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Interview with SDLP Leader, Mr. John Hume, "Inside Politics",  
 Radio Ulster, Saturday, 25 September, 1993

Interviewer: Jim Dougal

**Introduction:** Good afternoon. Since at least last April the SDLP leader John Hume has been engaged in talks with the Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams. Discussions which a statement at the time said were designed to find an overall strategy for lasting peace. In other words, a strategy which would bring an end to violence.

Those talks are still under way and both men have expressed confidence in each other's sincerity and commitment. Gerry Adams has said that the initiative is the only one which can move forward but John Hume says he will continue with it as long as he believes there is hope for a successful outcome.

Mr. Hume has weathered considerable criticism, in particular from Unionist politicians and some commentators in the Dublin media. He has also dismissed claims that the SDLP is involved in a pan-nationalist front which includes Sinn Fein and the IRA.

Last week during a meeting in Downing Street with the Prime Minister John Major and the Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew, his talks with Mr. Adams were also discussed. Then last weekend on this programme there was some criticism from an unexpected quarter when Mr. Hume's colleague the MP for West Belfast, Dr. Joe Hendron, said the discussions were undermining his position. Seamus Mallon also appeared to express his own reservations. This unease seems to have been

meeting between the four SDLP MP's Mr. Hume was given full support to continue his discussions. Later the homes of five members of the Party including that of Dr. Hendron were attacked by the Ulster Freedom Fighters. The UFF said the attacks were a response to the Sinn Fein talks.

Also this week John Hume led a party delegation and a meeting with the Minister for Political Development Michael Ancram. They discussed how those other negotiations between the SDLP, the Ulster Unionists, the Democratic Unionists, the Alliance Party and the British and Irish Governments stalled since last November could be re-started.

I am joined from our studio in Radio Foyle by the SDLP Leader. John Hume, thank you very much for coming in. Can I ask you first of all about this so-called pan-nationalist front. Are you involved in a pan-nationalist front with Sinn Fein, the IRA and the Irish Government?

**Mr. Hume:** That question doesn't even need answering. There's no such way that we are involved in a pan-nationalist front, and by the way, the people that use that term have also said that involved in that pan-nationalist front include the Catholic Church and the GAA. It's just an attempt to deepen sectarianism by people who are deeply sectarian. That's all that is, there's no question of any front. Neither is there even a question of a front between Sinn Fein and the SDLP. I mean as you have pointed out, the talks were underway in April, the local elections took place in June, I didn't notice any sign of any pan-nationalist or any agreement of any description at political level on that front and, of course, if there were a pan-nationalist front Mr. Maginnis would not be a member of Parliament for Fermanagh-South Tyrone and Mr. McCrea would not be the MP for Mid-Ulster. There is quite clearly a pan-Unionist, at least, agreement in elections, it is quite clear that there never has been any such agreement in elections with ourselves and Sinn Fein. So, anybody with any sense knows that is just a cheap jibe, and cheap, and loaded, sectarianism.

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**Interviewer:** Can you though understand why Unionists would say it when you are talking to Gerry Adams and at the same time the IRA are continuing carrying out attacks?

**Mr. Hume:** I have said, and said repeatedly, that I know that Unionist politicians talk regularly to paramilitary organisations. There is no doubt about that, I have repeated that repeatedly. They have not only talked to them; in the past they have sat around the table with them in order to plan how to achieve political objectives using the methods of paramilitaries. That happened in the Ulster Workers Council strike, for example, to bring down the first partnership government that we have had. The SDLP's position on violence has never changed, we have totally and absolutely opposed violence, from all paramilitary organisations right throughout this past twenty years, and as a result of our opposition to them, homes of many of our members have been attacked from both sides of the paramilitary divide and to this very day our opposition to violence remains the same. Our position is very clear, it is my position as leader of the Party, it is the view of the entire Party, violence has no contribution of any description to make to our problem other than to make it worse. It has divided society, a divided people, all that violence does and we have said this repeatedly is deepen the division and deepen the bitterness that goes to the heart of those divisions.

**Interviewer:** Wouldn't the IRA make it a lot easier for you in your talks if they were to suspend their operation?

**Mr. Hume:** Well, naturally I wish, it would make it a lot easier for everybody if the IRA had stopped altogether, or if they had never even started, and if the loyalist paramilitaries weren't in action either there isn't any doubt about that, I would love to see that happening. But, that has not happened, I mean the IRA have persisted in their campaign, all sorts of methods have been used to try and bring it to an end. All that I am doing, all that I am doing, is talking to someone, talking. I'm a politician, I'm elected, all I'm

don't they simply wait and see what the outcome is. All I said at the beginning is, suspend your judgement. If I can save hume life by talking, have I not a duty to do so?

Interviewer: Are you still hopeful that will happen?

Mr. Hume: I am still hopeful and I repeat - and by the way - I'm getting a bit fed up repeating, you know, because I've said it very clearly so often, I will continue the dialogue until it reaches a conclusion which I hope will be a successful one and a positive one.

Interviewer: What about the loyalist paramilitaries who use your talks and have been using your talks as an excuse to attack your members' homes?

Mr. Hume: They were attacking our members' homes before these talks. That is a matter of fact which can be checked if you look at the attacks that have been taking place this year on the homes of our members. Its just an act of naked sectarianism against people particularly at local Councillor level who as the people in those areas know, and the reaction to the attacks from both sections of the community behind those people shows it, are people who are giving public service at local Councillor level and who are themselves as members of our Party totally and absolutely opposed to all violence. So one wonders why these paramilitary organisations are doing that, do they want people to leave public life? Do they want people to quit public life altogether and do they realise what that means, that there is no politics, are they looking just for the whole community to be controlled by paramilitary organisations?

Interviewer: What do you say to those people who attack your members' homes?

Mr. Hume: Well, first of all its appalling, I condemn it without reservation and I welcome the similar condemnations which have come from elected representatives on the Unionist side. It's absolutely outrageous.



public service to the people of their areas, in the Councils of their areas, Councillors know them, the people know them, and there has been a very powerful reaction from both sections of the community in condemnation of the attacks on them.

Interviewer: Well, I mean if you are talking to Sinn Fein would you talk to the UFF, to the people who are attacking your members

Mr. Hume: I have made clear time out of number that I will talk to anyone if I can improve the situation in this community and I have particularly made clear that I will talk directly to loyalist paramilitaries.

Interviewer: Are you saying that you would talk to the people who are attacking the homes of your members'?

Mr. Hume: I will talk directly to any paramilitary because I believe that meeting people face to face is, and can be, valuable because people who engage in that sort of activity quite often have notions in their head which are far removed from the reality particularly about the views of other people. But, I repeat, and the public out there know I've said this repeatedly, I am, and I have offered directly before on air and in statements, to talk directly to the loyalist paramilitaries and I am still willing to do that if they are willing to do so or willing to listen.

Interviewer: If they agree to talk to you what would you say to the people who are attacking your members' homes?

Mr. Hume: Well, first of all, if I was in front of them I would be telling them that violence against anyone in our society has no contribution to make. I would be telling them that its an accident at birth where we are born and what we are born, as they often say, and that the answer to our differences isn't violence, but the only way we can settle our problem is to respect our differences and to reach agreements on how we can accommodate those differences and how we can then work together in the common interest of the people of this part of the world which is largely promoting employment,

**Interviewer:** Do you now have the full support of your Party in your talks with Mr. Adams?

**Mr. Hume:** I have always had the full support of my Party in my talks with Mr. Adams and still have the support because all of my Party who are totally opposed to violence from all quarters recognise that it is the duty of our Party at every level to do all in our power to bring about lasting peace in this society.

**Interviewer:** And you say that even though there was some criticism from Dr. Hendron last week?

**Mr. Hume:** I think that people took Dr. Hendron's remarks completely out of context. Dr. Hendron was talking about, and underlining the fact, that there is no pan-nationalist front. Dr. Hendron was talking about the internal tension which is very evident in West Belfast between our Party and Sinn Fein but he made clear that, in spite of that internal tension, or what political results, political battles in that internal tension would lead to, he put the achievement of lasting peace far above that and strongly and solidly supported me as I know personally he has done from day one.

**Interviewer:** They fully support you now you say?

**Mr. Hume:** Well, there isn't any doubt about that. There never has been and the statements that came out of our meeting last week underlined that.

**Interviewer:** What about the phrase you used ten days ago when you said that you didn't give two balls of roasted snow about the criticism. Now the UFF used that in their statement against you and Ian Paisley used it when he said that it proved you didn't care about Unionist opinion. Do you regret the use of those words?

**Mr. Hume:** Well, not at all. You don't understand Derry

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roasted snow". It's what I was replying to, was the critics who kept repeating their criticism and have been repeating over the months. In fact, a lot of people are just using it to fill space in newspapers and earn money for themselves but making no contribution to the peaceful process and I was making clear that the opinions of people like that weren't worth two balls of roasted snow, a great old Derry saying.

Interviewer: I understand that you are still not in a position to give us any details of the talks with Mr. Adams, is that right?

Mr. Ruane: I am not going to repeat what I have kept repeating. The talks will continue until we reach a conclusion which I hope will be a successful one.

Interviewer: You also had a meeting during the week with Michael Ancram the Minister for Political Development. What exactly does the Government want the parties to do now to get back into negotiations?

Mr. Ruane: They want the parties round the table and we are willing to go around the table. When people, including commentators, talk about getting the politicians round the table, I wish they would be specific. The SDLP are willing to go to the table tomorrow, the Alliance Party are willing to go to the table tomorrow, the two Governments are willing to go to the table tomorrow, the people who are not willing to go to the table, and their reasons should be analysed, are the OUP and the DUP. They keep inventing reasons why they are not going to come to the table, I mean they say they won't talk to the SDLP while I am engaged in talks with the President of Sinn Fein, yet these are people who have talked directly to paramilitary organisations. I saw the leader of the Unionist Party marching in a photograph surrounded by hooded men, imagine if I had done that. So, you know, they are only inventing reasons and one would have thought, I mean, if Unionists announced they were talking to people engaged in



because I think they would be doing a very good thing and I wish they would do it.

Interviewer: Are you optimistic that talks of the kind that were going on last year will start again?

Mr. Hume: Well, I think the mood in the community is certainly very powerfully strong behind the talks process and wants to get them going again and that's what the people want and I think that's what will eventually happen.

Interviewer: John Hume, we must leave it there. Thank you very much.