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*Mr. L. J. ...
SDLP Dinner, Dublin, 6 October 1990*

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At the annual SDLP fund-raising dinner in Dublin this weekend, John Hume spoke of the current "talks about talks" and strongly defended the position adopted by his party and by the Government. In his after-dinner speech to the attendance of about 500 (including Minister Michael Woods, Alan Dukes, John Bruton, Austin Currie, Nora Owen, Ruairi Quinn and Michael McDowell), Hume made the following points: -

- The SDLP has maintained from the outset that the fundamental issue to be addressed is that of "relationships on the island". All previous attempts at internal settlements in the North have foundered on Unionist distrust of Dublin; unless and until that issue is tackled and resolved there can be no enduring settlement of the problem.
- While holding to this basic conviction, the SDLP has shown maximum negotiating flexibility throughout the past months. At the outset, the Unionists established three pre-conditions for talks. The SDLP and Dublin went to considerable lengths to meet them on each of these pre-conditions: it was accepted (a) that the Anglo-Irish Agreement could be replaced by a new and transcending arrangement; (b) that there could be a natural gap between Conference meetings and (c) while the Conference was not meeting, the Secretariat would not be involved in servicing Conference meetings.
- Having achieved satisfaction on each of their original three pre-conditions, the Unionists then began setting further conditions. Their next demand was: "We won't talk to Dublin directly at all - we will only agree to talks if we are part of a United Kingdom delegation". Then came a further variation: "In fact, we won't agree to any sort of talks with Dublin until 'substantial progress' has been made in the internal talks".

- It must be obvious to anyone, Hume argued, that these further pre-conditions could not be acceptable to nationalists. Unionist unwillingness to talk to Dublin except as part of a U.K. delegation was fundamentally at odds with the SDLP view that a solution must be worked out among all Irish people and underpinned by referenda on both sides of the border. Only an outcome arrived at in this way could succeed in permanently removing any vestigial IRA claims to represent the views of Irish people.
- Equally, to attempt to attach a condition to Dublin's entry to the talks process was simply not on. If the Unionists wanted to talk about devolution, they could do so at any time under Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - that option was always open to them. But if Unionists insisted that the object of the exercise was to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement, then Dublin's involvement in the process automatically followed.

In concluding his remarks, Hume referred again to the shared approach of the SDLP and the Government "supported by the other parties in the Dail".

Anglo-Irish Division

8 October, 1990

cc: PST; PSM; Mr. Nally; PSS; Mr. Mathews; Mr. Brosnan;
Ambassador London, Joint Secretary; Counsellors A-I;
Box

Secretary to the Government

I was at this dinner but left it to D. Gallagher and J. Anderson to make official even if informal contact. However, I participated briefly in a conversation between Seamus Mallon and Dermot Gallagher in which Mallon made the point vehemently that he could detect no support for devolution among Northern nationalists, even among the more middle-class elements who might be expected to favour it.

I, none very favourably of your own intervention at the recent British-Irish Association meeting by 10.10.90