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BELFAST PRESS SUMMARY, MONDAY, 23 MARCH 1992

RADIO COVERAGE

Radio Ulster this morning gave extensive coverage to a local reaction to the suggestion that the Conservative party may enter into a deal with the Ulster Unionist parties to form a coalition Government or an electoral pact after the British General Election. Liberal Democrat Leader, Paddy Ashdown, had said over the weekend that such an eventuality would set back the peace process which had been so painstakingly engaged in by the present administration and which his party supported. Speaking on "Good Morning Ulster", the Ulster Unionist James Molyneaux attacked Mr. Ashdown stating that the latter was terrified of the scenario of the Ulster Unionists being part of or holding influence over a future British administration. He denied that any pact with the Ulster Unionists would undermine the present peace process and while admitting that the Unionists would be seeking the diminution of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, he maintained that that was in any event what was envisaged in the present Brooke talks. He said the objective of the talks was a new British Irish Agreement which would cover both Islands and their relationships with one another as had been envisaged in the talks between Mr. Haughey and Mrs. Thatcher in 1980. He also claimed that Dr. Garret Fitzgerald had recently said that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a mistake. Peter Robinson of the DUP speaking on the same programme stated that he did not think any pact would undermine the peace process. Mr. John Hume, leader of the SDLP said that deals will not bring peace and said that the only way forward was for the Unionists to stand independently on their own feet and put their case forward in political talks. Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein said any such pact would not enhance the calls for peace. Dr. John Alderdice of the Alliance party did not think the pact was a good idea because he feared the "destructive" tendencies of the Unionist parties. Transcripts of the interview with Mr. Molyneaux and the remarks of Dr. Alderdice, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Hume and Mr. Adams are being forwarded to you separately.

Sinn Fein has accused the NIO of meddling in the politics of the British General Election claiming that pressure had been brought to bear on Unionist and Workers Party Candidates in West Belfast to withdraw to give Dr. Joe Hendron of the SDLP a clear run against their party's leader, Gerry Adams.

Police are investigating reports of a shooting in the Springfield road area of West Belfast last night. A gang of masked men searched a house and fired a shot as they were leaving. No one was injured. The men claimed, apparently, to have been from the IRA but Sinn Fein denounced the attack as an attempted sectarian murder.