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MUFAX ROOM
STORM HUME
HOUSE ANNEX

N. OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND MR
IN NIO LONDON ON 10 MAY 1984

The Secretary of State had a meeting with Mr John Hume MP, the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, on 10 May. Mr Needham, Mr Andrew, Mr Merifield and Mr Lyon were present.

The Secretary of State said that he fully accepted the value of the Forum Report in dealing with the long term aspirations of nationalists and that parts of it represented a significant step forward for them. But he was concerned that the report had done nothing to address the short term problems. It had accepted that there could be no change without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. In practice, that meant that developments for the foreseeable future must be considered within the Northern Ireland context. He had seen Mr Molyneux ^{the previous} day and had discussed the UUP document on administrative devolution "The Way Forward". Mr Molyneux had expressed a wish to have discussions with Mr Hume. He hoped Mr Hume would agree to these. The government could then consider what was the best way forward.

Mr Hume said that he believed the Forum Report had put politics back into the North. There was a feeling of some movement and people wanted the talking to start. There was indeed a new tone in the unionist document "The Way Forward". Mr Hume believed too that there was some realisation that neither community could solve their problems on their own. Accordingly, he did not think there would be any value in him having discussions with Mr Molyneux. These had never got him anywhere in the past. What was required now were discussions between the Dublin and London governments. He believed these should initially be based on developing agreement and understanding on the principles and realities set out in the first three paragraphs of chapter 5 of the Forum Report. Most of the rest of the report could be put aside. He did not believe these discussions should deal at this stage with specific proposals. Those which had been aired in the press over the weekend had not helped the situation. The value of general discussions was to show that the political process worked and that political dialogue was taking place. The present situation in Northern Ireland was extremely serious. It did not matter whether Sinn Fein attracted more votes than the SDLP in forthcoming elections (which he doubted because of the core of nationalists who would never vote for violence).

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What was important was the degree of alienation and sheer hate which went wider and deeper than the Sinn Fein challenge, particularly among the younger generation facing continued unemployment.

Mr Hume said that the problem was essentially a matter for the two governments. The British government had consistently shown itself unwilling to implement proposals which were opposed by the unionists. This was the perception of both the nationalists and unionists. The government would have to show them wrong. Any movement would be opposed by the more irrational unionist politicians, and the drums would be beaten. But the unionists' attitude could hardly be any firmer than it was now, and he believed that there were indications that the unionists were prepared to move. Nevertheless the SDLP could not persuade the unionists to move; it was for the government to persuade them. The unionist veto should not be allowed to paralyse the British government, nor should the consent requirement prevent the government from having its own view. The Forum Report was a considered view of three quarters of the people of Ireland; the people of the United Kingdom as a whole also had a view: it was unreasonable for those majorities to be swept aside by the views of one million unionists.

Mr Hume said that he did not accept that the SDLP had ever stopped playing a part in politics in Northern Ireland. He resented suggestions that they took no action or interest in constituency matters or community politics. They were very active. But they could not afford the sort of provision which Sinn Fein had with its expensive advice centres because they did not have the same access to the proceeds of crime. For the future, he would not rule out the SDLP taking part in some form of devolved administration or legislature in Northern Ireland. It might be possible for the SDLP to have a share in some local powers. The SDLP would find it hard to sit in an Assembly in Stormont, but recognised the need for some give and take. Such a structure, however, would only begin to become acceptable as part of an overall package covering all areas. In particular, he did not believe it would be possible to restore the minority's confidence in the forces of law and order within a Northern Ireland context alone. He noted the problems of sovereignty this implied which would make it difficult to accept in a normal situation; but the present situation was not normal. He did not believe, however, that joint arrangements on security need extend outside Northern Ireland. That was where the problem was, and

it is right, therefore, that the arrangements should only apply to Northern Ireland. While a package which included some element of devolved power sharing in Northern Ireland might therefore be considered by the SDLP, although Mr Hume was not clear whether an election would be needed before it could be implemented, his own preference given the high level of bigotry in Northern Ireland, would be to have Northern Ireland run by the two governments with no devolved structures involving Northern Ireland politicians.

In continued discussion, Mr Hume commented that the SDLP had decided to reject the arrangements for the Assembly under the 1982 Act because of its requirement for a 70% majority for putting proposals to parliament for devolved powers. This level effectively excluded the SDLP from being involved in the formation of a devolved administration since it was well known that they never commanded more than 25% of the votes. The inclusion of the provision therefore confirmed all their worse suspicions.

The Secretary of State said that while he expected to have discussions with the Dublin government, it was not satisfactory that dialogue should be confined to that level alone. Mr Hume had himself identified some signs of movement among unionists, and discussions with them would help him to capitalize on that. He accepted that the political parties in Northern Ireland could not solve the problems by themselves, but neither could the two governments. The Forum Report had itself accepted the principle of the consent of Northern Ireland and that meant that, whatever the views of people in the Irish Republic or in the United Kingdom as a whole, there could be no change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom unless the part so affected agreed. It was evident that they did not agree. The problem therefore was to provide structures within Northern Ireland that were acceptable and which did not affect sovereignty or cause an unacceptable backlash from the unionist community. Movement from both sides was required. The Secretary of State accepted that the British government shared with the Dublin government the problem of security, but he did not see how the British government could agree that the government of the Republic could have some say in policing in Northern Ireland unless there was a reciprocal arrangement, however mild. Nor would such arrangements have to

infringe sovereignty.

Responding to the discussion, Mr Hume said that he was prepared to speak to anyone. He had noted Mr Molyneaux's desire for an early talk, although he had received no recent approaches from him. But he did not want the government to defer opening dialogue with the Republic on the grounds that local discussions had to take place first. He would be more willing to talk to Mr Molyneaux if he knew both governments were engaged in talks. In any event, he would arrange to bump into Mr Molyneaux.

Concluding the discussion, the Secretary of State said that he still believed early discussions between Mr Molyneaux and Mr Hume would be helpful. If Mr Molyneaux then refused to talk constructively, Mr Hume would be in a stronger position. He confirmed that talks would be held with the Dublin government, but he believed that quick discussions would only raise unionist hackles unnecessarily; and that any talks needed to be carefully prepared and ready to face the short term realities of the situation in Northern Ireland. He was personally keen to see things develop, but anything which emerged had to be practical and realistic.

The Secretary of State agreed with Mr Hume that the press should be told that this was the first opportunity Mr Hume had had to see the Secretary of State since the publication of the Forum Report and they had had a wide discussion on issues arising from it.

J. M. Lyon

J M LYON
Private Secretary

11 May 1984

cc PS/SofS (L&B) - M
PS/Ministers (L&B) - M
PS/PUS (L&B) - M
PS/Sir Ewart Bell - M
Mr Brennan
Mr Bourn - M
Mr Angel
Mr Merifield - M
Mr Carvill - M
Mr Doyne-Ditmas - M
Mr Burns
Mr Abbott
Mr Boys Smith
Mr Reeve - M
Mr Wood
Mr Templeton - M