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PRESIDENT' S VISIT TO BRITAIN

26 - 28 MAY 1993

Wednesday 26 May

- 08.40 President and Mr. Robinson arrive Dublin Airport.
- 09.00 President and party depart Dublin Airport for London Heathrow by Aer Lingus Flight EI 156.
- 10.10 Arrive London Heathrow.  
Greeted by Ambassador and Foreign Office representative.
- 10.15 Depart Heathrow for Oxford.
- 11.15 Arrive Oxford.
- 15.30 Depart Oxford for Embassy, London.
- 17.00 Arrive Embassy - rest period.
- 19.15 Depart Embassy for Irish Post Awards Dinner at Royal Lancaster Hotel.

**Black Tie/Evening Dress**

- 19.30 Arrive Royal Lancaster Hotel for reception.
- 22.30 Depart Hotel for Embassy.  
President and Mr. Robinson, Ms. Rosney and SDU overnight at Embassy.  
(Remainder of Party overnight at the Carton Towers Hotel.)

Thursday, 27 May

Morning Private

12.30 Private Luncheon at Embassy with Ambassador

14.00 Depart Embassy for Camden Irish Centre.

14.30 Arrive Camden Irish Centre  
Meeting with Irish Community Representatives

15.00 Depart Camden Irish Centre for Embassy

15.30 Arrive at Embassy - rest period

16.50 Depart Embassy for Courtesy Call on Queen Elizabeth II

17.00 Arrive Buckingham Palace

17.40 Return to Embassy

17.50 Arrive Embassy - rest period

19.20 Depart Embassy for Dinner at Royal Academy of Arts,  
Piccadilly

White Tie/Evening Dress

19.35 Arrive Royal Academy

20.00 Dinner Commences

23.00 Depart Royal Academy of Arts Dinner for Embassy

23.15 Arrive Embassy

(President and Mr. Robinson, Ms. Rosney and SDU  
overnight at Embassy : Remainder of Party overnight  
at the Carlton Towers Hotel)

Friday, 28 May

10.00 Depart Embassy for Heathrow Airport

10.50 Arrive Heathrow Airport

Farewell by Ambassador and Foreign Office  
representative

11.05 Depart Heathrow for Dublin by Aer Lingus Flight EI  
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12.15 Arrive Dublin Airport

**MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION ACCOMPANYING  
THE PRESIDENT AND MR. ROBINSON**

- I. The President
- II. Mr. Robinson
- III. Mr. Peter Ryan, Secretary to the President
- IV. Mr. Brian MacCarthy, Ass. Secretary, Dept. of the Taoiseach
- V. Ms. Brid Rosney, Special Advisor to the President
- VI. Mr. Charles Sheehan, Deputy Chief of Protocol
- VII. Mr. Tony Martin, SDU

[Mr. William Robinson - Fly to London and back with the party; Oxford Conferring,  
Irish Post dinner.]

**IN BRITAIN**

Mr. Joseph Small, Ambassador of Ireland

Mrs. Mary Small

(Other Embassy staff, as appropriate)

## VISIT OF PRESIDENT TO BRITAIN

### OVERVIEW NOTE

#### 1. Political Overview

The succession of ill-fortune which has dogged this Government in its first year of office continued this month. On 6 May, in the first by-election of this parliament, it lost the hitherto safe seat of Newbury with a massive swing of over 28% to the Liberal Democrats. On the same day, in local elections, the Conservatives ended up in control of only one English or Welsh county. These were the worst local election results since British local Government was reorganised in 1973.

The Prime Minister has sought to put the best possible face on these setbacks but he was obliged to acknowledge publicly that his Government had been given "a bloody nose". In a keynote speech to the Scottish Conservative Party Conference in Perth on 14 May, he strove to raise the party's flagging spirits and to put the troubles of the past year behind him, focusing on the signs that the British economy may finally be climbing out of recession. Since the electoral setbacks the Government has also retreated from a number of unpopular policy positions, most notably, on testing in schools and deficiencies in sentencing mechanisms in the Criminal Justice Act. Behind the scenes backbenchers, especially those representing counties where the Conservatives have lost control, have been vocal in their criticism of the Prime Minister and his Government. They have made clear their wish for changes, including an early-reshuffle. In a parliamentary situation where the Government is dependent on a majority, now reduced to 18, and where there is a hard core of independent-minded MPs ready to defy the Whips and vote against the Government, not just on Europe, the Prime Minister has little option but to acknowledge the setbacks, listen to his critics and act accordingly.

All, however, is not doom and gloom for the Government. In the past few weeks there have been several encouraging signs to suggest that the long awaited green shoots of economic recovery may finally be visible. A further unexpected drop in the unemployment figures and a marked slow-down in earning growth were eagerly seized on by the Government this week to help reduce the impact of the electoral losses at Newbury and in the local election. The fall in the monthly unemployment figures also helped offset doubts about the strength of the recovery, especially as earlier figures showed a drop in retail sales and manufacturing output. Government optimism was further boosted by news that the average earnings growth hit a 25 year low in the twelve month period up to March on the strength of lower pay settlements. Labour continue to cast doubts on the sustainability of the recovery. They accuse the Government of massaging the unemployment figures to suit their own ends, and of placing undue reliance on seasonal statistics. The overall picture, however, suggests that there is a solid basis for the Government's optimism and if the recovery is sustained their hope is that the disasters of the past year will, by the time of the party Conference season in the autumn, be just a distant memory.

Another cause for quiet optimism for the Government is the fact that the end of the tunnel is now finally in sight for the Maastricht Bill. On 20 May, the Government won the vote on the third reading, although 41 Tory MPs defied a three line Whip to make common cause with Labour rebels, thereby making it the biggest Tory rebellion in the long rebels, thereby making it the biggest Tory rebellion in the long running campaign against the Treaty. It has to be said that Labour, who abstained in protest against the opt-out clause on the Social Chapter, had 71 dissenters, more than a quarter of the party's 269 MPs. The Bill now goes to the Lords and the Government, for the moment at least, can turn its full attention to priority items on the domestic agenda. The party hierarchy will also try to heal the bitter divisions



which marked the protracted passage of the Bill through the Commons. The so-called Euro-phoebes operated as a party within a party with their own HQ, whips and promotional literature. Despite the healing phrases being put about by both sides now that the Bill has moved temporarily out of the Commons, it is clear that dissent has become a way of life for many Conservative backbenchers and the bitter divisions within the party may not be so easily healed.

The attitude of Conservative backbenchers will be an important focus of attention as the Government seeks within the coming weeks to press ahead with its legislative programme. There are several contentious areas where the Government, faced with a combined opposition, will need a full muster of support from its backbenchers if it is not to face embarrassing defeats on important policy measures. There are, however, ominous signs that this may not be forthcoming. There is, for example, great unease about hints that the Government may be planning to reduce the costs of National Health service prescriptions by charging pensioners and young children. This is intended as part of a cost-cutting campaign to curb an alarming rise in public spending. Any tinkering with the National Health service is a particularly emotive issue and Labour has accused the Government of planning a tax on illness. Several Government backbenchers have echoed this charge and made it clear that they will oppose the Government if it goes ahead with this proposal. Similarly, on Rail privatisation, an issue likely to arise during the coming week, the Government is likely to have to face down a mini revolt from its backbenchers over controversial proposals to privatise British Rail.

These are only two examples of the potential pitfalls facing the Government as it now seeks to develop its legislative programme, free from the distractions of Maastricht. All the signs are that they will not have an easy time of it over the coming months although their chances will be greatly improved if the signs of economic recovery are sustained into the Autumn and beyond.



2. Visits to Ireland by members of the Royal Family

The only recent visits by members of the British Royal Family to Ireland have been by the Princess Royal and Prince Edward. The Princess Royal paid a working visit to Dublin on 4 February 1993. She attended a meeting of the International Council of the Chartered Institute of Transport. During her visit, she met with the Minister for Transport, Brian Cowan TD. She has also visited Ireland in a private capacity for various equestrian functions, most recently on 8 September 1991 for the International Equestrian Federation competition. Prince Edward attended in Lansdowne Road for the Ireland/Zimbabwe Rugby World Cup match on 6 October 1991. Ireland won! The President met the Princess Royal at Murrayfield in January 1993. Whenever we meet Prince Charles, he invariably says that he would love to visit Ireland. He is, of course, a regular visitor to Northern Ireland. Princess Diana has also been there. Early last year she said to me, with obvious ignorance of or disregard for constitutional niceties: "I was in your country yesterday!"

Ambassador, London

21 May, 1993

**DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS****URGENT FAX PRESS RELEASE****URGENT FAX PRESS RELEASE**

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**Press Release****Visit by the President to Britain**

The President, Mary Robinson, and Mr. Robinson will visit Britain from 26-28 May 1993. The President will receive the Degree of Doctor of Civil Law by Diploma from Oxford University on 26 May and become an Honorary Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford. That evening, she will present the "Irish Post Awards", celebrating the achievements of the Irish in Britain, at a dinner in London.

On 27 May, the President will pay a courtesy call on H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, at the Queen's invitation. Earlier that day, the President will meet representatives of the Irish Community at the London Irish Centre, Camden and, that evening, she will be guest of honour at the annual dinner of the Royal Academy of Arts.

21 May 1993