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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

18 February 1986

COP 19/2

Dear Charles,

Prime Minister's Meeting with the
Taoiseach: 19 February

The recent series of accidental discharges of radioactive material from the BNFL plant at Sellafield is continuing to arouse serious concern in the Irish Republic. Dublin telno 105 (attached) reports that Mr Haughey has called for the closure of Sellafield and that the Tanaiste has said it is now impossible to have confidence in BNFL's statements.

HM Embassy Dublin have been told by Irish officials that the Taoiseach definitely will raise Sellafield with the Prime Minister. We have therefore, in collaboration with the Departments of Energy and Environment, prepared additional briefing on this topic, which is enclosed.

I am copying this letter to Jim Daniell (NIO), David Norris (Lord Privy Seal's Office) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

(R N Culshaw)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street

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FM DUBLIN
TO DESKBY 181300Z FCOLN
TELNO 105
OF 181115Z FEBRUARY 86
INFO PRIORITY NIO (B)

OUR TELS 99 AND 103 - SELLAFIELD: PRESS COMMENTS

SUMMARY

1. PRESSURE BUILDS ON IRISH GOVERNMENT TO SEEK ACTION ON SELLAFIELD. TODAY'S (18 FEBRUARY) NEWSPAPERS REPORT LEADER OF OPPOSITION'S (MR HAUGHEY) CALL FOR CLOSURE OF SELLAFIELD AND CASTIGATION OF GOVERNMENT FOR THEIR HANDLING OF THE ISSUE OVER PAST TWO YEARS. ALSO SPECULATION THAT THE TAOISEACH MAY RAISE SELLAFIELD WITH PRIME MINISTER TOMORROW. AND THE TAINISTE/MINISTER FOR ENERGY IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID THAT IT WAS NOW IMPOSSIBLE TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN BNFL'S STATEMENTS ON SELLAFIELD.

DETAIL

2. MR HAUGHEY LAST NIGHT TABLED A SPECIAL NOTICE QUESTION IN THE DAIL ASKING THE TAOISEACH TO MAKE AN URGENT REQUEST TO HMG TO CLOSE DOWN SELLAFIELD. HE ALSO ISSUED A STATEMENT (COPIES BY BAG) IN WHICH HE SAID THAT THE MINISTER OF STATE AT ENERGY'S (MR COLLINS) RECENT CALL FOR THE TOTAL ENDING OF ALL DISCHARGES FROM SELLAFIELD WAS A "COMPLETELY INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO AN OMINOUS AND THREATENING SITUATION". THE GOVERNMENT MR HAUGHEY SAID, HAD BEEN "GROSSLY NEGLIGENT" IN THEIR DEALING WITH THE ISSUE OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS.

3. REPORTING THAT DR FITZGERALD MIGHT RAISE THE SUBJECT OF SELLAFIELD WITH MRS THATCHER, THE IRISH TIMES SAYS THAT SINCE THE IRISH SIDE MADE REPRESENTATIONS IN 1984 IN RELATION TO SELLAFIELD "THE FLOW OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE OPERATION OF THE PLANT HAS IMPROVE SIGNIFICANTLY". HOWEVER THE PAPER SAYS THAT THERE ARE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE RELIABILITY OF THE INFORMATION. A "SOURCE" IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT "OUR DIFFICULTY IS THAT BNFL... DON'T SEEM TO BE TELLING THE TRUTH TO ANYONE".

4. THE CORK EXAMINER AND IRISH INDEPENDENT QUOTE MR SPRING AS SAYING THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN BNFL'S STATEMENTS ON THE OPERATION OF THEIR PLANT "PARTICULARY IN RELATION TO MALFUNCTIONS". HE ALSO SAID THAT THERE WAS A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY ON HMG TO ENSURE THAT SAFETY STANDARDS AT THE PLANT WERE MAINTAINED. "BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON THE REPUBLIC AND NORTHERN IRELAND THE ISSUE HAD AN ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT DIMENSION".

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COMMENT

5. THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY HAVE CONFIRMED THAT SELLAFIELD WILL BE DISCUSSED IN CABINET THIS MORNING. BUT WE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO ESTABLISH WHETHER DR FITZGERALD WILL RAISE THE SUBJECT WITH MRS THATCHER. WE SHALL ADVISE RID BY TELEPHONE WHEN WE HAVE A STEER.

FCO ADVANCES PLEASE TO GOODWIN NED, MORRIS RID, MISS MCINTOSH MAED, MISS NOWAK D/ENVIRONMENT, CHALLIS D/ENERGY, HATHAWAY MAFF/FISHERIES, SAUNDERS DHSS (HANNIBAL HOUSE) AND SILL NIO (L).

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RID.

MAED

NEWS D

INFO

RES D

PLANNING STAFF.

PUSD

PS

PS/MR RENTON.

PS/LADY YOUNG.

PS/MR EGGAR

MR GOODALL

MR DAUNT.

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AS ADDRESSEES.

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