



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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SDLP
Meeting with the SDLP
Dublin, 15 February, 1994

cc PST
22 PSS
Mr. F. Murray
Dr. M. Haughey
Mr T. Dalton
16/2

Present were:

Irish Government: Taoiseach; Tanaiste; Minister for Justice (for part of meeting), Mr. O hUiginn, Dr. Mansergh

SDLP: Messrs. Hume, Mallon, McGrady and Hendron.

1. The Taoiseach began by summarising developments since the Joint Declaration. He had made clear that there would be no renegotiation of the Declaration, but he had "gone down the line" on clarification. The British had originally dug themselves into a hole on this issue, but Mayhew was now attempting to retrieve the situation. It was unhelpful to speak of deadlines, but there was growing public impatience about the Sinn Fein position. In the absence of a positive reaction from Sinn Fein, the Governments would have to move on.
2. As regards the Three Stranded Talks, the Taoiseach said the Government felt that they would obviously have a better prospect in a peaceful environment. The British had submitted a "check-list" of points relating to Talks the previous week. The Government were concerned at some remarks by British spokesmen which seemed to point to an internal or purely local approach.
3. Mr. Hume said that if the British were genuine on the Declaration and the Provisionals said "yes", the situation would be totally transformed. If the Provisionals refused the peace process, they would be isolated. It would be a different matter however if the British forced them to say "no", which, to judge from Molyneaux's statement, seem to be

the Unionist strategy. If the latter attitude were to prevail, taken in conjunction with the re-drawing of the boundaries, chaos would ensue and the Provisionals would be able to say that the British had undone twenty years of progress. The Irish Government should make that point clear to them. Mr. Hume felt Mayhew's clarifications in the Irish Times, etc, were very good. However he has sent Paisley a letter which told a different story. The Provisionals had problems with their rural areas. It was possible they might take the approach that they did not trust the British, but were prepared to trust the Irish Government and join in the Forum.

4. The Taoiseach agreed the letter to Paisley was ill advised and said he would be making this point to the British on Saturday. Major had in any case accepted that Paisley would be a disruptive force.

5. Mr. Mallon said that if one looked at the Declaration and at Mayhew's recent statements, for example to the Irish Times, and set that against what he had said earlier in the Talks process, it was clear there was an enormous advance in his position. There were many issues which the Government and the SDLP needed to clarify for themselves, including what the real British strategy was. He felt a number of points were already clear:
 - (i) Sinn Fein would not go into anything on the basis of the Declaration. Adams' interview with Walden and Martin McGuinness' recent statements confirm this.

 - (ii) Adams could not take the IRA "hard-core" with him. If the Joint Declaration was the framework for a solution, then structures should be built on that basis, whether the Provisionals were in or out. The only thing which would take them into the process was to create

structures which they could not refuse. If a nationalist agenda for agreement on the solution was developed, this would take the initiative away from the British and from Sinn Fein. The longer the present situation remained, the more Sinn Fein and the British would write the agenda.

6. The Taoiseach said there was no question of an indefinite wait. There was public impatience here. Some weeks would not be a problem if there was a prospect of peace. However the statements he saw and read were contradictory. He speculated the Provisionals could conceivably say they accepted part of the Declaration, or would join the Forum. There was also a different emphasis as between Major and Mayhew. The Tanaiste had made very clear however that the starting point of future talks is the Declaration.
7. The Tanaiste said that Mayhew now knew that building on the Declaration was the only option for the future. There was a timeframe and a danger of running out of political space. It was necessary to build on the Declaration sooner rather than later.
8. Mr. Hume said Unionists were concerned about who would wield power while the SDLP were concerned about how to solve the problem. The Unionists had never faced up to their relationship with the South, which was the key to the whole problem. The present Unionist performance at local government level showed the danger of giving Unionists back local powers. The Declaration strategy and the Talks strategy could be married by focussing on the North-South dimension as a development of the Declaration.
9. Mr. McGrady said the main British policy, possibly anticipating a Sinn Fein rejection, seemed to be the inter-party talks, which would cover British backs politically.

He had the impression the British were developing a unilateral approach. Ancram had always concentrated on Strand One, with some "add ons". The British wanted to be in the driving seat. It that was their strategy, nationalists would be caught out badly in terms of preparation, unless they had worked out an agreed approach.

10. The Taoiseach said the Tanaiste had disabused them of any notion that a unilateral strategy on their part would work. The Tanaiste confirmed this.
11. Mr. McGrady warned that Molyneaux remained politically relevant. He had got the Select Committee, and McGrady had hints from some senior Stormont civil servants that they were working on plans to return planning and roads to local government. Molyneaux would also aim for weak devolved institutions in Belfast - he had never supported substantive devolution.
12. Mr. Mallon thought the British wanted to write Strand Two. It was important on the nationalist side to start with Strand Two. You could not define Strand One until you had Strand Two. Mr. McGrady thought there was a danger that North-South institutions would be quangos or mere appendages to Strand One.
13. Dr. Hendron thought the role played by the Irish Government in "boxing the Provisionals into a corner" was outstanding. The Provisionals would lose credibility on their own terms if they did not accept. Signals about the Provisionals' attitudes were mixed in West Belfast. All agreed Adams had problems, and some were saying the violence would not stop because too many people were making money out of it.
14. Mr. Mallon wondered whether Sinn Fein were trying to recreate nationalist politics on Provisional terms to rival

constitutional nationalism. The Taoiseach thought the Sinn Fein public meetings were merely cosmetic, certainly in this jurisdiction, where Adams' politics had no impact whatever. That would become crystal clear if he rejected the peace process.

15. Mr. Hume thought Adams' statements were in line with a strategy aimed at using the Forum as the way out of violence. Mr. Mallon said the longer the present state of affairs continued, the more it implied that Sinn Fein were the authentic voice of nationalism. The SDLP could not let that go unchallenged. Sooner or later Adams would have to make up his mind, but he would not be let move on the Declaration. Dr. Mansergh said Sinn Fein did not want to "collapse" the Sinn Fein position down to that of constitutional nationalism. Mr. Mallon felt that those who supported the Joint Declaration should now start writing the nationalist agenda. Mr. Hume thought that if Sinn Fein renounced violence and came to the table, there would be no question of their position being adopted, or of the SDLP adopting a "Brits out" strategy. The "peace atmosphere" at present was reminiscent of the "civil rights atmosphere" of the 70s. If the Provisionals refused, the people would turn on them. Youth groups were powerfully supporting peace.

16. The Taoiseach agreed we would have to write the nationalist agenda sooner or later. We should start getting it into shape, taking Strand Two first. The Tanaiste asked whether the Unionists had an interest in Strand Two. Mr. Hume thought the Unionist strategy was to force the Provisionals to say "no". Mr. McGrady said they were interested in Strand Two only as a pillar for Strand One, and they wanted the minimum in Strand Two consistent with that.

17. Mr. Hume said a recent meeting with the Methodist Church was one of many which convinced him there was a change in mentality at grass roots level in the Unionist community. They were critical of their leaders' negative stance. He thought the recent local government by-election result in East Belfast was significant. Dr. Hendron instanced a recent meeting addressed both by himself and Molyneaux, to show that Molyneaux was out of touch with this mood.

18. Mr. Mallon said that if the objective was to shape Strand Two so as to seize the initiative and to force the Provisionals into politics, then that could be achieved only if the two Governments agreed to push that objective as a key part of the Joint Declaration. It should build on the logic of seeking agreement between all the people on the island of Ireland. It would not work though a "bottom up" approach. In the Anglo-Irish Agreement the Irish people had accepted there would be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without consent. The Joint Declaration offered a definition of self-determination compatible with the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The British had now to reciprocate through support for bringing the people of Ireland together.

19. The Taoiseach asked what the key ingredients would be in Strand Two. Mr. Mallon suggested the power to do things and to prevent things being done. Mr. Hume suggested a Council of Ministers with clear powers over certain areas. It would have to operate on a consensual basis. Mr. Mallon said Sunningdale had provided not only for executive powers, but also an all-Ireland body. The all-Ireland body would be the flagship for nationalists.

20. The Taoiseach asked whether North-South structures would include joint policing, on which some had expressed reservations. Mr. Mallon said there were different ways in which the policing issue could be approached. Mr. Hume said

there might be a clear distinction between civilian policing and security policing.

21. The Tanaiste enquired what there would be in this package to sell to the Unionists. Mr. McGrady felt the Unionists did not see any real inter-relationship between the different strands of the problem. There was general agreement the Unionists were nervous of the pressures that peace might bring.

22. The Taoiseach summed up the broad lines of the discussion, which he said would be helpful guidance for further contacts with the British. There was agreement that pressure should be kept on the Provisionals to make a positive response and the maintain the momentum of the Declaration. Mr. Mallon objected that criticism of Sinn Fein was being equated to damage to the peace process, and the "drip drip" process was unsettling for the SDLP. The Tanaiste felt people in the South were focussing on the North now, in a way they had not done before, even at the time of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

23. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the proposed redrawing of constituency boundaries. The SDLP indicated the serious difficulties it would entail, both in Westminster terms and in any future Assembly election. The Taoiseach and Tanaiste agreed the matter would be raised in strong terms with the British side, who should be reminded that this raised the spectre of an anti-nationalist "gerrymander". It was agreed the Government and the SDLP would stay in close touch on future developments in this area.



Sean O hUiginn
16 February, 1994