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Reference Code: 2021/93/45

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(28)

Discussion with John Hume.

14th February, 1991.

1812
SEEN BY
TAOISEACH

- Taoiseach*
To see please - O X P3 in particular
1. John Hume telephoned last night to say he had been irritated with the approach taken by the Secretary of State in (a) his response to supplementary questions by Mallon and Hume in the House yesterday (during NIO question time) and (b) the leaking of arrangements which had been made for a private meeting between Hume and Brooke.

Brooke/Hume Meeting

2. Hume had been contacted early in the week by Brooke's office and asked if he would agree to a private meeting with the Secretary of State in London yesterday. Hume readily agreed to the request but, given the sensitivity of Mallon and McGrady to such meetings, underlined the need for it to be on a strictly confidential and private basis.
3. When the SDLP members met in the Commons yesterday morning, Mallon and McGrady asked Hume if he had received any soundings from the Secretary of State about a meeting, either with the SDLP MPs as a team, or privately with Hume. Hume denied that he had received any approach. Subsequently, he was taken aback when he was asked by a group of journalists in the Commons if he would confirm that he would be meeting informally with the Secretary of State at 4.00 pm; they indicated that they had been alerted to a possible meeting by the NIO Press Office.
4. Hume told the journalists that he had no plans for an early meeting with the Secretary of State. At this stage, he telephoned Brooke, protested strongly about the leak and indicated that, in the circumstances he had no option but to

M. L. ...
McCarthy
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cancel the meeting. Brooke rather lamely replied that the leak must have originated in Belfast as it could not have come from the NIO in London.

Brooke/SDLP exchange in Commons

4. The spiky exchange in the Commons between Brooke and the SDLP arose initially out of a supplementary from Mallon which asked the Secretary of State if, given that the Irish Government and the SDLP had over a period presented papers designed to facilitate political progress, he expected "at any stage a written position from the Unionist party". In response, Brooke referred to what he called Mallon's reluctance to engage in direct "conversations and negotiations" in advance of an agreed basis for talks. This provoked Hume to come in strongly and to emphasise that, long before Brooke had become Secretary of State, the SDLP had stated that it was willing to "sit down tomorrow with the Unionist parties to discuss any subject under the sun without any pre-conditions". He went on to regret that the Unionist parties would only speak to the SDLP through the Secretary of State, and added that the SDLP had never seen a written position paper from either of the Unionist parties.
5. Brooke, in turn, responded rather sharply and accused Hume of "slightly misremembering" the situation. He went on to ask - and this seemed, at least to some degree, to be pointing the finger at Hume - if Hume did not believe that on occasion "he had raised a point that has caused us to pause" in the process.
6. Hume was further taken aback when, in reply to the next supplementary, Brooke confirmed Ian Paisley's assertion that a position paper had been given to him by the Unionist

leaders at their last meeting and that other such papers had also been passed over during the talks.

Message to Secretariat

7. If it is in fact correct that the Unionists have been handing over position papers to the Secretary of State, it is a matter of very considerable surprise and concern that the British have not briefed us on the existence of such papers. In the circumstances, we instructed the Secretariat last night to raise this with the other side as a matter of urgency. (It may well be that the position papers in question are of such a negative nature that the British have decided, perhaps in order to protect the Unionists, that they would not show them to either the SDLP or ourselves. If this is indeed the case, one cannot but wonder if they would have been equally protective of an SDLP paper).
8. Copies of our faxed instruction to the Secretariat and of the Hansard of the exchanges in the Commons are attached as Annexes 1 and 2 respectively.

DAT.
Dermot Gallagher,
15 February, 1991.

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

FAX

ANNEX 1

Urgent

For Joint Secretary from Gallagher

We note from media coverage of today's Question Time in Westminster that Dr. Paisley stated that Unionists had given position papers to the Secretary of State on a couple of occasions including last week. If this is in fact correct, it is a matter of very considerable surprise that we were not informed of the existence of such a paper in the briefing we received from the British side on the meeting.

Perhaps you would take this up as a matter of urgency with your opposite number

- 1) seeking clarification as to the accuracy of what Dr. Paisley said;
- 2) if so, expressing surprise that we should hear of the Unionist paper in this way;
- 3) seeking a detailed and urgent briefing on the contents of the paper.

14 FEBRUARY, 1991