



FAX COVER SHEET

TO: JOHN ALDERDICE

FROM: JOHN BRUTON TD

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COMMENTS

For further information please contact:

Fine Gael Press Office No.: 789030

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I do not believe that the Taoiseach has any conception of the seriousness for Ireland of a failure of the Brooke talks. The purpose of the Brooke talks, getting the political representatives of the two communities to agree to talk constructively to one another - is the centre piece of any solution to the troubles.

Of course the problem has other dimensions. Other relationships exist. There is a British-Irish relationship. There is a North-South relationship. But the plain fact of the matter is that these other relationships will not lead to a solution, unless and until the vital third relationship - that between the two communities in Northern Ireland itself - is on some sort of a normal footing.

The appalling fact is that Northern Irish politicians are not talking to one another, ~~even by name~~. There is no forum in which they can meet. They are talking to the press. They are travelling the world to carry their case to external audiences. But they are not talking to one another.

There are very few places in Europe where divisions are so deep that politicians, representing different sets of electors, who live in the same townlands and the same cities, are not actually talking to one another. Is it any wonder that there is violence? Is it any wonder that nobody new wants to go into politics in Northern Ireland?

The central purpose of the Brooke talks is to end this completely unnatural cold war between democratic politicians within Northern Ireland.

According to the "Irish Times" yesterday the sticking point is the absence of "an element of certainty" about when the Irish Government will enter the process of discussions, once the internal talks have begun.

I do not see that this issue is sufficiently important to block talks.

My understanding is, and I have to rely on second hand reports, that there is already agreement that the initial round of internal talks will have a maximum duration. I am told that the maximum period agreed is ten weeks. So the Irish Government will come back into the picture automatically at the end of ten weeks, through the Anglo-Irish Conference. In the meantime, normal bilateral channels between Ireland and Britain will remain open anyway.

Furthermore if, within the ten week period, insufficient progress is being made in the internal talks, it is still possible for one party (say the SDLP) to withdraw from them. That eventuality would also immediately bring the Irish Government back into the picture through the Anglo-Irish Conference. And, again, bilateral Anglo-Irish channels remain open throughout.

If these reports are accurate, then there seems to me to be adequate protection of the Irish Government/nationalist position.

Certainly, I cannot see that the risks in such an approach are in any way commensurate with the risks that would flow from a breakdown of the Brooke initiative.

The breakdown of the Brooke initiative could lead to a number of eventualities:

- Pressure from unionists for integration in the U.K.
- Further alienation from the democratic political process of young people on both sides of the religious divide.

- An upsurge in simplistic rhetoric and megaphone diplomacy of the kind that we saw in activities like the fruitless "anti-partition" campaign of the late 1940's.

In other words, everyone would retreat to the cosy certainties of their tribal positions, and the killing would go on.

I supported the idea that Articles 2 and 3 of our Constitution should be amended, because I believe that we in the Republic must adapt our aspirations to the real world. Only then will we be at peace with ourselves.

The two communities in Northern Ireland need to do the same. The Brooke talks give them a chance to do so. The arrangements for the involvement of the Irish Government must not be allowed to be an obstacle in the way of such a process.