

INT 65/98

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CONSTITUTIONAL & POLITICAL DIVISION
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cc as attached

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

TALKS MONDAY 12 JANUARY 1997

Summary

A day dominated with the tabling of the Governments' paper on "Propositions on Heads of Agreement" which received a positive welcome with some doubts expressed by Sinn Fein. All agreed that the Propositions paper provided a basis for moving discussions forward and the atmosphere in Castle Building was more harmonious than we had experienced before Christmas.

The morning was taken up with how to present and brief the parties on the Propositions text; followed by the Business Committee (which gave final agreement on dates for the London and Dublin sessions of Strand Two), a formal plenary, and the public launch of the Propositions paper. In the morning the Secretary of State and Mr Murphy had bilaterals with some of the parties to outline the proposals in the Propositions paper. The Irish Government held similar meetings with Sinn Fein and the SDLP.

The Alliance Party were content with the substance of the document. The UDP emphasised that they were keen to see agreement on a 'Heads of Agreement' paper before the end of next week. They stressed that agreement on such a document would create a more comfortable environment for the Talks to proceed in. The PUP were irritated that their knowledge of the development of the Propositions paper was limited to what Mr Trimble had told them. They reiterated their concern that they were being treated like second class citizens and that a twin track approach to the talks was unacceptable. But they were content with the document itself.

The Business Committee held extensive discussions about the procedure for introduction of the paper, finally deciding on a formal plenary for its tabling (which lasted about 15 minutes, starting at 4.15) with substantive discussion tomorrow afternoon at 2.00pm. The Committee also approved the dates originally planned for the London (26-28 January) and Dublin (16 - 18 February) meetings for Strand Two, the UUP having withdrawn its reservations.

The Propositions paper was circulated to parties at lunch time: because of long drawn out (though amicable) disagreements with the Irish over the covering statement, however, it was not made public until 5.00pm. The launch went well: the paper was generally welcomed, though Sinn Féin were suspicious, and have put a series of questions to the Governments about what they fear are retreats from the Frameworks positions.

Detail

Pre-brief and meeting with the Irish

The day began with the arrival from Downing Street of the "Propositions on Heads of Agreement" text. The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy led the HMG delegation and Mr Andrews the Irish Government delegation. Discussion centred on how the text should be tabled within the process. Messrs Teahan and Gallagher reported a rough 20 minutes meeting with Sinn Fein, with Martin McGuinness being particularly difficult on the developments which had been leaked to the press over the weekend. **Mr Teahan** said that the Sinn Fein reaction had been to ask (disbelievingly) whether the Irish Government believed that Mr Trimble would agree with the text.

The **Secretary of State** advised that Mr Trimble was having difficulty with the text and wanted to pull back but her view was that the Governments should proceed. **Mr Andrews** said that the text was simply a road map or a first cut. **The Secretary of State** then suggested that it could be amended and other papers tabled alongside. Both Governments agreed that the Business Committee should be adjourned for 2 hours to provide space for consultation with the parties which had not seen the text and to gather views on how it should be tabled. The Irish agreed to meet Sinn Fein, SDLP and the NIWC with HMG to brief the UDP, PUP, Alliance and Labour.

Mr Teahan recommended that the parties should not be given the option of tabling amendments to the text but instead be encouraged to produce detailed papers for each element as too much focus on the text could lead to discussions becoming bogged down. **Mr Thomas** responded that it was probably unrealistic to believe that it would be possible to close down discussion on the text as it was an important paper and there wouldn't be much to gain by adopting the position suggested by Mr Teahan. **Mr Murphy** suggested that the amendability of the text would come when the participants had discussed the detail and then return to the big picture to gain final agreement. He added that the real problem this morning was the possible trouble which Mr Trimble might have with the UUP Executive meeting.

The Governments agreed that the text should be distributed to the parties towards the end of the Business Committee in order to prevent the

Committee focusing on the paper rather than the important business on its agenda. It was also agreed that the text would be shown to the parties in the bilaterals but not given to them. However that was soon overtaken by events when it emerged that the UDP already had obtained the text via the UUP. **Martha Pope** joined the meeting at that point and emphasised that Senator Mitchell would not want to hold the process up and therefore circulation of the paper shouldn't be delayed pending his arrival.

Meeting with the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) 11.10 am
(Gary McMichael, John White and 4 others)

Mr McMichael asked whether the text was being projected as the agreement. The **Secretary of State** replied no, that there was a need to decide how the paper would be discussed. **Mr McMichael** responded that the paper should perhaps be sliced into the various elements within the Strands although he was not opposed to a general discussion first. He emphasised that the UDP needed agreement on a "Heads of Agreement" before the end of the next working week but it was important that everyone should be got on board and the mistakes which occurred before Christmas not be repeated.

Mr Thomas enquired whether the parties should perhaps discuss elements before working up to the Heads of Agreement. **Mr McMichael** repeated that the parties should aim for Heads of Agreement and the text provided a basis for future discussion. He emphasised again that it was important that the Talks should move to a "Heads of Agreement" as soon as possible. **Mr Thomas** commented that some of the parties might want to get into the detail first. The **Secretary of State** commented that she agreed with Mr McMichael that it was important to get to Heads of Agreement as soon as possible as a first important step. **Mr McMichael** replied that there was a fine balance to be struck between "Heads of Agreement" and the text but the UDP needed to have the Heads of Agreement cleared in order to determine what the component elements of an agreement might be. His short-term objective was to create a comfortable environment within which the Talks could proceed.

Meeting with the Alliance Party 11.25am

Mr Murphy outlined the contents and status of the Propositions paper to the delegation. **Lord Alderdice** stated that they had discussed an earlier draft with the UUP. The Alliance delegation were content with the paper commenting that the proposals were broadly in line with what they had been advocating both before and during the Talks. In addition they were cautious of suggesting any amendments to a document that had been agreed by the Prime Minister and Taoiseach in case it led to more substantive amendments being proposed by other parties. Two changes however were suggested. The first related to the phrase 'all sections of the community' which they felt should replace the phrase 'both sections of the community' and would be particularly important when dealing with

Human Rights issues. Secondly, that a paragraph that acknowledged the victims of violence be included.

Meeting with the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) 11.40 am
(David Ervine, William Smyth, Gusty Spence, Dawn Purvis and
Winston Ray)

The **Secretary of State** began by commenting that she wasn't sure how much David Trimble had briefed the PUP about developments over the weekend. The Prime Minister had talked to Mr Trimble over the past few weeks about producing a paper to get the Talks going as he (the Prime Minister) believed that he was the only man who could get Trimble fully engaged. She wasn't sure whether Mr Trimble was fully signed up to the text but the Government's view was that the text provided the best bet to get the Talks moving forward. The text was not set in stone, amendments could be put down as well as other papers tabled for discussion. HMG and the Irish Government had taken other parties' views into consideration in drafting the text which was therefore wider than the UUP's view. Both Governments at this stage were not looking for an endorsement of the text but simply testing how the parties would bite. The next stage would be to determine how the paper could be taken through the system over the next day or two. **Mr Thomas** added that HMG's view was that Senator Mitchell could take the text through the process either in Plenary session or Strand 2 or in some other format.

Mr Ervine opened for the PUP saying that the Prime Minister had to understand that he was killing the PUP by using Mr Trimble as an emissary because Trimble's approach to the PUP was to drip feed to them what he thought they should be fed and that was often presented in a negative fashion. His strong preference was that the PUP should hear from the Prime Minister directly. The PUP believed that Trimble was trying to set them up by being as negative as possible and if they had been aware of the actual terms of the text they would have been more positive.

Mr Smyth said that his biggest gripe was that Tony Blair, through his meetings with Trimble, was reinforcing their view that the PUP were being treated as second class citizens. They had met Trimble last Monday and he had only given them the Irish version of the draft text. **Ms Purvis** interrupted to ask the Secretary of State to confirm that the Prime Minister's talks with Trimble had been going on since November as stated by Trimble. **The Secretary of State** replied that Mr Trimble was playing politics and she had given the PUP the text as soon as she had received it.

Mr Smyth said that the current process of Talks were doomed. **The Secretary of State** replied that she had emphasised to the Prime Minister that it was important to keep everything within the process and the Prime Minister and Taoiseach had been negotiating in good faith with

Mr Trimble. **Mr Smyth** replied that Mr Trimble had undermined the Secretary of State during her meetings last week when he had run off to Downing Street for his meeting with the Prime Minister. **Mr Ervine** said that he expected Mr Trimble's tactics were to keep the UDP and PUP volatile and have his exit strategy ready to deploy at his own whim. Trimble was fearful of being left with the political parcel in case the music stopped. Trimble had also damaged himself by going into the Maze as in future it would be difficult for him to resist calls to talk to Sinn Fein.

Mr Ervine said that he had been led to understand that the Prime Minister had given Trimble permission to negotiate with the loyalists and if that was correct it was a bad idea because the Prime Minister might be stuck with one route to the PUP, through Trimble, and that would be very dangerous.. **The Secretary of State** replied that she understood that the Prime Minister was working on the assumption that Trimble was working with the loyalist parties and she hoped that in future that route wouldn't be needed because hopefully the Talks process had reached the point where the preliminaries are over and substantive negotiations could begin.

Mr Spence commented that there was now an opportunity to marginalise the extremists outside the process. **Mr Smyth** added again that if the Prime Minister continued his talks with Trimble then the process was finished. **The Secretary of State** responded that that point had been very firmly registered with the Prime Minister and she recognised that the PUP had yet another hurdle to climb over once again. **Mr Smyth** commented that that was the last hurdle his party were prepared to climb over. **The Secretary of State** replied that she understood that but no-one thought that the process would be easy.

Mr Ervine said that an example of the UUP's attitude to the PUP could be found in the PUP's meeting with a UUP delegation last week. During the meeting Ken Maginnis had entered and exited the discussion while completing a crossword puzzle. Surely that must indicate how the UUP regarded its discussions with his party and their importance within the process. In response to a question from **Ms Purvis** the Secretary of State replied that she didn't think that she had seen the paper which Trimble had shown to the PUP last Monday [we understand that this was the Irish version of draft Heads of Agreement].

At this point the text was handed to the PUP which made the following off the cuff remarks. **Mr Ervine** commented that somebody had been reading the PUP manifesto with regard to the proposal for a Council of these Islands. **Mr Spence** said or our minds. **Mr Smyth** said that the PUP preferred the title IONA (islands off the North Atlantic) which would help provide cover to nationalists on the North/South issue because the IONA principle would take account of all the islands including the Isle of Man and the Channel Island and therefore the North/South issue would not be seen as subservient to the regions within the United Kingdom. **Mr Spence**

asked why the text was using the term All-Ireland body instead of island. **Mr Thomas** replied perhaps to remove ambiguity.

Mr Ervine noted that there was no mention of demilitarisation which might cause problems for Gerry Adams. He also commented that it would be difficult for Mr Adams to get off first base with his equality agenda when he couldn't get a meeting with David Trimble. **Mr Spence** commented perhaps the PUP should have a word with Trimble about that. **Ms Purvis** commented that the equality issues should be referred to within the context of both communities. **Mr Thomas** said that he hoped that the PUP would agree that the text provided a basis for discussion and could be tabled in Strand 2 or at Plenary or in some form of ad hoc meeting. **Mr Ervine** said he hoped that it would be offered in a way in which both sides could properly engage in debate.

Mr Smyth asked whether the social, economic and rights issues in the text referred to the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland. **Mr Thomas** responded that the last sentence of the text appeared to cover that. **Mr Ervine** said that while he would like the ROI to be a nice place for people to live he wasn't particularly bothered as he didn't want to live there. **Mr Thomas** said that the essential next step would be to move back to the Strands to put flesh on the various elements before moving to a general agreement. He added that the text was one of the most important pieces of paper which had come forward within the process. **Mr Ervine** said that he didn't feel strongly about how the text should be tabled but perhaps the sensible thing would be for he and his colleagues to go off and discuss how discussions could be taken forward and then come back later and advise HMG of their views

Business Committee

See Mr Thomas's note dated 12 January

Plenary Meeting 16.15

The meeting convened for the sole purpose of tabling the joint paper. Sinn Fein noted that they would be submitting a list of questions to both governments in order to seek clarification on a number of points after the meeting and duly did so. The UUP later issued a formal press release and background note outlining their view of the proposals.

(Signed)

Robert Travis