

BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEETING: 29 APRIL 1992

Government Team

Mr Hanley
Mr Bell
Mr Hill

Alliance Party

Mr Close
Mr Morrow

UDUP

Mr Robinson
Mr Vitty

Talks Secretariat

Mr Smith

SDLP

Mr Durkan
Mr Farren

UUP

Mr Cunningham
Mr Empey

Also Present

Mr Smyth

The meeting began at 14.32 and adjourned at 16.15. It resumed at 16.43 and concluded at 17.55.

2. The Government Team opened by apologising for the distribution of the minutes of the 9 March Business Committee meeting, which had not reached all the members of the Committee. In future, the notes of the meetings will be sent directly to the members of the Committee as well as to party leaders.

3. The Government Team opened a discussion on the paper "Realities and Common Themes" which had been circulated to party leaders under cover of the Secretary of State's letter of 24 April 1992. The UDUP delegation said that the paper that had been issued had not been written in the way that had been requested by the Business Committee. It did not so much express common themes as express the Government's view. While they did not necessarily disagree with everything in the "realities" section of the paper, they queried whether it was appropriate to incorporate such material at this stage. The Government Team replied that the views of the Committee would be taken into account and a revised draft would be issued by the weekend for the Committee to discuss at a subsequent meeting on Monday 4 May. This would, hopefully, secure the objective of agreeing a paper which could be tabled at a plenary meeting on Tuesday 5 May.

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4. After discussion, it was agreed that the paper would be divided into two separate papers: one reflecting the Government's view of the fundamental political realities which had emerged from the previous talks and the second to reflect the agreed common themes which also emerged from the previous talks. The UUP delegation referred to Mr Hume's offer, in plenary, to table a paper on the two identities and offered to receive and respond to any such document in parallel with ongoing discussion of specific issues in Strand One. Other delegations agreed that they would happily participate in such activity.

5. At the suggestion of the Alliance delegation, it was agreed to work through the "Common Themes" section of the paper, paragraph by paragraph, to elicit agreement to the form of a new paper. Points of detail on each paragraph were subsequently discussed, but the major substantive issue concerned the extent to which the document should incorporate matters which were for discussion in later strands of the talks. The SDLP delegation and the Government Team drew attention to the analysis, reflected in the statement of 26 March 1991, that the wider relationships could have a significant bearing on the internal relationships which were for consideration in strand one, and this was acknowledged. However, it was also argued that the Talks, and therefore the document, needed to concentrate at this stage on strand one issues, leaving to one side for the moment issues which would be discussed in greater detail at later stages of the talks process. In the interests of making progress, this was agreed.

6. Other substantive issues included:

- The UDUP delegation sought clarification of the proposition that the question of securing greater direct local political involvement in the governance of Northern Ireland would require consideration "on several levels". The Government team said that this was open to a number of interpretations, one of which was that the talks would need to consider

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channels for securing the input of local politicians at the level of central, regional and local government and to the work of executive bodies.

- There was substantial discussion on the acceptability of terms such as "the two parts of Ireland". The UDUP delegation strongly expressed its disagreement with the use of such terms, preferring the use of "Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland", which, it said, reflected the political reality. All delegations acknowledged the sensitivity of these semantic points. The SDLP delegation pointed out that it had challenged other formulations in the paper which carried particular political connotations. It would be better for both sides to show restraint. Various alternatives were explored. The Government Team noted the desirability of using value-free but not inaccurate terms and agreed to take account of the discussion in re-drafting the paper.

- It was agreed to delete from the re-drafted paper those paragraphs under the sub-heading "The Three relationships". The Committee noted that there was substantial agreement and common ground with respect to these matters, but agreed that they should not be presented at this time as being matters which were for consideration at a later stage.

- It was acknowledged that though the paper would deal with Strand One issues, the parameters of the 26 March 1991 statement meant that nothing would be specifically agreed within Strand One until everything had been agreed in the Talks as a whole.

7. The Government Team proposed a timetable for the following week. It was agreed that the Business Committee would meet again on Monday 4 May at 11.00 am to discuss the revised document on common themes which would be provided to delegations on Friday 1 May. This, when agreed, could be presented to plenary on Tuesday 5 May.

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It was also agreed that a plenary session could take place on Thursday 7 May beginning at 10.30 am, on the understanding that there may be some absentees from the parties' teams due to the Queen's Speech. The Business Committee meeting on Monday would deal firstly with the revised "Common Themes" paper and then consider how plenary might sensibly address the paper "Options for new Political Institutions".

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2. Paragraphs 3-17 below accordingly aim to identify various key political realities which, IMHO, requests, should be taken into account in the search for a comprehensive political accommodation in relation to Northern Ireland. They are offered not as a definitive treatment of the difficult issues with which they deal, but simply as an aid to informing future discussions.

Realities

1. Whatever the historical rights and wrongs, Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom. The Government exercises full sovereign authority in Northern Ireland and acknowledges a responsibility to all the people there to provide security, stability and good government. There is also a set of geographical, historical and political realities which give the Government of the Republic of Ireland an interest in relevant Northern Ireland matters.

4. Northern Ireland has a deeply divided community, characterized by traditions and identities which reach not beyond Northern Ireland itself. It has suffered from an absence of agreement on