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27 September 1995

Mr David Cooney
Counsellor
Anglo-Irish Division
HQ

Dear David

The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Northern Ireland

I had lunch at the end of last week with Sir Patrick Mayhew's political adviser, Jonathan Caine who will be taking up a new appointment in a lobbying firm after the Conservative Party conference.

In describing the political pressures on the Prime Minister were he to depart from the "Washington tests" on decommissioning, Caine gave me a breakdown of opinion in the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Northern Ireland, as follows:

John Major: wants to achieve a lasting settlement between ^{and} the General Election

Mayhev, Kenneth Clarke, William Waldegrave: support the Prime Minister

Rifkind: asked questions at the time of the Downing Street Declaration, may not be as reliable supporter of the Prime Minister as one might expect

Beseltine: not very interested in Northern Ireland, in his new role would have an interest in the Unionist vote at Westminster

Portillo: an unknown quantity on Northern Ireland, has links to the right wing of the party

2

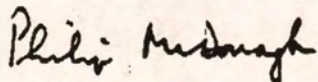
Cranborne: opposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, was brought around on the Framework Document, is used by the Prime Minister as a litmus test for what the right wing will accept: represents a real difficulty for the Prime Minister [comment: Viscount Cranborne, a large landowner in Dorset, is a relative of Lord Salisbury, leader of the Conservative Party from 1881 to 1902. Cranborne's political support has been important to Major who in terms of personal background has no links to the aristocratic tradition in the party.]

Howard: is sceptical about Government policy, represents the major obstacle in Cabinet to the Prime Minister's approach.

As I have already reported, the Home Secretary has been given the slot at the Party Conference immediately preceding the Northern Ireland debate. Caine indicated that Sir Patrick Mayhew intends to avoid being on the platform with Howard, having remarked at a planning meeting, "we will be in the background rehearsing our own proposals".

The other point of interest in my discussion with Caine was his sense that the Conservative Party has become more optimistic in the last few months about its General Election prospects. While Labour is still the favourite, the Conservatives feel they can make it a close contest and that they have at least an outside chance of winning. Caine attributes the changed political atmosphere to (a) the Prime Minister's successful gamble over the leadership election and (b) discontent in the Labour Party over Tony Blair's reticence in a number of policy areas.

Yours sincerely



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor