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Reference Code:	2016/52/98
Creation Dates:	November 1986
Extent and medium:	24 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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*Secretary
A-I Section
A-I Secretariat
Box*

18 December 1986

RECEIVED
ANGLO-IRISH SECTION
Time 16.00 Date 19/12

24404

Dear Assistant Secretary

Dinner with Lord McAlpine, Treasurer of the Conservative Party

The McAlpines came to dinner and, although it was a largely social occasion, we had a discussion in which he made four main points.

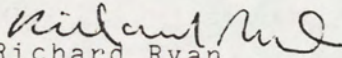
- The Prime Minister's main reason for "going for" the Anglo-Irish negotiation that resulted in the Agreement was to evaporate the cloud of international opprobrium, particularly American, hanging over Britain because of Northern Ireland. She did not, he said, take too seriously criticism from the Soviet Union or other communist countries, but American feeling got badly in the way of her strong desire to assert herself in Washington on East-West and other world matters. "It has all worked out very well for her" in this regard, he said.
- There is not the tiniest doubt in his mind that she could weaken in any way on the Agreement. For as long as she is around, he said, and in his view she will be around for quite a while, the Agreement will be high and dry and it is up to Dublin to keep its side of the deal.
- He is to see the Prime Minister before the weekend and he intends, she said, to give her hard advice about the timing of the next general election. In his view Labour are all over the place and the Alliance is in temporary disarray. However, his main worry is that as time passes the "SDP factor" could very well return and do serious damage to the Government. He will argue, he said, that she should go for an election on the same day if not before the local elections on 7 May. The Government will probably not

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come very well out of those elections and he would wish to avoid having that cloud cast over the general election if it were held over until, say, June. He thinks that she may have a psychological attachment to doing the full four years (to 9 June) and perhaps calling the election for the following Thursday, 16 June, but for his part (and he acknowledges freely his strong influence over her) he will urge 7 May.

- His previous prediction of an overall 40 seat majority still stands. He thinks it could even be higher but he would be more than happy with 40. This would get rid of "all those evilly-cut pups" presently crowding the backbenches and would make management by the Whips at Westminster much easier.

Yours sincerely


Richard Ryan
Counsellor