

RECORD OF A PLENARY MEETING HELD IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
ON TUESDAY 25 JUNE 1991

<u>Government Team</u>	<u>Alliance Party</u>	<u>UDUP</u>
Secretary of State	Dr Alderdice	Dr Paisley
Minister of State*	Mr Close*	Mr Robinson*
Mr Fell	Mr Neeson	Rev McCrea
Mr Pilling	Mrs Bell	Mr Gibson
Mr Thomas*	Mr Dickson --	Ms Paisley
Mr McNeill	Mr Jones	
	Mr McBride	
<u>Talks Secretariat</u>	<u>SDLP</u>	<u>UUP</u>
Mr Hill	Mr Hume	Mr Molyneux
Mr Hallett	Mr Mallon	Mr Nicholson
Mr Rodell	Mr McGrady*	Mr Trimble
<u>Also present</u>	Mr Farren	Mr Allen
Mr Pawson	Mr Feely	Mr Empey*
	Dr Hendron	Mr Maginnis
	Mr Maginness	Mr McGimpsey

* The members of the Business Committee were present only for the latter part of the meeting.

A plenary meeting of Strand One of the Talks took place at Parliament Buildings between 6.40 pm and 8.40 pm on 25 June.

2. On a point of order the UDUP withdrew comments made during a previous meeting about the procedure for nominating members of the Police Authority which they now realised had been misinformed.

3. The meeting then resumed its consideration of the document General Principles and Perceived Political Realities and Requirements: Key Points [a copy of which is attached at Annex A].

Local Institutions

4. It was agreed that there should be greater direct local involvement in the business of governing Northern Ireland. There was no dissent from the proposition that any devolved

administration should enjoy both executive and legislative powers though the UUP pointed out that the range of legislative powers available for devolution might need to be reviewed in the light of developments in the European Community. The Alliance, the UDUP and the UUP all spoke in favour of the idea that a future Assembly should, in general, work on the principle of majority voting; they all recognised, however, that there would be certain circumstances where it would be more appropriate to require a weighted majority. The SDLP said the key issue was the accommodation of differences. Any arrangement should be fully democratic and founded on consensus.

External Relationships

5. Under this heading the UUP advanced a particular interpretation of Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish agreement and argued that the role and function of any future devolved institution should not be dependent on the views of both the UK and Irish Government. The UDUP pointed out that even if substantial powers were transferred to a devolved administration, Ministers of the United Kingdom Parliament would continue to be responsible for a great many matters affecting Northern Ireland and they called for Northern Ireland's MPs to be given greater opportunities to call these Ministers to account. The UUP said that they would also like to see the Government give an undertaking that any matters reclaimed from the devolved administration by the United Kingdom Parliament would not be handled by means of Orders in Council and they expressed interest in receiving briefing from the Government Team on how the financial relationship between a devolved administration and the Treasury might be structured. The Alliance Party and the SDLP took the view that the relationship with Westminster was best considered in the light of any structures which were agreed.

6. It was agreed that good relations and practical co-operation between the two parts of Ireland were something that was desirable. The UDUP said that in their view this relationship should be managed by a sub group of the future

Assembly (as should Northern Ireland's relations with the European Community) and not by any separate institution. The Alliance pointed out that a number of separate administrative institutions, such as the Foyle Fisheries Commission, had existed for many years and the UDUP accepted that the Assembly might choose to set up further administrative structures of this kind.

7. All parties agreed on the desirability of ensuring a clear voice for Northern Ireland interests at the highest level within the European Community.

8. The SDLP highlighted the importance of Northern Ireland's relationship with the European Community and said that it offered more than economic benefit. Developing an awareness of being fellow Europeans might offer one way of easing the tensions between conflicting identities within Northern Ireland. The UDUP took up this point and asked the SDLP if they thought that a common European identity was a stronger bond than the 'unique relationship', as Mrs Thatcher and Mr Haughey had described it in 1981, between the British and the Irish. The SDLP said that European bonds were certainly increasing in importance and that the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland had found that it had much in common with minority communities in other member states. Britain and Ireland, however, continued to share a great deal in common, they used the same language, had very close trading links, an inextricably linked history and possibly the greatest mobility of population of any two countries in Europe. The SDLP went on to say that they sensed that there was a considerable amount of goodwill in Europe towards the Talks process and that if the parties could work together they would be able to exploit this for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland. The Alliance pointed out that there were several instances of European countries developing 'special relationships'. The Nordic Union was a particularly encouraging example because it had provided the mechanism for Finland and Sweden to settle a long running dispute over the Aaland Islands. The SDLP said

that Eastern Europe also provided many examples of communities with a long history of conflict now striving to find an accommodation.

9. Reverting to the North-South relationship, the UUP said that good relations depended on mutual respect as well as mutual interest. The removal of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution was a matter of vital importance. A close relationship would also require common attitudes, the Republic of Ireland would need to carry out a painful examination of its ethos and, the UDUP added, so would the Unionist community. The SDLP said that they were encouraged by the fact that the discussion was recognising that there was more to living together than was encompassed in statutes and constitutions. Constitutional settlements such as the Act of Settlement and the Irish Constitution were drafted at fundamental moments in countries' histories and could not easily be rewritten, but equally it had to be acknowledged that life moved on and attitudes changed.

10. There followed a long discussion about the nature of the Irish nationalist identity and the extent to which it had any affinity with the British way of life. The SDLP pointed out that the relationship had been mostly a negative one and that wider relationships with other European countries were developing. Nevertheless those sharing an Irish nationalist identity aid close affinity with the people of Britain, particularly to Scots and Welsh. It was arguable that they felt a closer affinity with the English way of life than many Unionists. In general Britain and Ireland shared many bonds - of language, history, trade and people - and the easy assimilation of people of Irish nationalist stock into mainland British society was a positive and encouraging sign. However the British and Irish people had one problem left to solve, in Northern Ireland; and that could only be addressed in a wider framework.

11. The UDUP asked the SDLP if anti-Britishness was one of the

elements in Irish nationalism. The SDLP said that this certainly had been the case but that the mainstream of Irish nationalism had moved on from that kind of attitude. The UDUP suggested that the Nationalist community had been able to rethink its identity because the British Government had taken steps to show that it was not hostile to them and that if the Irish Government were to withdraw its aggressive claim to Northern Ireland the attitudes of the Unionist community might undergo a similar transformation. The Government Team asked the SDLP if they thought that nationalists in the Republic of Ireland had moved as far as those in Northern Ireland. The SDLP expressed the opinion that although there was still a knee-jerk anti-British reaction in the Republic a great deal of rethinking had taken place and that most people would reject the suggestion that Irish unity could or should be brought about by violence or coercion. There was a widespread understanding that the only way forward was by agreement and mutual understanding. The UDUP said that they would like to believe this but the fact was that the Anglo Irish Agreement had been drawn up and signed without any attempt to seek the agreement of the Unionist community. Even now the Irish Government was refusing to postpone a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference for just two weeks in order to allow the Talks to continue. The UDUP appealed to the SDLP to ask the Irish Government to make this gesture of goodwill.

12. The Government Team offered the meeting the draft of a press statement [the text of which is attached at Annex B] and it was agreed that this should be issued.

TALKS SECRETARIAT

WORKPLAN ITEM 6

General Principles and Perceived Political Realities and Requirements: Key Points

Constitutional Status

1. Present Status.
2. Principle of Consent.
3. Present views of a majority/the greater number.

Nature of the Northern Ireland Community

4. One or two communities?
5. The need to accommodate two distinct communal identities.

Local Institutions

6. Greater direct local political involvement.
7. Legislative as well as executive powers.
8. No unfettered majority rule.
9. Mechanisms to ensure an appropriate and fair role for representatives from both sides of the community.

External Relationships

10. Effect on internal political situation.
11. Relationship with UK Government and Westminster Parliament (especially role of Westminster in relation to non-transferred matters).
12. Desirability of harmonious relationships with the Republic.

13. Need to consider value of any more formal North/South relationship.
14. Nature of relationship with EC institutions.

The Three Relationships

15. Desirability of settling all relevant external relationships.
16. Benefit of widely acceptable British-Irish relationship.
17. Need to give adequate expression to the totality of relationships (26 March).

Constitutional Politics/Defeating Terrorism

18. Commitment to constitutional, democratic means.
19. Potential long term security benefits of a political accommodation.
20. Desirability of a political consensus for security policies.
21. Importance of giving local political institutions at least an input into the determination of security policy.

Individual Rights

22. Machinery to protect individual/minority rights.
23. Cultural/community rights.

Endorsement

24. By the people of Northern Ireland.
25. In the light of proposals regarding other relationships.
26. The value of wider validation of any package.

25 June 1991

AGREED STATEMENT

Plenary sessions took place in the morning, afternoon and evening, concluding at 8.30 pm. Discussion concentrated on analysis of general principles and common themes emerging from the introductory statements. Discussion of the timing and content of work over the next fortnight continued in the Business Committee and in plenary sessions and will resume tomorrow. Delegations decided that, with immediate effect, proceedings would be conducted on a confidential basis except for a brief, agreed press statement each day.

The first plenary session tomorrow will begin at 10.30 am.