



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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John Hume's meeting with Ian Paisley, Strasbourg, 11 March

Hume reported this on 14 March and asked that it be passed on to Dublin.

Fred Catherwood hosted a lunch for the two of them. He said that five minutes after he returned to his office afterward the phone rang: it was Frank MacDonald of the Irish Times who said he had been informed about the lunch by his Dublin office which, he said, "knew all about it" and asked him to report on it. Hume said he understood that only the Taoiseach and his immediate circle in Dublin knew about the lunch and he was disturbed by the fact that the Irish Times now had it. He immediately informed Paisley who, however, blamed John Taylor for the leak. Catherwood inclined to this view also: he had invited Taylor to the lunch, but had been refused.

Catherwood had at the lunch produced a document (attached), of which the most relevant paragraph, for Hume, was the second last. Hume believed that Dublin knew about this text beforehand: his intuition told him this from the way Catherwood spoke (sic); this, he said, disturbed him as he should have been told.

He said he spent a considerable time assuring Paisley of the SDLP's willingness to enter talks on devolution and told Paisley he thought their conversation was a very valuable one; he developed his reasoning on how devolution fitted into the overall strategy for solving the problem.

Paisley said his conditions for going ahead were, firstly, the suspension of the Conference and, secondly, the withdrawal of the Secretariat while talks in the Round Table Conference were going on.



A long discussion led to agreement that they were seeking a formula of words that would not imply any backing off the Agreement by the SDLP and the two governments, but would allow the Unionists to enter into talks. Hume undertook to try to produce such a formula and to report back, when he had it, to Catherwood. Paisley said he would have to insist that talks, if they took place, must be chaired by the British Government as, if decisions were to follow, they would be taken by HMG. Hume said Paisley was very insistent on this, and Hume's interpretation was that at such talks the Unionists would not agree to power-sharing, but would allow themselves to be dragged over the line on the point by HMG.

Regarding the Catherwood text (second last paragraph), Paisley said he could not trust Cushnahan not to invoke a meeting of the Conference during the Round Table Conference, and on that basis he rejected that bit of the text.

"It was strongly agreed that nothing was agreed", but that a search for a word formula would follow. Hume promised on that basis to contact Catherwood by Thursday evening.

In relaxed conversation afterward between Hume and Paisley, Hume offered, as his view of the future, of "a final answer" (sic), a federal Ireland with a new relationship with Britain. Paisley's reply, said Hume, was that "such a scenario would only happen if each part of Ireland was independent and agreed to the powers to be given to the federal element within the island" (sic). Hume said he found this very interesting indeed: he saw it in broad terms as an agreed form of UDI giving way in turn to federation agreed between both sides and supported by HMG.

Hume said he gave the foregoing to Nick Scott in the Commons the night before. Scott had mentioned that Mrs Thatcher continues to be very firm and has no notion of suppressing the Agreement. They would, said Scott, give priority to any possibility of talks.

He said he also had a word with John Wakeham: he too was firm about implementing the Agreement, "but that they would give priority to talks if they happened and would deal sensitively with the Unionists



short of suspension of the Agreement" (sic).

Hume said he noted particularly that Scott and Wakeham used the word priority and this further confirmed his view that Scott and Wakeham, and therefore HMG, were aware of the Catherwood text as he believes Dublin is aware of it.

Hume said he told Scott that he had decided not to proceed with the word formula idea: on reflection he felt that a formula capable of protecting both sides could not actually be found and, instead, he felt that a better way was the following proposals (given to Scott):

1. to publicly announce talks and to continue with these until such time as agreement was found on devolution;

or

2. without prejudice to either side on the Agreement, both SDLP and the Unionists should enter dialogue to explain each to the other their view of the future on the basis that, if talks start at all, the atmosphere would improve;

or

3. HMG should set a date for Round Table Talks and should on that basis invite the parties concerned.

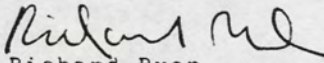
Hume's supplementary comments

- He believes the British would have some confidence that the "priority" approval would work.
- He said Paisley spoke warmly of Wakeham and said he believes that Wakeham is a key figure in all of this.
- He said Paisley offered the view that if there was agreement on a Northern Ireland administration based on power-sharing, the new

.../

devolved administration should immediately enter talks with Dublin concerning North-South relations.

Yours sincerely



Richard Ryan  
Counsellor.

