

CONFIDENTIAL

From: JOHN HOLMES
Date: 16 July 1996

PRIME MINISTER

CALL BY SDLP: 1545

John Hume expects to be accompanied by Seamus Mallon, Joe Hendron and Eddie McGrady. Paddy Mayhew, Michael Ancram and John Chilcot will be there on our side.

You will not be surprised to hear that the SDLP are feeling particularly bruised and resentful about recent developments:

- They believe they were pushed into elections they did not want, with the wrong system, and suffered at the ballot box accordingly, at Sinn Fein's hands.
- Thereafter, once the talks started they believe the two governments backed away from the agreed rules for the talks, and Mitchell's role, under Unionist pressure. They are very sore about the undermining, as they see it, of the original Ground Rules.
- They are both furious and depressed about last week's Drumcree events. You are familiar with the general Nationalist arguments. The particular SDLP thrust is that no room is being left for moderates like themselves: they are being squeezed and outflanked by Sinn Fein (this is of course largely Hume's fault, but you cannot easily say that!)

When I spoke to Hume earlier today, I suggested that raking over the events of last week and venting fury would not serve much purpose. He seemed to agree, and

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

said they wanted to look forward. But I am afraid the meeting is still bound to begin with a rant of some kind. Seamus Mallon in particular is in a very black mood, and we know that he entirely blames the British Government. Michael Ancram also saw Hume and Mallon earlier this afternoon, and agrees that there is bound to be a letting off of steam.

As I said in my note to you last night, this is a necessary part of the process. Michael Ancram hopes that you will be prepared to listen, make soothing noises about how dreadful last week was and how much you understand the difficulty of their position, without letting fly too much in return. The meeting can then move on to looking forward.

Here we are on more constructive ground, relatively speaking. The SDLP view is that, while they find it hard to be in the talks with the Unionists, are resisting round table meetings and believe the Unionists are in breach of the Mitchell principles, they are nevertheless prepared to give the process a chance to wrap up the procedural issues before the summer break. This would allow substantive discussions to start in the autumn. This means Trimble agreeing to move faster than he has hitherto. If no progress is made, the talks will effectively be over. The Irish Government view is the same.

We can readily agree that, as you told Panorama, the time has come to move on from procedure to substance. The NIO believe there is a reasonable chance of agreement over the next week or so, on the basis of discussions before Drumcree. Trimble may be ready to compromise, as he seems to feel a little chastened by last week's events, although Paisley and McCartney will no doubt continue to be unhelpful. The current game plan is for Mitchell to conduct a series of bilaterals, get a set of procedures agreed, notably by the UUP, and then get this ratified at a plenary meeting. Paisley and McCartney will almost certainly resist, but can be bypassed on the grounds of "sufficient consensus".

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

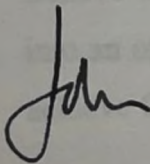
- 3 -

Mayhew and Spring met this afternoon. It was an amicable but largely insubstantive meeting. Both sides are holding their Drumcree fire until Thursday's IGC. But it still shows relations on the mend.

Other issues will be how the review on future handling of parades will work (you will need to ask Paddy to take the lead - in my view the NIO have still not come to grips with this issue properly, or shown enough urgency), and the particular issue of the Apprentice Boys' March in Londonderry on 13 August. The review itself is to provide solutions for next year, but there is a need for urgent activity to sort out an agreed solution for 13 August. Efforts are already under way. There seems to be a will on the part of most people on both sides to avoid any repetition of Drumcree. Equally, there are troublemakers on both sides who will be looking for further confrontation.

... I attach a brief from the NIO and my checklist of points to make.

Hume will not incidentally raise the so-called Hume/Adams initiative in this forum - presumably because it is not shared with his SDLP colleagues. He has said he wants to talk to me privately about it - he still hopes we can say what he has asked about comprehensive negotiations etc. I will ask him how he squares this with the Adams' letter, and other indications (including the London find) that a new ceasefire, while not entirely excluded, is certainly not imminent.



JOHN HOLMES

16 July 1996

[FSDLP.MRM]

CONFIDENTIAL