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Reference Code:	2018/68/51
Creation Dates:	24 November 1988
Extent and medium:	3 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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*PS see
the notes; All
the details there/see
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24 November, 1988.

CONFIDENTIAL - BY COURIER SERVICE

Mr. Dermot Gallagher,
Assistant Secretary,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
Dublin.

Dear Assistant Secretary,

Lunch with Ian Gow TD, MP.

1. Gow wanted to talk about the review of the Conference. He understood clearly, he said, the precise meaning of Article II. However, he believed that if the two Governments so wished, they could do whatever they liked with the Agreement. They could, if they so wished, re-write it or add or subtract reactions. As regards the draft Agreement, which he sent to Mrs. Thatcher, Geoffrey Howe and Tom King, he has received replies from them indicating that it will receive full consideration. He takes the position, therefore, that unlike the Unionist M.P.s, toward whom he feels ever-increasing impatience, he has,
 - (i) taken a position vis-a-vis the Agreement which merits serious attention; and
 - (ii) responded to the requests of the British and Irish Governments to contribute to the review process.

He understands that both Governments are willing and anxious to engage in dialogue with parties who wish to contribute to that process. He will now, he said, await responses. He recalled his previous suggestion to me (reported earlier this year) that he, Sir John Biggs-Davison and Sir Philip Goodhart visit Dublin, representing the Friends of the Union, to exchange views with the Taoiseach. Following John Biggs-Davison's death he would, if a third person were thought appropriate, suggest either Sir Patrick McCrory or Viscount Cranborne.

(McCrorry, now retired and living in England, was Chairman of the Review Body on local Government in Northern Ireland, 1970. Cranborne, heir of the present Marquess of Salisbury, resigned his seat at the 1987 general election ostensibly on foot of his opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement but, many say, actually on foot of his repeated failure to gain a significant job in the Government. He funds and provides offices to the Friends of the Union organisation.) Gow provided a copy of his draft for a new Agreement. I did not indicate that this text had been seen previously but said I would be happy to pass it on.

2. Gow argued that the Agreement is not working - it is failing, he said, and can not now work. Its stated aims of achieving peace, stability and reconciliation are, when weighed against events since November 1985, ludicrously and tragically exaggerated. He believes that, if the two Governments are prepared to face realities, they should be prepared to use the review process realistically. For him that means moving toward the Unionists regarding the most offensive elements in the Agreement (his draft Agreement, of course, takes care of that problem). As regards security co-operation, he would expect much more cross-border activity, and argued strongly for close and direct army-to-army liaison. Overall, I took from Gow, during this section of our conversation, the strong sense that he knows his draft Agreement is not on, but sees it as an opening bid on his part and would expect it to be seen as such.
3. He raised the question of the Conservative Backbench Northern Ireland Committee. He confirmed that he has decided to stand. He was critical of Ivor Stanbrook and clearly believes that he has plenty of support to win it if he is opposed by Stanbrook. He understands that Bill Benyon may stand against him but did not seem to be very troubled at the prospect. (Benyon is the choice of the pro-Agreement lobby; he has not, however, indicated that he will take Gow on : he and many others fear that the prospect of a vote split between Gow and Benyon could encourage Stanbrook to believe that he could slip through the gap and win.)

I asked Gow what approach he would take, as Chairman, in representing his views on Anglo-Irish relations and the Agreement. At first he argued that he would have no obligation to speak other than as Gow. After a discussion, however, he agreed that he would be morally bound to make it clear that his views, as Chairman at least, did not reflect those of the great majority of his colleagues.

4. We discussed the Inter-Parliamentary Body on which I brought him up to date. He agreed that, as the Unionists will probably not participate in the short term at least, and as a pro-Unionist presence is most desirable, he should take the place that would certainly have gone to Sir John Biggs-Davison. He will talk to Peter Temple-Morris about this. He also undertook to speak personally with John Wakeham, Geoffrey Howe and Tom King, reiterating his position of strong support for the project (he pointed to his draft Article 6 of his paper,

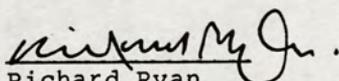
which says that "Each Government will recommend to its Parliament establishment of an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body...." He said he hoped I was pleased with this).

5. He does not hold out any prospect, he said, of bringing the Unionist politicians back into play with either London or Dublin in the foreseeable future. Paisley and Robinson are in his view "thugs"; Molyneaux is honourable up to a point but "hopelessly weak." Maginnis and Smyth do not in his view amount to anything. He has considerable respect for Frank Miller and, particularly, David Burnside but does not see them as players for some time yet.

I outlined to him the overall Dublin approach to dialogue with the Unionists in a wider landscape, within which the Agreement stood, but would not impinge upon any such talks. Gow said he would be happy to assist in any useful way efforts to bring the Unionists forward, but he did not see them as capable of serious dialogue. he made it clear too that, if any such dialogue developed, he would not hesitate to offer advice as to how to negotiate the Agreement "either away or downward from its present position".

6. He and his wife will spend the weekend of 10-11 December with the Howes at Chevening. He looks forward to that as a potentially important weekend. He is in fact coming to dinner on the night of the 11th and he said he would then tell me of his discussions with Howe. He re-iterated his intention to support the Inter-Parliamentary project.

Yours sincerely,


Richard Ryan
Minister-Counsellor