



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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SDLP Meeting with Secretary of State  
19th November, 1990.

1. Mr. Brooke, at very short notice, invited the SDLP to meet him in the House of Commons yesterday afternoon. Hume was accompanied by Mallon, McGrady and Hendron at the meeting.
2. According to Hume, the discussion was in surprisingly general terms. The Secretary of State's primary objective seems to have been to reassure himself that the SDLP were committed to participating fully in the internal talks. He asked Hume, for example, what subjects he envisaged being discussed at these talks, and emphasised that the Unionists were apprehensive that the SDLP would just sit through the meetings and say nothing until the North-South strand of talks had begun.
3. Hume replied that the SDLP were not "idiots". They intend participating fully in all strands of talks. As to substance, he saw the talks, including the internal talks, focussing on how relationships on this island were sorted out and given institutional effect. A solution did not lie in who wielded power in Northern Ireland - the North was only part of the problem. In this regard, Hume again emphasised that the failure of the various arrangements negotiated in the past had been largely due to Unionist mistrust of the rest of the island - if the SDLP were wrong in this, it was up to the other parties to put forward an alternative analysis.
4. Hume went on to repeat the suggestion in his July paper that Unionists might agree to enter into talks on the basis of their stated public positions; this would be acceptable to the SDLP, though they could not of course be asked to accept it as a pre-condition. (In a brief discussion later in the afternoon with Peter Robinson, the latter seemed to Hume to be interested in this approach of parties entering talks on the basis of their stated public positions; however, this

appears not to have been a substantive discussion and Hume may well be over-optimistic in his assessment of the Robinson reaction).

5. The Secretary of State, in a reference at one stage in the discussion to the UK delegation obstacle, said that Dublin appeared not to be as strong as the SDLP on this issue. Hume responded by emphasising that it was essential that the SDLP be able to deliver the full support of their community to any agreed new arrangements and institutions. In order to achieve this, their community would have to have a "clear vision" that the Irish people themselves were seeking to work out a solution; this would be much more difficult to achieve if the Unionists were seen to be meeting Dublin as part of a UK delegation. McGrady subsequently told us that the Secretary of State probed as to whether, if all other issues were satisfactorily resolved, the designation of Unionists as part of a UK delegation would still prove a stumbling block. According to McGrady, the SDLP reaction was that while they would be disappointed with such an outcome, they would not see this issue of itself as preventing talks getting off the ground.
6. The question of the venue for North-South talks was also briefly touched on. The SDLP delegation made clear that the holding of North-South talks in London (as the Unionists were demanding) would not be acceptable - it would seriously undermine the perception of these talks as being among Irish people and accordingly undermine the SDLP's capacity to sell the outcome to the nationalist community.
7. Finally, Hume discounted media reports to the effect that the meeting had agreed that the Northern parties would get

together to work out an agenda for talks, without either Government being present; this possibility had not been discussed at the meeting.

Dermot Gallagher,  
20 November, 1990.

cc: PST; PSM; Mr. Nally; PSS; Mr. Mathews; Mr. Brosnan;  
Counsellors A-I; Box.