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FROM: D J R HILL  
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM  
11 DECEMBER 1992

cc: Mr Bell  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Cooke  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Caine  
Mr Archer RID

MR THOMAS

TALKS: SPEECH ON POLITICAL MATTERS

I attach a first draft of a speech which the Secretary of State might make early in the New Year. He agreed at the Talks Stocktaking meeting on 1 December that something on these lines should be prepared and it will be trailed in next week's "culture and identity" speech.

2. In drafting I have sought to produce a speech which would
- (a) remind the parties and the general public that the talks process still exists and that HMG is strongly committed to it;
  - (b) strike a fairly optimistic note about future prospects;
  - (c) reiterate and explain some of the key aspects of the 26 March framework, partly for educational purposes but also to remind/reassure the parties and the Irish Government that there seems no obvious alternative to that framework;
  - (d) (in pursuit of (a) and (b) and to give the speech some interest) lift the curtain on what has happened in the Talks to date, though in practice I have not gone (far) beyond the statement of 11 November.

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3. I have sought to strike a rough balance between mentions of the issues of concern to particular parties and to treat the constitutional issue in a relatively low-key way.

4. Subject to any comments from copy recipients, it may be easiest to convene a short meeting to discuss the general shape of the draft before it is given a wider circulation.

5. I have not thought much about an audience but a sixth form group might be about right.

SIGNED David Hill

D J R HILL

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DRAFT SPEECH ON POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

1. One of the more high profile features of the past year has been the political Talks which commenced last March, under the Chairmanship of Peter Brooke and continued, after the election, initially under my Chairmanship and subsequently - after the Irish Government had joined the process - under the Chairmanship of Sir Ninian Stephen.

2. Many hopes were raised by and during those Talks and many fears were expressed. For reasons which I will come back to later the participants in the Talks accepted an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of what was going on in the Talks and much of what did emerge - presented, as it usually was, out of context - conveyed a misleading and partial impression. I should like to lift the corner of the curtain a little, to explain why some of the fears expressed about the Talks are groundless and why some of the hopes - even quite ambitious hopes - remain achievable.

3. But first it may be helpful to set out once again the rationale underlying the Talks process, and the parameters within which the discussion is taking place.

4. The essential political problem of Northern Ireland is that it has a deeply divided community. I explored some of the factors which contributed to that division in a speech [before Christmas]. I explained then that the division is characterised by political, religious, cultural and economic factors. These are significant lines of division in any society: it is a tragedy for Northern Ireland that here those lines of division overlay and re-inforce each other. The divisions are very significantly exacerbated by acts of terrorism from both sides and by a long history of intercommunal violence and distrust going back many hundreds of years.

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5. The result has been the creation of what might almost be called a tribal society in which both main parts of the community seek jealously to protect their own interests and to guard against any possibility of the other side gaining some imagined advantage.

6. The tensions which all this generates pre-dated and gave rise to the partition of Ireland in 1920; they have prevented the emergence of a healthy functional political system in Northern Ireland; and they continue to lie at the root of the appalling security situation here.

7. The Government obviously has a basic duty to all the people of Northern Ireland to provide peace and maintain law and order; and our determination to defeat terrorism remains undiminished. We will continue to provide the RUC with the resources, the military backup and the legal framework they need to tackle terrorism effectively.

8. The Government can also, through the implementation of its economic policies, including the re-distributive effects of its social and regional policies, seek to ameliorate and overcome the economic disadvantages which continue to affect all too many people in Northern Ireland. Economic deprivation provides a potent breeding ground for inter-communal tension. [Northern Ireland continues to face severe economic problems, especially given the current world economic situation, but I and my colleagues will continue to seek a generous share of national resources for Northern Ireland and to use those resources as efficiently and effectively as possible.]

9. The Government also has a role to play in diminishing inter-communal tensions through the creation of a legal framework and culture in which discrimination of all kinds can be eradicated, leading to genuine equality of opportunity for all. However, laws such as the Fair Employment Acts of 1976 and 1989, bodies such as the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and the Equal

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Opportunities Commission and programmes such as Targeting Social Need and Making Belfast Work represent only the tip of the iceberg. The real work of overcoming discrimination and distrust and promoting human contact across the community divide must be done within communities and, indeed, within individuals. I pay a genuine and heartfelt tribute to the work of the churches and of the many <sup>also</sup> secular community - based organisations who pour so much effort in to this area. It is enormously worthwhile; it is essential that it should continue if Northern Ireland is ultimately to throw off the shackles of the past. The Government is delighted to be able to <sup>only</sup> support what goes on in this field, through, for example, the Community Relations Council [, <sup>Cultural</sup> Two Traditions Group and the Ulach Trust]. *very other Peter Bode*

10. The Talks process represents the Government's attempts to round off its policies in the areas I have just mentioned by seeking to achieve a functioning political accommodation between the two main parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

11. Why do we seek such accommodation? Primarily because of the positive effect we believe an accommodation at the political level could have on the whole spectrum of intercommunal relations in Northern Ireland. Such an accommodation would almost by definition need to give genuine parity of esteem to both main political traditions in Northern Ireland and this would facilitate the emergence of a situation in which the whole community would be able to identify with and give allegiance to whatever new institutions were agreed upon. My belief is that the greater political consensus which would follow would create wider public support for, and confidence in, the security forces and the administration of justice; and enable law and order to be maintained more effectively. Finally, there is the point that decisions about local matters, distinctive to Northern Ireland, are likely to be more soundly based and effective if taken by local politicians with a deep knowledge of those local issues and who are accountable to the local electorate.

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12. How have we gone about seeking such an accommodation?

13. Well, the three-Stranded talks process did not arise by accident or by oversight. It was the outcome of a long process of discussion and negotiation and sought to provide a framework for substantive exchanges which would be effective but would also preserve the essential political interests of each of the talks participants. It is a tribute to the careful work of my predecessor, Peter Brooke, that the essential principles of his statement to the House of Commons on 26 March 1991 governed not only the talks which took place in that year but also, subject to one or two adjustments agreed by all in the light of experience, the talks which took place in 1992.

14. I do not wish to go through the various elements in detail but it is worth recalling the basic analysis on which the talks process was constructed.

15. First, there was an acceptance that the identities of the two main parts of the community in Northern Ireland reached out beyond the confines of Northern Ireland and that any accommodation therefore similarly needed to transcend those confines. This acceptance does not affect the stated position of Her Majesty's Government that Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people, a political reality which is echoed in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement [and accepted by all the Talks participants].

16. The acknowledgement that any accommodation would need to transcend the confines of Northern Ireland was reinforced by the fact that all the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland who were potential participants in the talks sought outcomes which could only be delivered as a result of discussion with and between the United Kingdom and Irish Governments.

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17. Thus, there are those who seek a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement governing relationships between the two Governments. The two Governments have made clear their readiness in certain circumstances to consider [proposals for] a new and more broadly based agreement or structure.

18. Equally, there are those who seek a new relationship within Ireland - a relationship based on mutual trust and respect and a commitment to enhanced contact and co-operation - arguing that such a relationship will be an essential element in securing the allegiance of the minority community in Northern Ireland for any new political arrangements. There is a general acknowledgement that in certain circumstances significant moves could be made in that direction.

19. Meanwhile, there are those who seek constitutional change in the Republic as a contribution to the development of mutual respect between the two main political traditions in Ireland and because they see it as an obstacle to the progressive normalisation of relationships which all men of good will wish to see.

20. These and other factors lead inexorably to the conclusion that any process which seeks to produce a comprehensive, stable and lasting political accommodation must involve both Governments and all the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland and address all the relevant relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; those within the island of Ireland; and those between the two Governments.

21. A major benefit of any process with these characteristics is that developments in one area are likely to have an impact on positions taken in other areas. This maximises the scope for trade-offs and should convey confidence that any agreed package which emerges is likely to be robust.

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22. A corollary of this, however, is that participants cannot realistically be expected to make irrevocable commitments in one area of discussion until they know how the consideration of other matters is going to develop. Hence the importance of confidentiality. The partial revelation of any participant's position could be enormously prejudicial; and experience has shown just how inhibiting leaks can be. Formally, the talk participants were protected by the agreement that nothing could be finally agreed in any one strand of discussion until everything was agreed in the talks as a whole: but this is in any event a recognition of reality.

23. A further underlying principle of the talks process was that agreement on new structures to reflect any of the three relationships under discussion could only be made by those directly concerned with that relationship. Again, this is not some idle rule dreamt up for the sake of it. Any agreement is bound to involve some compromise and the people who will need to operate any new political arrangements are more likely to stand by the necessary compromises if they have been involved in striking them. Also, any accommodation is most likely to emerge as the result of a growth of trust, respect and confidence; and that can only develop in face to face discussion and negotiation. The short point is that there is no magic constitutional device or political structure which will solve the problems of Northern Ireland and could be introduced from outside. We need to facilitate tough but constructive negotiation, between those directly affected, on the difficult and complex issues concerned.

24. How far did the talks process get?

25. I believe it made very considerable headway. During the past 2 ½ years relationships between the political parties and between the individual parties and HMG have improved significantly. For the first time since 1976 the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland have sat down together and debated at length the

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issues which confront them and their varying analyses and prescriptions for moving forward. For myself, it has been a privilege to participate in these discussions which have been of a very high quality and ensured a really thorough airing of the matters under consideration.

26. For the first time since 1973 Unionist politicians and Ministers of the Irish Government have sat down together to debate the issues which variously unite and divide them. Arguably it was the first time since the 1920s that Irish Ministers have had this kind of discussion with representatives of the whole spectrum of constitutional political opinion in Northern Ireland. Many of those exchanges might euphemistically have been described as "frank and forthright". Others were more constructive. Fortunately we rarely lacked a touch of humour. We were of course much indebted to the chairmanship skills of Sir Ninian Stephen.

27. This all produced a considerable improvement in the knowledge of others' general and detailed positions. Some of that knowledge was clearly unwelcome but it is obviously better that the participants should know where the others stand. We began to develop a common understanding of what was meant by particular phrases. Initially, as one of the participants remarked at the time, words seemed to somersault as they crossed the table so that the hearer understood something very different from what the speaker intended: so this growth of a common vocabulary, a common understanding of what particular concepts meant, was in my view an important and constructive development. My own belief is that there was a considerable improvement in personal relationships and in mutual respect among the participants among the talks.

28. I am constrained by the rules of confidentiality which I have just explained and by my hopes for the future from revealing the substance of any of these discussions. But I can say that in the opening phase of discussions between the parties, which I -

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supported by Jeremy Hanley - chaired, we identified a number of common themes and principles which should underlie any new political institutions in Northern Ireland and gave detailed consideration to possible structures which might reflect these. [We also examined the possible future relationship between such structures and the Westminster Parliament and a range of inter-related issues, including financial matters and the protection of human rights.]

29. Once the talks had expanded to incorporate an Irish Government delegation participants discussed fundamental aspects of relationships within the island of Ireland and the underlying realities, including issues of identity and allegiance and constitutional issues. We considered the scope for enhancing co-operation within the island of Ireland in the social, economic and security fields, amongst others; and the nature of the structures which might best facilitate such co-operation. Meanwhile, the two Governments, as co-signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, in liaison with the other participants, addressed possible principles for a new and more broadly based agreement and possible intergovernmental arrangements.

30. Where does that leave us?

31. When the talks were brought to a conclusion in mid November the participants agreed and issued a statement which included the following passage:

"while at this time there is no basis to agree a settlement, they [that is, the talks participants] have identified and discussed most, if not all, of the elements which would comprise an eventual settlement; they have developed a clear understanding of each others' positions; and established constructive dialogue on ways in which an accommodation might be reached on some of the key issues which divide them".

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32. They also recognised the great value of that dialogue and the four parties agreed with the view advanced by the two Governments that further dialogue was both necessary and desirable.

33. So where do we go from here?

34. I take as my starting point the judgement given by Sir Ninian Stephen, in the statement which I have just referred. That statement acknowledged that:

"all concerned had set themselves ambitious objectives on entering the three-stranded process. Those objectives have not yet been achieved, despite the good will and intense effort all parties had put into the negotiations. However, those objectives continued to be valid and, in the view of the Chairman, achievable".

35. I share Sir Ninian's opinion and, that being the case, I would be failing in my duty to all the people of Northern Ireland if I did not pursue the prospects for further dialogue. I was encouraged that all the parties agreed last November that they would "enter into informal consultations with a view to seeking a way forward" and I have since had a number of informal meetings with party leaders for that purpose. [I have also had a preliminary meeting with Mr , the new Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs.]

36. The way ahead is not clearly laid out and I do not think we need expect it to be the same as last time. Within the central principles of the approach announced on 26 March 1991 and to which I have alluded there is plenty of scope to apply the lessons of experience and, in particular, to seek progress in a more flexible format than previously. These matters remain to be determined.

37. What I hope I have demonstrated today, however, is that a comprehensive political accommodation is something from which all could gain - except the gunmen. Much of the preparatory work for

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the real negotiation has been completed. The pieces are on the board but the end game has not yet begun. There is real political negotiation to be done and if the participants can agree to hold further dialogue within broad framework which has been established no one will prejudice their principles by engaging in it. I cannot tell whether our efforts will be crowned with success but I am convinced that the effort would be worth while.

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