



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting with SDLP delegation

11 May 1990

Purpose of Meeting

1. The purpose of the meeting is to brief the SDLP on discussions to date concerning the prospects for political talks. The SDLP - somewhat unsettled by media speculation following the last Conference - will have been reassured by the Taoiseach's remarks in the Dail earlier this week that the suspension of the Conference and the removal of the Secretariat are not in question. However, the delegation will no doubt have a number of detailed questions as to precisely what gestures are envisaged to meet Unionist "pre-conditions" for talks.
2. The delegation will consist of Hume, Mallon, McGrady and Hendron (the same team as previously met Brooke). While tensions within the delegation are unlikely to surface at tomorrow's meeting, they undoubtedly - and perhaps inevitably - exist. Mallon and McGrady, in private conversation, are distrustful of Hume and extremely sensitive about what they perceive as Hume's tendency to exclude them from key decision-making. The two M.P.s themselves represent different tendencies within the party - with Mallon counselling a hard-line position in relation to any concessions to Unionists, and McGrady constantly returning to the theme that intransigence and inaction carry their own risks.

Presentation of Position to SDLP

3. The briefing might draw heavily on the "Note on Political Talks" - text attached - agreed at the last Conference. [It is for decision whether or not a copy of this Note should be shown to the SDLP. Given the extreme confidentiality of

the document, it might perhaps be preferable to have a copy available at the meeting which could be passed to the delegation but not actually left with them.]

4. Before going into the detail on the discussions to date, the Taoiseach and Ministers might wish to make some general introductory points

- there is absolutely no question of the Government putting the Agreement - and this of course includes the Conference and the Secretariat - at risk. The position was stated clearly in the Taoiseach's January statement: the Agreement will remain in place unless and until it is transcended by something better. Everything that is done will be consistent with that basic position;
- we have had protracted and detailed discussions with the Northern side on the basis for moving forward. We have developed a good relationship with the Secretary of State; however, we have repeatedly pointed out that we find it difficult to understand the basis for his optimism that progress may be within reach. Indeed, comments made by Molyneaux, in particular over the last couple of weeks, have confirmed our scepticism;
- nevertheless, if there is a genuine feeling that progress may be possible, then we obviously do not want to stand in its way - or indeed be seen to stand in its way. We have tried therefore to be as helpful as possible but within very clearly defined parameters. The SDLP can be reassured that the document we have agreed with the British ensures there is no room for ambiguity as to what is on offer from the two governments.

Text agreed between the two Governments

5. The SDLP delegation might then be taken in detail through the "Note on Political Talks". The contents might be summarised under the following headings: (a) "Gap"; (b) Format of talks (c) Secretariat.

(a) Gap

As regards the gap in Conference meetings, the key points are firstly, that it is a "natural" gap and, secondly, that it is of a fixed two month duration. There is a cast-iron agreement with Brooke that the Conference scheduled for the conclusion of the gap period will go ahead irrespective of developments at the political talks. [The SDLP may ask what our attitude will be if Unionists insist on this gap being described as an "unnatural" gap i.e. specifically created to allow talks to take place. The response might be that we have always spoken in terms of a "natural gap" and will continue to do so - however, if necessary, some phrase could be found to express the hope that the interval between Conferences would be used to facilitate dialogue; this might help to defuse any developing disagreement over whether the gap was natural or unnatural].

(b) Format

The format envisaged for talks is fully consistent with our emphasis - and the longstanding position of the SDLP - on the interdependence of the three sets of relationships (within the North, North/South, and East/West). The key point is that the three sets of talks will be "in unison" - i.e. within a day or two after the commencement of internal talks, the Government will be commencing talks with the Unionists and the SDLP on North/South relations.

The issue of the Dublin input into the internal Northern Ireland talks was a difficult one to handle: the device found - which we consider very satisfactory - is an official liaison group involving the two heads of the Secretariat. [The agreed document adds that the liaison group "could be expanded if the NI political parties wish to be represented": we might indicate to the SDLP that we would very much favour an expansion of the liaison group along these lines.]

(c) Secretariat

The SDLP can be reassured that the role of the Secretariat has been fully safeguarded. The two heads of the Secretariat would service the talks on North/South and East/West arrangements and would be members of the liaison group covering all three sets of talks. [The SDLP will have no difficulty with this (organic) link between the Secretariat and the servicing of talks - if anything, it strengthens the role of the Secretariat. McGrady may refer to Molyneaux's specific rejection of any such approach - at this stage, however, that is a matter for Brooke to tease out with Molyneaux]. An additional and key point is that "the remainder of the Secretariat would function as normal and there would be no question of suspending the Secretariat".

Where we go from here?

6. Much will depend, of course, on how Brooke's meeting with the Unionists goes (there may not be a decisive outcome since the Unionists seem to insist on approaching tomorrow's meeting as a preliminary and "exploratory" one). While the Northern side were talking in terms of the "natural gap" beginning after the next Conference (end May), there must be very considerable doubt as to whether sufficient ground can

be covered in the interim to enable this to happen.

7. The SDLP delegation - particularly Mallon - is likely to express considerable scepticism as to whether the Unionist leadership is serious about talks and also whether - if talks were to begin - there could be any likelihood of a successful outcome. The Taoiseach and Ministers might emphasise that we are fully alive to, and share, these concerns. For their part, the British have been suggesting that the Unionists are more accommodating in private than in public; this will obviously be proved or disproved over the next few weeks. As to what might emerge from talks, if they got going, a crucial factor would be the closest possible co-operation between the Government and the SDLP in articulating and advancing the nationalist position.
8. Finally, the Taoiseach and Ministers might refer to the confidentiality of these discussions between the Government and the SDLP: while the fact of the meeting taking place will, of course, be in the public domain, the details discussed will naturally remain private.

#### Other issues

9. It is possible that Hume will touch briefly on cross-border co-operation generally and in particular - in view of an editorial in today's Irish News strongly critical of recent remarks by Minister Brennan - on the Dublin/Belfast railway line. (The Northern side has been briefing the SDLP that Dublin is less than enthusiastic about Interreg - the Community Initiative under the Structural Funds designed to promote cross-border co-operation). The Taoiseach and Ministers might indicate that we are in fact working on the development of a ~~side-ranging~~ programme to be submitted

under Interreg and will stay in close touch with the SDLP on the matter. On the railway, the Taoiseach and Ministers might indicate that the Department of Transport and Tourism is still examining the proposal - the project is hugely expensive and the financing options have to be carefully examined.

Anglo-Irish Division

10 May, 1990

cc: PST; PSM; Minister for Justice; Mr. Nally; PSS

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NOTE ON POLITICAL TALKS

(FINAL VERSION APPROVED BY MINISTERS)

The following reflects discussions between Ministers at a second tete-a-tete, 19 April, 1990.

The Secretary of State would continue bilateral talks with the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland prior to the commencement of a two month "natural gap".

At the start of the gap the political parties would be brought together by the Secretary of State for the purpose of confirming the agenda for internal talks. The Irish side would be kept fully informed of the agenda.

The three sets of talks would begin immediately and in unison on internal, North/South and East/West arrangements. The North/South talks would begin a day or two after the commencement of the internal talks (allowing for the fact that participants would overlap) and East/West talks would begin a day or two thereafter.

The North/South talks would be between the Irish Government and the political parties. They would be without preconditions. It is assumed that the NIO would also be a party.

An official liaison group would be established to cover the 3 sets of talks. Dublin would use the liaison group for its input into the internal talks. The 2 heads of the Secretariat would service the talks on North/South and East/West arrangements. The liaison group would consist of the 2 heads of the Secretariat but could be expanded if the NI political parties wished to be represented.

The remainder of the Secretariat would function as normal and there would be no question of suspending the Secretariat.

Mr Brooke would seek the agreement of the political parties to these arrangements and there would be a meeting between Mr Brooke and Mr Collins before the commencement of the gap.

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