

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2009/135/710
Creation Date(s):	5 December 1979
Extent and medium:	3 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Meeting with Mr. John Hume

1. I met Mr. Hume in Dublin on 1 December, 1979. He confirmed that he would have talks with Mr. Atkins on Tuesday, 4 December. He intended also to seek a meeting with Dr. Paisley during the week and felt confident that, on the basis of the contacts he had had with Paisley at the European Parliament, such a meeting would come off. He confirmed his earlier remarks to me that Paisley was adopting a more open attitude towards cooperation between North and South and he considered it very important, both within and beyond the context of the present attempted British initiative, to explore Paisley's view as thoroughly as possible. Hume indicated that he shared David McKittrick's analysis in the Irish Times (1/12/1979) that he and Paisley could resolve certain differences as leaders of their respective communities.

2. Hume said that he would pursue the question of a meeting with Mrs. Thatcher, about which he had had no word so far, when he saw Atkins on Tuesday. I remarked that Mr. Atkins's approach seemed to be to avoid re-writing his paper but to show a more open attitude to what might be, in fact, discussed at the conference. He had for instance proposed that voluntary bodies might put in papers expressing views on points for consideration. Hume emphasised his aim of participating in the conference - the whole aim of his Party had always been to talk - but on a basis which the SDLP could accept at grassroots level. It would be very easy to do what Fitt had done - to forget the Party and acquiesce in inadequate British proposals.

3. While Mr. Hume in this respect showed what is obviously an essential concern for the views of his Party colleagues, there was further evidence on the occasion of our meeting that he is determined to keep control of the Party more effectively than his predecessor. He repeated that all public statements referring to the Government had to be cleared by him. As for contacts with the Taoiseach and Minister, they would be conducted by Hume alone. (I had wondered whether the Party intended to nominate replacements

of Hume and Mallon who had previously ensured liaison under Fitt). Hume expressed impatience with the sort of meeting in Dublin which had taken place in recent years when Fitt (whose interest Hume thought was in decline) was often absent and when large groups of SDLP representatives would come to Dublin and take up the time of several Ministers. I can foresee that the practice of conducting liaison through the Party leader alone may also prove difficult and I would envisage that some place might have to be given to occasional meetings of SDLP spokesmen with the Minister responsible for the relevant area.

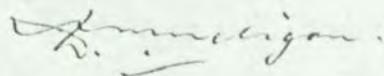
4. Part of Mr. Hume's concern at present seems to be the restriction of Séamus Mallon's role. He referred again to contacts which Mallon was said to have had with certain members of the Fianna Fáil party who are rumoured to hold views on Northern Ireland policy differing from those of the Government. Hume said he had challenged Mallon about this and had received an assurance that the only contact of that nature had been in the form of a visit Mallon had received when sick in hospital in Dublin. Hume had similarly confronted Paddy Duffy about reports that he had been consorting with Deputy N. Blaney. Duffy had given a complete denial. (I think Hume wished us to know of these actions before he meets the Taoiseach). His relationship with Mallon is unlikely to be an easy one given the latter's insatiable ambition. Opportunities will not be rare for Mallon to manoeuvre given Hume's frequent spells of absence in Europe. In the course of my conversation with Hume and Paddy O'Hanlon on Saturday an issue appeared, as yet in embryo, which could be the cause of trouble in the future, namely the new Westminster constituencies being worked out in Northern Ireland by a Parliamentary Commission as a result of the Labour Government's increasing of the number of Northern Ireland seats from 12 to 17 or 18. A constituency based on the Derry and Strabane Districts is apparently being considered where an SDLP candidate, presumably Hume himself, could win a seat. Another possible constituency combining Newry and Mourne and South Armagh (population 54,000) may also, according to the Party's attempts to monitor the Commission's thinking, be proposed where, barring split votes, an SDLP majority could be obtained. In this

case, however, the obvious main candidates Séamus Mallon and Eddie McGrady live outside the possible new constituency and there might be an ugly struggle for the nomination. Paddy O'Hanlon of Newry evidently comes into this picture and he was effusive in his declarations to Hume of reconciliation with the Party main stream.

5. If the relationship between Mallon and Hume will bear examination, in other respects Hume claimed a general movement towards intra-Party reconciliation and loyalty to himself since Fitt's departure. He had earlier that day met Austin Currie and had had a friendly chat with him, laying to rest past differences.

6. Regarding his meeting with the Taoiseach, Hume commented that Thursday would be very suitable timing as it would not follow directly on his talks with Atkins and would thus avoid giving the impression that he was "running off" to Dublin immediately afterwards "to report and for new instructions". Indeed he hoped he might manage to see Paisley before returning to Dublin. Hume said that he would intend to take up with the Taoiseach the question - to which he has alluded before - of what he regards as the unprepared state of Government policy on the details of cooperation and reconciliation with the Northern majority. He referred again to his view (see paragraph 1 above) that developments might now take place more rapidly than we in Dublin expected. I replied that we would be very gratified if that proved to be the case. He must be aware that detailed work has been going on within the Study Group for some time and that the Government's job was not to put down ideas for discussion but to prepare substantive positions to be disclosed in negotiation.

7. I told Mr. Hume that the Minister intended to speak on 2 December on the theme of the Irish dimension, and that his message would be intended particularly for unionists. Hume welcomed the news, and subsequently telephoned the Minister and also made a public statement welcoming his speech.



D.M. Neligan

5 December, 1979