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Conrad...
T.R.V.

10 November 1987

Mr Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
DUBLIN

Lunch with Bernard Ingham, Press Secretary to the Prime Minister
Monday 9 November

Dear Assistant Secretary,

1. Ingham began by marvelling how our democracies can allow Sinn Fein and IRA leaders like Gerry Adams to move around freely. This prompted me to describe the political damage caused by previous efforts to circumvent the rule of law by allowing internment, Castlereagh "confessions" and supergrasses. I also tried to convince Ingham that Sinn Fein were more vulnerable to reforms than repression and that they were showing genuine signs of demoralisation, a trend that could be reversed by now playing into their hands with repressive legislation. (This exchange may have helped Ingham in his later denials to the lobby that internment would be introduced).
2. Ingham asked if the Enniskillen outrage eased or compounded the implementation of the Extradition Act. I said that that assessment was now being made in Dublin and that whereas the context of the debate had changed there were warnings against the politics of the latest atrocity.

On the British side Ingham said that Enniskillen had compounded the problem of non-implementation. The P.M. had always considered deferral inconceivable but prior to Enniskillen he would not have wanted to exaggerate the problem of managing deferment. Speaking personally he speculated that if the Taoiseach had been able to convince the British audience that he was fully in favour of the Agreement that would have helped. If he could have said something like: "The Agreement has brought benefits for both traditions in Northern Ireland and will continue to do so."

It is also working to marginalise the IRA and paradoxically this results in even greater acts of terrorist outrage as they try to provoke state repression. I want to implement the Extradition Act, not just to improve Anglo-Irish cooperation but because its part of a European battle against terrorism. But I need more time to consider its implications and I will implement it before the review of the Agreement in November 1988".

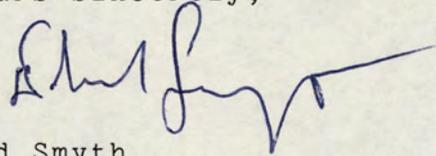
3. But Enniskillen had changed all that. This morning there was a sense of deep shock in No. 10. It would now be very difficult indeed to manage the negative reaction amongst the British public and MP's to deferment. It would be seen as the last straw in a list of failures under the the Agreement. In the two years of the Agreement there has been no successful extradition. In the past week the Irish police have behaved in such a way that many in Britain wonder if the problem is one of political will to tackle terrorism rather than incompetence. The feeling is being engendered, rightly or wrongly, that Dublin is either not serious or incapable of being serious. People might sympathise with the problem of retraining the police but failure on Extradition would be seen as refusal to do the one thing capable of being done on security. No. 10 constantly hears the litany of complaints from the British army about other things they would like from Dublin.

4. I put it to Ingham that the British side had seemed unwilling or unable to meet Irish concerns about the administration of justice in N.I. He replied that the common determination to crush the IRA was assumed by the public to be a given, and that extradition should follow from that and not be a subject for negotiation. London has a real political problem if it is seen to make concessions to get extradition. Unionists could not be trusted except to make the worst interpretation. In any event there might be room for political footwork if Harold Wilson was P.M. but that is not the present style. In fact, he added, Enniskillen has hardened Mrs Thatcher's heart. I turned Ingham's own thoughts about a speech from Dublin around and said that much of Irish public opinion feels that the British have neglected the Agreement over the past year. A new British initiative would be needed to inject the Agreement with vigour and momentum. I also said that Mr King's speech in Oxford was seen as merely a restatement of the status quo. Ingham then raised the reference in Monday's Guardian to a study on the Courts. He said he did not detect any reference to it in Downing Street.

5. Much of Ingham's conversation was interspersed with contempt for unionist politicians. He said Maginnis had been incoherent on television and he was depressed by the sort of leaders constantly re-elected in N.I. Even John Hume had disappointed those who expected him to do more when the Agreement was signed. Given the dismal political prospects within N.I., he concluded, the only thing that remains as a force for stability is the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Ingham asked that we keep in touch and he said that he would reflect further and give me a call.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ted Smyth', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ted Smyth