



An Chartlann Náisiúnta **National Archives**

Reference Code:	2020/17/55
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

INFORMAL MEETING BETWEEN THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.
ADARE MANOR, LIMERICK. 4 FEBRUARY 1990

1. The discussion took about 2 hours over lunch. The Minister for Foreign Affairs was accompanied by Mr. Dorr, Mr. Gallagher and the undersigned. Mr. Brooke was accompanied by Mr. Burns, Ambassador Fenn and Mr. Miles.

Political situation: Opening Presentations

2. Mr. Brooke said he had wanted to discuss with the Minister how we should handle the fallout from the Bangor speech. He judged that there was now a possibility, rather than a probability, of real political progress. He was not over-optimistic but he wanted to encourage the process in whatever way he could. He noted that the Unionist preconditions had been scaled down as time had passed. They now had a more realistic attitude. The question was how did we actually negotiate? It was understood that neither Government had any preconditions but there were two points which needed particular consideration, the question of a gap in Conference meetings and the question of the Secretariat.

3. In regard to a gap, Mr. Brooke referred to unionist comments that if they had known last May that no Conference would be held until September, the period could have been used for discussions. This was significant progress in unionist views. The Secretariat was a genuine difficulty, given its particular place in unionist perception. The unionist condition was that the Secretariat should not be operating when talks go on. It was not sensible for the Secretariat to be stood down but perhaps we could find a way to make progress. He wanted to talk about what attitudes he could adopt when he went into talks with unionists. The process would have to be step-by-step and cautious.

4. The last question was the involvement of the Irish Government in the process. At this point, Mr. Brooke invited the Minister to speak.

5. The Minister opened with the comment that both Governments agreed that no chances should be taken on the question of damaging the Agreement. That must be at the top of our sights. He added, first, that it was necessary to clarify what unionist requirements were and if they were ready for talks. We would need to be reasonably sure of unionists' internal thinking. At present, there seemed to be disagreement with the second line saying one thing and the first line (Paisley and Molyneaux) saying another. The first line seemed to be keeping its powder dry. Was there even agreement between Paisley and Molyneaux? Second, we needed to consider what kind of talks were in question, when they would begin and how the Irish Government would be involved. Third, in relation to a gap, even if it were a natural window between Conferences, this must not be a decision that could be interpreted as suspension. It must be sold as a natural gap arising from Ministers' commitments. If it was otherwise, we could damage our first priority which was the Agreement. He was worried how even a natural gap could be interpreted.

6. The unionist position could well be the old trade unionist tactic of keeping the ball rolling while demanding concession after concession. He recalled the standard security advice on hostage situations; keep talking. (Mr. Brooke said he was totally in agreement with the Minister's concerns). Fourthly, the most obvious way to wound the Agreement was through the Secretariat. We could not afford not to be suspicious of Paisley and Molyneaux. We had only one chance to make progress and we had better get it right. The unionists on the one hand could afford to fail, not once, but several times. They would want to use any area of indecision or confusion to keep their ball rolling.

7. The Minister noted that IRA support had been reduced since the Agreement. The most recent Belfast Telegraph poll

showed Sinn Fein down to 5%. It was important not to give them a window. They were never out of our (Irish Government) sights.

8. In considering the question of how we could encourage talks, we had to consider how we could be sure of not damaging" the Agreement before something better was in place.

9. At this point, Mr. Brooke said he had no blueprint, because if he had a blueprint he would not be going into talks without preconditions. Mr. Burns added that the British side was not in the position of taking risks but were conscious that "the unionists had no cards to play with".

Discussion

10. For convenience the ensuing discussion is summarised under the following headings.

A Gap: Would the Agreement be undermined if talks failed?

11. Ambassador Fenn took up the Irish concern that if talks got underway and failed because of unionist intransigence or unpreparedness, the Agreement would be damaged. There would be a fixed period for talks at the end of which the Conference would resume in any event. In his personal view, the Agreement would be strengthened in such circumstances, first, because it would be seen to survive and, second, because both Governments would have been shown to be willing to listen to unionist grievances.

12. The Minister picked Ambassador Fenn up on the word resume. Did this not imply suspension? He replied, apologetically, that he did not mean suspension. The Minister noted, nonetheless, that the wrong use of the word 'resume' went to show the tricky ground we were on.

13. Mr. Brooke stressed the British Government's commitment to the Agreement. He had been asked publicly in the U.S. if

the Bangor speech represented a retreat. He had said no and, indeed, he had pointed in the House of Commons on Thursday to "the extreme utility" of the Agreement. There could be no messing around about the period of the gap. It was important to have a clear and resolute stance on when the gap would end. Personally, he would be astonished if unionists pulled out of talks at that stage simply because a Conference was taking place. He used the metaphor of stones across a stream to describe his position on the risks involved. If a stone would not bear his weight, then he would pause. Mr. Dorr said another way of putting it would be to regard the holders of the Agreement as the defenders of a Castle with besiegers outside. The moment might come to parley but was this the moment?

The Secretariat

14. The Minister said he could not see the Irish Government going along with any action in relation to the Secretariat. Mr. Burns agreed but asked if there was any olive branch that could be offered.

15. The Irish side (Dorr) noted that the Secretariat was the gut point for unionists. They had a pathological dislike of Dublin's presence in the North and wanted to remove it. We appeared to be agreed that the Secretariat could not be removed. How then could unionists be brought to talks? The British side did not attempt to explore how the unionist precondition on the Secretariat might be met. Mr. Burns did suggest, however, that it might be necessary to give more on the gap because we could not give on the Secretariat.

Concurrence of Talks

16. Mr. Brooke said the talks were more likely to be concurrent than consecutive. The talks would not make progress unless all parties were prepared to consider three sets of relations (the two communities, North/South, British/Irish); and all parties would have to put their thumbprints on the results of the three sets of talks. Unless the political

parties were confident where they were on the second and third set of relations they would not place their thumbprints on the first.

Role of the Government

17. Mr. Brooke said he wanted to say something direct to us on this point. The Irish Government could not play a direct role on talks between the communities in Northern Ireland. If we did, unionists would not come to the starting gate. It would be a major role for himself to ensure that North/South relations were built into unionist thinking. It was absolutely necessary that that should be agreed. If not (referring back to his stones - across-a-stream metaphor), the next stone would not bear his weight. He repeated that he did not see any involvement for the Irish Government in the talks on internal relations except (prompted here by Burns) in relation to the views and proposals we could put forward under Article 4.

18. The Minister asked when he could see our involvement beginning. Mr. Brooke said he could envisage the talks going on side by side.

19. Mr. Dorris pointed out that what seemed to be envisaged was talks which would not involve Dublin but which in the logic of things meant that Dublin would be brought in (at the "thumbprint" stage). What did North/South relations mean? Did it mean a role for Dublin on behalf of nationalists? Mr. Gallagher said we had noted and welcomed the emphasis in the Secretary of State's Bangor speech on the interdependence of the three relationships. If and when negotiations got underway, it would be essential that the structures for these reflected the integral link between the three relationships.

20. Mr. Burns complained a little. We seemed to be chastising his side for talking to us when their ideas were forming rather than set. Mr. Brooke said he had said in his Bangor speech that it would be necessary to satisfy the aspirations of both communities in Northern Ireland. (The speech, in fact, refers to "views" rather than "aspirations").

The end result?

21. Mr. Dorr pressed the British side on how they foresaw the end result. They expressed reluctance to give a forecast. Mr. Burns was finally tempted to offer what he said was simply "a gleam in his eye". This appeared to be what is already envisaged in Article 4 of the Agreement (as Mr. Dorr pointed out), viz, a devolved administration conducting direct talks with Dublin on matters within its remit, a continuing role for the Irish Government on matters that were not devolved and a withdrawal from the Conference of the matters which would become the responsibility of the devolved Government.

Uncertainties

22. The Irish side dwelt on the uncertainties in the present position as against the risk which the British were suggesting we take: uncertainty about what unionists really wanted, whether agreement would emerge within or between the two unionist parties, whether unionists might not be content to withdraw from talks after securing a gap which they would proclaim was a suspension, whether jockeying within and between the parties might not push them in this direction. Mr. O'Donovan added that as against these uncertainties, there was the certainty of the Agreement to which both Governments had held firmly, the certainty of a drop in support for Sinn Fein (down to 5% in the Belfast poll compared to some 40% in local elections five years ago) and the certainty that unionists were moving in the right direction. Any mistake now would jeopardise all of these things.

23. Mr. Brooke agreed that there was confusion in unionist ranks. The DUP voters did not seem to want devolution but a number of important personalities in the party did. The OUP seemed to be in favour of devolution but their leader appeared not to be. He stressed, however, that the complication of unionist opposition to the Agreement could still be there in five years time if we did nothing and suggested again that the movement in the unionist position deserved a response at this point.

Further Meetings

24. Mr. Brooke said he would be talking to the parties during February but would like to meet for another informal meeting before the Conference set for 2 March. It was agreed that the afternoon of 21 February in London would be suitable. It was also agreed that the officials would meet in London on 16 February prior to a meeting of the Butler/Nally group which was already scheduled for that day. Looking further down the road to another Conference after 2 March, it was agreed that 19 April seemed to be the best date.

Other Matters

25. Mr. Brooke drew the Minister's attention to the British proposal for a Ministerial meeting on security matters which would include the two police chiefs and senior officials (the request had been transmitted to the Department of Justice).

26. It was agreed that the submission of the exploratory joint paper on transfrontier cooperation could be submitted to Brussels (modalities to be agreed through the Secretariat). Mr. Brooke said his one concern was that John Hume had been talking about a package of cross-border projects worth £100m. The British side were aware from Commissioner Millan that this was not on. The Minister fully agreed that it was important not to set sights too high.

27. The Minister asked about the Stevens Inquiry. Mr. Brooke said that the Chief Constable seemed to envisage a conclusion about 15 March.

28. The Minister also asked about recent events in regard to John Stalker. Mr. Brooke replied that the Home Office view was that the evidence recently presented had not advanced anything.

29. The Minister finally raised the Birmingham Six case and again emphasised the sensitivity of this case in the Anglo-Irish context.

Declan O' Donovan
5 February, 1990