

RECORD OF A PLENARY SESSION HELD AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS  
ON THE MORNING OF 29 APRIL 1992

<u>Government Team</u>	<u>Alliance Party</u>	<u>UUP</u>
Secretary of State	Dr Alderdice	Mr Molyneaux
Mr Hanley	Mr Close	Mr Cunningham
PUS	Mr Neeson	Rev Smyth
Mr Fell		
Mr Thomas	Mrs Bell	Mr Empey
Mr Bell	Mr Dickson	Mr Allen
Mr Maccabe	Mr Morrow	Mrs Bradford
Mr Hill	Mr McBride	Mr Donaldson (Part)
		Dr McGimpsey (Part)
<u>Talks Secretariat</u>	<u>SDLP</u>	<u>UDUP</u>
Mr Brooker	Mr Hume	Dr Paisley
Mr May	Mr Mallon	Mr Robinson
	Mr McGrady	Rev McCrea
<u>Also Present</u>		
Mr Fittall	Mr Farren	Mr Campbell
Mr Smith	Mrs Rogers	Mr Vitty
	Dr Hendron	Mr Gibson
	Mr Feeley	Mr McClure

The meeting began at 11.35 am and concluded at 12.54 pm.

2. The Government Team welcomed the Party Delegations in a set of opening remarks, text attached at Annex A.

3. The Chairman of the Business Committee reported on the meeting of 9 March, the main findings of which were agreed by the plenary session. Clarification was sought on whether the sub-committees as well as the plenary session might meet in London, and it was agreed that any part of the Strand 1 deliberations might take place in London, if convenient to all concerned. It was agreed that minutes of sub-committee meetings be forwarded to all those attending in future, rather than just party leaders. The Alliance Party delegation, commenting on the arrangements for the gap, suggested that there might come a point at which a substantial extension of the time available for talks was required, if too much business remained to be completed in the time remaining. However they were content to address the issue nearer the time. The UDUP delegation said that they wished to see the maximum degree of flexibility at

this point. The Government Team explained that a gap of 3 months had been agreed with the Irish Government.

4. The UDUP and UUP delegations both said that more work needed to be done to the Government team paper "Realities and Common Themes" to take account of the 28 June party submissions before the paper would be ready for presentation to the plenary session. It was agreed that the paper, when revised following comments made in the Business Committee that afternoon, would be discussed by the Business Committee again on Monday. It was also agreed that all Government Team papers would be dated in future. The Government Team then invited the four parties to make brief presentations.

5. The Alliance Party delegation welcomed the new members of the Government Team. It drew attention to the work that had been conducted in the previous Talks, and expressed its concern that time be used most profitably in the coming weeks. The Alliance Party delegation said that the Talks were about negotiation, and seeking agreement on fair and reasonable systems of governance for Northern Ireland. The Talks should pick up where they had concluded, and move speedily to discussion of the substantive issues of Strand I. They welcomed the paper promised by the Government on political institutions, and agreed it should be discussed next week.

6. The SDLP delegation also welcomed the new members of the Government Team, and agreed with the comments made by the Government Team that an opportunity lay ahead to ensure the democratic process triumphed. The SDLP analysis of the problem began from the fact that problems had existed in Ireland prior to partition, and that the problems were therefore more fundamental than the mere existence of Northern Ireland or the form its institutions took. Two different, but equally legitimate, traditions existed. There should be an acceptance that the rights of Nationalists and Unionists to effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity, their ethos and their way of life had to be addressed in the Talks process. The SDLP delegation said they were willing to provide a paper for discussion on the Unionist identity to that end, but recognised that the Unionist Parties would be the best arbiters

of what that tradition was. The SDLP could also produce a paper on the Nationalist identity. The nature of the problem had changed as the old notion of the "nation-state" had changed in recent years. The crux of the matter was not what was on the table but what was agreed. Nothing could be agreed until everything had been agreed. The Talks should quickly define the problem, make that analysis public and then move on to address institutional matters.

7. The UUP delegation then made its presentation, the text of which is attached to this minute at Annex B. The UDUP delegation then made its presentation, the text of which is attached at Annex C.

8. The Government Team recommended and it was agreed that the Business Committee should meet that afternoon and again on Monday 4 May to discuss the 'Common Themes and Realities' paper and then to consider the handling of the Government Team's paper on Options for New Political Institutions. The plenary session would resume on Tuesday, with a further plenary meeting on Thursday 7 May. The latter would create difficulties for delegates who were Members of Parliament but it was agreed that senior delegates should be empowered to take decisions as and when required in the absence of the leaders. The Government Team was asked to consider ways to facilitate Northern Ireland Members of Parliament making their contribution to the Debate on the Queen's Speech in addition to participating in the Talks. The Government Team, commenting on the volume of work to be conducted, said meetings outside formal talks sessions might be useful to all concerned.

9. The UDUP and SDLP delegations raised the question of confidentiality with the Government Team in the light of comments made by the leader of the Northern Ireland Conservatives. The Government Team gave an assurance that it would remain loyal to the confidentiality agreement without exception. A draft press statement was then agreed.

Talks Secretariat  
30 April 1992

## POLITICAL TALKS - 29 APRIL 1992

Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend to you a very warm welcome.

We meet in order to carry forward political talks which were newly begun on 9 March but interrupted by the General Election.

I am grateful to the leaders of the four constitutional parties represented here today for their commitment to the holding of these talks. More importantly, I believe they also have the gratitude of almost all who live in Northern Ireland. For the hopes of so many people - and not by any means in Northern Ireland alone - rest upon these deliberations.

I judge that those hopes are encouraged now by a new sense of what is possible. That we should achieve all that is possible is now not so much their plea as their demand.

For my part I hold a responsibility which I am very glad to shoulder for helping you in your task, and indeed for joining you in it as a member of the Government, with my colleague Jeremy Hanley. I will do my best. I have before me the example of my friend and colleague Peter Brooke. If it were not for him we should certainly not be here today. My very short time in post has been enough to show me the heartfelt and grateful respect in which he is so widely held. It is fitting that I, too, should record today my own deep admiration for my predecessor, and my determination to carry forward to fulfilment the task with which he persevered so very fruitfully.

But I have also your own example to follow, and from which to gain strength. For none of you can it have been wholly easy to decide to join in the Talks, and for some it must have been much harder than for others. For all it must have been difficult not to be deflected or discouraged by the tribulations which from time to time you have respectively encountered. To resume your forward march on the compass-bearing you accepted has called for political courage,

principle, vision, tolerance and sophistication. I know, and you know, that heavy demands will continue to be made upon those qualities. But these are the qualities of a statesman - and I want you to know that I believe they are present among you in abundance. Indeed, it is the coupling of the political talent to be found in all sectors of the community in Northern Ireland, to the business of government in Northern Ireland, that represents one of the great objectives I believe we must have before us.

I consider the present concentration of virtually all political power in Northern Ireland Ministers to be now an absurdity, as to the circumstances of whose introduction there may still be disagreement, but as to the need for whose step by step correction there should surely now be none. (Nevertheless it will indeed continue if nothing more sensible can be agreed.)

Similarly it would be difficult to dispute the proposition that the totality of relationships North-South and East-West, should be regularised and normalised. These matters will all be for discussion and, I hope, agreement.

It seems sensible at this stage to remind ourselves of what all concerned have agreed shall be the basis for these Talks. It was decided when the new Talks were started on 9 March that their basis would continue to be found, and only to be found, in Mr Brooke's statement to the House of Commons of 26 March 1991. I will cite two sentences:

"The endeavour on which we have all agreed to embark is an ambitious one. We are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands."

Mr Brooke observed that the stated positions of all the parties were well known. He reaffirmed the Government's own position, as I do today, namely "that Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the UK will not change without the consent of a majority of its people."

Equally Mr Brooke made it clear that

"in order to ensure a full airing of the issues it will be open to each of the parties to raise any aspect of these relationships, including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant."

Lastly, I recall Mr Brooke's statement of the declared joint position of the two signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, to which they were and remain committed, namely that:-

"they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement if such an agreement" - that is to say, an agreement as to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned - "can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all the parties concerned"

Those passages, together with all else in the statement of 26 March, remain the definitive foundation for these new talks. Much protracted effort went into the drafting. The statement received the approval and consent of all concerned parties. I believe we would be most unwise to attempt to put a gloss up on any part of that statement, let alone even to consider renegotiating it. After so much time properly spent on the preliminaries, we are now looked to by the public for early and substantive progress.

Accordingly, for example, in relation to the transition from Strand one to Strand two in these discussions I adopt in its entirety and without gloss or explanation the language of my predecessor:

"It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the other two strands should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the three sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other."

To that I shall hold.

I point, however, to the formidable scale of the task which we set ourselves to complete within three months, and I most earnestly urge the adoption of the self-discipline, and especially concentration, that its achievement will require from us all. We must bear in mind that it is agreed that:

"nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole....."

I suggest that maintenance of object should be our first principle.

I think we shall be assisted in all this if we keep before us - and this will be the last example of a lawyer's passion for citing authority - the words again of my predecessor, when he addressed you on 17 June last:

"this will require mutual trust and a strict adherence to our agreement that the talks should be confidential. But openness will clearly be necessary if we are to come to a full understanding of each others' positions. But if there is candour, there will also need to be tolerance; at some stage, we are all likely to hear things which we would rather not hear - but unless we are open about the issues, we will not be able to make progress in overcoming the problems. I hope that none of us will rush into any quick judgements or conclusions and that we will allow the issues to have a proper airing before we start to make firm pronouncements on each others' attitudes".

I turn now to the nature of today's business.

I have already mentioned the imperative imposed by our timetable. With a view to assisting progress I wrote to the Party leaders last Friday, setting out my proposed approach to the actual handling of the Talks. One of the propositions which appears generally acceptable is that we should begin this morning's business by inviting Mr Hanley to report the conclusions of the Business Committee which met on 9 March. Thereafter, I suggest each of the Party leaders could valuably make a short general contribution recalling his Party's broad position as we address Strand One in the substantive stage of our talks. Then, after the plenary session has concluded, the Business Committee might reconvene to help plan our future work programme.

That Committee has already recommended that we discuss a revised version of the Government team's paper 'Realities and Common Themes'. I circulated a first draft to the Party leaders with my letter to them of 24 April. I intend it to provide a take-off point. It is clear from the comments received that further work is necessary, and I accordingly look to the Business Committee to address it [? later today and] next Monday and to ensure that a final text is available for discussion in plenary next Tuesday. That text will advert to themes on which I have dwelt this morning. In particular, it will identify the various political realities which the Government suggests must form the platform for our construction of a comprehensive political accommodation in relation to Northern Ireland. It will summarise the common ground which has emerged from the talks process so far. The objective is, of course, to identify not only the general principles which should inform our future discussions in at least 'Strand One' of the talks, but also the specific issues on which further discussion must now concentrate, if we are to make the speedy progress which the success of our Talks requires.

It will be for the Business Committee, as I have suggested, to consider the agenda for future plenary sessions. The Government Team have, however, prepared a further paper, designed to prompt discussion on the broad principles that should characterise any new political institutions in Northern Ireland. I believe that



## PLENARY SESSION - 29 APRIL 1992

1. The Ulster Unionist Party re-tables the Presentation of last spring, but in doing so, we are very conscious of the considerable movement which has taken place in the meantime. We state in that paper that "the constitutional affairs of the United Kingdom are in a state of flux", and repeat this in our Election Manifesto. This has become more evident than ever and the arguments on the structure on the nation continued through the election campaign, and had considerable impact on it. These arguments will continue to feature in the political agenda for the foreseeable future.

2. We have noted the Prime Minister's adherence, expressed in various speeches throughout the election, to the unity of the Kingdom, and the importance of preserving that unity. We have further noted that in discussing the integrity of the Union, the Prime Minister has been at pains to name all four parts of the Kingdom, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3. Within that Union, there can be, indeed there should be differing systems of administration to suit the differing circumstances which exist. As Douglas Hurd, having warned against "foolish ideas for the mechanical separation of institution", said last October:

"... the governance of the different parts of the kingdom has to be different in style and flavour and we should welcome and act on these differences".

4. Secretaries of State over the last two decades have inflicted various grandiose schemes on this province. In contrast, we are more concerned with the simple and practical return of democratic structures of governance to the Ulster people. Where democracy is denied at a level which the people feel is within their compass, then that democracy atrophies and dies.

5. Power must be returned to the people through democratic institutions, but in doing this, certain principles must be observed.

5.1 The system of governance must be workable.

5.2 It must be durable.

5.3 The experience of the various failed initiatives illustrates the need for the above two principles, but to these we must add a third. It must be compatible with systems elsewhere in the Kingdom, or else all the strains which lead to division will become manifest.

6. This compatibility works in both directions. If some exotic scheme is tried here, it will certainly cause strains in our constitutional position, but in addition the knock-on effect in Scotland, and perhaps Wales, could be considerable. The separatist movements in those parts of the Kingdom are comparable in strength to that here, and such a "solution" here would stimulate in them further efforts to divide the nation.

7. In short, the principle of common sense must be followed, and the wilder flights of fancy resisted. To this end our Party has prepared models of structures of governance for Northern Ireland which meet the above criteria, and we shall be happy to table them when appropriate.

8. Our recent Manifesto, in the section headed "Constitutional Position", sets out our present stance, which is further amplified in the Leader's foreword to that Manifesto. We are ready to participate in the continuing debate on the United Kingdom's internal structures, and also its wider relationship with Europe. Above all we will spare no effort in ensure that this part of the Kingdom is well governed within the Union.