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E-Mail Message

CONFIDENTIAL

To: Joe Hayes, Press Copied Joint Secretary
 From: C Wrafter, London
 Date: 1 February 1995.

The Times and Matthew d'Ancona

1. The print run of first edition of today's Times was held up by 45 minutes or so. This is a standard ploy used by papers who are anxious to prevent their competitors from lifting or copying scoops. A contact in the Times whom I rang at 6.15 yesterday evening phoned this morning to apologise that he had been under strictest instructions at that time not to reveal any details of the front page story.
2. This same source, who has worked in Northern Ireland, told me that he is not convinced that the Times actually has a copy of the Framework Document. In his view while the quotations are accurate we should not assume that d'Ancona has actually been given a copy. D'Ancona's article on page 2 refers to "the late draft seen by the Times". As our contact pointed out d'Ancona has his own pro Union and pro Unionist agenda.
3. The same source tells me that Peter Stothard, Editor of the Times, phoned the Prime Minister last evening with a request for a statement. I am told that Downing St. - not necessarily the Prime Minister in person - expressed serious concern to Stothard about the effects of this story.

Who is Matthew d'Ancona?

4. As previous Embassy reports have indicated, d'Ancona is a leader writer - not a reporter - with the Times newspaper. Now in his late twenties, he received a "Double First" from Oxford and was a Fellow of All Souls. His nickname is "Two Brained d'Ancona", because of his alleged intellectual prowess.
5. In his contacts with the Embassy, d'Ancona has made no secret that he is in close contact with David Trimble, MP, and David Burnside. Burnside was once a member of Vanguard, worked as a public relations officer for British Airways but left BA under a cloud because of alleged involvement in a dirty tricks campaign against Virgin Airways, and is reported to be interested in

becoming a Unionist MP. Although he lives in Northern Ireland, he runs his own PR agency in London called DB and Associates. On 31 May, 1994 the Embassy reported that in a conversation, d'Ancona described Burnside as a "future leader of the UUP".

6. D'Ancona was a member of an allegedly independent study group which published a paper called "Ulster: After the ceasefire" last Autumn. This argued that Northern Ireland should be fully integrated into the United Kingdom and that the Republic should be content with friendly relations. There would be an administrative assembly which would operate according to power sharing rules. The paper was launched at the Conservative Party Conference in October 1994. As d'Ancona admitted to me at the time, the objective of the exercise was to move the Party Conference in the direction of a motion sponsored by Northern Ireland Conservatives advocating that the Conservative Party adopt an integrationist line. In this, of course, they failed. Other members of the group included David Burnside, described as a trustee of the "Friends of the Union", Paul Goodman, a pro-Unionist reporter on the Sunday Telegraph and Charles Moore, his Editor.

7. On 31 May, 1994 the Embassy reported that d'Ancona explained a particularly critical Times editorial in the following terms:

"At the time of the Joint Declaration British Ministers briefed commentators and leader writers like him to the effect that Sinn Fein/the I.R.A. were serious about peace and all they needed was a figleaf or facesaving device to allow them come in from the cold. D'Ancona and others (he said) had checked this information out with their own security and police sources who told them it was accurate. Given the failure to date of the Joint Declaration to deliver it is not surprising that people like himself are now extremely sceptical. The British Government clarification of 19 May is only justifiable if peace comes very soon, otherwise the exercise has not only been a waste of time but it has undermined the democratic process and increased stability in the North."

8. The Embassy reported on 13 January 1995 on a conversation with d'Ancona. At that time, he gave no indication of unease with the contents of the Framework Document and told the Embassy that he "was convinced that Jim Molyneaux is fully behind the Prime Minister on the peace process and the Framework Document. He interpreted Molyneaux's refusal of an Honorary Degree from Queen's as no more than a sop to his more trenchant supporters and in fact signifying Molyneaux's confidence in his own position and his relationship with the Prime Minister.

9. On 18 January 1995, the Times editorialised on the Framework Document. This editorial was clearly based on an incomplete and dated understanding of the contents of

the Framework Document. The Embassy reported that it had been told by a usually reliable media source that David Burnside was the inspiration behind that editorial. There was a similarity between the Times editorial and a report in the Belfast newsletter on the same day by Mervyn Pauley and it was perhaps not surprising that the latter's source was referred to as 'an informant close to Whitehall corridors of power', a description which Burnside would not hesitate to apply to himself.

Where did the story come from?

10. The reference to "the draft from sources in Dublin" is so meaningless that one has to consider the possibility that this reference was deliberately included to deflect from the real source. The heavily pro Unionist bias in the presentation and interpretation is manifest. It has been pointed out by a number of media contacts that the report shows signs of more than one source.

11. Lord Cranborne, the Leader of the House of Lords, and a member of the Cabinet committee on the North is well known for his unionist sympathies and the Times seems to have no hesitation in reporting Cranborne's privately held position. Cranborne chaired the "Friends of the Union" sponsored fourth Annual Ian Gow memorial lecture by Professor Tom Wilson which was delivered in London on 22 November 1994. This meeting was also attended by Enoch Powell, Nicholas Budgen MP, Andrew Hunter MP (Con), John Taylor MP, Roy Beggs MP, and David Burnside.

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