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McCarthy *Krow*
13.2.82

9 February 1987

13.2.82 cc
 Taoiseach
 Tanaiste
 Secretary
 Mr. Rally
 A-I Section
 A-I Secretariat

S24404
1. P... KL
2. B. O'Beallaigh

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Ian Gow, M.P.

I asked Gow about the meeting with the Prime Minister and Tom King on Thursday last, 5 February. He said that he and his colleagues in the Friends of the Union are very distressed for the following reason. They had prepared an Aide Memoire in advance and sent it to Mrs Thatcher. Gow said it was deliberately restrained and carefully written. It was their intention to issue it at their press conference after the meeting as background to the meeting and as a synopsis of the Friends' thinking at this time. Gow said that this was a good idea in itself, but also it was intended to counter mounting querulousness from the 100 or so Friends who are paid up and who are wondering where the Patrons and the Trustees are, "in the South of France or where".

The meeting was attended by Gow, Biggs-Davison, Sir Philip Goodhart, T.E. Utley, David Burnside, Patrick MacRory and one or two others. Gow had asked them to be very restrained, polite and not to get excited. They obeyed these requests, he said, and the meeting lasted an hour. Mrs Thatcher said that

- the Agreement is there and will stay there;
- tangible benefits are emerging, particularly (and, he said, she stressed this) in the area of security co-operation. Here King weighed in to say that he had on the day before (Wednesday, 4 February) had a full briefing from Jack Hermon who had professed himself to be very pleased with the concrete progress being made in security co-operation with the Republic;

- Unionists should come to understand all this and their politicians should return to Westminster.

The Friends outlined their usual arguments, which Gow repeated and I need not here. The upshot was that it was agreed that the group would have a further meeting with Tom King in the week beginning 9 February or, perhaps, the week beginning 16 February. Then the P.M. asked them not to say anything at their press conference other than that an exchange of views had taken place and that there would be a further meeting with Tom King; and not to issue their Aide Memoire. Gow urged his friends to go along with this request and they did so, although it meant that their press conference fell pretty flat. They only afterward heard that the NIO separately gave a press briefing on the substance of their meeting in which they were "pretty well made out to be rats", and they are all very upset about it. They blame the NIO about which, Gow said, he has had ample warning from Jim Molyneaux. He said that three of those concerned are Knights, three of them M.P.s in the Government party and two of them ex-Ministers in that Government. They intend to have it out with King when they meet him next week or the week after.

In the course of a friendly and lengthy conversation Gow accepted that he himself is pretty well now out in the cold, and that his "call to constitutional arms" to the Unionists, at considerable expense to his own political career, has not been reciprocated; that, in effect, he has made a bit of an eejit of himself. He sees no light at the end of the tunnel he so enthusiastically entered on their behalf and he sees no leadership emerging in the foreseeable future among his clients (the only one with independent intelligence he has noted is David Burnside who is not yet in a position to enter active politics). Further, he now feels that whatever Governments are returned in the Irish and British elections, the Agreement is here to stay.

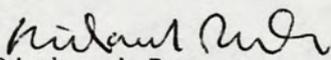
I put it to him that he cannot inhabit the shadow at the wood's edge indefinitely and that Gow must look to Gow. He really sank into his chair and ruminated that such dark thoughts have been preoccupying him. He agreed that to seek a Northern Ireland seat at the expense of giving up Eastbourne could spell political suicide and that the

laugh would really then-be on him. I suggested consideration of a return to Government after the next election, and he said "that depends on one being asked": I suggested that the right noises from him could surely bring this to Mrs Thatcher's mind. He mentioned again his wife Jane's distress at the situation he finds himself in and her resentment of his treatment at the hands of his Unionist friends. He had envisaged, he said, a concerted campaign at Westminster, led by himself and supported vigorously by the 14 Unionist M.P.s and the other Conservative opponents of the Agreement, to lobby their case openly and to counteract the Irish Embassy's lobbying job there: he said ruefully that they have seen their "moors shot over by the Irish guns".

This was our "frankest and fullest" conversation to date after which he said that he listened to the hard things said to him because he felt they were said in a friendly and helpful way, not as a lobbying exercise in trying to unhorse him in his anti-Agreement activities.

We agreed to meet again in due course.

Yours sincerely


Richard Ryan
Counsellor