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*Councillor A1
TBOK.*

CONFIDENTIAL

29 October 1987

Mr Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
DUBLIN

Dear Assistant Secretary,

A brief discussion with Bernard Ingham, Press Secretary to the Prime Minister

1. Bernard Ingham came up to me at the House of Commons before Prime Minister's Question Time on Tuesday (27 October). We briefly discussed the state of play on Anglo-Irish relations. I said that nationalist public opinion in Ireland, North and South, is not being encouraged to increase its confidence in the administration of justice by what it is hearing from from the British side. He took the point and said that Tom King is sorting this out. (I think he was referring to King's BBC interview on 22 October and his forthcoming speech in Oxford this Friday, 30 October, which NIO sources say is designed to be "helpful"). I replied that the problem would require a more substantial approach and he asked that we discuss it in greater detail. We have agreed to lunch on Monday 9 November.

Comment

2. Ingham is very influential with the Prime Minister, moreover, his presentation of an issue makes a great difference to how the British media play it. He is very much in ~~time~~ tune with Mrs Thatcher to the extent that he frequently in his twice daily 'lobby' briefings gives the PM's reaction to events without even checking with her. Since the Agreement was signed he has resolutely defended it and personally feels that unionists require two more years of "isolation therapy" before they will agree to power sharing (see my previous reports).

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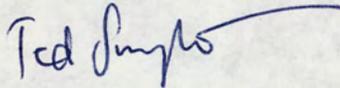
He has also sought to contain the visceral reaction of Fleet Street editors to the Taoiseach in the interests of Anglo-Irish working relations. However, on one or two occasions he has echoed his boss's impatience with the Garda's standards of anti-terrorist operations.

3. In our previous meetings Ingham has demonstrated a readiness to accept my arguments regarding the need to cater for the political requirements and needs of both the nationalists and unionists. On this occasion it will be more difficult because he will be advocating a British political requirement that the Agreement deliver the Extradition Act, something which was offered by the Irish side and promised in a major speech in London to the Westminster lobby press in February 1986 by the former Taoiseach. At that time, whereas the linkage with confidence in the administration of justice was made, Dr FitzGerald did not emphasize it nor warn that British failure to make "early progress" might jeopardize Ireland's Accession to the Convention. On the contrary what British journalists remember is: "I can now tell you that the Irish Government has approved our accession to the Convention. We will sign the Agreement in Strasbourg next week". Now we are having to answer the argument that Diplock courts were subsequently dragged in, not so much to meet Northern nationalist requirements (which seem not to distinguish between one or three judges) as to cope with traditional nationalist hostility in the Republic to state institutions in Northern Ireland in particular, and to British institutions in general. Obviously anything that appears to confirm this (mischievous) interpretation that our motives are anti-Northern Ireland or anti-Brit or that we are closing the door will deprive us of the high ground which we still retain in important sections of Britain (e.g. recent editorials in The Independent, The Guardian, The Times, Financial Times, Economist and various columns) and in the United States.
4. Although it might at first appear tactically attractive I believe it would not be fruitful to imply a parallel between Dail reservations about the Extradition Act and the House of Lords protest last week about extradition without prima facie evidence. The British Government has not accepted the arguments in the Lords but, on the contrary, says that the Lords suffer from serious misconceptions about the Criminal Law Bill, that they are lobbying energetically against them and will expect to enact the legislation.

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5. It remains to be seen whether Tom King's speech on Friday will offer any substantial progress. Even if it does not, and merely rehearses what has already been achieved, this may be designed to reduce the accusations made in Britain and the U.S. that the British are "slow-footed" in thinking or acting about reform (Times, 23 October).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ted Smyth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ted Smyth