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Secret.

Round-table Talks, Strand One

Plenary Meeting, Thursday 11 June 1992.

Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

1. The Plenary session was scheduled for 11.30 to consider the report of the Sub-Committee [finalised on 10 June].
2. The SDLP delegation met prior to the Plenary session for an exchange of views. According to a briefing later by Denis Haughey and Mark Durkan, the party meeting was "difficult" with John Hume generally dismissive about the report and the outline of possible new Institutions. Frank Feeley described it as a "Unionist document" with Seamus Mallon arguing that too much emphasis was placed on the role of the Assembly. Mark Durkan said that one difficulty faced by the negotiators was not being able to "harden up" the role of the Panel and that the document was essentially an outline, containing several SDLP reservations, to allow transition to Strand 2. After some discussion, it was agreed that Hume would call for a transition to Strand 2 in the Plenary and emphasise that the question of identities was central to the process and could not be adequately addressed in Strand 1.
3. The Plenary session began at 11.50 with all delegations headed by the party leaders and Secretary of State Mayhew chairing.
4. Ian Paisley asked to speak first and expressed appreciation for the sympathy from the Govt and the parties concerning the Carrickfergus coach crash on 4 June. He said his party were especially appreciative of the decision to adjourn the Structures Sub-Committee on 5 June as a mark of respect.
5. Mayhew said that all participants in the Talks process would be aware that an important stage had now been reached. He commended the sub-Committee for its work adding that he would like to propose a meeting with the party leaders regarding the position that had now been reached and the best way forward.
6. Dr Alderdice of Alliance agreed with this suggestion but said that, if the sub-Committee report were to be discussed it would be helpful if leaders were accompanied by one member of the sub-Committee.
7. John Hume said that the sub-committee had carried out its task of examining areas of agreement and disagreement. The SDLP did not believe that the overall solution to the problems being addressed was simply who held power although that was an essential element in any ultimate solution. The SDLP had reservations about the position that had been reached because the question of identities had not been adequately addressed. Hume continued that his party represented one identity whereas the three other parties

represented the other. His party believed that the allegiance of both identities to the institutions of government was essential if they were to prove stable. The Unionists had argued that Strand 2 was the forum in which this matter and these concerns would be discussed. The SDLP believed, Hume continued, that discussions in Strand 1 had gone as far as they could and it was now time to move to Strand 2. Hume continued that the SDLP had some reservations about the workability of the Institutions proposed and, in particular, while a good deal of agreement had been reached on the existence of an Assembly and other related matters, the SDLP did not believe or accept that the Assembly should have sole authority. His party emphasised the need for a separation of powers.

8. Molyneaux agreed with the proposal for a meeting of leaders. He added that the various delegations would welcome a chance to study the report as the documents had only been seen that morning. His party believed that it was necessary for the Govt to put forward its views and that it would be unfair to the Irish Govt to go into Strand 2 if Strand 1 participants had not finalised their views in one plan. The March 26 statement had proposed that Strand 2 concerned the linkage between structures devised in Strand 1 and the Dublin Govt. Once strand 2 discussions began, Strand 1 issues should only be addressed if some slight adjustment or fine tuning was needed as a consequence of the Strand 2 discussions. The Strands should not be seen as overlapping although there was flexibility to take account of developments in the other Strands.

9. John Hume pointed out that the final paragraph of the first page of the Sub- Committee report provided that the "course of discussions during Strands 2 and 3 may make it appropriate in the view of one party or another to propose that relevant matters in Strand 1 should be reviewed". This did not tally with the view just put forward by the UUP leader.

10. Molyneaux said that that paragraph was in line with the earlier understandings reached and, in his view, a return to Strand 1 would only occur if there was a need to refer back to conclusions reached as a consequence of discussions in Strand 2.

11. Mayhew asked that issues of substance be left to one side for the present and that the discussions focus on the procedural proposal made by the Government.

12. Paisley agreed with Molyneaux's comments and said that more time would be welcome to allow for consideration of the report. He agreed with Molyneaux that the Govt side should make clear its views on the bones or skeleton of the proposals in the report.

13. John Hume asked, in response to a question by Mayhew as to whether he agreed with the proposed leaders' meeting, what the discussions would focus on in such a meeting. Mayhew said the meetings would help in an assessment of how the process could be moved forward and suggested that he meet separately with each of the leaders initially with the possibility of a full leaders

meeting after that. Hume asked that members of his delegation accompany him and this was agreed by Mayhew. The meeting then adjourned.

14. In the subsequent meeting of the SDLP delegation with Mayhew, John Hume said that the Sub-Committee report had worked up common ground and had particularly focused on an Assembly. The SDLP had expressed reservations on some issues regarding the Assembly. He believed and hoped there was sufficient in the report to allow the Govt move to Strand 2. Seamus <sup>M</sup>allon asked Mayhew what he intended to do and was told the Govt did not have its own proposals as this was a matter for the parties. Mallon said that he was asking about a move to Strand 2. Mayhew said that his objective was a move to Strand 2 and he would come back to the SDLP after seeing the other party leaders. Sean Farren said that there was no need for further discussions in the Sub-Committee as sufficient had been done.

15. While Mayhew held discussions with the other delegations, Durkan and Haughey met Alderdice in a corridor discussion and he reported that, in his view, the situation was gloomy. The Unionists felt, he said, that they had given a lot but the SDLP were adopting a hard position in relation to their reservations on the Assembly powers and on safeguards. In a separate discussion with Dinny Vitty of the DUP, Durkan was told that "it is all over now" and Peter Robinson told him that the SDLP would have difficulty living with their position as they had stopped the prospects of agreement due to their Reservations on the report. Vitty claimed that Hume had said in Plenary that there was nothing in the report of the Sub-Committee. Durkan replied that Hume had been referring to the issue of identity and had said that there was nothing in the report that addressed SDLP concerns. Vitty said that the SDLP reservations made progress difficult and Durkan replied that the report provided for a return to Strand 1 at the request of any party in the light of developments. Vitty said that he sympathised with the SDLP negotiators in the Sub-Committee as their opposite numbers in the other parties had more respect for them than their party leadership appeared to have.

16. In the meantime, NIO officials indicated to the SDLP that the Govt side was working on a short statement by Mayhew that might meet Unionist concerns by giving an indication that the Govt would be willing to give assurances to facilitate the implementation of institutional arrangements as outlined in the report provided that, in the context of discussions in later Strands, such proposals came to have the support of all parties. Durkan said that he presumed the text of the statement was shown to the Unionist leaders who regarded it as insufficient. In the event, it was never shown to the SDLP who, however, found a copy on the Conference room table [copy attached, Annex A].

17. At four o'clock, Paisley and Molyneux told Hume that they were working on a paper and would give him a copy of it later. Haughey said later that the clear indications were that the Unionists were working up a "one model" draft that would seek by-

pass SDLP reservations. In a discussion with Steve McBride of Alliance, Durkan told him that if Alliance assisted in drawing up such a document "it would be grist to the Unionist mill". Chris McCabe of the NIO approached Durkan shortly afterwards to suggest as one option a meeting of the Business Committee. Durkan threw cold water on this idea and said the issue was up to Plenary.

18. The leaders met briefly shortly before eight o'clock and Molyneux asked Hume to consider lifting the SDLP reservations in the report. After the meeting, Alderdice told Hume he had declined to join Paisley and Molyneux in agreeing a document [apparently mainly drawn up by the DUP]. McBride [Alliance] told Farren later that the Unionists were seeking Alliance support in proposing what was essentially a "one model" summary of the report. He said it largely amounted to a "they said" and "we said" summary. Farren and Haughey made clear that there was no question of the SDLP lifting its reservations in the report.

19. In a meeting with Hume around 8.45, Molyneux asked Hume for his reaction to the idea that there be a preliminary meeting with Dublin in which the Irish Government's attitude could be clarified in relation to any new institutions in the North. Paisley, who had joined Molyneux, said that Molyneux had only made this suggestion to him five minutes before and he would have to consult his people. Hume, according to his own later account, reacted positively and said that he would envisage a short meeting and that it would probably be best timed for the week after the Referendum. The issue of location for the meeting; its chairmanship or whether it would be in a Strand 2 framework was not discussed.

20. In a subsequent meeting of the SDLP delegation, Hume presented Molyneux's proposal as a significant development that had to be accepted. Seamus Mallon expressed considerable hesitation and said the status of the meeting and whether it would be in the context of Strand 2 was crucial. Hume said that it was obviously desirable that it be a Strand 2 meeting but that this was not a central matter that should be allowed block the proposal. The meeting ended after a general discussion and Hume said that he would be recommending the proposal to Dublin.

21. Subsequently, Hume briefed the under-signed and asked that the proposal be passed on to A/sec O hUiginn in Dublin. He expressed strong support for the idea and said that the Unionists could not possibly be rebuffed on any narrow grounds of Strand Status in this proposal for a meeting. He added that obviously all the parties would be attending but that he did not know if Molyneux had briefed Mayhew on the proposal and whether the Unionists intended that London be represented at the meeting. At this stage, he wanted an indication of Dublin thinking and said he would be in touch with A/Sec o hUiginn the following morning to discuss the matter. I said that the initial reaction in Dublin was to share his view that such a proposal from the Unionists would have to be accepted.



Assessment.

22. The main concern of Haughey and Durkan was not so much the nature of the response to the Molyneaux proposal as the continuing Unionist reluctance to accept a broad outline of new Institutions as sufficient for movement to Strand two. Durkan said that it was partly a psychological hurdle but also reflected a doubt that the SDLP were truly serious in the discussions to date and a hesitation about whether the party will accept an Assembly with significant powers and functions. Haughey believes that the DUP are proving the more intransigent and that Paisley is concerned at the need to show clear progress and tie the SDLP to the greatest extent possible before agreeing to a transition. Durkan said that the DUP were likely to take a hard look at the implications of the Molyneaux proposal overnight and guessed that they would only accept such a meeting at the level of the Business Committee rather than party leaders. He felt either way, there was no option but to accept the proposal.

23. Both Durkan and Farren believe Hume is going to have to hold the position on the party reservations in the report as any alternative course would now lead to additional lengthy discussions. In their view, the leaders would be most unlikely to reach agreement in Plenary at this stage and any attempt to return to the report to the Sub-Committee would be pointless. Durkan said that the main reason to hope that Mayhew can succeed in breaking the impasse - even in the context of concessions of timing or appearance - is that neither of the Unionist parties wants to be held responsible for the collapse of the process and this is a card the NIO will have to play with some skill at the Plenary on Friday. All in all, both Haughey and Durkan regarded tonight's proposal by Molyneaux as a significant move that holds the promise of placing Dublin and the SDLP in a strong position provided the DUP accept the idea. End.

ew- 11/6/92