



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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12 November 1987

*cc'd Mr R O'Keefe  
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Roh*

Dear Assistant Secretary

Summary of attitudes in Fleet Street & Westminster in the wake  
of the Enniskillen atrocity

1. The atrocity had and is continuing to have a profound impact on the British public and is a major test for the British Government to be seen to respond effectively rather than appear helpless. British Ministers and spokesmen for No. 10 and the NIO moved quickly on Monday and Tuesday (9/10 November) to reject calls by Tory and Unionist MP's to respond by setting aside the Anglo-Irish Agreement due to its abject failure on security and take more repressive measures. Instead they publicly and privately reaffirmed their faith in Dublin and the Agreement as the best means to undermine the politics and violence of terrorism.
2. The inevitable result of this pro-Agreement approach is that the British media and politicians are now focussing very intently on the Agreement to see if it can deliver as an alternative to internment or proscription of Sinn Fein and the UDA. Specifically, the spotlight is on whether the Extradition Act will be implemented by 1 December and whether measures to improve cross-border security will be forthcoming after the O'Grady and Eksund revelations.
3. Those in the British media and Westminster who are friendly towards Dublin and Irish nationalism hope we can allow the Extradition Act to go through the Dail notwithstanding what they see as our legitimate reservations. Those in London who are pro-Unionist and Anti-Irish openly doubt this will happen and sneer that "if the Irish are our best hope in the face of terror, God help us". However these Unionist politicians have already alienated most of the British media by their truculence and sterile response to Enniskillen which contrasts sharply with the Christian charity of the injured and bereaved of Enniskillen that was portrayed on television and in newsprint.
4. Before Enniskillen British editors and politicians were coming round to accept that public reservations in the Republic about NI justice tied the Taoiseach's hands on Extradition, at least for the next few months. Now, however, they hear and read that Irish public opinion has so hardened against the IRA that these reservations might not necessarily be an obstacle (viz. John Bowman in the Times and Hugh Carnegie in the Financial Times, 10 November, as well as coverage of the Sunday Press poll and of the Opposition view in the Dail debate, 10 November). The growing

feeling is that if the Taoiseach really wants to implement the Act he will now be able to do so.

5. The argument that there is already a bilateral extradition policy and that deferment will not affect it cuts little ice after Enniskillen. It is difficult to see how even the most carefully worded statement on deferment would not now be open to massive misinterpretation and misunderstanding. As the Financial Times (a reasonable and sympathetic voice) said on 11 November: "the symbolism of the Parliament refusing to approve the new measure in present circumstances would be appalling". Tony Howard, deputy Editor of the Observer confirmed to me on Wednesday that deferment would make it very difficult for friends of Ireland to continue to sustain public support in Britain for a greater role for Dublin and nationalists in Northern Ireland. (This coming from a man who was instrumental in stopping Conor Cruise O'Brien writing Irish editorials in the Observer on the grounds that it is a liberal newspaper).

6. If the Extradition Act is implemented on 1 December next many expect that to increase the Irish Government's political credit with the media and political world and give the implementation of the Agreement's reforms a much-needed boost. There would, of course, be a minority of Conservative MP's and the media who would consider the Act long overdue and the least we could do. But the majority of British opinion formers and politicians could be expected to welcome implementation as a courageous and constructive step forward which requires reciprocal action by the British Government.

7. Regarding the perception of the Garda Siochana it is certain that their reputation has been damaged by the O'Grady kidnap and by the news that previous arms shipments have reached the IRA in 1985/86. This leaves us more vulnerable to RUC media briefing about a shortfall in cross-border security measures. Certainly we will have to consider what can be done in future months to project a better image of the Garda in Britain.

Yours sincerely



Ted Smyth  
Press & Information

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