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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,  
SW1X 7HR

Telephone: 071-235 2171

TELEX: 916104

Fax: 071-245 6961

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Mr Sean O hUiginn  
Anglo Irish Division  
HQ

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PSS  
Mr. Mureay  
Sent to  
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YE Counsellor-

Hume addresses Labour party NI Committee

Dear Assistant Secretary

John Hume addressed a private meeting of the parliamentary Labour party's committee on Northern Ireland last night - 25 January. I subsequently met with Amanda Francis, Secretary of the committee and she passed to me her notes on what was clearly a successful and interesting meeting. Although much of what Hume had to say will be well familiar to you, I felt that you might nonetheless be interested in a fairly detailed account of what he had to say, especially in reply to questions.

He began with some well worn observations. Northern Ireland he said has the highest church going population in Europe but the largest number of barriers separating its two communities. He spoke of the exclusivity of the Unionist mind-set based on a fundamental lack of self confidence. He told the meeting about the problems of the divided communities and the fact that this division had been the central problem of recent Irish history. There could only be real peace when this is sorted out. Partition, he said had institutionalised an existing problem. The essence of public order he told them is agreement among people on how they are to be governed. So long as there is no such agreement there will be inherent instability.

He then went on to make some well tailored comments which went down well with this particular audience. He spoke about his own up-bringing in Derry and his life long belief in socialism. He recalled for example, his father's mistrust of the dogmas of the old Nationalist politics of Northern Ireland. He recalled his father telling him at an early age that no one could ever "eat a flag". He described his own personal opposition to old style Nationalism and his belief in the need for a new party which would move away from the pre-occupations about territory to a socialist ethos embracing the politics of bread and butter. 1916 had been about dying for Ireland. It was a short but terrible step from this to killing for Ireland.

The future lay in Europe and the lessons it taught us about the value and possibilities of institutions which respected and catered for diversity. To succeed, the objective of Irish unity would have to have as an intrinsic part the acceptance of diversity. The key will be to find agreement. It doesn't much matter what the substance of the agreement is - once you have agreement all else will follow.

He spoke of the futility of British Government policy - 20,000 troops on the streets, 12,000 armed policemen on patrol and the strictest security regime in Europe. It was all to no avail.

He recounted for the meeting - with some selectivity - his dealings with Sinn Fein going back to 1988. He reminded them that he came from the same community as Sinn Fein. From the outset he said his discussions with Gerry Adams had focused on methods and reasons. They had first focused at methods and he had obliged Adams to acknowledge the lessons that were so clearly visible from the pattern of violence. More than half of those killed had been civilians, more than half of those killed by the IRA had been members of their own organisation. The pattern spoke for itself.

As they saw it, Sinn Fein had two principal reasons for continuing their struggle - the British Government's insistence on defending its interests in Northern Ireland by force and its denial to the Irish people of the exercise of its right to self determination. Hume had sought to persuade Adams that this analysis was out of date. It might have been true in the past but was no longer applicable. The British had now publicly acknowledged that they no longer had a selfish or strategic interest in Ireland. The legacy of this remained but the basic cause had been removed.

Hume emphasised the importance of Peter Brook's speech which first acknowledged this. He had, he said, kept Brooke informed about his contacts with Sinn Fein at that time and he had also sought to ensure that Sinn Fein, in due course, appreciated the significance of what Brook had said.

He had told Sinn Fein that he had no difference with them on the question of self determination provided it was self determination for people and not for land. Sinn Fein had seen this as a break-through in their understanding of where Hume was coming from. Adams had told him that this was the first time he had heard Hume publicly endorse the objective of self determination. Hume's task had been to get Adams to appreciate that the problem was the difference of view among the people of Ireland about how the right of self determination should be exercised.

It followed from his dialogue with Adams, that the next task was to get the two Governments to act. He had, he said, told both Governments all along that he would take full responsibility "and the flak" for the talks. This was his decision and his risk. He admitted that he had known nothing of the British Government's contacts with Sinn Fein and he referred sarcastically to this duplicity.

The wording in the Joint Declaration was, he assured the meeting, similar to what he had agreed with Adams. Before the impact of the Declaration could even be digested however, the republican community had heard the Prime Minister reiterating his Unionism. Language had been used which did not sit comfortably with the requirements of a peace process. People should not underestimate the atmosphere of mistrust and paranoia about British intentions which pervaded the ranks of Republicanism. He said that in any extremist organisation the thing most feared is a split which could be very bloody indeed.

He then launched a strong attack on Unionism. Unionists strength lay in its numbers and its geography not in its relationship with the British Government. It was a fundamental flaw in Unionist reasoning to continually look to the British Government for re-assurance. It was vital for them to sort out their relationship with the rest of Ireland, with the people among whom they lived. A key question which Sinn Fein wanted to address to the British Government related to the Unionist veto. What did it propose to do if the Unionists insisted on the status quo? He wondered if they would have any answer to this? The Unionists strategy was based on a calculation that Sinn Fein would not accept the Declaration. Much of what Molyneaux had said had not helped the internal debate within the republican movement. In a side-swipe at the outcome of the review of constituency boundaries, Hume remarked that this hadn't helped either, since the only ones who appeared to benefit were the OUP. He and his colleagues had to ask whether this too might not have been part of the Government's deal with the OUP.

Turning to the question of clarification, he told the meeting, that it was not a question of negotiation. He had himself made a suggestion which might, if accepted, get around this problem. He suggested using a phrase - "interpretation within the framework of the Declaration". If the Government had been prepared to talk in secret to Sinn Fein, why now did they feel themselves unable to agree to clarification. For that matter why issue an exclusion order on Gerry Adams? Was this another part of the deal with the Unionists?

Sinn Fein had a real problem when they saw the leadership of the Alliance party, with 4.7% of the popular vote, walking in and out of Government buildings in Dublin and London.

There were, he said, three fundamental issues on which Sinn Fein sought clarification. They needed to be reassured about the Unionist veto, they needed to have further explained to them what the Government understood by self determination and they needed to hear at first hand about the modalities of the de-contamination period.

He concluded by telling the meeting of his view that Sinn Fein in the urban areas was in favour of the Declaration, whereas those in rural areas were opposed to it. Adams and those with him on the leadership needed, he said, to get everyones agreement. That was partly why the process was taking so much time.



There were a number of questions, as follows:

Dennis Canavan asked him if he felt that the peace process was running out of time? Hume replied that people "always want deadlines" but in his experience the biggest asset was patience. Things could be speeded up if the Government gave clarification. The Government think Sinn Fein is bluffing. If so, let them call their bluff.

Tommy McAvooy wondered if clarification were really needed. Couldn't it just be a device by Sinn Fein to drag things out indefinitely. Hume's response was that it should be kept within a definite timetable - "no longer than a week".

Harry Barnes predictably took an NIO inspired line. Sinn Fein he said had already received clarification. He instanced for example Mayhew's speech. There was also a need for clarification about the specifics of Hume's dialogue with Adams. Hume's reply to this was to stress that the Joint Declaration was a central objective. The entire strategy to achieve a permanent cessation of violence had been to get this Declaration from both Governments. It would be pointless and distracting to start a side-line debate. When the time comes, he said, we will release the Hume/Adams documents. The time is not, however, now. People should remember that the toughest political opponents of Sinn Fein are the SDLP. It had been essential therefore for him to establish trust with Gerry Adams. A vital ingredient of this had been their agreement that anything said in public should only be by agreement between both. When the time is right he will seek that agreement from Adams.

Jeremy Corbyn asked about the danger of the Declaration fading onto the sidelines, allowing the British Government to press ahead with its own agenda, for example increased security measures. Hume agreed that this was a worry for him also. The present leadership of Sinn Fein, well remembered the onset of the troubles when the republican movement had been obliged to resurrect itself from obscurity, having been stung into action by taunts about its irrelevance and in-effectiveness. The very people who had led that criticism then were now themselves in charge of the republican movement.

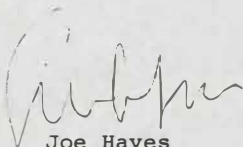
John Reid, one of the Shadow defence team, told the meeting of a recent call on him by the General Secretary of the Orange Order. He told the meeting that other representatives of the Order had approached colleagues. He specifically named Dennis Canavan, John Home Robertson?? and Tom Clarke. It was clear from these approaches that there were elements within the Unionist community who did not fully trust the intentions of the Prime Minister and who were by implication concerned about Molyneaux's strategy. They had enquired about attitudes within the Labour party. The meeting anticipated a most interesting question following these revelations. Reid's question however, was simply to ask Hume whether Sinn Fein's demand for clarification was more symbolic than real. Hume replied that it was a mixture of both. What he described as "the dignity factor" should not be underestimated. The republican movement did not want John Hume as its messenger. Sinn Fein needed both information and contact from the Government and they believed that they had a right to both.

Hume referred briefly to his recent meeting with the Prime Minister remarking that Major now accepted that he had leaned too far in one direction in his public comments about the Declaration.

The final question came from Kevin McNamara who felt that the Unionists never wanted to reach agreement. They had, he said, dragged out the preparatory stages of the talks process making a meal out of the search for an independent Chairman. McNamara remarked on Mayhew's comments in the debate on 21 January when he referred to local Government and devolved institutions. Government statements were littered with signals about the OUP agenda. Hume agreed. Molyneaux he said, was openly talking about power going back to local government in Northern Ireland within twelve months. He was speaking in a manner which, according to Hume, suggested that he might have the Prime Minister's authority.

Unusually for such a gathering, Hume's speech was met with sustained applause. We might note in passing that the next meeting of the Committee on 16 February will hear from Paisley and Robinson. Incidentally you might have noticed the report in the Financial Times on Tuesday last, 22 January, which referred in passing to a meeting which Paisley had with Tory MPs the previous evening. So far I have been unable to run this to earth. Perhaps I should put it this way I can find no Conservative MP prepared to admit that he had attended such a meeting.

Yours sincerely



Joe Hayes  
Counsellor

cc Secretariat