



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meeting with Sir Ninian Stephen

1. On 21 May, the Minister for Justice Mr. Flynn met Sir Ninian Stephen and Mr. George Thompson at the Department of Justice. The Minister was accompanied by the Secretary, Mr. Brosnan, Assistant Secretary Mr. O hUiginn and Mr. Dalton, Secretariat. The meeting lasted about an hour and a half. Sir Ninian proceeded immediately afterwards to a meeting with the Taoiseach.

What follows is a brief account of what took place.

THE IRISH DIMENSION - EXECUTIVE ROLE

2. Sir Ninian ^{had been given to understand} ~~observed~~ that the main impediment to progress towards Strand 2 was the SDLP proposal that the Executive Committee they had proposed should include non-elected members - in particular that the Committee should include an Irish Government representative. It was difficult to see how progress could be made unless this proposal was either modified or withdrawn. X

The Minister said that the key to progress was not the withdrawal of the SDLP paper but getting the British Government to persuade Unionists to proceed to Strand 2, where the structural arrangements necessary to give effect to the "Irish dimension" could be fully discussed. The point was made also that, in looking at the SDLP paper, it is necessary to bear the following matters in mind:-

- (i) It was necessary for the SDLP to include a strong element of "externality" in their paper. There is no prospect of producing any form of settlement without this and there was never any question that an internal settlement should be "wrapped up" as a pre-condition for progress to Strand 2.
- (ii) Very little is known concerning Unionist ideas as to what structures might be put in place in order to give due recognition to the "Irish dimension". There is no prospect that the SDLP could purport to reach an internal settlement on the basis of Unionist hints that they would "surprise" everybody by putting "something" (undefined) on the table in Strand 2 to cater for externality. The SDLP had to lay down a clear marker, from the outset, as to what recognition of the Irish dimension entailed. Anything less would have left the SDLP open to criticism by Sinn Fein (and by many nationalists North and South of the border who do not support Sinn Fein). It is necessary for the SDLP to keep Sinn Fein "off-side" by



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insisting on structures which would give clear (and strong) recognition to the Irish dimension.

4. The Minister also said that there was no prospect of reaching a settlement unless something was put in place which provided the hope of Irish unity at a future date. It did not have to take a form which guaranteed unity within any specified number of years - what mattered was that nationalists could see in it the start of something which might, in time, result in unity. ~~(As to what was meant by "in time", the Minister commented that it would not necessarily be in the lifetime of anybody present at the meeting.)~~

omit X

ARTICLES 2 AND 3

understood

5. Sir Ninian ~~felt~~ that the Irish Government's attitude in relation to Articles 2 and 3 were of central importance as far as Unionists were concerned. An indication that the Government would be prepared to "move" on these could greatly increase their confidence.

X

6. The Minister explained that it would be most difficult to persuade the people of Ireland that they should consider the amendment of these Articles. The Articles embody something which is "dear to the heart" of nationalists, North and South of the border. The idea of proposing an amendment to the people could be contemplated only if a comprehensive settlement of the Northern Ireland question were in prospect.

ROLE OF BRITISH GOVERNMENT

7. Sir Ninian confessed that the more he had come to know of the positions taken by both sides in Northern Ireland and the reasons for those positions, the more he tended to see the task of finding a solution as something of an impossibility. He is, however, looking forward eagerly to the task. The Minister said that there was much talking to be done yet. Proceeding to Strand 2 at this stage is the crucial issue - getting there is something which is entirely in the hands of the British Government. It is they who hold the key to progress - the "key" role of the British Government had been stressed by the Minister on several occasions during the meeting.

not only in relation to proceeding to Strand 2 but also to the eventual solution to the N.I. problem.

X

T. Dalton
2 June, 1992

