

Parties' Concerns Expressed in Bilaterals on 7 April

Alliance

Serious discontent over Annexes A and B of the Strand Two paper (common policies and separate implementation). These had not been discussed and raised unionist anxieties unduly. Implementation bodies in themselves were acceptable, but there was a major presentational problem over how the list of functions would be used by the opponents of an agreement.

Strand Three: the main problem was the apparent exclusion of the Northern Ireland Government from meetings of the Conference on Northern Ireland non-devolved matters.

The sections on policing, prisoner and decommissioning were "disastrous" and one-sided. They read the policing proposals as recommending an International Commission and they were unhappy that prisoners would be released without decommissioning. They also strongly disliked what they saw as an over-emphasis on the Irish language.

They wanted the Irish to incorporate the ECHR.

Strand One: they had a series of concerns but indicated that these were negotiable. They particularly disliked the civic forum (and its Strand Two counterpart), the idea of a top-up in the electoral system, the maximum of 10 Assembly Secretaries, the requirement for sufficient consensus, and what they saw as confusion over how the top two Assembly posts would be filled (by the d'Hondt rule or by a vote of the Assembly).

UUP (Mr Trimble)

Fundamental difficulties with the draft text on Strand Two. The Strand Two text contained a lot of "garbage". The first step was to "tear up the three annexes".

Proposed changes to the Irish Constitution were wholly inadequate. They neither removed the claim nor recognised the existence of Northern Ireland.

PUP

The PUP priority was to secure the quickest possible release of the largest number of prisoners. They wanted a uniform system applied to all prisoners, with no differentiation on the basis of court papers or the nature of the original offence. The PUP outlined an ambitious list of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into society. There should be no discrimination against released prisoners on the basis of their previous records..

Strand Two: their main difficulty concerned the proposed setting up of Strand Two implementing bodies in advance of the Assembly coming into existence. They were prepared to accept implementing bodies in principle, but these had to be rooted through the Assembly. The first step to agreement was to get the Annexes removed. Some

elements of Annex C could be looked at in a different form, but there was no requirement for Annexes A and B. They feared the possibility of north/south bodies continuing in existence even if the Assembly collapsed.

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

The NIWC had a large number of detailed amendments to offer on policing, civil forum, victim support, prisoners, equality, a bill of rights and other matters. It was agreed that these should be given to officials for examination. A fundamental point for the NIWC was the retention of a civic forum in Strand One.

All prisoners on ceasefire be released by June 2000, subject to the agreement of the two Governments and the other parties.

UDP

On prisoners the UDP shared the PUP's concerns about differentiation and favoured an automatic scheme which yielded the greatest number of releases in the shortest possible time.

Strand Two: their principal concern was the establishment of implementing bodies in Strand Two in advance of the setting up of the Assembly. They contrasted the treatment of the functions of the British/Irish Council under Strand Three (a single paragraph on page 33) with the much more extensive treatment of the functions of the North/South Council in Strand Two. This would cause them serious presentational problems and they could not sell it to their constituents.

SDLP

Particular points on Strand One were:

The need for a greater role for the First and Second Secretary, to let them act as a collective, to have no portfolios and have firing powers etc.

Safeguards remain difficult. The SDLP could accept the either/or formulation if the weighted majority also included significant support from both communities. We tried on the SDLP a simpler version involving a reduced sufficient consensus level of 33% or 40% instead to clarify the situation. They agreed to consider this.

For the SDLP the duty of service is the Code of Practice. They are only interested in our Code of Conduct not our version of the Code of Practice. Material from our Code of Practice will be included in the Agreement itself as recognised by the latest draft.

They remained unhappy that the committees had to agree departmental budgets and approve legislation. After discussion they saw the first as a serious obstacle, but believe they could live with the second.

They could be pushed to 18 x 6 STV. Some indicated they could live with the sort of proportional top-up we are suggesting, but Mallon and Hume were not willing to concede.