

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, UK
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND REACTION TO CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN
AIREY NEAVE'S REJECTION OF POWER-SHARING FOR ULSTER

1. THERE WAS A PREDICTABLE DIVISION OF OPINION IN ULSTER OVER THE FEBRUARY 1 STATEMENT BY AIREY NEAVE, CONSERVATIVE SHADOW SPOKESMAN ON NORTHERN IRELAND. NEAVE'S SPEECH TO THE CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE AT SURBITON WAS DESCRIBED BY THE BBC AS INDICATING A POSSIBLE BREAK IN THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE LABOUR AND CONSERVATIVE PARTY ON NORTHERN IRELAND. HIS CONTENTION THAT "THANKS TO THE IRISH GOVERNMENT, A POWER-SHARING ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS NO LONGER PRACTICAL POLITICS" WAS DESCRIBED BY SDLP LEADER GERRY FITT AS "THE BIG TORY DOUBLE-CROSS, BUT THEY WILL HAVE TO BE MADE VERY MUCH AWARE NOW THAT ANY PLAN TO PUT THE UNIONISTS BACK INTO POWER IN A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT IS A NON-STARTER." AUSTIN CURRIE, THE SDLP CHIEF WHIP TOOK THIS STATEMENT A STEP FURTHER. THOUGH CALLING FOR AN "URGENT MEETING TO CLEAR THE AIR WITH THE TORY LEADERSHIP" HE ADDED THAT "IF SUCH A POLICY IS EVER IMPLEMENTED NORTHERN IRELAND WILL BE UNGOVERNABLE AND THE SDLP WILL PARTICIPATE IN MAKING IT UNGOVERNABLE."

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2. LOCAL OFFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY REACTION TO MR. NEAVE'S REMARKS WAS GUARDED. HARRY WEST, THE PARTY LEADER SAID SIMPLY THAT THE "STATEMENT WAS OF GREAT INTEREST TO US." HE INDICATED A HESITANCY TO SAY MORE BECAUSE OF MR. NEAVE'S FURTHER REMARKS IN THE SAME SURBITON ADDRESS THAT "A NEW SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS NEEDED FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL SECTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY." IN RESPONSE TO THIS

MR. WEST INDICATED THAT "WE WILL HAVE TO BE VERY CAREFUL IN LOOKING AT WHAT HE MEANS BY A NEW SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT."

3. OFFICIAL UNIONIST REACTION IN PARLIAMENT CAME FROM JAMES MOLYNEAUX, THE PARTY LEADER IN THE COMMONS. HE DENIED THAT THE STATEMENT WAS THE RESULT OF ANY DEAL WITH THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OVER APPROVAL FOR AN UPPER TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE DROPPING OF POWER-SHARING "BUT ADMITTED THAT OFFICIAL UNIONIST AND CONSERVATIVES WERE COMING CLOSER TOGETHER. HE ADDED THAT THE UNIONISTS "HAVE ALWAYS HAD MORE IN COMMON WITH THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY THAN THE LABOUR PARTY."

4. REACTION FROM OTHER PARTIES WAS SIMILARLY VARIED. ALLIANCE PARTY LEADER OLIVER NAPIER DESCRIBED MR. NEAVE'S REMARKS AS "VERY REGRETTABLE" AND ACCUSED THE CONSERVATIVES OF "MAKING A DESPERATE BID - IN ANTICIPATION OF A CLOSE FINISH IN THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION." PETER ROBINSON SECRETARY OF IAN PAISLEY'S DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY STATED THAT, IF MR. NEAVE'S REMARKS INDICATED THAT "A GLIMMER OF LIGHT HAS PENETRATED TORY THINKING THEN IT IS TO BE WELCOMED." HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT "WE HAVE NO REASON TO PUT TRUST IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AS IT HAS BETRAYED ULSTER LOYALISTS BEFORE AND IF IT WAS EXPEDIENT WOULD DO SO AGAIN."

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