



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Secret

Round-table Talks, Strand One, Stormont:  
Summary Note of Proceedings, Week Three of Plenary Sessions,  
Monday 1 July - Wednesday 3 July, 1991.

Ms Anderson

1. This note attempts to summarise the chronology of the events of what has proved to be the final week of the current process. A detailed note on the only day of substantive talks (Monday, 1 July) is contained elsewhere on this brief. An overall assessment note of the talks from an SDLP perspective is also on this brief.

Monday, 1 July

2. Because of Somme commemoration commitments, Mr Brooke and several Unionist delegates did not attend Monday's session. In the former's absence, the session was chaired by Dr Mawhinney. From the outset, an air of unreality permeated the process this week, since it was clear that its ultimate breakdown was now inevitable and at most a matter of days away. Nonetheless, on Monday at least, the British side did its best to present a sense of "business as usual". Proceedings began with a meeting of the Business Committee, chaired also by Mawhinney, at which he mapped out the British side's proposal for a revised "General Principles" paper. He said that the paper would be based on the eight "propositions" contained in the paper they had tabled over the weekend; the NIO now proposed to go through the papers submitted in recent days by the parties, "relating each proposition" in their paper to the relevant paragraphs in these submissions. The outcome of the exercise would hopefully amount to "a set of general principles to which we can all subscribe".

3. The SDLP representative on the Committee (Denis Haughey) indicated that the SDLP could "live with" such an approach in principle. The Unionist representatives strongly disagreed, however, indicating that they were "getting fed up with analyses and requirements" and insisting that the process now move swiftly to concrete proposals for structures. They argued that agreeing a statement of common principles would be a futile exercise, given the gap between the sides, and that a "more flexible" approach would be to construct an "institutional blueprint" - it would quickly become clear whether or not this matched the individual parties' requirements. The Business Committee broke up without agreement on the issue.
4. The debate on how to proceed was then taken up in the first plenary session of the day, which commenced at 2.20 pm. John Hume immediately pointed out that a "central question" was "how long have we got? If we are going on next week we need to know". Mawhinney indicated that that question would have to await Peter Brooke's return the following day. Meanwhile, there was no consensus on how best to proceed. In the event, Mawhinney succeeded in winning agreement to a discussion on the first two "propositions" in the British paper - the Constitutional Status of Northern Ireland and the Identities issue.
5. In the discussion on the first issue, the Unionists made a strong attempt to "nail down", in perpetuity, the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK. Mawhinney, with some firmness, made clear that Northern Ireland's constitutional position had always contained "some element of conditionality" and that what the Unionists were seeking was simply not achievable. During the debate on identities, Paisley argued that at the heart of the SDLP

case was a desire to achieve a role for Dublin in the affairs of Northern Ireland equal to that of London. Unionists, he said, would never concede such parity. He also argued that Northern Nationalists should "follow the lead" of Irish people in other parts of the Commonwealth - he cited Australia, Liverpool, etc - who, while giving their "allegiance, as citizens, to the state in which they lived", had retained their Irish identity. The session ended at 8.30 pm, with agreement to reconvene at 10.30 on Tuesday.

Tuesday, 2 July

6. At the outset of the session, Mr Brooke who, following his return from France was again in the chair, asked Dr Mawhinney to give a brief report on Monday's session. Before the latter began, Seamus Mallon, who in the temporary absence of Mr Hume was leading the SDLP delegation, asked for clarification on the timetable issue. He argued that while the exchanges this week had been interesting and useful to a certain degree, they were developing more and more into the nature of a "university seminar" and that "it was serving no useful purpose to be continuing in that vein". In view of what had been said about the implications of the July 16th Conference meeting, it would not be possible for parties to now put substantial proposals on the table or for further "meaningful discussions" to take place. In these circumstances the SDLP was seeking clarification of how the Secretary of State saw the way forward.
7. Mr Brooke said that he was "going to come to that" but that first he wished to hear Dr Mawhinney's report. The latter duly provided a brief report on Monday's session, which he characterised as "worthwhile". Alderdice then spoke, essentially echoing Seamus Mallon's line about the need now for clarification. He also queried Paisley on the latter's

statement on Monday night that he would "not be seeking" a meeting with the Irish Government. Paisley replied in evasive terms, claiming that he was reacting to "reports" that had reached him that he was about to enter discussions with the Irish Government. There was no truth in these reports, he said, and he wished to put the record straight to that effect. He added that, in regard to Strand One, the DUP were "going to stay at the table until the day before the Secretariat resumed its duties".

8. Molyneaux's contribution was along predictable lines - he had forecast, he said, that once parties had become "boxed in" in this way (by the Conference deadline) it was inevitable that a breakdown was going to come about. It gave "him no pleasure" to say 'I told you so' - but he said it nonetheless!
9. Brooke then adjourned the plenary session (which had lasted less than 50 minutes) to consider the situation and to arrange meetings with the party leaders. (The SDLP told me that he was in noticeably "grumpy" mood and in one exchange had literally shouted at Paisley in an attempt to make a point of order! He apparently subsequently went over to Paisley to apologise.)
10. This was in effect the only plenary session of the day. Subsequent meetings were at party leader level (as you know, Mr Hume had returned by early afternoon). The final one of these was at 6.30 pm. Mr Hume told the SDLP delegation afterwards that Brooke had indicated that he proposed to have a wrap-up plenary session in the morning, following which he would travel to London to announce the close of the talks in the Commons in the afternoon. Brooke indicated to the party leaders that he had reached his decision upon

hearing from the SDLP that they felt unable to table substantive proposals, given the likelihood of the breakdown of the talks on the 16 July issue (he mentioned the Unionists' difficulty in relation to the latter). Brooke indicated to the party leaders that he was "open to suggestions about what he put in his statement, but without commitment to inclusion". Hume told Brooke that it was his (Brooke's) statement and that the SDLP would not be putting forward proposals as to its content. Hume told the SDLP delegation that Paisley and Molyneaux "arrived at the meeting waving pieces of paper" (presumably their proposals for the statement). The day's proceedings closed at that point.

Wednesday, 3 July

11. The final plenary session lasted roughly 30 minutes - 10-10.30 am - and was largely an exercise in valediction. Brooke explained that as it was clear that the process as a whole could not be completed in the time available under the terms of the 26 March statement, it would manifestly be difficult to "make progress towards specific proposals". He had therefore concluded that the talks should accordingly be brought to an end. He believed that the process had demonstrated "our capacity to do serious business" and that what had happened could in no way be characterised as "failure". He hoped that it would be possible for all participants to leave the table "without rancour" in a way that would facilitate the resumption of dialogue at a future time ("perhaps in a new framework"). He believed that lessons had been learned which would be useful for the future "both in terms of procedures and content". He paid tribute to the commitment which had been demonstrated by all parties. They had shown that it was possible for politicians in Northern Ireland to work for the common good

of their own people, the good of the people of this island and the people of these islands.

12. **Molyneaux** repeated his "I told you so" line of yesterday (see above) but paid tribute to the tenacity and courage of Brooke - particularly his courage in taking the decision he just had! He (pointedly) made no reference to the possible resurrection of the process. **Paisley**, while also making a low-key intervention, referred to the two Governments having operated a "guillotine" and not "allowing injury time". He said that there had been some "good exchanges" ("particularly last week") and "it was a pity that it had not been possible to move to Strand Two"! He also paid tribute to Brooke's skills and patience. **John Hume** (who according to Mark Durkan had not intended to participate in a "praise-in" for Brooke!) added his thanks to the Secretary of State to those of the other party leaders. He also extended his thanks to all the staff around Stormont who had facilitated the work of the conference (a point apparently immediately echoed by the other party leaders - with some hint of embarrassment that they had forgotten to do so in their own contributions!). He regretted that the talks had come to an end, welcomed the exchanges which had taken place and hoped that they could be built on in the future. He ended with an expression of appreciation of the work of the two Governments in making the talks possible and hoped that they would continue to work together in that spirit. The session then closed (I should add that during the session copies of the British Government statement to be issued after the meeting was distributed - copy at Annex 1).

*Joe*

T O'Connor  
3 July 1991



Annex 1**DRAFT PRESS STATEMENT: 3 JULY**

There was a plenary session this morning.

The Secretary of State reported that, in a series of bilateral meetings with the leaders of the political parties which he, accompanied by Dr Mawhinney, had held on the previous day, discussion had focused on the implications of the approaching end of the period set aside for the political talks announced in his parliamentary statement of 26 March. Given the fact that the process as a whole could not now be completed in the time remaining, it was clear that it would be difficult to make further progress towards specific proposals.

The Secretary of State explained that he had therefore concluded that the talks should accordingly be brought to an end.

The Secretary of State and the party leaders agreed that the Talks had been valuable and had produced genuine dialogue.

The Secretary of State made clear his own wish in due course to explore the possibility of finding terms on which fresh discussions could be held.

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