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cc Cox
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A. I. Jackson

SECRET

27 February 1985

DISCUSSION WITH EDWARD BICKHAM, POLITICAL ADVISOR TO DOUGLAS HURD.

Dear Assistant Secretary,

I spoke with Bickham at Richard Ryan's last night.

You will know something of Bickham from previous reports. He is quite young but seems to be close to Hurd and, so far as I could judge, well-informed on Northern Ireland. I gathered that he sees it as his role to keep in close contact with opinion within the Conservative Party to see how far it might be supportive of action by Hurd.

He seemed concerned to have confirmation of his own view that the meeting between our Minister and Hurd (in particular) on 4 February had gone well at the personal level. The feedback that he had got suggested to him that it had. I confirmed that this was our view also, and in response to his general interest in how Hurd appeared in the South said - suitably tactfully - that it was something of an advantage to Hurd to have started rather badly since he "had nowhere to go but up."

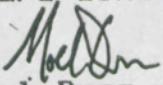
Bickham acknowledged this. He confirmed that Hurd thought that he had not really "jelled" at his initial meeting with our Minister in Dublin on 25 October. (Bickham mentioned incidentally that Hurd had had quite a hangover after that visit and had to be taken out and walked around the park the next day!).

More generally Bickham confirmed that Hurd is now beginning to enjoy the job. He is pleased to be in the Cabinet and is becoming

fascinated by his responsibilities. Bickham said to me that the fundamental question (for Hurd) is whether anything can be done to improve the situation - or should it simply be kept "ticking over" ? He spoke of the relatively small number of MPs who are actively concerned to the point of possibly becoming aroused about Ireland and of the very much larger number who have no active role but who would, he thought, be willing to take their lead from Hurd and be said by him - not in his personal capacity but in his role as a new Secretary of State who deserved to be supported. (Bickham's attention, as Hurd's adviser, was naturally concentrated on Hurd's role rather than on that of the Prime Minister).

I had the impression that Bickham, making a cool assessment of what may be possible and what may be in it for Hurd, judges that Hurd could get through the party more or less what he wants - within reason - at present. Accordingly he is considering action, in conjunction with Dublin rather than just "marking time". But the judgement IS a cool one, and one which will continue to be reassessed from time to time - by Hurd and Bickham.

Yours sincerely,


Noel Dorr (Ambassador)

Mr. Michael Lillis,
Assistant Secretary,
DFA.