

RECORD OF A PLENARY MEETING HELD IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON MONDAY  
1 JULY 1991

Government Team

Minister of State  
Mr Pilling  
Mr Thomas

Mr McNeill

Talks Secretariat

Mr Hill  
Mr Watson  
Mr Rodell

Also present

Mrs Miller

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice  
Mr Close  
Dr McGarry

Mrs Bell  
Mr Dickson  
Mr McBride  
Mr Maguire

SDLP

Mr Mallon  
Mr McGrady  
Mr Haughey

Mr Farren  
Dr Hendron  
Mr Maginness  
Mrs Rodgers

UDUP

Dr Paisley  
Rev McCrea  
Mr Campbell

UUP

Mr Cunningham  
Mr Empey  
Mr McGimpsey

Mr Allen  
Mr Donaldson

A plenary meeting of Strand One of the Talks took place in Parliament Buildings between 7.08pm and 8.30pm on 1 July.

2. The Government Team, noting that three of the four delegations had made reference in their submissions to the co-existence within Northern Ireland of at least two distinct communal identities, asked the parties if they wished to clarify their positions on this point. [Copies of all the submissions are attached to the record of the meeting held at 2.20pm on 1 July. The reference is to Alliance paragraph 6; SDLP paragraph 3; UDUP paragraph 4.]

3. The SDLP said that in their view there were two political/cultural identities in Northern Ireland, both were equally legitimate and both had a right to be respected. Northern Ireland's problem was that in the past only one of these identities had been given any official expression; Nationalists had been 'included out'. What the SDLP were looking for were new arrangements that would give expression to the Nationalist identity at every level of the three relationships.

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4. The Alliance Party said that they did not accept the SDLP's analysis and that they would be concerned about any arrangement which bound people into the present communal identities instead of leaving room to allow for change and development. There were in any case more than two identities in Northern Ireland; besides Nationalists and Unionists there was also a group of people whose identity was not based upon territorial considerations but upon international human values such as freedom of speech, protecting minorities etc.

5. The UUP said that they, for their part, believed that the people of Northern Ireland formed one community, though as in any community there were different outlooks/identities. They had heard what the SDLP had had to say and they were eager to discuss proposals for institutions which they hoped would give practical expression to these concerns. The SDLP emphasised that what they were looking for was not a mechanism that would give them the whiphand but recognition of the legitimacy of their identity. The UUP said that they would be putting forward proposals aimed at providing good and fair government and at assuring Nationalists of an opportunity to influence decision-making. They could hardly be expected, however, to agree to promote Irish Nationalism.

6. The DUP said that the SDLP had made it clear in their submission [paragraph 7] that what they were looking for was not equality under the law for everyone in Northern Ireland but equality for Dublin and London in the government of Northern Ireland. Nationalists had to make a choice about whether to accept the benefits and responsibilities of being British or Irish citizens; they could not have it both ways. It was no different to the choice which faced Irishmen living in London, Liverpool or, indeed, Australia. The UDUP would concede without question that there should be parity under the law for everyone but they would not help Nationalists to take Northern Ireland into a united Ireland.

7. The SDLP said that if the UDUP believed that there was no difference between the Irish in London and the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland then the two parties had quite fundamentally different views of the history of Northern Ireland. The SDLP were

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not trying to introduce an Irish dimension into Northern Ireland they were themselves representatives of the Irish dimension that had always existed. The UUP took issue with this point and said that the SDLP did not represent the Irish dimension but an Irish dimension. One of the problems they were facing was that Nationalism had tried to appropriate Irishness to itself and refused to recognise that it was possible to be Irish and a Unionist. It would be a great mistake for the Talks to proceed on such an exclusivist understanding of British and Irish identities.

8. The Government Team offered the meeting a draft press release which was accepted with one amendment. [A copy of the final text is attached at Annex A].

TALKS SECRETARIAT

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AGREED STATEMENT

1 July 1991

Plenary sessions, under the Chairmanship of Dr Brian Mawhinney, began at 2.15 pm. Discussions concentrated on common themes in light of work done by participants since last week's talks.

The start was delayed to allow some delegates to attend the Somme Anniversary Service in Belfast. Other delegates, including the Secretary of State and Mr Molyneaux, were in France for ceremonies there.

Plenary sessions were adjourned at 8.30 pm. They will recommence on Tuesday at 10.30 am.