

29/5/92

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1. The issues considered by the sub-Committee were identified in papers submitted by each party on the morning of 27 May. They arose from:

- (a) the perception that the SDLP had refused to contemplate any form of "majority rule"; and
- (b) the firm belief of the Unionist and Alliance parties that the manner in which the SDLP proposals sought to give effect to their concerns on the "identity" issue (that is, that the arrangements for governing Northern Ireland should give expression to the Irish identity of the nationalist community) would not secure the endorsement of the Unionist community.

2. On the first point

- the SDLP delegation reaffirmed their Party's opposition to "majority rule", particularly insofar as that carried the connotation that all decisions would be taken by the simple majority with no meaningful role given to representatives of the Nationalist community
- but confirmed that they were not opposed in principle to decision-taking by a majority where that was appropriate. They believed that any new political institutions in Northern Ireland should be based on the principle of consensus and that decisions should so far as possible be taken by consensus, especially in respect of certain fundamental issues, but accepted that decisions on particular administrative and legislative matters could appropriately be taken by majority vote.

3. On the second point, the SDLP delegation reasserted, and it was generally agreed, that the outcome of the Talks process, taken as a whole, should give effective political expression to the identity of both main parts of the community in Northern Ireland. They confirmed that they remained fully open to considering other proposals (besides their own proposal for the appointment of a

Commissioner nominated by the Irish Government) for meeting their concerns on this point, but noted that any such alternative proposals would need to recognise the Irish Government's right to involvement in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

4. As a means of enabling further substantive exchanges to take place the sub-Committee suggests that plenary should

- authorise the sub-Committee, building on the Common Themes and Common Principles documents and the provisional report of the Structures sub-Committee (dated 13 May), to work towards the greatest possible degree of common ground on new political institutions for Northern Ireland, including by addressing the issues listed in paragraph 5 of that report, on the understanding that each party may wish to reserve its position on particular points
- acknowledge that in order to secure a generally acceptable outcome from the Talks process it will be necessary to ensure that the outcome, taken as a whole, gives expression to the identities of both main parts of the Northern Ireland community and would attract the widest possible degree of allegiance and support and
- further acknowledge that the course of discussions during Strands II and III may make it appropriate in the view of one party or another to propose that relevant aspects of the features then on the table in Strand I should be reviewed.