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Conversation with John Hume

1. I had a talk today with John Hume. He had returned earlier in the day from a weekend in the US where he had visited Boston and Pittsburg to set up a new fund-raising organisation for the SDLP. In Boston this is being run by the Dunphy family with support from friends and aides to O'Neill and Kennedy and in Pittsburg by the Rooney family and their circle. Hume is satisfied that he has at last found a structure which will raise a significant amount of money. He deliberately excluded the Irish Government and our representatives in the US from this operation. (I told him this was appropriate.) His American friends accept that there is no prospect of having tax-exemption status for contributions but they are not deterred by this. (I did not ask him about the susceptibility of the operation to the US Aliens Registrations Act - I think it better that we remain strictly uninvolved in all aspects of this matter.)

2. Hume expressed concern and irritation at the way his paper on Fundamental Questions submitted to the Steering Group in the Forum had been altered. Not having his papers by him, he had not understood the Tánaiste's remarks in a telephone call he had received while in France. Three points in particular are unacceptable to him:
(i) the enlargement of the section entitled "Common Ground" in several respects: this was entirely unwarranted; (ii) the addition of the words "for the Irish Constitution" in para. 8 which added nothing and was merely provocative; and (iii) the addition of para. No. 25 which he regards as offensively sectarian. He said he has a certain amount of sympathy with Mr Haughey's objections. He cannot understand why the Government side would have wished to distort the position of acquiescence which had been with some ingenuity (and rather surprisingly) secured and which took substantial account of all the Government's basic desiderata and took no account of those of others. My impression is that he will give Mr Haughey a degree of support at the forthcoming session of the Steering Group.

3. Hume feels that the way this matter was handled has damaged his capacity to intervene to secure desirable goals in the event of deadlock in future.

4. He said his party are preparing three papers on overall solutions to be submitted to the Forum: (i) federal, (ii) confederal and (iii) joint sovereignty. He is confident he will persuade his colleagues of the merits of joint sovereignty, the "only workable solution". He was aware that Mallon is (surprisingly) committed to this option also.

5. Prior has mentioned the condominium solution to him several times since the election. He has also held out to Hume the prospect of a power-sharing solution within the Assembly on the model of Prior as Prime Minister with four Ministers.

6. Hume made the comment that British Ministers and Civil Servants have repeatedly raised expectations only to dash them in the event - we must all beware of this, he says.

7. So far as he is concerned a solution focussed on or confined to power-sharing would be worse than useless. It would do nothing to reverse the problem of alienation and violence in the nationalist community and its failure would ensure the elimination from any future workable solution of a power-sharing element.

8. Hume believes that this process of alienation can only be addressed and reversed by a credible and visible Irish Dimension centred in the security area and involving Irish State (as well as British and/or Northern Irish) security operations throughout Northern Ireland. He would be prepared to consider sacrificing the SDLP involvement in power-sharing and conceding majority rule to Unionists in the Assembly as a "concession" for Joint Sovereignty in the security area in Northern Ireland. Under such an arrangement - "Not Brits out but Irish in" - Unionists would lose nothing in terms of their British link, British sovereignty or British identity and would in fact gain majority rule locally. So far as this State is concerned a separate foreign policy, including neutrality, could conceivably be maintained.

9. Hume regards the Parliamentary Tier as being fundamentally inadequate so far as the "Irish Dimension" is concerned and moreover as a British trap for Irish negotiators. As he put it, the nature

of Governemnt basically concerns the creation of order and security - elements missing in Northern Ireland - and all other issues are subsidiary. Any attempted solution that fails to address these two issues centrally will fail.

10. Hume believes that, at this stage, both SDLP and Government should avoid committing themselves either publicly or in talks with the British to specific joint sovereignty solutions, e.g. condominium, and, while insisting on a solution which accommodates the basic problems of order and security, both should keep options open.

11. Finally, on the proposed Hume-Paisley tour of the US, he said that Currie would go in his place. It is highly undesirable that the Paisley Visa issue should dominate the enterprise and it is undesirable that the Mission should visit Washington both because the leading Irish-American politicians would not receive a group including Paisley and because a Washington visit would politicise and distort a venture which purported to be aimed at industrial investment.

M. J. Lillis
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30 August 1983

c.c. Secret and Personal

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