

C O N F I D E N T I A L

INTERNAL NOTE OF A BILATERAL MEETING WITH THE ALLIANCE PARTY, HELD
IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON THURSDAY 30 MAY 1991

Government Team

Secretary of State
Minister of State
PUS
Mr Fell
Mr Pilling
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice
Mr Close
Mr Neeson

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
Mr Marsh

In attendance

Mr Pawson

The meeting, which was at the Alliance Party's request, began at 10.45 am and ended at 11.30 am. There was a break between 11.10 and 11.15 while the Secretary of State took a telephone call.

2. Dr Alderdice made a long opening statement. He said that the process was now surrounded by confusion. Unionists had been telling the press the previous evening that the Secretary of State was wasting their time. At 9.00pm he had met a senior member of the DUP who had told him that they had agreed the guidelines for the conduct of the second strand with the Government but that they still had not had put to them the name of an independent chairman. The theme had been picked up that morning by Mr Nicholson on the radio; he had continued with some offensive remarks about the NIO. Finally, Mr Molyneaux was being quoted in that morning's Irish Times as having said that no names had been put to the parties. All this could not be squared with the truth, leaving aside the fact that several journalists clearly knew both the name, and also that it had been offered to the parties. Dr Alderdice said that he rarely agreed with the Newsletter but he found the final paragraph of that morning's leader compelling; the Secretary of State must now take firm action to clear the air.

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3. Continuing, Dr Alderdice said that this was not the first occasion during the talks when the Alliance Party had felt compromised by how things were developing. They had also sustained damage after Duisberg by holding to their integrity. They now found themselves in a similar situation; their integrity, and that of the process, was being damaged by other people spreading lies. He was not saying that all the Unionists who had spoken to the media were deliberately lying, but some were certainly not being truthful. There had been a clear attempt to mislead other participants and the general public. This was intolerable. It was extremely important that the Secretary of State make clear that a specific name for an independent chairman had been put to the Unionists the previous day. It was impossible to let the present situation continue.

4. The Secretary of State replied that he had not yet spoken that morning to Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley. He had made clear to everyone in the past, and still held to the belief, that it was not in the interests of the process for the names of potential chairmen to become a matter for ordinary gossip. It appeared that the Unionists had chosen to play their hand by denying totally that any name had been put to them. The Secretary of State agreed with Dr Alderdice's interjection that this was not truthful on their part, and said that he held no brief for them. Continuing, the Secretary of State observed that the issue of what other Unionists were saying was a function of the media taking as news any comments which anyone cared to give them. Maginnis and Smyth had made personal statements, possibly stemming from a disagreement with the position adopted by their leader. Nicholson had made his remarks having just flown in from Strasbourg. All of this was freelance stuff, and not on behalf of the party.

5. Dr Alderdice responded by saying that what had happened showed a lack of responsibility and was not acceptable. People were making clear comments which were untrue and unhelpful; he could not simply excuse it as freelancing. Yesterday the Unionist leaders had permitted their delegations to leave the building in high dudgeon and on a false premise. They appeared to have abandoned all sense of responsibility and had no trust in their own teams. Maginnis, McGimpsey and Trimble had been talking to the press from the

beginning of the process; what sort of real political party would permit this kind of indiscipline? The situation was intolerable, and getting worse. The DUP were saying that full agreement had been reached on the guidelines; someone simply was not being honest.

Dr Alderdice continued that he could not accept the Secretary of State's explanation of the Unionists' behaviour. Their leaders were permitting their people to tell lies. He could not accept that they could simply dismiss responsibility; it was quite appalling.

Dr Alderdice considered that it was the Secretary of State's responsibility to tell the public. The Alliance Party felt they had been on the margins throughout the entire process because they did not create problems; now they were being further marginalised by the lies of others. The Secretary of State must make this clear to the Unionist leaders, not necessarily in terms of criticising their response to the name which had been put to them but simply to set the record straight.

7. Mr Close added, in a rather emotional intervention, that this was not the only time that confusion had been stirred up in order to fog problems. The Alliance Party had been working hard every day; now the public were saying to them that the process was all a joke. There was no point in going on if lies were to go unchallenged in this way.

8. At this point the Secretary of State left to take a telephone call. In his absence the Minister of State, reverting to the previous day's business, said that the agenda paper had now been accepted subject to one presentational amendment, to which there was reason to hope the Unionists would agree. He proposed simply to have a word with them, following which he would circulate a clean copy. Dr Alderdice was content with this. As the Secretary of State returned to the room, Dr Alderdice announced that he had just been told that Downtown news were carrying the story that the Unionists had rejected Lord Carrington as Chairman for the second strand.

9. The Secretary of State reported that in fact he had just spoken to Lord Carrington on the telephone. Lord Carrington would issue a

statement saying that he had agreed to undertake the role of chairman but only if he were acceptable to all participants; he did not propose to comment any further. The Secretary of State observed that the Downtown story, coupled with Lord Carrington's statement, dealt with the particular issue and answered the Alliance Party's concern that it should be made clear that a name had been put to the Unionists. He would be asking the Unionist leaders whether they would disavow the freelance activity on the part of some of their members. He had been protecting a number of different people, and was happy to take overall responsibility for the process in order to prevent people from blaming each other; but there was a limit to how far this could be taken. Dr Alderdice concurred.

10. Changing the subject, Dr Alderdice asked about the guidelines for the conduct of the second strand. The Alliance Party had accepted them on Tuesday; he understood the SDLP had done so too. The Unionists had found them unacceptable and he believed that further negotiations had taken place. But now the Unionists were saying publicly that they accepted them; he wished to know the true position. The Secretary of State replied that insofar as the guidelines needed agreement by all there was no point in going back to the Alliance Party until agreement had been reached by those who were in conflict. The reason for delay was now not with the Unionists. In answer to a question from Mr Close, the Secretary of State said that he could not answer for the fact that the Unionists had said that they had accepted the guidelines.

11. Dr Alderdice then asked about the programme for the rest of the day. The Secretary of State replied that he intended to deal with the guidelines as quickly as possible. He hoped to take the issue forward with the Unionists later that morning. He observed that what the Unionists had said about agreement might have referred to the latest draft and not to the original document. (At this point Mr Close murmured 'fog' and the Secretary of State replied that his own view would be less generous.) The Minister of State observed that only the Unionists were content with the latest draft; Mr Pilling added that neither Alliance nor the SDLP had yet seen it. The Secretary of State confirmed that the Unionists had indicated where they were unhappy with the original document and wording had been sought to accommodate them; the majority of the

document remained unaltered. Dr Alderdice appreciated this, observing that this had been the Unionist attitude all the way through; some parties had accepted documents which were not precisely as they would have wished while others sought to redraft things from scratch.

12. On the question of the independent Chairman, the Secretary of State said that it was now for the two Governments to get on with it. He had suggested to Mr Hume that the Unionists' good faith might be tested by trying to find a name to which they and the other NI parties could assent; this would show whether or not they were using the identity of the Chairman as a blocking gambit.

Dr Alderdice found this fair enough, and said that he would be happy to participate in such a process. Finally, both Dr Alderdice and Mr Neeson specifically requested the Secretary of State to tell the Unionists about the present meeting; they wished him to convey to them the Alliance view that their recent behaviour had been dishonest and unhelpful. They also said that the party would not be able to refuse public comment for ever.

13. Throughout the meeting the Alliance Party delegation were in a highly charged emotional state. This partly subsided after it became clear that the true story of the Unionist rejection of Lord Carrington had already emerged, but they were very angry at what they saw as the way in which Unionist obfuscating tactics appeared to be succeeding to the detriment of the process and those who were participating honestly.

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