

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

BRIEFING NOTES ON THE TALKS AND THE FORUM

While characterised by a multiplicity of meetings, progress within both the Talks and the Forum remain depressingly slow.

DIARY OF EVENTS

Monday 10th June

Negotiations

Our delegates and support team arrived at the Talks clutching their carefully worked out opening statement, and a letter for Sinn Fein which expresses the Coalition view that all elected representatives should be admitted to the Talks. This letter was faxed to Sinn Fein as it was impossible to hand deliver it due to the melee of journalists.

Sinn Fein representatives were duly locked out of the Talks due to the Cease Fire not being in place.

John Major and John Bruton made their opening statements to the Talks Plenary Session. The process then halted as the Ulster Unionist Party, the U.K. Unionist Party and the DUP refused to accept the agenda and procedures as set out by the government, and also had problems with having Senator George Mitchell as the Chair. The Talks were adjourned. Along with Monica and Pearl, Bronagh, May and Annie were in Attendance.

Tuesday 11th June

Negotiations

There were informal meetings with a range of political parties all day. It became increasingly clear that the main aim was to enable the Ulster Unionist Party and others if they could, to accept George Mitchell, and to leave him with sufficient powers to fill the role of Chairperson. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition representatives had a meeting with Senator George Mitchell to assure him of our support.

1.30 A.M. Patrick Mayhew called the Talks Plenary Session into order. Senator Mitchell was introduced as Chairperson. Robert McCartney stormed out; Cedric Wilson tried to take Senator Mitchell's Chair; and Reverend Ian Paisley shouted "Shame! Shame! Shame!" His attempt at a speech was drowned out by other delegates applauding Mitchell. The PUP and the UDP were steadfast in their desire to see Mitchell in the Chair.

By this stage all the parties with the exception of the DUP and the U.K Unionists, who had left the meeting committed themselves to the Mitchell Principles on and democracy and non-violence. The session was adjourned. Along with Monica and Pearl, Kate, Annie and Avila were in attendance.

Wednesday 12th June

Negotiations

The Plenary met again to consider the proposed agenda and procedures. No agreement could be reached. It was agreed that each party should submit a written

paper to Mitchell by 3:00PM, Friday, and that his staff would then circulate each party's paper to all the others by 5:00PM, Friday and that these would be discussed in Committee the following week. Paisley and McCartney attended the session briefly to take the Mitchell Principles, they then went out to the media to denounce Trimble as having sold out on the Unionist Family . Trimble, for his part, claimed that he had arranged to curtail Mitchell's powers.

Friday 14th June

Negotiations

Bronagh delivered a paper on rules and procedures from the Women's Coalition to Senator Mitchell, and received submissions from the other parties.

Forum

2.00 p.m. Monica, Pearl and Avila attended the Forum at the Interpoint , Belfast. The Coalition was given a shoe box of an office. Again, procedural unrangling and disagreement over in the Chair broke out; John Gorman of the UUP had been temporarily appointed. A Rules Committee was established to work out procedures for the Forum, and it was agreed to accept John Gorman as an Interim Chair. It was accepted that Parties should put forward the names of independent chairs for decision on the long-term chair. The Women's Coalition started, trying to identify possible women candidates.

Monday 17th June

Negotiations

Back to Castle Buildings, Stormont for a Talks Committee of all the parties to discuss aspects of the procedures put forward by the parties. Bronagh and Pearl in the lead.

After a full day spent in discussing rules and procedures issues it was agreed finally that Mitchell's staff would draw together a composited procedural paper for debate.

By now the DUP are participating in the Committee but the U.K. Unionists are not.

Tuesday 18th June

Negotiations

All morning was spent discussing the draft agenda for the next Plenary Session. The Ulster Unionists and the DUP want to introduce the decommissioning issue higher up on the agenda, and to tie it down. This is being resisted by other delegations. It was agreed to adjourn to see if George Mitchell can come to a compromise agenda to put to a further committee meeting for agreement.. Avila and pearl in attendance.


Forum

2.00 P.M. Pearl has to go to a meeting of the Business Committee of the Forum.

~~✱~~ Discussion led by Ian Paisley Junior, as to whether the Forum sessions should start with the Lord's Prayer. Pearl objects -A compromise is reached; it will start with silent contemplation.

Negotiations


4.00 P.M. - Bronagh and Avila attend a reconvened Talks Committee to discuss the next draft of the procedures. This adjourned to 5.00 P.M.

5.00 P.M - 10:00 P.M.- Avila Bronagh and Pearl attend Talks Committee on Rules and Procedures. Still a number of sticking points- including a couple(introduced by David Trimble, which disadvantage the smaller parties.) Robert MacCartney deigns to  rejoin us and lengthens the discussion considerably. He tries to re-open the issue of Mitchell in the Chair. Bronagh accuses him of rudeness and disrespect. He is not amused. The Talks Committee on the final Procedural points and the agenda is adjourned to 10.00 A.M. on Wednesday 19th June with Pearl and Bronagh in attendance. Everything has to be agreed for the reconvened Plenary Session of the Talks at 12.00 P.M. noon on the Wednesday.

SOME HOPE!

Meanwhile attitudes harden against the Sinn Fein inclusion due to the Manchester bomb. This also strengthens the Unionists demands in decommissioning.

The drama continues.....

 (P.S. Overheard in the corridor: best description of the Talks to date - "caucus interruptus").