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AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

29 May 1987

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Bernard Ingham

Ingham remains very active and influential with Mrs Thatcher and her colleagues. He is forced to stand on the sidelines during the campaign but demonstrated an authoritative insight into the strategy and tactics of the Tory Campaign. He makes his points forcefully and, as with his briefing of the media, some of what he says reflects Mrs Thatcher's direct instructions and much of it represents what she is prepared to go along with after the fact. He joked about the political advice of a Halifax Town Councillor who years ago said to him that he should remember the rule in politics "Fait accompli". Ingham grew up in the robust Labour politics of Northern England and sadly reflects that the outgoing British Cabinet often lacked the "political instinct"; many were too nice or, preferred to operate as in Mrs Thatcher's case, in a bureaucratic style. He gave as an example Ministerial resistance to granting the Unionist request for a Commons security debate after the Gibson murders; he, Ingham, lobbied that it was a useful way to get the Unionists back to the Commons and Biffen was able to find the parliamentary time very quickly.

We discussed the following points and much of what he said was offered in confidence and in a speculative way.

British Irish Relations

On the basis that there will be a meeting on 29 or 30 June between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister (and assuming it will be Mrs Thatcher) Ingham hopes it can be arranged in a low key and businesslike with public expectations contained on both sides.

by the Secretary. here
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M. K. W.
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17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
 SW1X 7HR
 Telephone: 01-235 2171
 TELEX: 916104

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 ANGLO-IRISH SECTION
 Time 17.00 Date 29/5

cc Secretary
 Mr O Tuathail
 Counsellors A-I
 Mr. R. O'Brien
 Mr. Nally
 Box

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He sees no reason why the two leaders should be seen to be chasing each other, rather the emphasis might be on a steady relationship. In terms of Northern Ireland he felt

1. The Agreement should be shown as making progress without giving too much provocation. Mrs Thatcher is single minded in facing down opposition to it from her rightwing or from fainthearts in the Tory Party. But progress will depend on commitment from both London and Dublin. There could be a risk that if the management of the Agreement becomes too difficult or contentious that it could slip from the agenda in British politics where other issues are given a much higher priority by the voters, politicians and media.
2. The Unionists will have to be frozen out for another 2 to 3 years. This should have the necessary therapeutic effect for people who always made so much of their privileged access to the centre of power. The Government had used the same approach successfully against the TUC for the past eight years. Paisley seemed increasingly mad and there would be little or no progress so long as he and Molyneaux were the Unionist leaders. Ingham was very pleased at the way Irish Courts had tamed Peter Robinson.
3. Whereas, therefore, devolution in N.I. might not be an easy prospect it was very important for British public opinion to show that the Unionists have the option to exercise more control over their affairs if they are prepared to share power with nationalists.

The next Government and Mrs Thatcher's future

Ingham thinks the Tories will have a 40 to 80 majority. Mrs Thatcher would then have to decide by 1989 whether she will try for a fourth administration or retire. Ingham said he did not know what her wishes are but I felt from the way he weighed up the options that she would be unlikely to want to stay on. As for her successor Sir Geoffrey Howe would have no chance and Kenneth Baker, the Education Secretary, seems, for the moment, to be in favour.

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Ingham speculated along the following lines if Mrs Thatcher forms the next Government:

Hailsham (Lord Chancellor), Jopling (Agriculture), Channon (Trade and Industry), Edwards (Wales) and Biffen (Leader in Commons) will be dropped. Whitelaw (Leader in Lords) and Tom King (whom she considers recently to have improved) will stay on. Another source says that Nick Scott will probably be dropped with no other post being offered. Howe will refuse to move to become Lord Chancellor leaving him, Hurd (Home Office) and Lawson (Chancellor) in place. Cabinet responsibilities will have to be found then for Tebbit, Fowler, Walker and Cecil Parkinson because Baker will probably stay at Education given its new importance to the British public as in need of reforms. Tebbit suffered from being a bad manager, Fowler finds it difficult to make decisions but she might, contrary to speculation, keep on Peter Walker if he is prepared, for once, to work with her rather than against her. He might get DHSS.

Sir Michael Havers might be given the Woolsack at least until a mini reshuffle in 1988 - the point being, Ingham said, that she has already promised him the promotion provided his health is okay.

The Campaign

Labour have peaked far too early. In addition he was reassuring Ministers that the media spent last week building up Kinnock so that they could knock him down this week. He has little respect for the press and feels that British politicians are far too inclined to pamper them and give in to their demands. He regrets the reluctance of journalists to write straight news for their readers; they prefer to offer instant comment.

Ingham reminisced about his solo bicycle tour of Ireland in 1953 on his 21st birthday. He also said that what stuck out from his visit with Mrs. Thatcher to NI last Christmas was the British

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Army regret that they could not communicate directly with the Irish security forces at times when the RUC channel was very slow.

Yours sincerely

T. W. Gorman
Ted Smyth

Mr. Eamon O Tuathail
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2