

We believe that as discussion develops
a ~~new~~ different view may be taken
of the ~~SDLP~~ proposals for new institutions
in NI.

SDLP 1 July 1992

1. The SDLP entered the current Talks fully committed to the terms for these Talks as set out in the 26 March 1991 statement by the Secretary of State.

2. In keeping with these terms the SDLP has engaged in very detailed and protracted discussions on the relationships identified as pertinent to Strand 1, ie relationships within Northern Ireland, with a view, in the first instance, of working "towards the greatest possible degree of common ground on new political institutions for Northern Ireland" as mandated by the plenary meeting of 1 June 1992.

3. The Report produced by the Sub-Committee established to undertake this task contains a "Possible Outline Framework" for new political institutions many proposals of which have been agreed in principle by the four parties; other proposals contain reservations which the SDLP have entered as necessary, in its judgement, at this stage. The extent to which these reservations might be removed, or further proposals made must, in the SDLP's view, await proposals in later stages of the Talks. Therefore, no purpose would be served at this stage by trying to revisit issues already discussed in Strand 1.

4. The terms for the Talks do not require that full agreement be reached on issues in any Strand before progress to other Strands can be made. To suggest otherwise, or to indicate that Strands 2 and 3 are sequential and consequential to Strand 1 is to interpret the 26 March 1991 statement in a manner which the SDLP finds unacceptable. To accept such interpretations would amount to accepting new conditions for the Talks and this would have the effect of calling into the question all of the terms under which the Talks have been taking place.

5. The terms for the Talks furthermore indicate that "it is accepted by all those involved that, so as to make full use of the interval between meetings of the Conference to achieve an overall agreement satisfactory to all, it will be necessary to have launched all three sets of discussions within weeks of each other". Nine weeks have now elapsed since the current round of Talks commenced, seven of which have been devoted to discussing Strand 1 issues.

6. The progress made to date in Strand 1 discussions, taken together with the preliminary Strand 2 and 3 meetings, suggest to the SDLP that there can no longer be any excuse for not announcing the launch of Strand 2 for the purposes of substantial discussions. The responsibility for deciding on the launch of the other Strands lies with the Secretary of State. It is the view of the SDLP that this is a responsibility which he must now exercise if the future of the Talks is not to be jeopardised.

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