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Reference Code:	2017/10/78
Creation Dates:	22 January 1987
Extent and medium:	5 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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22 January, 1987

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Tom Keogh
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Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Andrew MacKay, M.P., PPS to Tom King

I provided MacKay with our Minister's Statement (which had just arrived) on Tom King's remarks on Radio Ulster this morning. He fully accepted that King had blundered again, and said that "the agreed line" as of when he spoke with King a few days ago has been to not go beyond saying that Ministerial meetings of the Conference would not take place during the Republic's election campaign. He regretted King's blunder; he hoped we would see it as such and that King could be got to put it right.

He made the following points during our conversation:

- Now that we have come to the end of phase one of the Agreement, where "the Agreement is just beginning to leave the harbour - has not yet cleared the harbour and has not quite reached open sea, but will do so shortly", his own objective assessment is that it is all going very well. Mrs. Thatcher is harder than ever; Tom King is in his view "getting his sea legs, despite this morning's incident"; the backbenchers are by and large very well behind us; the right wingers (Cranbourne, Amery, Budgeon, Biggs-Davison, Stanbrook etc.) are pretty well "cart-horses on the race track" and are losing wind - the friends of the Union organisation is in disarray; Gow is feeling lonely (he agreed fully that the thing is to give Gow a good Minister

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of State job in the next administration); and he believes that the Agreement is having an effect on the ground (he said that Minister Barry's support for Catholic recruitment to the RUC has had a major positive effect within the RUC).

- They are, however, he said, hardening in their attitude to the failure of the SDLP to show some statesmanship. Hume is mercurial and Mallon is "playing number one" all the time. He would accept that Hume is right in his view that further progress, toward devolution or whatever, can only follow Unionist recognition that the Agreement is the landscape of the future and that they must inhabit it; but, he said, they object to his trumpeting this in the Unionists' faces.
- He said (in strict confidence) that he had dinner recently in Dungannon with Ken Maginnis. Maginnis was surprisingly positive toward Peter Barry's "behaviour" in the recent past, and was much less inflamed about the Agreement. MacKay felt, however, that Maginnis is no closer to accepting it but that it perhaps occupies just a little less of his waking hours. MacKay felt also that this tiny evidence of relaxation may go for small pockets of the Unionist population, but he was very concerned that I should not give my Ministers the impression that the Unionists (what Dublin calls "moderate Unionists") are coming round to an acceptance of the Agreement: in his view they are not.
- He expressed great interest in electoral possibilities in the Republic. He said that on the British side they are quite pragmatic. Their position is that they intend to deal fully with whatever administration is returned by the electorate. They take the view that much - very much - work needs to be done and that they will do it with the next Irish Government, whatever that is. As regards the

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probability that Mr. Haughey will lead a single party Government, he said that, whether this is known in Dublin or not, the attitude within Government, and certainly in Number 10, toward Mr. Haughey is quite positive: he said "she likes tough nuts and politicians who work hard for what they want" and that she sees Mr. Haughey in this way. MacKay said she found Mr. Haughey "attractive", and in his view the "Falklands factor" is buried. On the other hand, he said that if, contrary to their expectations, Mr. Haughey - or any other Taoiseach - tried to tamper with the Agreement (with, say, Article 1) there would be no possibility whatever of movement on the British side.

- He expressed great interest in Ambassador Dorr's successor, on which I could not help him. He said that they would assume that we share their feeling as to how vitally important it is to have a first class Ambassador in London over the next few years when so much will depend on him. He said they also found Mr. Dorr's appointment as Secretary to be "inspired".

- He said that they had seen press reports to the effect that Deputy Secretary Lillis had been offered - and had refused - the London post. He said that if the press reports were true, he supposed they fully understood on the British side the integrity underlying the decision at this particular moment; but he felt, and he said King also felt, that Mr. Lillis in London would also be an "inspired" appointment. He banged on at some length about the high esteem in which Tom King holds Michael Lillis: King "enjoys the hard ball", he said.

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- He is continuing to bring groups of MPs to Northern Ireland and, as usual, we exchanged notes on this. He said they believe that our own contacts with back-benchers, and visits to Dublin by them, have a very worthwhile effect, and he urged us to keep it up. He asked whether we would consider asking a cross-bench group of MPs to observe our election campaign (as, it seems, they do in other European countries). He felt it would help to further deepen parliamentary links. I said I would pass this on but that, speaking personally and off the cuff, I felt that with the Northern Ireland issue en marge - so far - in the campaign, the presence of MPs in candidates' wakes at rallies and so on, could if spotted by the press attract flak of one sort or another.

- On the Parliamentary Body, he said that much progress has been made by David Crouch (following my lunch with Crouch on 27 October last, reported to you), and that Crouch had before Christmas contacted "Dublin (Tom Fitzpatrick, T.D.?) to propose 25-26 March next as the dates of the IPU-context meeting in Westminster which we had discussed. He was very surprised that I had not heard anything about this: so was I. He suggested I check with Crouch and/or with Dublin about it. He said that Crouch had approached him for his views on it following my conversation with Crouch. He had enthused about it and undertook at Crouch's request to sound out Tom King. He "sold it" to King, he said, although the NIO (David Chesterton and others) are very much against it. Indeed, King has agreed to MacKay's request to offer a lunch or dinner to the participants at this first meeting in order to stress its importance. I welcomed this very strongly.

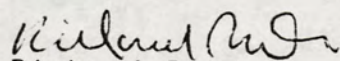
- He intends to meet the Cardinal, he said, to try and get across to him the harm his recent remarks about the RUC

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have done, like Seamus Mallon's. He said that King has tackled the Cardinal before, and met a good deal of hand washing: the Cardinal defended his remarks as being taken out of context and not intended to cause trouble. MacKay felt that this smacked of either naivety or slyness - probably the latter.

- On the prospects for the British election, he feels it will be on 7 May (to coincide with the local elections) or in October. He does not think it could be June as the results of the local elections will cast a slight pall over the Tories. He has a hunch that King might be kept on in Northern Ireland; that Howe will get the Woolsack (he thinks Mrs. Thatcher is turning against Havers: "not her sort of chap, really"), and that Hurd will get the Foreign Office. If King were to go, MacKay feels John Patten, who was a Northern Ireland Minister 1981-3 and is "nakedly ambitious", would be a hot tip.

Yours sincerely,


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