

BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEETING: 4 MAY 1992

Government Team

Mr Hanley
Mr Bell
Mr Hill

Alliance Party

Mr Close
Mr Morrow

UDUP

Mr Robinson
Mr Vitty

Talks Secretariat

Mr May

SDLP

Mr Durkan
Mr Farren

UUP

Mr Cunningham
Mr Empey

Also Present

Mr Smyth

The meeting began at 11.38 and concluded at 12.55.

2. The SDLP delegation asked whether Mr Haughey might sit in as an additional member of their team, as he was normally one of the nominated representatives of the Party, but had been in hospital last week and wished to keep in touch with the work of the Committee. After discussion, it was agreed that to accommodate the request would be a bad precedent.

3. The Government Team explained that the Secretary of State had an unavoidable commitment on the afternoon of 7 May and asked whether Mr Hanley might act as substitute when the Secretary of State was unavailable rather than slow up the process. The delegations agreed to this.

4 The Government Team sought the views of the Parties on which members of delegations should receive the Talks allowance for days on which there was no plenary meeting. The Government Team explained that 4 May would be treated as a full Talks day, and suggested that in future, when only Business and/or Sub-Committees were to meet, allowances be paid only to members of the Committee in question, and two others per delegation who might be required for consultation purposes.

5. The DUP delegation said that when the Business Committee was only intending to discuss procedural issues there would be no call

to pay allowances to anyone except Committee members. However, they pointed out that when matters of substance were to be discussed, there could be a need to consult widely within Party delegations and asked that consideration be given to the payment of allowances on days when non-plenary meetings could be expected to take decisions requiring endorsement. The SDLP delegation pointed out that a ruling such as the one proposed by the Government Team might result in delays. The UUP delegation suggested that the question of whether the Talks allowance should be made payable to all members of delegations on particular days might be considered by the Business Committee on a weekly basis looking to the business to be conducted in the week ahead. The Government Team agreed to consider the matter further.

6. The minutes of the Business Committee meeting of 29 April were agreed without amendment. The Government Team explained that as a result of that previous meeting, it had separated the draft statement of the common themes to have emerged from the previous talks from its view of the fundamental political realities. It asked whether the Common Themes paper was now in suitable form for presentation to the Plenary Session, and for views from the delegations on how the paper might be handled at the Plenary Session. The Government Team suggested the paper might be noted by the Plenary Session rather than discussed at length. The delegations indicated they had a number of points to raise on the paper, although it constituted a considerable improvement over that presented to them at the previous Business Committee meeting. A revised paper is attached, incorporating agreed amendments, at Annex A. The UDUP delegation asked it be recorded that they agreed paragraph 4 of the paper on the basis of the interpretation offered by the Government Team at the previous Business Committee meeting (ref BC/1 paragraph 6 first indent).

5. It was agreed that a further meeting of the Business Committee would commence at 14.30 that day.

Introduction

1. This paper seeks to identify common themes which emerged from the previous talks.

Constitutional Status and Guarantee

2. It is accepted by all the talks participants that Northern Ireland is de facto a part of the United Kingdom; that there should be no change in that position without the consent of a majority of the people who live here; and that at present a majority of the people who live here do not wish for any change. More discussion may be needed on the way in which the 'constitutional guarantee' is worded.

Nature of the Northern Ireland Community

3. There are, at least, two distinct communal identities within Northern Ireland, both of which need to be given respect and recognition by the other so that they can be appropriately accommodated in the political system, taking account of the wider framework of relationships within these islands.

Local Institutions

4. There is a need for greater direct local political involvement in the business of governing Northern Ireland. This is a large and complex subject which will need to be addressed on several levels and in considerable detail, including in respect of both legislative and executive responsibilities.

5. Any new local political institutions should be workable and likely to prove stable and durable; they should command widespread support and provide an appropriate and fair role for representatives of both sides of the community.

Wider Relationships

6. Northern Ireland's relationships with the EC, with the rest of the United Kingdom and with the Republic of Ireland, have an important bearing on Northern Ireland and its people. Real progress will only be possible through finding ways of giving adequate expression to the totality of the three main relationships mentioned in the statement of 26 March 1991.

7. As Northern Ireland remains a part of the UK, the relationship between Northern Ireland and the UK Government and Parliament continues to be of central importance. The relationship between the UK Government and Parliament and any new institutions will need to be carefully delineated to ensure that the proper interests of the UK Government, in relation, for example, to financial matters, and its obligations under various international instruments are taken fully into account.

8. Ideally, there should be good and harmonious relations within the island of Ireland and practical co-operation between the respective authorities should be developed in their mutual interest. The extent to which new relationships (the parameters of which will be discussed in Strand 2) might help to resolve political tensions and difficulties within the Northern Ireland community needs further consideration.

Constitutional Politics/Defeating Terrorism

9. All the participants in the Talks are united in their opposition to terrorism and in their determination to resolve political problems through constitutional means.

10. Law and order could more effectively be maintained in Northern Ireland if there were a greater basic political consensus which should lead to wider public support for, and confidence in, the security forces.

11. It would be desirable to secure local political input into security policy.

Individual Rights

12. The establishment of machinery to deal with and correct grievances and to entrench individual and community rights, including the possibility of a Bill of Rights, requires further detailed consideration.

Endorsement

13. Any political accommodation affecting Northern Ireland should be subject to endorsement by the people of Northern Ireland.

14. There needs to be further discussion of the arrangements for ensuring that the outcome of the Talks is acceptable to the people. The SDLP have expressed a firm belief in the requirement for a broader endorsement of any agreement. The Unionist parties recognise the strength with which this view is held but have some concerns on the matter. They have, however, undertaken to consider and draft further proposals in an attempt to establish how it might be possible to address this issue.

Commitment

15. All involved acknowledge the need for realism, commitment, hard work and compromise if suitable institutions, within a wider framework of stable relationships, are to be established.