

STRUCTURES SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING: 12 MAY 1992

Government Team

Mr Hanley
Mr Fell
Mr Bell
Mr Hill

Alliance

Mr Morrow
Mr Close
Mr McBride

UDUP

Mr Robinson
Mr Vitty
Mr Wilson

Talks Secretariat

Mr Priestly

Also present

Mr Smyth

SDLP

Mr Haughey
Mr Farren
Mr Durkan

UUP

Mr Cunningham
Mr Empey
Mr Donaldson

The meeting began at 10.30am and concluded at 11.40am.

1. The Government Team opened by welcoming the party delegations and expressing gratitude for the work that had been undertaken by the parties on their proposals. The Government Team expressed concern that the media had obtained accurate information on the Talks proceedings, and reminded the parties of the confidentiality rule that had been agreed by all concerned.
2. The Government Team outlined the business before the Committee. It was proposed that the Committee should commence its consideration of each set of proposals in order to clarify them and explore their implications. In doing so, the Committee should seek to identify the common areas and also the areas of disagreement. It was also proposed that the Committee should take stock at the end of the day on progress made and the way forward.
3. The SDLP delegation agreed that the session should be devoted to exploring the proposals and their implications, and reaffirmed that the Sub-Committee's role should be to report back to the Plenary Session on common areas and areas of disagreement. The DUP delegation said they felt betrayed and let down by the SDLP proposals which they did not believe conformed to the Common Themes and Common Principles documents agreed previously. They also

believed it offended against the spirit of the 26 March statement although they accepted the Secretary of State's ruling on the matter. They were prepared to engage in meaningful discussions in order to narrow and, if possible, bridge the political divide but were concerned that the SDLP did not seem prepared to negotiate. This made the DUP's position difficult: they would not be able to show flexibility in discussions.

4. The Government Team believed that clarification was necessary at this stage, not detailed negotiation. It would, however, be helpful for each delegation to put forward its views on the unacceptability of any proposals. It was important that each party delegation should be aware of the strength of opinion against any of its proposals. By discussion and clarification the areas of agreement and disagreement could be exposed. The Committee agreed to proceed on this basis.

Alliance Party Proposals

5. The Alliance delegation presented its proposals, and was questioned by the other parties. The UUP and DUP delegations noted that Alliance proposed to exclude parties which support the use of violence from participation in the Executive, and asked whether that would also apply to the proposed Committee Structure. The Alliance delegation replied that it would be difficult in current circumstances to exclude supporters of violence from the Committee Structure because of the proportionality rule; however, if legislation were brought forward to that end it would find support from the Alliance Party.

6. The DUP delegation accepted that the Alliance proposals broadly met the agreed Common Principles, but expressed doubts that the proposals would meet the principles of acceptability, durability and stability. They believed that any new structures should be capable of accommodating differences, be widely acceptable, stable and durable, but did not believe the Alliance proposals would achieve this.

7. The SDLP delegation agreed that the Alliance proposals were likely in practice to be unstable and that the proposed system was capable of being paralysed by the unwillingness of parties to work it. The Alliance Party responded that that problem would face any system that was proposed. The SDLP did not believe a traditional cabinet style executive could work in present circumstances. In terms of the practical realities of Northern Ireland today, they could not accept that these arrangements would work. The party had taken part in this type of system in the past and it had not worked.

8. The SDLP delegation asked what would happen if the 70% acceptability test was not met in the Assembly. The Alliance delegation said that in such circumstances it would be necessary to have another attempt at agreement by selecting a new executive. If it did not pass the acceptability test in the Assembly then fresh elections should be called. The SDLP and UUP delegations said that such a system would fail the durability test. There was a need to develop enduring systems and structures which would not be capable of being triggered into crisis by events.

TALKS SECRETARIAT