

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2014/105/789
Creation Date(s):	23 October 1984
Extent and medium:	5 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Meeting with John Hume

I saw the Leader of the SDLP by arrangement and on instructions in Derry on 21 October 1984. Our main discussion was on developments in Anglo-Irish exchanges on which he has been briefed by the Taoiseach, Tanaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

I showed Hume the Speaking Note we had used as the basis for our approach in London on 15 and 16 October. His view was that his party would support a package which secured the key elements in that Note. His worry was not about the package as such but rather about the viability of a referendum on Articles 2 and 3 which he saw as an uncertain business. I said that what our Government would want to know from him primarily was whether the package would work and endure; it would be for the Government to make a judgement about the referendum. I accepted his concern as reasonable that the referendum had implications also for the SDLP in that it might split the Irish nationalist camp and, moreover, that the danger could not be discounted that the new arrangements might break down irretrievably, leaving the nationalist side with nothing to show but an abandoned claim. In reporting this I do not wish to imply that Hume opposed the notion of a referendum or thought it unwinnable; rather that he was worried, and for reasons of legitimate concern to himself and his party.

I put to Hume an idea of Ambassador Dorr's that has surfaced in internal discussions here, namely, that the rephrasing of Arts. 2 and 3 should incorporate language which would also be used by the British in new legislation on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland (i.e. involve a rephrasing of the "guarantee") and also in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He sees very strong attractions in this approach but said that his eventual approval would naturally depend on the wording.

Security - both the control and content of security - remains the key issue for Hume. He believes that the Irish Government must exercise a direct role in the control process. He also believes that no political solution, no matter how "green", and even if it involves a strong Irish Government role in the control of security, would work unless there is extensive visible change in the system of policing as the normal citizen actually encounters it. He did not think that the restructuring of the existing system along County lines - which he saw as involving progress - would be enough. The restructuring would have to be community-oriented so as to provide for the recruitment of young Catholic men with the support of Dublin and the SDLP. He was not opposed to the idea that the restructuring should be for a transitional period only although he said he would have to think about this.

His view is that the UDR must be stood down (he drew my attention to reports of emerging views on these lines within senior levels of the RUC). He believes that the issue of prisoners remains a major source of poison in the ghettos. He responded very positively to the idea of a programme of releases of young offenders without publicity to be begun at the moment of transition coupled with an announcement of a major review of sentences to be undertaken six months after the beginning of new arrangements depending on the level of instability in the meantime.

I told Hume we were encountering difficulties both in relation to control of security and its content. I put to him the following idea for his reaction: \that the Joint Security Commission for Northern Ireland would control senior appointments and recruitment to the police and prison service for a period (say 10 years) during which the police system would be restructured in such a way as

to secure the confidence of the minority; that thereafter control of security would be devolved to a power-sharing Executive if that existed (otherwise it would continue until such an Executive existed) and the police system itself reintegrated. He saw merit in this approach but wished to reflect further.

On devolution Hume has no objection to the Secretary of State as Chief Executive so long as there is SDLP representation in the Executive. He would be opposed to a "non-political" Executive i.e. comprising non-elected personnel on the US or French models: his party had made intolerable (in many cases) financial sacrifices and taken a great deal of unfair criticism in staying out of the Assembly, precisely so as to create pressure for power-sharing. He felt that the terms of the Agreement should provide for the Ministerial Commission to "exercise" all the powers of government, except the Westminster Powers, pending the establishment by agreement within the Ministerial Commission of a power-sharing Executive for Northern Ireland. That Executive might for as long as necessary be chaired by the Secretary of State. Members from both sides of the Assembly would be invited to take their places in the Executive and, in the case of those who refused, persons would be appointed to the Executive to represent their point of view. I put it to him that a situation with the SDLP representing the nationalist side and only private individuals of Unionist background representing the Unionist viewpoint would undermine the principle which was important from a nationalist viewpoint, which was set out in the Northern Ireland Assembly Act 1982 viz. that no devolution should take place unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that (in relation to the proposals for devolution):

- "the substance of the proposals is likely to command widespread acceptance throughout the community" (Section 2,4,(b)).

/...

He did not agree. He also thought it essential to maintain under all circumstances the role of the Ministerial Commission in the nomination of the Executive. On the Northern Ireland Assembly he said that, purely from an SDLP viewpoint, he would prefer fresh elections. He accepted, however, the validity of the point that to hold elections would be to give a huge opportunity to hard-liners on the Unionist side to create deadlock at the worst possible moment by playing on Unionist anxieties and ensuring at the outset of the new arrangements a Unionist mandate against change as happened in the British General Election in February 1974 which was a major contributing factor to the downfall of power-sharing.

He had one real difficulty, however, which was that Mallon's seat in the Assembly had been taken by a Unionist following Mallon's appointment to the Seanad. He would want to include Mallon in the Executive: he felt this could be done precisely by leaving open the possibility of appointing non-Assembly persons to the Executive.

Hume said that the importance to him of the idea of a conference lay largely in the fact that the SDLP had publicly called for a conference of the parties on the Realities and the Requirements of the Forum Report and had made this the main point of their approach to the Government at the meeting several weeks ago between an SDLP delegation and members of the Government. Should it come to a situation where the Governments would agree on a package which was satisfactory to the SDLP without going through the process of a conference, Hume felt he could live with that. He felt, however, that the process of negotiation had not yet reached anything like a definitive stage and that it was useful to keep the idea on the table on our side at least until such time as the Government were content that they had secured a workable and satisfactory "deal".

Hume's attitude to the current talks is one of strong, although anxious, support for the Government. He expressed some dismay at the effect of statements made on behalf of the Opposition. He would be anxious to do anything possible which would keep the fundamental consensus of the Forum to the fore.

M.J. Lillis

23 October 1984

c.c. Taoiseach
Tanaiste
Minister
Secretary
Attorney General
Mr Nally
Mr Ward
Mr Quigley
Ambassador, London