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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

*Mr. G. Conroy  
9.6.88  
Brian,  
Cohn & NO 18  
and PIA this on  
NO 5. please  
20/6/88*

17 Grosvenor Place

*[Signature]*  
9/6

SW1X 7HR

*cc P.S. Tavis  
P.P.M.  
Mr. Waller  
P.L.L. ; Mr. Russell  
Mr. Matthews / Mr. Barron*

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*Mr. G. Conroy  
Copy to  
Gouldwood 4 p.m.  
B...*

7 June 1988

Dear Assistant Secretary

LUNCH WITH DAVID LIDINGTON, POLITICAL ADVISER TO DOUGLAS HURD

1. Lidington is now four months in this job. He has a very high reputation which is easy to understand. Irish matters are a small part of his concerns but he brought a very clear head to the matters we covered. He showed frankness up to a point - beyond the call of duty in the circumstances - and was clearly interested in a good relationship. He sees, he said, most of the papers going to the Home Secretary other than highly classified security files. He is clearly very enthusiastic about his work and approached our discussion with a strong interest in hearing our perspectives on the agenda points covered.

2. By far the most interesting thing to emerge - and it emerged very slowly - was that the Guildford Four case, currently being studied by Hurd, has a chance of being referred to the Court of Appeal. All our information to date has pointed to the probability that Hurd will reject the alleged new evidence and not decide on a referral. When I brought him through our concerns on this case (having previously covered the BIRMINGHAM Six case), and, to try and draw comment from him, observed that it may not look too good, he said "don't give up on this one". I took him back and forth on this, and he said that

- it could go either way and "it is on a knife-edge" just now;

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- the Home Secretary has circulated the file internally for expert opinion: a great deal will hang on the balance struck in that opinion;
- a pardon is out; the decision will be to reject it or to refer it to the Court of Appeal;
- Hurd is personally prepared to refer it if the expert advice within the Home Office, when it comes back to him, leaves a sufficient margin of possibility that it is not a shut case;
- Hurd will not take into account the undoubted unpopularity in the Conservative Party of a decision to refer this case (Lidington was strong on this point); the decision will be made on its merits.

I can only offer the judgement that Lidington, who did not really want to be drawn, was speaking honestly. While it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that the case will be referred, the door would seem to be less than closed at this particular stage.

3. On the Birmingham Six, Lidington - like many others - warned of the widespread negative effects our "impugning of the judges" has had. How, he asked, could it be suggested that Lord Justice Patrick O'Connor, a Catholic, set out to pervert the outcome of the Court of Appeal?

I took Lidington through the background of feelings in Ireland about this case. I stressed, too, our appreciation of Hurd's role in the affair. He said afterward that he understood much better the nature of the pressure in Ireland and also the extent to which efforts have been made to avoid Anglo-Irish confrontation on it.

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4. On the Maguires, which I also went through with him, he warned that we should not make automatic assumptions that progress on the Guildford Four case necessarily had implications for the Maguires. "They are different kinds of evidence", he said, and they cannot be easily linked up.

5. Overall, on these cases, I explained that, as the Tanaiste is ill at present, the Ambassador will be calling on the Home Secretary on instructions from Dublin. He was aware of this, he said, and expected him to get a fair hearing. I did not pre-empt the substance of the demarche to be made.

6. He said that Hurd is following carefully developments on the Anglo-Irish front generally. On extradition, the last note circulated to Ministers by Mayhew was of a "much better tone" than previous notes. Previous notes, he said, had been "very warm". Hurd is plugged in on developments regarding Northern Ireland and is one of the Ministers who meet regularly on it.

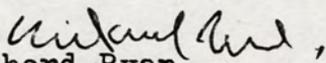
7. Mrs Thatcher, he believes, is not very fond of King but accepts that he is doing quite well now. Hurd and other Ministers think so too. He does not see any reason at this moment to assume that King will go next September. If he did, John Major could be a candidate for Northern Ireland.

8. I mentioned that a Unionist had recently pressed a bit on the idea of internment North and South of the border. Lidington's response was, straightaway, that if we considered this, Northern Ireland would "go to the top of the agenda". I argued that the whole approach represented by the Agreement surely made the internment debate redundant, particularly if the Agreement was properly worked. He said that they on the British side do not, as far as he knows, intend to push on the point.

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9. He agreed that the relations with the Home Office at official level, which we have slowly built up, are a good thing. He approved strongly of opportunities to let the Home Office people hear the kind of arguments he had been given. He also looked forward, he said, to developing the kind of relationship which he knew we had with his predecessor.

Yours sincerely

  
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