

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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Note:

Following reports of Mr. Hume's second round of talks with Mr. Atkins on 10 December (in respect of which Hume's sole public comment was that "progress had been made") I attempted to contact him on 11 December. He had already left for a session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, but I contacted Pat Hume and Bríd Rodgers to enquire how matters stood. The following picture emerged:

John Hume was hopeful of achieving the aim sought and had made significant progress in his talks with Atkins. He had reported back to the Party executive who shared his view. It now seemed very likely that after their next meeting on Saturday, 15 December, the NIO and the SDLP would be able jointly to announce that the SDLP would participate in the proposed conference. This would be made possible on the basis that the participants in the conference could discuss their Party policy in each case, thus enabling the SDLP to talk about an Irish dimension as they desired. The formula would imply that the DUP could for instance put down also majority rule for discussion, and the SDLP accepted that implication.

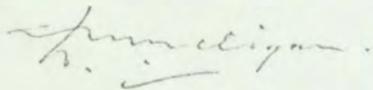
The SDLP of course maintained their position that the Atkins document itself was inadequate, but now hoped that a way might be found around that problem in the way described above.

The SDLP is observing and would continue to observe the greatest discretion in talking publicly about these developments both now, in the negotiation phase, and subsequently when or if agreement would be reached with the British. Anything suggestive of crowing or shouting of victory would be sedulously avoided. They had to beware of Paisleyite reaction. Hume felt that Dr. Paisley himself would read what was probably going to happen correctly and would maintain his intention of taking part in the conference. However there was a risk that Peter Robinson and others in his camp would kick over the traces in response to any obvious claims of advantage gained which the SDLP might make.

Accordingly the least said about an agreement to widen the scope of the talks the better. This would be the SDLP line. As Hume had at all times made clear, the Party wished, as a political party interested in dialogue and deploring the vacuum of recent years, to take part in the Atkins conference if a decent and proper basis could be found.

Brid Rodgers, as Chairman of the SDLP, expressed the hope that we would take account, in any statements that might be made in Dublin, of the Party's situation and of the fact that they were in the middle of delicate negotiations with the British Government. Strong condemnation of the British Government's working paper or a demand from us that the Irish dimension be discussed, or alternatively a premature comment that we believed the SDLP and the NIO were on the point of agreement on a proper basis for the former's participation in the conference, would all be potentially damaging through the Paisleyite reaction which they would evoke. Mrs. Rodgers commended the type of explanatory exposition of our views - avoiding for the moment specific tactical demands or bald references to Irish unity - contained in the Minister's speech of 2 December. She commented that this had been well received, referring to the Newsletter's coverage in particular.

Mrs. Rodgers finally stressed the unanimity of the SDLP view that Hume was on the right lines in his talks with Atkins and that a discreet presentation of the hoped for result was essential.



D.M. Neligan

11 December, 1979