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CC Mr Boys Smith (B&L)
Miss Wright (B&L)
Mr Smith (B&L)
Mr Blelloch
Mr Marshall
Mr Wyatt
Mr Moriarty
Mr Doyne Ditzmas
Mr Palmer ✓
Mr Blatherwick
Mr Chesterton
Mr Harrington

13 AUG 1981

*Miss Robb
Mr Dalzell
MT
14/8*

Mr. Templeton

Mr. intercity.

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MEETING WITH MR JOHN HUME, STORMONT CASTLE, 10 AUGUST 1981

Present:

Secretary of State
Mr Blelloch
Mr Blatherwick
Mr Boys Smith

Mr John Hume

During the course of a 2½ hour meeting Mr Hume expressed his anxiety about the present political situation, which he believed was caused largely by the continuation of the hunger strike. He made the following points:

- (i) the SDLP had for 10 years provided an alternative to violence and had participated in democratic processes. There had however been a political vacuum since the collapse of the Executive in 1974 despite efforts to reach a settlement;
- (ii) the Government treated the SDLP with contempt, as a result of which its role as a serious party was being undermined. It could offer its supporters only the access that its leaders had to the Secretary of State. For example, the suggestions it had recently made for appointments to area boards had all been rejected and it was seen to be without influence. Members of the party were disaffected even about continuing to contribute to local government. He wondered how long it would remain an effective party;
- (iii) the continuation of the hunger strike had caused widespread bitterness which would erupt in due course. Those who sought peaceful development were being weakened as a result. This atmosphere was much more serious than the hunger strike itself;

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(iv) he believed the PSF would run a candidate in each constituency in the Irish Republic in the General Election which he expected they would precipitate at a time of their own choosing (but very probably before Christmas) by causing Agnew to resign in due course. They might succeed in having 10 candidates elected to the Dial and thereby holding the balance of power;

(v) PIRA was well pleased at the way things were developing and at the increasing tension and bitterness. Their propaganda was succeeding, and if the Government thought otherwise it was greatly mistaken. The PIRA believed that for the first time in a long period they had won young people away from the moderates. These moderates, including the SDLP, would increasingly become targets for PIRA pressure. Party members and local Councillors would not be able to resist these pressures even if the leaders could;

(vi) the RUC was not widely accepted in the minority community and would not be until a consensus was reached on the political future of the Province. He would not go so far as to say, as the Secretary of State suggested, that the RUC was more widely accepted than it had been 10 years ago. The failure of Catholics to join the RUC in any significant number was a fact of life which would remain until there was political development;

(vii) he believed that the Government should consider declaring Northern Ireland an area of shared sovereignty which could be administered by joint commissions. The Government had extensive leverage on Protestant opinion which it could exercise without withdrawing financial or other support.

In further discussion of the hunger strike Mr Hume made the following points:

(i) he believed the hunger strike could have been solved before. The involvement of the Prime Minister had been unfortunate, both

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because of the attitude she adopted and because no higher authority now remained to whom matters could be put for final resolution;

(ii) he had met relatives of the hunger strikers, and at their request had also met two leading Belfast Provisionals who had said they were ready for him to try to bring about a settlement and that he might meet the prisoners. He believed this was a significant development; previously the hunger strikers were unwilling to see him. The PIRA leaders had told him that they wanted the dispute solved and that there was a gulf between them and the prisoners; they could see to call the hunger strike off only at the risk of causing strife within their own movement;

(iii) against this background Mr Hume was willing personally to make efforts to seek a solution. It was essential to bring the matter to a close both because of its intrinsic seriousness and because of the wider effect it was having on attitudes and the political scene in Northern Ireland. His perception of the hunger strike was different from that of the Government; in particular the Government appeared to see it in terms of principles whilst he saw it in terms of its practical impact;

(iv) he agreed with the Secretary of State that the dispute was a political matter and not about prison conditions. He believed that the Government should be ready to negotiate although he accepted that there could not be a re-establishment of a compound or the creation of prisoner-of-war camps. He noted that central to the dispute were circumstances under which the prisoners were prepared to undertake work. He and the minority community as a whole saw the recent prisoners' statements as conciliatory in tone. It was simplistic to continue to emphasise the need to treat criminals as criminals.

(v) he did not believe that reaching a settlement with the hunger strikers would create any significant problem with the Protestant community as a whole or with the extremists within it. The threats of the extremists would remain threats.

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(vi) he was firmly of the view, as he thought was the minority community, that in the end there would have to be an amnesty for terrorist offenders, although he would not say so publicly because it would encourage the PIRA to continue their campaign.

The Secretary of State emphasised that he too wished to see an early end to the hunger strike. He would continue to provide a humane and constructive regime; the Government had already made a number of changes to that end. All prisoners must, however, accept that they were convicted of acts which in all countries would be accepted as crimes (and which Mr Hume himself accepted were crimes), and that they would be detained for the course of their sentences in proper conditions but without differential or special treatment because of their alleged motives. He referred to the Government's need to retain control of the prison and therefore, for example to the need for the prison authorities to be able to allocate people to suitable work. There could be no question of restoring all remission lost as a result of the protest. Nor would the Government negotiate. If there were real signs that the hunger strikers wanted to bring the dispute to an end he would be hopeful; but there were no such signs so far. An indication that they were serious in their wish to bring the matter to a close would be the suspension of the hunger strike.

The Secretary of State could not agree to Mr Hume's suggestion that Northern Ireland should be declared an area of joint sovereignty. But he pointed out that the Government gave considerable protection to the minority community by remaining unwilling to restore devolved Government save in a form acceptable to the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. It was not for him to persuade people in Northern Ireland to ^{agree} that there should be a single Irish state but for those in the Republic and in Northern Ireland who wanted them to do so. The Government would not however stand in the way of the people of Northern Ireland if they wanted unity; he had made this clear before and doubted Mr Hume's view that in what he was saying he was adding anything significant to opinions he had earlier expressed.

The discussion on the hunger strike continued with Mr Blelloch and Mr Blatherwick after the departure of the Secretary of State; see

Mr Blatherwick's note for the record of 11 August.

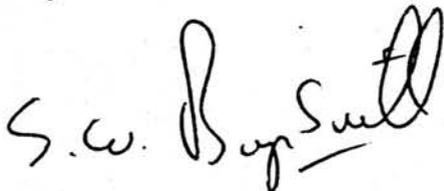
Northern Ireland Council

The Secretary of State invited Mr Hume's views on the establishment of the Northern Ireland Council. He pointed out that the Council would provide a way to take forward political affairs in the Province and would give the SDLP an established way of offering advice to the Government and to Parliament. He and Parliament needed considered political advice from the Province and could best obtain it through a Council. He would also value the opinions of the NIC on the developing discussions with the Government of the Irish Republic. He was anxious to set up the Council soon, which was why he wanted at least in the first instance to proceed without direct elections although in due course elections might be appropriate.

Mr Hume said that neither the Government nor Parliament had any obvious interest in the views of the SDLP and he doubted the value of their participating in the NIC. He believed there was no way in which he could persuade the members of his party to join in.

Fermanagh and South Tyrone By-Election

Mr Hume said that Fermanagh and South Tyrone was a constituency in which the SDLP had always done badly. Recent local elections had shown they would have no chance of success in a by-election. This was the real reason for the party deciding not to put up a candidate. Moreover, if they lost to the H block candidate, the result would be represented as a PIRA victory over the SDLP which would be very damaging to his party.



S W BOYS SMITH
Private Secretary

12 August 1981