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FROM: A D S GOODALL

DATE: 26 November 1985

Private Secretary

cc:- Mr Clark, RID
Mr Mallaby, Cabinet Office
Mr Brennan, NIO

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND

1. The Irish Ambassador telephoned me this afternoon to say that the Taoiseach had decided to write an article for The Times in response to the negative piece today by Conor Cruise O'Brien. He has just sent round the attached text, which seems broadly helpful.

2. Mr Dorr explained that it was not certain that the Taoiseach's piece would make tomorrow's Times but the Embassy were doing their best. Meanwhile the Taoiseach's office wanted us to be forewarned.

3. I do not think the text needs to be brought to the Prime Minister's attention: but you may like to mention it on the telephone to Charles Powell.

AG

A D S Goodall

Please copy to
Mr Powell in No 10
W Appleby
26/11

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THE HILLSBOROUGH AGREEMENT

by An Taoiseach Dr Garret FitzGerald TD

The arguments for doing nothing are always the most seductive in politics. They often have a mesmeric effect. Being mesmerised about the danger of action is not the same as being worried or fearful. Of the two persons in three in the Republic who support the Anglo-Irish Agreement, I am sure at least one is worried, maybe even fearful. But this worry or fear is accompanied by the realisation that the situation in Northern Ireland cannot be allowed to drift further and that, in this case, the situation would inevitably get worse if allowed to fester.

Among those who criticise the Agreement in the South, there are some who take the mesmerised position: Do nothing. There is a kind of fascination with the horror of the situation and with the possibilities for greater horror still. On those who now counsel retreat from Hillsborough there is, in the face of the crisis and sufferings of the people of Northern Ireland, at least an obligation to offer some alternative to a passive fatalism. They have not done this.

The Hillsborough Agreement is not a magic cure. No sane person should be without some worry about Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the Agreement. The facts of the situation justify sober reflection: some 2,500 dead in the last sixteen years; some 25,000 maimed; some 45,000 incidents of shootings, bombings and arson. All this amongst a population of a million and a half.

Can this violence get worse? We should be under no illusion but that it can, because the Agreement threatens the merchants of violence. It is precisely for that reason, however, that the Agreement offers hope. It is a hope reflected in the recent MORI poll commissioned by The Sunday Times which showed 48% of Catholics in Northern Ireland expressing the view that the Agreement would lead to less support for the IRA and only 14% expressing the view that it would lead to more support. Despite prophecies of doom only one third of all the people of Northern Ireland believe the Agreement will lead to more support for the IRA. One third of Catholics and Protestants believe there will be less support and one third say neither or have no opinion.

People naturally have misgivings. But they also have hope. It was to give that hope to ordinary people that Margaret Thatcher and I signed the Hillsborough Agreement. We are both fully conscious of the risks of doing something to tackle violence at its political root. But we are firmly convinced that the riskiest path is to do nothing at all. This is one problem which will not solve itself.

It has been the great object of my political life to help to reconcile the two opposing traditions - Nationalist and Unionist - in Ireland. Not to make them the same. Not to subordinate one to the other. But to allow each to live with the other, each respecting and enriching the other. For all of that time I have believed that Unionists and Nationalists

must talk to each other and that an eventual solution will only come from that dialogue. It has been argued that the Hillsborough Agreement does the opposite: that it seeks to impose a solution, that it removes the incentive for Nationalists and Unionists to talk to each other and that it has been negotiated over the heads of the people of Northern Ireland. I see the Agreement differently.

The Agreement imposes no particular solution. On the contrary, its purpose is to provide a context in which a way forward can emerge. The Agreement addresses what has been obvious for some time, that Nationalists and Unionists within Northern Ireland have been incapable of agreeing a way forward by themselves. Both communities have deep problems of identity. Nationalists have not been able - nor have they been encouraged - to develop within structures which were alien to them in their own land. Unionists have been fearful - and their fear should be eased - of finding themselves in a similar position in their own land. The political arena of Northern Ireland needed to be widened to give more space to the Nationalist and Unionist parties. The lack of security of each side, which feeds off the other, needed the bolstering influence of both Governments. The political leaders of Northern Ireland needed to be given new opportunities for dialogue on a firmer base. This is the accomplishment of the Hillsborough Agreement. Unionists are now formally assured by both Governments in a solemn and binding international Agreement that there will be no change in the present status of

Northern Ireland without the freely given consent of the majority of its inhabitants; and are assured further that both Governments recognise that such consent does not at present exist. Nationalists are assured by both Governments that if in the future a majority decides in favour of Irish unity, the British and Irish Governments will take steps to give effect to that wish. Thus, both the Unionist and Nationalist positions are given equal legitimacy. On this there will be no change.

Nationalists in Northern Ireland look to Dublin for support of the legitimacy of the Nationalist position. We in Dublin will have a say in precisely those areas of the problems of Northern Ireland which touch on the issues of greatest sensitivity: political and security matters, legal matters including the administration of justice, matters of identity and cultural matters. The British Government will provide the same role - as the governing power - for Unionists while continuing to exercise responsibility, without any derogation of sovereignty, for all the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Both Governments want to see democracy at work in Northern Ireland. We want to see devolved structures set up on a basis of widespread acceptance across the two communities. The Agreement offers a solid basis for this to happen, not only by providing a firmer stage for the Unionist and Nationalist leaders but also by providing that the role of both Governments in devolved matters will cease when the political leaders get together and agree. We will gladly withdraw from the devolved areas in these circumstances.

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The Hillsborough Agreement is the result of long and often difficult discussion between the two Governments. I believe the very length and difficulty of the discussion has helped us to get a better grasp of each other's position and a better understanding of the problems facing us in Northern Ireland. We need now to communicate our shared perception to the people of Northern Ireland whom I believe will see merit in this Agreement on better acquaintance.