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ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT: PRESS REVIEW 16 NOVEMBER

SUMMARY

1. MASSIVE COVERAGE OF THE SUMMIT AND THE AGREEMENT REFLECTS MIXED REACTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC. EDITORIAL OPINION GENERALLY FAVOURABLE.

DETAIL

2. THERE HAS BEEN MASSIVE PRESS AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT IN THE LAST 24 HOURS, AND IRISH MINISTERS HAVE GONE ALL OUT TO PERSUADE THE IRISH PUBLIC OF ITS MERITS IN THE FACE OF SULLEN OPPOSITION FROM MR HAUGHEY. IN ADDITION TO LIVE COVERAGE OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE AND IMMEDIATE REACTION, RTE TV DEVOTED MOST OF ITS EVENING TO THE SUMMIT AND AGREEMENT INCLUDING INTERVIEWS WITH THE TAOISEACH, MR ING, MR HAUGHEY AND BRITISH, IRISH AND NORTHERN IRISH POLITICIANS ON ALL SIDES (EXCEPT UNIONISTS WHO PRESUMABLY WOULD NOT SPEAK TO RTE).

3. THE HEADLINES IN TODAY'S IRISH PAPERS ARE MIXED. THE IRISH INDEPENDENT SAYS 'DEAL OF COURAGE: ANGLO-IRISH PACT HAILED AT HOME AND ABROAD'. THE IRISH TIMES SAYS 'ROLE IN NORTH FOR REPUBLIC AGREED'. BUT THE CORK EXAMINER SAYS 'NO AGREEMENT SIGNALS END OF BIPARTISANSHIP', AND THE IRISH PRESS HEADLINE IS: 'NATION SPLIT ON DEAL'. ALL THE PAPERS CARRY THE FULL TEXT OF THE AGREEMENT AND ALL PUBLISH EXTENSIVE SUPPLEMENTS ON THE EVENTS AND REACTIONS OF THE DAY.

4. EDITORIAL REACTION MIRRORS THE MAIN HEADLINES. THE INDEPENDENT PUTS ITS COMMENT AT THE TOP OF ITS FRONT PAGE UNDER THE HEADING 'WE MUST BACK THIS ACCORD FOR A BETTER TOMORROW'. THE CORK EXAMINER COMMENTS THAT THE AGREEMENT IS 'ONE SMALL MOVE TO SANITY AND PEACE WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE SEEMED POSSIBLE A YEAR AGO, WHEN THE PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION WAS BEGUN'. THE IRISH TIMES HEADS ITS COMMENT...

COMMENT 'IN WITH A CHANCE' . THE AGREEMENT 'IS A REASONABLE DEAL. IT IS NOT A SOLUTION: IT IS A BEGINNING'.

5. THE IRISH PRESS WHICH IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE CLOSEST TO FIANNA FAIL POSITIONS AVOIDS GIVING ITS OWN VIEW. NOTING A COMMON THREAD IN UNIONIST AND CONSERVATIVE OPINION WAS THAT THE AGREEMENT 'WAS IN FACT THE INTRODUCTION OF ... JOINT AUTHORITY UNDER ANOTHER NAME' THE IRISH PRESS COMMENTS THAT 'THERE WILL NEVER BE PEACE IN THIS COUNTRY UNTIL IRISH UNITY FINALLY COMES ABOUT' AND ALLEGES THAT 'DESPITE FAVOURABLE 'OPTICS', 'THERE WERE SERIOUS DIFFERENCES IN EMPHASIS' BETWEEN THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE. THE MAIN BENEFICIARIES IN THE NORTH ARE THE SDLP ' AND IN PARTICULAR MR JOHN HUME WHO NOW HAS THE BIGGEST ADVICE CENTRE OF THEM ALL SET UP TO COUNTER SINN FEIN CENTRES' . FOR THE SDLP THE AGREEMENT REPRESENTS 'A TANGIBLE ADVANCE': IT WILL BE 'AN ADVANCE FOR THE WHOLE ISLAND IF THE UNIONIST BACKLASH THREAT IS AT LAST CONFRONTED AND PUT DOWN'. THE IRISH PRESS CONCEDES THAT 'CERTAINLY ONE COULD ARGUE THAT 'TOTALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS DO INDEED COME WITHIN THE PURVIEW OF THIS AGREEMENT', BUT WARNS THAT IF THE AGREEMENT IS NOT TO FULFIL MR HAUGHEY'S PREDICTIONS 'FROM TODAY, DAY 1 OF HILLSBOROUGH, THE ANGLO-IRISH PROCESS MUST BE SEEN TO WORK TOWARDS GIVING TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF MRS THATCHER'S DESCRIPTION OF DR FITZGERALD (AS A NATIONALIST AND REPUBLICAN)'. .

6. THE QUESTION OF THE LOCATION AND NATURE OF THE SECRETARIAT IS EXAMINED IN THE PAPERS. THE IRISH INDEPENDENT REPORTS THAT IT WILL BE BASED IN BELFAST, CLOSE TO STORMONT CASTLE, AND SAYS THAT 'THE PERSONNEL HAVE ALREADY BEEN CHOSEN - THERE WILL BE 18 - 20 AT THE MOST - BUT THEIR IDENTITIES HAVE NOT YET BEEN FORMALLY DISCLOSED - THIS IS PURELY FOR SECURITY REASONS'. NEVERTHELESS, THE IRISH PRESS REPORTS THAT THE IRISH TEAM WILL BE HEADED BY DAITHI O'CEALLAIGH, OF WHOM IT GIVES A SHORT BIOGRAPHY.

7. THE REACTIONS OF THE UNIONISTS ARE EXTENSIVELY REPORTED. THEIR THREAT TO RESIGN THEIR COMMONS' SEATS IS NOTED, AS IS MR KING'S STATEMENT LAST NIGHT THAT UNIONIST REACTIONS WERE V 'AN ABSOLUTE ABDICATION OF LEADERSHIP'. IN THE IRISH TIMES, JOHN HEALEY COMMENTS THAT THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL FOR UNIONISM', AND IN THE INDEPENDENT THE NORTHERN EDITOR SAYS 'THE UNIONISTS COULD BE HEADED DOWN THE ROAD OF UDI AND WILL HAVE NEITHER THE BRAIN NOR THE POLITICAL SKILL TO ALTER COURSE'.

8. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE REACTIONS OF FIANNA FAIL, AND IN PARTICULAR MR HAUGHEY ARE PROMINENTLY REPORTED AND DISCUSSED. HIS PERFORMANCE ON TELEVISION LAST NIGHT SEEMED DEFENSIVE AND UNCONVINCING, AND THE IRISH PRESS'S REPORT: 'RTE ATTACKED BY HAUGHEY OVER INTERVIEW' SUGGESTS THAT MR HAUGHEY THOUGHT SO TOO. THE IRISH TIMES HAS A FRONT PAGE REPORT HEADED 'FIANNA FAIL WILL REPUDIATE AGREEMENT', BUT THIS IS NOT IN FACT DEMONSTRATED BY THE TEXT, IN WHICH, ASKED IF HIS PARTY WOULD RENEGOTIATE THE AGREEMENT WHEN RETURNED TO GOVERNMENT, MR HAUGHEY IS QUOTED AS SAYING 'WE WILL CERTAINLY NOT BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT IT IN ITS PRESENT FORM'. THIS TALLIES WITH OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE POSITION HE AND OTHER FIANNA FAIL SPOKESMEN ADOPTED IN INTERVIEWS. THE CORK EXAMINER HEADS ITS REPORT OF FIANNA FAIL'S POSITION 'IT GIVES EVERYTHING AWAY - HAUGHEY' AND THE INDEPENDENT HAS 'HAUGHEY : WE WILL FIGHT IT - AGREEMENT TERMS 'BREACH CONSTITUTION''. HOWEVER JACK LYNCH (FORMER FIANNA FAIL TAOISEACH) SAID THAT THE AGREEMENT WAS POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE AND DESERVED A POSITIVE RESPONSE FROM PEOPLE OF GOODWILL ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER. THE CORK EXAMINER ALSO REPORTS THAT DES O'MALLEY HAS WELCOMED THE AGREEMENT AS A STEP FORWARD.

MR. INGHAM

cc Mr. Flesher

ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT: STATEMENT

The Prime Minister would be grateful if you could flag up for her tomorrow a selection of principal press comment on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. She wants to go through this at 1500 as part of the preparations for her Statement. Perhaps you could let Tim Flesher have it.

(Charles Powell)

17 November 1985