



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/44/4
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Mr Brooke's Meeting with the Unionist Parties

The British side (Burns) rang at 2.20 pm to say the talks had just adjourned in the House of Commons in London. He gave the following rapid sketch of the meeting leaving till later a more comprehensive briefing.

Burns emphasised that the meeting had not concluded and would resume in 10 days time. It would have continued this afternoon but for diary problems on both sides and would have resumed more quickly if Paisley were free to attend but he has travel commitments in Europe in the coming days.

An anodyne joint statement has been issued saying that a number of major issues were explored, there were matters which needed to be resolved and there would be a meeting shortly to take the talks forward. Burns said Mr Brooke will make a point of saying to the Press, when they ask about the talks, that "he has nothing to add."

Burns' account of the talks was optimistic. A "good deal of useful progress had been made which was worthwhile holding on to." It would be an exaggeration to say that the Unionists were happy with the offer, but they will accept it or, as Burns put it, "the clothing of what we are not offering." They accept that the Secretariat will not disappear but want more demonstrable language for the man in the street. In particular, they will need an assurance that the Secretariat will not be servicing the Conference while it is not meeting.

In regard to the format they "took very strongly against" an early meeting with the Irish Government arguing that the Northern parties needed to know first where they stood. They would, however, explicitly accept that there would be discussions with the Irish Government "in due course". In Burns' view, the format

is accepted but the early opening of the North/South talks (i.e., one or two days after the internal talks) is "too large to swallow".

Unionists also "took against" the Joint Secretaries serving the North/South and East/West talks. Burns said, however, that his judgement was that the Unionists would make no problem if the Irish and British Ministers attending the talks were accompanied by their respective Joint Secretaries.

I asked Burns about the "natural gap" in the light of Molyneaux's recent comments. He said Molyneaux put his views slightly differently i.e. that it could not be a gap just because the two Governments were having a holiday between two Conferences. Burns said the thinking on the British side was that a gap beginning in early June would be too early. They were now thinking of a Conference at the end of June or early July and "would like to reflect" on the question of whether a gap could begin after that Conference. Burns' remarks suggested that the British are thinking of a gap at a later time.

Burns said the location of any talks was not discussed.

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Declan O' Donovan,
11 May, 1990

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