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AN RÚNAÍÓCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

17 December, 1992

Confidential

Mr. Sean O hUiginn  
Assistant Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Assistant Secretary

The Secretary of State's Coleraine Speech

We discussed the Secretary of State's speech at the University of Ulster yesterday with the head of the Central Secretariat at the NIO, David Watkins, who was the main drafter. David Donoghue joined us for the conversation this afternoon.

**Main Points**

The speech was given to us a day in advance. Nothing struck us as startlingly new and, in relation to the IRA, the speech could be seen as a missed opportunity. Generally, we thought it helpful that Mayhew made a gesture towards Nationalist political views and culture, consolidated initiatives taken by Peter Brooke and set out important principles established in the Talks. He described the divisions in the North, said a solution is required which recognises these divisions, acknowledged the equal legitimacy of the Nationalist aspiration to unity, said the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem must be upheld and applied, repeated Brooke's line that the British Government was a facilitator with no self-interest of its own and added that the Government would "never try to impede any body of opinion in working to achieve a place for Northern Ireland within a United Ireland"

**Critical Reaction**

The reaction to the speech has been mostly critical. Paisley called it "outrageous", Robinson a "surrender", Alderdice "superficial and disappointing" and Gerry Adams "pax Britannica" although he at least said he would study it and make a further response later. Patsy McGlone of the SDLP dismissed the announcements about the Irish language but Mark Durkan said Sinn Fein should study the speech carefully. Ken Maginnis for the UUP was muted, contenting himself with endorsing the call for an end to violence and repeating his views on internment. The headline in today's News Letter says "Outrage at Mayhew line" and the editorial says "Northern Ireland needs a pilot, not a Pilate". Mayhew received no

bouquets from the Northern Nationalist press either, the Irish News editorial is entitled "Mayhew policy is fatally flawed". Their complaint is that Mayhew is demanding too much of the IRA before talks can take place with them.

### Signal to the IRA?

Watkins said the speech started with an idea he put up last Summer for a speech on Irish culture. It had broadened into a comprehensive statement which was intended to be "Nationalist-inclined". Planned for mid-January, it had been brought forward when an opportunity arose recently for an address to the Centre for the Study of Conflict at the University of Ulster at Coleraine. The first point to note, therefore, is that the speech was not intended to address the possibility of a prolonged ceasefire this Christmas. Watkins said the betting in the NIO now is that there would be nothing out of the ordinary about this year's ceasefire (you will have seen our recent letters reporting an expectation at the top levels of the army and police that the ceasefire would be longer than usual). The speech was a long to medium-term "investment" and was not intended for any immediate purpose although, of course, care had been taken in drafting to ensure that it would not discourage any possibility of a longer ceasefire. In this respect, the language used in the speech (pages 8 and 9) is not new:

But there can be absolutely no question of our dealing directly, or indirectly, with anyone who still espouses violence. The provisional movement has so far excluded itself from discussions, by its devotion to the very methods it has followed. If its cause does have a serious political purpose, then let it renounce unequivocally the use and threat of violence, and demonstrate over a sufficient period that its renunciation is for real.

We made the point that if it had been intended to encourage the prolongation of a ceasefire, it might have been better not to insist on a prior renunciation of violence. Had the British thought out the sequence? Could there be a de facto ceasefire over a period, responded to by the security forces and followed by a renunciation of violence? Watkins took note of the point which he said had not occurred to him or to anyone else on his side.

The speech says that when terrorism is genuinely seen to have ended, there will indeed be profound consequences for the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice (p. 9) which, Watkins, said was intended to include prisons policy. The carrot is held out that the army could return to its garrison role, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. This is not a particularly encouraging signal to the IRA because it suggests there will be no move, even a partial one, on the army's role until terrorism is clearly seen to have ceased. Privately, General Wilsey had a more nuanced view in the

discussion I reported recently. He suggested that the army could show a lower profile in response to a ceasefire which was allowed to continue into the New Year.

Nor is the phrase "return to its garrison role" very fortunate, as it implies to the Irish ear the continuation of the very hegemonistic notions that Watkins said he intended the speech to bury. He volunteered that the thought could have been put differently.

#### Development of Peter Brooke's themes

Watkins described the speech as Whitbread Mark 2, a reference to the major speech made by Secretary of State Brooke at the Whitbread Brewery in London two years ago. The speech was intended to be an expansion of that statement. Watkins described three elements which he saw as new:-

- Mayhew had set out for the first time in a formal, public way, the non-impedance language which had its origins in discussion with our Ministers (Strand Three meeting of 11 September);
- He had made an expression of regret for the past and signalled that the old "hegemonistic" attitudes of the British in Ireland were now dead and buried;
- He had made a gesture of respect for Irish culture and shown a determination to remove inhibitions placed upon the Irish language, to promote Irish culture as part of the shared heritage of people in Northern Ireland and to facilitate those who wish to speak the Irish language.

#### Non-Impedance

Mayhew says "you will not find me seeking to argue that Britain's role in this island has only ever been associated with what has been up-lifting. On the contrary, there is much in the long and often tragic history ~~history~~ of Ireland for deep regret, and the British Government for its part shares in that regret to the full" (p. 7). As confessional statements go, this is scarcely in the first rank. More helpfully, Mayhew describes four lines of division in Northern Ireland in regard to national identity, religion, culture and the economic and social disadvantage suffered by the minority community. He says that "problems in Northern Ireland require a solution which recognises these divisions" (p. 4), that the aspiration to a United Ireland is no less legitimate than the Unionist position (p. 6) and that the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem, already established by the Government, must be upheld and applied (p. 11).

On pages 12,13, Mayhew says



Her Majesty's Government would never try to impede any body of opinion in working to achieve a place for Northern Ireland within a united Ireland, provided they work only by democratic and peaceful means. If by such means they were to persuade the greater number of those living in Northern Ireland to agree with them, then Her Majesty's Government would present no obstacle. All this is indeed well known, and already constitutes a binding obligation upon us.

The "no obstacle" phrase is actually less helpful from our point of view than the language of Article 1 (c) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement but the declaration that the British Government would "never try to impede any body of opinion in working to achieve a place for Northern Ireland within a united Ireland" is helpful and it is important that Mayhew did not repeat what he said at the BIA Conference at Oxford in September when he tried out language on non-impedance and then ruined the effect by expressing his personal hope that Northern Ireland would stay in the United Kingdom. He does nod in the Unionist direction at one point by saying with more emphasis than Brooke that "we are committed, warmly, solemnly and steadfastly, to honouring our commitment to the wishes of a majority in Northern Ireland" (p. 6).

#### Old "hegemonistic" attitudes buried?

Watkins believed this was the first speech that singled out the names of historic figures of Irish nationalism for "profound respect" (they were O'Connell, Parnell and Joe Devlin). The speech also invokes Tone to condemn force and coercion. He thought it was the first time a Secretary of State had referred to an IRA leader, in this case, Ernie O'Malley of whom Mayhew says on page 15 that he recently learned how the letters of O'Malley in the 1920s warmly recognised the cultural riches of the very country against which he had just been fighting with such determination.

The point to note here, perhaps, is that these remarks were drafted for Mayhew, very deliberately, by a Northern Ireland Unionist civil servant. In discussion with Watkins, we made the point lightly that this kind of reference could come across to the Nationalist side as self-conscious or even condescending. Watkins accepted the self-conscious point and hoped the references would not appear condescending. All the references to Nationalist figures had been intended as a gesture and he hoped that by making further references in future speeches, they would in time come to be seen as a natural expression of the British Government's position (presumably on parity of esteem).

## Irish Culture

The speech announced that the Government are committed to remove "as soon as practicable" the legislation which forbids street names in any language other than English (page 17). This is an old identity issue which was raised in the early days of the Agreement and many times since. The British have been prepared to accept the move in principle for some years, but have been nervous of a Unionist backlash. Now that Unionists have been drawn into the political talks, the NIO presumably feels it safe to act. Even so, Watkins could not tell us when exactly the change would be made. He did mention that another chestnut will also be dealt with, although this one is not mentioned in the speech. It is an Act of 1737 which provides that only English may be used in the Courts. Watkins said it was directed at the time not against the use of Irish but against the use of French and Latin.

The speech may make the first public mention of a policy of accepting letters written by members of the public in Irish although they will be answered in English.

We mentioned to Watkins that the effect of graceful remarks about the Irish language and the Irish contribution to English literature was somewhat spoiled by the statement on page 17 that "the removal of barriers to the Irish language is not intended to be at the expense of the position of English. Of course not. We have no plans for a bilingual society". As Mayhew had just said earlier in his speech that 10% of the population of Northern Ireland knew Irish, was it necessary to assert that bilingualism would not be permitted? Watkins said the phrase was included to head off Unionist reactions. He said he had consulted "a strong Nationalist" who had advised him to be more even more prudent than he had been.

We said we would have to disagree with the "strong Nationalist" and made the general point that we would have welcomed consultation on this and several other aspects of the speech. I recalled that I had had opportunities previously to make some points about the likely content of speeches to the British Joint Secretary, Robert Alston, who left here a fortnight ago and will not be replaced until January. Watkins said in extenuation that our views could well have been sought in January if the speech had been delivered as planned about the middle of the month but, as he had explained, the timing had been brought forward.

Lastly, Watkins said there is a coded reference on page 16 of the speech to the GAA ban on the security forces. The speech expresses the hope that "those who have already discovered (the) wealth of Gaelic culture and games will be ready to share it freely within the whole community".

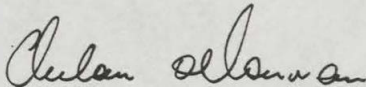
Secretary of State's remarks to the FPA

We took the opportunity to mention the edited transcript of an address given by Mayhew to the Foreign Press Association in London on 3 December 1992 which contained some interesting elements, including the declaration that so long as people argue for a united Ireland and work for a united Ireland by peaceful and democratic means, they will never meet any obstruction from the British Government, the suggestion that the political talks had been concerned with "how institutions may be developed that may have jurisdiction on both sides of the border", the confident prediction that further talks will take place, and the view that everybody wants to see them succeed and that Mayhew himself "did not mind how long that process of talks takes, so long as talking continues". Mr. Donoghue drew attention to a particularly interesting remark that "if one looks at an island of that size with no natural territorial division of a geographical kind, then if other things were equal and there was no historical influence which is decisive, there is no reason why it should not, and the natural thing is that it should be one political entity. But, of course, there is a very strong historical overlay".

Mayhew makes this kind of remark in private but I think this is the first occasion he has been recorded.

Watkins could not recall seeing the transcript or even hearing of it. We have noticed before that speeches made by the Secretary of State in London or abroad are not always released or even circulated internally in Northern Ireland probably due to some disfunction in the system, although no doubt some remarks made elsewhere might not be intended for release here. We asked Watkins to use his coordinating role to remedy the problem at least so far as the Anglo-Irish Secretariat is concerned. He said he would do so, but it is likely that we will continue to have to rely on our colleagues elsewhere to send on anything that comes to their attention.

Yours sincerely,



Declan O' Donovan  
Joint Secretary