

North leaders agree to start talks on June 17th

By Frank Millar, Denis Coghlan and Gerry Moriarty

THE leaders of the four Northern Ireland political parties — the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Alliance Party and the SDLP — yesterday announced their agreement that strand one of the talks about a possible new British-Irish agreement would open in plenary session on June 17th.

The statement was read to journalists by the Ulster Unionist Party MP, the Rev Martin Smyth, who was deputising for the party leader, Mr James Molyneux, who had flown to London on parliamentary business.

The Government however, has pointedly not formally welcomed the decision to hold strand one talks on June 17th. It is understood that the decision to proceed with the talks was taken by the SDLP leader, Mr John Hume, without specific consultations with Dublin on that point, and there was some uncertainty about what exactly had been agreed.

The reason for Dublin's concern and coolness centred on the question of the appointment of a chairman in advance of the formal commencement of the talks, but the Government was said to be "reasonably happy" that the issue would be resolved in advance of June 17th.

Government sources were anxious to make the point that there was no question of Mr Hume's action in agreeing to talks being criticised. The Government had always indicated that it wanted the talks to start, the sources said, and it was the

unionists who had introduced three preconditions — venue, terms of reference and the chairman. Two of those issues had been resolved and the Government was confident that the question of the chairman could be dealt with before June 17th.

The leader of the Labour Party, Mr Spring, welcomed yesterday's development and said he hoped that no further obstacles would be put in the way of the talks, and that all the parties will be given the space and peace to get on with the job without hindrance.

The leader of Fine Gael, Mr Bruton, commented: "This is a truly historic day. Fine Gael is delighted that the road to talks is now underway." The leader of the Workers' Party, Mr De Rossa, welcomed the announcement that the talks were about to begin and remarked that the announcement offered "a gleam of hope after several gloomy weeks." He said he hoped that the remaining organisational details would be quickly cleared

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out of the way so that talks on the substantive issues could begin.

Yesterday's statement from the Northern leaders confirmed that, having met without the Secretary of State, Mr Brooke, the four leaders were agreed that the talks should proceed, and they expressed confidence "that a chairman for strand two will be appointed by that date".

The meeting of the party leaders followed a one and a half hour meeting between Mr Brooke and the SDLP leader, Mr Hume. Mr Brooke told reporters he had asked to see Mr Hume following earlier agreement with the unionists on the final form of the procedural guidelines which will govern strand two.

Mr Brooke explained he had taken the view that they should remove all outstanding questions

on venue and standing orders before addressing the question of a chairman.

The agreed statement does not explicitly say that the commencement of the strand one talks is dependent on resolving the question of chairmanship for strand two, but it clearly is assumed that the matter will be settled before June 17th.

While none of the party leaders was available for comment on the chairman issue last night, other party sources expressed confidence that the unionist leaders have removed the suspicion that the chairmanship would be the occasion for further difficulty and delay.

Mr Brooke said: "The leaders have expressed their confidence (that a chairman would be found) and that confidence on their part is a very, very important element in the process because it indicates their assent to propositions which will be put in front of them by the two governments."

While there is still some confusion, and dispute, about the degree of consultation with the parties implied by the terms of Mr Brooke's May 14th ultimatum, neither government nor any of the parties will want to see the question of the chairmanship cause further disruption of the process.

Under the May 14th terms, it was envisaged that the Dublin session of North-South talks would take place by the end of June. The unionist fear, apparently, was that by deleting reference to the previously agreed format of meetings in London, Northern Ireland and Dublin, there was an attempt to ensure a Dublin encounter by the end of June in any event.

The final difficulty over procedural guidelines was also resolved yesterday with Dublin agreeing to have it stated explicitly in the guidelines the venues for the strand two North/South talks after unionists had raised objections to the venues not being referred to in the guidelines.

Unionists (ICTU) to discuss ways of combating unemployment at which Mr Haughey announced a range of Government measures aimed at reviewing fiscal and industrial policies. The Government promised to promote job creation through contacts with the semi-State commercial sector and with private employers.

Mr Haughey said that he did not wish, in advance of today's meeting, to criticise employers for failing to take on more staff, but said the Government had created favourable conditions for the expansion of employment, even though there were difficulties in the international markets.

No-one wanted to create artificial jobs, the Taoiseach said, and there were some sectoral steps that the Government could take, but the real solution lay elsewhere. Asked if he would press the Central Bank to reduce interest rates, Mr Haughey replied: "We are always pressing for lower rates... we would all welcome a reduction in interest rates and I think we can expect it, but formally it is a matter for the Central Bank."

One of the main undertakings given by the Government to ICTU representatives yesterday involves the establishment of a special review of PRSI and income tax rates as a barrier to job creation. This study will be taken into account in framing the next Budget.

The only Government action which will cost money this year is the promise to take on an extra 2,500 people under the Special

David Owen on UUP list for chair

From Frank Millar, London Editor

A FORMER British Foreign Secretary, Dr David Owen, has been proposed by the Ulster Unionist Party as a possible chairman for strand two of the Brooke talks about a possible new British-Irish agreement.

Dr Owen is one of 14 names given by the Ulster Unionist leader, Mr James Molyneux, to the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr Peter Brooke, on Tuesday night.

Dr Owen apart, the unionist list

is not short of big names, including Baroness Mary Warnock, elevated to the House of Lords following her chairing of the inquiry into human fertilisation; Sir Shridath "Sonny" Ramphal, formerly secretary-general of the Commonwealth; Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien; Sir Philip Foreman, formerly managing director of Shorts in Belfast, and Sir Philip Reeves, a former governor of New Zealand, and currently an Anglican Communion representative at the United Nations.

The unionists have also

forwarded the names of the former UK Australian High Commissioner, Mr Doug McClelland; the Canadian High Commissioner, Mr Donald McDonald and a constitutional lawyer from Canada, Ms Rosalie Abella.

The Ulster Unionists have also drawn heavily from the academic world, suggesting Mr Gordon Beveridge, vice-chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast; Professor Colin Campbell, vice-chancellor of Nottingham University, and Professor S. Shepperson of Edinburgh University.

From the US, the unionist nominee is Professor Jim Laue, Professor in conflict resolution at the George Mason University, Virginia. The final name on Mr Molyneux's list is the Rev James White, a former moderator of the Church of Scotland.

The unionist list will again cause surprise, although it is not clear — notwithstanding last night's developments — to what extent they have managed to engage the interest of either of the two governments.

Some expert observers

contacted last night by *The Irish Times* expressed particular interest in the name of Professor Campbell.

Professor Campbell was appointed chairman of the Northern Ireland Economic Council in 1987, and was professor of jurisprudence at Queen's University from 1974 to 1988. He is a former member of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and, in 1990, was appointed chairman of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

Apart from Lord Carrington,

Algeria's state of siege

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