

MEETING AT STONMONT CASTLE ON WEDNESDAY, 29 MAY 1990, FROM 3.30 PM TO 4.40 PM.

TO DISCUSS THE OUTCOME OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL PARTIES AND WITH THE IRISH GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE OBSTACLES TO POLITICAL DIALOGUE.

PRESENT: Peter Brooke, Secretary of State for N I,
Ian Burns, John McConnell and Another (N I Office)
Dr John Alderdice
Gordon Mawhinney } Alliance Party

The Secretary of State spoke for 20 minutes outlining his discussions with the other parties. He said that he wanted to avoid what the mathematicians call the "Zero Game" where the only way one party could win would be at the expense of another.

The Unionists had introduced pre-conditions to any talks and everyone was aware of these pre-conditions. The SDLP had said that there were no pre-conditions to them talking but he was well aware that there were circumstances which they sought to exist at the beginning of any such talks and from that point of view those were pre-conditions. The first of the Unionist conditions related to a replacement for the Anglo Irish Agreement and it was universally accepted that if there was agreement between the parties in Northern Ireland then part of that agreement would be what John Hume called "the totality of relationships". All the parties will have a different view of what that relationship should be and that is a matter for discussion but all agree that there has to be some sort of relationship.

On the second of the Unionist demands that there should be a suspension of the Conference it is agreed that at a future Conference an announcement will be made of a fixed date for the next following meeting of the Conference and the hope will be expressed that the parties will take the opportunity of the fixed time scale provided to enter into discussions about the future government of Northern Ireland. When that date is announced that Conference meeting will take place come what may and even if Mr Collins should find himself in some far flung part of the world then the Conference meeting will be held in that place. This does not mean that the negotiations are time limited. There is no intention to time limit the negotiations and the parties would be quite free to continue the discussions.

The third of the Unionist demands relates to the Secretariat. The senior staff in the Secretariat are career diplomats and are for example currently involved in discussions about extradition. The Secretary of State had asked the Unionist leaders if they wanted those discussions to be disrupted and quite clearly they did not. What could be agreed between the Conference where the starting gun is fired and the next Conference following is that the Secretariat cease to service the Conference. The Secretariat would complete its work on the last Conference and would do no further work on the Conference until it was necessary to prepare the papers for the next Conference. The Secretariat would not be suspended as such but it would cease to function in relation to the work of the Conference.

All of these terms have been agreed in outline with all of the parties and the Secretary of State says that he has taken considerable trouble to ensure that there are no misunderstandings. It will now be necessary to agree the precise details but it will not necessarily mean that all those details are made public at the Conference at which the starting gun is fired.

Between now and the start of that Conference it is proposed that the Civil Servants who will be directly involved will enter into bilateral discussions with each of the parties on what the Secretary of State referred to as "the house-keeping arrangements" and that further bilateral discussions may take place between the Secretary of State and the parties.

At an appropriate time the Secretary of State will chair a plenary session of a meeting between all of the parties and although the detail following that has not been worked out it may well involve further bilateral meetings between himself and each of the parties.

The Secretary of State said that he would anticipate chairing each of the plenary sessions and it did not seem to him that any other acceptable candidate is likely to be nominated.

On an Agenda for any discussions the Secretary of State said that he had not to now been sufficiently optimistic to give much thought to an Agenda and Mr Burns said that in outline it would involve discussions about the arrangements within Northern Ireland, arrangements between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and arrangements between the two Governments.

It is agreed that the Irish Government will be involved in the discussions but that is likely to happen at a later stage if the discussions between the parties in Northern Ireland are successful. There is clearly no point in involving the Irish Government if those discussions do not bear fruit.

It is possible that parties could put to the Civil Servants any matters they so wished.