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STRAND TWO TALKS - DAY 1 - LANCASTER HOUSE
MONDAY, 6 JULY, 1992

The Strand Two talks opened in London on the afternoon of Monday, 6 July, and continued on Tuesday and Wednesday morning. The opening meeting began a little after 2 p.m. and finished about 5.30 p.m.

The following is a reconstruction from notes. It is not a verbatim record.

The Chairman (Sir Ninian Stephen) opened the meeting. The text of his statement is attached. The following is a summary from notes.

Chairman

Began by introducing himself. It is a great honour for me to be here. I bring good wishes from Australia which has links both with Britain and with the island of Ireland.

The talks are primarily a concern of the six parties involved. But you all know that on every continent men and women have links of blood and sentiment to Ireland, North and South, and they are awaiting the outcome. There is a heavy responsibility on us all.

I regard my function here as simply that of chairing meetings and giving guidance to the Business Committee to ensure that there are no procedural obstacles. Mine is exclusively a facilitating role. I may, on occasion, make procedural suggestions but procedure, like substance, is ultimately for the parties. All should feel welcome to offer views on how the meetings are conducted. I ask for your tolerance and understanding. Neutrality is an advantage. But sometimes I may be unfamiliar with issues which are very familiar to you.

The aim of the three strands is to achieve a new beginning for relations within Northern Ireland, in the island of Ireland and between the peoples of both islands. This is an ambitious, imperative aim. If it is achieved, generations unborn will look back on these talks. It is in your hands to ensure that they will have a bright future.

The aim of Strand Two is more specific. It is "relations among the people of the island of Ireland". The statement by the Secretary of State of 26 March 1991 speaks of a wide-ranging dialogue. It also says that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. As a mere spectator it seems to me that we should approach Strand Two with considerable but guarded

optimism. Some elements of agreement emerged in Strand One. Coming as I do from a one hundred year old federation, with States protective of their interests and regular debates about Constitutional change, it is surprising to me to see such a measure of agreement. I hope that our dialogue will produce a text that we can agree on. We would then move to the margins of agreement and then seek to define disagreements and find ways around them. We have a lot of work ahead of us. Much of this will be done in small groups. I will follow the guidelines and therefore there will be no announcement without prior agreement of all. I ask that all delegations observe confidentiality - the only exception will be a brief official statement at the end of each day.

I will return now to the business for today. We begin with a report from the Secretary of State in regard to the proceedings in Strand One to date. Now that both the Irish Government and I have been supplied with the relevant documents from Strand One, this can be brief. We will then move to adoption of the draft agenda. We could easily find that we are moving to complete today's work fairly quickly. We could, therefore, use this time for opening statements by delegations. The Alliance Party would be prepared to make their presentation today if all agree. We would have more time tomorrow to consider the substance.

The question is when time out of session would be most useful - today or tomorrow after all presentations? I hope that presentations can in any case be confined to the hope of each for what they see as a desirable outcome. It is better that they should be positive in presenting positions rather than offering a critical analysis of other's positions. That could come on Wednesday. It would be helpful to base it on what is realistically achievable. Confidentiality makes it possible to be more open in statements.

On Wednesday, the parties would give their reactions to these presentations in reverse order. That could be an occasion for critical analysis. It would not be productive in this three day plenary session to have further debate on those responses. But if there are ambiguities the party should be free to ask questions after all have made their presentations and responses.

What follows thereafter depends on what has happened. The plenary would decide on order and might establish working groups to identify agreement and disagreement. I plan to chair each such group. Therefore, they could not be simultaneous. The smaller groups are the better - preferably one representative from each party.

All this is for discussion in the Business Committee and it would depend on consensus. It is open to any party at any time to call for adjournment. No one should feel pressured. At the close of the responses phase on Wednesday we could discuss the future programme, the appointment of the business committee, the dates, location, duration and format of the next phase and find out the timetable for the rest of July. We should, therefore, all consider these matters in the interval.

Before beginning discussion I understand that the Secretary of State and the Tanaiste, on behalf of the two Governments, wish to make an announcement.

Message from the two Heads of Government

Secretary of State Mayhew

The two Heads of Government have offered a joint message of good wishes. I invite the Tanaiste to deliver the joint statement.

Tanaiste

Read the statement from the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major. They spoke of the historic opportunity and of setting out to achieve a new beginning in the three relationships. The process would have their whole hearted support. They sent their warmest wishes to all participants and expressed their gratitude to Sir Ninian. The statement went on to speak of the complexity of the issues and the opportunity for open dialogue on issues which divide and unite those concerned. It noted that all share a rejection of violence. It reaffirmed the readiness of the two Governments to consider a new and more broadly based agreement; and it concluded by saying that the two Heads of Government did not underestimate the difficulties.

Opening of Meeting

Paisley

On a point of procedure. I feel it would be a better way to proceed if we were to have a cross-examination after a presentation rather than a formal response. This was how we did it in Strand One.

Chairman

I did not use the term "cross-examination" but I did contemplate questions to resolve any ambiguities at the close of presentations. It would be more orderly and we would be in a better position to do it after all have made their presentations.

Paisley

I agree with this last point. I would also like to see all statements submitted in writing.

Molyneaux

We should have an opportunity to tease out ambiguities.

Mayhew

Reported formally on the proceedings of Strand One.

Summary

The agreed documents have now been made available and for that reason this report can be brief. Strand One agreed common themes and principles. It also agreed a number of statements in regard to ways to protect and express the identities. There was a certain measure of agreement on new political institutions in reports of the Sub Committee of 13 May and 1 June. There was also, furthermore, a possible outline of a framework of political institutions. There was measurable agreement on other matters especially the future relations of any new institutions with Westminster.

After discussions, in my statement of 12 June, I said that the two Governments were inviting Sir Ninian to convene a meeting to consider the Strand Two Agenda. I also said there would be a meeting in Strand Three formation and that the Strand One Sub-Committee would continue its work. This programme set out on 12 June by me has now been satisfactorily completed. In the light of this and of my predecessor's statement of 26 March, 1991, that all Strands would be under way "within weeks of each other" and "that all would participate actively", I consulted and I judged it appropriate to propose that the later Strands should be launched. The party leaders and the Irish Government accepted it.

Many are surprised that we have got so far. Much courage and vision has been shown. I welcome the participation now of the Irish Government. If any of you are over-awed by the occasion I am sure you will be reassured by the homely surroundings! (said ironically). This is an historic opportunity to begin new relationships. In the statement of 26 March it was said that all participants would participate in good faith. Since 29 April there has been real commitment on all sides to the process.

Agenda for Strand Two

At this point (2.40 pm) the Chairman drew attention to the possible agenda drawn up at the meeting of 19 June and asked if there were any views in regard to it.

Paisley

I would like clarification in regard to the order of

presentation particularly in relation to item 4.

Chairman

I had in mind that we should work in a clockwise direction. This would mean beginning with the Alliance, going on to the Irish Government, the SDLP, the DUP, the British Government and the UUP (i.e. in clockwise order around the table).

Paisley

I have no objection to that.

Hume

I note that some people change the alphabet to suit procedure. I am not referring just to Her Majesty's Government.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

We will be glad to hear the Alliance presentation. We will reserve our own paper until the first thing tomorrow.

Chairman

Is the agenda agreed?

Paisley

We have clarified - there will be short questions after all presentations have been made.

Chairman

Yes, that is agreed. The microphones and the acoustics are bad so speak close to the microphone.

Maginnis

As regards the time on Wednesday, can you foresee the length of time needed to cross-question five parties?

Chairman

I hope I can rely on the good sense of the parties. I have no idea how long it will take. I will play it by ear.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Our delegation has a small difficulty on Wednesday. Our President is addressing the Dail and the Seanad at 4.30 pm on Wednesday. The four Ministers who are here will be required to be present. So we have some difficulty about time on Wednesday.

Chairman

At what time would you need to leave the hall?

MFA

12.30 or 1 p.m. On coming in we were stacked up over London.

Chairman

So Wednesday will only be a half a day? Is there no possibility of someone staying behind in your seat?

MFA

It would be a rudeness to the President not to have all of us present. When would the question and answer period be?

Chairman

After the six presentations. After that again we would come to the responses.

MFA

In written form?

Chairman

If this is possible, so much the better. If they are oral we will have to await fairly detailed notes which will emerge.

McGrady

In your opening remarks you suggested that our opening presentation should, as far as possible, be positive and not detailed. Would it not then be inappropriate for us to seek to make detailed analysis of each others positions after these presentations?

Chairman

I did not suggest any lack of detail in the opening presentations. What I did was to suggest avoiding criticism of the submissions of the other parties. Just as nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, new thoughts or aspects may arise. Therefore, no one should feel bound by the opening statement as a full statement of their views.

Paisley

This is confusing. If we are going to grapple with what we feel is keeping people apart we must deal with some negative issues. It is unfair for people who start off especially overnight. But we can't ask everyone present to take a purely positive view.

Molyneaux

As regards Wednesday - we are all determined to make progress. If the Business Committee is set up could some of the Irish Government delegation stay behind to man that Committee?

MFA

I accept the point.

Chairman

I thought we would have to agree by Wednesday in plenary on important questions in regard to our future work programme. Our Wednesday session will be very short. Therefore, it is

most important to have someone from the Irish Government side with full powers.

MFA

Are you talking about officials?

Molyneaux

I wouldn't wish to advise the Irish Government but we do not want to lose momentum.

Robinson

I see difficulty in seeking to arrive at conclusions on Wednesday. There could be as many as thirty possible sets of questions and responses.

Chairman

I share your misgivings. Is Thursday impractical? Is the building available on Thursday? Are enough representatives of each party available?

Mayhew

The building would probably be available. I will check on that.

Minister for Justice

I sympathise with what Dr. Paisley and Peter Robinson have said. We are heading into a cumbersome question and answer session. It had originally been thought that the individual parties would give a general response to the whole set of papers. It would be impractical to conclude on Wednesday. It would be more practical to consider the detail at a later meeting. If I take aboard the five papers I could have questions on each. That could be set aside for another day.

Paisley

What is worrying us and our people is that we are running out of time. It seems to be always one of the Governments that is at fault. I can understand what the Irish Government is saying, however, about the President. I hope that the British Government would show as much respect for Her Majesty the Queen.

I see only one way out. When the presentations have been made we should cross-examine and then go around. This would put us beyond the week. You should tell us tomorrow what you have in mind for the future. And we should settle other dates. I can't come on Monday afternoon. We need some idea where we are going and some diary projections.

Chairman

I agree. I had intended to do that on Wednesday. What is the

general feeling?

Hume

I would say a strong "No". I am not objecting but the alphabet has obviously been fixed to suit some people. Therefore, everybody should make their opening presentations first (i.e. before questioning).

Mayhew

I have not been involved in any fixing of positions. I would favour initial questioning while the presentations remain fresh in people's minds. For my part I would be ready to make our own presentation after the Alliance and to answer questions on it.

Paisley

I resent any suggestion of fixing positions. Who changed their position?

Hume

You did.

Paisley

I came to the table as appointed.

Chairman

I take the blame. George Thompson and I thought that the two Governments should be opposite one another and the UK Governments surrounded on either side by Unionists.

Molyneaux

The layout is the same as at the pre-Strand Three talks (30 June).

Chairman

Yes. It is.

Robinson

I would ask Mr. Hume to withdraw his allegation.

Hume

I am not saying that they changed the order but I never heard of the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party until these talks.

Chairman

The British Government is ready to come next after the Alliance have made their presentation.

Minister for Justice

It is generally agreed that all parties should make their

presentations seriatim. I suggest there might be a short general response by the parties which wish to do so after the six parties have spoken.

Chairman

We now have three proposals:

- a) There should be questions after all presentations have been made and responses given.
- b) There should be questions after each presentation.
- c) There should be a short response by each party after presentations.

Paisley

I would be happier if the two Governments go first. As to any allegation of change of name I am an Ulster man and my party is registered as the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party - the UDUP.

Maginnis

I am concerned that we are creating a situation of special status for the two Governments. I and others came here to meet on an equal footing. Also the process may be slowed down. We are here like others because we believe there is need for a dialogue in person. Eye to eye contact is important. We are disappointed that the three day process is being reduced to two and a half days. I understand what the Irish Government said but knowing the President and her interest in progress, I believe she would be most understanding if the Irish Government could facilitate us by continuing here.

Robinson

All can understand the position of the Irish Government. But can they indicate whether they could be here on Thursday?

MFA

I personally can't because I have to go to a CSCE Summit in Helsinki but members of my delegation could.

Alderdice

We would need to consult for our part. It is worrying that we are spending so much time not getting down to real business. Whenever you take questions it will take the same time. I suspect that we will want to study and put questions in writing. But I don't think we should spend time working on imponderables.

Chairman

Mr. Molyneaux, could you be here on Thursday?

Molyneaux

In strength. I will try to be here during the morning but

will arrange someone of decision making powers to be here in the afternoon.

Hume

Our understanding was that this meeting was planned for three days. I agree with Dr. Alderdice that we should do what we came to do and then see if there is a need for further time. It could even be until Monday. We should get on now with the job. I am willing to bring forward our own statement.

Mallon

Even if we continue over four days it is not humanly possible to complete our work in that time. Could we transpose the questioning session in to the next item on the agenda and include it in item 6?

Paisley

My understanding is that the Irish Government would make their presentation tomorrow and that the Alliance and the British Government and the SDLP are ready now?

MFA

We have no problem.

Chairman

We are engaged for the moment on considering the proposed agenda for Strand Two. Is there agreement on the draft agenda? Yes. Then we can take it that the agenda is agreed.

At this point (3.20 pm) the Chairman adjourned the meeting. It resumed at 3.47 pm.

Chairman

I propose we should take the presentations seriatim. We will adjourn at 5.30 p.m. and we will start tomorrow at 9.15 a.m.

Paisley

On a point of order, I would point out that in the statement made by the Secretary of State on 26 March, 1991, my party is described as "the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party".

Alliance Statement

Dr. Alderdice then began the Alliance opening presentation. The text of what he said is available.

Irish Government Statement

The Tanaiste then delivered the Irish Government Statement. The text is available.

Paisley

On a point of order - I will study the statement but I want to put down a marker. We were not called to Strands 1, 2 or 3 for re-negotiation of the Union. If the Irish Government think that, through Jesuitical cunning, they will get the Unionists to agree they are mistaken.

SDLP Statement

John Hume then delivered the SDLP Statement. The text is available.

British Statement

At 4.50 p.m. Dr. Paisley said he wished to defer his statement until tomorrow. The UUP (Ken Maginnis) also deferred their statement. Accordingly, the Secretary of State (Mayhew) delivered the British Government Statement. The text is available.

After the British Statement a press release was agreed. Tanaiste proposed appending a list of front-bench spokespersons for each delegation.

Chairman

Front-benchers only or all delegates?

Tanaiste

Only the front-bench exists!

Paisley

Not all, for security reasons.
This was agreed and the meeting adjourned.