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RECORD OF A DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND MR. JOHN HUME
AT 10 DOWNING STREET ON TUESDAY 13 MAY AT 1135

Present: Prime Minister Mr. John Hume
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Mr. M.O'D.B. Alexander

Mr. Hume said that there had been a wide welcome in Northern Ireland for the fact that the present Government was willing both to look at Northern Ireland's problems from the bottom up and to take action. The SDLP had had doubts about the terms of reference for the Conference. They considered them too narrow in that they dealt only with relations between the two communities. However, Mr. Atkins had handled the Conference very well. He had won the confidence of those involved and this was of great importance.

The Conference had failed to reach conclusions. In the view of the SDLP this was because it had failed to go to the root of the difficulties. Unless an attempt was made to face the fact that one part of the population feared being engulfed in a Catholic island while the other felt that the country must come together, no solution would be reached. In the view of the SDLP there were three separate but related issues:

- (a) The relationship between the two communities in Northern Ireland;
- (b) The relationship between the two parts of Ireland; and
- (c) The relationship between the two islands.

Unless the second and third problems were tackled, no final solution to the problem of security would be found. All the problems had to be on the table and all those concerned should be forced to come to the table to discuss them.

In the view of the SDLP the concerns of the Unionists could be met. The SDLP were not talking about separation. There were strong interlocking relationships between the two islands. The Prime Minister had referred to these at length in her Airey Neave lecture. It ought to be possible to express the special relationship in some way and to safeguard the position of the Unionists.

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There were lessons to be learned from Benelux and the Nordic Council.

Continuation of present policies could never produce lasting peace. So far they had merely resulted in the presence of up to 20,000 troops in Northern Ireland, ^{to} 2,000 dead, to hundreds of millions of pounds of compensation and to endless special legislation. Even today there were two new prisons under construction. This was proof that the policies so far adopted had been going in the wrong direction. The key to the security issue was to develop consensus in the community. This was lacking in Northern Ireland because one section of the community had never had any sense of loyalty towards or identification with the State. It had appeared to them that law and order was not for the benefit of all but was for the benefit of one community and against the other. If a sense of commitment could be generated within the Catholic community, the presence of troops would in due course become unnecessary. Mr. Hume said that the development of this feeling of identification would only be possible if political agreements could be reached which expressed the aspirations of the Catholic community. Security in Northern Ireland would not be possible without the co-operation of the authorities in the Republic. Therefore, they should have some say in the future arrangements for Northern Ireland. Their opinions should at least be listened to and their endorsement secured for whatever settlement was made. The joint involvement of both Governments should be clear.

The Prime Minister said that it was in the interests of both Governments to eliminate violence. The terrorists would turn against the Government of the day whatever its complexion. Violence had become a way of life for them in both North and South. She was surprised to hear that the Catholic community did not think that the law was administered impartially. Surely those Protestants who had been responsible for the outrages eighteen months earlier had been dealt with severely? Mr. Hume said that the people in Northern Ireland supported the Security Forces but they would not support a transfer of responsibility for security to the UDR and RUC. The presence of British Security Forces would continue to be necessary until there was an agreement with which the population could identify. At present, for instance, Catholics would not join the Police Force in case Stormont was restored. The Prime Minister

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said that the British Forces would stay as long as they were needed.

The Prime Minister asked Mr Hume what sort of solution he would favour. Mr Hume said that he thought it would be necessary to build up trust gradually. SDLP support for power-sharing had been based on the hope that it would lead to the development of greater trust. But the Protestants would not agree to power-sharing and would not move until the British Government withdrew its guarantee to respect the wishes of the majority. Such a guarantee would never have been given to Mr Smith in Rhodesia if a situation had been created there in which the Whites had an artificial majority - which was what had been done 60 years ago in Ulster.

The Prime Minister said it was necessary to look forward rather than back. She was surprised that the two communities had not grown together in the face of their common difficulties. Mr Hume said there was no lack of willingness or effort on the part of the Catholic community. But how could one reach agreement with Mr Paisley? The SDLP wanted to create the means which would enable the communities to come closer. They had dropped their earlier insistence on the inclusion of the Irish dimension in any agreement. If they moved further in the direction of accepting compromises on majority rule the SDLP would be decimated in any future election. If they abstained from the elections they would be accused of surrendering the field to the men of violence. They were being drawn further and further into these difficulties without receiving any concessions from the Protestant side. Mr Molyneaux and Mr Paisley were engaged in a competition as to who could be tougher on the Catholics. How long were HMG prepared to allow the Unionists of North East Ireland, a tiny percentage of the total population, the right to exercise their veto and to poison relationships between Ireland and the UK. It was the more extraordinary that they should have these rights when HMG were paying £1,000 million a year into Northern Ireland.

/The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister asked why communities which appeared to be able to live together up until 1968 and which were still able to work together, had got blown so far apart. Mr. Hume said that the Province had been run by one party. There had not been the slightest evidence that that party was willing to accommodate the views of the minority. The unemployment figures in different towns and housing throughout the Province showed how far the Catholics were discriminated against. Generosity had been necessary but had not been forthcoming. Any Unionist leader who had tried to help had been overthrown viz O'Neill, Chichester-Clark, Faulkner. The Protestants were not willing to respond to the needs of the Catholics and would only do so if they felt that the guarantee was no longer there.

The Prime Minister asked whether it was not the case that housing was now handled fairly. Mr. Hume said that the Housing Executive was completely fair. Progress had been made in dealing with education and jobs. However, little progress had been recorded in the staffing of the Northern Ireland civil service. Not one of the eight Permanent Secretaries was a Catholic. The Conference had been a dialogue of the deaf. Mr. Paisley had never brought forward his Party's proposals. He had on occasion sounded reasonable but last week's incident at Armagh underlined the difficulties involved in dealing with him.

The Prime Minister said that she could not decide who would run the Province. Mr. Hume acknowledged this but said that if the Unionists continued to make clear that they would not accept the will of Westminster, the Government was surely entitled to ask why they should continue to go on supporting them financially. The Prime Minister recalled that in Rhodesia we had provided a mechanism but that we had not tried to determine the outcome of the elections there. Mr. Hume said that he would be happy if Northern Ireland was given a mechanism provided it was a mechanism which dealt with all the outstanding problems and not merely those of inter-communal relations.

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It would be necessary to include the questions of relationship between Northern and Southern Ireland and between the two islands. The Unionists had to be brought to think in a wider context. The Prime Minister said that she had to think of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Southern Ireland. Mr Atkins observed that the Irish Government's claim, in the Constitution of Eire, to sovereignty over the whole of Ireland was a problem. Mr Hume said that this point should be included in the agenda for any discussions. He was not attempting to prescribe the outcome merely to ensure that all points were covered in order that the sources of tension might be relieved.

The Prime Minister said that it was her duty to protect everyone in Northern Ireland including those who wished to remain in the United Kingdom. Terrorism was directed against all established order whether in North or South Ireland. Mr Hume said he agreed but that the terrorists fed off the absence of agreement about the future of Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister said that so long as the majority in Northern Ireland wished to remain part of the United Kingdom, they were entitled to do so and to be protected. Of course the rights of minorities and individuals also had to be protected. Mr Hume asked whether the Prime Minister meant that if the Unionists did not want something, they needn't have it. The Prime Minister referred to the fact that there were places in England where one party or the other was in a permanent minority. Mr Hume said that he did not think that the parallel was exact. Nationally the Government changed from time to time. This did not happen in Northern Ireland. When the Prime Minister repeated that she thought progress had been made in protecting the rights of minorities, Mr Hume said that the Prime Minister should ask for a report on the performance of the local authorities in Northern Ireland. Even though the local authorities had relatively few powers, those powers were being abused in Protestant districts. He commented that while in Derry Catholic and Protestant Mayors alternated, in Magherafelt a Catholic housing estate had been named after William III! The Prime Minister said that she would have a report prepared.

/Mr Hume

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Mr Hume said that he was leaving in a worried frame of mind. Northern Ireland was not the same as an English locality where one party or the other was in a minority. The Prime Minister said that she did not wish to be misunderstood. So long as the majority wished to stay as part of the United Kingdom, it would be the responsibility of the United Kingdom authorities to see that the forces of law and order protected the rights of all who lived in Northern Ireland. Mr Hume said that he appreciated the point and valued the Government's willingness to face the difficulties in Northern Ireland. However, there were issues other than those of inter-communal relations which would have to be resolved. Unless a satisfactory relationship could be worked out between the two halves of Ireland there would be no peace.

The meeting ended at 12.15.

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