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cc FA/OPS
PressBritish Embassy
Dublin

5 December 1996

BY FAX

J Holmes Esq
No 10
Downing Street
LONDON SW1

① of Jane Hope, CPS's office.
We spoke. This may be
useful.

② Re John 5/12.

Dear John,

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: BERTIE AHERN

1. You asked for advice on what line Lord Cranborne might take with Bertie Ahern when he sees him at the weekend. I enclose a note on him from our Leading Personalities Report.
2. Before becoming party leader in December 1994, Ahern did not follow developments in Northern Ireland closely and was not involved directly in Fianna Fail policy making. Since succeeding Albert Reynolds he has taken a close interest in developments, but he still relies heavily on others in the party, in particular Martin Mansergh, his special adviser.
3. At times, Ahern has been blunt, even offensive, in his criticism of British policy. But considering Fianna Fail's traditional position on Northern Ireland, this could have been worse. He has made clear his abhorrence of violence, and has condemned the IRA in the most forthright terms. In addition, Ahern has so far largely refrained from making political capital from developments since the breakdown of the ceasefire, adopting a position broadly similar to the Irish Government's.
4. In speaking to Lord Cranborne, Ahern will probably rehearse familiar arguments, possibly with greater vehemence than the Irish Government, on our failure to respond adequately to the Hume/Adams initiative, and the need to set an early date for Sinn Fein's admission to talks (in the Dail on 4 December he argued that this should be by "late January"). He will call on the British Government to put forward more "confidence building" measures (particularly on prisoners) and to put greater pressure on Unionists to negotiate. He may also point to what Fianna Fail see as a heightened risk of IRA violence (a point stressed in internal party briefings last week).
5. In spite of a generally bipartisan approach to Northern Ireland, there are differences in approach between Fianna Fail and the Government. Ahern did not break off contacts with Sinn Fein after Canary Wharf, arguing that lines of communication

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had to be kept open to help secure a resumption of the ceasefire. He is firmly of the view that the Government should do more to reinforce the nationalist consensus, arguing that this would strengthen the "doves" in the Republican movement. And more generally, he is of the view that a Fianna Fail led coalition would have put a good deal more pressure on HMG than the current Irish coalition.

6. These difference show a propensity to take insufficient account of Unionists. It would be useful if Lord Cranborne could emphasise to Ahern that, while talk of a nationalist consensus offers Republicans an incentive to get into negotiations, it has the reverse effect on Unionists, who view it as a threat, and a means to put outside pressure on them. Lord Cranbourne might also usefully reiterate the British Government's commitment to all-party talks, but the challenge is to achieve talks in which all parties participate simultaneously. This has been the over-riding objective of British policy since the ceasefire of 1994. This in turn involves building the necessary confidence of all participants, for, in the absence of such confidence there will be those who refuse to participate.

Yours ever,

V E Sutherland

V E Sutherland
HM AMBASSADOR

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AMERN, ALDERMAN BERTIE TD

Leader of Fianna Fail since December 1994.

Born Dublin, 1951.

Education: St Aidan's Christian Brothers School, Rathmines College of Commerce, and University College Dublin. Trained as an accountant.

First elected to the Dail in 1977. Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and Department of Defence and Government. Chief Whip, March-December 1982. Opposition Chief Whip December 1982-87. Lord Mayor of Dublin, 1986-87. Minister for Labour 1987-91. Minister of Finance 1991-94.

Ambitious, shrewd and pragmatic, he was elected party leader, with overwhelming support, after the resignation of Albert Reynolds in December 1994. He is pleasant, knows his job and has no particular hang ups about dealing with the British. He is very much a working-class populist, with no known republican sentiments or connections.

He does not live with his wife Miriam (they have two daughters) but (openly) with his constituency secretary, Cecilia Larkin.

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