

(22) (23) + (27)

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting with Mr. John Hume

Derry, 13 April, 1996

1. I met Mr. John Hume in Derry on Saturday the 13th April.
2. He had had a meeting with Mr. Gerry Adams earlier that day. He was optimistic, and reported Mr. Adams as optimistic also, on the possibility of the IRA reinstating a complete cessation of violence - a total abandonment of the "armed struggle" in favour of a political approach. Hume believed that Sinn Féin did want to be part of the negotiating process scheduled for June 10th and was hopeful they would move accordingly. He repeated his deeply-held views that negotiations which excluded them would not be "for real".
3. I said the Taoiseach had briefed us in general terms on his conversations with Hume so far. The Taoiseach shared fully his views on the importance of reinstating the ceasefire, and was willing to make great efforts in that direction. However, he was understandably very wary of any general commitments to a "nationalist consensus", the actual content of which might be defined from time to time by Sinn Féin. Like all his predecessors he would feel it incumbent on him to protect and preserve the sovereign prerogatives of the Irish Government. Secondly, the idea of a role for the Opposition in Dáil posed a number of delicate problems. It had always been taken for granted that the Government of the day would represent the people of the State as a whole. Any role for the Opposition would have to be carefully managed. Hume thought the matter could be simply done, through consultations between the Dáil parties. It need not be much more elaborate than that.

4. Hume said Adams had asked him to pass a message that he (Adams) would like to meet me early next week. I asked Hume if that would cut across any of his contacts. He said "no". I said I would seek guidance and follow up in the light of that.

5. I asked Hume whether the text had developed above and beyond the paper which had been discussed with the Taoiseach. He said there was work in progress, but it was not yet finalised. He had been asked not to pass the paper on to anyone for the time being. However, he gave me sight of it. A note on my recollection of it is in annex. Hume's view of it was that it was essentially a restatement of the broad lines of the 1994 understanding. He said he had warned Sinn Féin that the language needed to be changed at some points, and that their expectation of a formal US guarantor role was unlikely to be achieved in practice.

6. Hume was very deeply worried about the forthcoming legislation on elections, etc., and appeared uncertain how to handle them. He had a general feeling, from the pressure put on him from the US and elsewhere, that "the Brits were up to something" in relation to the forum. I said the Americans concern for nationalist participation was probably explained by a fear that if nationalists abstained from the forum, unionists might seize the alibi to abstain from the negotiations.

7. I said we had not been given sight of the Bill, but had had a first briefing in the Secretariat, to be followed by a more comprehensive briefing on Monday. He raised the issue of the rules of procedure of the Forum, on which he had spoke to the Taoiseach. I said that, like him, the most significant new point we had noted from the briefing, compared to our earlier expectations, was that the Chairman and rules of procedure of the forum would be decided by a 75% majority. This clearly opened the way for a departure from the "broad consensus" rule which had been flagged in the British papers.



8. I said that his own proposal, that the 75% threshold should relate to the total membership, and not just those present, would clearly be an improvement from a nationalist point of view. However, if the SDLP and Sinn Féin ultimately decided not to participate in the forum, it might be paralysed for lack of a quorum from day one. That would pose obvious difficulties for the unionists (and, in a more subtle way, for the nationalists, who would thereby assume a kind of direct responsibility in relation to the operation or otherwise of the forum). I suggested that a simpler alternative might be to reinstate the broad consensus rule on the face of the legislation, as one of the several key aspects of the forum decided in advance. It was moreover, very logical that the forum as a body for dialogue, rather than for decision making, should have little use for potentially divisive majority votes, even by a weighted majority, and should be firmly geared towards a consensual approach.
9. I took Hume through the various discussions we had with the British Government on the "ground-rules paper" and the protections we were trying to build in at both ends to ensure that the negotiations could not be interfered with by the forum. He accepted that certain parts of it were helpful to him.
10. Hume expressed his perplexity that his schedule (Strasbourg, a conference in Nice, and addresses in the US at Notre Dame and at the UN) would keep him away from Westminster in terms of the tabling of the legislation. My hints that some of these commitments might be negotiable did not invoke much response, so I suggested that he should at a minimum have a full discussion with Seamus Mallon so that Mallon would know he was to be in the "hot seat" and would be prepared.
11. I raised the question of the referendum, saying the Taoiseach had taken up directly with Downing Street the lack of advance notice on the decision which had been taken to drop it. Hume noted that the Bill would open the way for a referendum by Ministerial order. While making clear that we had been open

to the idea, and had indeed put some preliminary work in hand, for a referendum before the negotiations, I urged strongly the advantage of going for the joint referendum with the solid asset of an agreement to put to the people, rather than in the abstract. Hume did not seek to quarrel with this, and as far as I could judge seemed to view the decision on the referendum with equanimity.

12. Hume said Chilcot had raised with him the question of a Chairperson for Strand Two, and in particular the acceptability of Sir Ninian Stephen. Hume had told him flatly that Sir Ninian would not be acceptable and had strongly commended Senator George Mitchell for the position.
13. At the beginning of our discussion Hume had raised with me a report which he said would be in the Sunday Independent, concerning the intention to wind up the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. He thought this would be ill-advised at the present time. I said it had always been tacitly understood that the forum would wind up when negotiations got underway. The date of June 10th, and the prior election campaign, meant it would be difficult for forum members to attend after the beginning of May. (I had intended to sound out his views more fully on this issue, but forgot to do so in the course of discussing other topics).

Sean Ó hUiginn

15 April 1996