

Dermot Nally Papers

UCDA P254/34

SECRET

Meeting of Anglo-Irish Conference (10 September)

SUMMARY NOTE

Political matters

1. The Secretary of State emphasized his commitment to three-stranded talks and his belief that the process is not dead.
2. In the light of Minister Ancram's recent contacts with the parties, he favours a phase of informal bilateral discussions between the British Government and the parties to identify areas of agreement as well as areas which might be the subject of subsequent negotiations. These would cover Strand One matters and aspects of Strand Two which relate directly to Strand One.
3. He believes that the DUP, whose attitude is at present negative, could be persuaded to take part in the bilaterals in due course.
4. In parallel, he would like the two Governments to work closely in the Liaison Group over the next four to six weeks in order to identify the elements of a package likely to be acceptable to all participants. The objective would be a "joint framework statement" with a substantial constitutional component.
5. This document would serve to "focus the minds" of the Governments and would not be presented to the parties. The Secretary of State hopes, however, that it would enable him to persuade the Unionists that the Governments

had addressed the constitutional aspects of the process and that the Irish Government was taking a "positive" attitude (to an extent even greater than that indicated in the Tanaiste's Mansion House speech). This would give the Unionists "cover" to come back into formal talks.

6. The British side made clear that the document would have no standing and would commit neither Government. It might, however, produce formulations which would be of use in resolving key areas of difficulty with the parties.
7. In response, the Tanaiste emphasized the need for both Governments to address their responsibilities in the area of constitutional balance. The Minister for Justice sought (and received) confirmation that the object of the document would be not merely to produce political agreement but also to secure peace.
8. It was also emphasized by the Irish side that the question of constitutional balance raised issues of the highest political importance for the Government and would necessitate the most careful reflection and consultation at political level in Dublin. The Tanaiste's heavy schedule over the coming weeks presented problems in this respect. While some preparatory work could be done in the Liaison Group, matters could not be taken further until the Government had an opportunity to consult following the Tanaiste's return from his engagements abroad and to give the necessary political directions.
9. In further discussion, the Tanaiste highlighted the difficulties of settling this matter within the space of a few weeks. He also pointed out that the Government could not determine its attitude without some sense of

how the bilaterals with the parties were proceeding.

10. It was agreed that the Liaison Group would "use its best endeavours" between now and the next meeting of the Conference (proposed for 27 October) to formulate a joint assessment of what might be acceptable to all participants in order to achieve the objectives of the process and to secure peace.

Other matters

11. In response to a comment by the Tanaiste on continuing perceptions of a British Government "deal" with the UUP, the Secretary of State reiterated the denials earlier given to the Government on this score.
12. In response to suggestions by the Secretary of State that media speculation about a U.S. "peace envoy" was undesirable in the context of efforts to relaunch political talks, the Tanaiste pointed out that all of the Government's statements on this subject had been prefaced with references to the priority being attached to political talks.
13. Arising from the Chief Constable's press conference remarks about the Loyalist paramilitary threat to the Republic, the Minister for Justice secured confirmation that no new information in this regard had arisen since the last meeting of the Conference.

(Note by
Mrs D. Donoghue).