

1

PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH TO SECOND WORLD CLIMATE CONFERENCE

I attach a revised draft of your speech to the Second World Climate Conference. It takes account of some comments from Crispin Tickell: and Chris Patten has had another look and proposed some changes.

I also asked Professor Stewart for some suggestions. I attach his offering, some of which I have drawn on. But I have not found it easy to incorporate them all, not least on grounds of length.

We have time in the diary for a discussion tomorrow afternoon.

CDP

CHARLES POWELL  
30 October 1990

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2623 words

DRAFT SPEECH

FOR THE

PRIME MINISTER

TO

THE SECOND WORLD CLIMATE CONFERENCE

Introduction

Since the last World War, our world has faced many challenges, none more vital than that of defending our liberty and keeping the peace. Gradually and painstakingly we have built up the habit of international cooperation, above all through the United Nations. The extent of our success can be seen in the Gulf, where the nations of the world have shown unprecedented unity in condemning Iraq's invasion and taking the measures necessary to reverse it. [The threat is above all to the small and the vulnerable, whose protection is the international order and the rule of law. We are determined - all of us - to ensure that aggression does not succeed, does not pay.]

But the threat to our world comes not only from tyrants and their tanks. ~~As we know with increasing certainty,~~ it can be more insidious ~~even~~ though less visible. The danger of global warming is as yet unseen, ~~But it is nonetheless real:~~ <sup>but</sup> real enough for us to make ~~present~~ changes and sacrifices <sup>so that we do not</sup> ~~for the benefit~~ of future generations. <sup>but at the expense</sup>

Our ability to come together to stop or limit damage to the world's environment will be perhaps the greatest test ~~of all~~ of how far we can act as a world community. No-one should under-estimate the imagination that will be required, nor the scientific effort, nor the unprecedented co-operation. We shall have to show statesmanship of a rare order. <sup>how</sup> ~~If we did~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~not~~ know that, we <sup>are</sup> ~~would not be~~ here today.

Man and Nature: out of balance

For two centuries, since the Age of Enlightenment, we assumed that whatever the advance of science, whatever the <sup>economic</sup> development ~~of~~ our economies, whatever the increase in human numbers, the world would go on much the same. It was progress. And that was what we wanted.

Now we know that this is no longer true. We have become more and more aware of the growing imbalance between our species and other species, between population and resources, between humankind and the natural order of which we are part.

In recent years, we have been playing with the conditions of the life we know on the surface of our planet. We have cared too little for our seas, our forests and our land. We have treated the air and the oceans like a dustbin. We have come to realise that man's activities and numbers threaten to upset the biological balance which we have taken for granted and on which human life depends.

We must remember our duty to Nature before it is too late. That duty is constant. It is never completed. It lives on as we breathe. It endures as we eat and sleep, work and rest, multiply and ~~pass away~~. The duty to Nature will remain long after our own endeavours have brought peace to the Middle East. It will weigh on our shoulders for as long as we wish

Or, as we tip the  
scales of this earth.

as we are born and as we ~~die~~

to dwell on a living and thriving planet, and hand it on to our children and theirs.

The importance of research

I want to pay tribute to the important work which the United Nations has done to advance our understanding of climate change, and in particular the risks of global warming.

Dr. Tolba and Professor Obasi deserve our particular thanks for their far-sighted initiative in establishing the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The IPCC report is a remarkable achievement.

It is almost as difficult to get a large number of distinguished scientists to agree as it is to get agreement from a ~~group~~ group of politicians.

As a scientist who became a politician, I am

perhaps particularly qualified to make this observation!

Of course, much more research is needed. We do not yet know all the answers. Doubts and uncertainties remain. No-one can yet say with certainty - the IPCC report is very careful on this point - that it is human activities which have caused the apparent increase in global average temperatures. For instance, the total amount of carbon dioxide reaching the atmosphere each year from natural sources is some 600 billion tonnes, while the figure from human sources is <sup>only</sup> 18 billion tonnes.

Nor do we know with any precision the extent of the likely warming in the next century, nor what the regional effects will be. We cannot

be sure of the role of clouds. There is a continuing mystery about how atmospheric carbon, including the ~~tiny~~ extra contribution from human sources, is being absorbed: is most of it going into the ocean, as used to be thought, or is it feeding trees or plants, or soils, especially in the northern hemisphere? What is the effect of burning carbon on the earth's oxygen supplies, particularly in the sea? These are questions that need answers sooner rather than later.

Global climate change within limits need not by itself pose serious problems - our globe has after all seen a great deal of climate change over the centuries. It is notable that the micro-organisms - the blue-green algae which dominated the Precambrian period at the dawn of

life - are still major components of the marine phytoplanton today. Despite the global perturbations of many millions of years, these microbes have persisted on earth virtually unchanged, pumping out life-giving oxygen into the atmosphere and mopping up carbon dioxide.

The real dangers arise when climate change is combined with other problems of our age, such as the population explosion and consequent deterioration of soil fertility; increasing pollution of the sea; and when we use up the stored sunlight which is fossil fuel and cut down the world's forests, particularly those in the tropics.

Britain will continue to play a leading role in trying to answer the remaining questions and to

advance our state of knowledge of climate <sup>with Britain</sup> change. This year, we have established the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research for this purpose. We need to improve in particular our understanding of the effect of the oceans on our weather and our capability to model climate change. I have seen for myself the outstanding work being done on both these subjects at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado.

We must also make sure that research is carefully targeted. Too many people can do the same thing, and vital problems can be neglected. The task of global observation is immense. It will require a coordinated effort more ambitious than ever attempted before, as the meeting of scientists and experts last week

recognised.

The need for precautionary action

But the need for more research should be no excuse for failing to act. <sup>delaying much needed action.</sup> There is already a clear case for precautionary action at an international level. The IPCC tells us that we cannot repair the effects of past behaviour on our atmosphere in the same way as we might cleanse a stream. It will take, for example, until the second half of the next century, until the old age of my grandson, for the hole in the ozone layer above the Antarctic to disappear. <sup>Some</sup> The gases we are adding to the global heat trap will endure in the upper atmosphere for just as long.

The IPCC tells us that, on present trends, the

earth will warm up faster than at any time since the last ice age. (The consequences could be irreversible within any measurable human time frame.) Weather patterns could change so that what is now wet would become dry, and what is now dry would become wet. Rising seas <sup>c</sup>would threaten the livelihood of that substantial part of the world's population which lives on or near coasts. The character and behaviour of plants would change, some <sup>for</sup>better, some for worse. Some species of animals and plants would migrate to different zones or disappear for ever. Forests would die or move. And deserts would advance as green fields retreated.

Many of the precautionary actions that we need to take would be sensible in any event. It is

sensible to improve energy efficiency and use it prudently; sensible to develop alternative and sustainable sources of supply; sensible to replant the forests which we consume; sensible to re-examine industrial processes; sensible to tackle the problem of waste. I understand that the latest vogue is to call them 'no regrets' policies. Certainly we should have none in putting them into effect.

And our uncertainties about climate change are not all in one direction. The margins of error in the IPCC report are admittedly great. Climate change may be less than predicted. But equally it may occur more quickly than the present computer models suggest. Should this happen it would be doubly disastrous were we to shirk the challenge now. I see the adoption of

these policies as a sort of premium on insurance against fire, flood or other disaster. It may be cheaper or more cost-effective to take action now than to wait and pay much more later. This message has already reached some of our big companies, for instance in building off-shore oil platforms higher above the surface of the sea, *in the research they are doing to find substitutes for damage to the ozone layer*

The need for environmental diplomacy

We are all aware of the immense challenge. The enormity of the task should not <sup>*make us too pessimistic*</sup> ~~drive us to~~ despair. *The problem with science has created, science can solve provided structure* We have already established a <sup>*Co-operation*</sup> ~~model~~ of international ~~environmental~~ diplomacy to deal with ozone depletion. For the first time ever, rich and poor nations alike set out together to save our planet from a serious danger. This painstaking work culminated in

the historic agreement reached in London this year. That agreement is a real beacon of hope for the future.

The main focus in London was on protecting the ozone layer. But the agreement will have other consequences. We should not forget that CFCs are 10,000 times more powerful, molecule for molecule, than carbon dioxide as agents of global warming. We must focus on all greenhouse gases if we are to be successful in slowing the rate of climate change to acceptable levels.

~~Of course, at the present time, carbon dioxide is by far the most important greenhouse gas.~~

It contributes around half the manmade greenhouse warming. All our countries are

Nevertheless CO<sub>2</sub> is  
much more abundant - indeed  
it contributes about half  
the manmade greenhouse  
warming.

sources of it. The latest figures which I have seen show that 26 per cent comes from North America, 22 per cent from the rest of the OECD, 26 per cent from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and 26 per cent from the less developed countries. These figures underline why a joint international effort to curb carbon dioxide is so important. There is little point in action to reduce the amounts ~~(of carbon dioxide being put into the atmosphere)~~ in one part of the world, if the <sup>y are</sup> amounts are promptly increased in another. ~~In making the necessary effort we must of course take account of equity. Our industrial countries have particular responsibilities and should give a lead as well as an example.~~

Within this framework the United Kingdom is

prepared, as part of an international effort, to set itself the demanding target of bringing carbon dioxide emissions back to this year's level - whatever it may be - by 2005. That will mean <sup>reversing a rising trend</sup> ~~stabilising emissions~~ before that date. (Taken together with action in other areas, this would lead to a cut in our present contribution to greenhouse warming from all gases before the turn of the century.)

Targets on their own are not enough. They have to be achievable. Promises are easy. Action is difficult. For our part, we have worked out a strategy which sets us on the road to achieving the target. We propose ambitious programmes both to save energy and to encourage the use of cleaner fuels. Many of the measures we propose have little or no cost, and we shall

get on with those as quickly as possible.

We now require, by law, that at least 20% of our electricity comes from sources which do not generate carbon dioxide. ~~We plan a tenfold increase in power from renewable sources. We also envisage a continuing important~~

*including an important*  
contribution from nuclear energy.)

Such measures as these - which increasing numbers of countries are adopting - should be seen as part of the premium on that insurance policy to which I have referred. They buy us protection against the hazards of the future:

but they also pay dividends even if ~~catastrophe~~ *though the gloomy prediction is not fulfilled* does not materialise - dividends such as less air pollution, lowered acid rain, reduced energy costs.

We also wish to contribute to conserving the world's forests, and to planting new ones. ~~Trees help to reduce global warming.~~ We intend to plant more at home. We have just announced our plans to replant one of the ancient forests of England - destroyed in an earlier phase of our history. We shall offer our expertise and aid funds to help plant and manage forests elsewhere in the world, particularly in tropical countries. A year ago I told the UN General Assembly that the United Kingdom would aim to increase its funds for tropical forestry by £100m: we now have 115 projects underway in more than 30 countries.

The need for a Global Convention

But our immediate task this week is to ~~carry as~~ <sup>ag</sup>

many countries as possible with us <sup>so that we</sup> ~~on the road~~  
<sup>can</sup> ~~to negotiating~~ <sup>c</sup> a successful framework  
convention on climate change in 1992. We must  
also begin work on the binding <sup>commitments</sup> protocols that  
will be necessary to make the convention work.  
To accomplish these tasks, we must not waste  
time and energy disputing the IPCC's report or  
debating the right machinery for making  
progress. The IPCC's work should be taken as  
our sign post and the United Nations  
Environment Programme and the World  
Meteorological Organisation should be the  
principal vehicles for reaching our  
destination.

We will not succeed if we are too inflexible.  
We will not succeed if we try to ~~take~~ <sup>take</sup> ~~environmental diplomacy into~~ <sup>in</sup> selfrighteous

point-scoring for the benefit of audiences and voters at home. We have to work sympathetically together. We have to promote economic growth of a kind that benefits future as well as present generations in all our countries. We need it not only to raise living standards but to generate the wealth required to pay for protection of the environment. It would be absurd to adopt policies which would bankrupt the industrial nations or doom the poorer countries to increasing poverty. We have to recognise the widely different circumstances facing individual <sup>Countries</sup> ~~member states~~, with the better-off assisting the poorer as we agreed to do under the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer.

The differences can't be drafted away in

*that phrase belongs to the 1970s 'a form of words'*  
~~communiqués and declarations.~~ They need to be resolved by tolerant and sympathetic understanding of our various positions. Some of us use energy more efficiently than others. Some of us are less dependent on fossil fuels. And all of us have our own economic characteristics, resources, plans and hopes for the future. These are the realities that we must face if we are to move forward towards a successful conclusion to our negotiations in 1992.

Rich and poor, North and South, West and East - all of us have to play our part if we are to succeed. And succeed we must for the sake of this and future generations.

One of our greatest poets, George Herbert, in

his poem on "Man" wrote presciently:

"Man is all symmetry,  
Full of proportions, one limb to another,  
And all to all the world besides;  
Each part may call the farthest, brother;  
For head with foot hath private amity,  
And both with moons and tides."

We are, as we know, in symmetry with nature.  
To keep that precious balance, we need - all  
men and women - to work together for our  
environment. (I give this pledge.) The United  
Kingdom will work with all of you in this  
common cause - a cause to save our common  
inheritance for generations to come.