

Meeting with Brian Cowan, 07.11.02

Round table planned for next week.

Gave Cowan briefing of our position on suspension/exclusion. Very disappointed about the current state of limbo.

Excellent that the implementation committee will be going ahead - pushed for it etc. Sub-committees on truth, community relations, Bill of Rights. May elections are our bottom line.

Peace and Reconciliation Forum: needs a British leg, as the Unionists won't attend. What about something convened under the auspices of the British-Irish Council.

Cowan: The P&RF is the to supplant the round-table talks up here. The Opposition parties want an involvement, especially as the GFA was voted for on an all-Ireland basis: we changed our constitution, we have a vested interest in this. The Unionists can grow up. We obviously want to see different positions at the table, but we have been sensitive and want inclusivity. This puts pressure on the IRA. The Round Table talks are a priority - Strand One messes up the rest of it.

Spoke about making the Unionists feel more comfortable about the Irish Government's role - a United Ireland not being around the corner and so forth. The Irish Government has an important role to play in consent, and how they phrase things can make Protestants feel less threatened. What happens to Stormont, the Agreement, the Human Rights and Equality Commissions etc. Cowan: this could be raised in the P&RF, where Nationalist Ireland could talk about these things. Arrangements would obviously have to be arrived at - it isn't in the immediate term anyway. Respect all traditions in the way the GFA is laid out anyway. The equality issue is a guarantee for both communities. The idea that it belongs to a tribe is wrong - it guarantees the future whatever the arrangements.

It's a complex constitutional issue in the Agreement - the idea you can be B//both. There is a need to show generosity to Unionists.

There is a greater effort needed for community relations, integrated education and housing, and fighting sectarianism. This needs solid support. Cowan has no objection to this - Rol is considering integrated teacher training.

Cowan: the election should not be deferred beyond May - GB doesn't seem to be changing the timetable. Message seems to be "Let's get this thing back on track". Regarding press, all we can say about the round-table meeting is that the Governments are committed to a consultation process and they can expect an announcement next week.

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(NB)

Never called it "implementation meeting/committee" - always "round table".