



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Sec Gallagher.

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Telephone Call from Mark Durkan

1. Mark Durkan spoke to me on the telephone from Derry about the party negotiations on Departmental Structures in Northern Ireland. He said that the parties had met on the issue in round table format on Monday. The meeting was initially chaired by David Trimble, who had to leave after a short time, and Seamus Mallon took the chair for the rest of the morning session. Trimble returned for a short afternoon meeting.
2. Durkan said that at the beginning Trimble rambled on about the various party contributions and seemed reluctant to let the session get into any detailed discussion. However, after Mallon took the chair, the meeting became much more focused.

Departmental Numbers

3. The UUP (Empey) started out by reiterating the UUP policy line that they opposed creating 10 Departments, stating that seven would be adequate. All the other parties present (the DUP, UKUP and the United Unionists stayed away) wanted ten. Empey said that the UUP opposition was based on the cost factor and the need to ensure that administrative costs did not spiral. After some discussion on the issue, Empey seemed to indicate that the UUP would be open to a larger number of Departments, provided it could be shown that over a number of years the changes would be cost neutral.
4. Durkan feels that a scheme can be worked out to show that there would be no major increase in administrative costs by moving to a ten Department structure.

Individual Departments

5. When Seamus Mallon took over the chair, he decided that the meeting should identify "core" Departments without any add ons. He instanced Agriculture which will have to

be one of the new Departments, regardless of whether it had "extras" such as rural development or sustainable development. Other core areas were identified, such as Environment and Health. Considerable progress was made on these lines but the most difficult area turned out to be the Education, Training and Employment (human resources) area. It was agreed that a smaller Working Group would look into this issue. The Working Group met separately on Monday afternoon.

Working Group

6. The Working Group consisted of Ken Robinson UUP; Mark Durkan SDLP; Bairbre de Brún SF; David Forde Alliance and Billy Hutchinson PUP. Also in attendance were officials Ian Walters of Training and Employment Agency; Gerry Loughran of Department of Economic Development and Nigel Hamilton of the Department of Education.
7. Durkan said there was no party political point scoring at the meeting and the Group worked very well together. The SDLP (Durkan) want to split the present functions of the Department of Education into two new Departments, one specialising at primary and secondary levels and a new Department of Employment and Applied Learning. The latter Department would look after all school leavers, regardless of whether they go into a job, higher education or training.
8. Durkan got support from Billy Hutchinson who is concerned about low achievement levels in Controlled (Protestant) primary and secondary schools in North Belfast. Alliance and UUP were reasonably receptive. The main opposition came from Bairbre de Brún who defended the present remit of the Department of Education. Durkan feels that Bairbre de Brún already regards herself as the Shadow Minister for Education. When the discussion was going against her, Bairbre said that she feared for the future of the humanities at third level with a technology-orientated Department.
9. The officials present agreed to prepare a position paper on the discussions which will be presented to the Working Group when it resumes next week. Durkan said that there will

be a further round table plenary discussion on Friday afternoon, chaired by Trimble.

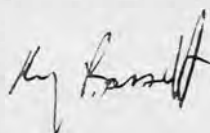
Overall Assessment

10. Durkan expressed satisfaction with the work to date, particularly the discussions in the Working Group. However, he is fearful that once a written report is produced the goodwill may disappear and there may be some backtracking.

11. In the longer term, Durkan believes that the UUP want to reach a settlement in this area. He feels that, as the Oslo Nobel ceremony comes closer, Trimble will want to show some movement and will sign up to ten Departments. Durkan also added that the display of international support in Oslo will be helpful to Trimble in confronting his own internal party problems.

12. On the wider issues, Durkan said that it was dawning on Trimble that delay in implementing the Agreement does not, in fact, strengthen his position but rather has the contrary effect.

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Anglo-Irish Division

4 November 1998