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APPOINTMENT OF NEW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

SUMMARY

1. THE APPOINTMENT OF MR HURD AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND IS THE LEAD ITEM IN THIS MORNING'S DUBLIN NEWSPAPERS. REACTIONS ARE CAUTIOUS, BUT NOT UNFAVOURABLE.

DETAIL

2. THE "IRISH TIMES" LEADS WITH AN ARTICLE HEADED "HURD GETS FIRST POST IN CABINET AS NI SECRETARY" IN WHICH DAVID MCKITTRICK SAYS THAT HIS LACK OF PREVIOUS CABINET EXPERIENCE "RAISED DOUBTS ABOUT WHETHER HE WILL CARRY ENOUGH POLITICAL WEIGHT TO PRESS FOR THE FAR-REACHING INITIATIVE ON THE NORTH WHICH THE IRISH GOVERNMENT IS CURRENTLY ADVOCATING". HE ADDS:

"APART FROM SUNNINGDALE, MR HURD HAS SHOWN NO INTEREST IN NORTHERN IRELAND IN HIS CAREER TO DATE, APART FROM ONE EPISODE IN 1978 WHEN HE TOOK PART IN BBC NORTHERN IRELAND'S "SPOTLIGHT" PROGRAMME. DURING A VISIT TO BELFAST HE MET SINN FEIN PRESIDENT MR GERRY ADAMS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UDA".

ELSEWHERE, MCKITTRICK SUGGESTS THAT THE MEETING WITH ADAMS IS ONE OF A NUMBER OF "INITIAL DISADVANTAGES" WHICH WILL ACCOMPANY MR HURD TO BELFAST. ED MOLONEY ("IRISH TIMES" NORTHERN EDITOR) DEVOTES A WHOLE ARTICLE TO THE MEETING, AND ANOTHER (HEADED "ANXIETY AND CAUTION IN NORTH") TO REACTIONS IN THE NORTH TO THE APPOINTMENT: IE "ANXIETY IN THE RANKS OF THE OUP, CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM AMONG SOME IN THE SDLP AND IN THE ALLIANCE PARTY, EQUANIMITY IN THE DUP AND SCORN FROM SINN FEIN".



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3. THE ''INDEPENDENT'' LEADS ON THE STATEMENT (SEE MIFT) ISSUED LAST NIGHT BY THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AFTER A MEETING WITH JOHN HUME, UNDER THE HEADLINE ''GOVERNMENT STANCE AFFIRMED AS HURD GOES NORTH''. OF MR HURD'S APPOINTMENT IT SAYS: ''THE CHOICE WAS SEEN IN WESTMINSTER LAST NIGHT AS A SIGN THAT THE PROBLEMS OF THE NORTH HAVE MOVED SLIGHTLY HIGHER UP MRS THATCHER'S LIST OF PRIORITIES.'' ANOTHER FRONT PAGE ARTICLE, HEADED ''NEW NI MAN GETS MIXED RECEPTION'', SAYS THAT THE APPOINTMENT WAS GREETED WITH ''BOTH GUARDED WELCOME AND OUTRIGHT ATTACK'' IN THE NORTH. THE INSIDE PAGES CARRY FURTHER ARTICLES: ''HIGH-FLYING HURD THATCHER'S ACE'' (NICHOLAS LEONARD) AND ''LOYALIST UNEASE GREET'S NORTH'S NEW SECRETARY'' (PETER MCKENNA).

4. THE ''IRISH PRESS'', UNDER THE HEADLINE ''TORY 'ODD COUPLE' CHOSEN FOR THE NORTH'' SAYS THAT THE APPOINTMENTS OF MR HURD AND DR BOYSON WERE SEEN AS A ''POLITICAL BALANCING ACT''. ACCORDING TO THE ''PRESS'', UNIONISTS REACTED WITH ''UNEASE AND SUSPICION'', WHILST THE SDLP GAVE ''A QUALIFIED WELCOME''. THE ''PRESS'' GIVES THE ONLY STATEMENT FROM AN IRISH POLITICIAN, QUOTING MICHAEL O'KENNEDY OF FIANNA FAIL AS SAYING ''I FOUND MR HURD VERY CONSISTENT AND EASY TO WORK WITH. HE HAD AN OPEN MIND''. LIKE THE OTHER PAPERS, THE ''PRESS'' REFERS TO MR HURD'S MEETING WITH SINN FEIN LEADERS. A PROFILE BY THEIR LONDON EDITOR, HEADED ''HURD - A SHREWD MIND BEHIND A BLANK MASK'', SPECULATES THAT MR HURD WILL ATTEND THE BIA CONFERENCE IN CAMBRIDGE.

5. EDITORIAL COMMENT IS MIXED: THE ''INDEPENDENT'' ECHOES MR HUME'S REACTION TO THE APPOINTMENT: MR HURD ''HAS THE QUALITIES FOR THE JOB BUT WILL HE BE GIVEN THE POLICIES A NORTHERN SECRETARY OF STATE NEEDS IF HE IS TO DO SOMETHING?.... MR HURD WILL NOT BE TESTED UNTIL THE THE BRITISH AND IRISH PRIME MINISTERS HAVE STARTED TO MAP OUT A ROAD FOR THE NORTH. WHAT IS DECIDED BETWEEN THEM WILL, IN THE SHORT TERM, HAVE TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY THE NEW MAN IN THE NORTH. HE MAY WISH HE HAD NEVER LEFT LONDON''. THE IRISH PRESS SEES THE APPOINTMENT AS SURPRISING. IT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT MR HURD'S INVOLVEMENT IN SUNNINGDALE CAN BE ''COUNTED AS A PLUS'', BUT SAYS THAT MR HURD IS ''ABOUT TO LAUNCH OUT ON A PATH WELL CALCULATED TO SHOW HIM EXACTLY HOW DEADLY SOME GAMES CAN BE''.

6. THE ''IRISH TIMES'' DESCRIBES MR HURD AS A MAN OF MANY PARTS'', BUT IS CAUTIOUS ABOUT HIS PROSPECTS: ''HE DOES NOT HAVE PLENIPOTENTIARY POWERS; HE IS A MEMBER OF THE BRITISH CABINET, BOUND BY GOVERNMENT POLICY AND DOMINATED BY A STUBBORN PRIME MINISTER''. IT CONCLUDES, HOWEVER:

''THIS IS A TIME FOR NEW DEPARTURES; AND A GOOD TIME TO FIT A NEW FACE TO A NEW POLICY. MR HURD HAS A CHOICE; HE CAN SERVE OUT A TERM OF OFFICE IN THE NORTH, HOPING FOR NO MORE THAN THE AVOIDANCE OF MAJOR ERRORS, OR HE CAN MAKE HIMSELF AN IMPORTANT PART OF SOMETHING DIFFERENT, SOMETHING OPEN AND IMAGINATIVE. THIS IS THE RISKY COURSE, BUT IT IS THE RIGHT COURSE FOR AN AMBITIOUS MAN, A MAN WITH A SENSE OF HISTORY, AND IT IS ALSO RIGHT IN ITSELF.''