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PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - M-2

c.c. PS/Mr. Scott (L)
 PS/PUS (LAB) - M-5
 1. Mr. Bloomfield - M-6
 Mr. Brennan
 Mr. Stephens - M-8
 Mr. Bell
 2. AT 31K

ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT: DRAFT SPEECH FOR PRIME MINISTER

At the request of the Cabinet Office we have drafted a speech for use by the Prime Minister in opening the debate on any Anglo-Irish agreement. We have sent a copy of the draft in its present form to Cabinet Office. But we have told them that it is subject to the Secretary of State's views.

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D. CHESTERTON
24 October 1985



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DRAFT SPEECH FOR THE PRIME MINISTER

Introduction

Last week, Mr. Speaker, Garrett FitzGerald, the Irish Taoiseach, and I signed a new Anglo-Irish agreement. This unique agreement opens up a new phase in relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It extends and deepens the relationship between us. And it offers the hope of an important step towards reconciliation between the two communities in Northern Ireland.

No single Agreement can resolve the problems of Northern Ireland - tragic, deep-rooted and complex as they are. But this Agreement sets us on the way. It points to a new common approach - and new agreed solutions - to some of the problems that we face.

Mr. speaker, I want first to describe what the Agreement does. Then perhaps, in view of some of the wilder claims that we have heard, I will make clear what it does not do.

First, the Agreement incorporates for the first time in a formally binding international accord a recognition by the Irish Government that the status of Northern Ireland will remain unchanged as long as that is the wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Also for the first time, it incorporates Irish formal recognition that the present wish of the majority is for no change in that status.

The Agreement then recognises the interest of the Irish Republic

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in the affairs of the North. That interest has always existed. The nationalist community in Northern Ireland and its constitutional elected representatives have long looked to Dublin to give authority to their views. That is a reality. It is not going to change and we cannot pretend it does not exist. In this Agreement we recognise that reality. And we seek to channel it in a way that will help both our countries. For in the past the Irish interest has at times been expressed in critical or negative terms. That does not help us. It does not help the Irish Government. It certainly does not help harmony between the communities of Northern Ireland.

So the Agreement gives a formal role to the Irish Government in advancing views and proposals on matters relating to Northern Ireland so that they can be put constructively and methodically. And it commits both Governments to determined efforts to resolve any differences between us. Finally, it also commits our two Governments to work closer together in a wide range of security, economic and social matters.

I will look at the Agreement in more detail in a moment. But first I must say something about what is not in the Agreement. It does not affect the constitutional status of Northern Ireland or set us on some imagined slippery slope to Irish unity. I regard it as dangerously irresponsible nonsense to claim that it does. Anyone with eyes in their head can read Article 1. That repeats the provision in Section 1 of the Northern Ireland

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Constitutional Act - that Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom as long as a majority there so wish. That again is a recognition of reality. The guarantee for the majority lies in the fact that they are a majority. The principle of consent must prevail in Northern Ireland. It is a principle that neither I nor any Government led by me will forsake.

The second thing I want to make clear is that the Agreement does not detract from British - or for that matter Irish - sovereignty. I have heard all kinds of ingenious definitions of that term. But no amount of twisting or turning of words can result in this Agreement abrogating our sovereignty. We, the United Kingdom Government accountable to Parliament, remain responsible for the government of Northern Ireland. Yes, we will listen to the views of the Irish Government. Yes, we will make every effort to accommodate those views. We do not claim a monopoly of wisdom - particularly when struggling with issues as important and complex as those facing us in Northern Ireland. We welcome help. And we particularly welcome help from a country whose political, economic, security and cultural history is so closely intertwined with our own. But at the end of the day the decisions must be made by us. That is the essence of sovereignty.

Mr. Speaker, I mention what the Agreement is not in no sense of apology. This House will know me better than that. I mention it because I believe that this Agreement is too important to have its significance distorted. It does not set Northern Ireland on a path to some new constitutional future. Rather, it

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is aimed at helping both communities in Northern Ireland accept and identify with the apparatus of government through a measured development of our relations with the Republic whose interests are in so many ways identical to our own.

I describe the Agreement as a measured development of our relations. It was reached only after long and careful consideration of how to move forward in Northern Ireland where for too many years we have failed to light the beacon of hope for the future. At the heart of that failure has been a failure to reconcile the two communities in Northern Ireland.

On the one hand the Unionist community, firmly loyal both to the Crown and to the United Kingdom. They represent a proud tradition of devotion to the Union which everyone in these islands should respect - and which this Agreement does respect. They have a right to our unswerving support. They have a right to be secure in the knowledge that we will not try to force them into new constitutional arrangements against their will. The agreement confirms that security.

On the other hand is the nationalist community, who think of themselves as Irish in terms of their identity, their social and cultural traditions and their political aspirations. This House can respect their identity too - and their aspirations, even though we may not yet see the time when they can be fulfilled.

It is reconciliation between these two communities that is the

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goal of this Agreement. And it is a goal that the people of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic - who have together watched with sorrow and horror the agonies of Northern Ireland over the past one and a half decades - will, I am sure, whole-heartedly support.

The Agreement

Mr. Speaker, much of what I have just said is summed up in the preamble to the Agreement. It sets out our joint commitment to work for reconciliation; our wholesale rejection of violence; our recognition and respect for the separate identities in Northern Ireland; our acceptance of the right of each to pursue their aspirations by peaceful means.

Article 1 of the Agreement contains an affirmation by our two Governments that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of the majority of the people there. And it recognises that the present wish of the majority is for no change in that status. It is clear for all those who wish to see that this Agreement presents no threat whatsoever to Unionists' heartfelt desire to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Article 2 develops and builds upon the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council that was set up after my summit in November 1981 with Mr. Haughey. It establishes an Intergovernmental Committee concerned with relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic in respect of Northern Ireland. This

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Committee will deal on a regular basis with political, security and legal matters, including the administration of justice, and the promotion of cross-border co-operation, including security co-operation. The matters of concern to the Committee are spelt out in Articles 4 to 10.

This House, Mr. Speaker, is sufficiently aware of the mettle of this Government to know that we would not have consented to any arrangement that would give another country authority over any part of the United Kingdom. Responsibility for decisions and administration will continue to rest with Her Majesty's Government who will remain accountable to Parliament. This is a fundamental point. There can be no misunderstanding.

One point of detail in the Agreement is worth a special mention. The Committee will concern itself with the matters set out in the Agreement as long as there is no return to devolution in Northern Ireland. If devolution is restored - and the Agreement makes clear both Governments' commitment to finding an acceptable form of devolved government - then those matters that become the responsibility of the devolved government will no longer fall to the Intergovernmental Committee. We hope that the Agreement will encourage the elected representatives of both communities to come together to form a local administration acceptable to both.

And before I leave the Agreement I should draw the particular attention of the House to Articles 9 and 10 which promote cross-border co-operation. No-one in this House will, I believe,

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question the desirability of exploring ways of improving co-operation between our two Governments - particularly perhaps in the field of security - or the priority which will be given to this aspect of the work of the Committee.

Finally, Article 10 records our intention to co-operate on economic and social development. It also refers to the possibility of securing international support for this work. I am deeply gratified at the US President's offer of financial assistance. That act of great generosity represents a massive endorsement of what our two Governments are trying to achieve.

The Benefits

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this Agreement holds out two main prizes. Both are valuable. That is why I have given the long negotiations my closest personal attention. I can think of few areas more worthy of my interest.

The first of the prizes is the development of our relationship with the Republic. I have already referred to that. The process begun in 1981 has been significantly extended. Both our countries will benefit.

But also there is the prize for the two communities in Northern Ireland. I know that the agreement is being represented in some quarters as one-sided, as a threat somehow to Unionists. But I want to make a plea to anybody who may be alarmed by such claims. Look at the agreement on its merits. Look at the balance it strikes. Look at what it really has to offer. I believe that

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any objective observer will come to see it not as favouring one side or the other, but as benefitting Northern Ireland as a whole - and therefore all the people of these islands. Let me explain why.

It restates and clarifies the attitude of both Governments to Northern Ireland's constitutional status. That banishes any lingering uncertainty on that score. That must be in the interests of stability.

It promises closer co-operation between the two Governments. That cannot but be helpful. In the security field, particularly, it is invaluable in making further progress in ridding Northern Ireland of the menace of terrorism.

It ensures that Irish views reach us in a constructive, methodical way - not, as has sometimes happened in the past, as critical responses to events where neither side has properly understood the position of the other. I cannot think that that will not be an improvement.

It recognises the identity, rights and aspirations of both communities. It acknowledges that there can be divergence in what each community wants in the long term. And it commits us both to seeking an approach that accommodates that divergence rather than seeking to steamroller one side into acceptance of the others view. Can anyone find fault in that?

Above all, the Agreement offers a guarantee to the minority in

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Northern Ireland that their views will not go by default and that they have a vital role to play. I believe that this is the way to assure the nationalist community that government deserves their support, to bring them to play their part in confronting and dealing with the host of difficult issues that exist in Northern Ireland. And if we succeed in that aim, it is not just the minority who benefit. All in Northern Ireland benefit from the sea-change that will occur in inter-communal relations as the two communities work together for a more stable, peaceful and prosperous society. In the last analysis, that is the greatest prize to be won.

General Policy

But Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, this Agreement cannot work miracles. It is not on its own going to be enough. I make no such claims for it. Nor, I know, would the Taoiseach.

No, it must be accompanied by a considered, determined and co-ordinated drive to deal with the other issues that face us in Northern Ireland. And that drive must rest on clear and consistent principles of justice, equity and fairness. In all we do we must insist on observance of the rule of law, protection of individual rights, and respect for the needs of the two communities in Northern Ireland. Certainly there must be no second class citizens anywhere in the United Kingdom.

So, on the economic front we must continue to pay special attention to Northern Ireland's needs. During direct rule spending on

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continue to seek a way of bringing the parties together so that progress can be made.

Peroration

I hope I have explained, Mr. Speaker, the reasons why we have entered upon this enterprise, and the benefits that I believe it will bring. It is my heart-felt wish that the members of both communities in Northern Ireland will come to share my view of those benefits.

I have heard the claims that this Agreement is unacceptable to certain members of the Unionist community. I have to say that those claims were being made before those making them knew what the agreement contained. They had decided to find fault with the Agreement regardless of what was in it. So now, even though they may have found that it did not live up to their own advance scare-stories, they find themselves locked into opposition irrespective of the Agreement's merits. I can only hope that they will reconsider now that they know the reality of the situation.

I have also heard the demands that we should submit this inter-governmental agreement to some test of acceptability in Northern Ireland. Mr. Speaker, I am not prepared to conduct government by referendum. Relations between sovereign states are a matter for the Governments of those states, accountable to their Parliaments. As long as Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom, the people of Northern Ireland must accept what flows from that. And that includes acceptance of the policy of

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the freely elected Government of the United Kingdom in respect of relations with other Governments - including the Irish Republic.

But I would prefer to dwell on the positive reaction that has been given to this Agreement. I am in no doubt that it will find favour on both sides of this House. I have already been gratified by the popular welcome that it has received. And we will all have noted the international response to it.

It will not solve all our problems in Northern Ireland. But I do genuinely believe that it does present a way forward. It provides a better opportunity for the peaceful, constructive expression of minority views than has ever before existed. It simultaneously gives unparalleled formal recognition to the rights of the majority. And it deepens the unique relationship between us and the Irish Republic.

That I believe to be a precious combination. It offers a real hope of making progress towards lasting peace and political stability - if men and women of goodwill take advantage of the opportunities it provides. I am confident that the welcome given to it already throughout these islands and abroad will be echoed in this House.

I beg to move.

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