

CONFIDENTIAL

Copy

(24)

Telephone conversation with Mr. John Hume

1. I rang Mr. Hume on Friday evening to ask about his meeting with Mr. Adams.
2. Mr. Hume was extremely critical of the decision to cut off contacts with Sinn Féin (much more so than in our previous conversation). He said that there could be a serious danger that the political leadership in Sinn Féin would be disavowed, and possibly even in physical danger from the hardliners. It was vital to keep lines open and not to take any narrow, partisan or Dublin-centred view. I explained again the considerations behind the Government decision.
3. I asked him how he now saw the way forward. He said that he had "new language" from Mr. Adams and that he would be putting this to the British. I assume this related to a rewording of the "10 October" statement. He was optimistic that it would work, because it was reflecting British language back to them. I expressed doubts, unless there was some hidden dimension we were unaware of, that Mr. Major could be brought now to reverse a decision on Sinn Féin admission. Whatever one thought of his November decision, it was firmly on the public record, and events since then obviously made it more, and not less difficult for Major to reverse himself. I said my own view was that the real agenda now was how Sinn Féin would respond to the "valley period" up to the election, without further escalation of violence.
4. I telephoned Mr. Hume again on Sunday. I said I would be passing on his views to the Government, but asked him to bear in mind the Government's

concern that sustained dialogue did not seem to have prevented an escalation of violence, and that violence would reach the scale where no contact could be contemplated. I suggested that since both he and the Taoiseach would be in Strasbourg next week, that they should find an opportunity for a full discussion away from media or other pressures. My understanding was that the Taoiseach's European Parliament programme ended at lunch time on Wednesday. Mr. Hume said he would make contact with the Taoiseach's party in Strasbourg.

5. I asked him again about his own continuing efforts for a ceasefire. He seems wedded to testing the new language on the British side, and will, I understand, make contact with them in the margin of the Belfast talks this morning. I wished him well in his endeavours, but suggested that it would be prudent to think over fall-back positions, in the event this démarche did not work.



Sean Ó hUiginn

13 January 1997