



## **An Chartlann Náisiúnta** **National Archives**

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*An excellent overview  
(N.B. PAR 19, P3)*

*1. cc PST: PCH  
H. Hume: PCH  
H. Ramm: S. L. Lee  
PCH*

Secret

Round-table Talks, Strand One, Stormont:  
Overview Note of First Week's Plenary Sessions

Ms Anderson

1. This note attempts to draw together an overview of the first week of Strand One Plenaries in Stormont, which ended today; it also includes an assessment (based primarily on conversations with Denis Haughey and Sean Farren) of how the SDLP saw the week and its implications for the remainder of the process. Detailed notes have, of course, been prepared on the sessions on Monday and Tuesday (today's not yet available), but I felt that in preparation for tomorrow's Liaison Group meeting, an overview might be useful.

Sequence

2. To begin with a brief resume of how the three days were broken down: The plenaries formally opened on Monday lunchtime with the introductory statement of Mr Brooke, in which he sought to set the tone for how he hoped the process might proceed. This was followed on Monday afternoon by the opening statements of Alliance leader, Dr Alderdice and Mr Hume for the SDLP. It was agreed that each opening statement would be followed by "questions of clarification" rather than substance - these would follow at a later point after all the introductory statements had been delivered. After Mr Hume's speech, Dr Paisley indicated that he needed time to study the SDLP analysis paper which he had tabled with his speech. It was agreed that the bulk of the questions to Mr Hume would be left over until Tuesday.
3. Before the close of proceedings on Monday, Mr Brooke announced the establishment of a Business Committee to facilitate the running of Strand One. The Committee, on

which the SDLP was represented by Mr Haughey, had its first meeting on Tuesday morning, amid reports that the DUP were seeking an "intensification of the schedule of the work" of the Strand. In the event, no proposal for extra days or an extension into the Summer was tabled; it was agreed however that three additional evening sessions would be held over the next two weeks on days for which plenaries were already scheduled. Annex 1 attached contains the timetable agreed up to the period 3 July.

4. The Tuesday (18 June) morning plenary was devoted exclusively to questions (of clarification) to Mr Hume. The lead on the Unionist side in this regard was taken by Dr Paisley, who questioned Mr Hume for close to 90 minutes. As the report of the session shows, he asked a number of interesting questions and, at the very least, showed a level of engagement and interest in the SDLP analysis of the problem that was new. Dr Paisley was followed by Dr Alderdice, Mr Molyneaux and Dr Mawhinney (for the British side) in questioning Mr Hume, who confined themselves to a brief number of, for the most part, unexceptionable, questions.
5. Tuesday afternoon was devoted exclusively to the opening statements of Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley. The former was along predictable lines, with the primary focus on the need for better links with Westminster. The situation of the Nationalist community was barely even referred to. Dr Paisley's speech, which was 27 pages long, was regarded as more interesting, in that he deployed language which implied a readiness for possible new thinking. Nonetheless, all the explicit messages remained of the familiar ilk - no Irish dimension, no power sharing, the constitutional status of Northern Ireland to remain exclusively British etc.

9. Today's (Wednesday, 19 June) session was given over to questions to Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley by the other parties. Time constraints prevented me from obtaining anything more than a preliminary overview from Mr Haughey (he will let us have his note in the next few days). The sequence of questioners today was:
- To Mr Molyneaux: Dr Alderdice, Mr McGrady, Dr Mawhinney.  
 To Dr Paisley: Dr Alderdice.
- When the plenaries resume on Monday next, the first item will be the questioning of Dr Paisley by Mr Mallon.
10. Mr Haughey and Mr Farren told me that Mr Molyneaux's performance today was "extraordinary" (in an entirely negative sense!) One had the sense, they said, of somebody who was "on a different planet". He devoted long sections of his replies to questions to opaque points of parliamentary and legislative procedure. Essentially, the Northern Ireland problem, in his view, was a matter of "administrative tidying up" - "a Select Committee here, "re-jigged" (his word) local councils there" etc. In one extraordinary sequence, when Mr McGrady was trying to take him through the symptoms of the Northern Ireland problem, Mr Molyneaux began a detailed analysis of Road Traffic legislation, pointing to the "confusion" which the difference between legislation in the UK and in Northern Ireland gave rise to! Mr McGrady responded: "Well, actually Mr Molyneaux, I was thinking about the bombs and the killings and the violence and the hatred.....!" But Mr Molyneaux refused to be engaged. Mr Haughey said that despite some penetrating questions from all three questioners today, there was no moving him from the extremely narrow ground upon which he has chosen to argue his case.

11. On the question of the very obvious gaps which are emerging between the positions of the two Unionist parties (on the basis of their opening statements), Mr Molyneaux refused to accept that there was any divergence - rather, he argued, the two documents were "complementary".
  12. While the real engagement of the DUP's position will have to await Mr Mallon's "cross-examination" on Monday next, a number of interesting points arose during exchanges with Dr Alderdice this afternoon. For instance, Dr Paisley at one point appeared not to rule out the possibility of some form of institutionalised relationship with the South ("that is something we may make proposals about"). While continuing to rule out power sharing as of right, he appeared to be suggesting that some form of "voluntary coalition" might be possible. Questioned on paramilitary organisations, he said that he "did not accept" the UVF/UFF etc as Protestants. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, he claimed, did accept the IRA (he referred to the funerals of IRA members at which the officiating priests "described them as good men" - this did not happen at UVF funerals, Dr Paisley said).
- Assessment**
13. The SDLP's sense is that it has been a mixed week. There is relief that the process is at last underway and there was some encouragement in some of the things they heard during the three days. The atmosphere has, for the most part, been good ("business-like") and there has been little evidence of the tension of the weeks leading up to the plenaries. In the SDLP view, however, the overall assessment remains negative. They feel that they are still waiting for tangible evidence to demonstrate that the Unionists might be serious about a deal and those within the SDLP (the

majority!) who were sceptical about Unionist readiness in this regard before the process began believe that most of what they have heard this week has merely served to confirm them in their doubts.

14. Overall, Molyneaux has been as depressing - if not more so - as expected. The SDLP's sense is that he is beyond getting through to. They have heard from the NIO that several members of his own delegation and a number within the DUP were very unhappy with his opening statement yesterday (which had all the hallmarks of his own work). Denis Haughey's sense this evening was that it would be very difficult to see Molyneaux having anything to do with the kind of arrangements which would be necessary if an agreement were to be "on".
15. Paisley has been something of a surprise. At the very least, he has shown a willingness to engage and he clearly has done a lot of homework. Mr Haughey said that, for instance, he had shown a surprising knowledge and grasp of Irish history and was familiar with much of our legislation. His cross examination of John Hume yesterday demonstrated that he had studied the SDLP analysis document carefully. Moreover the language of his introductory statement showed an openness which had rarely been seen before (eg. "We must be honest with ourselves. I hope that as these talks continue we will face up to realities. No doubt many of us will find some things hard to swallow.... Difficult decisions will have to be made from which it would be easier to run away" etc.) Nonetheless, the essential message remained uncompromising and there was considerable doubt within the SDLP as to what extent Paisley's language was tactical as much as "for real". However, for the moment, there is a general willingness to give him the benefit of

that doubt. Denis Haughey believes that he is under conflicting pressures - on one side the "bigoted wing" (people such as McCrea etc) want to make sure that there are no concessions to "Catholics", while on the other side the "realist wing" (Robinson etc) feel that if a deal is not done now it will be too late later. Mr Haughey's instinct is that personally Paisley leans towards the latter group but he (Mr Haughey) feels that it would be a big mistake to underestimate the influence of the former (or overestimate the "stomach" of the latter).

16. The British side appear to be playing a relatively low key role so far. Mr Brooke has confined himself to his Chairmanship role, with Dr Mawhinney - uncontroversially so far - making the substantive NIO contributions. Mr Brooke has to date kept his profile low and the indications are that he will continue to do so.
17. Mr Haughey said that Mr Hume has been performing extremely well, although it has been a heavy week for him. Now that his opening statement is behind him he proposes to make greater use of Mr Mallon and Mr McGrady (the former will, as mentioned, make his first substantive contribution on Monday). Logistically, the party is happy at how things are going. Mr Haughey himself is doing an excellent job on the note taking and overall they feel in reasonably good shape - without complacency! - for whatever may lie ahead.

*Q.C.*  
T O'Connor  
19 June 1991



Ref: DH/GC/Disk 3/T-Table

## TIMETABLE

Week-commencing 17 June, 1991

Morning session	10.30am	12.45pm
Afternoon session	2.15pm	5.00pm

Week-commencing 24 June, 1991

Morning session	10.30am	12.45pm
Afternoon session	2.15pm	5.30pm (possibly 6.00pm) (Coffee break in afternoon)

## Additional Evening session

Tuesday, 25 June, 1991	6.30pm	8.30pm
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Week-commencing 1 July 1991

Morning session	10.30am	12.45pm
Afternoon session	2.15pm	5.30pm (possibly 6.00pm) (Coffee break in afternoon)

## Additional Evening sessions

Tuesday, 2 July 1991	6.30pm	8.30pm
Wednesday, 3 July 1991	6.30pm	8.30pm