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ROUTINE US CONSULATES GENERAL

THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT: U S PRESS REACTIONS.

SUMMARY

ALTHOUGH SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE COLOMBIAN VOLCANO DISASTER AND THE REAGAN-GORBACHEV SUMMIT, THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT STILL GENERATED EXTENSIVE POSITIVE COVERAGE IN THE PRESS AND ON TELEVISION. GENERAL REACTION IS ONE OF GUARDED OPTIMISM. EDITORIAL REACTION: VERY FAVOURABLE. TELEVISION NEWS REPORTING: MORE EQUIVOCAL.

DETAIL

2. IN AMERICAN NEWS TERMS THE SIGNING OF THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT WAS A ONE DAY WONDER, GENERATING EXTENSIVE COVERAGE DURING THE TWENTY FOUR HOURS FOLLOWING THE HILLSBOROUGH SUMMIT. THE MAIN THEME IN THE NEWS REPORTING HAS BEEN THE ASSESSMENT OF THE HARD LINE UNIONIST REACTION. THE PRINCIPAL SUB-THEMES INCLUDE THE FAVOURABLE RESPONSE OF PRESIDENT REAGAN, HOUSE SPEAKER O'NEILL AND THE QUOTE FRIENDS OF IRELAND UNQUOTE. THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE SPECULATION ON THE NEXT POLITICAL MOVES BY THE TWO GOVERNMENTS, WHILE THE POLITICAL FALL-OUT IN THE REPUBLIC HAS GONE VIRTUALLY UNREMARKED. WIRE SERVICE NEWS ANALYSES IN THE PROVINCIAL SMALL TOWN PRESS HAVE DWELT UPON THE QUOTE SHAKY AND FRAGILE UNQUOTE NATURE OF THE AGREEMENT: DR FITZGERALD AND MR HUME WERE TAKING THE MAJOR POLITICAL RISKS IN A DELICATE SITUATION WHERE A PROTESTANT BACKLASH COULD DESTROY THE PACT.

3. THE NETWORK EVENING TELEVISION NEWSCASTS REPORTED THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT FAIRLY, BUT DIFFERED IN THEIR EVALUATION OF ITS IMPORTANCE. NBC SUGGESTED THAT THE AGREEMENT USHERED IN AN ERA OF QUOTE NEW HOPES AND NEW FEARS UNQUOTE, WHILE CBS AND CNN HIGHLIGHTED THE POSSIBILITY OF A UNIONIST BACKLASH. IN CONTRAST, ABC SAW THE SIGNING OF THE AGREEMENT AS AN QUOTE HISTORIC MOMENT UNQUOTE WHICH OFFERED HOPE TO THE CATHOLIC MINORITY. PBS'S MCNEILL-LEHRER NEWSHOUR DESCRIBED THE AGREEMENT AS QUOTE THE MOST FAR-REACHING INITIATIVE SINCE 1921 UNQUOTE AND RAN A HELPFUL DISCUSSION WHERE IRISH JUSTICE MINISTER, NOONAN, SKILFULLY OUT-MANEUVRED CONGRESSMAN MARIO BIAGGI. UNFORTUNATELY, CNN FEATURED MARTIN GALVIN IN A CURIOUSLY ONE-SIDED ANALYSIS OF THE AMERICAN RESPONSE WHICH IGNORED PRESIDENT REAGAN'S AND SPEAKER O'NEILL'S JOINT NEWS CONFERENCE.

PREDICTABLY, THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA TELEVISION STATIONS WERE LESS THAN HELPFUL, WITH THEIR NEWS EDITORS FEELING COMPELLED TO OFFER MARTIN GALVIN AS A QUOTE REPRESENTATIVE UNQUOTE IRISH-AMERICAN VOICE TO CHALLENGE THAT OF MR NOONAN.

4. IN SHARP CONTRAST, U S EDITORIAL REACTION HAS BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE ECHOING COMMENT IN THE IRISH REPUBLIC. IN GENERAL, U S EDITORIAL WRITERS HAVE ADOPTED AN ATTITUDE OF GUARDED OPTIMISM: PRAISING THE COURAGE OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND DR FITZGERALD, WHILE EXPRESSING A SOBER UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIFFICULTIES THAT LIE AHEAD. THE NEW YORK TIMES GAVE THE AGREEMENT A ROUSING QUOTE THREE CHEERS UNQUOTE, CONCLUDING THAT THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS HAD QUOTE FASHIONED AN INGENIOUS EXPERIMENT THAT DESERVES A GOOD FAITH TEST UNQUOTE. THE TIMES ADDED A WARNING TO PROTESTANTS NOT TO TRY TO STRANGLE THE AGREEMENT LEST THEY WISH TO BENEFIT THE IRA. THE WASHINGTON POST TOO WELCOMED THE AGREEMENT ASSURING BOTH GOVERNMENTS THAT AMERICANS APPLAUDED QUOTE THEIR STEP TOWARDS PEACE UNQUOTE. THE NEW YORK TABLOIDS, ALWAYS IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF THEIR IRISH-AMERICAN READERSHIP, AGREED THAT THE ANGLO-IRISH PACT OFFERED GENUINE HOPE OF ESTABLISHING INSTITUTIONAL SANITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THE MORE IMPORTANT REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS - THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE, THE BOSTON GLOBE, THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, THE HARTFORD COURANT, THE PHILADELPHIA ENQUIRER AND NEWSDAY, THE LONG ISLAND DAILY, WELCOMED THE AGREEMENT WITH CONSIDERABLE ENTHUSIASM. THE HARTFORD COURANT CAPTURED THE FLAVOUR OF THE REGIONAL COMMENT IN DESCRIBING THE AGREEMENT AS QUOTE A REMARKABLE PIECE OF STATECRAFT UNQUOTE.

5. IN SUM, US PRESS/MEDIA REACTION IS ONE OF GUARDED OPTIMISM, REVEALING UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING NORTHERN IRELAND AND GENUINE ADMIRATION FOR THE SKILL AND STEADFASTNESS OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS.

6. F C O PLEASE PASS TO N I O AND TO MR NICHOLAS SCOTT (BY 190900Z).

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