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14 July 1978

dh. O'Callighin

dh. O'Donoghue Mary

9/23, (original)

66, 5/1, 5/1/2/2

Dear Hugh

I enclose a copy of an interesting report of Mr Corr's on a recent meeting he had with Alistair Cooke, Research Officer on Northern Ireland in the Conservative Research Department.

28/7/78

Cooke seems to have little input compared to his predecessor, Mr John Houston, with whom he seems not to get on very well. The report is of particular interest in its comments on some of Mrs Thatcher's views.

Yours sincerely

Daithi

Daithi O Ceallaigh
Press and Information Officer

Mr Hugh Swift
Anglo-Irish Division
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Dublin 2

in the affairs of the UK. He agreed with me that it was essential to foster good Anglo-Irish relations if the Tories win power but added that it can only be hoped that she would be more perceptive to the realities of the situation from the vantage point of 10 Downing Street.

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Mr O Ceallaigh

I had lunch today with Alistair Cooke, Northern Ireland Desk Officer at the Conservative Research Department.

Cooke had accompanied Mrs Thatcher to Belfast and informed me that she had not regarded the trip as a great success. He ascribed this to her failure to grasp the intricacies of the situation in the North and her consequent disappointment that the Unionists are still maintaining a deliberate distance from the Tories. In Cooke's view, Mrs Thatcher is possessed of the idea that the "preservation of the Union" is the only real issue in the North and she is puzzled that the Unionists have failed to recognise that, as she believes, the Tory party is far more committed to the Union than is Labour. In addition, she holds the naive view that a Conservative victory in the General Election is essential for the future good health of British democracy and she believes that the Unionists should more readily appreciate this and adopt a more "national", as against provincial, outlook. I asked Cooke why Mrs Thatcher had not met, even informally, any SDLP representatives and he replied that SDLP members had in fact been invited to Mr Mason's reception but that none had attended. I remarked that, nonetheless, it was hardly a good omen for a Thatcher Government's relations with the minority in the North if Mrs Thatcher had not taken the bother to arrange a short courtesy meeting with the SDLP. In reply, Cooke argued that the aim of the visit had been to build bridges to the Unionists rather than to hear minority views which Mrs Thatcher has heard many times before. He agreed that her comments on extradition had not been conducive to good relations with Dublin but stated that Mrs Thatcher is heartily sick of what she sees as Dublin interference in the affairs of the UK. He agreed with me that this is not likely to foster good Anglo-Irish relations if the Tories win power but added that it can only be hoped that she would be more perceptive to the realities of the situation from the vantage point of 10 Downing Street.

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Cooke informed me that Mrs Thatcher had made rather sour comments about her meeting with Dr FitzGerald and that Neave had told him that the meeting was not a success. In Cooke's view, this was because Dr FitzGerald's casuistical exposition of Fine Gael policy was not the right approach to someone whose mind functions within a more crude black and white framework. I asked him whether Neave still enjoys a close relationship with Mrs Thatcher and he replied that they were now even closer than before in that Mrs Thatcher has responded to the Tory drop in the opinion polls by relying and depending more and more on the Loyalists who won her the leadership. In addition, he said that Neave is well liked by Mr Thatcher, the latter being even more oriented to the right (except on capital punishment) than his wife. Cooke himself was less than enamoured by what he saw of Mr Thatcher during the Belfast visit in that Mr Thatcher had mistook him throughout as a plain clothes army officer.

He also told me that Patrick Cosgrave's star has very much waned in Mrs Thatcher's eyes. Apparently, she was quite offended by his biography of her and felt that he too readily associated his own views with her own, particularly on monetarism. In addition, her puritanical instincts have been offended by accounts of drinking bouts. Cooke knew Cosgrave in Cambridge and dislikes him intensely so it might be advisable to accept his views with some detachment. Similarly, he seems to dislike John Houston whom he spoke of critically once or twice.

I asked him what effect he thought Ted Heath's "I wish them well" speech would have and he said that, obviously, it would have a good effect on Tory prospects but he rather doubted if Ted Heath would accept a Cabinet post. I asked him about media reports that Mrs Thatcher has offered Heath the leadership of the Tory group in the next European Parliament and he said he simply didn't know. He feels the Tories