

Private Secretary
The T. Council will 'work to note.'

(1)

S. Hume 7.3.16

Multilateral Intensive Consultations
Meeting between Tánaiste and Alliance Party, Belfast, 6 March 1996

Main Points

- Alliance will only meet Sinn Féin once ceasefire is restored. Consistent with pre-ceasefire position.
- Gave us paper on "Elections to All-party Talks", but said that while they were happy to brief us on it, they did not see themselves as negotiating with us. Strongly underscored main points of the paper, emphasising possible legal difficulties with a list system, and arguing that for a variety of reasons smaller parties, and those with their main strength in urban areas, historically did better in elections on a constituency - PR basis. This system also favoured moderate parties which attracted transfers. Admitted own self-interest. *(initials)*
- Would prefer a referendum to be on the substantive issue of consent, but appreciated that this could cause problems for Sinn Féin. If this not possible, should for political/ trade-off reasons use a formula as close as possible to John Hume's.
- Saw an elected Forum as analogous in activities to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. Involvement of wider community would build momentum for a settlement.
- Negotiating teams, which should be equal in size, would do real work. Could ask Forum to carry out research or hold specific hearings.
- Forum could test overall outcome of negotiations prior to a referendum.
- Forum chair elected from within.
- Members not to draw salaries, but to be paid expenses and a per diem allowance.
- Strands 1, 2 and 3 defined, chaired and run largely as in 1991/2. Should be concurrent, not sequential. Liaison arrangements in Strand 3 should be more robust than in 1992.
- Agendas should be brief.
- Possible use of experts, as in South Africa, to offer neutral advice on how to break specific deadlocks in negotiations.
- 18 months might be a realistic timescale for negotiations, given forthcoming British and Irish general elections.
- Decommissioning should be dealt with outside the negotiations. A twin-track approach. It would be dangerous to have too close an interplay/linkage between political issues and progress of decommissioning. Alliance said that the DUP shared this view, and saw that

the UUP approach would not work: but they could find it hard to say so publicly.

- Alliance (S. Close) asked repeatedly what "passport into negotiations" should be for Sinn Féin. Tánaiste emphasised terms of Communiqué. He stressed that we were determined to see total decommissioning as part of outcome, but also felt that the best chance to achieve this was through the development of a negotiating dynamic. The issue could not be a roadblock. We were flexible on how precisely this objective could be achieved. Alderdice expressed interest in exploring this issue further.

Rory Montgomery

7 March 1996

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