



**An Chartlann Náisiúnta**  
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## Political Issues

1. Now that the local elections are out of the way, the Governments will come under renewed pressure to define their intentions on political talks. Insofar as the elections had a message it was that the traditional lines of political demarcation remain intact in Northern Ireland. Paisley will now be convinced that a "no surrender" policy will be an asset rather than a liability in next year's European Parliament election, which is his dominant personal concern. The notion of a separate Talks deal, excluding the DUP, always extremely dubious, becomes even more so in the wake of the elections.
2. The Governments are therefore left with a strong commitment to political talks, but with little prospect (on existing terms of reference) of overcoming the procedural hurdles to convening them, not to speak of securing substantive agreement. A posture of general promotion of political talks may therefore face increasing credibility problems from now on.
3. While this is a problem for both Governments, it is particularly so for the British Government. Their public posture has been based on benign assumptions about the possibility of building a middle ground across the divide, through a growing solidarity and compromise which would emerge spontaneously from Talks. Their actual strategy - to secure unionist acceptance of power-sharing devolution and a North-South body in return for greater endorsement of the Union from the nationalist side - was also based on optimistic assumptions, both on the degree of reassurance unionists were likely to want and the extent that nationalists would be prepared to offer it, as well as about interest of either community in devolution for its own sake.

4. If British optimism is unfounded, and the central problem remains the constitutional issue (which, in practice, means British intentions on Northern Ireland) then the British must themselves decide their position, rather than pretending that some form of agreed recommendations can come from two communities whose hopes and fears on this issue are diametrically opposed, which is precisely the essence of the problem.
  
5. Any change from the present British position must be towards either:
  - (a) back to managing the Northern nationalist problem through the unionists; or
  - (b) managing the unionist problem through the nationalist tradition; or
  - (c) some different expression of neutrality as between the two.
  
6. The first option would be strongly resisted by Northern nationalists. If change in the Agreement and a constitutional referendum here are pre-conditions for it, it is difficult to see these being met. The second runs counter to the immediate British desire to conciliate the unionists. The third would have to show results different from the operation of the Agreement to make the change worthwhile.
  
7. The British "game plan", as manifest in the Talks process so far, reflects their (accurate) belief that there is less "give" in unionist attitudes on constitutional issues than among nationalists. However this simply reflects the similar conclusions which both communities draw from the demographic and political realities of the island as a

whole. The perceived trend towards eventual unity means that the political gap between qualified acceptance of the Union and confirmation of the Union is probably much wider for nationalists than the British understand. For unionists, the debate on the Irish Constitution is ultimately about underlying realities, which dictate rather than follow constitutional forms. Constitutional change which does not abolish the perceived threat of a nationalist continuum in the island as a whole is unlikely to have much real impact on unionist fears.

8. The proposed British paper, to judge from what we have been told at official level, will very much reflect their original "game plan" and be a "lowest common denominator" approach. Since the British position will be the high-water mark of any possible unionist movement, the tabling of such a paper would set the Talks in a minimalist context which will be difficult to change. It would again presuppose that the constitutional issue could be changed in one direction only in return for North-South institutions falling short of either the Agreement or Sunningdale.
9. From the Irish Government point of view the objective might be:
  - (a) to persuade Mr. Mayhew that his proposed low-key approach will fall between all the stools and that only a thoroughly-going application of the three stranded approach, involving a much more radical balance between the two aspirations, has any prospect of success;
  - (b) to work out with the British what such a radical balance might be.

10. A number of factors (the US dimension, career pressure on Mr. Mayhew to "deliver", erosion of Tory majority in by-elections) may lead Mr. Mayhew to seek to reconcile his concern for the unionists with the need to be seen to be active by engaging a long drawn out process of sporadic "talks" between himself and Northern political leaders, and encouraging Molyneaux-style low key contacts between them.

11. Such a process would have low credibility and would also tend to marginalise the Irish Government role and the Agreement. For that reason, the Tánaiste might signal in advance a scepticism about such a process. (Would it underline the point to suggest the Governments might signal their common commitment by jointly inviting the parties for preliminary discussions ?) He might place the focus on next month's Summit meeting as the best opportunity for a thorough British-Irish exchange on the problem and on future directions of policy, making the points:

- We have long believed that a solution will not emerge spontaneously from the Northern parties but must be created by the two Governments and "sold" by them to the parties. The elections confirm this analysis.
- The "lowest common denominator" approach foreshadowed in discussions of the proposed British paper is based on optimistic assumptions about a common middle ground which is clearly not there. We see little prospect of success in this approach.
- We should remain firmly committed to addressing all three sets of relationships and aim to strike a much more radical balance between the two traditions than Mr. Mayhew seems to envisage.

- We should be aware that persistent pleas for Talks to parties who refuse to come could reflect on the credibility and authority of the Governments and on the political process as a whole.
  
- We should therefore decide either that we will take the process firmly in hand on a basis agreed between us or, alternatively, accept that there is no alternative to the Agreement for the present, and make clear we are basing our policies on the logic of that position.
  
- The forthcoming Summit will offer both Governments an opportunity for a thorough-going discussion of the options.

*File* :

24 May, 1993

Review of political situation/Prospects for political talks.

SPEAKING POINTS

Local election results

- Taken as a whole, the local elections do not mark any significant shift in the political landscape in Northern Ireland. The traditional lines of demarcation remain intact.
- (The SDLP went up by 1% and Alliance by just under 1%; the UUP vote fell by 2% and the DUP vote stayed roughly the same as in 1989).
- It is, of course, disappointing that the Sinn Fein vote went up (by just over 1%).
- However, it would be wrong to read too much into these results. What emerges essentially is a confirmation of the status quo.
- I think as Governments we should take the view that the necessary "time out" for the election period is now over and that we and the parties should now address seriously the question of political talks.

Position of Unionist parties.

- What is your assessment of relations between the Unionist parties following the local elections?
- The weekend bickering between them may be an automatic reflex following a bitter campaign. It may, however, presage a more serious and lasting division, which



inevitably has implications for what we are trying to achieve.

- A UUP willingness to go it alone might have some superficial attractions. However, I have serious practical doubts that a talks process which excludes the DUP will result in a viable agreement.
- The UUP would be subjected to endless assaults and charges of betrayal from a DUP leader who has his sights firmly fixed on next year's European Parliament election and who believes that his no-talks and no-surrender stance has been vindicated in these elections.
- A permanent DUP veto from the sidelines (whether on procedural or substantive grounds) would severely limit the UUP's ability and willingness to reach the kind of agreement with the nationalist tradition which we consider to be essential.
- I understand that you intend to seek early meetings with the party leaders. Those meetings will presumably provide some clarification of the Unionists' intentions.
- You will no doubt be making the point to the leaders that the continuing imposition of preconditions of whatever description is frustrating the manifest public desire for talks to resume.



British Government paper

- I am grateful for the indication which you gave us, through the Liaison Group last week, of the contents of your proposed paper.
- I have to say that the approach which you outlined seems to me to fall distinctly short of what is required to ensure success in any new talks. (I made this point to you in our phone conversation last Friday).
- You envisage that an agreement would be possible on the basis of a trade-off between internal and North/South institutions - the latter of fairly limited scope - and constitutional change which would be in one direction only.
- There is, in my judgment, no prospect of Northern nationalists agreeing to a set of arrangements which is so heavily skewed in the Unionist direction, and we must remember that nationalist assent to new arrangements is no less important than unionist assent.
- What is needed is a far more radical balance between the two aspirations than what you appear to envisage. Without it, there is quite simply no likelihood of fresh talks reaching a successful conclusion.
- My reaction to your paper, therefore, is one of considerable doubt that it will be helpful to the realization of our joint objectives in this process.

- I accept that you are simply offering your own judgment on where convergence might be achieved and that your paper is not intended to be prescriptive.
- I would ask you equally to accept, however, that any British Government paper has a powerful political charge by virtue of the role which you play in the whole process.
- Since the British position will always be the outside limit of unionist movement, your paper will effectively set a minimalist agenda for new talks.
- If we want fresh talks to succeed, we must get the basis right, as I said recently. We must establish parameters which are conducive to the kind of agreement which we said we would seek when we all signed the 26 March terms.
- The approach in your paper is likely "to fall between the stools" rather than to make for the "new beginning in relationships" we pledged in the agreed basis for our Talks.

Joint position

- I would like to see the two Governments sitting down together and working out proposals which would provide the more radical balance needed between the two aspirations.

- (I note that Dr Alderdice remarked over the weekend that the two Governments should get into "Strand Three mode" as soon as possible and must get talks going if a political vacuum is to be avoided).
  
- I have long believed that a solution will not emerge spontaneously from the parties but must be created by the two Governments and "sold" by us to them. The local elections show that it is optimistic to expect a spontaneous "sea-change" from within Northern Ireland.
  
- I am also of the view that persistent pleas for talks to parties who refuse to come to them could reflect on the credibility and authority of the Governments and of the political process as a whole.
  
- We should therefore decide either that we will take the process firmly in hand on a basis agreed between us or, alternatively, accept that there is no alternative to the Agreement for the present and make clear we are basing our policies on the logic of that position.
  
- We should also make clear that the two Governments are unashamedly coordinating their positions. We are partners under the Agreement and our people expect the Irish Government to be partners in the search for any new Agreement.
  
- The forthcoming meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister will, of course, offer the two Governments an opportunity for a thorough discussion of the options.

A "gap"

- On the question of a possible "gap", the Taoiseach and I have made clear that we are ready in principle to contemplate an interval between Conference meetings in order to facilitate talks.
- However, we cannot take a decision of that kind lightly. We are deeply committed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which is the central element in the Anglo-Irish relationship.
- We are prepared to permit an interference in the normal operations of the Conference only in the most carefully defined set of circumstances. As on previous occasions, we would need to be satisfied that we would be offering a "gap" only on the basis of the parties having given clear and definite commitments that they would take part in a fresh round of talks.
- At the moment, there is no evidence that the UUP and the DUP are ready to make such a commitment.
- It would be very unwise of us to take a "leap into the dark", offering a gap in the absence of any certainty that talks are possible at this stage. To do so would be to bring the credibility of the Agreement very seriously in question.
- Only when there is a definite Unionist willingness to proceed with talks on an agreed basis on the lines of the March 26th statement will it be sensible to consider the kind of "gap" which we could offer to facilitate talks.

Public presentation after Conference

- I believe that we should take the opportunity of today's Conference to signal publicly the continuing strong commitment of the two Governments to a resumption of talks now that the local elections are out of the way.
  
- We might issue a joint invitation to the party leaders to have preliminary discussions with us about the way forward.