

DESH 87 5-26 P.M
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NOTE OF A MEETING WITH MR HUME ON 7 NOVEMBER 1984

Present:- Secretary of State
Mr Hume
Mr Andrew
Mr Sandiford

The Secretary of State recalled that he had already had an introductory round of talks with party leaders, and explained that the present meeting was the first of a further round in which he wished to explore the views of the party leaders in more detail.

2. The Secretary of State said that the UK Government was not content merely to act as the passive administrators of direct rule. In the search for political progress, three aspects were connected:-

(i) the scope for an Irish dimension, which the Secretary of State recognised had been the main concern of Mr Hume as one of the main originators of the New Ireland Forum;

(ii) scope for new arrangements for devolved government in Northern Ireland, which could come only through discussion among the party leaders in NI; and

(iii) scope for action to make it easier for members of the minority to express their Irish identity.

3. The Secretary of State said that the scope for an Irish dimension was bound to be one of the concerns of the forthcoming Anglo-Irish Summit. He thought that the Dublin Government understood that the UK Government did regard the summit as an important part of the political process. On the British side, the Prime Minister was keen to make any possible progress, and had considerable personal respect for Dr FitzGerald. On the Irish side too, there was a desire for progress...

speech in the Commons debate on 2 July on the Forum Report, that joint authority which gave the Irish Government a measure of executive responsibility in the North was not a feasible option; but something less than that, involving a measure of consultation, had not been excluded. The Secretary of State thought that it should be possible, and was desirable, to keep the process of discussion going in a useful way, provided that both the desire for progress and the limits on the scope for action were recognised.

4. Mr Hume asked whether he was to take it from this that joint authority was not a possible outcome. The Secretary of State repeated that Mr Prior had said as much on 2 July, and that the Prime Minister had since also spoken to the same effect. Mr Hume asked what, then, the summit would be reduced to discussing. He himself had consistently made clear that what he was looking for was a response to that section of the Forum Report which dealt with the "realities". This section presented an analysis of the problem, and the difficulty to date had been that the parties disagreed even about the nature of the problem. The Unionists saw only a security problem, which they thought could be dealt with by a tough security policy. The SDLP attempted to see the problem in a broader perspective. The "realities" section of the Forum Report had sought to define the problem in terms of the need to accommodate both those who had a Protestant ethos and particularly valued the link with Britain, and those with a Roman Catholic ethos and Gaelic culture, who had aspirations towards Irish unity.

5. Mr Hume said that if the two sovereign Governments could agree for the first time on the realities, or principles, underlying the situation, then he believed that the parties would accept the realities and move to fruitful dialogue. From the summit, Mr Hume asked only for agreement on the realities; he certainly did not expect an announcement of particular measures decided upon.

6. Mr Hume said that the reaction to the Kilbrandon Report reminded him of the reaction which the Forum Report had received. The Kilbrandon analysis was similar to the Forum analysis. Mr Hume said that his own belief on the importance of agreeing the analysis was so great that he had asked the other parties to the New Ireland Forum to stop their work, and their report, at the point where the analysis

of realities was agreed. He had thought that this was the most appropriate point at which to halt and invite comment from other interests. The other parties to the Forum had not, however, been content with this, and the Forum Report had in the event gone on to canvass particular options. Mr Hume said that he, however, remained committed to the approach of agreeing first upon the analysis.

7. The Secretary of State said that he found Mr Hume's explanation very interesting, and recalled that Mr Hume had spoken to the same general effect in the recent televised discussion programme "Question Time". He added that, at about the same time as the Forum Report had been published, the Unionists had also published a document ("The Way Forward") which had something of the same conciliatory tone as the Forum Report itself. When the Forum Report and other documents had been debated in the House of Commons on 2 July, Mr Prior had presented a series of realities as the British Government saw them. The Secretary of State said that it would in logic be possible to pursue in public the debate on "realities", and that he recognised the train of thought which had led Mr Hume to suggest this. He feared, however, that this might lead to a sterile controversy.

8. The Secretary of State said that he was very concerned that progress should be made, and that a process of substantial dialogue should be pursued. He agreed that the summit should not be expected to produce practical agreement on measures to be undertaken. He did hope, however, that some form of agreement might be reached on general principles, even if these were not so elaborate or deeply conceived as Mr Hume would wish.

9. Mr Hume said that it was important to recognise that the problem was not about Northern Ireland itself. Northern Ireland, as it presently existed, was not a source problem, but a consequence of the failure of the two Governments to make proper provision for the government of all the people. It followed, in Mr Hume's view, that no agreement could be found within Northern Ireland, because Northern Ireland was not the whole problem. He thought that progress could not be made as long as Unionists refused to discuss the whole problem, and that the guarantee that there would be no change in the

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status of Northern Ireland without their consent was a stumbling block. The UK Government had rejected the three models in the Forum Report because Unionist consent to any of them was not forthcoming, but Mr Hume wanted to know what the opinion of the UK Government itself was. Mr Hume objected that, at present, the UK Government seemed to have no separate opinion of its own, but merely to take refuge in the proposition that the views of the Unionists could not be over-ridden. He recognised that Unionists could not be persuaded to change their views in the short term. But if the view of the UK Government was different from that of the Unionists, then he thought that the Government's right course was to seek to persuade Unionists, no doubt over a long period, that Government's view was the better one. Mr Hume thought that, at present, the UK Government gave Unionists a total veto, and that it was therefore not surprising that Unionists refused to move.

10. The Secretary of State said that the constitutional guarantee did not, as Mr Hume had suggested, give Unionists a right of veto over all change within Northern Ireland. The existence of direct rule itself was proof of this. Mr Hume persisted in his view that there was a fundamental difficulty. Government policy had two strands: first, to press for progress towards devolved government, on the basis of widespread agreement, which in effect implied some form of power-sharing; and secondly, to maintain security. In Mr Hume's view, it was only the second of these which the Government was forced by circumstances to implement, and one result of this was that the operation of security policy acted against any success in getting agreement on arrangements for devolved government.

11. The Secretary of State said that, although the Irish Government could not share executive authority, arrangements short of that were conceivable which would represent a change in the current arrangements. To this, Mr Hume replied that if the process of Anglo-Irish consultation could be developed, this might not amount to joint authority as contemplated in the Forum Report, but might nevertheless come quite close to that. Mr Andrew commented that the influence of Unionists over developments was not attributable to the statutory constitutional guarantee so much as to the reality of the weight which their views must necessarily have. It was, however, for consideration whether ways could be found to make progress within Northern Ireland.

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with related progress on an Irish dimension. Mr Hume said that he was interested in any prospect for movement. However, his view over the last ten years, which he thought had been substantiated by events, had been that Unionists would not consider movement unless they were forced to do so by a change of attitude on the part of the UK Government.

12. The Secretary of State said that movement by all parties was desirable. He explained that, when he had met the Report Committee of the Assembly recently, to discuss their interim report, he had urged them to make progress towards a more substantial report giving suggestions for devolution. The Committee had, however, insisted that it was impossible for them to do this without knowing the views of the SDLP, and that the Unionist Parties could not disclose their final positions on possible movement without comparable disclosure by the SDLP. The Secretary of State commented to Mr Hume that the process of political dialogue and possible movement was prevented by the absence of the SDLP, not so much just from the Assembly itself but from political discussion generally.

13. Mr Hume said that it was not merely the SDLP pursuit of an Irish dimension which kept them out of the Assembly. He considered that the SDLP had been alone, over a ten year period, in accepting the guidelines laid down by the UK Government, and being prepared to work them, but had found that this was futile in the face of Unionist intransigence. The SDLP abstention from the Assembly could be ended if the participating parties were to endorse a motion calling for devolved powers on a basis of power-sharing. The fact that they had not done so was proof, to Mr Hume, that they had no serious intention of agreeing to any form of power-sharing. His view of the Unionists, based on his previous experience, was that they would seek to involve the SDLP in the Assembly only for the purpose of engaging in futile confrontational debate, and in the hope that eventually a Secretary of State would agree to devolve powers to the Assembly on the Unionists' terms.

14. The Secretary of State said that the Unionists knew that devolution would not be agreed unless the arrangements commanded widespread acceptance. He thought that the Forum exercise had initiated a process of change, but that the SDLP was damaging its

own interests in leaving matters as they had stood at the time the Forum Report was published.

15. Mr Hume said that there was no problem about having discussions with the other Party Leaders. He had offered to meet Mr Molyneux any time. Mr Molyneux had said that a meeting should be deferred until after the marching season. Mr Hume thought that this had been a device to postpone any meeting until after Mr Prior had left, and Mr Hume had heard nothing more from Mr Molyneux about a meeting since the present Secretary of State had been appointed. Dr Paisley had also said that he was ready to have discussions, with a view to involving the SDLP in the Assembly; but Dr Paisley had also agreed that the search for ways to restore order in society could provide a starting point for an agenda. Mr Hume thought, however, that Dr Paisley had also only been playing for time.

16. The Secretary of State said that he understood the reasons for the SDLP abstention from the Assembly, but that he also understood the frustrations of the Report Committee at not knowing how far, if at all, the SDLP might compromise in agreeing proposals for devolution. He therefore very much hoped that Mr Hume and the SDLP would find ways of entering into dialogue with the other constitutional parties, whether in public or in private. Mr Hume said that he would make it his business to contact the leaders of the other constitutional parties and asked whether they were still interested in talking.

17. Mr Hume added that, as regards devolved government, nothing less than power-sharing would now do. He did not see how the SDLP could possibly settle for anything less, given that it had obtained ten years earlier. When asked whether power-sharing as it had previously been understood would be a sine qua non, even if there were in addition some Irish dimension, Mr Hume said that consideration would need to be given to the form of a total package. He agreed with the Secretary of State's earlier comment that the themes of the Irish dimension and the scope for devolution were connected. He did not expect anything dramatic from the Anglo-Irish Summit, but if there were not result at all - not even a commitment to continue the process - then the cause of constitutional nationalism would be in severe trouble.

The Secretary of State asked Mr Hume for his views on the subject of possible measures to provide increased recognition of the Irish identity of the minority community. Mr Hume said that he personally was not much concerned about proposals for action of this kind. He felt that his own Irish identity was sufficiently assured not to need bolstering. He thought that examples of the non-recognition of the Irish identity of the minority (eg the Flags and Emblems Act) were irritants rather than points of main substance. They were irritants because they served as a reminder of the period of Unionist repression of the minority. But the main abuses which had resulted from the old system (eg voting rights and housing) had been dismantled during the period of direct rule. The remaining points (such as the Flags and Emblems Act) were signals, which it would be preferable to remove, rather than the essence of the question at issue - which was how to introduce institutions of government which would be supported by both the majority and the minority, and which would work.

19. Mr Andrew said that, while Mr Hume might regard points of the kind under discussion as no more than irritants, the consequences of dealing with any of them could be very disruptive. The recent change of name of Derry City Council was an example. Mr Hume commented that if the reactions to that episode were to be taken seriously, it was not clear how they could be any hope of progress on the main issues. At some stage, it would be necessary to get the Unionists to realise that, while they were entitled to hold their views, they were not entitled to impose disadvantage on others. His own concern was that, the longer the main issues went unresolved, the greater the opportunity afforded to terrorists to exploit the situation. A discussion he had had recently with a Basque nationalist leader had led him to realise how similar were the IRA and the Basque terrorist group ETA. Both battered on nationalist aspirations as a vehicle for revolutionary socialism, which they sought to bring about by inducing repression by government and depression in the economy.

20. As for financial support to the IRA from organisations such as NORAID, Mr Hume said that he thought the recent visit by Mr Gummer to the US was a great mistake. Mr Hume thought that NORAID provided comparatively little financial support to the IRA, but that the IRA derived great propaganda value from any evidence of

support in the US, and that Government attention to NORAID elevated it to a status which it would not otherwise have. Mr Hume thought that the IRA had no shortage of cash and that the salaries and cars enjoyed by leading IRA figures were evidence of this. He thought it most regrettable that the Unionists failed to see that their refusal to pursue a reasonable settlement served to encourage the IRA. The Secretary of State replied that Unionists sometimes argued (although they had not done so recently with any great force) that discussion of possible political change, within Northern Ireland or with Dublin created a climate of uncertainty in which terrorism could flourish. Mr Hume commented that there was some truth in the argument that terrorists exploited uncertainty.

21. Mr Hume said that it was desirable that measures to recognise the identity of the minority should be undertaken, on their merits, where relevant; but that he would not regard action of this kind as amounting to a major concession. When Mr Andrew referred to possible changes in the procedure for complaints against the police, Mr Hume said that this again was a surface point. Order in society would come only from agreement on a system of government - an issue which had nothing to do with the RUC as an institution. When pressed for his views on possible police reform, Mr Hume said that he had no wish to see the RUC disbanded, since he had no idea what the policemen who had been stood down would do or how they could be replaced. The Secretary of State mentioned that the recruitment of Roman Catholics to the RUC had increased slightly, and added that this trend was not assisted by repeated public references on the part of some nationalist politicians (north and south of the border) to the alleged alienation of the minority.

22. When reference was made to the possibility of considering a joint security commission, Mr Hume said that the difficulty was that the UK Government appeared to be interested in nothing beyond such a commission, whereas the SDLP had a stronger interest in other forms of cross-border co-operation. The Secretary of State said that suggestions for a security commission put Unionists under particular pressure, since they could hardly argue both that the Republic should co-operate more over security and that joint action with the Republic on security was undesirable. He did not, however, exclude the possibility of increased co-operation on other subjects, though there

could be more difficulty with these according to the case. Mr Hume reverted to his thesis that the first question needing to be resolved was whether a solution was to be sought only within Northern Ireland or on a broader footing. The Secretary of State said that many options remained open for discussion, subject to the delimitation which had already been established, that joint authority which gave the Government of the Republic executive responsibility in Northern Ireland was not feasible or acceptable. There were many possibilities which could be helpful on their merits, and helpful to constitutional nationalists as an interest group, even if some of them might give rise to controversy with Unionists. The Secretary of State repeated that this was one reason why it was important that Mr Hume should recognise the connection between progress with a possible Irish dimension and progress towards devolved government.

23. The Secretary of State referred to personation, and explained that he had just sent Mr Hume a copy of the Bill, which was due to be debated on second reading on 15 November.

24. Mr Hume expressed interest, and said that he had brought back from the United States various material about measures against personation. He said that he would give this to NIO officials. In his view, the measures taken in the US Federal system provided a total deterrent, and closed every loop hole through the use of a single form.

25. The Secretary of State asked Mr Hume to explain to the Labour Party the need for the Bill against personation. Mr Hume said that there was no need to worry about that. The SDLP worry was to get something against personation which would be foolproof. He was also concerned that the list of documents to be accepted as proof of evidence might deter responsible people from voting. The Secretary of State said that he was open to argument about what the documents should be.

26. Mr Hume said that he had told Mr Peter Archer MP that the electoral system that should be introduced for Westminster elections in Northern Ireland was the single constituency alternative vote. Mr Hume thought that this system would be more relevant to the circumstances of Northern Ireland. If SDLP representation were

increased, with an associated increase in support services, this could lead to greater rationality in political discussion. At present, the SDLP leaders were, for the most part, public figures in name without the support needed to back them up. Only in Derry was there a developed system of SDLP service to constituents. Mr Hume thought that the Unionists were rather defensive about their disproportionately high representation. He added that, at the next Westminster elections, there would be calls for a deal to be reached on fielding of anti-Unionist candidates. The only way to avert the difficulty this would cause would be through adopting a system where a split vote would not matter. Mr Hume thought that this was a very important issue.

27. When the Secretary of State asked Mr Hume about his forthcoming party conference, Mr Hume said that much depended on what happened in the period up to the conference, which would take place in January. As to the situation on the ground between SDLP and Sinn Fein, Mr Hume said that he thought the SDLP had been doing better recently. He added, however, that he was not deceived by Sinn Fein talk of reducing its electoral efforts. Sinn Fein were lowering their sights for tactical reasons. He thought that in the May local elections they would field about 50 candidates in the expectation of getting 40 elected. If they could thereby affect the balance of power within councils, they would claim this as a victory. Any such outcome would cause serious problems, not only for the SDLP but also for the Government. The Secretary of State accepted this.

28. It was agreed that consideration should be given to a further meeting between the Secretary of State and the SDLP after the Anglo-Irish summit. Mr Hume repeated how important it was, in his view, that Sinn Fein should not be able to claim with any credibility that the result of the summit was the rejection of the best efforts of constitutional nationalism. The Secretary of State agreed that consideration would need to be given to the question how Sinn Fein could be denied any such opportunity.

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Private Secretary
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