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Mr Hume
7.12.88

Confidential

7.11.88

(NO1)

cc PSM
Mr. Kelly
P.L.
Mr. Kelly / Mr. Thompson
③ Mr. Hume
③ Mr. Kelly
J.P.K.

Meeting with Dr. John Alderdice

30 November 1988

The Alliance Party leader let me know that he was in a rather disagreeable mood, complaining about the Anglo-Irish Agreement and our apparently negative attitude to Article 4 and the possibility of devolution. He warned that the bulk of his party wanted to withdraw their support for the Agreement because of what they saw as the lack of goodwill on the devolution issue by either the Irish Government or the SDLP. He complained that since he became leader of the Alliance, John Hume ignored his requests for meetings and to date he has only managed to have a hurried 20 minutes with him about events in Duisberg. He said he was also disappointed that he had not been able to follow up what was for him "a very positive and useful" meeting with the Taoiseach last January. While he did not specifically say so, he implied that he believed that John Hume was instrumental in preventing his meeting the Taoiseach.

I said the Governments' position on devolution was well known and it would therefore be disingenuous and indeed incredulous if the Government were to state that they were actively seeking devolution. It would have the effect of making devolution unacceptable to unionists. I reassured him that his request for a meeting with the Taoiseach had not yet been fulfilled simply because of circumstances beyond anyone's control - pressure of work at home and abroad, the summer holidays and the Taoiseach's recent illness' for example.

He accepted my argument and explanations and it became obvious that his main focus for complaint was John Hume.

Shortly before I met him, Alderdice had spoken to Peter Robinson who informed him that John Hume had had a meeting with unionists, in Westminster this week (Tuesday, I gathered). He would not (or was unable) to give me more details on the meeting except to say that the unionists were cautiously pleased with it and a

follow up had been arranged. He said that Hume's speech at the SDLP Conference on Saturday was taken as a signal by the unionists and they acted on it. Alderdice formed the conduit by which the meeting was arranged. He made the point that both Molyneaux and Paisley are reluctant to participate in any political movement. Nonetheless, both feel compelled to go along with any talks that may begin. Alderdice said that one of the obstacles was an absence of that vital element of trust in Hume by the unionist leadership and vice-versa. In these circumstances, he argued that there was a need for a "bridge" between both sides and he felt that Alliance could provide that link.

Notwithstanding this, he was told, apparently by Robinson, that Hume has asked for the exclusion of the Alliance Party from any preliminary negotiations. Alderdice feels that this will be accomplished by holding all their meetings at Westminster.

Alderdice, visibly annoyed at his exclusion, pointed out that the Alliance Party had been the catalyst at Duisberg and the go between in the activities which followed it. He argued that they, more than anyone else, had convinced the unionist rank and file of the futility of opposing the Anglo-Irish Agreement and not actively seeking a political settlement. It was Alliance, he said which finally convinced the Churches to encourage unionist politicians of the need to look for a political solution. Their recent joint statement calling for an input into the review of the workings of the Conference had come after he personally had visited all the Church leaders and asked them to do so. This added to the pressure on unionist political leaders from within their own community to engage in the current contact.

He feels his party has at least bought its place at the conference table. He added that Alliance could still have a pivoted role in the lead up or during any negotiations because they are in the unique position of being able to shoulder what is

politically unacceptable to mainstream unionists and to put them on the table in such a way as to avoid forcing one or other side to withdraw.



Liam Canniffe
1 December 1988

c.c. Mr. Gallagher.