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 LONDON SW1A 2AA
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From the Principal Private Secretary

14 October 1997

Filed on:

Dear Gen,

MEETING WITH JOHN HUME, 13 OCTOBER

The Prime Minister met John Hume privately in the margins of his visit to the Seagate factory in Londonderry. Hume, who looked much better physically than I have seen for some time, began by recounting in some detail his own role in bringing Seagate to the city. The Prime Minister was suitably flattering in reply.

The Prime Minister said that he looked forward to a proper session with Hume and his colleagues to consider what the final settlement might look like. Hume welcomed this. They would want to spell out in detail all their proposals. Strand 2 would obviously be difficult, but the SDLP had some good ideas, for example for a Council of Ministers able to deal with subjects like agriculture and tourism. It would obviously operate only through unanimity and have a joint secretariat. This would be accompanied by a proportional assembly and proportional government.

The Prime Minister said that reassuring the Unionists over Strand 3 might help them to accept proposals in Strand 2. The Unionists' difficulties were in many ways symbolic rather than practical. Hume agreed. It should be possible to say that, if matters related to Northern Ireland were being discussed between two Governments, Northern Ireland Ministers should always be present. Trimble should also understand that Britain and Ireland were constantly meeting in European contexts, and it was much better for Northern Ireland politicians to be involved.

The Prime Minister asked how he should handle his meeting with Adams later in the day. Hume said that he was glad the Prime Minister was doing it behind the scenes. He had told the media himself that it was normal for the Prime Minister to meet all the parties. He added that he and Paisley continued to have a strong private relationship, through their common European activities. He

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had told Paisley last week that it was time for him to "catch himself on" to what was going on. There was no point remaining on the sidelines. Paisley had said he could not come into the talks, but Hume thought he might get him through the door eventually. Going back to Adams, Hume said that the Prime Minister should emphasise the need for the ceasefire to continue, and that negotiations could not lead to a victory for either side. He had told Adams privately in a recent meeting that the SDLP would not be putting a united Ireland on the table. The way forward was to put together a settlement, and for all to work together on this basis for 25 years. He would continue to talk to Sinn Fein, but the media were often unhelpful. For example, RTE had just done a long programme on Ruairi O'Braudaigh. This was just giving him the chance to recruit new terrorists.

Hume went on that he had to raise Bloody Sunday. He understood that various Government Departments were looking at this and would give their answer when this process was finished. It would be very helpful if the Government could do something, since the event remained traumatic. He would say publicly that he had raised it with the Prime Minister.

Hume concluded that he was very pleased the Prime Minister had come to Derry. It symbolised continuing commitment to the peace process. It was also recognition of the continuing problems of unemployment in cities like Derry. He also repeated that he was glad the Prime Minister was meeting Adams privately, otherwise the media would make too much of it. It was nevertheless an important first step.

I am recording separately what the SDLP leadership said to the Prime Minister when he met them briefly during his tour of the parties later that afternoon.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and to Stephen Wright (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin) by fax.


JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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