



## **An Chartlann Náisiúnta** **National Archives**

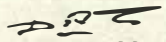
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SECRET

NOTE

Hume's efforts to encourage Sinn Féin dialogue

1. In order to give a new impetus to the internal Sinn Féin debate, John Hume has had as an objective for some time to convince the Secretary of State that he should - to quote Hume's recent Sunday Independent article - "directly address their own (i.e. Sinn Féin's) stated reasons for what they call armed struggle and demonstrate that those reasons no longer exist". Hume would, therefore, like to see the Secretary of State take an early opportunity to put on the record that the British have no longer any diplomatic, security, military, economic or financial vested interest in staying in Northern Ireland and that the issue of self-determination is one on which the Irish people themselves must seek to reach agreement.
2. Hume recently drafted a text (Annex 1 attached) which he has passed to the NIO and asked that it be considered as a basis for the suggested speech by the Secretary of State. He has also handed over to the NIO a text which he has received from a source who has sought to interpret Sinn Féin thinking on this issue and who is working with Hume in trying to advance the dialogue within Sinn Féin (Annex 2).
3. The limited indication we have to date suggests that the British remain very cautious and circumspect about the Hume approach.

  
Dermot Gallagher,  
28 May, 1990.

Annex 1.

Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA have repeatedly stated that their objective is a united Ireland without a British presence, and have argued that it can only be achieved by force. One of the reasons for this advanced by their spokesmen is that Britain has some interest of her own in staying in Northern Ireland and is therefore engaged in some way in defending those interests by force and by military strength.

Britain of course has an interest in Northern Ireland which is to respond with warm goodwill and friendship to the needs of the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. (We respect and admire the contribution which they have made to the Union in peace and war.) But let me be very clear! In the second half of the 20th Century, no matter what has been the position in the past, the British Government has no political, military, strategic or economic interest in staying in Ireland or in the exercise of authority there that could transcend respect for the wishes of the majority in Northern Ireland. If the people were freely to decide that they wished to unite with the South then not only would the British Government not stand in the way, they would facilitate and legislate for the change.

What that means in clear terms is that Irish unity is a matter for Irish people and for no one else. If those Irish people who want unity can persuade those who do not, why should a British Government stand in the way? That being the case, the question asked by most British people is, What is the possible justification for the use of force in such circumstances? I now ask the same question.

We also hear calls from time to time, calls for round-table conferences involving elected representatives of the Irish people, North and South, to discuss the future and future relationships between the people of Ireland. It seems to us at the present time that agreement on such a conference is extremely unlikely, but if it were the British Government would not stand in the way. Indeed, we would give it our encouragement.

In the meantime and in the absence of agreement on all these matters, the British Government continues and will continue to exercise its responsibilities in Northern Ireland and to do our best to ensure peace, stability and some measure of economic prosperity there. We would only wish that all the people and parties there would give us their full co-operation in achieving these objectives.



The Provisional I.R.A say that they are fighting a "War of Independence" to win the freedom of self-determination for the people of Ireland. They maintain that force must be used to persuade the British Government to acknowledge such a freedom because it has a "colonial" self-interest in remaining in Northern Ireland and in exercising authority there.

This interpretation of the political situation in Northern Ireland is based on the false assumption that Britain has some interest of her own in remaining there and is, therefore, engaged, in some way, in defending those interests by force and military strength.

Britain, of course, has an interest in Northern Ireland which is to respond with warm good-will and friendship to the needs of the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. (We respect and admire the contribution which they have made to the Union in peace and war.) But let me be very clear! In the second half of the 20th century, no matter what has been the position in the past, the British Government has no political, military, strategic, or economic interest in staying in Ireland or in the exercise of authority there that could transcend respect for the wishes of the majority in Northern Ireland.

The political and security situation, as it has now developed in Northern Ireland, is due to the historical, political, religious and cultural divisions which separate the people of the Nationalist tradition from the people of the Unionist tradition in Ireland. These divisions are at the root of the conflict there and not any self-interested, dominion policies of the British Government.

The central issue in the conflict, therefore, is not to persuade the British Government to decide on the question of self-determination in Ireland but to bridge the divisions between the people of both traditions there in a way that will enable them to decide it, freely and democratically, for themselves.

The political consensus and agreement which would bridge these traditional divisions and so open the way to a peaceful resolution of the question of Irish self-determination, can only be achieved through the processes of political debate and dialogue between the people of both traditions.

Should they, through their political representatives, agree to engage in such dialogue, the British Government would do everything possible to accommodate and facilitate it. It would, for example, provide the necessary frame-work and forum which could take the form of an on-going Conference or Convention composed of the official representatives of the people of both traditions. It would confine its own role in such a dialogue to that of facilitator and so would not officially take part in it or much less, seek, in any way, to dictate to it.

This means that the British Government is prepared to withdraw from the central area of historical, political, religious and cultural conflict and from the

central forum of political debate that would seek to resolve it, so that the parties to the conflict, namely, the people of the Nationalist Tradition and the people of the Unionist Tradition, could engage, freely, independently and democratically in the political dialogue and agreement-making which would bridge their divisions.

Should this dialogue result in agreements, based on the consent of the people of the two Traditions, which would bridge the political divisions between them and define the forms of new political structures which would embody, institute and organise such agreements, the British Government would respond with the necessary legislation.

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The British Government is also proposed to encourage any dialogue among Nationalist and Republican representatives which would seek to replace violence by a new and purely political strategy for achieving their democratic aims.

Note: It is better to say "the Provisional I.R.A. are fighting a 'War of Independence' to win the freedom of self-determination for the people of Ireland (as in document 2) rather than that their objective is a united Ireland." Sinn Féin and the I.R.A. make a distinction between the political objective of a 32 County Republic and the military objective of winning the <sup>exercise</sup> ~~right~~ of what they see as the right of the Irish people to self-determination.