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AG
cc Mr Nally
Counselor AI
T.S.O.

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26 January 1988

Dear Assistant Secretary

I called on the new Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, last week and he accepted an invitation to lunch on Friday. He intends, like his predecessor, to take an interest in Anglo-Irish affairs and he assured me of his availability and his willingness to be helpful.

In general conversation, he made the point that he does not come to his new job without some background in Anglo-Irish matters, since (though not directly involved) he was Principal Private Secretary in No 10 during the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and was present at Sunningdale, when he was Heath's Private Secretary. At the private level, he was at school with one of the Connolly-Carews and spent holidays at Castletown; he has played rugby with the Wolfhounds. He remains very interested in rugby and plays squash and golf. Butler has, as you know, already visited the Secretariat in Belfast and has an arrangement to meet Dermot Nally in Dublin next month. A biographical note is enclosed.

In the course of our lunchtime talk, I put to Butler our view that it remains essential that the minority community in Northern Ireland should believe that their problems and well-

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founded grievances are capable of solution through the political process; it followed that the Agreement and its mechanisms must continue to be worked and be seen to produce results. He agreed with this. In regard to the general situation he offered the following summary: the Government has recently had a lot of trouble with the Unionist community; some of their hostility to the Agreement has been overcome but they remain unreconciled; the Government hopes to consolidate the present position and then it should be possible to make further constitutional progress which would benefit the nationalists. I found this use of language very interesting; on pursuing it I found that the constitutional progress he had in mind was devolutionary progress. In this context I mentioned that in spite of the rumours reported to be floating in Belfast, we had seen no evidence that the Unionists are ready to engage in real dialogue and I said that although we had been reticent until now in pressing for information on the talks about talks we have a growing need to know what is going on. He replied by saying that Paisley and Molyneaux have a dilemma: there is insufficient substance in the talks for them to want to continue, but they fear criticism from their own people if they stop. So far as HMG is concerned, they are not prepared to make concessions on the Agreement; they consider it right to let the pressure of circumstances play on the Unionists.

On other rumours - of a possible ceasefire - Butler did not believe there was anything in them. He did not see why Adams would be interested in a ceasefire at this particular time. On security cooperation, Butler said that

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Mrs Thatcher is very appreciative of what has been done in the Republic.

I tried to reinforce this sentiment by referring to the expressions of satisfaction we have heard from people like Stanley and Harmon at the level of cooperation. I went on to give Butler a strong statement of our views on the extradition issue, based largely on the letter from the Tanaiste to Mr King (Butler had not seen this), Butler agreed that it is essential to solve the present impasse. Mrs Thatcher is not up to date on the detail of the problem: I gathered she has not seen the papers for some time and is under the impression that a new system is operating and if difficulties arise it will be reviewed by us. The problem lies with Mayhew, who is angry because he had believed Burn's report of the meeting of 24 November and then was dismayed to learn our position is different. Mrs Thatcher would take her line from Mayhew. Butler agreed with the Chesterton view that officials should meet to work out a solution and put it to their political masters.

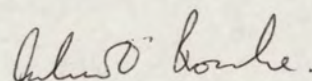
I was careful, following the line taken in Belfast, to stress the statutory position of our AG. I also put strongly to Butler our case that there has been a significant net advance in extradition arrangements when account is taken of recent Supreme Court rulings and the ratification of the ECST. I

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also explained to him the realities of the political context in which the decisions were taken and the continuing criticism which the Government is subjected to from, for example, a former Chief Justice and from political supporters, for not going further in the matter of safeguards. I said we found it extremely difficult to understand Mayhew's angry reaction to the new arrangements and his refusal to accept the essential reasonableness of the new procedures. To reinforce this I gave him a copy of the useful leader in the Belfast Telegraph of 21 January which, referring to "some lingering dissatisfaction that the AG must vet extradition warrants", concludes "now to test the new system, by putting some of the most notorious suspects on the spot", (copy attached).

In connection with his visit to Dublin to meet Dermot Nally you may wish to note that Butler has given up his role as "Sherpa" in connection with the preparation of economic summits. He confirmed that this is at his own request, to enable him to give sufficient time to his role as Head of the Civil Service. There is a news item on this in the Financial Times of 21 January (copy attached).

Yours sincerely



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