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November 1988

Mr. Dermot Gallagher  
Assistant Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Assistant Secretary

A conversation with Merlyn Rees, M.P.

I had a conversation with Merlyn Rees at a function over the weekend.

The following points of interest arose:

- Rees was sympathetic to the Irish Government's predicament in the Fr. Ryan case. He was critical of the Belgian Government for having taken what appeared to be essentially a political rather than legal decision and for having "dumped this problem in your laps." Particularly at a time of some domestic sensitivity on the subject of extradition, "the last thing you will want" is a high-profile and emotive case such as this one. The development is also to be regretted as Anglo-Irish relations on the whole have been on an even keel in recent months.
- Rees applauded the Taoiseach's decision to seek dialogue with the Unionists. Although he is personally sceptical about the likelihood of a permanent solution ever being found to the Northern Ireland problem, "the best hope" seems to him to lie in the promotion of an understanding of some sort between the Unionists and Dublin. Privately, he added, the Unionists make clear that they are very pleased with the openness which the Taoiseach has demonstrated towards them. (Rees, it may be noted, is on friendly terms with Jim Molyneaux). "The problem is that they don't know how to handle it - they don't know what the next step should be".

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue  
Press and Information Officer