

Taoiseach  
L. Keating  
9.5.96

**CONFIDENTIAL**

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### Meeting with John Hume

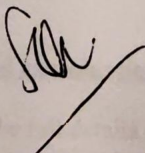
1. I met John Hume in Derry over the weekend. He was very appreciative of the Taoiseach's Finglas speech. He had endorsed it publicly earlier that day on the RTE "This Week" programme. He hoped the Taoiseach would find his comments helpful. I assured him he would.
2. He emphasised, as usual, the overwhelming importance of restoring the ceasefire. His main focus of effort in that respect was to obtain a similarly constructive speech or statement from the British side. He had been in discussion with Adams about possible language, but Adams was now sick. . He thought the Republicans should restore the ceasefire before the election campaign got underway. He did not at that meeting raise the prospect of a new "understanding" among the nationalist parties and I did not press him on his views on the earlier draft, since I felt his focus on a British statement the more promising avenue.
3. We discussed the election situation. He thought the SDLP preparations were proceeding satisfactorily. Most selection conventions had already taken place. The campaign would be launched formally in the early part of next week.
4. Both he and Mallon would be on the constituency lists and on the Northern Ireland lists. He refused to be drawn into any speculation on the West Belfast situation beyond confirming that, obviously, Hendron was running.

Agreed

5. He did not foresee a hugely intensive campaign, and did not want the SDLP effort to peak too soon. His main worry was about a high rate of abstention, although he was still hopeful that people would turn out. The SDLP campaign would be based on a "strengthen our hands for peace" theme. I stressed the relevance of the SDLP vote to "sufficient consensus" measurements.
6. He was naturally concerned about the rumblings in the loyalist camp, and the effect this would have on the peace process generally. He himself had had a chance meeting in the Europa Hotel with Ervine and some of his colleagues a few days previously. They had asked him to join them for coffee and it had been a constructive and non-confrontational encounter. He felt the loyalist paramilitaries in general were not hostile to him personally, and broadly understood what he was trying to achieve.
7. I updated him generally on our efforts to secure a viable scenario for the talks, including a formula to deal with decommissioning and the possibility of reassurances from the British relating to the process. He said he had been talking recently to a key security source who had professed amazement at the importance the British had accorded to the decommissioning issue, and made clear that that was a political rather than a security based policy.
8. We had some general talk about the negotiations and the forum. He is publicly keeping options on the forum more open than Eddie McGrady did. He would envisage a nuanced position, whereby the SDLP's participation would be directly related to the assessment at any given time whether the forum was genuinely a factor for advancing understanding and reconciliation.

9. He was worried about the proposed participation of Conor Cruise O'Brien, whom he felt could do a lot of mischief in "poisoning the unionist wells". Revisionist commentators forgot how much the SDLP had transformed the situation.
10. He asked me about the story by Ed Moloney in the Sunday Tribune, that the Government's proposals on decommissioning legislation were departing from the Mitchell report. I assured him that the allegation was without foundation. We were committed to the Mitchell report. As a practical reality, it was unlikely that forensic testing would feature if or when some form of decommissioning was agreed. In the absence of a specific model, lawyers would naturally want to cover the full range of hypothetical options, and Moloney was confusing this process with a Government decision.
11. Hume said he had a meeting earlier that day with a (now retired) Republican activist from Donegal, who had sought to meeting to fortify himself with arguments in favour of restoration of the ceasefire. He had stressed to Hume that bad feeling about the prisoners issue was a particularly negative factor in the equation.
12. Hume is to travel to the Netherlands this coming weekend to receive a Roosevelt Award in company with other distinguished honourees, including Shimon Peres, King Juan Carlos of Spain and Archbishop Runcie.

Another award!



Sean Ó hUiginn

8 May 1996