

## IN CONFIDENCE

Northern Ireland Negotiations

Str 1(98) 7th Mtg

STRAND ONE, SEVENTH MEETING  
19 JANUARY 1998*Minutes*

1. The seventh meeting of Strand One commenced at 11.00am on Monday 19 January, with Mr Murphy in the Chair and Alliance, Labour, NIWC, PUP, Sinn Fein, SDLP, UDP and UUP all present. The meeting adjourned at 12.20pm, resumed at 3.00pm and ended at 4.45pm.
2. Mr Murphy opened welcoming delegates and condemning recent murders. He introduced the British Government's background paper on Scottish and Welsh devolution and referred to the Propositions on Heads of Agreement paper as providing a basis on which to move the Strand One discussions forward into detailed negotiations. He suggested that the second and final paragraphs of the Propositions paper provided a summary of the key issues for Strand One negotiations. He proposed that the meeting initiate a discussion of Strand One institutional arrangements, which might continue in the week commencing 2 February together with some consideration of rights and safeguards. On 9 February, Strand One might focus on policing and justice issues, and on 24 February participants might begin to draw together whatever agreement had been achieved.
3. The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 1997 were agreed. Sinn Fein requested that future minutes be recorded in a more detailed format. After discussion it was agreed that the current format should continue as that was the preference of most other parties. Sinn Fein distributed their paper, 'Sinn Fein submission to Strands One, Two and Three'; which set out their response to the Propositions on Heads of Agreement.
4. Alliance expressed concern that there was little time remaining to do business and suggested that negotiations could be intensified by agreeing an agenda of 3 or 4 broad sections (institutions, powers and remit, and relationships to other bodies). One or two delegates from each of the parties could be asked to address these areas and then feed their work

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back into the Strand One Sub-Group which could provide a brokering service with regard to any disagreements.

5. Labour was content with the work plan suggested by Mr Murphy. NIWC found the Government's background paper on Scottish and Welsh devolution very useful but needed time to consider how to take the format of discussions forward. The DUP said that one day per week on Strand One discussions was not enough as there was a need to create and maintain momentum and greater focus in all of the Strands.

6. Sinn Fein suggested that participants needed to find agreement through a fully participative process that included an explicit recognition that the previous institutions in Northern Ireland had failed. The current structure of the agenda caused problems for them because the Propositions paper did not address all of the issues and therefore failed the test of providing a balance between all three Strands. The SDLP asked Sinn Fein to clarify what they meant by political arrangements under Strand One. They also asked for clarification of the UUP's Strand One position. They had concerns about paragraph 5 of the Propositions paper because in their view policing was a key fundamental issue to be dealt with within the Talks rather than simply a confidence building issue. They indicated that the work plan as set out by Mr Murphy would not provide enough time for detailed negotiations.

7. The UDP had no difficulty with the work plan suggested by Mr Murphy. The UUP were content with the work plan. In their view there was a disparity between Sinn Fein's position on Strand One and that of the other parties although that didn't mean that the Sinn Fein view had any less legitimacy. Mr Murphy interjected to report a shooting incident in Dunmurry advising that a man had been shot dead in Jim's Carpets.

8. The SDLP asked for discussion to continue today on the second paragraph of the Propositions because it wanted to leave the meeting with a broad idea of what the other parties might agree or disagree with. Alliance said that Sinn Fein's position on cross-border co-operation was inconsistent

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with their view of objecting to an Assembly in Northern Ireland. The NIWC welcomed Sinn Fein's paper because they recognised that the status quo was no longer an option. They suggested that the Business Committee should be asked to schedule more time to look at Strand One in detail and the Government could also give a steer on unpicking Proposition's paragraph 2 and provide a synopsis of the Governments' bilaterals with the parties before Christmas subject to the agreement of the parties. Mr Murphy commented that that might be unwise as the range of detail provided by the parties had varied. The UUP suggested that discussion of an Assembly should take account of the current process of administration and the framework of fiscal and other national policies.

9. Mr McMichael (UDP) said that he had heard that the murder victim in Dunmurry may have been a family friend and asked for an adjournment. The parties agreed and Mr Murphy adjourned the meeting until 3.00 pm.

10. Mr Murphy opened the afternoon session confirming that Mr Guiney had been shot in Dunmurry. He expressed his condolences to the family on behalf of participants, commenting that this was another senseless murder which would not undermine the resolve of the parties. He suggested that the meeting should proceed with a discussion of the general issues and defer discussion on rights and safeguards to a subsequent meeting. Under Rule 17, he as Chairman, would ensure that every party was able to raise any issue of concern to that party. In that context he noted that Sinn Fein had a different view on Strand One institutions from most other parties and would ensure that they received a fair hearing together with any other party which has difficulties with an Assembly. He then circulated a work plan for Strand One (copy attached), based on his opening remarks and invited comments.

11. The NIWC expressed some concern about the layout under Section B in the work plan and suggested that discussion of the Strand One institutions should be tabled under the universal heading of "Democratically-elected Institutions", under which both the NIWC and Sinn Fein could put forward alternatives. Labour referred to a useful meeting with Northern Ireland

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Civil Service (NICS) Permanent Secretaries on the work of the Northern Ireland Departments and suggested that the Head of the NICS should be invited to present a broad outline of Departments' functions.

12. The SDLP said it was necessary establish whether there was going to be a parliament or democratic institution in Northern Ireland and sought further information about Sinn Fein's proposals. Sinn Fein said that Mr Murphy had satisfactorily responded to their concerns about how they might put their case. Replying to the SDLP's question, Sinn Fein said that they had put forward their opposition to the proposed body based on their collective experience of 50 years of Stormont rule followed by Direct Rule and their negative experience of District Councils. Sinn Fein would like to hear from those who supported the concept of an Assembly on how an Assembly might work and the merits of an Assembly, based on acceptance of the principle of democratic accountability as the common ground.

13. The SDLP replied that a northern institution was referred to in the Framework Documents and they understood that Sinn Fein favoured Frameworks. Sinn Fein replied that they had never endorsed Frameworks, but had found them a useful basis for discussion as a benchmark of the two Governments' positions. Alliance commented that the substantial issues hadn't changed since 1920. The question to be answered was whether there was to be an elected body in the North East part of Ireland within which the communities can share power.

14. The SDLP suggested to Sinn Fein that in order to make the Strand Two elements work there had to be something of equal substance in Strand One. Sinn Fein replied that they couldn't answer that question until they had the practical experience of the Strand Two discussions to measure the degree of commitment to the other Strands. The UUP commented that in 1992 the parties had conducted the process consecutively across the three strands. That experience unnerved people and it was therefore agreed to run the strands in parallel which they had accepted. Sinn Fein had rejected an internal solution but it was important to note that there is a

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three stranded process. The UUP might not like it but it accepted that there could not be an internal settlement: any settlement would run across all three strands. If they chose to they could inhibit discussion in Strand Two as Sinn Fein was now trying to do on Strand One, but that wouldn't get the Talks anywhere.

15. Mr Murphy suggested that one of the biggest incentives for having an Assembly was to remove Direct Rule. Tomorrow's Strand Two discussions might cause difficulty for the Unionists in the same way that Strand One had caused difficulty for Sinn Fein. However, he accepted that everyone was entitled to put their own case forward to represent their constituents who also wanted agreement. It seemed to him that everyone wanted to move to the details of democratic institutions at the next meeting although no-one would be committed to anything until everything was agreed. It was important to keep Strand One and Strand Two in balance.

16. Mr Murphy proposed that the Business Committee should be asked to allocate more time to Strand One and that the British Government would produce a paper to facilitate further discussion of Strand One institutions and a background paper on the functions of the six Northern Ireland departments and possible NIO functions which could be devolved. Parties could also table papers. The UUP said that it would be useful to have background information on the role of the Northern Ireland Departments and NIO and on the realistic scope for Northern Ireland institutions to adopt distinctive policies in the event of devolution.

17. Mr Murphy adjourned the meeting at 1645 hrs.

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