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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
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Charles Powell Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

18th June 1985

Prime Minister

has seen

CPD 19/6.

CPD 20/6

Dear Charles,

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

As you may know, the Secretary of State has begun another round of talks with the leaders of the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland to see what scope exists for political development in the Province. The first meeting in the current round took place yesterday with John Hume MP and the Secretary of State has suggested that the Prime Minister might be interested in seeing a copy of the record. As you will see, the discussion ranged over the twin tracks - internal and external (Anglo-Irish) developments.

I am sorry the quality of our mufaxed copy is not very good.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Len Appleyard (FCO) and Richard Harfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

Niel Ward.

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MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND JOHN HUME HELD ON 17 JUNE TO DISCUSS POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Mr Hume opened by mentioning two American based initiatives which would be of assistance to the SDLP. First, the party had secured the assistance of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs which was to organise a fund-raising effort for the SDLP in the United States. This had been announced in Northern Ireland in a relatively low key fashion and the Secretary of State noted that so far it had not precipitated any reaction from the Unionist parties. Second, advisors to the Democratic Party on electioneering had arrived in Northern Ireland to carry out a survey into nationalist voting patterns in the Province with a view to advising the SDLP on how to pitch their campaigns in the future; and they would assist the party to refine its campaign organisation.

2. On the district council elections, Mr Hume stressed that all along he had been predicting that PSF would win some 50 to 60 seats while the SDLP would win around 100. This was exactly what had happened. It was to be regretted that the media should have attached unwarranted significance to Sinn Fein's performance. Mr Hume agreed with the Secretary of State's comment that the SDLP had done rather better in the East of the Province than in the West. This he put down to poor organisation in some districts and the unreasonable behaviour of the unionists in some areas (eg Fermanagh) which had cut the ground from under the SDLP. He noted that in Londonderry the SDLP had a number of new young councillors who should become a dynamic force in that city.

3. On the events since the elections Mr Hume said that the unionists were playing into PSF hands by proving that democracy did not work in certain areas. Also they were confirming the widespread belief in the nationalist community that unionists were not interested in sharing power or in the principle of proportionality. This was bound to affect attitudes on the question of whether any further powers could be devolved to locally elected representatives.

4. Introducing the discussion on political development, the

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Secretary of State said he appreciated that the SDLP might find it difficult to commit themselves to anything before knowing the outcome of the Anglo-Irish talks. Nevertheless the SDLP should understand the Secretary of State's concern that progress on the external track should be accompanied by movement internally. That was why he wanted to continue the process of sounding out the party leaders. The Secretary of State specifically mentioned the option of partial devolution as a possibility, stressing that under such a system he would, initially at least, keep control of the purse strings through retaining responsibility for the DFP. The nationalist community's experience of local government should not colour their attitude towards partial devolution which was in the gift of the British Government who could devise a system and procedures which would not be open to abuse. In view of Mr Hume's comments about anything that smacked of local government, the Secretary of State did not make any mention of the other two models although he said that there were other possibilities.

5. Mr Hume said that he would not set his face against partial devolution. It was a possibility that could be given positive consideration in the right circumstances. However he was bound to doubt the Unionists' commitment to any form of proportionality or power sharing; and, given the attitude of their MPs towards the Assembly, the UUP seemed unlikely to make a genuine effort to bring about devolution. Mr Hume noted that the SDLP were to have a party meeting within the next two weeks at which political options were likely to be discussed. He was confident that any move to commit the party against considering internal options would be defeated.

6. On the external track, the Secretary of State said that he assumed Mr Hume was being kept in touch with developments by Dublin. Mr Hume confirmed that this was the case in general terms although he did not know the details of the negotiations. He agreed with the Secretary of State's assessment that undue optimism about the likely outcome of the talks had been replaced by undue pessimism and that the prospects for success were slightly better than evens. He thought it no bad thing that agreement was unlikely to be reached before or during the marching season.

Mr Hume felt that the main focus of interest in future negotiations would be in Confidence Building measures (he made use of this term without any prompting), especially in the law and order field. Radical changes in the UDR and RUC were necessary and these would constitute a package of measures associated with any agreement. Mr Hume did understand the Secretary of State's point that sometimes progress could more safely be made quietly and by stages: for example there was the gradualist approach on releases in Secretary of State's pleasure cases. However he felt that the nationalist community needed a clear sign of a change of policy and attitude when security policy was concerned; this meant more than cosmetic gradualist changes. Moreover it was unreasonable to expect the Republic to accept responsibility in security matters in Northern Ireland without authority. The Secretary of State responded to this last point, arguing that if the Republic were given a consultative role they were not being asked to accept responsibility for policies; they would be at liberty to make it clear that they had made representations and that they did not agree HMG's approach on particular issues.

7. In the context of Confidence Building measures, Mr Hume mentioned joint Courts. When asked how central this concept was to his view of any agreement, he replied that he was bound to favour anything "joint". However joint courts did not go to the root of what was needed and Mr Hume by his general tone and attitude did not seem to view this as an issue on which any agreement would stand or fall. (Nor did he at any stage say that joint authority, as opposed to a consultative role for Dublin, was essential.)

8. Mr Hume said that if agreement with the Irish were reached, presentation would be important. He suggested that any agreement be represented not as some dramatic new development, but rather as a logical extension of what had gone before. This would make it difficult for Charles Haughey to oppose the agreement in the Republic and it might stir up less antagonism amongst unionists in the North. The Secretary of State expressed interest in this approach but pointed out that care would have to be taken not to feed the argument that this was but one more move down the slippery slope.

9. The Secretary of State asked Mr Hume whether there was anything he felt that HMG might do over the next couple of months to strengthen the hand of the constitutional parties. Mr Hume mentioned effective control of marches and parades as an area where action was necessary. Portadown was an example of where a very dangerous flashpoint existed which could lead to a repeat of the events of August 1969. It was intolerable that loyalists, led by Ian Paisley, should be permitted to march through a small catholic ghetto in the town; and the sight of policemen being effectively brushed aside by Dr Paisley and his followers did the RUC serious harm in the eyes of the community. Mr Hume also mentioned, without elaboration, the economic situation as an area of increasingly serious concern on the part of the minority community. The Secretary of State asked how the SDLP might react to his floating the idea that all elected persons in Northern Ireland on taking their seat, be required to swear, not on oath of allegiance, but rather a declaration of commitment to non-violence. Mr Hume responded by saying that one of his aides had suggested that the SDLP might propose resolutions in Councils requiring that office holders commit themselves to non-violence. As for the possibility that there might be a legal requirement that a declaration be made, Mr Hume said that he would mull it over but that in the meantime he would prefer other SDLP representatives not to be consulted.

10. There was a brief discussion of Mr Goldin's visit. Mr Hume said that he had seen Goldin whom he had found intelligent and understanding. Goldin had apparently been upset at PSF's assertion that he understood the logic of the bomb attack on Belfast City Centre on 14 June. Mr Hume had taken the opportunity strongly to press Goldin on the importance of securing more jobs for Northern Ireland as the best way to reduce unemployment in catholic areas; disinvestment could not help.

11. On his future availability, Mr Hume told the Secretary of State that he would be accessible in Northern Ireland for most of the rest of the summer, apart from two weeks at the beginning of August when he would take a holiday abroad.

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12. The discussion was relaxed throughout and Mr Hume, while not showing great enthusiasm, took care not to rule out any options that were raised - internal or external.

J A DANIELL
Private Secretary

18 June 1985

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