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SAVING WASHINGTON AND BIS NEW YORK.

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NORTHERN IRELAND: INTERVIEW WITH TAOISEACH

1. A MAJOR INTERVIEW WITH THE TAOISEACH, DR FITZGERALD WAS PUBLISHED IN THE CORK EXAMINER ON 22 SEPTEMBER. IT COVERS U.S. ATTITUDES TO NORTHERN IRELAND, CONTACTS BETWEEN THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE UNIONISTS, AND POSSIBLE CHANGES TO THE REPUBLIC'S CONSTITUTION TO MAKE " THIS STATE A MORE ATTRACTIVE ONE FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN UNIONIST TRADITION TO JOIN". THE FULL TEXT FOLLOWS BY BAG.

2. THE TAOISEACH SPOKE OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM AND OF THE TENDENCY FOR IRISH-AMERICANS TO SIMPLIFY THE ISSUES. THEY FAILED TO SEE " THAT THE PROBLEM WAS NOT PRIMARILY THE PROBLEM OF BRITISH RULE IN NORTHERN IRELAND BUT HOW DIFFERENT GROUPS OF IRISH PEOPLE ACCOMODATED THEMSELVES TO EACH OTHER AND FOUND A WAY OF LIVING AND WORKING TOGETHER ON THE ISLAND." HE DID NOT KNOW THAT THERE WAS MUCH THE US PRESIDENT COULD DO IN RESOLVING THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE BUT HE HOPED THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE SITUATION.

3. ON RELATIONS WITH UNIONIST POLITICIANS, THE TAOISEACH WAS ASKED WHETHER HE WAS NOT DISAPPOINTED AT THEIR CONTINUED REJECTION OF HIS OVERTURES. HE REPLIED THAT WHEN HE WAS FOREIGN MINISTER (1973-77) HE HAD VISITED THE NORTH REGULARLY AND MET A WHOLE RANGE OF POLITICIANS, THOUGH NOT MR PAISLEY WHO HAD REFUSED TO SEE HIM. HE REGRETTED THAT THE SUBSEQUENT FIANNA FAIL GOVERNMENT HAD ABANDONED THESE CONTACTS. HE ADDED THAT HE WAS NOT PREPARED TO MEET POLITICIANS (E.G. OWEN CARRON MP) WHO OPENLY ESPOUSED VIOLENCE.

4. ASKED WHETHER HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO MAKE CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION IN ORDER TO WIN THE CONFIDENCE OF THE UNIONISTS, THE TAOISEACH SAID THAT IT WAS "SELF-EVIDENT THAT THE CONSTITUTION COULD IN NO WAY BE A CONSTITUTION OF A UNITED IRELAND OR EVEN A PART OF A CONFEDERAL IRELAND. IT IS QUITE UNSUITED TO THAT IN ITS PRESENT FORM. IT WOULD HAVE TO BE RADICALLY ADAPTED." HE WOULD BE IN FAVOUR OF MODIFYING ARTICLES 2 AND 3 BECAUSE THEY HAD BEEN INTERPRETED - WRONGLY IN HIS VIEW - AS CONSTITUTING A CLAIM TO TERRITORY WHICH WAS OFFENSIVE TO THE MAJORITY TRADITION IN NORTHERN IRELAND. IN ADDITION TO CONDEMNING THE VIOLENCE OF THE IRA, DR FITZGERALD BLAMED THEM FOR THE GROWTH, IN THE REPUBLIC OF "A CONSCIOUS PARTITIONISM AND A DESIRE TO KEEP THE STATE WE HAVE AND NOT TO DO ANYTHING TO MAKE IT EASIER TO BRING NORT AND SOUTH TOGETHER."

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5. THE GENERAL TONE OF DR FITZGERALD'S REMARKS WAS REASONED AND HELPFUL AND THE INTERVIEW CONFIRMS REPORTS WHICH WE HAVE HAD FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF THE TAOISEACH THAT HE WOULD BE TRYING BOTH TO CULTIVATE THE UNIONISTS AND TO BRING HOME TO SOUTHERN OPINION THE NEED TO MAKE THE REPUBLIC MORE ACCEPTABLE TO NORTHERN UNIONISTS.

6. DR FITZGERALD'S OBJECTIVES ARE UNEXCEPTIONABLE BUT I DOUBT:-

I) WHETHER THE SORT OF MEASURES HE HAS IN MIND WILL MAKE ANY SERIOUS IMPACT ON UNIONIST OPINION. SUBJECT TO THE VIEWS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE, UNIONIST OBJECTIONS TO SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF LIFE IN THE REPUBLIC (THE CONSTITUTION, DIVORCE, CONTRACEPTION ETC.) SEEM TO BE EXCUSES RATHER THAN REASONS FOR THEIR DISLIKE OF A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP.

II) WHETHER THE IRISH ELECTORATE WISHES TO CONFRONT THE NITTY GRITTY PROBLEMS WHICH UNIFICATION WOULD ENTAIL, STARTING WITH CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION. THERE ARE UNLIKELY TO BE MANY VOTES FOR AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION AND FIANNA FAIL MIGHT RALLY TRADITIONAL NATIONALIST OPINION AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO TAMPER WITH THE CONSTITUTION WHICH DE VALERA INSTALLED.

7. BUT THIS SCEPTICISM NEED NOT PREVENT US FROM WELCOMING THE MODERATE AND REALISTIC TONE OF DR FITZGERALD'S STATEMENT.

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