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MR ANCRAM
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MR D FELL
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MR WOOD
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MR J STEELE
MR M WILLIAMS
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COPENHAGEN FOR PRIME MINISTER'S PARTY

MIPT: PRESIDENT ROBINSON'S VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND,
18/19 JUNE:
IRISH PRESS SUMMARY

SUMMARY

1. MIXED VIEWS ON WHETHER WEST BELFAST VISIT SHOULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE. ATTENTION NOW SHIFTED FROM MERITS OF VISIT AND POSSIBLE RIFT BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS TO RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESIDENT AND NATURE OF EXCHANGES BETWEEN THEM PRIOR TO THE VISIT. ALLEGATIONS OF A BRITISH PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN.

DETAIL

2. PRESIDENT ROBINSON'S VISIT TO WEST BELFAST HAS DOMINATED THE WEEKEND PAPERS. THE STORY REMAINS ON THE FRONT PAGES TODAY (21 JUNE). ATTENTION INITIALLY FOCUSED ON THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF THE VISIT AND ON A POTENTIAL RIFT BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS, BUT IS NOW FOCUSED MAINLY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESIDENT AND ON HOW FORCEFUL THE TAOISEACH AND TANAISTE WERE WITH THE PRESIDENT IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT.

3. BOTH THE IRISH TIMES AND, EVEN MORE STRONGLY, THE IRISH PRESS REACTED POSITIVELY TO THE VISIT. THE IRISH TIMES SUGGESTED IN ITS 19 JUNE EDITORIAL THAT 'THOSE WHO COMPLAINED BECAUSE SHE WENT TO WEST BELFAST AT ALL - AND THAT WHILE THERE SHE MET MEMBERS OF SINN FEIN - DISPLAY A PAVLOVIAN RESPONSE TO ALL THINGS POLITICAL AND A FAILURE TO APPRECIATE EITHER THE HUMANITY OR THE SUBTLETY OF THE PRESIDENT'. HER GREETING OF ADAMS 'WAS A COURTESY WHICH ROBBED IRA PROPAGANDISTS OF THE ADVANTAGE THEY MIGHT HAVE GAINED FROM A SNUB.' THE IRISH PRESS CLAIMED THE SAME DAY THAT 'IT IS ALAS MR (PETER) ROBINSON - AND SAD TO SAY THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE - WHO ARE DISGRACING THEMSELVES WITH THEIR ALMOST HYSTERICAL REACTION' AND ARGUED THAT THE VISIT WAS A MUCH NEEDED MORALE BOOST FOR THE EMBATTLED PEOPLE OF WEST BELFAST.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND THE IRISH INDEPENDENT AND ITS SISTER NEWSPAPER THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT (WHICH HAVE THE LARGEST CIRCULATION) OPPOSED THE VISIT. UNDER A SIMPLE HEADLINE 'MISTAKE' THE IRISH INDEPENDENT'S 19 JUNE EDITORIAL ARGUED THAT

NO SIGNALS SHOULD BE SENT OUT WHICH SUGGEST THAT THE DISAPPROVAL, SHARED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE, IS OTHER THAN TOTAL. THE MEETING MUST NOT BE TREATED AS A MISTAKE' AND IT ACCUSED THE IRISH GOVERNMENT OF HIDING 'BEHIND THE SKIRTS OF WESTMINSTER'. THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT DESCRIBED THE VISIT AS 'A SERIOUS ERROR OF JUDGEMENT' CLAIMING THAT SINN FEIN HAD SCORED ANOTHER PROPAGANDA VICTORY. A PARTICULARLY HARD HITTING PIECE BY THE CONTROVERSIAL JOURNALIST EAMON DUNPHY ON THE FRONT PAGE DESCRIBED THE PRESIDENT AS 'A VERY FOOLISH WOMAN: THE PRISONER, IT WOULD APPEAR, OF HER OWN CONCEIT, UNFIT TO BE THE GUARDIAN OF OUR CONSTITUTION WHICH MR ADAMS DOES NOT RECOGNISE.'

5. NEWSPAPERS TODAY (21 JUNE) FOCUS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE GOVERNMENT AND ON WHAT MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN SAID IN DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE TAOISEACH AND TANAISTE IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT. AN IRISH PRESS PIECE UNDER HEADLINE 'STRAIN OVER ARAS CLASH' REPORTS COALITION SOURCES AS SAYING THAT RELATIONS HAD BEEN 'ALTERED' AND THAT ANY FUTURE VISITS ABROAD OR TO NORTHERN IRELAND BY THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE SCRUTINISED VERY CLOSELY BY THE GOVERNMENT. A SEPARATE REPORT IN THE PAPER SUGGESTS THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ARE ENGAGED IN A 'DIRTY TRICKS CAMPAIGN' AIMED AT DISCREDITING THE PRESIDENT'S ROLE IN THE AFFAIR. THE IRISH TIMES LEADS WITH THE REPORT THAT THE TAOISEACH HAD RESISTED UK OBJECTIONS TO THE VISIT, ALTHOUGH IT ALSO SAYS THAT AS A RESULT OF 'FRANK' DISCUSSION WITH THE TANAISTE THE PRESIDENT CUT THE WEST BELFAST VISIT MORE OR LESS BY HALF. HOWEVER THE IRISH INDEPENDENT'S FRONT PAGE STORY IS THAT THE TAOISEACH DID INDEED TRY TO STOP THE VISIT AND THAT BOTH HE AND THE TANAISTE HAD RELAYED THE 'STRONG RESERVATIONS' EXPRESSED BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT.

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