

STATEMENT FROM  
JOINT UNIONIST LEADERS

Thursday 9th May

Arrived at Stormont at 10.15am. Brian Mawhinney came down at 10.30am to say that since they were clear about our position, which was uncontroversial, would we accept that they might spend much of the time with the other two delegations. I readily agreed, repeating that for us the guiding principle was that the talks were more important than the venue. We would meet him again in the afternoon.

The SDLP and Unionists met separately with the SOS in the morning. At lunchtime Ian Paisley asked to meet with our front three. I agreed. We speculated that he wanted to recruit us against the SDLP. But we would maintain our position.

We met in Room 37 at 2pm. Present were Molyneaux, Cunningham, Nicholson, Paisley, Robinson, and McCrea. Molyneaux presented a 'blame Brooke' picture where he introduced the issue of the Chairmanship of strand 2. He was defensive about the fact that they had not asked about it before. Then Paisley presented their amendment. I replied that we were prepared to meet any of them at any time. We would accept their amendment or the SOS proposals, or any others. For us the guiding principle was that the talks are more important than the venue. Robinson and McCrea then weighed in trying to increase the pressure. Paisley then got angry and made to blame the breakdown on us for not supporting him. I pointed out that I had already told the SOS that without an agreement the talks would break down. Paisley insisted that we had to be on one side or the other.

After this meeting which lasted over an hour we returned to our room and later had a meeting with the SOS (full team) when he brought us up to date. We were at an impasse and would adjourn until Monday, at which point he would put an ultimatum.

After this the team discussed some possibilities, of which we thought to advise Dr Mawhinney. He had left, but just then the SOS returned to see IRKP and JM. I saw SOS after them and gave give the ideas directly.

A discussion in the bar with some unionists followed before we left, at about 5.40pm. The unionists remained until after 9pm drinking in the barf and producing a draft statement.