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25 April 95 (27)

Note

Present status of SDLP Bilaterals with (a) UUP and DUP;
(b) Sinn Fein and (c) UDP and PUP

SDLP-DUP

1. The only SDLP-DUP meeting to date was held on 12 April. No further meetings have yet been arranged.
2. The SDLP was represented by John Hume; Sean Farren; Eddie McGrady and Joe Hendron. The DUP delegation included Paisley; Peter Robinson; Rev. William McCrea and Nigel Dodds.
3. Sean Farren in a recent discussion made the following comments on the meeting:
 - discussions were courteous but not very positive;
 - the DUP opened by asking SDLP support for a Constitutional Convention involving the list system;
 - Robinson said this would assist the DUP to engage in talks with Sinn Fein since all parties in the Convention would have an explicit and fresh mandate to participate in dialogue;
 - Hume rejected this proposal as contrary to the three strand process and emphasised the SDLP view that the Framework Document represents an important basis for future discussions;
 - Paisley said that if the Framework Document is "explicitly" on the table in future talks, the DUP will not be able to participate;
 - the DUP delegation gave a clear indication that they will not be able to enter future talks if Sinn Fein

are present;

- Robinson said, however, that if a constitutional Convention were to be elected, all parties would have a right to participate. He went on to say that 50 Convention members could be elected on a list system with the North as a single constituency. This would avoid elected members having any "constituency" representation role in addition to a negotiation mandate;
- Farren concluded by describing the meeting as low key but essentially negative.

SDLP-UUP

4. This meeting was also held on 12 April with the UUP represented by Molyneaux; Jim Nicholson; Reg Empey and Roy Beggs. The SDLP delegation was the same as for the DUP meeting.
5. Farren made the following observations on the meeting:
 - the discussion was much more diffuse than at the DUP meeting and with hardly any discussion on substantive political issues;
 - there was a lengthy discussion on the Washington Conference and NI companies likely to participate;
 - both sides expressed concern at the dilution of the role of Government Departments through the creation of "next step agencies". McGrady, who feels especially strongly on this, remarked that any future devolved administration may find that there is nothing left to administer;

- Molyneaux said that the "Blueprint for Stability" remains the basic UUP policy position for future talks. Hume in response said that the SDLP believes the Framework Document provides the most worthwhile basis for future dialogue;
- it was agreed that the two delegations will meet again on 1 May for more substantive discussions.

SDLP-Sinn Fein

6. Three meetings have now taken place between the SDLP and Sinn Fein. The SDLP has been represented by Mark Durkan; Alex Attwood; John Hendron and Brid Rogers. Sinn Fein has been represented by Tom Hartley; Mitchell McLaughlin; Ann Speed and Conor Murphy.
7. Mark Durkan recently made the following comments on the discussions:
 - Sinn Fein appear increasingly determined to "force the pace" on the agenda;
 - the most recent meeting centered on the Framework Document;
 - Durkan at this meeting outlined the background to the 1992 Talks (Strands One and Two) and stressed that a sine qua non for the SDLP in any future agreement must be the establishment of strong North-South structures;
 - Mitchell McLaughlin said Sinn Fein is encouraged by evidence of an increasing all-Ireland perspective on the part of both Governments (Durkan took this as meant mainly in the context of the Framework Document);

- McLaughlin said that the debate on the Framework Document has only started and that there must be a range of analyses made before Sinn Fein can come to a clear conclusion;
 - [Durkan said that the SDLP took this as a signal not to become "too comfortable" with the JFD. Durkan told Sinn Fein in response that the SDLP believes the Document provides an essential basis for future dialogue];
 - Hartley on several occasions said that "we are constantly negotiating with our base" which Durkan took to mean that the Sinn Fein leadership has limited freedom of manoeuvre;
 - McLaughlin proposed that both parties should strengthen cooperation at local Council level but added that Sinn Fein now accepts the SDLP position (from previous discussions) that there is at present no basis for a "coordinated approach". McLaughlin said that Sinn Fein would like to see a "trouble shooting mechanism" established between the two parties as well as the development of close cooperation, in a structured way, at Council level.
8. Durkan, in an assessment of the discussions, said he feels Sinn Fein is deliberately adopting the tactic of reading precise commitments into vague undertakings. For example, the SDLP and Sinn Fein Groups in Belfast City Council recently met for discussions and Sinn Fein at this meeting argued that agreement had already been reached between the two parties on the need for an explicit working arrangement.
9. Alex Attwood, SDLP leader on Belfast City Council, said today that the SDLP Councillors at this meeting told Sinn

Fein that the main requirement on the Council is an understanding to bridge the Unionist and Nationalist divide and that the SDLP will continue to see all parties on that basis. Hartley described himself as "very disturbed" at this and said that the two parties had already agreed at higher level on the need for "a very tight working relationship". Alex Maskey said explicitly that Sinn Fein wants a "pan Nationalist" working arrangement. Alisdair McDonnell replied that the SDLP is not into "pan-Nationalism". Hartley retreated somewhat at this and said Sinn Fein accepts that there could be "levels of cooperation". Attwood said today that Hartley has since told him that Sinn Fein was not happy with the meeting and was "disappointed" at the SDLP position.

10. Attwood said today that the SDLP group on Belfast City Council agreed at an internal party meeting on Sunday to now support, for the first time, Sinn Fein candidates as Chairmen of Council Committees.
11. In an effort to prevent the re-election in June of Hughie Smyth as Lord Mayor, Fred Cobain of the UUP last week proposed to Attwood an arrangement whereby the UUP would support (for the first time) an SDLP candidate for Deputy Mayor as well as election of an SDLP nominee as Chairman of one of the main Council Committees.
12. The SDLP, without consultation with Sinn Fein, has now decided to reject this offer on the basis that it does not address the requirement for equality of partnership and that any arrangement must cover the post of Lord Mayor. The SDLP will, in the absence of any agreement with the UUP, support the re-election of Smyth. Sinn Fein, as of now, seems certain to abstain in such a scenario.

13. Durkan said today that he believes, on the basis of the discussions to date, that Sinn Fein is especially keen to develop electoral arrangements with the SDLP wherever possible. Durkan said he expects Sinn Fein will shortly return to the issue of an electoral arrangement for the next Westminster elections but that the SDLP will continue to "kick to touch".

14. There is already considerable local SDLP irritation in West Tyrone at recent media reports that Martin McGuinness will be given a free run in the Constituency in exchange for Sinn Fein standing down in Mid-Ulster. [Joe Byrne, the most likely SDLP candidate in West Tyrone, said in a recent discussion that the party locally will do everything possible to prevent any arrangement being agreed with Sinn Fein. Byrne added that he does not believe sufficient SDLP voters would back McGuinness to assure victory, even if an SDLP Sinn Fein pact were agreed].

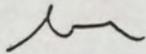
15. The next SDLP-Sinn Fein bilateral is scheduled for later this week. Durkan expects that Sinn Fein will ask SDLP intentions regarding the forthcoming North Down by-election. The SDLP, as of now, remains divided on whether to run a candidate and no decision seems likely to be taken until early May.

SDLP-UDP/PUP

16. Three meetings have been held to date between the SDLP and the UDP/PUP. The SDLP has been represented by Farren and Attwood and the UDP/PUP by McMichael, Hutchinson and Ervine.

17. Attwood in a recent discussion made the following points:
 - exchanges of views have so far been general and tentative;

- McMichael has stressed that a major purpose of the dialogue is to ascertain what the SDLP can do to ensure that the Loyalist parties are not excluded from future talks. [Attwood commented that there is a "deep vulnerability" on this that keeps surfacing in the discussions];
- in Attwood's view, the UDP/PUP have no thought-out positions on possible outcome from future talks and "keep circling around the edges on all the important themes";
- a deep hostility and distrust of the DUP is a common theme with both the UDP and PUP;
- to date, the discussions have ranged from general analysis of the Framework Document to the position of the UDA in South Belfast;
- in summary, Attwood said that the discussions so far have essentially been "getting to know you" sessions. He expects that there will be two more informal meetings (one next week) and that more structured meetings involving delegations from each side will begin over the summer;
- Attwood concluded that the main value of the meetings is that they are taking place and that they provide a useful mechanism to ease a palpable sense of political isolation and apprehension on the part of the Loyalist parties.


G. Corr

25 April, 1995

c. c. Secretary O hUiginn
Mr. Donoghue

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