

RECORD OF A BILATERAL BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT TEAM AND THE ALLIANCE PARTY HELD IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON 7 MAY 1991

Government Team

Secretary of State
Minister of State
PUS
Mr Fell
Mr Pilling
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice
Mr Close
Mr Neeson

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
Mr Marsh

Also present

Mr Pawson

The meeting began at 11.20 am.

2. The Government Team indicated that there was a problem with the location of the second strand. The current position, following a meeting with the SDLP earlier that morning, was that the SDLP were prepared to contemplate an alternation of venue between London and Dublin, with the first location being decided on the toss of a coin. The Unionists, however, preferred London and were not prepared to accept a meeting on the island of Ireland. The Alliance Party were understood to prefer Belfast.

3. The Alliance Party replied that they were prepared to talk at any time, to anybody and anywhere. The only issue for them was one of practicality. Their preferences, in order, were Parliament Buildings, London and a peripatetic formula. These preferences were simply on the practical level; they would be content with any location, provided the party were given any necessary support.

IN CONFIDENCE

4. The Alliance Party also said that in their view the credibility of the talks process was being put at risk by the delay in agreeing a location for the second strand and moving into plenary discussion; they urged the Secretary of State to reach agreement as soon as possible. Dr Alderdice offered to participate in a meeting of party leaders if that would be helpful.

5. The Government Team emphasised their intention to reach a resolution as soon as possible, and were grateful for the Alliance Party's clear and helpful position.

6. The issue of confidentiality was also briefly discussed. The Alliance Party were irritated by the fact that the media appeared to have a clear grasp of what had transpired in meetings the previous week. The Government Team replied that everyone knew the location of the second strand to be an issue; questions from the media about whether plenaries were to start on 7 May could not simply be blocked. However, the expectation was that in future such identifiable and free-standing issues which had to be decided at a particular point in time would not exist.

7. The meeting concluded at 11.40 am.

TALKS SECRETARIAT

IN CONFIDENCE

ADMIN1/45/MD