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Secret

Meeting with Mr. Hume

I met by arrangement with Mr. Hume in London prior to his meeting of 10 May with Mr. Prior.

- He told me it was his intention to invite Mr. Prior to concentrate on Sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 of the Report of the New Ireland Forum and ignore the rest of the text. He said he would ask Prior to consider a joint statement with the Irish incorporating the substance of these three paragraphs. He would also suggest that the British should conduct their own reassessment of their position as part of this process.

On the evening of the 10th Mr. Hume came to the Irish Embassy in London where he spoke to the Ambassador and the undersigned.

He was somewhat depressed by his meeting earlier that afternoon which had gone on for two hours. Mr. Prior had been accompanied by his Parliamentary Private Secretary, Mr. Needham, and by a number of civil servants.

Hume found Prior's attitude to be very negative. Prior had insisted that it would be necessary that a policy of Irish unity be abandoned and that Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution should be removed. He persistently pressed Hume on the question of the SDLP participating in the Assembly. Hume believed that Prior was trying to take the accent off action by the two Governments and transfer it to the possibility of talks between the SDLP and the Unionists. He told Prior that the SDLP had been down that road frequently before and that everybody knew precisely where it led: nowhere.

Following his meeting with Prior, Hume met Needham for a drink. Needham suggested to Hume that Hume should write to Prior describing the meeting which had just taken place as a "disaster". Hume said that he was considering doing this.

Needham said that Robert Andrew, Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, had written a Memorandum for Prior for

possible presentation to Cabinet which stated that there was no room for manoeuvre on either the Unionist or Nationalist side in Northern Ireland at the moment and that the only course open to the Government was to continue direct rule.

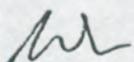
I made the point to Hume that the senior civil servants in the Northern Ireland Office were, in my experience, extraordinarily hostile to a political initiative. I said that Prior and Needham had both indicated to us on various occasions that they found their professional advisers difficult to deal with. I suggested to Hume that he should see a meeting at which Prior included these civil servants as being a set-piece occasion for going through an agenda of traditional British desiderata.

The Ambassador said Hume should bear in mind that this was an opening shot in Prior's negotiating process. Hume should not expect Prior to be particularly forthcoming at this stage.

Hume said that Prior was not forthcoming at all. His personal impression had been that Prior had abandoned even the limited ideas which he had had in the area of joint authority. He also had the impression that Prior was "confused".

Comment

It is difficult to disagree with Hume's view that there is an element of confusion in Prior's approach. On the one hand he has been leaking several outlets and personalities in Northern Ireland a range of ideas in the area of joint authority. On the other hand it is reported recently that he was seeking to conciliate Mr. Molyneux on the basis of the Official Unionist idea (note: we heard that Molyneux stated after his meeting with Prior that Prior told him that the only ground on which there would be joint security operations would be if they were set up both in Northern Ireland and in this State). Then again we see him taking this totally negative attitude with Hume. To my mind a large part of the problem is that Prior has no clear idea as to how to proceed at this point, either with Dublin or with the Parties in Northern Ireland.



M.J. Lillis
16 May 1984

cc Personal + Secret
Taoiseach Secretary
Tánaiste
Minister