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ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT: PRESS INTERVIEW WITH THE TAOISEACH

1. IN TODAY'S IRISH TIMES DR FITZGERALD ANSWERS QUESTIONS FROM THE PAPER'S POLITICAL EDITOR, DICK WALSH. ASKED WHETHER THE CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES (IE THE ARRIVAL OF THE PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS) OR FOR THAT MATTER THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT, WOULD AFFECT THE TIMING OF AN ELECTION, DR FITZGERALD SAID "CERTAINLY NOT" AND WENT ON:

"TO PUT AT RISK WHATEVER HAS BEEN ACHIEVED FOR POLITICAL ENDS WOULD BE ABSOLUTELY UNFORGIVABLE AND PEOPLE WOULD SEE IT AS UNFORGIVABLE.

"IT'S VITAL THAT WE MAKE THE FULLEST USE OF THIS PERIOD WHEN THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER AND I ARE IN OFFICE. WE WOULD WISH TO CARRY THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD OF UNIONIST REACTION UNTIL WE COME OUT AT THE OTHER END WHEN THE UNIONISTS SEE THAT THE AGREEMENT IS NO THREAT TO THEM, IS, IN FACT IN THEIR BEST INTERESTS."

WALSH ASKED IF THE UNIONISTS COULD BE GOT TO SEE IT THAT WAY ?:

"THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN THAT HAS CONVINCED SO MANY OF THEM - EVEN MODERATES - THAT THE AGREEMENT IS DAMAGING TO THEM - THAT CAMPAIGN CARRIES WITHIN IT THE SEEDS OF ITS OWN CONCLUSION ... IT IS BASED SO OBVIOUSLY ON A NON-READING OF THE AGREEMENT AND THE DIRECTION IN WHICH IT WOULD LEAD UNIONISTS IS SO CONTRARY TO THEIR INTERESTS THAT IT'S BOUND TO PROVOKE A REACTION."

2. THE INTERVIEW CONTINUES:

"DR FITZGERALD CONSIDERS THE CAMPAIGN TO HAVE PROVED EMBARRASSING TO THE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS WHO HAD PARTICIPATED WITH PARAMILITARIES IN PROTEST MARCHES - SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE, INDEED INCONCEIVABLE, ON THE NATIONALIST SIDE. IT WAS A DEVELOPMENT VERY DISTURBING TO ORDINARY UNIONISTS WHO, THOUGH THEIR EMOTIONS HAD BEEN ROUSED, MUST BE AWARE THAT IT WAS LEADING THEM TOWARDS A POLITICAL CUL-DE-SAC.

THE PROCESS OF EMERGING FROM THE TRAUMA WOULD BE LONG AND DIFFICULT, BUT AN INCREASING PROPORTION OF PEOPLE IN THE NORTH WOULD PROBABLY SEE THAT THE POLICY OF THE LOYALISTS WAS LEADING TOWARDS VIOLENCE AND DISRUPTION.

IAS

AS FOR THE TWO GOVERNMENTS, THE TAOISEACH SAID:

"WE WILL REMAIN STEADILY ON COURSE: THE CONFERENCE WILL CONTINUE TO WORK AND THE UNIONISTS WILL GRADUALLY SEE THE SENSE OF THAT WORK WHILE THE ALIENATION OF THE NATIONALISTS DIMINISHES."

THE PROCESS, DR FITZGERALD BELIEVED, WOULD END WITH AN AGREEMENT BY POLITICIANS NORTH AND SOUTH THAT THE TWO SIDES IN THE NORTH SHOULD COME TOGETHER IN A PARTICIPATORY EXECUTIVE WITH DEVOLVED AUTHORITY, AN IDEA FOR WHICH, IN HIS VIEW, THERE WAS GROWING SUPPORT.

GOODISON

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