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SECRET

Meeting with Mr. Frank Millar, General Secretary, OUP, Belfast,
Saturday, 2 March 1986.

Signals began to come through a Belfast Unionist journalist, from last Thursday on, that Mr. Millar might wish to meet with an official from the Department. We responded positively saying that we were willing to hear the Unionist view, in line with the Minister's stated policy.

After a meal together, the journalist left Mr. Millar and me alone.

Mr. Millar made the following points:

- Before last Tuesday's meeting in London, it had been clearly understood that the least that Mr. Molyneaux and Mr. Paisley could bring back from London was suspension of the Agreement. There was no mention of this Unionist point of view in the Downing Street Communique.
- Mr. Millar confirmed however, that the Communique had been seen in full by the two leaders before it was released. A separate meeting had been held at Mr. Paisley's home after return from London. At the meeting of the ^{Unionist} Joint Working Party that evening Mr. Millar himself had opposed the agreement reached in London. This ^{meeting} had lead to the statement issued at the end
 - and also to the agreement for the strike to go ahead, though Mr. Molyneaux was opposed to strike action. Mr. Molyneaux had threatened to resign on a number of occasions, but was still the undisputed leader of the OUP. (The account is similar to the Sunday Tribune - Ed Moloney - story yesterday).

- The events of the week had again confirmed the strength of Unionist opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We should not underestimate this. It was easy to talk of the Unionist turnout at the by-election as being less than the half a million hoped for. But the fact was that over 400,000 Unionists had said no to the Agreement. There was a serious danger that unless constitutional unionism was given a chance, then more extreme policies would take over. Mr. Millar said that he admitted that this was similar to the arguments that the SDLP used as regards the IRA. But the threat was real. He wanted us to understand this. Unionists objected to the lack of consultation with them during the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and even more so they objected to the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference working out policies which concerned them but without their being involved. He referred several times to Joint Authority.

- The resolution (attached) adopted by the Executive Committee of the Party on 28 February had been an attempt to go forward through constitutional policies. It would have been preferable if this resolution had been issued before the Downing Street Meeting. Within the party there were divided councils on, for instance, integration with Britain or devolution. His own feeling was that devolution, if attainable, would suit best. (I pointed out that opinion polls pointed to the support for devolution). He referred to the present direct rule arrangements whereby Northern Ireland was being treated by the UK as a colony. He stressed several times that Unionism had changed. Unionists wanted an accommodation with Nationalists but not through the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They had shown this in the policy document "the Way Forward" of last autumn. The resolution aims at bringing about devolution first and then to working out a British/Irish framework. Mr. Millar pointed out that this acceptance of the need for a British/Irish framework is new.

- Mr. Millar referred to the call on the British Government "to abandon or suspend the Anglo-Irish Agreement pending discussions of our proposals". He said that I should concentrate on "suspension" which could mean not holding meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference for a period of say two months. This would give time for devolution talks to get under way and would act as a stimulus to Unionists to be serious about the talks as the Agreement could be reactivated at any time if the talks did not succeed. Mr. Millar asked if I thought we could accept this formula. I replied that any formula which implied a change in the Agreement itself or in the operation of the Agreement would be very difficult for us. I said that there were legal and political realities of which he was aware of as much as I. He asked if I meant that the formula was impossible and I again said that the difficulties would be very great.

I said that as regards consultation and information procedures we could be flexible. The Downing Street Communique had mentioned various possibilities: there might be others for instance publishing the ^{Conference} agenda in advance. He said he was not interested in this idea of publishing the agenda in advance. As regards the Secretariat in Belfast Mr. Millar attacked it as a constant irritant, but went no further.

- I asked Mr. Millar how he saw the strike going on Monday. He referred to the appeals by Mr. Molyneux for orderly behaviour, no intimidation, etc. and said that he hoped the result would be a further but orderly demonstration of opposition to the Agreement. The problems would still be there on Tuesday. He again expressed Mr. Molyneux's opposition to the strike and referred to the fear that it could lead to a continuing strike.
- Mr. Millar confirmed that Mr. Molyneux was aware of our meeting. I undertook to convey his views in Dublin and to let him know the result after Monday.

- During the conversation the tone was quite friendly. Both sides were aware of the other's position (e.g. Mr. Millar's article in the Belfast Telegraph of 15 January "Why I oppose the Anglo-Irish Agreement"). Mr. Millar asked me if I agreed with John Hume's position that the Unionists had to be faced down, i.e. humiliated. I replied that the intention behind the Agreement was a levelling up of the two communities not a levelling down. He asked also if I thought the SDLP was serious about devolution. I replied that having the Agreement as a framework allowed the SDLP much more room in negotiation. John Hume had said he would talk without preconditions. Mr. Millar then said that it was obvious that we had negotiated the Agreement only with the SDLP in mind. I replied that the SDLP had the IRA looking over their shoulders but that the Agreement was aimed at helping Northern Ireland as a whole. Mr. Millar was critical of the Minister on a number of occasions particularly as regards lack of sensitivity (by comparison with the Taoiseach) concerning Unionism. I remarked that the Minister had on many occasions said publicly that his door was open to Unionists. I told Mr. Millar to contact me at any time if his Party had any message for us. As regards the next stage in Unionist - London talks Mr. Millar said that he would visit London next week for contacts at official level but that resumption of political discussions would depend on a positive response to the resolution from Mrs. Thatcher.

- Mr. Millar asked that our meeting should not be made public and that information about it should be restricted to very few people. I agreed to this.

COMMENT

The fact that the OUP has initiated this approach to us confirms their concern about the situation (i.e. loyalist paramilitaries). We cannot obviously accept a compromise based on the formula in the resolution because the formula impinges on the Agreement itself. The Minister (to whom I had reported) has already indicated this in talking last night to the Irish Times. It may be useful to keep open, however, the contact with the OUP through Mr. Millar.