

Ref. A085/3025

MR POWELL

Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

On return I have been catching up with developments in the situation, and particularly in unionist reactions.

2. I have not seen the very latest draft of the Prime Minister's speech for opening the debate on 26 November. But I should like to suggest (in case you have not already thought of it) a possible line for inclusion in this speech. I attach a note accordingly.

3. I am sending copies of this minute and the note to the Private Secretaries to the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Northern Ireland.

MS

for ROBERT ARMSTRONG

25 November 1985



Mr Speaker, I should like to say this to the unionists in Northern Ireland, speaking as a unionist and a loyalist myself. This Agreement poses no threat to them, or to the union, or to the sovereignty and authority of the United Kingdom Government in Northern Ireland. It is not the first step in a process of creeping surrender of sovereignty, and no-one who reads the text can believe that it is.

My record on these matters entitles me to say to the unionists that my position, and the position of the British Government, is that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and that that will not change unless a majority of the people of Northern Ireland want and formally consent to a change.

That is not just the Government's position. It is the law of the land.

Now that is reinforced, not weakened, by the formal recognition on the part of the Irish Government that the status of Northern Ireland will not change unless and until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland want a change, and that they do not want it now.

If there is a threat to the unionists, it comes not from this Agreement, or from the United Kingdom Government, or from the Irish Government. It comes from the men of violence, whose methods, whose calculated inhumanity, are no less abhorrent to the Irish Government than to the unionists in Northern Ireland and to the United Kingdom Government.

The unionists look to the Government of the United Kingdom to maintain law and order, to combat the terrorism of the men of violence. That is a duty which, on behalf of all the people of the United Kingdom, this Government accepts.



But the fulfilment of that duty is not a matter of words or promises; it is a matter of deeds, of resources, and above all of the readiness of the men and women in the security forces to put their lives at risk.

Over 2,000 men and women have lost their lives in the fulfilment of this duty over the last fifteen years: men and women from every part of the United Kingdom.

I say to the unionists that, if we, the Government, accept the obligation to protect them against the men of violence, we must be entitled to take measures which we believe in good faith will in the long run diminish the threat of terrorism and reduce the cost of security in terms of the lives lost in pursuit of it.

We believe that this Agreement will have such results, both because it will give nationalists in Northern Ireland greater confidence that the institutions of government there are aware of and sensitive to their legitimate needs and concerns, and because it will lead to closer and sustained co-operation with the Irish Government on security, particularly in the border areas.

I ask the unionists to give us a chance to achieve these aims by means of this Agreement. I ask them to consider: do they not owe it to those who put their lives at risk to defend them, to the families all over the United Kingdom - not just in Northern Ireland - with husbands, sons or brothers serving in the security forces in Northern Ireland, to join in grasping the opportunity which this Agreement offers of saving their lives, and of making life easier and safer for everybody in Northern Ireland?