

Confidential

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Washington, Joint Secretary

Donlin each
for see please
5/2/96

Meeting between the SDLP and UUP, 3 February 1996

Mark Durkan briefed me on the latest in the SDLP's series of meetings with the UUP, which took place this morning. The UUP were represented by Reg Empey and John Hunter.

The meeting began with an apology from the UUP for the claims made in public by UUP spokesmen about discussions in earlier meetings in the series.

Empey described Major as having "thrown a smoke bomb" over the Mitchell report and having escaped from Washington 3 under its cover. He insisted that there had been no prior consultation with the UUP, and that the first Trimble knew of what the Prime Minister was about to say was at 2 o'clock on the Wednesday. He claimed that Trimble had been as surprised as everyone else.

The UUP repeatedly emphasised that they wished to move forward on the basis of the Mitchell Report. They wanted all parties to accept and honour the six principles. Following elections, they saw negotiations and decommissioning proceeding in parallel on the lines envisaged in the Mitchell report. They were prepared to see Washington 3 set aside and to move ahead with negotiations, but they "did not want to be shot in the back". They needed to feel secure.

The SDLP asked them how they would envisage consolidating the Mitchell report, given their refusal to participate in the twin-track process. How did they envisage that parties would pledge their commitment to the six principles. The UUP admitted that measures were needed. Hunter suggested that parallel legislation would be needed in both parliaments to cover an amnesty on the use of forensic evidence in relation to decommissioned weapons and other matters. The UUP proposed that the SDLP take this up with Dublin.

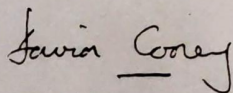
On elections, the UUP outlined their thinking that the elected body would be a means of allowing the parties to get comfortable with each other - Durkan

described their idea as equivalent to a "sherry reception". The SDLP pointed out that this was very far from anything which they might find acceptable. They pointed to the need for elections to be situated in a three-stranded structure, and emphasised that this was a very different concept to a Body which would address the three-stranded agenda. The UUP accepted that there would be a need to deal with North-South relations, but suggested that this could be done by a committee of the Body which could travel to Dublin.

Hunter pointed out that the UUP's willingness to refer to a Body, rather than Assembly, was not unconnected with the party's ban on the holding of dual mandates. It was felt that it would be easier for MPs to justify taking seats in a Body, rather than Assembly.

The UUP restated a proposal, put forward at the last meeting, that officials of both parties meet with Michael Ancram to discuss technical details of the way forward. The SDLP suggested that any such meeting ought to involve officials of both Governments. The UUP, who were clearly not prepared for such a counter-proposal, offered to respond after Trimble had met the Tánaiste. They suggested that a meeting between the Tánaiste and Trimble might not be possible for a couple of weeks due to diary problems.

The UUP also referred to the need to talk to the opposition parties in London and Dublin. The SDLP asked, with no real conviction, if that meant that the UUP might come to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. The UUP reply was non-committal.



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