

Ref: Renewing the Talks Process,
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The Peace Process

The current political impasse takes place within the wider context of the Peace Process. The process of peace involves more than the endeavours of politicians. It has four key dimensions -

- Political negotiations - the Talks Process.
- Agreed law and order.
- Social and economic progress.
- The work of reconciliation.

In a variety of ways, work is going on across each of these dimensions. In spite of various crises, our society has consistently backed away from the brink of wide-scale violence and chaos. The process of peace is at work in our society. Politicians were given a cross-community mandate to play a vital part in the wider Peace Process.

The Talks Process

The Talks Process has gone through five phases.

- Phase One: establishing the Inter-Party Talks.
- Phase Two: creating the Good Friday Agreement.
- Phase Three: selling the Agreement.
- Phase Four: sustaining the Agreement. *I don't recognise this phase.*
- Phase Five: implementing the Agreement.

The Current Impasse

The Hillsborough Declaration is a cul de sac into which the Talks Process has turned. It will not be possible to proceed much further without driving through a wall of opposition from a number of pro-agreement parties. The collective basis of the Good Friday Agreement would be demolished.

The current difficulties flow from the following factors:

- A design fault in the Agreement - leaving parties at odds with each other over the clause on de-commissioning.
- Phase Three of the Talks Process - the 'selling' phase - involved parties selling their respective versions of the Agreement to their own constituencies.
- Phase Five of the Talks Process - the 'implementation' phase - has involved each party defending the particular version of the Agreement which their respective constituencies bought into.

Renewing the Talks Process *renegotiation*
reframe

- **Step One.** The pro-agreement parties re-define the current impasse. They agree that this phase of the Talks Process is failing but that this should not mean that the Agreement will collapse. They also acknowledge their sense of responsibility to the Peace Process and to the cross-community mandate (the Referendum) for which they campaigned.

- **Step Two.** The pro-agreement parties agree on the tasks for the Talks Process at this time. E.g

Validating the Agreement - the need for the parties to better understand each other's approach to the making of the Agreement; their various interpretations of it; their hopes and fears about it. It would be valuable to renew some common understandings about the Agreement.

Social and Economic progress - the need to maintain political momentum around these issues.

Normalisation - from a republican point of view, de-militarisation et al; from a unionist point of view, dsarmament.

Implementation - based on progress on the above themes, a fresh approach could be made to the implementation of the Agreement.

- **Step Three.** The parties agree to the establishment of four 'grand committees' to address the above themes.

The Validation Committee would begin first. Within a short space of time, the Social and Economic Committee would convene. After a further period, the Normalisation Committee would meet and, ultimately, the Implementation Committee would begin its work.

- **Step Four.** The parties would ultimately consider findings from the Implementation Committee as a way of triggering De Hondt etc.

Commentary:

It is not essential to resolve the current impasse ahead of the summer.

- The pro-agreement parties could face the European elections with the confidence of the community that, in spite of a stalled Talks Process, their endeavours represent the only alternative to chaos.
- The marching season will go its own way, regardless of politicians. ✓
- By the autumn, Patten will have reported and there will be new grounds for greater consensus on policing.

At present, various parties are losing faith with each other.

Unionists view republicans as dishonouring the Agreement by their refusal to disarm.

Republicans view unionists as dishonourable by demanding surrender as the price of shared government.

Republicans view the two governments as dishonourable by deferring to the unionist veto.

The SDLP view republicans as dishonourable by being insincere about the Agreement.

Loyalists view Unionists as dishonourable by their inability to face down anti-agreement forces.

There is a need to re-visit a neglected phase of the Talks Process - the sustaining phase.

Rather than trying to resolve the impasse, the pro-agreement parties should address more fundamental issues which have given rise to the current stalemate.