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Lunch with Mr. John Hume, Leader of the SDLP,
1 September, 1982.

Mr. Hume expressed considerable satisfaction at the party's decision on 24 August 1981, and said the vast majority of the party were behind it. There were a couple of dissentients in mid-Ulster, out and out boycotters whom he thought might be 'plants' in the party*, and Séamus Mallon was being wheeled in to talk to a meeting of the mid-Ulster constituency party in the next few days. He also referred to Mr. Austin Currie creating some difficulties on the other/ ^{side.} He was in general pleasantly surprised by how little criticism the party decision had provoked. The important thing was that it had retained the initiative firmly in the SDLP's hands.

He had spoken briefly with Pat Fahy, Leader of the IIP, who had privately told him the SDLP had made the right decision. Hume had asked why Fergal ^{us} McAteer had called it 'a sad day for Ireland'. The explanation seemed to be personal. Fahy had a good chance of picking up a seat, whereas McAteer had none. The IIP would tend to be crushed between the SDLP and the Provisionals.

Mr. Hume did not exclude the possibility that Provisional Sinn Féin might change their mind again and boycott the election. They had very little to gain.

*It seems to be a little more serious than that. The movement is headed by Mr. Paddy Duffy, an Executive Member.

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He thought that some of the Catholics who would have voted Alliance were coming back to the SDLP. The Alliance platform was simply not credible in present conditions.

He had hopes if Provisional Sinn Féin continued to contest that the Nationalist turn-out would be higher than usual. He estimated the SDLP would probably get 17-20 seats with about 3 going to other Nationalist representatives. They were not anxious for a high Unionist turn-out.

Mr. Hume said that their aim was to bring down the Assembly in the shortest possible time. He was half contemplating a direct démarche to Mrs. Thatcher asking her to call the whole thing off. If the SDLP succeeded, this would be a considerable feather in their cap.

Mr. Hume confirmed, as Mr. Mallon did last week, that they would not welcome any meeting with Mr. Prior before the elections. He expressed satisfaction with the current flurry of statements about the parliamentary tier, which had strengthened their position.

The shooting in Derry of an unarmed Provisional IRA man had provoked very strong feeling, and was unfortunately helpful to the Provisionals.

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His view was that while tempting any initiative relating to an all-Ireland body should be held over for the time being. They were fighting against the Prior Assembly and indeed opposing the parliamentary tier as conceived by Mr. Prior as a talking shop, and did not wish to be seen to be advocating any other kind of talking shop.

He intended speaking to Garret FitzGerald about holding off on the parliamentary tier. He had warned him of the danger of becoming Britain's favourite Irish Statesman. He said it would be helpful if Southern Protestant Irish businessmen or professional people could be persuaded to refute Paisley's claims about the decimation of the Protestant population in the Republic.

Martin Hanrahan

2 September, 1982.