

29/5/92

TIME: 18.15 29 MAY 1992

1. The issues considered by the sub-Committee were identified in papers submitted by each party on the morning of 27 May. They arose from:

- (a) the perception that the SDLP had refused to contemplate any form of "majority rule";
- (b) the firm belief of the Unionist and Alliance parties that the manner in which the SDLP proposals sought to give effect to their concerns on the "identity" issue ~~(that is, that the arrangements for governing Northern Ireland should give expression to the Irish identity of the nationalist community)~~ would not secure the endorsement of the Unionist community; and
- (c) the perception of the SDLP that they were being required to abandon their proposals before the Talks process could proceed.

2. On the first point

- the SDLP delegation reaffirmed their Party's opposition to "majority rule", particularly insofar as that carried the connotation that all decisions would be taken by the simple majority with no meaningful role given to representatives of the Nationalist community
- but confirmed that because of the particular nature of the problem the maximum cross-forum agreement is desirable for decision-taking but is essential in respect of contentious matters. In relation to routine non-contentious matters decisions might normally be taken by simple majority. A means of categorising areas of decision-making in respect of the degree of consensus required will need further discussion.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

3. On the second point, the SDLP delegation reasserted, and it was generally agreed, that the outcome of the Talks process, taken as a whole, should give effective expression to the identity of both main parts of the community in Northern Ireland. They explained how they believed that their proposals accommodated this requirement but confirmed that they remained fully open to considering other proposals.

4. The Unionists Parties reasserted that the SDLP's proposals would be treated in exactly the same way as those of all other Parties.

5. As a means of enabling substantive exchanges in Strand I to continue the sub-Committee suggests that plenary should

- authorise the sub-Committee, building on the Common Themes and Common Principles documents and the provisional report of the Structures sub-Committee (dated 13 May), to work towards the greatest possible degree of common ground on new political institutions for Northern Ireland, including by addressing the issues listed in paragraph 5 of that report, recognising that each party may wish to reserve its position on particular points
- acknowledge that in order to secure a generally acceptable outcome from the Talks process it will be necessary to ensure that the outcome, taken as a whole, gives expression to the identities of both main parts of the Northern Ireland community and would attract the widest possible degree of allegiance and support and
- further acknowledge that the course of discussions during Strands II and III may make it appropriate in the view of one party or another to propose that relevant matters in Strand I should be reviewed.