

UNCLASSIFIED

FM DUBLIN

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 61

OF 031645Z FEBRUARY 86

INFO IMMEDIATE NIO (BELFAST)

OUR TELNO 58: IRISH REACTIONS TO UNIONIST PROPOSALS FOR A
NEW CONFERENCE

SUMMARY

1. SPEAKING ON RTE AT THE WEEKEND, PETER ROBINSON ECHOED HAROLD MCCUSKER'S REMARKS OF 30 JANUARY. GREAT PRESS INTEREST INCLUDES REACTIONS BY THE TAOISEACH AND OTHER POLITICAL FIGURES IN THE REPUBLIC, AS WELL AS SCEPTICAL BUT SYMPATHETIC EDITORIAL COMMENT.

DETAIL

2. REMARKS BY PETER ROBINSON ON RTE SUNDAY LUNCHTIME RADIO NEWS ARE GIVEN DIFFERING EMPHASIS BY TODAY'S DUBLIN PAPERS. THE IRISH TIMES AND IRISH PRESS BOTH LEAD WITH THE STORY: THE IRISH TIMES REPORT, HEADED 'ROBINSON JOINS UNIONIST CALL FOR TRIPARTITE TALKS', SAYS THAT HE HAS 'PUT FORWARD PROPOSALS FOR A CONFERENCE BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS AND POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE NORTH TO WORK OUT A REPLACEMENT TO THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT'. THE AGREEMENT MUST GO, WHETHER BY NEGOTIATION OR BY CONFRONTATION, BUT THERE SHOULD THEN BE A CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS 'INTERNAL STRUCTURES' IN THE NORTH, IN WHICH CONSTITUTIONAL NATIONALISTS FROM THE NORTH SHOULD PARTICIPATE. THERE COULD ALSO BE A SECOND (TRIPARTITE) CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND NORTHERN IRELAND.

3. THE IRISH PRESS QUOTES HIM IN MORE POSITIVE VEIN, SAYING THAT HE WAS NOW PREPARED TO RECOGNISE THE NEED 'TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP AND COOPERATION WITH THE IRISH REPUBLIC THAT WILL REMOVE THE MANY OBSTACLES AND FRICTION THAT WE HAVE HAD IN THE PAST' AND THAT HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO ENTER INTO DISCUSSIONS WITH THE IRISH GOVERNMENT. THE REPORT, HEADED 'TAOISEACH'S NO TO ROBINSON', QUOTES DR FITZGERALD AS REJECTING SUGGESTIONS THAT THE AGREEMENT SHOULD BE SCRAPPED: 'WE ARE ALWAYS WILLING TO TALK TO PEOPLE, BUT THE AGREEMENT IS THERE. THE AGREEMENT STANDS.' RAY MCSHARRY (FIANNA FAIL) IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE MISTAKE IN THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT HAD BEEN TO EXCLUDE THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES ON THE ISLAND (THE UNIONISTS AND FIANNA FAIL) FROM NEGOTIATIONS. FIANNA FAIL WELCOMED RECENT UNIONIST STATEMENTS.

4. THE IRISH TIMES EDITORIAL COMMENT (''TRY-ON OR CHANGE OF HEART ?'') TAKES A SCEPTICAL LINE ON THE UNIONIST PROPOSALS, BUT SAYS ''THE NORTH WILL NOT CALM DOWN OVERNIGHT, BUT THE TEMPERATURE MUST BE LOWERED WHEN MR MCCUSKER AND MR ROBINSON SOUND SUCH A DUET''. WHILST THERE MUST BE ''SOME RESERVATIONS ABOUT MOTIVES'', IF THE NEW UNIONIST LINE IS GENUINE AND CAN BE SOLD TO THEIR FOLLOWERS ''WE MAY INDEED BE LOOKING TO BETTER TIMES''. THE IRISH INDEPENDENT SAID THAT ''BOTH MEN BY THEIR STATEMENTS SHOW THAT THE UNIONISTS ARE TRYING TO LOOK A LITTLE FURTHER INTO THE FUTURE THAN THEY ARE ACCUSTOMED TO''. THE GOVERNMENT IN THE REPUBLIC WOULD HAVE TO EXAMINE THEIR MOTIVES CAREFULLY, AND IF UNIONISTS WANTED TO COME AND EXPLAIN THEIR WORRIES IN DUBLIN THEY SHOULD BE GIVEN EVERY ENCOURAGEMENT. THE CORK EXAMINER BELIEVES THAT IT IS UNREALISTIC TO DEMAND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE AGREEMENT AS THE PRICE OF A NEW PACT, BUT SAYS THAT MCCUSKER'S REPORTED PREPAREDNESS TO OFFER THE SDLP POWER-SHARING IN A DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT WITH CONTROL OVER INTERNAL SECURITY IS ''A NUDGE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION''.

5. THE IRISH PRESS, MORE OVERTLY SCEPTICAL, SAYS THAT NATIONALIST PEOPLE, NORTH AND SOUTH, CAN BE FORGIVEN IF THEY TAKE WITH A LARGE PINCH OF SALT THIS SUDDEN OUTBREAK OF UNIONIST REASONABLENESS. INTERESTINGLY FOR A NEWSPAPER WHOSE REACTION TO THE AGREEMENT ITSELF WAS CRITICAL, THE IRISH PRESS NOW SAYS OF UNIONIST PROPOSALS: ''LET'S FIRST SEE THE COLOUR OF THEIR POLITICAL CURRENCY. IF THEY WANT TO NEGOTIATE AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT, THEN FINE - LET'S ALL NEGOTIATE. BUT LET'S ALSO BE CLEAR THAT THE AGREEMENT STAYS UNTIL THE NEW DEAL, ADEQUATELY COPPER-FASTENED, HAS BEEN CONCLUDED''.

STIMSON

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