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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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4 March 1986

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Dear Assistant Secretary

A conversation with Ian Gow, M.P.

We were introduced in the bar at the Garrick Club and spoke for about an hour. He was very courteous and, it seemed, even responsive to arguments made to him about our Government's position on various aspects of Anglo-Irish relations at the moment.

He agreed - strongly, he said - that the Unionist leadership is at present stretching Westminster's patience dangerously, and that what is going on could have real implications for the Union. He said that the Unionists do not really take account of his advice to them, and said that the Government may have to think seriously about how to get through to the majority of ordinary Unionists.

He has to accept, he said, and live with Margaret Thatcher's determination to stand over the Anglo-Irish Agreement. If the Agreement is to be the context of the foreseeable future, then he must use his position to be as helpful to her, and to the forces of reason and justice, as he can: he specifically included, he said, the present Irish leadership in the latter category although he would be very concerned as, he said, many of his colleagues would be, about the possible implications of political change in Ireland in a couple of years time.

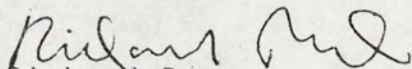
He advanced strongly the old argument about the facetiousness of proceeding on the basis of alienating the majority in order to bring in the minority: he asked whether Mrs Thatcher could possibly have proceeded with the Agreement if it could not have carried the minority. He became surprisingly reasonable, however, in face of the argument that the Agreement does not give to the nationalists by taking from

the Unionists, but is a framework within which, with hard work, a fundamental imbalance already there can be corrected within present constitutional boundaries. He seemed to accept also that our motivation is not to undermine the Union but, for the present at least, to make the place work.

He said he would like to continue this conversation, and we agreed to have lunch next Monday.

Gow is hard going: his conversational and personal effulgence make one feel that one is dealing rather with a kind of talking Christmas tree than a mortal like the rest of us. He is, however, clearly deeply and genuinely engaged on this question and, if he is in fact as susceptible to reasonable argument as he seemed to be, he will be worth the further effort at persuasion he has now made possible.

Yours sincerely


Richard Ryan
Counsellor