



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

(Handwritten: NOS)

(Handwritten notes and signatures)
 13/1/89
 6/1/89
 17 Grosvenor Place,
 London SW1X 7HR.
 A1

5 January 1989

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(Handwritten notes)
 ec PS4
 Mr. Mully, PPS
 Mr. Mully/PPS
 (3) Gualter A1
 O'Garra.

Mr. Dermot Gallagher,
 Assistant Secretary,
 Department of Foreign Affairs,
 Dublin.



Dear Assistant Secretary,

Lunch with (Lord) Jim Prior and Sir David Crouch

They were interested to having a full briefing on all current issues and we covered these at some length. Prior said in a genuine way that he very much admired the Taoiseach's "quite uncharacteristic restraint" on issue after issue over the past twenty months or so. He admired it, he said, because to have responded to Mrs. Thatcher with the same level of insensitivity could not have had any positive effect and could only have made things worse.

// He stressed his view that the most powerful man around her is Charles Powell who, on just about every major issue other than the Treasury has a stronger voice than her Cabinet colleagues.

He said he would be happy to do anything we asked to help and asked us to bear this in mind in the future.

He was very taken by the Inter-Parliamentary Body project and said that he will without delay talk with the Ministers concerned, including Howe, Hurd and Wakeham to show his full support for it. He said, with a smile, that he would stay away from Mrs. Thatcher, however.

He was very critical of her handling of Irish issues and of her "behaviour" toward the Taoiseach. Although he counts Howe and Hurd as "good friends", he views most of the present Cabinet as "basically and fundamentally" disinterested in Irish matters. Although he considers that it would be very difficult for the Taoiseach and Mrs. Thatcher to re-build a good, creative relationship, he thought that, unpleasant as the task may be, it really falls to the Taoiseach to do the building: she is, he said, beyond that not only with the Taoiseach but also with other leaders in Europe and elsewhere.

He expects her to be around for the next 3-4 years, to take the Party through the next election in or about June 1991 and to go 12-18 months after that. He would put his money on Heseltine as the next leader. Crouch agreed with this. They felt that Heseltine has more intelligence and ability than the rest of the Cabinet put together.

He was very interested in our view of Tom King. In reply I gave a fairly positive but restrained view of King's rôle since September 1985. Prior agreed strongly that King's single-minded devotion to devolution will leave him with empty hands next September when, Prior thinks, King will go, possibly to Agriculture. He cannot see Mayhew being given Northern Ireland (he agrees strongly with Gowrie that Mayhew would, in his words, be "very hard" if he got the job). He sees Paul Channon as a runner but, overall, feels that the Northern Ireland may well be filled, as often in the past, on the basis that there is nowhere else for whoever it is to go.

He would worry, he said - and Crouch agreed very strongly - about the serious erosion in Parliamentary and public opinion in Britain of support for the present Anglo-Irish process in the Agreement framework. There is a major erosion of faith in the political process and a major shift in favour of direct anti-terrorist action. In our place, he said, and with the help of our many friends in Parliament, he would try to make some major effort to pull that round.

He regrets, he said, the passing of some vital figures on the British side such as David Goodall and Robert Armstrong. Nevertheless, for what it was worth, he said, he really believed that this issue is crucial.

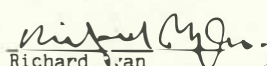
He also takes the view that major action should be tackled on an east-west (London-Dublin) axis rather than a tripartite policy bringing in the Unionists who, in his view, are seriously incapable of meaningful dialogue and can not take or stand over important decisions. Dublin and London have to do their work for them and on behalf of the wider Unionist population.

I briefed them on the Taoiseach's efforts in good faith to try to draw the Unionists into dialogue without any pre-conditions and outside the present frameworks. Prior was very supportive of an "island-of-Ireland dialogue" with the British outside this, although he could see how HMG might not appreciate this. However, he wondered whether the present Unionist leadership is at all capable of joining a dialogue with the Taoiseach: he thought not. He dismisses Paisley and Molyneux, and those presently in their shadows - Robinson, McCusker, Taylor and Maginnis. He has great respect for Frank Miller who he hopes will return to the political stage. I briefed him on David Burnside and he was very interested to hear about him and his plans.

He said again that he would be only too happy to help in any way we thought fit and asked that we should keep in touch more regularly as he would like to be kept more up-to-date in this detailed way.

Prior sent his kindest personal regards to the Taoiseach, the Tanaiste and to Secretary Dorr. Crouch did so too (he met the Taoiseach and the Tanaiste in Dublin during an IPU visit at the end of 1984).

Yours sincerely,


Richard Ryan
Minister-Counsellor