

Cops -

CONFIDENTIAL

Secret to PST
PSS
Mr. Feahan
Mr. Dalton
Ambs L/W
Joint Sec

Meeting with John Hume9th January, 1997

1. I had a meeting with Mr. John Hume in Derry on 9th January. I suggested that he should make contact with the Government at political level as soon as possible. In the meantime, I had been asked to brief him on our current thinking in relation to Sinn Féin.
2. I said the Government were currently engaging in a fundamental rethink of this issue. We had done our utmost to keep dialogue open with Sinn Féin. We had consistently stressed to them the need to ensure that the limited political room for manoeuvre should not be destroyed by events on the ground. In spite of our pleas, the pattern of attacks suggested they had given carte blanche, or something close to it, for opportunistic "hits" in Northern Ireland. I took him through the Government paper point by point. Having considered the matter very carefully, the Government was not disposed to have further meetings with Sinn Féin. They wished him to explain the reasons to Mr. Adams, and to establish as a matter of urgency from Mr. Adams whether a satisfactory ceasefire was possible on the basis of "identified and attainable" actions. I left Mr. Hume a copy of the paper for his own reference, stressing that in the absence of direct contacts, the Government would be relying on him to convey their position clearly to Mr. Adams. He undertook to do so.
3. I asked Mr. Hume for his assessment of the current situation, and what course of action he would recommend to the Government. He did not give any very clear overview of the situation as he saw it, and is clearly juggling

options in his mind, and keeping them open as far as possible. His general advice to the Government was that contacts should be continued. He saw the conflict within the Republican movement as a tension between the political element, who wanted the peace process to work, and the militaristic elements, who did not. Cutting off contact tended to play in to the latter's hands and to enhance the sense of isolation they thrived on. He stressed the very dramatic reduction in violence in the period since August 1994. He agreed however with my point that there could be no relativistic approach to this, and that the fundamental dividing line was not between, say, ten attacks and twenty attacks, but between no attack and any attack at all. He said very vehemently if his efforts for peace failed, he would be very sorry that they failed, but he would never be sorry for having tried.

4. I said I had picked up some hints from American sources that Mr. Adams was concentrating his efforts on a rewording of some sentences of the Sinn Féin "October 10th statement". I said I felt this was now unreal. The salient difficulty with Major's text had been the question of a "probation period" for Sinn Féin. After the odium of the recent attacks, it was unthinkable that Mr. Major would soften his position on that. It was equally unreal to think that Mr. Blair would now do anything which made his electoral strategy hostage to IRA actions.
5. I suggested that rather than getting lost in any secondary textual changes which Adams might put to him, Hume should check whether any proposed amendments presumed immediate Sinn Féin access to the Talks before the election or not. The key issue for Sinn Féin now was how to weather the period between this and the election, in the virtually certain knowledge that they would not be part of inclusive talks in that period. If they chose war for

that reason, they would poison the wells very seriously into the future, and specifically for a new British Government.

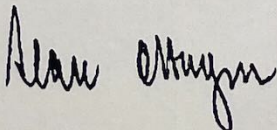
6. I suggested to Hume that he should take a very firm line with Adams on this, and remind him of the risks which had been taken to build bridges for Sinn Féin. If the Republican movement could not reciprocate, even to the extent of creating political space for a few weeks and making realistic allowances for an election campaign, then that was both a very unworthy recompense to him and others, and a bad omen of their political capacity in the future. Hume agreed that a Labour Government would have its own preoccupations, and would face highly chauvinistic, not to say atavistic, Tory opposition, but felt the Republicans did not sufficiently appreciate this dimension.
7. He speculated that he might suggest to Adams that if, in the event of a ceasefire being declared now and observed consistently, the Irish Government and the SDLP might guarantee to Sinn Féin that they would insist on the latter's participation in resumed talks, to the point of refusing themselves to participate unless that were the situation. I said this was something we could put for consideration to the Government. I said it might be a fall-back or an insurance policy if no more positive approach were possible.
8. He asked me to spell out how an approach to the British parties might work in practice. I said it was essentially aimed at giving the Republicans a "hook" for a ceasefire, if they wanted one. It would require Major to agree to a fixed date, but with an even longer intervening period than he himself had hinted at, and in the lifetime of the next Parliament when he would probably be out, or in the alternative, possibly more in charge. As regards Sinn Féin, it could address their three main difficulties with Major's November 28th statement: the waiting period would be presentationally a

more neutral and realistic "time out" for elections, with a fixed date after that. The decommissioning precondition would be met by an affirmation of the Mitchell report as the only way forward, with the unionist capacity to stall indefinitely circumvented by a proposal by the two Governments of a timetable to include a commitment that they themselves would launch substantive negotiations in Strand Three at a specified point. That would also address the Sinn Féin timetable issue.

9. Hume seemed very interested and said he would explore this scenario fully with Adams. He seemed to take it for granted, however, that any statement to launch the proposal would be made by him, with appropriate support from the Governments and other protagonists. I did not pursue this issue, merely stressing that the essential condition for taking the matter any further would be a clear understanding that a satisfactory and unequivocal ceasefire was on offer. Without that, it would simply be wasted effort. He said he would try to get clarity on that point.
10. We had some general discussion about the election prospects. He presents himself as robust, and more or less almost dismissive, on the issue of any electoral understanding with Sinn Féin. He is also opposed to a notion of agreed independent candidates. He mused darkly that some speculation by Frank Millar in the Irish Times about possible constituency understandings had been planted by Patsy McGlone in mid-Ulster. Hume seemed to assume that the view of the SDLP was in general hostile to any such idea. He said there was great uncertainty about the mood in the nationalist community, with Drumcree as a huge imponderable. He was wary (and perhaps slightly defensive) on the danger that the peace process could be exploited electorally by Sinn Féin, and suspicious of their tactics. I reminded him that the nationalist community would be greatly swayed by any verdict he passed on

Sinn Féin's approach to peace, and that was a very strong card in his contacts with them. However he said also that too many of his people were concerned about their own positions, to the detriment of solving the problem. He did not volunteer any comment on his own candidacy, and I did not press him on the matter.

11. He spoke in near despairing terms of the British Government's position, and the role of the unionists, drawing parallels with the fateful legacies of 1912, 1920, etc. He was particularly resentful of attacks on him by Ken Maginnis, asking me for a copy of Mr. Maginnis' much vaunted paper from the end of the 1992 Talks. He was also critical of a number of journalists, who he said had misrepresented his position, but noted with satisfaction he had forced the Sunday Telegraph to apologise for a Kevin Myers article.
12. I urged the need for the earliest possible contact with the Government at political level, for a further discussion. He is in Strasbourg in the early part of next week and had unbreakable commitments over the weekend. I agreed I would check the possibility of a meeting on Thursday, if he was prepared to return from Strasbourg via Dublin.
13. He is meeting Mr. Adams at lunchtime tomorrow. He promised to make contact afterwards. I indicated a willingness to meet him, if he felt a more detailed debriefing was necessary in the interval.



Sean Ó hUiginn

9 January 1997