

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION - of the Plenary
TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER 1996 (14.37)

Those present: the Conference Room at 10.00 on that morning to

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Mr Holkeri	British Government	Alliance Party
General de Chastelain	Irish Government	Labour
		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Social Democratic and Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic Party
		Ulster Democratic Unionist Party
		United Kingdom Unionist Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman called the meeting to order at 14.37. He said that he proposed to continue with the discussion on item 2 of the agenda but he had no names of parties offering at that time. He invited the Chairman of the Business Committee to report to the meeting on the consultations he had with the parties over the lunch-break on the subject of the proposed meeting of that Committee. The PUP, with reference to earlier exchanges in the morning session, said that it was the case that difficulties would arise from time to time in relation to particular matters. Parties in the talks had to do their best to conduct themselves in a reasonable way, but the trading of personal insults had no place in the meeting. The Chairman emphasised that every participant had the right to be treated with courtesy and respect.

2. The Chairman of the Business Committee said he had spoken with all the delegations as to the timing of a meeting of the Committee to discuss its future. The consensus was for Monday

morning 28 October, 1996, in advance of the meeting of the Plenary meeting on that day. He proposed accordingly that the Committee should meet in the Conference Room at 10.00 on that morning to complete its business before 12 noon, at which stage the Plenary meeting would resume discussions.

3. The DUP said it would have preferred an earlier meeting of the Committee and, while it agreed with the Chairman's proposal, it would like to meeting to take place in a more informal setting. The Chairman of the Committee said he had considered that point but in view of the fact that there could be two delegates per party as well as two from each of the Governments, there might be a need for microphones. It should also be remembered, he said, that the Committee itself could determine where it should hold its meetings. The UUP said it agreed with the comments of the DUP about the venue for the meeting. The Chairman of the Plenary said the Committee meeting would take place somewhere in the building; the Chairman of the Committee would notify the participants if another room could be selected for the purpose; and, that the agenda for the meeting would have one item of business to deal with.

4. With regard to the resumed discussion on item 2, the DUP said that it had further comments to make by way of developing its position but the matter under discussion was still the opening statements by the parties on decommissioning. The Chairman said that certain delegations were preparing such statements, but they were not finalised. The UKUP said that most of the delegations had thought that the DUP presentation of its opening statement would continue on into the afternoon, so it could well understand that some were taken by surprise by the brevity of the comments. It would seem, therefore, that an adjournment would be helpful.

The UKUP also said that perhaps a more sensible way of dealing with the debate would be to ask for comments in writing or orally for inclusion on the record (as it had done). Then parties could speak to their proposals and that would be followed by an open discussion. The UKUP said it intended to have its submission in by Monday/Tuesday of the following week. Some form of organisation was needed to deal with item 2(a) on the agenda by having the parties open up their proposals followed by a debate on the issues which had come to light. In this way a whole mass of information and comments could be sifted through to get at the essential details of the subject under discussion.

5. The UUP said that contributions were made by three parties. It would be making a further detailed submission. It would be helpful if the participants had some indication of what the other parties intended to contribute, including the two Governments. The Chairman said that he had that very point in mind in the morning session, when he asked for views from the parties for the further structuring of the debate. That had led to the discussion on the role of the Business Committee. He said he would be grateful for the information, so perhaps the delegates could give indications of their positions at the meeting of the Plenary on the following Monday. The NIWC said that its contribution would be made in the following week.

6. The DUP said the last thing it wanted to do was to try and structure the proposals, but it suggested that each party could begin with its opening presentation. Then, there would be an opportunity to examine the position of each party. That would be followed by parties' proposals for decommissioning and a discussion would take place on those proposals. It was clear that

the Business Committee could have considered proposals along these lines.

7. The British Government said there was merit in considering the DUP's suggestion. The Government intended to make a statement reflecting its views. However, it wanted to hear the views of all the parties in the process before doing so. The UUP said it would be helpful if the other parties who had not responded could do so at that stage, e.g. the Irish Government, the SDLP, the PUP and the UDP, Labour and Alliance.

8. Alliance said it recognised the point made by the UUP, but it believed that there was more value in having written submissions rather than oral presentations. The UDP said that its contribution would be ready the following week. The party had already circulated a paper which had value. The UKUP supported the UUP's position. The stance of the DUP and the UKUP was clear, but the position of Alliance was not so clear, nor had it submitted a written paper. The UKUP then said that the position of the SDLP was somewhat different. That party had taken the view, according to UKUP, that decommissioning should not be a block to proceeding in the three stranded process. The UKUP said the SDLP believed that the two Governments should deal with decommissioning along the lines suggested by the SDLP itself and that it should be shunted off the scene altogether. The UKUP stressed that if that was the position, then there was no basis for the talks proceeding any further. That was the position of the DUP and the UKUP and, with minor variations, the UUP. Their position was clear - there had to be a permanent cease-fire accompanied by the handing over of some weapons as an indication of good faith to corroborate the earnest intention behind the cease-fire. The loyalist parties too would have to face up to

some actual decommissioning before they could advance into substantial talks in the three stranded format. Accordingly, the UKUP believed that the SDLP should state its proposals in the matter clearly in writing as well as making a detailed oral presentation on the issue. The present agenda was largely their creation so it was essential to proceed with the debate in a balanced way. The UKUP said that the debate on decommissioning could not progress as long as there were two conflicting views on the matter.

9. The Chairman explained that three separate documents had been distributed to all the parties which included the views of the UUP, Alliance and the UDP. That day a further document was received from the DUP. Alliance said that disposed of its first point about the statement by the UKUP that no paper had been presented by it. The paper had been available for some time prior to the establishment of the International Body and was also available on the internet. The UKUP apologised for its earlier comment. It acknowledged it had the document. Alliance continued and said it had re-submitted the paper because it was an early preface to matters which were relevant even at that time. While the meeting was dealing with item 2 on decommissioning, the party also wanted to indicate that it accepted the proposals made by the International Body. It believed the Mitchell Report had to be accepted as a package. However, it had to be noted that the Alliance paper also contained technical suggestions on decommissioning which went beyond the Mitchell proposals. The party had also prepared a more detailed paper on decommissioning, looking at the lessons which had been learned from other experiences. That paper would be the basis for the party's oral presentation. Alliance said it was keen to get on with the matter

and to explore beyond what the Mitchell Report recommended in relation to technical details.

10. The Chairman asked whether there were any more comments. The DUP asked if any of the remaining delegations, intending to make opening statements, would be ready by lunch-time on Monday next to do this. The party said if an indication could be given this might at least avoid people sitting around the table looking at each other. The DUP said that, given the fact that it and the UKUP had already presented opening statements and the UUP had submitted a written paper, perhaps a party from the non-unionist side might wish to provide an indication.

11. On hearing no response, the UUP said it was quite astonishing that no one on the nationalist side could even, out of courtesy, respond to the DUP point which in itself seemed a very straightforward and reasonable request. The UKUP said that what was developing now could in effect result in the end of negotiations. The party said that the SDLP represented the nationalist interest and as such it had a veto on any proposals to decommission. This was what the UUP was trying to elicit when it had raised the earlier question. The UKUP said that if there was any attempt to veto proposals, there would be no point in the pro-union parties continuing with the talks process beyond this. Decommissioning was not a single issue and there would be no commencement of the three stranded negotiations unless the issue of decommissioning was decided upon properly. Referring to the SDLP's silence in the face of the DUP and UUP enquires, the UKUP said that if the SDLP believed they could sit on their hands and effectively say nothing on decommissioning, then the process was going absolutely nowhere.

The SDLP said it realised the

12. The Irish Government said that participants needed to be careful about dictating to others when and how they could present their case in a plenary session. Deciding when to address the body was an issue that rested with each party and if a party did not wish to divulge this information it was then dangerous to draw inferences from its silence. That said, the Irish Government stated that in terms of planning and looking into next week, the questions which had been raised by the DUP were entirely reasonable. As for the Irish Government, its position was clear on decommissioning viz 30 September joint document. It accepted the Mitchell Report; therefore decommissioning should be along that route. The Irish Government said it would elaborate at a time of its choosing on this position, probably next week. This information was given on a "without prejudice" basis to its comments at the beginning of its intervention. As for the Irish

Government's comments, the DUP said that it had no desire to

13. The SDLP said it did not intend or wish to be discourteous. The party had remained silent thus far, because it wanted to avoid any doubt regarding its position on decommissioning. The party said that the issue was complex enough and fraught with difficulty, without adding to this by creating further misunderstandings. The SDLP reminded those participants who were looking for an input to the debate from it, that it wished to see the start of the three strands of negotiations as well as pursuing actual progress on decommissioning. The party emphasised that both the negotiations and decommissioning had to be pursued together rather than one in advance of the other in case a difficult issue from the first blocked progress on the other. As regards those who were seeking a time and suggesting certain questions already, these were the same people who didn't wish to discuss certain issues such as the constitutional position of Northern Ireland in the UK. The SDLP said it realised the

importance of decommissioning. Its position on the issue was no more evident than when the party took on Sinn Fein at the Dublin Forum. Decommissioning was an important issue for all the people in Ireland. It was therefore important not to read anything into the party's position. The SDLP said it would address all the issues on the comprehensive agenda as this issue was considered no less important than any other on it.

14. The UKUP said the SDLP was perfectly entitled to say that it would not discuss decommissioning. This position was not analogous, however, in any way, to that of the UKUP. If the SDLP wished to sit on this issue, it was entitled to do this but it should at least tell others that that was their position in a manner that was similar to UKUP's frankness concerning its resistance to discuss the issue of the union. As for the Irish Government's comments, the UKUP said that it had no desire to dictate to anyone how or when it should state its position. The Irish Government was correct in its earlier comments; there should be no press-ganging of others, but that was a different issue to the political consequences of not setting out a position. The UKUP then referred to a press article in which an SDLP representative had been quoted as saying that the party would wish decommissioning to be put to one side. The extract also attributed comments to the SDLP, to the effect that it was in agreement with the two Governments when they had stated that they would not permit decommissioning to be used as a blockage to moving into the three stranded negotiations. Had the two Governments privately indicated this to the SDLP? The UKUP also asked whether the two Governments had made it clear that they wouldn't allow any single issue to block progress towards the three stranded negotiations? Would the two Governments bang on, in any event, if they were not happy with any proposals on

decommissioning? The UKUP asked the SDLP to confirm whether the press article quoted was a true reflection of the SDLP's policy on decommissioning.

15. The DUP reminded the chair that it had asked an earlier question re parties' intentions come Monday lunch-time, the following week. This would be helpful information, if it was forthcoming, as it would at least allow some planning to occur in terms of coming in to the talks that day. The DUP said that as regards the SDLP's remarks concerning the Forum in Dublin, it wondered whether these could be made available to the DUP to enable it (the DUP) to get an idea of the SDLP position on decommissioning. The DUP said it also intended to hand in to the chair, at close of business, two reports from Jane's regarding arms intelligence reports.

16. Alliance confirmed that the previously mentioned material from the Forum in Dublin was already in the public domain and it might therefore be best to circulate this to all participants. It also reminded participants that if the point had now passed whereby opening statements were completed, it stood ready to enter the next phase of the agenda. The Chairman stated that his office would be happy to serve the interests of the participants by circulating this material. As to the substantive issue, the Chairman said he was unable to judge whether any delegation was planning to speak now or later. It was a matter for the participants whether they gave advance notice of this or not. The Chairman said that the next plenary meeting would be on Monday 28 October and as there was no further speaker on his list, he would conclude proceedings now with the reminder that the Business Committee was scheduled to meet at 10.00am on 28 October, followed by a meeting of the plenary at noon.

17. The SDLP, in reply to the UKUP's earlier comments, stated that it had never publicly talked about decommissioning being knocked aside or put into a fourth strand. Regarding the issue of the Government statements in the "no single issue" context, these were in the public domain and were therefore not a matter of private indication to the SDLP. The UKUP asked the NIWC whether it was likely to be in a position to make its opening statement on Monday 28th. The NIWC stated that it couldn't yet provide a time for this. On this note the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 15.23 until noon on Monday 28 October.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
25 October 1996

OIC/S34