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RECORD OF A PLENARY SESSION AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON 18 JUNE 1991

<u>Government Team</u>	<u>APNI</u>	<u>SDLP</u>
Secretary of State Minister of State PUS	Dr Alderdice Mr Close Mr Neeson	Mr Hume Mr Mallon Mr McGrady
Mr Fell Mr Pilling Mr Thomas Mr McNeill	Mrs Bell Mr Jones Mr McBride Mr Dickson	Dr Hendron Mr Haughey Mrs Rogers Mr Farren
<u>Talks Secretariat</u>	<u>UUP</u>	<u>DUP</u>
Mr D J R Hill Mr Hallett	Mr Molyneaux Mr Nicholson Mr Cunningham	Dr Paisley Mr McCrea Mr Robinson
<u>Others present</u>	Mr Trimble Mr Maginnis Mr Smyth Mr Empey	Mr Dodds Mr Campbell Mr Vitty Mr Wilson
Mr Pawson		

1. The meeting began at 10.37am.
2. Before the substantive business began, the SDLP sought confirmation of the agreement that the party statements were not to be made public at this stage. The Government Team confirmed that this was the case, adding that if selected extracts from the statements appeared in the media, the party concerned would have the right to make the full text public.
3. The Government team then invited questions concerning the SDLP statement.
4. On paragraph 5, the DUP sought clarification of the scope of the term "Anglo-Irish process". The SDLP replied that this reflected their view that the problem had to be addressed in the context of the three relationships, since previous attempts at a purely internal Northern Ireland approach had not succeeded. The DUP asked whether this meant that there could be no internal Northern Ireland solution. The SDLP replied that, while the problem had to be addressed in the wider context, this did not mean that there could not be internal Northern Ireland arrangements.

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5. On paragraph 6 and 7, the DUP sought clarification of the terms "mutual respect" and "mutual expression". The SDLP replied that, prior to the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, they considered that no expression had been given to the nationalist identity.

6. On paragraph 7 and 8, the DUP asked whether it was the case that Southern nationalists saw the people of Northern Ireland as part of a wider Irish nation. The SDLP replied that while the main Republic of Ireland parties favoured unity, the simplistic nationalist approach of earlier years had been re-examined, and the emphasis now was on unity of people rather than territorial unity, and it was recognised that unity could only be achieved by agreement.

7. The DUP said that the first sentence of paragraph 10 was a very strong statement and asked whether it really was the SDLP position that no recognition had been given to the Irish identity before 1985. The Unionists had ceased to hold power in 1972. Were the SDLP saying that the Nationalist identity had been denied after 1972? The SDLP replied that after 1972, the UK Government had attempted to secure the agreement of all the Northern Ireland parties to internal Northern Ireland solutions. When that had failed, they had examined alternative approaches requiring the co-operation of the Irish Government. The UK Government had attempted to give recognition to the Irish dimension as an essential part of the process but had not succeeded in doing so until 1985.

8. The DUP did not accept that the UK Government had in fact attempted to involve all Northern Ireland parties in the search for solutions. A major section of the Unionist community had, for example, been excluded deliberately from Sunningdale. The Government team intervened to say that it was not appropriate to address points regarding the British Government to the SDLP. The DUP nevertheless considered it appropriate to clarify the reference to Sunningdale since paragraph 10 of the SDLP document referred to the legitimacy and validity of the Irish identity being "first signposted at Sunningdale". The SDLP replied that recognition of the Irish dimension at Sunningdale was a fact whether or not one agreed with the outcome.

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9. The DUP expressed concern about the absence of a reference in paragraph 16 to the key relationship between Northern Ireland the rest of the United Kingdom. The SDLP replied that this was covered by the reference to "Britain and Ireland". The DUP commented that the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain was entirely different from that between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, and stressed the need for a clear recognition of Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom.

10. On paragraph 22 the DUP asked whether the SDLP accepted that the Unionists had positive reasons for wishing to preserve the union. The SDLP said that they accepted that the Unionist position was as they described it themselves. Unionists had however traditionally taken the view that the only way of protecting their identity was by living apart from the rest of the people of Ireland and holding all the power within their territory. The SDLP aim was to remove that distrust to enable the two communities to grow together. The DUP disputed the suggestion that Unionists had isolated themselves, pointing to the readiness of the Government of Northern Ireland to appoint representatives to the Council of Ireland envisaged under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920.

11. The DUP questioned the reference in paragraph 25 to the Anglo-Irish Agreement as "a permanent mechanism". Did this mean the SDLP were not prepared to contemplate a replacement of the Agreement? The SDLP replied that the reference was intended to indicate that the present Agreement would remain unless and until it was transcended by alternative arrangements.

12. The DUP challenged the suggestion in paragraph 26 that the Government of the Republic had a "right" of involvement in the affairs of Northern Ireland and whether it was appropriate that one part of the Northern Ireland community should look to another country, rather than its own Government, to protect its interests. The SDLP replied that this recognised the fact that there were two identities in Northern Ireland, one of which transcended the boundaries of Northern Ireland. The minority community had seen the only way of protecting its identity as giving the Irish Government a role in Northern Ireland through the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

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13. The DUP, in the light of paragraph 29 of the SDLP document, asked for the SDLP's definition of the status of Northern Ireland. The SDLP replied that it was evident that Northern Ireland was at present part of the United Kingdom, but it was equally clear that it was different from other parts of the United Kingdom and had been from its inception.

14. With regard to paragraph 30, and the reference to the possibility of a united Ireland, the DUP asked whether it could also be envisaged that the people of Northern Ireland had a right to a different status. The SDLP replied that this would be possible if agreement among the people of Northern Ireland could be achieved. In a divided community, it was important that both sections of that community were agreed on any solution.

15. On paragraph 32, the DUP asked whether the reference to "exclusion" also covered the Unionist exclusion from the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The SDLP replied that the reference was intended to refer to the exclusion of the Nationalist community from the institutions of Government under Stormont. The DUP commented that they were similarly excluded under the present arrangements, while the Republic of Ireland Government had a say.

16. With regard to the reference in paragraph 34 to Franco-German reconciliation, the DUP pointed out that reconciliation would not have been achieved if Germany were still claiming a part of French territory. The SDLP replied that the important consideration was that if France and Germany could be reconciled despite their history of conflict, it should be possible to achieve reconciliation within Northern Ireland. The DUP commented that the reconciliation had followed a decisive military victory.

17. On paragraph 44, the DUP questioned the suggestion that the security forces had contributed to the problem. The SDLP replied that there undoubtedly had been occasions when actions by the security forces had contributed to the problem.

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18. On paragraph 45, the DUP asked what changes the SDLP would be seeking in the RUC and whether they would encourage Catholics to join the force. The SDLP replied that these matters would be addressed at the appropriate point on the agenda.

19. At the conclusion of the DUP points, the Government team proposed an adjournment, after which questions from the Alliance Party and the UUP would be considered. This was agreed. The meeting adjourned at 11.35am.