IN CONFIDENCE

FROM: D J R HILL Talks Secretariat 30 May 1991

Mr Close

Room 12

SUB-PLENARY MEETING: 29 MAY

1. I attach copies of the record of the sub-plenary meeting which took place on the morning of 29 May between the Government team and representatives of the Alliance Party, the SDLP, the UDUP and the UUP.
2. This will, of course, remain confidential as between the

Government team and the delegations.

1. I hope you agree that this constitutes a fair and accurate

d. If there are any material inaccuracies I should be
to take receipt of suggested amendments.

I J R
'B Ext 2591

ID315/A2/HMH

CONFIDENTIAL



1 N CONFIDENCE

MORNING OFA29^AyLENARY MEETING HELD IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON THE

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sovernment Team | Party Representatives |
| Minister of state Mr Thomas | Mr Close (APNI)Mr Haughey (SDLP) |
| Talks Secretariat- | Mr Robinson (UDUP) Mr Cunningham (UUP) |

Mr D J R Hill Mr Hallett

The Minister of State said that the meeting had been convened to continue the previous day's discussion of the workplan for strand one. He had had discussions with delegation leaders that morning. He had also reflected overnight on the document which had emerged from the previous day's discussion. His view was that the detail set out in paragraph 8 of that document sat uncomfortably with the more general considerations in the rest of the document. He had therefore prepared a new draft to take account of that problem. He proposed to circulate the revised draft as a basis for discussion.

1. Mr Robinson asked whether it was the intention to circulate an aide memoire of the previous day's discussion. The Minister of State confirmed this.
2. Mr Robinson then expressed concern about the timing of meetings, which often did not take place at the time arranged. This was causing some irritation among the Unionist delegation. Firm times for meetings should be fixed and then adhered to. He wished this point to be reflected in the aide memoire of the meeting. The Minister of State replied that it was nobody's intention to delay or postpone meetings without good reason.
3. The Minister of State said that his basic objective in the revised document was to avoid appearing to give disproportionate emphasis to the specific points listed in paragraph 8 at the expense of the more general considerations in paragraphs 6 and 7. The revised workplan was then passed to the party representatives.

IN CONFIDENCE

Id.288/A2

IN CONFIDENCE

-2-

Hauahey said that he had discussed the previous day's ocument with his party leader. Mr Hume's view was that the simpler the document the better, particularly in view of the likelihood of it being leaked. The workplan should be an outline, in the broadest possible terms. After the party presentations, there should be a statement of intention to seek to identify common ground or general principles, on the basis of which there would be consideration of the reguirements for any new arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland. If the specific areas to be explored were listed, there was a risk of pre-judging the outcome of the discussions. It was obvious that the specific matters referred to in the new paragraph 7, would have to be discussed and it was not necessary to state this explicitly. Inclusion of a reference to "constitutional status" would cause particular difficulty for the SDLP.

1. The Minister of State said that the main purpose of the workplan was to record broad agreement on the areas to be addressed in the substantive discussions so as to avoid the risk of subsequent delay. While the workplan should not be a "straight-jacket", it should not be so general as to provide no practical basis for guiding the discussions. It would be difficult to argue that "Northern Ireland's constitutional status and relationships within the Northern Ireland community" would not be at the forefront of the discussions.
2. Mr Cunningham commented that it was essential to "chart the rocks before embarking on the voyage".
3. Mr Robinson expressed unhappiness about the procedures which had been adopted for revising the work plan. The new document had emerged as a result of SDLP views communicated overnight. If the SDLP were unhappy with the previous version, it would have been better for them to say so themselves. The Minister of State stressed that the revised document reflected his own further thoughts, while taking account of the views expressed by Mr Hume and Mr Molyneaux.
4. Mr Close expressed anxiety to make progress towards the stage of

IN CONFIDENCE

Id.288/A2

IN CONFIDENCE

-3-

g.appling with the real issues. The Secretary of State had

ted an outline agenda on 3 May and no-one had indicated

ous problems with it. It was now a matter of fleshing out that list.

1. The M~~inister of state~~ then asked if all the representatives were content to work on the basis of the revised document. Mr Robinson asked why it had been thought necessary to amend paragraph 6. The Minister of State replied that the intention was to provide a more accurate reflection of the discussion on this point. Mr Robinson said that, as revised, the text would provide scope for endless discussion of generalities without getting down to specific problems. He was conscious of the time constraint within which the talks process had to operate. The Minister of State replied that the revised wording was not intended to provide for open-ended discussion but the term "comprehensively aired" in the original draft had seemed to him, on reflection, to be too vague.
2. Mr Cunningham suggested that paragraphs 6 and 7 of the revised document needed to be read together and that the new sentence of paragraph 6 might fit better in paragraph 7.
3. Mr Hauahev commented that he did not see Mr Robinson's difficulty in that it was not clear how the revised draft would make open-ended discussion more likely. Mr Robinson said that it remained his view that the additional sentence could have that effect.
4. Various alternative formulations for paragraphs 6 and 7 were then discussed to see if these positions could be reconciled, in the light of which, the Minister of State proposing that the relevant sentence in paragraph 6 might read: "it is envisaged that in the resulting discussion the general principles and perceived political realities and requirements will be comprehensively aired". This revised formulation appeared to command acceptance.
5. Mr Hauahev then suggested that the first sentence of paragraph 7 might be placed at the end of paragraph 6 with the last sentence of

IN CONFIDENCE

Id.288/A2

paragraph 7 being deleted. T~ ~ „1..\_

Unionist delegation could not accept this

in paragraph 9 were also deleted, i

would then become simply a collection
Minister of State also had difficulty

amendment.

credibility of the process,

**Mr Cunningham**

indicated that the
unless the specific items

with the result that the workplan

of general statements. The
with the SDLP's proposed

It was important to have regard to the public

which could be diminished if there was

no reference to the substantive issues which everybody knew would feature in the talks, namely constitutional status and relationships within Northern Ireland.

1. Mr Haughey said that he did not agree that inclusion of these matters was necessary to credibility. What was needed was an order of business which facilitated dialogue between the parties, which would allow understandings to emerge. There could then be consideration of what arrangements were needed to give expression to those understandings. The Minister of State considered the present document allowed for that approach. It envisaged statements of positions, leading into discussion of general principles and requirements, followed by consideration of the detailed issues.
2. In further discussion of the desirability or otherwise of including a reference to "constitutional status", Mr Haughev maintained the SDLP view that this was not necessary, while the Unionist representatives made clear that they could not agree to its deletion. This discussion concluded with a suggestion from Mr Robinson that the workplan might consist of a statement of general principles, with an addendum, containing a list of specific items for discussion. The Minister of State proposed that he and his officials should draft a revised document along these lines, to be discussed at a reconvened meeting at 2.30. This was agreed.

**TALKS SECRETARIAT**

IN CONFIDENCE

Id.288/A2