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Meeting with Mr. John Hume

I and Mr. Ó hUiginn met Mr. John Hume in Dublin on 6 September. We briefed him on the talks the previous day between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister in London, maintaining the agreed confidentiality in regard to the suggestions advanced on that occasion for security cooperation. Mr. Hume commented on the unpropitious timing, as it seemed to him, of the London meeting. We explained the background and emphasised the normal atmosphere that had prevailed and the normal nature of the agenda and participants. The pattern of the meeting had conformed to that of previous "summit" discussions.

Hume enquired about the political part of the talks. We referred him to the Taoiseach's statement after the meeting and confirmed our impression, although Mrs. Thatcher had said very little at the meeting beyond what appears in the communiqué (see Annex), that the British still seemed to adhere to the principle of seeking an administration acceptable to both parts of the community.

Mr. Hume exhibited a generalised impatience for political advance. He had no precise ideas but indicated that the SDLP Executive would be holding a weekend brain-storming session on 8/9 September to consider the current situation in the wake of the IRA atrocities. He adverted to the possibility of Mr. Atkins going ahead with some plan ^{with} ~~to~~ which the SDLP might be prepared to operate solo. I pointed out that even to suggest such a possibility would imply the, perhaps more likely, alternative of a system operated solely by the Unionists and the British, with the SDLP withholding consent or participation.

As on previous occasions, Hume expressed particular revulsion for the IRA whose recent atrocities were directly responsible for the extreme attitudes now being revealed by public opinion in Britain and amongst Unionists. His thoughts were evidently running towards the idea of internment as a solution to IRA

violence. The authorities could publish names of suspected members of illegal organisations and require them to announce publicly that they had severed all connections with those bodies or, alternatively, be interned. In this and other respects Mr. Hume's ideas to cope with the immediate grave situation did not seem to have been fully thought through.

He explored the concept of action by Dublin on security as a quid pro quo for political progress. I made the point that more effective security cooperation on our part would be a constant factor in the future. It was not a bargaining counter that had to be cashed in now. In any case a central concern of the Government for some time had been the protection of society in our own jurisdiction from subversive crime. The situation was, objectively, not one in which we were well placed to press the British for an early initiative, nor had their response been encouraging on 5 September. However one had to consider the present state of unionist opinion. What prospect had Mr. Atkins of making rapid progress at this time? We would of course continue, as the Taoiseach had done with Mrs. Thatcher, to emphasise our views and to draw attention to the difference between cause and effect as regards violence.

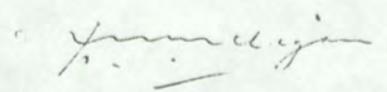
Mr. Hume as on previous occasions enquired when the Fianna Fáil study group would complete its report and we indicated that it was expected to do so this Autumn.

Hume deplored the recent behaviour of Mr. Gerry Fitt in adding his voice to those which had criticised the Taoiseach for his "delayed" return from leave after 'Bloody Monday'. They did not know what to do about Fitt in the Party. (Two weeks ago Séamus Mallon had made similar complaints about Fitt for remarks the latter had made at the Social Study Conference in Corrymeela criticising the Government for a "failure" to clarify their intentions on Northern Ireland.)

In connection with the European Parliament, we mentioned John Taylor's attempts to outdo Paisley in putting down questions hostile to the Government. Hume wondered who would have to

answer Taylor's question about security for the Dublin European Council. Hume was collaborating, as reported, with Paisley and Taylor in the context of the Parliament to try to save the Courtauld's man-made fibre plant. The South was proving to be the scapegoat for unionist attacks, not for the first time.

In general our conversation revealed no very coherent response, on the part of either Hume or the SDLP, to the situation resulting from the events of 27 August, beyond condemnation of the IRA and the conviction that something must be done to curb them. I undertook to get in touch with Hume after the SDLP meeting at the weekend to which he had referred.


D.M. Neligan

16 September 1979