

E.R.

Dr. Stays 1/15/75
Mr. Hume
To impl. (8)
File
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1/1/75

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND THE SDLP HELD AT STORMONT CASTLE AT 3.45 PM ON FRIDAY 10 JANUARY 1975

Present:

- | | |
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| Secretary of State | Mr Fitt |
| Mr Orme | Mr Hume |
| Sir Frank Cooper | Mr Devlin |
| Mr Allan | |
| Mr Gilliland | |
| Mr Jordan | |

The Secretary of State had asked the SDLP to the Castle for an exchange of views on the situation created by the IRA ceasefire.

Political

After some initial light-hearted references to the incident with Dr Paisley, the Secretary of State stressed that there had been no negotiations or consideration of proposals either with the clergymen from Peakle or with the main church leaders. The IRA had called the ceasefire because they had lost the support of the Catholic community especially since the Birmingham bombings and the O'Connell speech. They had also suffered heavy attrition from the Security Forces, although they could not be said to have been beaten.

Mr Fitt said that the Secretary of State had played his hand very well so far but the present situation was delicate. He pressed for the release of detainees. Whilst detention remained there would still be an element of support for the IRA. Peace depended on the response of the Catholic population and if by releasing a number of detainees, the Secretary of State showed that it was the IRA who were preventing further releases by their campaign of violence, the Catholics would turn even further away from them. Agreeing, Mr Devlin said that the longer the ceasefire could be maintained, the more pressure would be put on the IRA to put an end to violence and the more difficult it would be for them to re-start. A release of detainees before 16 January would not create a Protestant backlash. The only real opponent of releases was Paisley; West and Craig accepted the inevitable. When pressed by Mr Orme, Mr Fitt said that he was thinking of the possible release of a 100 Catholics and all the Protestant detainees as a reasonable figure. The more releases the more responsibility would be placed on the IRA to maintain the ceasefire so that others could be released. Mr Hume said that in Londonderry, of all the detainees released, only two had become re-involved. Many had come to him to express their resentment at the restrictions placed on them by the IRA in the Maze. There was a real war weariness.

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The other main area of response was to lower the Army profile in urban areas. If the ordinary member of the public could see a relaxation in the Army's policy on searching and questioning, he would appreciate the advantages of a continuation of the ceasefire. Mr Hume also warned that the hunger strike in Crumlin Road Prison was very dangerous. The Secretary of State said that he had this point very much on board.

Mr Fitt said that in the longer term there would have to be movement on releasing Special Category prisoners. Obviously there could be no general amnesty and he realised the political difficulties involved. Nevertheless he felt that selected releases could be made by marginal reductions in sentence. Mr Devlin said that the parole scheme should be adopted. The Protestant para-military organisations were divided against Dr Paisley, in that they wanted the release of their men. This split had to be encouraged.

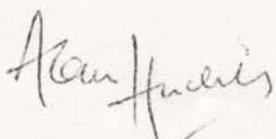
The Secretary of State raised the possibility of an arms amnesty but the delegation questioned its effectiveness - Protestants would never hand in their weapons - and said that now was not the right time.

Constitutional Convention

Mr Devlin argued for the postponement of the Convention elections. The various parties were still entrenched in their political positions and he urged the Secretary of State to encourage political dialogue between the parties. Without such a dialogue, this meant the mistakes of 1973 would be repeated. The SDLP wanted to find common ground with the other parties but he, Mr Devlin, was not prepared to enter a political slanging match. The moment the election date was announced all dialogue would cease. The Secretary of State said that the Protestants were well aware of the problem and were just as concerned as the SDLP about the potential quality of their backbenchers. Both he and Mr Orme stressed that the stance of the SDLP would be crucial to the success of the Convention.

Finally the Secretary of State suggested that the SDLP might find it to their advantage to have discussions with the political parties in Westminster; a suggestion which was readily accepted.

The meeting was friendly and good natured.



A E HUCKLE
Private Secretary

13 January 1975

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