



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meeting of Liaison Group

Dublin, 1 May 1991

1. The Irish side was led by Sean O hUiginn, accompanied by David Donoghue and Sean Farrell. The British side was led by Quentin Thomas, accompanied by Robert Alston and John McKervill. The meeting lasted about two hours and was followed by lunch.

Strand One meetings

2. Supplementing the briefing already given through the Secretariat, Thomas gave an account of the Strand One meetings which took place on Wednesday (29 April).

The proceedings began at 10.30 am with a meeting between the Secretary of State and the party leaders (which, Thomas indicated, might become a more regular occurrence than during last year's talks). They agreed on a joint photo-call and on the release of a short press statement. They agreed that the Business Committee would revise the "Realities and Common Themes" paper, which the British Government had tabled towards the end of last year's talks and had now re-circulated in slightly amended form. They also showed some interest in the paper on "Options for New Political Institutions" which the Secretary of State had flagged to them.

The subsequent plenary session (11.30 am - 1 pm) opened with some general remarks from the Secretary of State (which provoked little interest). Jeremy Hanley then reported on the outcome of the Business Committee's

meeting on 9 March. He mentioned its recommendation that meetings should take place in Belfast as a rule, though there was provision for meetings in London should this be agreed by all participants. It had also recommended a "gap" to the end of July or early August, with provision for an extension if this seemed desirable and was requested unanimously. When the DUP argued at this point for an open-ended extension, the Secretary of State intervened sharply to say that the Conference had agreed not to meet until the week beginning 27 July. He made no reference to the question of a possible extension and the discussion of this point went no further.

The remainder of this plenary session consisted of opening remarks from the parties (already reported through the Secretariat).

In the afternoon, the "Realities and Common Themes" paper was considered in the Business Committee (Conyngnam and Empey for the UPP, Robinson and Vitty for the DUP, Morrow and Close for Alliance and Farren and Durkan (deputising for Haughey) for the SDLP). The Unionists held that revision of the Realities section should be left to the British Government, as the realities in question had been defined by the latter and not by the parties. Discussion concentrated, therefore, on the Common Themes section, which was extensively amended. It was agreed that a revised version of the paper would be prepared by the British Government and circulated over the weekend with a view to discussion at a meeting of the Business Committee on Monday morning. The Committee would also consider how to handle the "Options" paper, which had been circulated at lunchtime on Wednesday.

The initial indications were that John Hume did not regard the "Options" paper as the answer. He was thinking of tabling an SDLP paper on institutional arrangements but would not do so without "cover" in the form of agreement between the parties on the nature of the underlying problem. The British hoped that Hume could be brought to the point where he judged that there was sufficient acknowledgement of the nature of the problem. If the "Options" paper were to have the effect of provoking Hume into tabling institutional proposals of his own, a useful purpose would already have been served.

Thomas mentioned that, in the Business Committee, Reg Empey responded positively to a suggestion made by Hume earlier in the day that the SDLP might table a paper defining the Unionist identity (presumably to spur the Unionists into doing this). Empey had also indicated that papers might be forthcoming from the Unionists. The British were encouraged by any sign of readiness on the part of the parties to exchange papers.

Asked what purpose they envisaged for the revised "Realities and Common Themes" paper, Thomas replied that they wished merely to "park it". Geared they maintained very much to Hume's approach and agenda, it was summation of the underlying realities which they had identified from last summer's discussions. If it helped to define some common ground for the parties, it would have served its purpose and attention could turn to more specific Strand One issues.

Provision of documentation relating to Strand One

3. O hUiginn thanked Thomas for his presentation. He brought up the Irish side's serious concern at the British refusal to provide copies of Strand One documentation. Underlining the joint management of the process by the two Governments, he pointed to the unfortunate symbolism of this refusal and to the impression which it might convey that the Irish Government was less a partner than an under-privileged party. It left the Irish Government in the anomalous position of being the only participant without a complete overview of the entire process since there was provision for liaison with the Northern parties in Strand Three. There was also a risk that, if the Irish side had no access to the papers, something might be said quite innocently which could have an unintentional effect on the process.

4. Thomas recalled that the point to which this discussion had been taken last year was that the Irish Government should be given the same degree of access to Strand One material as Sir Ninian Stephen (i. e., statements which were released to the media). The new Secretary of State, with whom the matter had been discussed, had voiced the same worries as his predecessor about the risk to the process should he be obliged to admit that Strand One documentation had been passed to the Irish Government. Thomas suggested, however, that, as there was a slightly more workmanlike atmosphere on this occasion than last year, the question of giving the Irish Government sight of this documentation might be raised in the Business Committee.

5. O hUiginn asked that the concerns of Irish Ministers on this issue be conveyed to the Secretary of State.

Sir Ninian Stephen

6. It was agreed that instructions should be issued to enable our respective Missions in Canberra to make a joint approach to Sir Ninian Stephen in order to update him on developments, to promise advance notice in relation to the date on which he would be required and to propose briefing arrangements. The text of these instructions was agreed and is attached (Annex 1). The list of documents to be given to Ambassador Stephen was agreed (subject to the addition of Irish material). It was further agreed that a letter formally confirming his appointment might be issued by the two Joint Chairmen when it was clear that Ambassador Stephen would definitely be required. It was also decided that, when instructions issued later on in relation to a possible reconnaissance visit by Mr. George Thompson (Ambassador Stephen's designated Private Secretary), the two Heads of Mission would be asked to reconfirm the various practical arrangements made last year with the Australian Government.

Arrangements for Strand Two

7. The first issue discussed was that of venue. As regards the London venue, Thomas indicated that locations in the Home Counties (though still convenient to London) were under consideration. It was confirmed that Parliament Buildings would be the Northern Ireland venue. O hUiginn

indicated that, while this had yet to be considered by the Government, Dublin Castle would probably be the Dublin venue. He assumed that, in accordance with the timetable envisaged last year, the Dublin meeting would take place towards the end of June.

8. As regards the size of the delegations, the British favoured a maximum of six for the London venue, with two to three at the table at any given time. This would be practical reasons - it would be difficult to find premises capable of accommodating larger numbers. If this were agreed, they expected the total numbers to be in the region of 40-45. They would point out to the parties that the London meeting was only intended to be an opening meeting. However, even in Parliament Buildings, they expected that numbers might have to be reduced, as space would have to be found there for the Irish Government and Sir Ninian Stephen and his staff.

9. There was some discussion of the nature of the opening meeting and the possible role which might be envisaged for the two Heads of Government. One possibility would be a ceremonial format which would emphasise publicly the interest of both Heads of Government in the proceedings (e.g., parallel welcoming addresses by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach).

10. O hUiginn also mentioned the importance of adequate back-up facilities in relation to the London venue. If a location outside London were chosen, it might be necessary for the Irish Government to bring along additional personnel.

11. The next point discussed was that of accommodation in Northern Ireland. O hUiginn had strong reservations about a British suggestion that Ambassador Stephen might be housed at Hillsborough or in one of the flats in the Stormont complex which were currently occupied by junior Ministers. It was important that the Independent Chairman be seen to be independent in every respect. Any contrary indication would be open to exploitation by people hostile to the process.

12. The British side proposed the same accommodation arrangements for the Irish Government delegation as had been suggested last year, i.e., Ministers and senior official in Stormont House, middle-ranking officials in Maryfield and others in hotels in the vicinity. Construction work to provide eight additional bedrooms at Maryfield had commenced on 29 April (with a deadline of 8 June). The Irish side undertook to propose these various arrangements to Ministers.

13. As regards the Dublin venue, O hUiginn asked where the Secretary of State would wish to stay (Dublin Castle and the British Ambassador's residence being two obvious options). The British side indicated that they would be guided by the advice of the Garda Siochana on this. It was noted that, if the Secretary of State stayed with the British Ambassador, Ambassador Stephen could be housed in Dublin Castle.

14. The staffing of the small note-taking Secretariat for Strand Two was discussed. It was agreed that, with a view to the selection of a four-member team (two from each Government), a panel of candidates at Principal

level (First Secretary or AP in the Irish system) would be proposed to Ambassador Stephen. Advantage might be taken of Mr. Thompson's reconnaissance visit to settle this point.

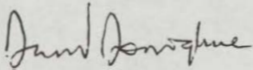
15. The question of the financial arrangements for Strand Two was discussed over lunch. O hUiginn indicated that, while the Government was committed to the principle of cost-sharing for Strand Two, we had serious difficulty with the approach proposed in this respect by the British side. While we were content to share the direct costs arising (travel, salaries and allowances, communications, etc.), we considered it unreasonable that the Irish side should be invited to bear the cost of works (refurbishment, provision of furniture and equipment, etc.) in respect of assets which would continue to be owned by, and to be of benefit to, the British Government when Strand Two was over. Thomas replied that, as the entire building was due to be gutted and refurbished once the talks were over, so that the British Government would in fact have no benefit from this work. O hUiginn pointed out that this did not alter the position from the Irish Government's point of view.

16. No agreement was reached on this point. However, the Irish side made clear its willingness to pay an agreed sum commensurate with the use of the equipment and facilities for the period concerned. We also indicated that we would bear half of the equivalent costs for Ambassador Stephen and his staff, subject to certain conditions, and also for their private accommodation. We also said that we would bear half of the delegates' allowance at the various venues. The British side

clarified the basis on which these allowances were calculated.

Next meeting

17. The next meeting, subject to confirmation, will be held on Friday, 8th May.



David Donoghue

1 May, 1992

c.c. PSM
PSS
Mr. Nally
Mr. Brosnan
Joint Secretary
Ambassador, London
Ambassador, Washington
Ambassador, Canberra