

I N C O N F I D E N C E

RECORD OF A PLENARY SESSION AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
ON THE MORNING OF 26 JUNE

Government Team

Secretary of State
Minister of State
Mr Fell

Mr Pilling
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice
Mr Neeson
Mr Close

Mr Dickson
Mr Morrow
Mr McBride
Mrs Bell

DUP

Mr Robinson
Rev McCrea
Mr Dodds

Mr Wilson
Mr Vitty
Mr Campbell
Miss Paisley

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
Mr Hallett

SDLP

Mr Hume
Mr Mallon
Mr McGrady

UUP

Mr Maginnis
Mr Trimble
Mr McGimpsey

Others present

Mr Pawson

Mr Haughey
Mrs Rodgers
Mr Gallagher

Mr Molyneux
Mr Allen
Mr Empey

The meeting began at 11.50 and concluded at 12.50.

2. The SDLP said that discussions could either consist merely of re-statements of old positions and grievances, or there could be an attempt to make progress on the basis of a forward looking search for common ground.

3. The DUP said that it was nevertheless wrong to demand concessions from Unionists in return for the removal of a claim to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland for which there was no legal basis. It was necessary to start from the present realities. A new relationship could only be based on trust, not on illegal claims.

4. The SDLP said that it was first necessary to get agreement in order to establish a basis for trust.

5. The UUP expressed concern that the SDLP was drawing away from the core issue of Articles 2 and 3. This question had become more relevant as a result of the Irish Government being given an improper say in Northern Ireland affairs through the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The SDLP commented that trading legal arguments was not the best way of making progress.

6. The UUP asked why the withdrawal of Articles 2 and 3 would be a "body blow" for Northern nationalists, as asserted by Fianna Fáil. The reality was that all political parties in the Republic, except Fianna Fáil, had spoken in favour of changing Articles 2 and 3. As an alternative, the aspiration to unity might be accommodated within a Bill of Rights. Articles 2 and 3 were deeply offensive to all Unionists who, as a result, felt insecure in establishing relations with the Republic of Ireland.

7. The SDLP commented that Articles 2 and 3 had not injured anyone. If one talked about illegal acts, the act of partition was also illegal since it had been contrary to the wishes of the majority of the Irish people. The way forward however was not to trade different views of history but to seek common ground. The UUP commented that they were merely seeking to establish the facts as a basis for moving forward.

8. The Government Team intervened to suggest that it would facilitate progress if speakers did not merely repeat positions which had previously been put forward.

9. The SDLP reiterated that it was necessary to move away from past attempts to resolve the problem. They had identified the core issue as the existence of two identities with legitimate rights which had to be safeguarded. A solution had to be found on the basis of recognition of that problem.

10. The UUP commented that progress could not be made if the SDLP backed away from addressing Unionist concerns. The Government Team commented, however, that they had heard no such suggestion from the SDLP. In response to a question from the SDLP, the UUP acknowledged the political reality that Articles 2 and 3 would not be changed in isolation from wider political developments.

11. The UUP said that a solution required a stable framework. Articles 2 and 3 were not helpful in that respect because they expressed a desire for change in the framework. If aspirations were expressed in a form which sought change, there could be no stability. The SDLP commented that they did not regard the

present position as stable. They had views on the causes of instability which were different from those of the Unionists. They were prepared to put all these issues on the table for discussion.

12. The Alliance Party drew a distinction between stability and stagnation. People must be allowed to have an aspiration for change provided this was sought through the democratic process. The Alliance Party expressed concern about undue attention being given to what was a Strand Two issue during Strand One. While recognising that the issue of Articles 2 and 3 needed to be addressed, it was more appropriate to do so during Strand Two, leaving Strand One to concentrate on internal Northern Ireland arrangements.

13. The UUP asked whether the Alliance Party accepted a Bill of Rights as a means of solving the Articles 2 and 3 problem. The Alliance Party replied that while they had no problem with a Bill of Rights, this would not be a substitute for amendment of Articles 2 and 3.

14. The SDLP said that today's discussion confirmed that the central relationship to be addressed was the North/South one. The DUP sought clarification of paragraph 26 of the SDLP paper which referred to the right of the Irish Government to be involved in Northern Ireland's affairs. The DUP asked whether the SDLP considered that such involvement would continue to be necessary if new Northern Ireland arrangements were established which enabled the SDLP to represent nationalist concerns directly. The SDLP replied that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had come about because of the failure of the Northern Ireland parties to reach agreement on structures which would provide fair treatment for nationalists. The Irish Government's role through the Agreement provided an important protection for the nationalist community. It did not, however, give the SDLP advantages which Unionists did not have. With regard to future arrangements, the SDLP was prepared to look at any proposals which would give fair play to both identities. In that situation, direct involvement of the Irish Government might not be necessary, but any arrangement had to be part of a wider

15. The DUP asked whether the SDLP accepted the offence which the Anglo-Irish Agreement had caused to the Unionist community and whether they accepted that it excluded them from the process. The SDLP reiterated their view that the Agreement afforded them no greater influence in decision-making than was available to the Unionists, should they choose to exercise it. The DUP replied that there was no framework for Unionists comparable to that under the Agreement, under which the British Government was obliged to make "determined efforts" to resolve any differences.

16. The Government Team asked for confirmation that the SDLP suggestion that it might not be necessary for the Republic of Ireland to be directly "involved" in Northern Ireland matters in the event of satisfactory internal Northern Ireland arrangements being agreed was regarded by the Unionists as a helpful development, which would facilitate agreement. The DUP confirmed that this was a helpful factor, but there were many other matters which needed to be addressed.

TALKS SECRETARIAT