

Mr. John Hume's meeting with Lord Stonham at Home Office
on Tuesday, 22nd July, 1969

Mr. North of the Home Office 'phoned me at 1.00 p.m. on Friday, 18th July, to tell me that Mr. John Hume, M.P., had asked the Home Secretary to receive him for the purpose of discussing a proposal that a United Nations Peace-Keeping Force should be stationed in Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary had decided that Mr. Hume should be received by Lord Stonham.

I protested about this, pointing out that while the Leader of the Official Opposition had been received by Home Office Ministers in the past to discuss Northern Ireland's internal affairs it was entirely wrong that a private member should be heard on a topic which was so clearly related to the Northern Ireland Government's responsibility for law and order. Mr. North was obviously unhappy about the decision and hinted that I was merely echoing the views which had been expressed to the Home Secretary by his official advisers. Mr. Callaghan had, however, taken the view that as John Hume had demonstrated his ability to exercise an influence over events in Northern Ireland and had shown a generally constructive purpose in a very confused and difficult situation it would be wrong not to see him; in deference to the advice of his officials he would not see Mr. Hume himself but would leave this to Lord Stonham. I asked whether a similar privilege was to be given to other Opposition Members and mentioned the rivalry between the various Opposition groups which could well lead to Mr. Austin Currie and others seeking the same facility to discuss 'transferred' matters.

Other points made to Mr. North in the course of this demarche were:-

- (a) Mr. Hume had always been given unlimited access to Northern Ireland Ministers, including the Prime Minister who had seen him on matters of common interest many times. Why should he be encouraged by United Kingdom Ministers to by-pass the proper Northern Ireland channel?
- (b) To meet Mr. Hume in this way simply encouraged the belief held in some quarters that the Stormont Government was a mere puppet of Westminster with the Civil Rights people pulling the strings.
- (c) The Northern Ireland Government (and the Unionist M.P.s at Westminster) could not accept a situation in which Members of Opposition Parties at Stormont had the right of audience with British Ministers on matters within the

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Northern Ireland sphere of responsibility.

- (d) To go on this way would be to undermine the authority and standing of the Northern Ireland Parliament and Government.

Mr. North suggested that I should put my views to Sir Philip Allen, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State. I did so at once. He too gave the impression of being embarrassed by the decision taken and did not conceal his view that our objections were perfectly valid; he hoped, however, that the fact that Lord Stonham was receiving Mr. Hume and not the Home Secretary might soften the affront to Northern Ireland. To this latter point I had to retort that the stature of the Home Office Minister really made little difference, the principle was the same.

Subsequently I retailed the situation to the Minister of Home Affairs, who took an equally critical view of the Home Secretary's action.

On Saturday morning the Northern Ireland B.B.C. news announced that Mr. Hume was meeting Lord Stonham to give him a first-hand account of conditions in Londonderry and the measures which should be taken to restore the situation to normal. This is a different version of the purpose of the meeting to that given to the Home Office but it is just as damaging since the "measures" referred to can only stem from the Northern Ireland Government's powers.

21st July, 1969.