

The consequences of suspension
16/10/2002

- The MLAs are getting a pay-cut with effect end of October; back to pre-devolution wages, (2/3s what they get now); staff will be able to use offices in Stormont for constituency purposes, but this, and the MLAs pay, will be reviewed again at the end of the year if suspension continues. The suspension is an open-ended "breathing space", but London and Dublin want the parties to sit down and talk through the problems. We are having bilaterals with SF today and the SDLP tomorrow.
- Election: **due in May 2003**: only new legislation can delay these elections. DUP want these elections now - they say a new mandate is needed before negotiations. The NI Act 1998 set the date for the May election, and there is a two month leeway on either side to accommodate emergencies; John Reid told the House of Commons yesterday that the May elections would go ahead as planned. We will be pressing for a commitment on this. Fear that these elections could be scrubbed if there is no sign by February of the Assembly being re-instated - that would suit the unionists and possibly the SDLP, but not us. SF want elections sooner rather than later. Alliance may be going for pro-Agreement UUP votes, but won't want to be out of the spotlight either.
- Funding: We will continue to receive an office cost allowance, and a party allowance. Neither can be used for election purposes; staff will no doubt be doing some election work outside working hours. £2100 was raised at the Art Sale, Jane raised approx £2500 in Denver,
- Next steps: shift of emphasis on to the media - **have to maintain a high profile**, as the attention will be shifted to London / Dublin, and those parties with paramilitary links / UUP seen as holding the key to the process.