

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Alfred Nathan

24/12/82

CONFIDENTIAL

This was delayed & I did not get a chance to clear it with you. Feel free to add to it.

P.A. date order

Discussion with John Hume

to add to it.

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1. Mr. John Hume came to Dublin on 21 December 1982 for a discussion with Mr. Peter Barry T.D., the Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the latter's request. The discussion took place mainly over lunch in which the undersigned also participated. The following are my recollections of the main points made by Mr. Hume.
2. He pressed for early acceptance of the SDLP's proposal that the Government should set up a forum in which Irish nationalists would consider the options for new political arrangements on the island of Ireland and draw up a proposal or proposals for putting in due course to the Unionists and to the British. He did not add much to what is already known about the proposal but he emphasised that its function should be to examine in detail the constitutional, economic, legal, administrative and other implications of the type of new Ireland envisaged by Irish nationalists. It might well be that at the end of such an examination a range of options rather than one single option might emerge. Hume mentioned federation, confederation and joint sovereignty as among the likely options the implications of which needed to be examined. He himself seemed to incline towards joint British/Irish sovereignty over NI, along the lines proposed by C.F. Carter ten years ago, as the option he would favour but we did not discuss it in great detail. As far as timing was concerned, Hume thought that the Council should be established very quickly and given a period of 6-12 months within which to complete its work. He envisaged the invitations to the Council being drawn up in a way which would exclude Sinn Féin and, probably, the Alliance Party. While he had no fixed ideas about the name of the forum or its method of operation, he thought it should meet in private though some of its deliberations would, inevitably, become public.
3. As regards the Fianna Fáil attitude to the SDLP proposal, Hume agreed that they had so far refrained from opting for or against it but he thought it likely that Mr. Haughey would go along with it. He pointed to the answers given by the former Taoiseach to an Irish News interviewer during the NI Assembly elections campaign and also said that in his own private conversations with Mr. Haughey, including one since the elections here, he had established that Mr. Haughey was "not opposed" to the proposal.
4. On the general situation in Northern Ireland, Hume painted a bleak picture. People were opting out of the political process at an alarming rate and the alienation of young people from the system was particularly obvious. The only vibrant political activity on the minority side was that of Sinn Féin who were well organised all over NI. Money seemed to be no problem to them. Their elected representatives were in effect

the only minority politicians active on a full-time basis on the ground in NI. They were perceived as responsible politicians. For example, Martin McGuinness in Derry had all his activities fully covered by the Derry Journal and he and others were received at the NIO and at NI Ministries up to and including junior Minister level.

5. The attitude of the NIO and the British Government generally to the SDLP was not as encouraging as it used to be. The British were probably hedging their bets as between Sinn Féin and the SDLP. There was no pressure from the British on the SDLP to take their seats in the NI Assembly and indeed some NIO people now seemed to realise that the SDLP attitude to the Assembly from the beginning was not unreasonable. The behaviour of the unionists in the Assembly was showing the world how unreasonable they were and there were even some indications that the internal unionist squabbling would eventually destroy the Assembly. Molyneaux had privately told Hume recently that he was intent on bringing the Assembly to an end.

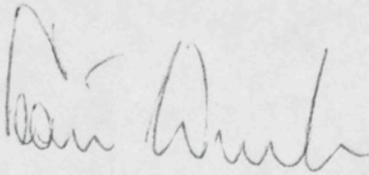
6. Hume expressed himself at some length and with some bitterness on Mallon's handling of the recent court action against him by McCusker. They had agreed in advance that Mallon would take a principled political stand - "the people have elected me. No court can deny that" - but Mallon had unilaterally gone and done his own thing, including injecting the case into southern party politics. There was, according to Hume, no question of other SDLP members resigning their seats. Only Paddy O'Hanlon had advocated that and he, Hume, had since had it out with O'Hanlon. The Mallon disqualification did, however, make it impossible for the SDLP to take their seats in the Assembly, even if the political climate were to change radically.

7. We had a brief discussion on current demographic trends in Northern Ireland. Hume said that so far unpublished figures were encouraging and he referred in particular to the fact that 14,000 Catholics as compared with 12,000 Protestants were born in 1981. He also talked about encouraging contacts he had recently had with Church of Ireland leaders, including Archbishop Armstrong. The Protestant political leaders were certainly more extreme than their Church leaders and probably also more extreme than the Protestant people generally.

8. Hume came back time and again to the need for early action on his nationalist forum idea. Not only would it serve the practical purpose outlined but it would, for the first time for many years, move the centre of stage away from British political initiatives. This initiative would be an Irish nationalist one and could go ahead irrespective of the British

attitude. It would also have the immediate benefit of providing a symbol of nationalist activity and therefore providing an alternative to the Sinn Féin activity.

9. Hume said that he had been asked to see Prior the next day and he agreed to let us know what happened as soon as possible afterwards.



Seán Donlon
Secretary
24 December 1982