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AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

*Taoiseach  
Ingham is very close to the  
Prime Minister. He can be taken to  
reflect her views.  
9/2*

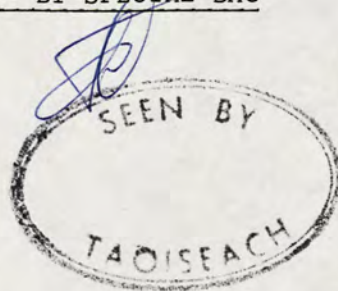
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cc: P.S.M., P.S.S.,  
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COUNSELLORS A-E

5 February, 1988



*Box  
Mr B  
10/2/88*

Dear Assistant Secretary

Meeting with Bernard Ingham, Government Press Secretary

4 February, 1988

1. Ingham stoutly maintained that the Stalker affair is not a major issue in Britain, that time will heal the sense of grievance in Ireland and that Dublin should not make it worse. I responded very firmly with counter arguments and the atmosphere got a bit warm. After an hour he was at least prepared to admit that the issue was more serious and requires urgent action.
2. Ingham heard me out when I explained how the Attorney General's statement was seriously undermining the security progress that had been made in the last two years, specifically regarding the Gardai's trust in the RUC and the nationalist community's trust in the RUC. I said that Irish people felt that they were being taken for a ride and this was now developing into a major crisis. The situation was worsened by the Birmingham Six judgement even though some argued that it was a separate issue. The Irish Government is trying to contain the situation but needs an urgent response to its proposals.
3. Ingham, with a good deal of customary blustering, asserted that this was not a real issue but was stirred up by the usual media who saw conspiracies everywhere: The Observer, Guardian, Independent and Sunday Times, even the Daily Express got in on the act in an effort to secure readers. I replied that there was much wider British concern in my view; the Mail, the Times, the Financial Times, the Telegraph, the News of the World, the Mail on Sunday and even tomorrow's Economist were all critical

of the Attorney General's statement. Ingham said that he thought the Sun spoke for most people in Britain in its dismissal of the deaths of IRA men in 1982 against the background of 2,000 deaths. I suggested that if British policy was based on popular opinion, then it would go along with the 62% who supported British withdrawal from Northern Ireland in a Daily Express poll in February 1987. At this stage Ingham relaxed a bit and conceded that Britain could not have it both ways and that if it is going to stay in Northern Ireland it has got to govern according to the highest standards. He seemed to be struck by the point that the RUC could not be seen to operate on the same level as the IRA.

4. On the question of a response to the Irish proposals, Ingham rehearsed the argument about the separation of the judicial function of the Attorney General as an agent of the Crown and referred approvingly to Lord Hailsham's article in the Independent. Again I suggested that Hailsham had skated around the question of what to do about evidence of perjury. Ingham replied that he was tired of the Government setting up judicial and police enquiries and the media then rubbishing them. I said that on this occasion it was the Attorney General who was rubbishing the conclusions of two senior police officers. Ingham then seemed to reveal the basic philosophy behind the Attorney General's thinking as he began a long discourse about how Government had to do certain things to protect national security and there were always people who made this difficult. One got the impression that the judgement on what to do about the Stalker Sampson conclusion was very much influenced ~~by~~ the previous track record on the Belgrano, Westland and Spycatcher, that these are all no-win situations and the only thing to do is batter ~~en~~ down the hatchets. The implications of the Stalker business for security in Ireland may not have been given due weight until Irish Ministers starkly made the case at the IGC.

5. Ingham confirmed that the issue had been discussed at Cabinet that morning where it was felt that the only thing that could be done would be for Tom King to make a statement to the House of Commons on discipline of RUC officers and structures. He did not expect this statement before Wednesday and hardly on Thursday and Friday. I said that Dublin was

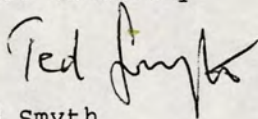
using every means at its disposal to keep the temperature down but that further delay, far from cooling things off would decidedly worsen tempers. In addition the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis would take place from Friday, 19 February. Ingham seemed struck by this point and made note of the date. He said they were also concerned about the impact Stalker would make on the Gay Byrne programme.

6. Ingham again tried a counter attack by saying that if security was affected or if something went wrong with extradition that would "confirm our worst fears that extradition will not work". He said that he could not see the system that our AG was proposing working and again one got some insight into British thinking because he spoke almost with bitterness, as if the thinking that the Irish Government had let the British down on extradition made them less partial to our advice about the need for RUC prosecutions. I protested strongly that extradition would work if the certification procedure was followed.

7. Comment

Whereas Ingham was on occasions speaking for the record and keeping up a front, he did finally appear to accept that the crisis is genuine and that the British must respond in a substantive way. What we may have to address, however, is a lack of faith or confidence in the Anglo-Irish Agreement which I had not detected in 1987. It would seem that Sir Patrick Mayhew's hostility to our extradition proposals has infected Downing Street and stirred up real anger towards us. I would suggest that a real effort will have to be made (a) to outflank Mayhew and show that extradition will work and (b) to bring home to the British privately and publicly how much they have gained from the Agreement.

Yours sincerely



Ted Smyth

Assistant Secretary Gallagher  
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