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Conversation with Ian Burns, 23 November, 1989

As per security policy

I had a brief conversation over lunch with Ian Burns on last Thursday, 23rd November. Burns was in Dublin to attend the debate in the Dáil on Anglo-Irish Relations. The bulk of the conversation was taken up with a discussion on the Taoiseach's speech opening the debate.

Among the general points made by Burns were:

- the Secretary of State's recent remarks about the IRA were not premeditated. Mr. Brooke was an extremely open and frank person who tended to think on his feet and to give straight and honest answers to questions posed to him. We should therefore situate his responses, including that on the possibility of involving the IRA/Sinn Féin in talks if violence were to cease, in this context.
- there had, of course, been nothing new in what the Secretary of State said; it was more the timing than the substance of his remarks which had posed problems for the Secretary of State, and indeed for the NIO;
- asked if the Secretary of State in his remarks had been seeking to influence in any way the on-going internal debate in Sinn Féin/IRA circles about ending violence and pursuing a more active political approach, Burns repeated that Mr. Brooke's remarks were not in any way premeditated. As regards the debate itself, his view was that the more politically inclined of the Provos (in particular Adams and Morrison) had been gaining some ground up to about a month ago; however, more recently, and particularly in the light of the substantial publicity resulting from recent Provo atrocities, particularly the Deal, Colchester and Warrenpoint bombings, the position of those in Sinn Féin, who argued against any consideration in current

circumstances of the political option, had been considerably strengthened;

- Burns went on to say that the Secretary of State, when reflecting on his remarks subsequently, hoped that - while they might not carry any influence with active members of Sinn Féin and the IRA - they might serve to suggest to those who gave Sinn Féin tacit and voting support, that there was an alternative way forward through political, economic and social methods;
- on the Birmingham Six, Burns expressed the view that the language in the Taoiseach's statement was quite strong. I responded that, given recent developments in the Guildford Four and Maguire cases and the extremely strong feelings throughout the country on all these cases, the language used was the minimum that could have been expected. Many indeed would have expected the Taoiseach to call formally for the release of the Six and to have been overtly critical of the approach of the Court of Appeal to these cases. The Taoiseach had in fact shown considerable restraint in not having gone further than he did;
- Burns added finally that he thought the language in the Taoiseach's speech on the UDR, while not new, had also served to "turn the heat up in the oven".

*DAG*

Dermot Gallagher,  
29 November, 1989.

cc: PSM  
Mr. Nally/PSS  
Mr. Mathews/Mr. Brosnan  
Counsellors A-I  
Box