have combined since the beginning of 1988 to make the situation even worse than it has been. The shelving of the Stalker/Samson report, and the failure to prosecute those identified as having been implicated in a shoot to kill policy, the rejection of the Birmingham Six appeal, the shooting of an unarmed civilian at Aughnacloy, the early reinstatement in the British army of a private convicted of murder in Northern Ireland, and the killing of three Irish people in Gibraltar. These incidents have had serious implications for public confidence in the system of administration of justice,"

FRANK MILLAR

Mr Haughey then indicated his disbelieve in the Anglo Irish Agreement as the main vehicle for political progress in the North:

"I wish to assert my conviction that a solution guaranteed to last, to end conflict and tragedy and to bring peace and stability will only be found in a new political structure, accommodating safely and securely the two traditions in Ireland."

After a conciliatory response from the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mrs Thatcher and the Ulster Secretary, Tom King, fired off any challenges to Mr Haughey to work the Agreement.

MARGARET THATCHER

"... and the defeat of terrorism requires unstinting effort, and effective co-operation across the border. We shall continue to press for that, and to seek reassurance from the Irish Government that the speech to which my honourable friend refers does not mean

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MARGARET THATCHER (contd.)

... backing away from their responsibilities under the Agreement.

FRANK MILLAR

So Anglo Irish relations are once more in turmoil, and politicians here in the Irish Parliament in Dublin view recent developments with grave concern. In America, Mr Haughey has singled his lack of believe in the Agreement as a vehicle for major change in Northern Ireland - that earned him a swift exocet from Mrs Thatcher. Catholic alienation in West Belfast still runs deep, and Ulster's Unionists continue to say no. Are we witnessing then the failure of yet another political initiative in Northern Ireland, or has the renewed debate in fact conspired to provide a window of opportunity? Certainly Protestants in West Belfast are looking for a window of opportunity, neither the security fence which divides them from the Catholic estates, nor the Anglo Irish Agreement, have brought them peace

FRED PROCTOR - Belfast Councillor, Official Unionist Party

The night before last a house was attacked in the middle of the night by a gang of thugs that came from the other side of the road which a sledge hammer and half a dozen other people there with hurly sticks attacked a man's home, who had six young children sleeping upstairs, you know, that type of thing unsettles the community. It's not just hundreds of you, there's thousands of people feel that Springmartin isn't the place to live, if you look round you can see the size of the peace barrier, you know, and it has to run the length and breadth of the Springmartin Road, most of the families that live on the road have to have wire mesh covers on their windows just to go about their everyday business, and that's a sage mentality.

FRANK MILLAR

But however beleaguered the unionist community feels, they and their leadership have consistently rejected the one political solution on offer - the Anglo Irish Agreement.

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FRANK MILLAR (contd.)

They feared the link between London and Dublin would isolate them, and drag them into a united Ireland. And isolate them, it did. In the last three years, Unionist have seen things they never thought possible. Irish ministers have visited Stormont to discuss security, the Irish Government has talked directly to London about internal affairs over which the Unionists once had controlled. Grass roots Unionists feel cast adrift.

FRED PROCTOR

The Unionists are very disillusioned at this point in time, they feel ostracized, they feel beaten into a corner, they just simply don't know what to do. There's no doubt in my mind that they want something done. Most of them probably don't know what they would like done, but they want something done. They're not satisfied the way things are at the minute, and they're urging politicians at all levels to get something done in their interest.

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This frustration is shared by Unionists at the highest level. Peter Robinson is one of the most hard-line Unionists and widely seen as the heir to the Reverend Ian Paisley.

PETER ROBINSUN, MP - DEPUTY LEADER, DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY

Well, the union that exists at the present time is not the union about which I was taught when I was young. Even in my lifetime, the concept of the union has changed dramatically and it's now a matter of some inconvenience to many politicians in Great Britain that Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom. The facts are there. They can't be disputed. We are now being governed jointly by the British Government and the Government of the Irish Republic. There is effectively power-sharing between those two countries in the day-to-day affairs of Northern Ireland. As an elected representative in Northern Ireland, I have less of a say in the decisions that are taken affecting my constituents than the Foreign Minister of the Irish Republic. Clearly it's a nationalist agenda.

FRANK MILLAR

But it's Robinson's sense of isolation which is propelling him from the simple politics of demonstrating against the Agreement back to the conference table.

PETER ROBINSUN, MP

Well, I think that unless we can move towards an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, then the weakness of the union will continue week by week and month by month. I think Unionists will find that more decisions will be taken through the inter-governmental conference, that while there will be difficulties from time to time, they will find that any difficulty that annoys the Government of the Irish Republic will be paid for by concessions to the Irish Republic at a later stage.

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FRANK MILLAR

And the same fear of isolation is also proving a spur in the largest protestant party, the Official Unionists.

KEN MCGINNIS, MP - OFFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY

Of course the Unionists are in a particularly weak position when they are, as at present, virtually on their own in terms of negotiating a negotiating bar. Nonetheless, we have got to try to get ourselves the advantage of being able to negotiate our position for the future.

FRANK MILLAR

It's this mood which suggests to the Nationalists that the time has come to move Northern Irish politics into a new phase. John Hume, Leader of the moderate Catholic party, the SDLP, was the architect of the Agreement and the acknowledged lynch-pin of any attempt to bring about a peaceful solution on the Nationalist side. So what Hume pushes for, Dublin tends to support. When I spoke to John Hume he made it clear that he now wants to look beyond the Anglo-Irish Agreement, because it has failed to attract support from one of the key constituencies in Northern Ireland.

JOHN HUME, MP - LEADER SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY

Well, there is a statement put out by myself the day the Agreement was signed that said very clearly to people, this is not a solution to the Irish problem. This is a framework within which the healing process can take place. My view is if we want to sort the problem out as opposed to seek victories of one side over another or to maintain party positions, then the central relationship that goes to the heart of this problem, that of the Unionist people and the rest of Ireland, should be sorted out first to their mutual satisfaction because, let me make this very clear, I don't believe that we can have a peaceful, stable future on this island without the Unionist people or without their full agreement any more than you can have a peaceful, stable Cyprus without the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots both agreeing. You can't have a peaceful, stable Ireland without both Unionist and Nationalist agreeing.

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FRANK MILLAR

tell me, then, about your political strategy to carry the situation forward with the Unionists.

JOHN HUME, MP

The first step that I would like to see would be the Unionists themselves going to Dublin and satisfying themselves first that their agreement and that Dublin are deadly serious as we are, that their agreement is required for any future to this island and having secured that, to then enter a conference or get around the conference table with a view to discussing how we live together on this island and with a view to coming to a final agreement about how we share this island.

FRANK MILLAR

Can I be clear about this? You are talking about a round-table conference which would lead to a new agreement which would transcend the existing Anglo-Irish Agreement.

JOHN HUME, MP

Well, if such an agreement was reached, it would obviously be a new agreement. It would also transcend in importance any previous agreement ever made because it goes to the centre and the heart of the problems of this island. The people who are in basic conflict, the Unionist people who live apart from the rest of us, sitting down and finally settling how we live together in this island would be a very historic agreement and would transcend in importance any previous agreement ever made and, in my view, would be applauded worldwide.

FRANK MILLAR

Hume's plan could bring about a historic breakthrough in Northern Ireland because what he's offering the unionists is a new agreement. To get things going, he wants them to talk to Dublin and Mr Haughey seems to have given this plan the go-ahead.

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CHARLES HAUGHEY - QUOTE

I have indicated clearly my willingness to engage in constructive dialogue at any time with the political leaders of the Unionist people. It is my belief that direct dialogue of this kind would be of great significance and would open the way for political progress even if only on a limited scale initially. It is still my view that an all round constitutional conference summoned by the two governments will ultimately be necessary to provide a lasting solution and dialogue now between representatives of the different editions could be a beneficial forerunner of such a conference.

FRANK MILLAR

But Unionist politicians here in Belfast might be expected to view such a proposal with grave suspicion. They know Mr Haughey's republican credentials and might fear that his purpose in such dialogue would be to promote the cause of a united Ireland. Moreover, Unionists have said repeatedly that they won't enter negotiations of any kind prior to the suspension of the work of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. On the face of it, then, the prospects for talks don't look good but there are signs that Dublin might be prepared to be flexible in order to bring the Unionists to the table. The Nationalist view of the main Unionist concerns: a united Ireland and the suspension of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is a realistic one and they are indicating they might put both of them on the back burner. A united Ireland would not have to be on the agenda.

CONUR BRADY - EDITOR, 'THE IRISH TIMES'

There are many forms that a united Ireland can take and there would be many phases and many stages towards that objective. I think political consciousness and political awareness for the great majority of people in this State is long and well gone beyond the point in which a united Ireland is equated with simply tearing down the Customs post at the border and raising the tricolour over the Belfast City Hall and over Stormont. That is a passe view which I don't think serious observer would contemplate from this perspective; from the perspective of the State at the moment.

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CUNUK BRADY Cont'd

I think Mr Haughey, to understand Mr Haughey, I think it might be instructive to look back at Mr Devalera upon whom perhaps he would seek to model himself and would wish to model himself. Devalera was perceived in the 20s and 30s as the arch-devil of Sinn Feinism, of violent Irish Republicanism. Mr Devalera succeeded in creating and in selling a compromise in the 20s and 30s which lasted to this date which has maintained this State in a condition of stability and which has allowed it to prosper and go forward. I think Mr Haughey would like to see himself as the person who could sell and who could devise and who could be the architect of a new Ireland of the 80s and 90s.

FRANK MILLAR

And John Hume made it clear, the agenda for talks is completely open.

JOHN HUME, MP - LEADER, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY

Well, Unionists go to a conference table to discuss how we live together on the island and if their agreement is required, as it must be, then they're free to put on that table whatever proposals that they want to put. Mr Haughey would be putting whatever proposals he wanted to put. It would be then for the different sections of the people of this island to reach agreement on how we live together. I don't think that's impossible. I think there is a great new reality around in both parts of this island, brought about, mind you, by the Anglo-Irish Agreement and by making people face up to those realities. And I think those realities and present circumstances and in the present atmosphere would produce an agreement and I also believe that the very act of the Unionists, the act of self-confidence for the first time of Unionist leaders saying, 'We're quite prepared to sit down and put our proposals on the table for how we live together in this island, in the full knowledge that our agreement is required.' That very act would transform the whole atmosphere politically on this island and make things possible that today seem impossible.

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FRANK MILLAR

As for the second stumbling block, Nationalists will not suspend the Agreement but they will agree to parallel talks outside its framework about a possible new agreement. It's a significant olive branch, as John Hume has tried to signal.

JOHN HUME, MP

Well, nobody has suggested talking to Unionists would take place within any framework. I mean, if I talk privately to Unionists, it's not in any framework. If I sit in a television studio with them, it's not in any framework. So talks can, quite clearly, take place outside any framework and if the talks are about the content of agreements that I'm talking about and have been talking about in this interview, and if Unionists and the rest of the people of this island reach an agreement on how we live together in this island and how we share this island, that would be a very historic agreement and it would transcend in importance any previous agreement ever made.

FRANK MILLAR

So, let's be absolutely clear about this. You're prepared to talk to the Unionists outside the parameters of the Anglo-Irish Agreement about a new agreement which would transcend the existing arrangements

JOHN HUME, MP

Everything I've been saying today shows that I'm quite willing to talk to the Unionists. I don't need the talks to be convened by the Anglo-Irish Conference. They can be convened by mutual consent and, of course, they are about an agreement on how we live together in this island - an agreement that has never before been made. So, I think that the logic of what I'm saying is pretty clear to anybody who wants to see it.

FRANK MILLAR

In the Dail last week Mr Haughey appeared to back this new strategy. When asked whether pursuing a path separate from the Agreement might be damaging, he said:

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CHARLES HAUGHEY - QUOTE

Not necessarily. You would have to aver to the fact that representatives of Unionist traditions are not prepared to accept the processes of the Agreement; at this stage, at any rate. If we want to have dialogue with them, it would have to be outside the processes of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and parallel with it.

FRANK MILLAR

But what conditions would the Nationalists insist on for a deal with the Unionists? At the very least it seems power sharing and an Irish dimension would have to be on the agenda, as they are in the existing accord before Mr Haughey could agree.

CONOR BRADY - EDITOR, 'THE IRISH TIMES'

I think there are certain things which would have to be implicit in any settlement that he could give his support to. There would have to be some form of power sharing, sharing of responsibility - call it what one will. That is a sine qua non. There would also have to be some form of Irish dimension. There would also have to be a constitutional option for the North which, in a sense, is there already in the guarantee to the majority or to a majority that as long as they would wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, they can do so. That possibility of Irish unity would have to remain. I think if those things were part of a package which was put together, certainly I think Mr Haughey could live with it.

FRANK MILLAR

But the politics of all this are extremely tricky for Mr Haughey. His is a minority government and he'd rely on the support of Alan Dukes, Leader of the opposition party, Fine Gael, to bring off such a controversial plan. Mr Dukes inherited the mantle of Gareth Fitzgerald who negotiated the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the jewel in the crown of the last Fine Gael administration. But even here, there's some flexibility about new talks.

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ALAN DUKES, ID - LEADER, FINE GAEL

The Agreement is not an immovable object. I would take the view that it's not an end in itself. I know that Mr King has said it is an end in itself. It puts cross border security co-operation in place and I agree with him as far as that goes, but the Agreement itself, that the whole framework of the Agreement was designed to bring about progress in developing political structures in Northern Ireland so that what's important is developing those structures.

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FRANK MILLAR

Dublin does seem prepared to go some way to meet Unionists concerns and are to clear the path for formal talks. But the big question remains would the Unionists be prepared to talk to Dublin on those terms. Unionists want to see power restored to a devolved institution here at Stormont. However, they've always rejected the idea of dialogue with Dublin about how Northern Ireland could best be governed. In the past they've likened such dealings to trading with the devil. Nonetheless the imposition of the Anglo-Irish Agreement despite Unionist protest, has fueled an intense debate with Unionism about their future relationships, not just with London, but also with Dublin. Some undoubtedly rallied behind the banner of no surrender but although their champion, the Reverend Ian Paisley, shows no appetite for dialogue with Dublin, there are others who are slowly coming to terms with a new political agenda.

KEN MCGINNIS MP - OFFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY

There is no doubt that if we resolve the problems internally, in Northern Ireland, if we resolved or redefined our relationship with the United Kingdom, we would still have to live cheek by jowl with the Irish Republic. We would therefore, and I think this would probably arise fairly in any discussions anyhow, we would have to recognise that there must be a formal relationship between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

RAYMOND FERGUSON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER, OFFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY

I don't think the Unionists should get themselves hung up on this shibboleth that they have created for themselves in the past about the relationship with Dublin. As I said earlier, the Dublin dimension has been written in on a constitutional basis, by the British Government and I think Unionists have got to take that into account. There certainly is an element in the Republican movement and in particular in Sinn Fein which are very anti-Unionists and which the Unionists can never come to terms with and indeed their whole philosophy mitigates against that. I don't think Haughey is part

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RAYMOND FERGUSON (CONT'D)

of that movement and to that extent, and taking into account what Charles Haughey background is, I think the Unionists nevertheless have got to address that and, as I said, if the parameters are right, then I think that they should be prepared to at least listen to what he has to say about their future. And I could put it no further than that.

FRANK MILLAR

These kind of responses indicate a shift, because in the past the Unionists have been impackably opposed to talks with Dublin when the Agreement was in place. Now although they know suspension of the Agreement isn't imminent, some of them are biting on the carrot of parallel talks. Indeed, Peter Robinson Deputy Leader of the most militant Unionist Party, is eager to take what he thinks is the first step.

PETER ROBINSON MP - DEPUTY LEADER, DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARIY

The proper way to proceed, and I would be happy if the Secretary of State moves on it immediately. It would appear from what you are telling me that Mr Hume is prepared to consider an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Secretary of State now has two parties who are willing to consider an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It would seem logical if the Secretary of State were to make the necessary arrangements to bring those two parties together; if those two parties themselves representing the interests of the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland can come to some arrangement together, I believe that the difficulties that there may seem to now in selling those proposals outside would soon be removed.

FRANK MILLAR

And longer term, Mr Robinson wants to go further and have direct dealings with the government in Dublin.

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PETER ROBINSON

If there were a new structure in Northern Ireland there would clearly be a relationship between it and the government of the Irish Republic. I would too quite honestly I would prefer that relationship to be between the Unionists who will see what's going on, rather than the English Scottish or Welsh ministers who meet on frequent basis with the Irish Republic behind our back so that we don't know what's going on.

MATTHEW PARRIS

Peter Robinson is the emerging leader of a younger element in Unionist politics who want a share of power and influence, and who are eager for change. They know that the old Unionist descendencing has gone and that modern unionism has to come to terms with a new set of realities. But though the time seems right to them, they can't set the ball rolling; only their leaders can do that. The leader of the largest Unionist party is Mr James Molyneaux; he's always been acutely aware of the faith of previous unionists leader who move too far ahead of their troops. Could he and Mr Haughey do business? We'll be asking him after the break, stay with us.

PART TWOFRANK MILLAR

James Molyneaux is leader of the largest Unionist Party, The Official Unionists. A man known for his political caution, he's widely seen as the politician least likely to contemplate a dramatic political initiative. In recent years he has been working hand in glove with the leader of Ulsters hardline loyalists, the Reverend Ian Paisley. Since the Agreement they've refused to talk the STLP or Dublin about anything. So will the new agenda outlined by Mr Hume and Mr Haughey change the situation? Earlier this week I spoke to Mr Molyneaux.

FRANK MILLAR INTERVIEWING MR MOLYNEAUX

Mr Molyneaux 2½ years do the Unionists still say no to the

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INTERVIEW (CONT'D)

Anglo-Irish Agreement or have they in any sense come to terms with the Agreement?

MR MOLYNEAUX

Like all the other pro-Union people in Northern Ireland, Protestants and Roman Catholic alike, they still refuse to consent to the Agreement in that sense they say no. But they are also prepared to say yes to suggestions that we might have a constructive approach to, for example, a new Agreement in a nut sense they're in positive mood.

FRANK MILLAR

Let's just explore the possibility of the new Agreement. It has been put to Weekend World by John Hume, and we had the Taoiseach speech recently in the United States that they would be prepared to talk to Unionists outside the terms of the existing Agreement about the possible new Agreement. In those circumstances would you be prepared to talk to Mr Haughey.

MR MOLYNEAUX

I have never been a great believer in so much, I think that the grind has got to be prepared by way of exchange of papers and informal discussions. I don't think so much are of any value at all unless broad agreement has been reached and therefore, I think it would be a bit unfair to Mr Haughey and to me for example to engage in summitry at an early stage. I don't rule out the possibility that at some stage it may be necessary and it may be desirable to do that.

FRANK MILLAR

You did say that as a precursory to summitry and your antipathy to summitry is some pretty well known, as a precursory to a possible top level meeting between yourself and Mr Haughey that there could

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INTERVIEW (CONT'D)

be perhaps an exchange of papers, some exploratory discussions. Does that point to some development beyond the smoke signals which you and Mr Haughey appeared to have been sending each other in recent months, perhaps to the appointment of teams at a lower level for some exploratory contact in the first instance.

MR MOLYNEAUX

I think the exchange of ideas in paper would be the first step and then, if necessary, yes there could be teams of not necessary negotiators but the equivalent of Civil Servants who would be in a position to clarify, but not to make decisions and not to negotiate, I think that would be a sensible next step.

FRANK MILLAR

There is a general Unionist perception in your own community, if I may put it to you that Mr Haughey is the ultimate greenman, that he is committed to United Ireland or nothing. What's your perception of Charles Haughey?

MR MULLYNEAUX

Well I think that you are not being really fair to the Unionist community, because over in this bigger island of Great Britain where I work in Westminster, there has always been a blind unreasoning hatred of Mr Haughey regardless of how he behaves; I don't share that perception, I agree that he is tough, he is ruthless, he's an effective politician but then I don't think he ought to be just unreservedly condemned just because of that.

FRANK MILLAR

And you believe that Mr Haughey is someone with whom you could ultimately do business?

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MR MOLYNEAUX

Do business openly, not by means of any sort of trickery or underhand conjuring, but I think in a frank open honest way, I think that following on the policy documents which we have submitted over the past three years, not just the past two and a half year, I think it is possible, yes, to do that kind of business openly with the Prime Minister and the government of the Irish Republic, giving that our position as a party has always been even in the days of Stormont, that all matters of common interest there should be, and was indeed for 50 years, co-operation in matters of common interest between the two governments and we are simply following on in that tradition.

FRANK MILLAR

And given a Dublin willingness to consider proposals for a new Agreement, one which might submerge the existing agreement, are there any other obstacles to those talks commencing to those explorator contact and, leading up to a possible high level meeting, is there anything needs to be done to clear the way?

MR MOLYNEAUX

Our position has been that we would like to know whether Her Majesty's Government, in the first instance, is prepared to consider an alternative to the Agreement. Now if, even by implication, the two governments say to us, yes we are not satisfied we don't pretend that the present Agreement is perfect, if you have something better to put on the table let's have it; I think that would be sufficient to encourage us to put forward ideas, not just an outline but in detail.

FRANK MILLAR

Mr Hume has indicated to Weekend World his desire for a vastly superior Agreement; he's put the view that until the Unionists are aboard, until the two parties of the island agree, the basis on which they share the island of Ireland there will be no lasting

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FRANK MILLAR (CONT'D)

peace and your Democratic Unionist colleague, Peter Robinson, has suggested to us that in that case Mr King, the Ulster Secretary, should convene a conference involving the STLP and Unionists Parties, would you be happy to go to such conference?

MR MOLYNEAUX

Yes, again at some stage, but I think we don't want to get into even that kind of summitry at an early stage, because you know we would be faced with microphones and reporters as we emerge from every single session of such a meeting and that's not really the way to do business of that kind; its not a matter of concealing anything but its simply that if people are asked different questions by different people not, surprisingly different answers, reply do not come quite easily in the sensitive area like this do hidious damage.

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FRANK MILLAR

Can I put it to you that politicians like yourself and Mr. Hume could quite easily devise ways to avoid the presence of cameras; would it be a better thing, in the first instance, for yourself and Doctor Paisley perhaps to meet with Mr Hume to discuss what you may respectively have in mind as to the parameters of a potential and the potential indeed of a new agreement?

JAMES MOLYNEAUX MP

Yes I think if we can move forward a bit from the meeting in the middle of this week with Mr King, and if we can have a clear indication, not in the business of humiliating anybody, we just simply want a clear honest indication that everyone is prepared to look at the possibility of designing a superior agreement. And if that can be genuinely expressed, then I think we're in business.

FRANK MILLAR

Mr Hume has put it to Weekend World, that he regards the Unionists as the essential partner in any new agreement. His view is that there won't be peace in that island, until there is an agreement with the Unionists people as to how the island is shared. How important is it in your book to reach an accommodation with the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, and with those with whom you share the island on the other side of the border?

JAMES MOLYNEAUX MP.

I shall resist the temptation to be catty and remind Mr Hume that it was he who insisted that the Unionists should be faced down, and the Unionists boil should be launched, before the agreement was signed, let's leave all that aside, and this changed more charitable atmosphere. Let me take up his words, I have made it quite as clear, as has Mr Paisley, that we want to see the Catholic minority and their representatives having their rightful say in the affairs of Northern Ireland, the province in which they live, and anything which can be done to achieve that will have my full support.

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FRANK MILLAR

Mr Molyneaux, so that I'm absolutely clear about this, if Mr Haughey and the Irish government and Mr Hume for the SDLP are prepared to consider a new agreement outside the parameters of this agreement, as far as you're concerned there are no obstacles to such discussions, such consideration getting under way.

JAMES MOLYNEAUX MP

No obstacles as far as we're concerned, but I have to be quite frank with you, we have noticed a marked reluctance on the part of Her Majesty's Government rather, not just Mr King, but the Government in general, it's almost a sort of amounting to something like nervousness of embarking on a rethink of the present agreement. And somehow or other that obstacle has got to be clear, because that is up to the moment the main obstacle.

FRANK MILLAR

But isn't the reality, I put it to you that if you the leader of the majority of the Unionist community, and Mr Haughey, and Mr Hume are interested in looking at the possibility of a new agreement, it isn't realistic that Britain could be an obstacle to such progress?

JAMES MOLYNEAUX MP.

It's not realistic I agree, but this Government has the gift of going on, clinging to a position long after the position is tenable, and I would hope for the good of all of us in Northern Ireland and in the island of Ireland generally, and in the entire British Isles, that they don't pursue that particular tactic in regard to this very serious issue.

FRANK MILLAR

Mr Molyneaux thank you very much indeed. What Mr Molyneaux has said is of great significance in Northern Irish politics. For the first time the leader of the largest Unionist party has said he's ready to talk to Dublin. For the first time also he's indicated his belief that the way to those talks is now clear. Clearly the Unionists focus has shifted from demand for the suspension of the work of the Anglo-Irish Agreement

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FRANK MILLAR (cont'd)

to direct talks with Nationalists, about the possibility of a new agreement. Dublin as we have shown will welcome this signal from Mr Molyneaux. But how will British ministers here at the Northern Ireland office in London, respond to this latest development.

After my interview with Mr Molyneaux, I spoke to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Tom King. Can I put it to you Mr King that in the Dial recently the Taoiseach deliberately in response to Mr Duke's said that he would not preclude discussions with Unionists outside the terms of the agreement. Mr Hume has indicated to us in an interview for this programme, that he is eager to talk to Unionists outside the terms of the agreement about a possible new agreement. How do you respond to what appears to be a new Nationalist agenda.

TOM KING - SECRETARY OF STATE NORTHERN IRELAND

Well I've always said that people could come and talk to me about any issues without any pre-conditions, I put no obstacles in their way if they want to talk about the agreement, within the agreement, without the agreement, I have made absolutely clear that I have no hang-ups about that; I'm not requiring a signed pledge of total support for somebody before he's allowed through the door. But I think the question about others, whether they are prepared to talk in the same way that's for them to answer.

FRANK MILLAR

Can I be absolutely clear about this Mr King, Mr Hume has indicated that he is perfectly happy to talk to the Unionists about - outside the terms of the agreement, about a new possible agreement which would transcend the existing Anglo-Irish arrangements. Are you prepared to see discussions and negotiations outside the terms of the agreement which could lead to a new agreement.

TOM KING

Well I don't know what, you know form that might take, but I've always recognised, I think a lot of people have elevated the agreement as though it was the sort of total scheme for the government of Northern Ireland, it's never been that.

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TOM KING

Well I think I'd want to see exactly what had been said, we're talking about people choosing their words usually pretty carefully, and I make a point now perhaps rushing into comment on that, until I've seen exactly what was said.

FRANK MILLAR

I can understand that. But let me press and put to you exactly what Mr Robinson said, 'If Mr Hume is prepared to talk about the possibility of an alternative agreement I believe, Mr Robinson believes, that the Secretary of State should convene a conference of the Unionists party's, and the SDLP. And Mr Robinson further said that he would recommend that Mr Molyneaux and Doctor Paisley should go to such a conference and place no obstacles in its way.

TOM KING

Well I hear what you say and I shall take note of that and think about it. You're reporting on what Mr Robinson has said about what he thinks Mr Hume has said, that's why I have to just note very carefully what has been said, and people know how I think hard I have been trying to get people together to get people to talk to each other. Now if that is achievable, I'm the first to want to see it happen, and I shall certainly do all I can to encourage it, but I think I'd be interested to see just how easily achievable that is, and how whether the statements that you've made are possible to translate into that sort of meeting.

FRANK MILLAR

Yes, I understand that perfectly Secretary of State. There is can I put it to you a sense in some quarters that the British Government's role seems to be that of a bystander, and there does also appear to be conveyed to us in the course of our research of this programme, a feeling that a number of the parties are very eager to move, and that what the situation requires is precisely someone in your position, we haven't heard it suggested that there is anyone better placed than you as Secretary of State, to actually pull the various strands together and construct the bridges. I mean isn't the requirement in Northern Ireland that you've got to be a leader of these developments.

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TOM KING (cont'd)

It has been a number of things, it has been a - an agreement between countries, as to what should be the means on which the status is presently determined and in future should be determined. That part of the island we are, comprises Northern Ireland presently part of the United Kingdom by will of a majority of the people there, the democratic choice.

FRANK MILLAR

Just so that we understand exactly what the position is, there are no pre-conditions and you do not preclude the possibility of new developments leading to a new agreement one which could transcend the existing arrangement.

TOM KING

Well I have no evidence that that is a likely eventuality at the moment, it was hard enough to negotiate present agreement, and the idea that there's some alternative ready and available I would wait to see. But what I do say is that I think it is important there is dialogue, one of the things that I've most regretted in the past couple of years, have been the refusal of people to talk, to discuss the situation, I think for many people to take a far gloomier and more depressed view of the opportunities for dialogue and cooperation than I think was justified, I think now you're seeing the signs and maybe in some of the interviews that you have on this very programme, maybe the signs of people starting to get out of their trenches and actually being prepared to talk each other.

FRANK MILLAR

Well let me put to you another proposition which has been put to Weekend World. Mr Robinson the Deputy Leader of the DUP, has suggested that if the SDLP are prepared as John Hume as indicated to Weekend World they are, preparing to talk to Unionists about the possibilities of a new agreement one which could transcend ultimately the existing arrangements. Mr Robinson has suggested that he feels you should call a conference involving the Unionist parties and the SDLP, is that a proposal you'd be likely to consider.

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TOM KING

Well I think you know the hours that I've spent in recent weeks and months precisely trying to pull people together, and trying to get that sort of progress; I'm certainly committed to doing that, and we shall do all we can to try and get such a dialogue going.

FRANK MILLAR

Secretary of State thank you very much indeed.

MATTHEW PARRIS

Ironically, it's the difficulties London and Dublin have had recently which make it possible for Unionists and Nationalists to contemplate developments that would have been unthinkable had the agreement been riding high. For the first time it looks as though a conference could be convened that would include the major forces for change in Northern Ireland. The Dublin government, and key Unionists like Mr James Molyneaux. It seems as if both sides now sense an opportunity to move towards a new deal, whereby they could eventually share the island of Ireland.

THE END