

From: Barrington Ted - Ambassador
To: Downes Eugene
Subject: Conversation with John Hume
Date: Thursday, March 21, 1996 6:40PM

TAOISEACH,

TO SEE PLEASE

S. Hume

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MR. P. TEAHON

MR. S. DONLON

MR. T. DALTON

For Secretary O hUiginn from Ambassador Barrington

1. As reported on the phone Philip Mc Donagh and I spoke with John Hume after the Commons debate this afternoon. He was clearly tired after his trip to the States and I did not feel that he had had an opportunity to study and grasp the detail of the British proposals. While he had listened to and had received a copy of the Prime Minister's statement he was unaware of the existence of the accompanying memorandum. He said that he had not known that there was to be a statement in the Commons until he had spoken to you earlier today and that he had changed his travel plans accordingly. Because of his jet lag he had decided that Seamus Mallon should speak.
2. Hume was highly critical of the proposals. He felt that he had made progress in the past week with Gerry Adams which had left him optimistic about the chances of a restoration of the ceasefire. All this was now at risk. The proposals were a mess. Whatever the document might say the Forum would attempt to interfere in and guide the negotiations and he could foresee endless resolutions attempting to tie the hands of the negotiators. He was also dismissive of the elections arguing that elections were unnecessary and divisive. No one in Northern Ireland really wanted elections, and the last thing he wanted was to fight a campaign in May. He hoped that the Irish Government had not been a party to or agreed the package.
3. Hume said that his inclination was to oppose the package and to boycott the elections.
4. We took him through the proposals pointing out that the the document specified that the Forum would be independent of the negotiations and would have no power to intervene in them. It would act by consensus and therefore the SDLP could prevent wrecking type resolutions. Some of his concerns might be addressed if the Forum had an independent Chairman and tight rules of procedure. Moreover the Referendum option was still open. On elections I pointed out that an election boycott would also constitute a boycott of the talks. I drew his attention to the way in which such a decision could be

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Pg. 03

presented by the British Government and media as compromising the hopes for peace especially since a fixed date had been settled for all party negotiations. He was well aware of this and said that the proposals had been framed to put Nationalist Ireland in just such a position.

5. Hume seemed uncertain about his next steps. He said he had no immediate plans to talk to us but that he would be consulting with his party colleagues.