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NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL REVIEW : 22 NOVEMBER - 5 DECEMBER 1982

A: INTRODUCTION

1. In the Republic of Ireland elections to the 24th Dail took place on 24 November. Neither Fianna Fail nor Fine Gael won an overall majority but it seems likely that Dr Garret FitzGerald will become the next Taoiseach. On 30 November the Secretary of State addressed the Assembly members on security.

B: NORTHERN IRELAND

2. In an emergency debate on security in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 22 November a UUP resolution proposed by Harold McCusker MP urged the Assembly to proceed to no other business until it received the "firmest reassurances" from the Government that terrorism would be brought to a swift end. Alleging that the UUP motion was designed to bring the Assembly to a standstill the DUP and Alliance parties tabled their own amendments and, following a long and at times acrimonious debate when it became clear that agreement among the parties could not be reached, it was decided in a behind-the-scenes move between the Speaker and the three party leaders that the Secretary of State should be invited to address the Assembly on security.

3. The Secretary of State addressed the Assembly on Tuesday 30 November and announced that he had secured resources to increase the strengths of the RUC by 500 and the RUC Reserve by 300, with the addition of a further 336 civilians for back-up help and supporting jobs. But he told the Assembly that the only real weapon to defeat terrorism in Ulster was the Assembly. A continued political vacuum told the world that the men of violence were having their way. The evolution of legitimate politics in Northern Ireland, slow and often frustrating as it may be, was the greatest moral weapon in the armoury against violence and crime.

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4. John Cushnahan, the Alliance candidate for the chairmanship of the education committee, revealed on 2 December that Harold McCusker MP (UUP) had made it clear that he could not consider a Catholic for this post which would be dealing with the State education system in Northern Ireland. Mr Chusnahan said he found the position intolerable, the Alliance Party was non-sectarian and had come to the Assembly to make it work, but if these sort of issues continued the Party would have to reassess its attitude to the Assembly and in particular whether it would be a forum for progress and political stability. Mr McCusker called the revelations "a total breach of confidence and a deliberate exploitation of the situation" and when later interviewed on UTV pointed out that "whether we like it or not, education is a sectarian issue in Northern Ireland. It has been made a sectarian issue by the insistence of the Catholic Hierarchy on controlling the education of their children."
  
5. UUP Assembly member for North Down, Robert McCartney, argued at a meeting of Fine Gael's youth wing in Dublin on 27 November (which was also addressed by the Fine Gael leader, Dr Garret FitzGerald) that institutions established within an all-Ireland context were an infringement of the sovereignty of the United Kingdom: "There is no consent to a United Ireland in the foreseeable future. It is a fantasy which, if persisted with, will destroy not just Northern Ireland but the whole of Ireland."
  
6. In an RTE radio interview on 5 December John Hume (SDLP leader) made it clear that he did not like Northern Ireland being used as a party political topic in the Republic, and suggested that if the parties in the Republic, who believed in a coming together of the two parts of Ireland, could not have a consensus among themselves "then there is very little chance of getting consensus in the island as a whole". Referring to his proposals for a Council for a New Ireland Mr Hume suggested that it was in the interests of everyone that an acceptable solution be worked out to bring peace and stability to the whole island of Ireland but in any new arrangements there would have to be a proper share of power for the Northern part of the country.

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C: REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

7. Elections to the 24th Dail were held on 24 November 1982. Seats were distributed as follows:-

		(February 1982 General Election)
Fianna Fail	75	(81)
Fine Gael	70	(63)
Labour	16	(15)
Workers' Party	2	( 3)
Others	3	( 4)

The results once again failed to produce an overall majority for either Fianna Fail or Fine Gael and left the Labour Party holding the balance of power. Dick Spring (Labour leader) and Dr Garret FitzGerald (Fine Gael leader) have been holding a series of meetings to discuss the terms on which the Labour Party could enter coalition with Fine Gael or support a minority Fine Gael administration. A Labour Party Conference on 12 December will decide the party's policy. Whatever the outcome, it seems likely that Dr FitzGerald will be elected Taoiseach when the Dail meets on 14 December.

8. Despite media speculation to the contrary, Charles Haughey was endorsed as Fianna Fail's nominee for Taoiseach when the Parliamentary Party met on 2 December. Afterwards Mr Haughey criticised as "unsavoury" the leaders of Fine Gael and Labour "being closetted together at a secret and clandestine venue working out a deal for Government".

D: MISCELLANEOUS

9. The invitation from the Chairman of the Greater London Council, Ken Livingstone, to Sinn Fein Assembly members, Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison, to discuss with the Labour members of the Council

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"the withdrawal of British troops and the re-unification of Ireland" and to also address a group of Labour MPs at the House of Commons was widely condemned by both Unionist politicians and the Conservative members of the Council. Richard Brew (leader of the GLC Conservative members) said on 5 December that he had not been told of the visit and accused the Labour councillors of staging a stunt "designed to create disturbance and trouble" and of "once again sticking their noses into matters which are nothing to do with the GLC". Jim Molyneux MP (UUP leader) called it "disgraceful" and "quite monstrous" to invite Sinn Fein members for "cosy chats and discussions" but Harold McCusker MP (UUP) commented that the invitation was representative of Mr Livingstone's pro-republican stance which he had promoted since his election as GLC chairman.

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

9 December 1982

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