

RECORD OF A PLENARY MEETING HELD IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
ON WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 1991

<u>Government Team</u>	<u>Alliance Party</u>	<u>UDUP</u>
Secretary of State	Dr Alderdice	Dr Paisley*
Minister of State	Mr Close	Mr Robinson
PUS	Mr Neeson	Rev McCrea
Mr Fell	Mrs Bell	Mr Campbell
Mr Pilling	Mr Dickson	Mr Gibson
Mr Thomas	Mr McBride	Miss Paisley
Mr McNeill	Mr Morrow	Mr Wilson
<u>Talks Secretariat</u>	<u>SDLP</u>	<u>UUP</u>
Mr Hill	Mr Hume	Mr Molyneaux
Mr Rodell	Mr Mallon	Mr Cunningham
	Mr McGrady	Mr Empey
<u>Also present</u>		
Mr Pawson	Mr Farren	Mr Allen
	Mr Feely	Mr Donaldson
	Mr Haughey	Mr McGimpsey
	Mr Maginnis	Mr Wilson

* For part of the meeting

A plenary meeting of Strand One of the Talks took place at Parliament Buildings between 2.15 pm and 3.55 pm on 19 June.

2. The SDLP sought clarification on a number of points in the UUP's opening statement (a copy of which was circulated with the aide memoire of the plenary session held at Parliament Buildings on 18 June). The main matters of discussion were as follows:

- Paragraph 18. The UUP confirmed that they believed that in certain areas Northern Ireland had specific legislative needs and that these would best be met if such legislation were actually made in Northern Ireland.
- Paragraph 24. The UUP explained that they believed that had a Westminster Select Committee on Northern Ireland existed during the period of the Northern Ireland Parliament it would have been able to prevent the sovereign and subordinate parliaments from drifting apart and would have forestalled many of the difficulties that had, in the event, arisen. They did not believe that a Select Committee would have been

able to do anything about perceptions of discrimination and pointed out that nearly twenty years after the Northern Ireland Parliament had been prorogued such perceptions still existed.

- Paragraph 26. The UUP explained that their description of the constitutional affairs of the United Kingdom as being in 'a state of flux' was a reference both to the review of local government that had been initiated by the Secretary of State for the Environment and to the fact that changes were taking place in the relationship between Westminster and the European Community. This was an opportune moment for an experiment in regional government and Northern Ireland was well placed to be the guinea pig but they would not be prepared to accept any arrangements for Northern Ireland that could not equally be applied to other regions of the United Kingdom.

- Paragraph 32. The UUP said that at a time when the Westminster Parliament was surrendering many of its own powers to the European Community it would be an act of negligence on their part if they did not try to ensure that the powers and responsibilities of any regional assembly in Northern Ireland could not also be surrendered by Westminster against that Assembly's will.

- Paragraph 34. The UUP reiterated their belief that the root of Northern Ireland's problem was the ambiguity surrounding its constitutional position. If everyone were to accept the fact that it was the will of the greater number of people in Northern Ireland that it should remain part of the United Kingdom and were to turn their attention to giving the Province good government the ambiguity would be removed. The SDLP asked how the UUP intended to accommodate the aspirations of Irish nationalism. The UUP replied that they were not looking for unfettered majority rule and would in due course be producing detailed models for devolution.

3. The Government Team also sought clarification on a number of points in the UUP's opening statement. The main matters of discussion were:

- Paragraph 4. The UUP said that if English people were to come to respect the fact that the Republic of Ireland was a separate, sovereign state, that would allow a real relationship to develop between the Republic and the United Kingdom and would do much to help relations within Northern Ireland.

- Paragraph 8. The UUP confirmed that the removal of Articles 2 and 3 from the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland was not, for their part, a precondition to discussion. They went on to say that in the event of the Government of the Republic withdrawing this illegal claim they would feel bound to do all they could, in response, to encourage the development of a unique relationship between the two countries.

- Paragraph 11. The Government Team pointed out that when they had introduced a number of reforms to the education system in Northern Ireland in 1989 the UUP had criticised them for bringing the Province into line with England and Wales without regard to its special circumstances. The UUP explained that they were not asking that all social and economic legislation in Northern Ireland should be identical to that in Great Britain but that they should receive the same treatment in the way that the legislation was framed and enacted. They also explained that when they had spoken of economic quarantining they had been referring to the decision not to build a gas pipeline to Northern Ireland.

- Paragraph 12. The UUP said that for the Government to 're-establish' the constitutional framework it would be necessary to return to the situation where no other sovereign state had the right to interfere in the United Kingdom's internal affairs.

- Paragraph 13. Asked what further assurances they would be seeking from the Government on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, the UUP replied that they considered the present qualification, that Northern Ireland's status would not change 'unless and until a majority of the people [there] want it', unnecessary. Such a right of self-determination was already guaranteed by international law.

- Paragraph 21. The UUP emphasised that they were not seeking special treatment for Northern Ireland but merely asking that the people and industries of the Province be entitled to the same benefits as the rest of the United Kingdom.

- Paragraph 22. The UUP reiterated that although they believed that a Westminster Select Committee on Northern Ireland would have been extremely beneficial to the Northern Ireland Parliament they did not believe that it would have had any affect on the perception among the Nationalist community at the time that they suffered from discrimination. The UUP accepted that there had been discrimination, but said that it had resulted from abuses by local government rather than the Northern Ireland Parliament and that it had affected both communities.

- Paragraph 26. The Government Team asked for clarification of the phrase 'distortion of relationships'. The UUP said that while they were prepared to see a regional level authority established in Northern Ireland and to increase the powers exercised by local government they would not be willing to accept any structures that could not equally be applied to other regions of the United Kingdom.

- Paragraph 29. The UUP said that they were in favour of a Bill of Rights that applied to the whole of the United Kingdom but saw little point in one that only applied to Northern Ireland.

- Paragraph 32. The UUP explained that they would be proposing that the powers of any devolved assembly should be safeguarded by an inviolable bilateral treaty between the assembly and the United Kingdom Parliament.
4. When the Government Team had completed their questioning of the UUP a number of points of order were raised.

- The UDUP expressed concern about some of the comments attributed to Sir Ninian Stephen by the media. They pointed out that in the Chairman's Terms of Reference it was laid down that he should not make any public comments without the approval of the heads of all the delegations. They accepted that Sir Ninian might not have been personally at fault but they encouraged the Government Team to bring this point to his attention. The Government Team said that they were hoping to be able to arrange for the party leaders to speak to Sir Ninian themselves.
- The SDLP expressed concern that members of the press were claiming that two delegates had told them that if the meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference scheduled for 16 July went ahead the Talks would collapse. The Government Team said that they were conscious of the fact that less time was available for the Talks than had been hoped and that, as the 16 July drew near, the question of how they might all proceed next would need to be addressed.

TALKS SECRETARIAT

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