

NOTE FROM MEETING WITH SECRETARY OF STATE - 19.12.91.

Venue: Meeting held at Westminster at 7.00pm.

Present: Rt Hon Peter Brooke MP, Dr Brian Mawhinney MP, John Chilcott, Quentin Thomas, note-taker.

The SOS immediately indicated that whilst he had hoped for a meeting of all four leaders together it would not now happen.

He gave an account of developments since we last met, on 26.11.91.

He had met with the **Irish Government**. It was a very useful meeting - constructive and positive. They accepted the idea that after the January AIC there could be a gap until the Election Campaign, or until the end of June. In the event of an election, a meeting would be held during the campaign, and then a gap until the end of June, BUT, they wanted a second meeting after the election with the new government. This was to see how things were going, and to perhaps arrange a longer (but not shorter) post election gap, in order to facilitate negotiations.

He then met with the **Unionists**, (today). He recounted the details of the meeting with the Irish Government. They had two problems. They could not accept a second conference, and one of the leaders had problems about Sir Ninian. The SOS said that he had told them that while the first might be negotiated the second was not and would eclipse the prospect of talks before the election.

He then met the **SDLP**. He recounted to them the state of play, including the Unionist 'demands' that the meetings be at least partly in London, that there be only three in the delegations, and that if Labour were returned that there would not necessarily be a continuation. They left for an internal meeting.

They then returned saying that there were five problems:

1. They wanted 5 at the table and five outside as before.
2. They wanted to meet in Northern Ireland, though accepted Stormont Castle rather than Parliament Buildings.
3. There was some confusion over the order of Strand 2. The SDLP had thought that it was London, Dublin, Belfast, rather than London, Belfast, Dublin.
4. If the election was postponed there would be an unacceptably long break in the AIC.
5. They did not accept that a new government constituted a problem for negotiations.

When he had given the above details to me I indicated that whilst my party's preference was for the arrangements that had previously been negotiated we were not going to make them preconditions, and we were disappointed that others were.

There was a useful exchange, and it was agreed that the four leaders should meet with the Secretary of State in Belfast on 7.1.92, if possible.

The SOS was then going to meet with the Unionist Leaders again.