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M. Ryan.
I am puzzled as to why Needham should have told us x. Would he know if it is in fact the case? 31/10
P.

SECRET - BY COURIER SERVICE

P.S. looking for an explanation other than indiscretion, is it possible e.g. that the British want to leak the Americans (& others) in the dark?
P.

15 October 1984

Ambassador
Mr. Dempsey 16/10/84
to see & return pl.
M. and
15/10

Dear Assistant Secretary

Telephone-tapping

Richard Needham M.P. took me aside at the Tory Conference. We chatted about his indiscretion, which he greatly regrets, in telling third parties about the incident when Jim Prior and himself were reprimanded after a coded telex, from me to you, containing certain ideas of Prior, was intercepted by GCHQ. The story was reported in a garbled way by Tim Pat Coogan in his Irish Press Saturday Column a few weeks ago. It has also become a widely known funny story (rebounding on them, not us) among politicians and journalists here.

Needham went on to give some friendly advice. He said the British have our entire telephone network tapped and listen to all calls in and out of the Embassy and all calls between the Embassy (including my home number), and Dublin. I asked if this tapping included telephones, in Dublin, of politicians and senior officials. He referred to his Oath as an M.P. but nodded affirmation. He gave me to understand that certain telephone links in Dublin, with scrambling devices attached, are also easily cracked and the calls made on them are listened to. He asked me not to push the point any further and I did not. I promised secrecy on the conversation. He concluded by saying that there is some amazement among

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those in London who read the transcripts, at how free some of the Irish are on the telephone in the light of the fact that tapping is one of the oldest and simple tricks in the business.

Comment

Needham's political career is very probably finished. He believes that his indiscretion, both generally (and, particularly, in regard to his telling the story picked up by the Irish Press), put him out of the running for the job of PPS to Doughlas Hurd. In reality he and Hurd are as oil and water and Needham was never in the running. However, we have built up rather a friendship and I believe that he was genuinely trying in his remarks to do us a favour. I also believe that he was speaking with conviction (he believed that what he was saying must have some truth in it).

The Garda officers who "swept" the Embassy prior to last November's Summit warned specifically, and above all, against telephone tapping, and against speaking in a room with a telephone in it: the telephone can apparently be used as a listening device. The latter point would, if accepted, prohibit confidential discussion in rooms in the Embassy which contain telephones.

Yours sincerely

R. Ryan

Richard Ryan
Counsellor.

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