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INFO IMMEDIATE NIO (BELFAST)

ANGLO-IRISH TALKS

1. SUNDAY TRIBUNE OF 28 APRIL CARRIED THE FOLLOWING FRONT PAGE ARTICLE UNDER THE HEADING 'THATCHER HEADS TOP ANGLO-IRISH TALKS COMMITTEE':

'A SPECIAL BRITISH CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED TO OVERSEE THE PRESENT INTENSE ROUND OF ANGLO-IRISH TALKS, ACCORDING TO RELIABLE BRITISH GOVERNMENT SOURCES.'

THE COMMITTEE IS T

ADED BY THE PRIME MINISTER MRS THATCHER. AMONG ITS MEMBERS ARE THE NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY, DOUGLAS HURD, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, GEOFFREY HOWE, THE EMPLOYMENT ? SECRETARY, NORMAN TEBBIT AND THE ARTS MINISTER, LORD GOWRIE, WHO IS ALSO A FORMER NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE MINISTER.

THE GROUP, WHICH HAS BEEN IN EXISTENCE SEVERAL MONTHS, IS KNOWN IN WHITEHALL TERMS AS AN AD-HOC COMMITTEE - THAT IS, ONE WHICH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED TO DEAL WITH A PARTICULAR SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE COMMITTEE'S EXISTENCE AND MRS THATCHER'S PRESENCE ON IT INDICATE THAT THE ANGLO-IRISH TALKS ARE BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY IN LONDON. HOWEVER, BOTH BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENT SOURCES SIGNIFICANTLY USE THE SAME PHRASE TO DESCRIBE THE PROSPECTS FOR FINAL AGREEMENT - 'ABOUT 50-50'.

DUBLIN'S CONCERN IS TO FIND A FORMULA THAT WILL TACITLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT BRITISH SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE NORTH WILL REMAIN UNCHANGED, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ALLOWING THE REPUBLIC AN INCREASING SAY IN THE DAY-TO-DAY RUNNING OF NORTHERN IRELAND.

BUT IRISH OFFICIALS SHOW A CERTAIN SUBDUED OPTIMISM. ON THE BRITISH SIDE, BY CONTRAST, NORMALLY COMMUNICATIVE MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS ARE SILENT. THIS IS SEEN AS A SIGN THAT PARTICULARLY DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDER WAY.

THE AD HOC COMMITTEE WILL REPORT TO THE OVERSEAS AND DEFENSE (OD) COMMITTEE. THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMITTEES IN WHITEHALL, BUT ITS INFLUENCE HAS WANED SLIGHTLY IN RECENT TIMES DUE TO A CHANGE OF PERSONNEL. THE SENIOR CABINET OFFICE OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF ITS WORK, BRIAN CARTLEDGE, WAS APPOINTED AMBASSADOR TO MOSCOW SEVERAL WEEKS AGO.

/HIS.

HIS SUCCESSOR IS CHRISTOPHER MALLABY, ANOTHER SOVIET SPECIALIST WHOSE PREVIOUS JOBS INCLUDE THAT OF HEAD OF ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE. MR MALLABY, WHO HAS DEPUTY SECRETARY RANK, HAS NOT YET HAD TIME TO STAMP HIS PERSONALITY ON THE WORKINGS OF THE OD COMMITTEE AND CERTAINLY NOT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANGLO-IRISH POLICY.

ONE OF THE KEY OFFICIALS IN THIS REGARD CONTINUES TO BE DAVID GOODALL, WHO ONCE HELD MR MALLABY'S POST AND IS NOW DEPUTY SECRETARY AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE.

WHEN JAMES PRIOR WAS NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY, HE HAD NO AD-HOC COMMITTEE OVERSEEING HIS ACTIONS: HE REPORTED DIRECTLY TO THE OD COMMITTEE. THE LAST TIME SUCH A COMMITTEE WAS SET UP IN RELATION TO NORTHERN IRELAND MATTERS WAS IN 1979, WHEN AN AD-HOC GROUPING OF MINISTERS SUPERVISED THE ULTIMATELY UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS OF HUMPHREY ATKINS TO FIND AGREEMENT AMONG NORTHERN IRELAND PARTIES.

THAT PREVIOUS COMMITTEE WAS HEADED BY LORD WHITELAW AND INCLUDED LORD HAILSHAM AMONG ITS MEMBERS.'

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