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MIPT: FIANNA FAIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 7 MARCH: NORTHERN
IRELAND AND ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: COMMENT

1. THE TAOISEACH'S SPEECH BEARS ALL THE HALLMARKS OF HIS OWN THINKING: A DISQUISITION ON THE 1920 GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND ACT, EMPHASIS ON NORTH/SOUTH ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION, HOPE THAT A EUROPEAN CONTEXT WILL FACILITATE A SOLUTION AND A DIRECT APPEAL TO UNIONISTS. HIS REFERENCE TO LEMASS, REGARDED AS THE ARCHITECT OF PRAGMATIC CO-OPERATION WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT IN THE EARLY 1960'S, SYMBOLISES THIS APPROACH.
2. WHAT IS INTERESTING IS HIS HEAVY EMPHASIS ON PEOPLE, RATHER THAN THE SHIBBOLETHS OF THE PAST: THAT WITHOUT POPULAR CONSENT, NO POLITICAL SOLUTION IS POSSIBLE AND THAT PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE IS NEEDED, ON BOTH SIDES. NEITHER HAUGHEY NOR MANY OTHERS IN FIANNA FAIL WOULD HAVE SO OPENLY ACCEPTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT UNIONISTS HAVE A RIGHT TO CHOOSE WHETHER OR NOT TO REGARD THEMSELVES AS IRISH.
3. CONFERENCE REACTIONS SUGGESTED THAT THE TAOISEACH AND ANDREWS ARE AHEAD OF THE RANK AND FILE OF THE PARTY. A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE AUDIENCE FAILED TO APPLAUD ANDREWS' CONDEMNATION OF VIOLENCE, AND PLAINLY OPPOSED DELETING ARTICLES 2 AND 3. THE TAOISEACH'S POINTS ON NORTHERN IRELAND WERE APPLAUDED, BUT WITHOUT MUCH ENTHUSIASM. IT IS TOO EARLY TO JUDGE HOW MUCH TRADITIONAL REPUBLICAN SENTIMENT IN FIANNA FAIL MIGHT TIE HIS HANDS IN STRANDS II AND III, BUT EVEN IF WE GET THERE IT WILL NOT BE PLAIN SAILING.

BLATHERWICK

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ADDITIONAL

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