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Meeting with Mr. Frank Millar, 29 October 1985

I met with Frank Millar, General Secretary of the Official Unionist Party in Belfast on 29 October, a few hours after the publication of the proposals made by Sir Frank Catherwood on devolution. Millar said that publicly the Official Unionists would take the view that the proposals were Catherwoods and that the party is not necessarily fully in agreement with those proposals, but that they do form the basis for discussions on the return of a devolved administration in Northern Ireland. The three parties in the Devolution Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly had wanted to try and have a piece of paper which they could present as forming an acceptable basis for negotiations even if they did not fully support the proposals in the document itself. A number of names had been tossed around and some people had been approached but were unavailable before they agreed on Catherwood. Among the other points he made were the following:

- The negotiations which have lasted over a week were extraordinarily intense. Cushnahan had led for the Alliance party although he had called on various occasions on persons such as Napier. Paisley had led for the DUP and he himself had led for the OUP though he remained in close contact all along with Molyneaux. Paisley had made the running in the negotiations.
- He believes that the proposals made in the Catherwood report represent a very considerable movement on the part of unionists and also represent a development of the ideas first contained in The Way Forward of 1984.
- Both Alliance and the Official Unionists had very serious doubts before agreeing with the report.

- It will be claimed that unionists only agreed to put forward these proposals once they realised that an Anglo-Irish Agreement is imminent. Whatever the truth or otherwise of such claims a significant political gesture has now been made by unionists which they cannot remove from the table.
- The publication of the report the day before Paisley and Molyneaux were due to meet the Prime Minister was entirely fortuitous and owes more to an urgency on the part of Catherwood than a desire of the Unionist parties to produce a document before they met the Prime Minister.
- Millar claimed that Catherwood had spoken to Hume on Thursday 24 October and that Hume had indicated his broad approval of the approach.
- Millar stressed that in their view the document represented a very considerable advance on their side to take account of the interests of nationalists.
- He said that he wished to say in the strongest possible terms that in the event of an Anglo-Irish agreement it would be almost impossible for unionists to support the sort of proposals made in the Catherwood document. As they see it logically devolution of this type, which is sensible and which should in their judgement meet the needs of the nationalist community, provides an alternative to the Anglo-Irish process and to the perceived need for an Anglo-Irish Agreement.
- He expected that an Irish Government would be opposed to the achievement of successful devolution. He supposed that if there were an Anglo-Irish Agreement it would endeavour to give the Irish Government a role in the areas which were originally devolved to Stormont. Logically he believed that if the Irish Government has such control they would not wish to surrender it to a Northern Ireland administration.

- In his view a major result of the pact between the OUP and the DUP has been that it has so far ensured that the reaction of all Unionists except of the most maverick kind to the Anglo-Irish talks has been placed in a political, legal and constitutional framework rather than being manifested in an unconstitutional way. Millar claims some credit for this. He noted that Paisley has been particularly affected by this process.

- He is doubtful if he can hold this line in the wake of an Anglo-Irish Agreement. If there is an Anglo-Irish Agreement he will be open to the charge that his political attempt to frustrate it has failed and that other ways must now be found. Paisley and Robinson would, he is certain, take this line.

- The atmosphere in the unionist community is at present relatively calm. He does not think that this calmness can remain much longer if the Anglo-Irish process is continued with and particularly if there is an Agreement. He believes that a Ministerial Commission and an Irish Secretariat located in Belfast will produce very vigorous opposition on the part of loyalists.

- He has argued that the resignation of a Westminster seat would be more effective in galvanising British opinion than would the resignation of Assembly or European seats. He would not rule out the possibility that unionist MPs might end up in prison. He expects major riots on the streets. He also believes that even if Paisley wished to maintain constitutional opposition that Robinson would force his hand and would put him in the same camp as the paramilitaries.

- Paisley, in his view, is certainly unstable but he believes that Robinson is even more unstable and that it is not possible with any degree of certitude to predict what he might do in particular circumstances. Millar is convinced that Robinson sees himself as a future leader of the unionist community.

- There is a widespread belief among unionist politicians that the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Tom King, dislikes the agreement and is much more favourable to the unionist position than his predecessor.

- If there is an Agreement the Official Unionists will try to maintain opposition in a political and constitutional framework. However, it will not be lost upon the unionist community that a minority within the nationalist community by refusing to give their support to the institutions of the state have succeeded in obtaining the involvement of the Irish Government in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Unionists will conclude that if they withdraw their consent Northern Ireland will become ungovernable.

- He believes that the United Ulster Unionist Front has been denied an effective role essentially because unionist dissatisfaction has been guided into other channels.

- Millar does not believe that an Anglo-Irish Agreement can work. Unless it gives a substantial role to the Irish Government the Irish Government would be placed in a position where it would have responsibility without being able to affect matters. The Government could find itself in a position where it could not defend a shooting by the Army or the RUC. But a substantial role for the Irish Government would create enormous difficulties for the British Government in dealing with unionists. The unionists would see such a role as a change in sovereignty. Millar does not believe that there will be enough in an agreement for the Irish Government and he

thinks they would be mad to reach an agreement with the British.

- He said that Tebbit has been telling unionists, as recently as the end of last week, that the reasons for the delay and the real purpose of the negotiations is that the British Government want to whittle down the matters in the agreement to the greatest possible extent. The purpose of having an agreement at all is to obtain the support of the Irish Government in order to defeat the Provisionals. Millar seemed himself to be convinced of this argument.

- He claimed that John Taylor does not speak for the Official Unionist Party and in recent speeches has been speaking only for himself.

Daithi O'Ceallaigh

31 October 1985

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