

I N C O N F I D E N C E

RECORD OF A BILATERAL MEETING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT TEAM
AND THE ALLIANCE PARTY, HELD IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON
WEDNESDAY 22 MAY 1991

Government Team

Secretary of State
Minister of State
PUS
Mr Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice
Mr Close
Mr Neeson
Mrs Bell
Mr Dickson
Mr McBride
Mr Morrow

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
Mr Marsh

Also Present

Mr Pawson

The meeting began at 10.35 am and ended at 11.15 am. It had before it the Joint Unionist position paper of 21 May.

2. The Government Team indicated that the paper had been produced by the Unionists. They could respond to questions on it but could not take responsibility. They hoped that it would now be possible to make progress on the location and standing orders for the second strand; they were also open to any suggestions the Alliance Party cared to make as to the identity of the independent chairman.

3. The Alliance Party reaffirmed their acceptance of the Secretary of State's 14 May document. They saw nothing in the Unionists' 21 May position paper as incongruent with it; they regarded it as a coda to the earlier document. They also took the view that the mechanism by which it had been achieved might be useful as a means of resolving difficulties in the future.

4. In discussion of the paper, the following major points were made:-

Paragraph 2. The Alliance Party considered this to be positive.

Paragraph 3. It was noted that the fact that an independent chairman was being sought for a limited role in the second strand did not set a precedent. He would not have a role in the third strand, but would have to remain available in case it was felt appropriate to reconvene the second strand.

Paragraph 4. The final sentence was important as an indication of how quickly the Unionists thought that certain matters vital to the SDLP could be settled. The precise wording of the terms of reference and standing orders would be of considerable importance to HMG since the independent chairman would become a terrorist target.

Paragraph 6. There was no overlap between this paragraph and Annex A; the presence or otherwise of the independent chairman would define whether a meeting was in the second or third strand. The arrangements outlined in Annex A applied once the third strand had started.

Paragraph 7. This paragraph was designed to deliver the commitment in the 14 May document to a meeting of the second strand in Dublin during June.

5. In further discussion of the paper, the Government Team stated that they regarded it as reflecting acceptance by the Unionists of the substance and the detail of the Secretary of State's 14 May document. The paper had been sent to the SDLP the previous evening; the Government Team could not speak for their attitude but observed that everybody had an effective right of a veto to anything.

6. The Government Team asked the Alliance Party for some indication of the areas which they thought the terms of reference and standing orders for the second strand should cover. The Secretary of State would however reserve responsibility for the actual way in which they were expressed.

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7. The Government Team expressed a preference for Parliament Buildings as the Northern Ireland location for the second strand. It would make sense for practical reasons; the Unionists and the SDLP might have difficulties with the symbolism but these should be on an equal level. The Alliance Party agreed.

8. The Government Team indicated that the following week's sessions would begin at 11.00 am on Tuesday 28 May, continuing on the Wednesday and Thursday.

TALKS SECRETARIAT