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CONFIDENTIAL - BY COURIER SERVICE *M. J. W.*

Secretary A. G.
Mr. Kelly
Mr. Wood

11 January 1985

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Adam Ridley, Special Adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Ridley has played a pivotal rôle in Tory economic policy planning for over ten years. He was, previously, the main draughtsman of the Government White Paper on Community membership. He was an adviser to Mrs Thatcher from 1976 to 1979 and wrote five successive Party ^{Conference} speeches following her accession. She wished him to join her at No. 10 but he preferred a free-hand as adviser to the Chancellor, then Geoffrey Howe. Howe, he says, asked him to move with him to the Foreign Office but he again preferred to sit on his economic policy reputation at the Exchequer. He says he nominated Howe's present Special Adviser, John Houston, to the post. Ridley retains good relations with Mrs Thatcher and with Geoffrey Howe.

We discussed Northern Ireland at length and he made the following comments:-

- Nigel Lawson does not see a political return in a major move on Northern Ireland. He is, like some others, persuaded by the statistics that the situation is pretty well under control and there is little point in fanning the embers now. In the foreseeable future the Unionists' votes will not be needed in Parliament and that is the bottom line in political terms. Lawson has quite enough to do. He does not know Ireland, he has not traditionally been in the Prime Minister's confidence and is prepared to leave it that way. If he has credit to use up with her he would certainly have enough pressing matters to the exclusion of Ireland. He has, however, gone along with the Cabinet, in agreeing to continued Anglo-Irish exchanges,

in the belief that they are in perfectly good hands with Mrs Thatcher and, particularly, Geoffrey Howe. He sees any political apples which might fall from an Irish initiative as destined certainly for their laps, and that is that. He would go along with a Government move, but only in the body of his Cabinet colleagues.

- Douglas Hurd will read himself in with great caution. His political weather eye will be to ensure praise for his careful stewardship, not his foaming zeal; and to place him carefully in the right place for the succession stakes. He will, in a year or so, probably make authoritative noises to demonstrate his own stamp on the file. It would be surprising, however, if those noises were the sort to make much difference. He is more likely to say: "the situation is not entirely acceptable, certainly, but we are doing all that is reasonably possible in trying circumstances. Certainly the minority should have a dimension, and we will press that point with due force (i.e. not too much). Certainly, co-operation with the Republic is valuable and we must continue it, particularly in the security area. FitzGerald is a good fellow and we must be positive. But then he may not be there in five years, whereas Northern Ireland will be, and I must ensure that it is no worse for my stewardship. Good relations with Dublin are a good thing, therefore, but must take their place in the order of things."
- Geoffrey Howe is the single major force for good around Mrs Thatcher. He is interested; he understands the complexities; he considers that something must be done, both for its own sake and because there is political seed to be sown for himself and for the Prime Minister. Ridley was at Chevening, Howe's official residence, recently when the Irish Ambassador was invited. Howe considered it a valuable discussion with the Ambassador and his "circling interest" is continuing. Howe finds the question intriguing; it suits his temperament, and he will continue to follow it quite closely. We should keep in close touch with Howe at all stages of the dialogue. (I would draw from Ridley's carefully pitched comments the feeling

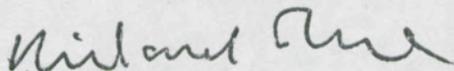
that he was suggesting closer political-level contact with Howe. This would bear out what Lord Gowrie was saying some time ago.)

- Two other major influences for good around the Prime Minister are Willie Whitelaw and John Biffen. She will do nothing of major significance without close consultation with them and without their full support. Whitelaw is still very canny and has the Irish experience. He would probably be amenable to something major as long as it made sense. Biffen, on the other hand, is by nature Manichean and, at a personal level, depressive. He is a good man, however, and could be the antidote to Powell's evil influence on her. Biffen is at present politically negative on Northern Ireland because his instincts tell him there is little, if anything, to be gained from touching it at present. If he could be brought into Howe's ambiance, on this subject, however, in the "nearish future", when Howe is more engaged, he could possibly be turned. This would be an enormous advantage. (I mentioned that Gowrie had brought Biffen and myself together over dinner some time ago, specifically for just this reason, but that I had found Biffen not very open - with me, at any rate - to the ideas put to him. Ridley's response was that to Biffen both Gowrie and I are, as one and a half Irishmen, as it were, suspect and it could hardly have been otherwise.) Ridley advised further social contact with Biffen to bring him into our ambiance, followed if possible by Ministerial contact (Garret FitzGerald and Peter Barry) when feasible.
- Enoch Powell remains the major check on the Prime Minister. He uses his parliamentary weight on her in a way that is tantamount to blackmail. It might well be a relief to her when his teeth finally loosen. Ridley wonders whether Powell will stand again in the next election. He may before then begin to visibly lose his grip and, therefore, his authority. Ridley says that the decline of Powell would be welcome to sensible Ministers. He is, however, holding the crossroads for the present and, knowing this, is bending all his malign will on an unfortunately susceptible Prime Minister.

- The Irish Government should keep hammering away at Mrs Thatcher in the ongoing exchanges. Dublin must ride out the difficulties as long as she is in the ring. She has the capacity to make Northern Ireland a priority for the Government: she needs to be convinced that it is necessary, right, and feasible. The process represented by the last Anglo-Irish Summit must be continued. The hiccup that followed the last meeting should be avoidable in future: it was an unfortunate accident.

Ridley left the impression that he speaks with authority, most particularly on Geoffrey's Howe's present thinking. He was, on balance, cautiously optimistic that Dublin could persuade London to move seriously over a necessary period of time. He concluded that this time period has to be employed carefully, to manoeuvre the Prime Minister, and the right people around her, toward a decision to act.

Yours sincerely



Richard Ryan
Counsellor.