

8. May. 1997 9:26

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No. 4974 P. 2/5

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SP
cc: AA
PB
PRESS**FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
7 MAY 1997**

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
PS/Mr Ingram (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Steele
Mr Thomas
Mr Stephens
Mr Bell
Mr Watkins
Mr Brooker
Mr Maccabe
Mr Lavery
Mr Beeton
Mr Warner
Mr Holmes

file

John 9/5.

Mr Hill

MEETING WITH JOHN HUME: 6 MAY 1997

The Secretary of State met John Hume yesterday morning in Stormont Castle. Mr Murphy, PUS, and Mr Thomas were also present. It was a constructive and friendly meeting.

General Election

2. Mr Hume began by commenting on the elections last week, in which he said Sinn Fein had benefited from both the Drumcree factor (particularly among young people) and the "organised stealing of votes". He said people had driven from Galway in mini-buses to vote in Mid-Ulster and a review of the electoral register was badly needed. He repeated the claim made before that the Chief Electoral Officer was not taking the problems of vote-stealing seriously enough. The Secretary of State said Dr Hendron had raised this with her and she had promised to do something about it if in government. It was better to look at it now, though clearly too late to do anything before the local government elections. Mr Murphy agreed to take this on board.

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Ceasefire/Talks

3. Mr Hume reported a conversation he had had with Martin McGuinness the previous night. McGuinness had said that he was very optimistic that a ceasefire was now a real possibility. He sketched out how he saw the events leading up to the 28 November statement by the Prime Minister and said that a ceasefire would be available on that basis, provided there was a private assurance on the timescale of entry. This private assurance would have to be given to an outside party as well - perhaps the Americans. Pressed on the kind of timescale which would be acceptable, Mr Hume said he thought 10 June would be about right. He agreed with Mr Thomas that Sinn Fein/PIRA would understand that what happened in the intervening period would be crucial.

4. The Secretary of State was unhappy with the notion of a private agreement, which was always likely to get out and, in any event, given the security incidents in GB in recent weeks, the timescale was too short. She had carefully set out the requirements for entry in an interview just after Easter, so PIRA/Sinn Fein really could not expect to declare a ceasefire in mid-May and get into talks in June. She understood the need to decommission the mindset, but the other side of the coin was that there had to be something from the republican movement to show a commitment that any ceasefire was meaningful. Mr Hume said that the mindsets of these organisations were such that bringing violence to an end was not the same as bringing hardliners in a political party onboard. If there was a split, they would simply shoot each other. He said that if the objective was to have a ceasefire, then undoubtedly there would be 'blips' from the hard men up to that point.

5. To a question from Mr Murphy, as to whether Sinn Fein would accept entry after the summer recess (ie early autumn), Mr Hume said he did not think that was acceptable and, in any case, the talks would be in limbo until then in anticipation. He contended that one of the major factors to put pressure on the republican movement was when he had pressed for an agreement to be put to people North and South on the

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same day. For unionists, this enshrined the principle of consent; it also meant that the theology of 1918 (let all the Irish people speak - the IRA being the inheritors of that) could finally be set aside. Mr Thomas asked if there was any indication that there was a lingering delusion in the republican movement that the Governments may be pushed off their insistence of a ceasefire before entry to talks. Mr Hume replied emphatically that he would not sit down with Sinn Fein in talks without a ceasefire being declared.

6. The Secretary of State confirmed that she wanted the talks to be inclusive and asked if Mr Hume would be involved on June 3. He replied that it was unfortunate the talks had not moved on to discuss institutions of government, rather than sticking on decommissioning. Any fears the unionists might have could be assuaged by confirming that no solution would be imposed because, at the end of the day, it would be endorsed by all the people in a referendum. Mr Hume did not offer any suggestions as to how to resolve the decommissioning problem, but moved the conversation on to other matters

Parades

7. First, he said he had arranged a (strictly) private meeting with Robert Saulters, Grand Master of the Orange Order, for Friday. He had a proposal to put to him similar to the one that was brokered successfully in Derry last year with the Apprentice Boys. The Secretary of State said she was pleased to hear that and confirmed that the Parades Commission would have statutory powers as proposed prior to the election. This would be included in the Queen's Speech on 14 May and would be on the Statute Book by the autumn. Mr Hume did not seem impressed or otherwise by this and said that what was really important was what happened on the ground. That was where agreements would come about. He said he was now in the habit of meeting the Apprentice Boys 'socially' every two weeks or so.

8. Second, Mr Hume, who was about to leave for Brussels, said that his journey would not be necessary if the British Government would ask for special status for Northern Ireland beef. The Secretary of State said she would ask Dr Cunningham to

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meet the three MEPs to discuss this. Third, he suggested that the five Education and Library Boards should be retained and not reduced in number.

9. Finally, Mr Hume mentioned the difficulties caused by the health and education cuts due to the increasing expenditure on the law and order front. He particularly thought that university cuts were damaging as their research capability was central to economic development.

Ken Lindsay

**W K LINDSAY
PS/SECRETARY OF STATE**

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