



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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PST: PSS: Ministers Owen,
 de Rossa & Taylor; Attorney
 General; Minister of State
 Coveney; Messrs. Teahon,
 Donlon & Dalton; Amb.
 London and Washington; Joint
 Secretary: Counsellors A-I.

Multi-Party Talks

Daily Report - 18 December 1996

1. In summary:

- A one-hour Plenary agreed to resume the talks process on 13 January for meetings among participants in preparation for the next Plenary on 27 January.
- 2. The Government delegation today was led by Minister Coveney. We had a meeting with the Chairmen and the British Government prior to the Plenary.
- 3. Opening the Plenary at 11 am, Senator Mitchell proposed a schedule for January which would involve a resumption of the talks process on 13 January, with meetings between participants recommencing on that day, and the Plenary reconvening on 27 January. Noting that there had been no agreement to date on decommissioning, he made clear that he and his colleagues remained ready to explore the scope for a proposal of their own under rule 30 (a). They had been encouraged by the progress made in the recent trilateral contacts, in which, they understood, some common ground had been identified. While they had not yet identified a solution which might secure agreement, they would wish to reflect on what they had heard in their consultations and see whether they could put together a proposal which could secure agreement.
- 4. There followed a round of responses from the participants. Michael Ancratt and Minister Coveney supported the Chairman's proposal, while regretting that it had not been possible to make more progress hitherto. Alliance, Labour, the NIWC, the Loyalist parties and the SDLP took a similar position and made clear that they would be available for meetings from 13 January onwards. Labour commented that it was up to the two or three major parties to take the decisions required for an agreement on decommissioning. Expressing disappointment at the lack of progress during the "school term" just ended, the NIWC took the UKUP to task for conduct more associated with the school-yard than with the classroom.
- 5. The DUP made a lengthy intervention which combined invective against the other parties with a degree of festive cheer and exuberance. Rejecting criticism relating to an initiative (the trilateral contacts) in which his party had not been involved and about which he was in the dark, Paisley insisted that he would not compromise on decommissioning, which could not be "some mutual admiration society between terrorists on both sides of the divide". Picking up the emphasis laid by others on the need for reflection over Christmas, he suggested that the Chairman should convene an informal meeting, following the resumption, to enable participants to offer the fruits of their "reflections" prior to going into the envisaged bilaterals. He otherwise

supported the Chairman's proposal.

6. The UKUP (McCartney) sniped at the other participants, noting in particular a contrast between the refusal of the trilateral participants to circulate their document and the discussion of this document which had taken place in a debate on RTE's Prime Time last night.
7. Supporting the Chairman's proposal, the UUP (Taylor) objected to SDLP criticism of them on the RTE programme. The DUP and the UKUP reacted with glee when Taylor subsequently tripped himself up by complaining about a "breach of confidentiality" in relation to the document, for which (as the SDLP pointed out) his colleague Ken Maginnis had been responsible. Taylor confessed, to general amusement, that he had been so upset at the breach of confidentiality that he had missed who had been responsible for it.
8. Summing up, the Chairman noted a clear consensus in favour of his proposal. On the point raised by Paisley, he said that the Chairman would consider on 13 January whether it was desirable to convene an informal meeting as proposed by the DUP and would canvass participants at that time as to whether or not they saw merit in this.
9. The Chairman subsequently issued the attached press statement.



David Donoghue
18 December 1996

NEG 83/96

18 December 1996

STATEMENT BY THE INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN

The talks process will resume on January 13. Meetings involving participants will recommence on that day.

The full Plenary will reconvene on January 27. We hope that between January 13 and 27, all of the parties will participate in such meetings, among themselves and with us.

In the light of recent indications of some convergence on certain issues, we will explore whether there is a basis for exercising the authority conferred on us by the rules of procedure, in circumstances where there is no unanimity on an issue, to put forward a solution we believe will secure agreement on the handling of decommissioning.

We note that the participants in the negotiations have made a significant commitment of time and effort to the negotiations over the past six months and have made serious efforts to address and resolve the many substantial obstacles to agreement.

We wish it were possible to report more rapid and more meaningful progress. But although the issues are difficult and progress is slow, we remain convinced that this process offers the best - indeed the only - way forward. We also remain convinced that with renewed determination and effort by all of the participants, substantial progress can be made on the issue of decommissioning and also on the ultimate issue of an agreed settlement.

In this season of hope, we join the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland in praying that the new year will bring the lasting peace and reconciliation we all so fervently want. We are committed to do all we can to help achieve that objective.