

SUBJECT
CC Master.

FWE

SLHASK



MS

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 January 1985

Dear Neil,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH JOHN HUME MP, 17 JANUARY

The Prime Minister had a discussion with Mr Hume this afternoon in her room at the House of Commons. Your Secretary of State was present. I took no note of the meeting. But the following summarises my recollection of what passed.

Mr Hume spoke calmly and constructively. Among the points he made were: the Catholics in the North suffered most from and as a result of the IRA's activities and consequently had a strong interest in order, but could not accept its imposition by what they regarded as a hostile and alien police force: he was very ready to talk to the Unionist parties in the North, but it would be better that these talks should not be formal or structured, at least until it was clear that there would be results: it would be impossible for the SDLP to accept anything less than power sharing: the nationalist identity could not be expressed and protected without the involvement of Dublin: measures to create employment and get young people off the streets would greatly help the situation in the North. Overall he felt that Parties in the North would never succeed in arriving at a solution if left to themselves: a solution could be found only in the wider context of North/South and Anglo/Irish relations. In reply to the Prime Minister's question what would most hinder the advance of Sinn Fein, Mr Hume replied some progress on the political front and more sensitive handling of the security situation, for instance funerals.

The Prime Minister thought it significant that Mr Hume had laid stress on the need for order as the basis of a settlement. She felt that too much time, both in discussions in the North and between Britain and the Republic, was spent stating and restating the problem rather than negotiating seriously for a solution. There had to be a real desire to make progress and both sides had to

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

recognise the need to make painful concessions. The communiqué of the Chequers Summit had established the limits within which a solution had to be found, both as regards the North and the role of the Republic. She genuinely wanted to make progress and would continue her talks with the Taoiseach in that spirit. At the same time, the parties in the North must talk to each other, though she agreed that behind the scenes talks were better than a formal meeting. The SDLP should not pin all its hopes on talks between HMG and the Irish Government. There had to be parallel progress between the parties in the North. It was regrettable that the SDLP continued to boycott the Assembly. At the least it should make use of other opportunities and procedures for putting the nationalist view, bringing forward complaints and so on. The Prime Minister assured Mr Hume that her contacts with the Taoiseach would continue: she accepted that it was no solution just to stand pat on the present situation in the North.

Mr Hume seemed genuinely gratified by the tone and substance of the meeting and said that he would pursue the discussion in greater detail with the Northern Ireland Secretary next week.

I am copying this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,
Chris Powell

C D Powell

Neil Ward, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office