



**An Chartlann Náisiúnta**  
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SDLP Meeting with the Government  
10:00 am - Monday, 24 February, 1992

OVERVIEW NOTE

1. The SDLP delegation will consist of Messrs. Hume, Mallon, McGrady and, subject to confirmation, Hendron. The full meeting (which should end no later than 11:00 am to permit some MPs to catch the 12:00 flight to London) will be followed by a private meeting between the Taoiseach and Mr. Hume.
2. One purpose of the meeting is symbolic, to underline a continuing close relationship between the SDLP and the new Taoiseach and Government. It is suggested the meeting be given appropriate publicity.
3. As regards the substance, it will also be a useful opportunity for a general exchange of views prior to the Summit on areas such as:

Political Prospects:

- The SDLP assessment of Mr. Major's meeting with the four party leaders on 11 February. Follow-up, if any, to that meeting.
- The election prospects in Northern Ireland.
- Dangers of a "hung parliament".
- The prospects for new political dialogue after the election.

Security Situation:

- The SDLP assessment of the current upsurge in violence, paramilitaries, etc. Issues of harassment and confidence in the security forces.

Economic Situation:

- The SDLP may wish to stress the importance of cross-border programmes such as INTERREG.

General:

- The SDLP may reflect the concerns of many Northern nationalists at possible pressures for amendment of Articles 2 and 3.
4. The Taoiseach and Minister will wish to give a sympathetic hearing to the points put to them, and give the SDLP leaders general assurances of solidarity and goodwill. If any specific issues are raised they could undertake to respond in detail later.
  5. A draft outline communique/press line is attached.

Seán O hUiginn  
21 February, 1992

DRAFT

1. (Introductory paragraph: participants, etc).
  
2. The meeting reviewed the situation in Northern Ireland, in particular developments relating to political dialogue and the prospects for the three-stranded talks, which both the Government and the SDLP would wish to see resumed on the agreed basis at an early date. They discussed also the present security situation, issues related to confidence in the security forces in Northern Ireland and a number of aspects of North-South economic cooperation.

## Political developments

### Background Note

1. Efforts which were made during the December/January period to revive the round-table talks process were formally abandoned at a meeting between the party leaders and the Secretary of State on 27 January and at a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference on the following day. The stumbling-block was a Unionist stipulation that they would reserve their position on a continuation of talks after the British election in the event of a Labour Government coming to power.

2. However, a positively worded statement following the meeting on 27 January left the door open for further contacts on matters of common concern, "including in the economic field", during the pre-election period and held out hopes for a resumption of the process "in due course".

3. Against the background of a dramatic upsurge in paramilitary violence, the Prime Minister invited the party leaders to a meeting on 11 February to discuss the security situation. In the event, political matters were also discussed. John Hume asked that the parties renew their efforts to overcome the remaining obstacle. Jim Molyneux agreed to this and suggested a separate meeting for this purpose. The result of this discussion was that, in his statement following the meeting, the Prime Minister announced that the party leaders had agreed to an extension of the agenda set on 27 January for their meetings and would now meet also "to discuss obstacles in the way of further political dialogue in the hope that that political dialogue might be able to recommence at an early date".

4. We understand that no date has been fixed as yet for this meeting. Hume is privately doubtful that it will succeed in resolving the difficulty. It is also clear that, with speculation about the election date focussing increasingly on 9 April (with an announcement expected in mid-March), the window of opportunity for talks prior to the election is rapidly closing.

5. In practical terms, therefore, the conditions which would enable the two Governments and the parties to agree a basis for fresh talks are unlikely to be forthcoming until after the British election. However, the remarks made in public by the parties about a possible resumption of the talks have, on the whole, been characterised by a constructive tone which augurs well for the success of future contacts. The agreement to meet together on various issues during the pre-election period, with or without the Secretary of State, indicates an underlying openness to dialogue and suggests that

an atmosphere exists at present between the parties which is conducive to a post-election agreement on a resumption of talks.

6. It was also agreed on 27 January that the British Government would offer the parties factual briefings on the present financial and other administrative arrangements affecting the people of Northern Ireland. Though the Prime Minister referred again to this after the meeting on 11 February, our understanding is that the briefings have yet to get underway.

7. A major element of uncertainty in predicting post-election developments is, of course, the extent to which a future British administration, whether Conservative or Labour, may be dependent on Unionist support. The SDLP have reacted with considerable irritation to reports of preliminary Tory/Unionist contacts to discuss the "hung Parliament" scenario. Their suspicions have also been aroused by remarks made by the Secretary of State which did not explicitly rule out cooperation in that context.

Meeting with the SDLP

24 February 1992

Security Situation

1. The level of violence in Northern Ireland has escalated significantly since the beginning of the year, with a total of 31 deaths. There were during this time a number of major incidents involving multiple fatalities as follows:

- PIRA attack on construction workers at : 7 dead  
Teebane:
- Sinn Fein Advice Centre (attack by : 3 dead  
deranged RUC officer)
- UDA attack on betting shop in : 5 dead  
Ormeau Road
- PIRA killed by British Army : 4 dead  
following attack on Coalisland  
RUC Station

2. Two notable trends in the security situation over the past year are

- the upsurge in secretarian attacks by paramilitaries, most notable in the case of the UDA (Loyalist groups were responsible for 43% of fatalities in 1991, as against 27% in 1990)
- the fall in Army and RUC fatalities as a percentage of the total (from 43% in 1988 to 20% in 1991).

3. Against a background of mounting concern at the recent attacks the British Prime Minister convened a meeting in Downing Street of the four party leaders, including John Hume, on 11 February. Although billed as a discussion about the security situation the meeting was largely concerned with efforts to revive the political talks

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process. The Prime Minister recalled that additional troops had been dispatched and that recruitment of a previously announced increase of 400 in the RUC was proceeding satisfactorily. There was no indication that major legislative changes or departures from the overall thrust of existing security policy were envisaged.

4. The upsurge in paramilitary violence has prompted renewed speculation about the reintroduction of internment. The SDLP position is similar to that taken by the Government: in his Irish News interview on 20 February the Minister for Foreign Affairs said:

"I believe strongly that governments must act within the framework of the rule of law. Experience has shown that internment does not work in Northern Ireland. Those who espouse internment are really offering a counsel of despair."

#### Coalisland Incident

5. The SDLP reaction to the shooting dead of 4 IRA members by the British Army in Coalisland on 16 February has been relatively muted. Party representatives, including the local SDLP Councillor Jim Kavanagh, have largely focussed on the theme of the futility of violence and the need for a political solution, while allowing that the particular circumstances of the shooting require further investigation. Seamus Mallon placed the responsibility on the instigators of the attack:

"surely the lesson from this is for those people who are encouraging violence to realise the harm they are doing to the entire community....."

The Government are continuing to monitor developments in this case through the Anglo-Irish Secretariat.



Proscription of UDA

6. Following the Ormeau road shooting there have been demands for the proscription of the UDA. The Government have taken the view that the UDA is overwhelmingly a terrorist rather than a political organisation and, as such, needs to be firmly confronted by the security forces. It is for the British authorities to judge whether proscription would be appropriate in that context. The SDLP have not in the recent past sought to make a major issue of this question, and are no doubt conscious of the complications likely to arise from Unionist demands for any such action to include the proscription of Provisional Sinn Fein.

Lethal Force

7. The issue of the unwarranted use of lethal force by the security forces has been the subject of continuing discussions in the framework of the Anglo-Irish Conference. Public interest is likely to remain active with the recent decision by the NI DPP to press murder charges against British soldiers involved in the death of Fergal Carragher, in December 1990.

A case which may be referred to by the SDLP representatives is that of Kevin McGovern, a totally innocent individual, who was shot dead by the RUC in Cookstown on 29 September last. The RUC expressed regret at the shooting and indicated that an investigation by the RUC of the killing, supervised by Fionnuala McGrady (Eddie McGrady's niece) of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints, would take place. We voiced our concerns at the circumstances of the shooting at the Anglo-Irish Conference of October last and argued for a fully independent investigation. We also argued that the officer concerned should be removed from duties pending the outcome of the investigation. He was not removed. It was announced on 18 February that the investigation

had been completed and a file sent to the DPP. We have requested a full briefing on the latest developments through the Anglo-Irish Secretariat.

Brian Nelson Case

8. The Nelson issue will figure prominently at the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference of 6 March. Central questions which will arise concern the foreknowledge and involvement of Nelson's British Army handlers in UDA murders, the degree of continuing collusion between the security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries, and the claims, made by Nelson, that he was encouraged by his British Army handler to plan UDA bombings in this jurisdiction.

Our concerns are shared by the SDLP. Seamus Mallon has drawn attention to implications for nationalist confidence in the administration of justice. Joe Hendron, who is the prospective SDLP candidate for West Belfast, has expressed concerns about the case, including media reports that Brian Nelson had been sent to South Africa several years ago on an arms procurement mission for the UDA.

Ulster Defence Regiment/Accompaniment

9. Statistics recently received from the British side on UDR accompaniment rates for the period April-September 1991 indicate that there has been a decrease in overall accompaniment rates, compared to the previous six-month period of October 1990 - March 1991. We have vigorously raised our concerns at the poor British performance on this issue at meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference and in official-level exchanges. We have in the past week conveyed our concerns at the appearance of unaccompanied UDR checkpoints and patrols in the Markets area of Belfast (e.g. Cromac St.).

The Bill providing for the merger of the UDR with the Royal Irish Rangers passed its second stage in the House of Commons on 13 February. Seamus Mallon and others have generally welcomed the move, but remain keen to see the part-time element removed from the new Regiment. The British Armed Forces Minister acknowledged in the Commons that there was a decline and that it was likely to continue but denied, in response to Unionist MPs, that there was a hidden agenda to phase out the part-timers. The DUP, in particular, remain sceptical on this point. Paisley sees the Bill as the result of pressure by the Irish Government. The SDLP have prudently adopted a low profile in the House of Commons during the debate.

Anglo-Irish Division

21 February, 1992