



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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TO:	HQ	FROM:	BELFAST
FOR:	A/Sec O hUiginn	FROM:	Joint Secretary
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Political Talks (1)

1. My opposite number, Robert Alston, briefed me this evening on today's political talks. He was not a participant and is relying on a meeting tomorrow morning to gain further information on a number of matters, including any discussion there may have been of Strand 2. The following may be of interest, however, for the time being.
2. Copy of the agreed statement was faxed to you earlier.
3. The discussions had the limited objective of getting ready for post-election talks. Alston summarised them as a reasonable success. There was no substance to them but the parties were determined not to be seen to cause difficulties. The main reason for the length of the sessions (four hours) was a desire to appear credible. There was a good deal of talk (from the Unionists) about the need for discretion with the media and a good deal of scepticism (from the SDLP) about whether such discretion would be maintained. As of this evening, it appeared the parties were staying quiet.
4. The position now is that there will be no further discussions this week. If the Prime Minister delays the election, the plenary will meet next week. If he calls an election as expected, there will be no talks until after the election.
5. Plenary began at 10.30 a.m. under the Chairmanship of Mr. Brooke with forty delegates present, ten from each party. Following an adjournment for lunch, the plenary met again in the afternoon from 2.45 to 4.15 p.m after which a business committee, under the Chairmanship of Minister Mawhinney, met for half an hour or so. The plenary sessions were "hard going" with people slow to resume the rapport of the end of talks last summer. Discussion focussed on procedural matters, physical arrangements and the press statement. The work plan circulated last Summer was recirculated and eventually referred to the business committee. The main feature of discussion was a tussle between the Unionists and the SDLP about the creation of sub-committees or sub-groups. The business committee eventually decided that these may be set up. The business committee also drew up a programme of work

which I have not yet seen. (Note: I have asked for a copy which is being considered. You will recall that the British declined to give us internal Strand 1 documents last Summer.)

6. Brooke did not go into such detail about the gap as he did at the Conference on Friday. He told the parties that he and the Minister for Foreign Affairs were agreed that the gap would last two months or until the end of June whichever was the later. Paisley made it clear that he believed more time was required. Brooke pointed out that the Conference could revert to the issue at its post-election meeting. He did, however, float the idea of a double gap before and after the August break. Interestingly, this drew a negative from Paisley.

6. The business committee is composed of two representatives of each party at any one time. There was some speculation on the news this evening that the business committee would meet during the election. This seems highly unlikely as the Chairman, Minister Mawhinney, will be fighting a very precarious seat. Alston's view was that the business committee had done what it was asked to do and that it would not be necessary for it to meet again for the time being.

TALKS, 9 MARCH 1992 - AGREED STATEMENT

The first plenary meetings of the first strand of the new political talks took place at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, today. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke MP, chaired the meetings, supported by the Minister of State, Dr. Brian Mawhinney MP. The Rt. Hon. James Molyneaux MP, Mr. John Hume MP MEP, the Reverend Dr. Ian Paisley MP MEP and Dr. John Alderdice led delegations from the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social, Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party and the Alliance Party respectively.

The Secretary of State reported the Prime Minister's good wishes, conveyed this morning, which the participants noted with appreciation.

All the participants warmly welcomed the start of the new talks and looked forward to frank and constructive exchanges in the months ahead. They emphasised their determination to work together within the framework set out in the Secretary of State's statement to the House of Commons on 26 March 1991.

The parties confirmed that the talks would continue up to the point when the UK general election was called and that they would then resume after a post-election meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

The participants agreed on the need for arrangements to ensure swift and effective progress. To this end, a Business Committee was established to plan for the efficient conduct of business at future meetings. The Committee will comprise representatives of each delegation and be chaired by the Minister of State. It was agreed that the Committee would meet immediately in preparation for the next plenary meeting.