

GRS 380
UNCLASSIFIED
DESKBY FCO AND NIO 090830Z MAY 79
FM DUBLIN 081625Z MAY 79
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 82 OF 8 MAY
AND TO NIO BELFAST
INFO ROUTINE WASHINGTON AND MODUK

NEW BRITISH GOVERNMENT: IRISH PRESS REACTIONS

1. THE GENERAL TONE OF THE PRESS REACTIONS FOLLOWING THE APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS AND RESTRAINED. ATTENTION HAS, INEVITABLY, FOCUSED LARGELY ON THE APPOINTMENT OF MR ATKINS AS NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY AND ON THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT MAY EMBARK ON A POLITICAL INITIATIVE. MR ATKINS' APPOINTMENT HAS BEEN GREETED WITH A MIXTURE OF SURPRISE AND PUZZLEMENT. THE GENERAL OPINION IS THAT, ALTHOUGH HE IS NOT A WELL-KNOWN FIGURE AND HAS NO PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE NORTHERN PROBLEM, HE HAS IN HIS FAVOUR HIS EXPERIENCE AS CHIEF WHIP AND THE FACT THAT HE IS ALLEGED TO BE A "GOOD LISTENER". THE HOPE IS ALSO EXPRESSED THAT, AS A NEWCOMER TO THE NORTHERN PROBLEM, MR ATKINS MAY BRING FRESH IDEAS FOR DEALING WITH IT.

2. THE IRISH TIMES STATES IN AN EDITORIAL THAT MR ATKINS IS "RELATIVELY UNKNOWN" AND THAT, BECAUSE HE IS THE PRODUCT OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL WHICH GIVES THE BRITISH ARMY MANY OF ITS MOST NOTABLE OFFICERS, HE MUST KNOW "THE SERVICE ANGLE". THE EDITORIAL GOES ON TO ASK "WILL HE LEARN ABOUT THE HUMAN PROBLEM? THE GOVERNMENT HERE IS RIGHTLY ANXIOUS, BUT NOT UNWELCOMING". THE IRISH INDEPENDENT SAYS THAT THE VERY MOST THAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT MR ATKINS AT THIS EARLY STAGE IS THAT HE APPROACHES THE PROBLEMS OF THE NORTH WITH AN OPEN MIND. THE INDEPENDENT ARGUES THAT HE SHOULD BE GIVEN "A GOOD LONG TIME TO READ AND TALK HIMSELF INTO HIS NEW AND VERY ONEROUS POSITION BEFORE DEMANDS ARE MADE ON HIM", AND ALSO POINTS OUT THAT ALTHOUGH MRS THATCHER "BANGS THE LAW AND ORDER DRUM A LITTLE TOO LOUD FOR SOME PEOPLE'S TASTES, SHE MUST BE SHREWD ENOUGH TO REALISE THAT LAW AND ORDER WITH A POLITICAL INITIATIVE WOULD HAVE A MUCH BETTER CHANCE OF SUCCEEDING THAN OTHER APPROACHES HAVE IN THE PAST". THE CORK EXAMINER TAKES A SIMILAR LINE.

3. THE IRISH PRESS, ON THE OTHER HAND, ADOPTS A CARPING TONE, SUGGESTING THAT MRS THATCHER HAS INDICATED THAT NORTHERN IRELAND RATES PRETTY LOW IN HER LIST OF POLITICAL PRIORITIES BY PICKING A MAN WITH NO PREVIOUS MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCE FOR NORTHERN SECRETARY. HOWEVER, THE SAME PAPER ADMITS THAT MR ATKINS' APPOINTMENT MAY BE 'GOOD NEWS IF IT ENABLES HIM TO BRING TO THE JOB A FRESH AND IMAGINATIVE APPROACH'. COMMENTING ON THE CABINET AS A WHOLE, THE IRISH PRESS SAYS THAT THERE IS VERY MUCH A LOOK OF YESTERDAY'S MEN ABOUT IT.

STAPLES

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