

CHRIS

Notes of meeting of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation held at Dublin Castle on 10th December, 2002.

I arrived at Dublin Castle a few minutes before the meeting. Although the meeting was due to start only Sean Farron and one other man had arrived. Maurice Hayes and about nine others joined the table and the meeting commenced just a few minutes late. Wally Kerwin introduced himself to me but other than that there was no introductions so I had to guess who was who.

Right from the beginning of the meeting it was clear that this was to be a very short meeting. A copy of a letter from Martin Mansergh was circulated suggesting that if there was to be a meeting set up with Unionists that it would be better held after the Christmas holidays and that a judgement could then be made on what structure the Forum should take. It was agreed that formal plenary meetings would be kept to a minimum. It was also agreed that the NIWC could have two at the table.

There was a short discussion on how to get Unionist involvement. Sean Farron came up with names of people who could represent the Unionist voice. Names such as Rev. John Dunlop, Chris Gibson and Harold Good were amongst his choice. The woman from Sinn Fein said she could live with a special meeting to address Unionist concerns as long as there would be a follow-up meeting for Nationalists. She talked about the beleaguered people of North Belfast and Short Strand.

I contributed to this debate suggesting, as Avila had said, that creative ways should be found to have the Unionist voice heard. I said that video inputs could be used through local community groups. I also said that the names of the people being suggested were very special people and did not necessarily represent the missing voice of Unionism. I also said that it would be better for such a meeting to be held outside Dublin.

Sean Farron did not seem to like our message. He said that meeting in Dublin had not stopped Unionists in the past.

It was agreed to have a meeting on sectarianism on the 16th January and a further meeting on the 22nd. They were not clear what the second meeting would be about.

The meeting was over in less than an hour. No lunch – Nothing.

(A long way to go for such a meeting. Maybe we should check out the substance of the next meeting before attending)