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FROM SIR KENNETH BLOOMFIELD
DATE 14 December 1989

NI Permanent Secretaries

SPEECH BY MR KEVIN McNAMARA

Mr Kevin McNamara's Office have kindly sent me a copy of the speech which he made on 11 December at the Methodist College Current Affairs Society.

/ You also may be interested to see it.

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K P BLOOMFIELD

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SPEECH TO METHODIST COLLEGE CURRENT AFFAIRS SOCIETY
11 DECEMBER 1989

LAST WEEK THE SECRETARY OF STATE ADDRESSED YOU ON HIS HOPES FOR THE FUTURE. TODAY I WANT TO OUTLINE THE WAY IN WHICH THE LABOUR PARTY SEES THE POSITION OF NORTHERN IRELAND AND HOW A LABOUR GOVERNMENT WOULD SET ABOUT TACKLING THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE PROVINCE.

I AM GOING PLACE A HEAVY EMPHASIS ON THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION TODAY. I AM NOT GOING TO DO SO BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS ARE SECONDARY, BUT BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ALL ASPECTS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND QUESTION IN A COHERENT MANNER IF ANY SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS IS TO BE ACHIEVED. I CANNOT SEE HOW IT IS POSSIBLE TO SEPARATE THE ECONOMIC SITUATION FROM THE POLITICAL SITUATION.

FURTHERMORE, IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN THE PROVINCE, ONE HAS TO LOOK WELL BEYOND THE CONFINES OF NORTHERN IRELAND ITSELF. THOUGH NORTHERN IRELAND BEARS THE BRUNT OF THE CONFLICT, ALL OF US THROUGHOUT BRITAIN AND IN THE WHOLE OF IRELAND HAVE AN IMPORTANT PART TO PLAY. SOME YEARS AGO, THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL VIEW. BUT NOW IT IS ALMOST A CLICHE.

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IT HAS NOW BECOME WIDELY ACCEPTED THAT THERE ARE THREE
RELATIONSHIPS WHICH MUST BE RESOLVED IF DEMOCRACY AND PEACE ARE
TO BE ESTABLISHED IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

FIRST, THE CONFLICT BETWEEN UNIONISM AND NATIONALISM WITHIN
NORTHERN IRELAND ITSELF.

SECOND, THE POSITION OF NORTHERN IRELAND WITH RESPECT TO THE
REST OF IRELAND

THIRD, THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRITAIN AND THE
REPUBLIC.

THIS VIEW IS SHARED BY THE LEADERS OF ALL THE CONSTITUTIONAL
PARTIES, AND HAS BEEN CLEARLY EXPRESSED BY PEOPLE AS DIFFERENT
AS PETER ROBINSON AND JOHN HUME. NATURALLY, THEY HAVE VERY
DIFFERENT VIEWS ABOUT THE FORM THESE RELATIONSHIPS SHOULD TAKE.
NEVERTHELESS, THERE DOES SEEM TO BE THE BEGINNING OF A CONSENSUS
ON THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED - SOME
SLIGHT GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE. THERE DOES SEEM TO
BE A GROWING RECOGNITION THAT ONE CANNOT MAKE EITHER COMMUNITY
SECURE BY MAKING THE OTHER INSECURE.

LET ME DEAL WITH THE INTERNAL PROBLEM FIRST, SINCE THIS IS THE
PRIMARY CAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE WHICH AFFLICTS NORTHERN IRELAND,
THE REPUBLIC, GREAT BRITAIN AND NOW MAINLAND EUROPE.

AT THE MOST BASIC LEVEL, NORTHERN IRELAND HAS BEEN CHARACTERISED - BY THE FAILURE TO MAKE THE NATIONALIST MINORITY FEEL THAT THEY HAVE A LEGITIMATE ROLE TO PLAY IN POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

THIS PROBLEM HAS PERSISTED FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE STORMONT PARLIAMENT. I DO NOT INTEND TO GO INTO THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS ABOUT WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS. THAT CAN BE LEFT TO THE HISTORIANS. BUT IT IS ESSENTIAL TO REMEMBER THAT THE MINORITY HAS NEVER FELT ITSELF TO BE AN EQUAL PARTICIPANT.

THE PROVISIONAL IRA IS AN UNFORTUNATE AND DAMAGING REFLECTION OF THIS POLITICAL FAILURE. THE OUTCOME OF THE "ARMED STRUGGLE" HAS BEEN TO CREATE EVEN DEEPER SUSPICION BETWEEN UNIONISTS AND NATIONALISTS, AND TO MAKE UNIONISTS AS DISSATISFIED WITH THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AS NATIONALISTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN.

ARISING FROM, AND ASSISTING IN THE PERPETUATION OF, THE CONFLICT HAVE BEEN A SERIES OF VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL RIGHTS. BRITAIN HAS BEEN CONDEMNED MORE OFTEN THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY BY THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, A TOTAL OF TWENTY-ONE TIMES. MORE EVEN THAN TURKEY WHICH FOR MUCH OF THE TIME HAS BEEN A MILITARY DICTATORSHIP. IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THESE VIOLATIONS ARE NOT JUST OF CONCERN TO NORTHERN IRELAND, MANY OF THEM HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT ON THE EROSION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES IN BRITAIN AS A WHOLE.

FURTHERMORE, THE MILITARY CONFLICT HAS HAD A SEVERE IMPACT ON AN ALREADY WEAK ECONOMY. COMBINED WITH THE EFFECTS OF THATCHERISM, THE RESULT HAS BEEN A DEGREE OF INDUSTRIAL DEVASTATION MORE SEVERE THAN THAT SUFFERED BY ANY OTHER PART OF THE UK. MOST ECONOMIC INDICATORS GIVE NORTHERN IRELAND AN UNFAVORABLE RATING BUT THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IS PERHAPS THE MOST WORRYING. (14.4% IN OCTOBER).

THE SCARCITY OF JOBS NOT ONLY ASSISTS THE PARAMILITARIES IN THEIR SEARCH FOR RECRUITS, IT ALSO MAGNIFIES THE PROBLEM OF SECTARIANISM BY FITTING TWO SETS OF IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITIES AGAINST EACH OTHER IN COMPETITION FOR SCARCE JOBS. THAT IS WHY IT IS SO ENCOURAGING TO SEE THE FALLS AND THE SHANKILL COOPERATING, THROUGH THE PHOENIX TRUST, TO BRING JOBS TO THE WHOLE OF GREATER WEST BELFAST.

BUT WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS. IT IS OFTEN ARGUED THAT NORTHERN IRELAND CANNOT BE REFORMED. I DO NOT ACCEPT THAT, IT IS A COUNSEL OF DESPAIR. I DO ACCEPT THAT IMPLEMENTING THE NECESSARY REFORMS IS LIKELY TO BE A DIFFICULT TASK.

ONE EXAMPLE OF THIS IS HOUSING. IT WAS A MAJOR CONCERN OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT. THROUGH THERE ARE STILL SERIOUS PROBLEMS, MAJOR STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN IN IMPROVING BOTH THE QUALITY OF HOUSING, AND EQUALITY OF ACCESS TO IT.

SO A LABOUR GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO PURSUE A MAJOR PROGRAMME OF REFORM, NOT UNDERESTIMATING THE DIFFICULTIES BUT NOT YIELDING TO DESPAIR EITHER.

THE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES OF THE PROVINCE ARE OBVIOUSLY A PRIORITY. IN MANY RESPECTS, THE PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN THE SECTIONS OF THE LABOUR PARTY'S POLICY REVIEW DEALING WITH THE ECONOMY AS A WHOLE WILL BE RELEVANT TO NORTHERN IRELAND.

WE WILL NEED TO INVEST IN HIGH QUALITY TRAINING, TO PROMOTE INVESTMENT AND TO USE THE NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS AN EQUIVALENT TO THE NEWLY UPGRADED DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY WE INTEND TO CREATE IN BRITAIN. WE NEED TO BUILD ON THE PROVINCE'S EXISTING SUCCESSES IN HIGH TECHNOLOGY AND TO MAKE THE MOST OF FIBRE OPTIC NETWORK.

BUT IT WILL ALSO BE NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT THE PROSPERITY WE SEEK TO CREATE WILL BE DISTRIBUTED EQUITABLY. THAT WILL REQUIRE MAJOR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN EMPLOYMENT, BOTH THROUGH GETTING EMPLOYERS TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES AND THROUGH KEEPING A CAREFUL EYE ON THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND ON THE LOCATION OF NEW EMPLOYMENT.

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WE CANNOT BREAK DOWN THE SECTARIAN BARRIERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND UNTIL BOTH COMMUNITIES HAVE EQUAL STATUS AND, WHEN, IN A MATERIAL SENSE, ONE'S LIFE CHANCES ARE NOT AFFECTED BY THE COMMUNITY TO WHICH ONE BELONGS.

THE PROBLEMS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES MUST BE TACKLED. THE POLICY DOCUMENT ADOPTED AT THE LAST LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE LISTS MANY OF THE MEASURES WHICH NEED TO BE TAKEN. THIS INVOLVES REPEALING THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT AND GRADUALLY DISMANTLING THE EMERGENCY PROVISIONS ACT. THE DIPLOCK COURTS SHOULD BE REPLACED BY THREE-JUDGE COURTS UNTIL SUCH TIME AS JURY TRIAL CAN BE RESTORED. THE USE OF STRIP SEARCHING AND PLASTIC BULLETS WILL BE ENDED.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE WHICH MUST GUIDE THE ACTIONS OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT IS THAT VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES SIMPLY ENCOURAGE THE PARAMILITARIES. IT ALLOWS THEM TO PORTRAY THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT AS OPPRESSIVE, NOT AS PROTECTIVE OF FREEDOM. THIS IS A SITUATION IN WHICH PRINCIPLE, THE MAXIMISATION OF FREEDOM, AND EXPEDIENCY, THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO MARGINALISE THE PARAMILITARIES, GO HAND IN HAND.

FINALLY, WHILE SEEKING TO PROMOTE EQUALITY BETWEEN THE TWO COMMUNITIES ON A MATERIAL LEVEL, THERE IS ALSO A PRESSING NEED TO BRING ABOUT A SETTLEMENT BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND, I.E. DEVOLUTION.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE TALKED TO YOU THE OTHER DAY ABOUT DEVOLUTION. I AM ALWAYS GLAD WHEN MINISTERS COMMIT THEMSELVES TO LABOUR PARTY POLICIES, SO I READ MR BROOKE'S REMARKS WITH A GREAT DEAL OF INTEREST.

I RECOGNISE THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH PREVENT PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND FROM BEGINNING SERIOUS TALKS ON SETTING UP DEVOLVED INSTITUTIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THE UNIONIST PARTIES ARE STILL HOSTILE TO THE ANGLD-IRISH AGREEMENT AND NATIONALISTS CANNOT ACCEPT DEVOLUTION WITHOUT POWER-SHARING. THERE IS OBVIOUSLY MUCH GROUND TO BE COVERED BEFORE DEVOLUTION CAN BE AGREED.

BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE PRESENT STALEMATE CAN LAST FOREVER. THERE IS A CRYING NEED FOR EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONS IN PROVINCE WITH A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF POWER IF THE POSSIBILITY OF A GENUINE POLITICAL PROCESS IS TO BE KEPT OPEN AND THE HOPE OF DEMOCRACY KEPT ALIVE.

THE PRESENT DIRECT RULE SYSTEM IS MANY THINGS BUT IT IS NOT DEMOCRATIC. THE POSITION OF SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND IS REMINISCENT OF THAT OF A VICEROY. IT WAS NOT INTENDED TO BE PERMANENT, NOR SHOULD BE SO REGARDED NOW.

IN MANY RESPECTS, DIRECT RULE IS INEFFICIENT AND REMOTE. TOO MUCH POWER IS CONCENTRATED IN THE HANDS OF CIVIL SERVANTS. THERE IS AN ACCOUNTABILITY GAP WHICH CANNOT BE FILLED SIMPLY BY GREATER BRITISH MINISTERIAL SURVEILLANCE.

IF THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND EVER HOPE TO ESTABLISH A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEM, THEY MUST BEGIN BY PLAYING THEIR PART IN PUTTING IN PLACE ARRANGEMENTS WHICH WILL ALLOW THEM TO EXERCISE DAY-TO-DAY SCRUTINY OVER THE WORK OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND TO DECIDE THE POLICIES OF THESE DEPARTMENTS. THEY NEED TO CONCERN THEMSELVES NOT JUST WITH THE GREAT CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS BUT WITH THE DAY TO DAY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES WHICH HAVE IMPORTANT EFFECTS ON THE DAY TO DAY EXISTENCE OF THEIR CONSTITUENTS.

FINALLY, IF NORTHERN IRELAND REQUIRES DEVOLUTION, SO DO THE POLITICAL PARTIES THEMSELVES. THE HEALTH OF A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEM CAN BE ASSESSED BY THE VIGOUR OF POLITICAL PARTIES. WITHOUT DEVOLUTION, THE INCENTIVES TO TAKE PART IN PUBLIC LIFE ARE LIMITED. WITH DEVOLUTION, I BELIEVE THAT THE POSITION OF THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE COULD BE ENHANCED. IT WOULD STOP THE DRIFT TOWARDS THE CONSOLIDATION OF RULE BY A SMALL AND UNELECTED ELITE. THERE IS A CLEAR NEED TO REVERSE THE TREND TOWARDS THE CONCENTRATION OF POWER IN THE HANDS OF APPOINTED BODIES. IT WOULD BE FAR PREFERABLE FOR INDIVIDUALS TO MAKE THEIR CONTRIBUTION AS ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES, NOT AS UNACCOUNTABLE APPOINTEES.

I BELIEVE THAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND, AS WE MUST IN BRITAIN MUST, AS THE PARTIES IN THE REPUBLIC MUST, TAKE THE SITUATION AS IT IS. IF WE HOPE TO CHANGE THE SITUATION, WE HAVE TO START FROM THE REAL WORLD, NOT THE WORLD AS WE WOULD LIKE IT TO BE.

THAT BRINGS ME TO THE SECOND DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC.

IN THIS RESPECT, THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFICULTY IS THE HOSTILITY OF UNIONISTS TO BEING PART OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM WHOSE CAPITAL IS IN DUBLIN. I APPRECIATE THAT THIS FEAR IS BASED ON A COMPLEX MIXTURE OF CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC MOTIVES, WHICH CANNOT BE WISHED AWAY.

IN THE VIEW OF THE LABOUR PARTY, PARTITION WAS A SERIOUS ERROR, A SETBACK TO THE INTERESTS OF ALL THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND, AND, IN MANY WAYS, ESPECIALLY TO THOSE OF UNIONISTS. PARTITION IS ALSO DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY IN DEMOCRATIC TERMS. DEPENDING ON ONE'S CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY EITHER NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD NOT HAVE EXISTED, OR IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY MUCH SMALLER.

BUT PARTITION TOOK PLACE IN THE 1920S AND HAS ENDURED. IT IS A REALITY WHICH HAS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. WE CANNOT CORRECT THE ERRORS OF THE 1920S BY SIMPLY REVERSING THE PROCESS WHICH TOOK PLACE THEN.

THE LABOUR PARTY BELIEVES THAT THE LONG TERM FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND LIES IN RECTIFYING THE ERROR OF PARTITION. BUT THAT CAN ONLY BE DONE BY PERSUADING THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND THAT THE DIVISION OF IRELAND IS WRONG AND BY OVERCOMING THEIR FEARS ABOUT A UNITED IRELAND. TO END PARTITION WITHOUT CONSENT IS SIMPLY A RECIPE FOR REPLICATING THE PRESENT-DAY CONDITIONS OF NORTHERN IRELAND ON A WIDER SCALE THROUGHOUT IRELAND AS A WHOLE.

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THAT CONSENT, THERE ARE A VARIETY OF WAYS IN WHICH CLOSER COOPERATION BETWEEN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC CAN BE PURSUED SO THAT THE BENEFITS OF AN ALL-IRELAND APPROACH BECOME CLEAR. AS THE LABOUR PARTY'S SPOKESMAN ON NORTHERN IRELAND, I HAVE BEEN CONCERNED TO ENSURE THAT THE LABOUR PARTY FORMULATES ITS POLICY ON THE BASIS OF A SERIOUS ANALYSIS OF PRESENT REALITIES AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES RATHER THAN ON ANY ROMANTIC NOTIONS OF IRELAND, WHETHER OF UNIONIST OR NATIONALIST DERIVATION.

SUCH BENEFITS ARE MOST IMMEDIATELY APPARENT IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT, SO MUCH SO THAT ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A BELIEVER IN A UNITED IRELAND TO SEE THEM.

COOPERATION AND HARMONISATION BETWEEN THE TWO PARTS OF IRELAND ARE BOTH DESIRABLE AND NECESSARY. THERE ARE A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES, APART FROM THE OBVIOUS SECURITY ONE, WHERE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION WOULD BE TO THE MUTUAL BENEFIT OF BOTH PARTS OF

ALL-IRELAND. IN AREAS SUCH AS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORT, AGRICULTURE, TOURISM, ENERGY, AND HEALTH, THERE IS SCOPE FOR ALL-IRELAND INITIATIVES. LIKE THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS, WE SEE A NEED FOR AN ALL-IRELAND RECOVERY PROGRAMME TO RESTORE THE FORTUNES OF BOTH ECONOMIES.

THE LABOUR PARTY BELIEVES THAT SUCH HARMONISATION IS NECESSARY BECAUSE OF THE CHALLENGE TO BOTH PARTS OF IRELAND POSED BY 1992. JOINT APPROACHES BY THE TWO GOVERNMENTS TO THE COMMISSION TO SECURE BACKING FOR CROSS-BORDER PROJECTS WILL BE MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE THAN A SERIES OF ISOLATED INITIATIVES.

THERE IS ALSO A NEED FOR SUCH POLICIES OF HARMONISATION IN OTHER FIELDS IF THE UNNECESSARY BARRIERS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTS OF IRELAND ARE TO BE REMOVED. FOR EXAMPLE, THE RESPECTIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS SHOULD RECOGNISE THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT SCHOOLS IN BOTH PARTS OF IRELAND PROVIDE THEIR PUPILS WITH AN ADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF THE UNIONIST AND NATIONALIST TRADITIONS (SOMETHING WHICH IS BEGINNING TO BE RECOGNISED IN NORTHERN IRELAND). IN HIGHER EDUCATION, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL TO BE GAINED THROUGH RENDERING THE BORDER IRRELEVANT, BOTH IN TERMS OF EXTENDING ACCESS TO COURSES AND IN MAKING THE BEST USE OF THE FACILITIES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE.

IN THE LEGAL FIELD, THE SINGLE EUROPEAN ACT IMPLIES A HIGH DEGREE OF HARMONISATION OF COMMERCIAL LAW. IN CRIMINAL LAW, THE NEED FOR HARMONISATION IS SELF-EVIDENT, AS WAS RECOGNISED IN THE REVIEW OF THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT EARLIER THIS YEAR. I WOULD, HOWEVER, STRESS THE NEED FOR THIS HARMONISATION TO TAKE PLACE ON THE BASIS OF PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS, NOT LIMITING THEM.

IN OTHER AREAS, IT WILL TAKE A COMMITMENT ON THE PART OF THE REPUBLIC TO MAKE THE CHANGES NECESSARY TO SHOW THAT IT WISHES TO ACCOMMODATE THE FEARS OF THE MAJORITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

I HAVE MERELY OUTLINED A FRACTION OF THE SCOPE FOR HARMONISATION IN THIS WAY. BUT THROUGH SUCH METHODS, IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT PARTITION IS NOT IN THE INTERESTS OF NORTHERN IRELAND. THESE POSSIBILITIES ARE CLEARLY IN LINE WITH THE LOGIC OF EVENTS IN THE MODERN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY. IT IS IN THE INTERESTS OF ALL CONCERNED TO PURSUE THAT LOGIC RATHER THAN TO REFUSE TO RECOGNISE IT.

FINALLY, I RETURN TO THE ISSUE OF ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS. THIS IS A CRUCIAL DETERMINANT OF THE FUTURE. BUT IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE EVENTS OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS, DESPITE ALL THE DIFFICULTIES AND DISTURBANCES, HAVE PUSHED THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE REPUBLIC AND OF BRITAIN CLOSER TOGETHER.

ONE OF THE IRONIES OF THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT IS THAT, HAVING BEEN DESIGNED TO DEAL WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM, IT HAS BEEN, SO FAR, MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE IN ESTABLISHING A CONSTRUCTIVE AND COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. FOR ALL THE CRITICISM OF THE AGREEMENT, FOR ALL THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF THE HIGH HOPES WHICH GREETED ITS SIGNING, THE AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REASONABLY SUCCESSFUL IN ITS EFFECTS ON ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS.

THAT IS WHY I REGARD SUGGESTIONS, HOWEVER WELL-MEANING, THAT THE AGREEMENT BE SUSPENDED WITH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF SCEPTICISM. NO RATIONAL INDEPENDENT OBSERVER WOULD PREDICT THAT TWO SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENTS WOULD BE PREPARED TO SET ASIDE AN INTERNATIONAL TREATY WHICH HAS BENEFITED BOTH OF THEM IN ORDER TO GAMBLE ON THE OUTCOME OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES IN A REGION OF THE ONE OF THE STATES INVOLVED.

THERE WILL BE MANY PEOPLE WHO REGRET THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS, BUT AS I HAVE SAID BEFORE, POLITICS IS DEALING WITH WHAT IS AND WHAT MIGHT BE, NOT WITH WHAT ONE THINKS OUGHT TO BE.

GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE AGREEMENT LOOKS LIKE SURVIVING, I BELIEVE THAT IT IS INCUMBENT ON BOTH GOVERNMENTS AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO MAKE THE BEST OF WHAT SOME MAY REGARD AS A BAD SITUATION.