



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Secretary of State's Speech

9th November, 1990

1. John Hume had been urging on the Secretary of State for some considerable time to make a speech on the nature of the British presence in Northern Ireland. Hume's thinking was that, if the Secretary of State would say publicly that the British presence in the North was a neutral one (as between the two aspirations), this would help to undermine the Sinn Fein/IRA argument that the essential problem was the British presence. Hume's hope also was that such a speech would evoke a considered and positive response from Sinn Fein and significantly help his efforts to move them on to a political path.
  
2. The speech undoubtedly goes a considerable distance in the direction desired by Hume. The language in places is arguably as forthcoming to the nationalist aspiration as could be expected from a British Secretary of State at this time. There are quite a number of examples of this in the text but the following four, in particular, are worth noting:
  - "but the obstacle to the development of a new and more inclusive Irish identity if people want this for themselves is not to be sought in Great Britain".
  
  - "Just imagine what developments of positive benefit to all sections of the community and both parts of the island of Ireland would be bound to follow a permanent end to violence".
  
  - "In Northern Ireland it is not the aspiration to a sovereign, united Ireland, against which we set our face, but its violent expression".

- "the British Government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland: our role is to help, enable and encourage".
3. The timing of the speech is also, in my view, significant. Up to recently, the British seemed primarily concerned that any effort by them to reach out to Sinn Fein/IRA might cut across the Brooke initiative. However, the Brooke speech (which is clearly directed in very large part at Sinn Fein) may reflect a reduced expectation for the Secretary of State's initiative. The apparent change in approach may be due in part also to the influence of the new Permanent Secretary at the NIO, John Chilcot, who at this stage is possibly "agnostic" about the various options on the agenda, including the Brooke initiative and the tentative signals from Sinn Fein.
4. On the other hand, the Secretary of State has probably also been stung by recent media criticism which has suggested that he has not been neutral in the talks process but, on a number of crucial issues, has aligned himself with the Unionist position. In order to help restore credibility to himself as a "facilitator", Brooke would clearly have an interest in trying to correct this perception. He would undoubtedly hope that Friday's speech might be helpful in this regard, including in encouraging Dublin and the SDLP to have renewed confidence in him.

Dermot Gallagher,  
13 November, 1990.

P.S. The philosophy behind the speech  
is clearly neutral and perhaps even  
anti-interpretation.