

MEMO.**FROM: Brendan McAllister.****DATE: Wednesday, July 11, 2001****Re. The management of the Peace Process.****A. General Observations.**

1. Since the Good Friday Agreement the two governments have been dealing with difficulties in the Peace Process by holding regular bilateral meetings with the parties and, on a cyclical basis, by convening **summit** talks. Summits usually take place in a context of crisis and, by a process of **negotiation**, a formula for further progress is constructed, usually at the eleventh hour. A number of difficulties with formulae have emerged, notably a lack of clarity (leading subsequently to differing interpretations) and the fact that some parties feel that some significant understandings have been reached but have not been shared with all the parties.
2. Another difficulty is that the two governments tend to divide the pro-agreement parties into two divisions. The first division consists of the UUP, the SDLP and Sinn Fein. The second division consists of the Alliance Party, the PUP, the Women's Coalition and the UDP. Thus the peace process tends to be treated as primarily the responsibility of three political elites and two governments. Consequently, the holistic nature of the Peace Process has been damaged and the principle of **inclusion** has been diluted. One result of this marginalisation of the minor parties has been to exacerbate a feeling of alienation and lessen the sense of ownership of the Peace Process in the loyalist community.
3. The Weston Park event has illustrated the shortcomings of summitry as a method of advancing the Peace Process. Each side approached the negotiations with their respective shopping lists. The summit has taken place against a background of parties increasingly accusing each other of bad faith. Each party has been struggling to respond to a loss of confidence among their support base. As a result, positions have become more entrenched .

4. The Weston Park conference is reliant on negotiation for success. The search for a new formula involves the two governments practising the age-old art of 'state-craft' and the parties engaging in brinkmanship and 'horse-trading'. This is the time-honoured tradition by which political agreements are reached and, as with the Good Friday Agreement itself, in the event of success the world will breathe a sigh of relief and applaud.
5. However, at this stage in the Peace Process it is extremely dangerous to rely so heavily on **negotiation among elites** as the main mechanism to advance peace.
6. In the event of the Weston Park summit failing to reach a formula the Peace Process will continue its downward decline into political gridlock and the two governments will adopt a joint strategy for the management of Northern Ireland in the absence of political agreement. Alternatively, a way may be found to create a new period for further bilateral work leading to another summit in the not too distant future.
7. Either way, there is a pressing need for political **conciliation** to be introduced to the Peace Process. Conciliation would involve **all** the pro-agreement parties in discussions aimed at shared analysis of the Peace Process rather than negotiations about deals. Conciliation activities could come to be viewed as important work carried on between negotiation summits. Therefore, the Peace Process could become characterized by **events** for negotiation, punctuated by **periods** of conciliation in which the parties would engage in reflective discussions aimed at improving their collective insights.

B. An Agenda for Conciliation.

- **Process.** Give renewed attention to the concept of 'process'. Process infers a dynamic at work; organic activity; construction. It raises the question of 'inclusion' as a governing principle.
- **Design.** The major issues of contention are being addressed in a sequential way. In other words, one at a time, with the parties prioritizing different issues. For example, Unionists now want movement on decommissioning as a pre-requisite of further progress, whereas Republicans view decommissioning as a

consequence of further progress. It would be more productive to redesign the process so that issues are dealt with simultaneously. If there is movement on all the major issues at the same time then the level of confidence in the Peace Process would be restored across the whole community, not just in one section of it.

- **Making the Agreement.** What were the 'best intentions' of each party when they signed the Agreement? What were their worst fears?
- **Selling the Agreement.** How did the parties sell the Agreement to their respective constituencies? How do the parties view each other's sales pitch?
- **Honouring the Agreement.** How do the respective parties feel they have honoured the Agreement? How do they feel other parties (and the governments) have dishonoured it?
- **Managing the Process.** What are the things that have built confidence? What are the things which have lessened confidence? What are the things which have maintained balance and what are the things which have created imbalance?
- **Integrity.** Each party could usefully articulate their sense of integrity, in terms of Values, Principles and Behaviours which must be respected and upheld. It is only by safeguarding each other's integrity that the Peace Process can advance in a way which retains cross-community respect.
- **Reframing the Issues of Contention.** After a period in which the above agenda could be teased out it would be possible to 're-frame' the remaining issues. In other words, to state the issues in a way which creates greater possibilities for movement.
- **Analysing the Issues.** In turn and away from the pressure-cooker atmosphere of negotiations, the parties could engage in collective analyses of why the issues continue to be contentious. For example, with regard to decommissioning, what is the nature of the threat which each party perceives? How can these perceptions be addressed in a way which would inspire confidence across the pro- Agreement constituency?

B. McAllister, 11 July, 2001.