

ANATOMY OF THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND: FROM THE
PLANTATIONS TO THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

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WEATHERHEAD CENTER FELLOW, 2005–2006

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INTRODUCTION	4
<i>Terminology</i>	6
I. THE ORIGINS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONFLICT	7
<i>Introduction</i>	7
<i>The Plantations</i>	8
<i>The Penal Laws</i>	9
<i>Act of Union</i>	10
<i>The Home Rule Movement</i>	11
<i>Easter Monday, 1916</i>	12
<i>The Anglo-Irish War</i>	12
<i>The Irish Free State</i>	14
<i>The Civil War</i>	15
<i>The Civil Rights Movement</i>	16
<i>British Army Deployment</i>	20
<i>The Provisional IRA</i>	21
<i>Internment</i>	21
<i>Bloody Sunday, 1972</i>	22
<i>Direct Rule from Westminster</i>	23
<i>Hunger Strikes</i>	23
II. THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS	25
<i>The Peace Process</i>	25
<i>The Sunningdale Agreement</i>	26
<i>The IRA Cease-fire, 1974</i>	28
<i>The Anglo-Irish Agreement</i>	28
<i>The Peace Process</i>	30
<i>The Downing Street Joint Declaration</i>	32
<i>The Mitchell Report</i>	33
<i>The End of the IRA Cease-fire</i>	35
<i>All-Party Peace Talks, September, 1997</i>	37
III. NEGOTIATING THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT	39
<i>The Good Friday Agreement</i>	39
<i>The Breakthrough in the Talks</i>	40
<i>Proposition on Heads of Agreement</i>	40
<i>Agreement</i>	44
<i>The Unionist View of the Good Friday Agreement</i>	45
<i>The Republican View</i>	47
<i>The Referenda on the Good Friday Agreement</i>	51
<i>The Election to the Northern Ireland Assembly</i>	52

<i>A Halt to Progress</i>	54
<i>The Contribution of Third Parties to the Peace Process</i>	55
IV. ARE NORTHERN IRELAND'S TROUBLES OVER?	59
<i>A power sharing agreement will be a necessary condition for peace</i>	59
<i>..... but, on its own, it will not be sufficient</i>	61
<i>The parties need to start talking</i>	62
V. CONCLUSION	65

ANATOMY OF THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND: FROM THE PLANTATIONS TO THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

INTRODUCTION

...the Troubles undoubtedly produced their fair share of songs and heroic ballads about the "boys" who went on to become the "men behind the wire". The reality was bleaker, and like all "civil" wars, the one in Northern Ireland was Hobbesian in the extreme: nasty and brutish, but unfortunately not very short. (Michael Cox, 'The War That Came in from the Cold: Clinton and the Irish Question', World Policy Journal, Volume XVI, No.1, Spring 1999.

On Good Friday, 10 April 1998, a peace agreement, the Good Friday Agreement (officially the "Belfast Agreement"), was reached between the Unionist and republican political parties in Northern Ireland.

There was, as Cox has remarked, nothing inevitable about what happened on Good Friday 1998.¹ Northern Ireland is amongst a group of countries whose inter-communal conflicts have been generally regarded as intractable: Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Sudan and the Middle East belong in the same group. Winston Churchill was to write of Northern Ireland in 1922:

The whole map of Europe has been changed ... The modes of thought of men, the whole outlook of affairs, the grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world. But as the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world.²

Seventy years later John Bowyer Bell described how: "(m)y other wars, my other analytical interests, offered perspectives, if rarely hope, for the Irish events. Those other wars mostly ended. The Irish conflict went on and on ... It was a drama no one claimed to have authored and few enjoyed performing."³

The purpose of this paper is to determine: firstly, how an end to the conflict came about; secondly, whether the power-sharing arrangements in the agreement will satisfy republicans whose *raison d'etre* has been to politically reunite Northern Ireland with the Irish Republic; thirdly, whether Unionists, who held power exclusively in Northern Ireland for fifty years, will be satisfied to share power with the republicans; and, fourthly, whether the day-to-day level of cooperation the Assembly members achieve will contribute to a breaking down of the differences which divide the two communities. Any successful peace agreement in Northern Ireland will need to both settle the political differences between the two communities and to contribute to the long-term reduction in the historical antagonisms that exist between them.

Section I of the paper outlines the events in history that help to explain the origins of those antagonisms and how the conflict came into being.

Section II recounts the efforts made to resolve the conflict from the time Britain assumed direct rule of Northern Ireland in March 1972 to the election in May 1997 of the Blair Labour Government in Britain.

Section III describes the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement and how the political parties and the communities in the province and in Ireland reacted to the outcome.

Section IV attempts to gauge the likelihood of power-sharing arrangements working in Northern Ireland. It also attempts an analysis of the conflict to determine whether the agreement, if implemented, will contribute to a

healing of the long-standing grievances that exist between the two communities.

Section V concludes the paper, outlining its essential arguments.

Terminology

The set of terms “Protestant”, “loyalist” and “Unionist” used throughout are not necessarily interchangeable – nor are the terms “Catholic”, “nationalist” and “republican” but the two sets of terms do define the two sides of the conflict. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) split in December 1969, from which emerged the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), later known simply as the “IRA”.

I. THE ORIGINS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONFLICT

Ireland is an infernal country to manage ... Impartiality is impossible, statesmanship wholly out of place. The only way to govern is the old plan (which I will not attempt) of taking up violently one faction or the other, putting them like fighting cocks, and then backing one. I wish you would send me to India. Ireland is the grave of every reputation. (A communication in 1867 from the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Mayo, to Benjamin Disraeli quoted in Paul Johnson, Ireland: A Concise History from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day, Academy Chicago Publishers, 1980.)

For the Catholics most of the period of English rule represented outright colonial repression. For the Protestants it was a noble attempt on the part of the English Parliament to support a besieged but civilizing community inside Ireland. (R.S.P. Elliot and John Hickie, Ulster: A Case Study in Conflict Theory, Longman, London, 1971.)

Introduction

In order to be able to judge whether the current peace process will provide the basis for an enduring end to the conflict in Northern Ireland it is necessary to first revisit those events in Anglo-Irish history that help to explain how the conflict came into being.

Most of the literature on the conflict in Northern Ireland finds an explanation in the country's history. Lowenthal, for example, has remarked how:

(s)ome societies need no re-enactment to reactivate history; the process seems to be ingrained, habitual. Unassuaged injuries and injustices often lead men to conflate the remote with recent times and even with the past. Many Irish continue to experience the Danish invasions, the devastation of Laud, the famine of 1847, as almost contemporaneous events. Irish memory has been likened to historical paintings in which Virgil and Dante converse side by side. But the Irish do not live in the past: rather, Ireland's history "lives in the present". All previous traitors and all previous heroes remain alive in it.⁴

Many accounts of the conflict start in 1969 with the beginning of the "troubles", which followed Catholic civil rights actions protesting discrimination in education, public housing and employment. More than 3,000 Catholic and Protestant civilians, police and military personnel died in

the ensuing sectarian violence. Other accounts date the commencement of the conflict to earlier times: the events of Easter Monday in 1916 when Irish Volunteers seized the Post Office in Dublin and proclaimed themselves the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic; or to the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, which provided for the partition of Ireland into the present two states. But the origins of the conflict may be found in times earlier than that: as far back as the 17th century when the British Government established plantations on lands seized for English and Scottish settlers from native Irish. ⁵

The Plantations

Ireland's misfortune was its strategic location. Henry VIII's split with Rome in the 16th century led to confrontation with Catholic Europe, and Ireland could have provided a base for Catholic powers to launch an assault on England from the rear.⁶ The plantations allowed England to secure a hold over Ireland and allay those fears.

The new settlers were mostly Scottish Presbyterians who brought with them their own religion and culture. Today's Northern Ireland Unionists are their descendants. Catholic farmers in Northern Ireland can still point to plots of Protestant land taken from them during the establishment of the plantation. Darby has argued that: "(t)he deep resentment of the native Irish towards the planters, and the distrustful siege mentality of the planters towards the Irish is the root of the Ulster problem. To the planters and the government,

however, the Irish were traitors who refused to accept the rights of conquest.”⁷

In 1649 Oliver Cromwell conducted a series of massacres of Catholics who were trying to regain their land. Thomas Sowell has remarked that:

Cromwell's slaughters and mass confiscation of land in Ireland, and the oppressive and degrading laws which fastened second-class status on the Irish for more than a century thereafter, were all too typical of what other conquerors have done.⁸

In establishing the plantations, England intended to leave one half of the land in Irish Catholic hands. However, by 1703, only 14 per cent of land in Ireland remained in Irish Catholic hands – in Ulster it was only five per cent.⁹

The Penal Laws

The penal laws, which were designed to keep Catholics out of positions of influence, were passed in Westminster between 1695 and 1727.¹⁰ They prevented Catholics from bearing arms, buying land, holding public office or entering the army or the legal profession, becoming members of parliament and voting. They also restricted their rights to education. It was not until 1778 that Catholics were allowed to buy land. In 1793 the Catholic Relief Act restored to Catholics the rights to inherit, to enter the professions and to vote. Most of the Penal Laws were repealed during the 1780s but it was not until the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 that Catholics were allowed to become members of parliament.¹¹

The effect of this legislation and the manner in which it was enforced was to create ... a landless Catholic peasantry governed by a legally exclusive Protestant ruling class, with a small predominantly Protestant middle class sandwiched in between, and a multi-class Protestant enclave in Ulster.¹²

Act of Union

Following an unsuccessful Irish nationalist uprising against British rule in 1798, the British Government, concerned that Dublin might conspire with France against Britain, passed, in 1801, the Act of Union, which brought Ireland under direct rule from England.¹³

After initial resistance, the Act of Union was welcomed by the Protestant ruling class. Johnson has noted: “ ... in the last resort they could do without independence and still flourish.”¹⁴ However, it resulted in the Catholics being able to assume from the Protestants the leadership of the Irish nationalist movement.¹⁵

During this period of direct English rule, as a result of overpopulation and a potato blight, Ireland suffered a famine which led to the deaths of one million of its population of eight million.¹⁶ British Government efforts to provide relief from the impact of the famine failed to have any effect. Woodham-Smith has remarked in regard to the famine: “(b)etween Ireland and England the memory of what was done and endured has lain like a sword. Other famines followed, as other famines had gone before, but it is the terrible years of the Great Famine which are remembered and only just beginning to be forgiven.”^{17 18}

As significant for the subject of this paper, between 1845 and 1851 a further one million Irish migrated to England, Scotland and the United States to escape the famine. Irish emigration to the United States was to provide much of the republican movement's support and financing.¹⁹ It also proved to be a

major factor in the peace process. As Cox has argued, without the involvement in the conflict of the United States, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 may not have been concluded.²⁰

The Home Rule Movement

The dissatisfaction of Irish nationalists with British rule of Ireland led to a Home Rule conference in 1873 which declared that only when Ireland ran its own affairs would it have peace and prosperity.²¹ However, the Protestant community saw Home Rule as a threat to its religious and economic interests and sought to maintain the connection with England.²² As Kennedy–Pipe has noted, the desire of the Protestants to maintain the link with England and the desire of republicans to sever is still the issue dividing the two communities.²³

In 1912, a Home Rule bill was passed in the British House of Commons (but was subsequently defeated in the House of Lords). The day after the bill was passed in the Commons the strongly Unionist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was formed, concerned that Home Rule would be a threat to their civil and religious freedoms. They were determined to defeat any moves to establish Home Rule for Ireland.²⁴ In response to the establishment of the UVF, Catholics formed the Irish Volunteers, who were dedicated to an independent Ireland, by violence if necessary. The possibility of conflict between the two groups was averted by the outbreak of the First World War.²⁵ Home Rule was not to resurface until after the war.

Easter Monday, 1916

One of the defining events in the history of the conflict in Northern Ireland took place on Easter Monday in 1916 when a group of Irish Volunteers seized the Post Office in Dublin and proclaimed themselves the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic. The rebel leaders mistakenly believed they had wide-spread support in the country. They were arrested, court martialled for treason and executed. As a consequence, they became martyrs and the Easter rebellion of 1916 is commemorated by Northern Ireland's Catholics to this day. ²⁶ William Butler Yeats' poem, 'Easter 1916', was a tribute to those who were executed for their role in the rebellion.

I write it out in a verse--
MadDonough and MacBride
and Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be.
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born.

The Sinn Fein organization, which was committed to Irish independence, was formed in 1905, but was already regarded as a spent force by 1916. However, the Easter Monday rebellion, and more especially the repressive measures taken by the British in response to the rebellion, resurrected Sinn Fein. In December 1918 Sinn Fein won 73 of the 105 Irish seats in Westminster. The Unionists won 26 seats, 23 of which were in Ulster.²⁷

The Anglo-Irish War

Sinn Fein members of parliament refused to sit at the foreign parliament in Westminster. ²⁸ Instead, they formed an "Assembly of Ireland" in Dublin and in January 1919, declared an independent Irish republic. The first shots in

the “Anglo–Irish” war broke out on the day of the Assembly’s independence declaration. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) was formed in the same year and waged a guerilla war against Britain for almost two years. ²⁹

In March 1920, in response to a series of IRA murders the British Government sent to Ireland the so-called Black and Tans. The atrocities many of them committed led to increased support for the IRA. The most notable of their actions took place on “Bloody Sunday”, 21 November 1920, following the murder by the IRA of twelve British military officers engaged in undercover work. Claiming an IRA meeting was taking place at a Gaelic football game in Dublin, Black and Tans fired on spectators and players killing twelve including a woman, a child and a player.³⁰

The Anglo–Irish war lasted for 18 months, ending in a truce in July 1921. 500 soldiers and policemen, 700 IRA volunteers and 700 civilians were killed. By one account, the war ended just as IRA resistance was about to give out.³¹ Despite a shortage of arms and supporters, the IRA, described by the British Government as “criminals conspiring against the Crown”, had tied down a British force of 43,000.³² Bowyer–Bell has noted that: “(i)n 1921 Britain, exhausted by the war and frustrated after centuries of the Irish question, unable to win by acceptable means and unwilling to resort to terror, sought a negotiated settlement. In effect the IRA, unable to win, had refused to lose, thus bombing the British to the bargaining table.” ³³

The Irish Free State

Home Rule returned to the British Government's agenda in 1920, leading to the adoption in Westminster of the Government of Ireland Act. The Act provided for the partition of Ireland into two separate states – the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. The boundary between the two states did not follow the historical boundaries of Ulster province, which would have given Unionist members of parliament only three or four seats. The new state of Northern Ireland comprised only six of Ulster's nine counties: Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Londonderry, which gave the Unionists ten seats. The Act was adopted while Irish nationalist members of parliament were boycotting Westminster. Kennedy–Pipe has noted that:

(i)t is difficult to dispute the nationalistic interpretation of British and Protestant collusion at this point ... the actual political constituencies established under the Government of Ireland Act were arranged to maximize the winning of Unionist seats at the general election of 1921.³⁴

The British Government described the partition of Ireland as a temporary measure, attempting to lend credibility to this claim by including provision in the Act for a Council of Ireland to unify the island under an all-Ireland parliament – but only when Northern Ireland's Unionists agreed to it.³⁵

Republicans had calculated that the Boundary Commission created by the Act would determine that Northern Ireland should include only the predominantly Protestant counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry, a political unit that was not economically viable. This, Irish nationalists thought, would lead to its eventual amalgamation into the Irish Free State. However, when the Boundary Commission met in 1925 the

“neutral” South African chairman sided with the Unionist member, supporting his view that the “temporary” borders be made permanent. This drew accusations from Irish nationalists that he had bowed to Unionist pressure, which forced his resignation. The representative of the Irish Free State resigned also and the talks collapsed. In order to limit the political damage this could cause, the three Governments, British, Irish Free State and Northern Irish, agreed to revoke the Boundary Commission’s mandate, to leave the border unchanged and to annul the provision for a Council of Ireland.³⁶

Partition created an uncertain environment for Unionists which continues to this day. Elliot and Hickie have described how: “ ... the Protestant majority felt like an embattled community in the midst of a hostile Catholic Ireland.”³⁷ As a consequence, they treated Catholics as fifth columnists. The Unionist authorities created a special constabulary (the “B-specials”) to enforce the division between the two communities. Many Catholics refused to participate in the workings of the new province, further strengthening the political dominance of the Protestants.³⁸ “One of the unrecorded casualties was the hope, however slight, that the Treaty would eventually lead to Irish unity ... The Treaty had divided the two communities even more and inflamed sectarian tensions.”³⁹

The Civil War

The Irish General Election of January 1922 supported home rule but the IRA was divided. Those who rebelled against it were arrested on the orders of the Irish Free State Cabinet and were tried and executed.⁴⁰ The executions

sparked a civil war which lasted for ten months, until May 1923, and killed 500 on each side. Northern Ireland did not escape the war. Between the end of the Anglo-Irish war and the civil war, over 450 people, mainly Catholics, were killed in Belfast, 1000 Catholics were expelled from their jobs and 500 Catholic businesses were wrecked. Thousands of Catholics took refuge in the Irish Free State.⁴¹

Protestants in Northern Ireland, outnumbering the Catholics, created what was, in effect, a Protestant parliament (Stormont). Lord Craigavon, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, called it: “ ... a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people.”⁴² The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), Northern Ireland’s police force, was almost exclusively Protestant: the “B-special” police force was exclusively Protestant. Unionist Governments adopted draconian security laws and in 1922 passed “special powers” legislation unseen elsewhere in the United Kingdom.⁴³ These special powers became one of the major grievances of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.⁴⁴

... not only the content, but also the manner in which the regulations were applied, denied legitimacy to the political aspirations of a broad portion of the minority community. Periodic outbreaks of violence emphasized that ... an organisation committed to the overthrow of the Northern Ireland government existed. ... however ... the government failed to distinguish between violent and non-violent challenges ... establishing a sense of injustice that exploded with the civil rights marches.⁴⁵

The Civil Rights Movement

In the 1950s, improved economic conditions for Catholics in Northern Ireland led to a loss of support for the nationalists and in 1959 Sinn Fein lost the two seats it held in Westminster:

Gradualism, a community of economic interest, the easing of old grievances, bridge building appeared to be the new direction. In 1968 a small but vocal civil rights movement was created seeking Stormont reform, not revolution. Even the IRA had put the gun on the shelf and gone into radical politics.⁴⁶

British historian, A.J.P. Taylor, described how, in 1921, Lloyd George had: “conjured the Irish Question out of existence”.⁴⁷

The British Government thought the problem of Northern Ireland was finally resolved and was not seriously involved in the running of the province, preferring to leave that to the Unionist authorities in Belfast.⁴⁸ The Labour and Conservative parties in England did not contest seats in Northern Ireland electorates.⁴⁹

At Westminster the affairs of Northern Ireland were filed in the General department of the Home office and left to the clerks along with ceremonial functions, British summer time, the protection of animals and birds, the administration of state-owned pubs – the odds and ends. ... Labour attempts in the mid-sixties to raise questions of unemployment and civil rights had been discouraged by succeeding Speakers and by the protests of Northern Ireland Unionist members. ... The Unionists wanted London to make up any fiscal shortfalls ... and to allow the Stormont Government to rule the province unchallenged and unchecked.⁵⁰

During the period of peace between the two communities in the 1950s and 1960s Catholics began to see their future in Northern Ireland rather than in a united Irish state. Catholics were enjoying some of the significant economic gains that had been made in the province. In the 1959 elections Sinn Fein lost both of its seats at Westminster.⁵¹ However, there continued to be political, economic and social discrimination against members of the Catholic community: “ ... there were many warning signals remembered in retrospect but underrated in the exuberant optimism of the 1960s, that basic attitudes had not altered significantly.”⁵²

Disagreement exists about the extent of discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland. Many such allegations came from political pressure groups and could not be supported by any evidence. There was, however, clear evidence that deliberate discrimination was practiced against Catholics in public employment and public appointments.⁵³ The same applied to private employment. Most of Northern Ireland's employers were Protestants who largely employed other Protestants. At one time, the Belfast shipbuilders Harland and Wolff employed 10,000 workers, only 400 of which were Catholic.⁵⁴

There was also discrimination against Catholics in the allocation of public housing (but it should be noted that working-class Protestants also suffered discrimination through electoral laws that limited voting in local elections to property owners or tenants accorded certain statutory rights).⁵⁵ Electoral wards were also gerrymandered to provide Protestant majorities in predominantly Catholic areas.⁵⁶

The Catholic community also suffered discrimination in education. Since partition, more funding had been provided to government (i.e., Protestant) schools than to Catholic schools. Protestant schools also had better provisions for teaching science and access to grammar school places always favored Protestants over Catholics. In the period 1978–82, mixed marriages ran at a rate of 9.7 per cent but there were only places for two per cent of mixed marriage children in the schools that had been integrated.⁵⁷

Ironically, the civil rights movement came about during a period of serious attempts at economic and political reform by Captain Terence O'Neill who was elected Prime Minister on Northern Ireland in 1963. He was a pragmatist. He felt the province could function better with greater cooperation between the two communities but he also wanted to co-opt the province's Catholics into the life of the province and reconcile them to it continuing to be ruled from Belfast, rather than Dublin. But Unionists, unconvinced O'Neill could succeed in this aim, and fearful of political change, opposed his reform efforts.⁵⁸ Of O'Neill's reforms, Democratic Unionist Party leader, Ian Paisley, commented: "(a) traitor and a bridge are very much alike, for they both go over to the other side."⁵⁹

For the Catholics, O'Neill's reforms did not go far enough. Catholics had benefited from the introduction to the province of free education, and a larger, better educated and more ambitious Catholic middle class sought to end its second-class status. For republicans, O'Neill's bridge-building between the two communities only delayed their goal of reuniting the province with the Irish Republic.⁶⁰

Catholic activists in Northern Ireland, unable to form a political party strong enough to challenge the more numerous Unionists, chose political protest to achieve their goals. In 1967 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, influenced by the civil rights movement in the United States, was born. Its activities attracted the attention of the international news media and made Northern Ireland an international issue. A defining event for the civil rights movement took place in October 1968 when a civil rights march in

Londonderry (Derry) was broken up forcefully, reportedly without provocation, by RUC police.⁶¹ Further civil rights marches were to take place in Northern Ireland, often attracting loyalist attacks from which the RUC failed to protect marchers.⁶²

British Army Deployment

Several months of rioting in Northern Ireland culminated in August 1969 in the Battle of the Bogside. The rioting had been prompted by the stoning of a Protestant street march by Catholics. Protestants, aided by the RUC, set fire to houses in Catholic areas to intimidate the Catholic community. The rioting led to a complete breakdown in relations between the Catholics and the Protestants and between the Catholics and the police.⁶³ Irish Prime Minister Jack Lynch ordered Irish army field hospitals along the border and asked the United Nations to send a peace-keeping force to Northern Ireland to bring an end to the violence.⁶⁴

The RUC proved unable to contain the conflict between the two communities.⁶⁵ With the security situation continuing to deteriorate, British Army units arrived to restore order in Londonderry and Belfast.⁶⁶ The warring communities had to be separated by a “peace-line”, an Irish “Berlin Wall” of corrugated iron and barbed wire.⁶⁷

The British Army also imposed curfews and conducted searches of Catholic homes for weapons, treating Catholics like: “... the restless natives encountered in far-flung places of the British Empire.”⁶⁸

The Provisional IRA

A split in the Irish Republican Army in December 1969 led to the emergence of the Provisional IRA (PIRA, or later simply the IRA). The cause of the split was the events of August 1969 in the Bogside where the IRA had been unarmed and unprepared to defend the Catholic community there. Slogans had appeared on the walls of houses in Belfast saying: "IRA = I Ran Away."⁶⁹ The IRA argued that its intervention would perpetuate the sectarian nature of the conflict and destroy any hope of working class solidarity being built across religious lines. The Provisional IRA believed that unless they intervened there would be large-scale killings of Catholics in the province.⁷⁰

Memories of the events of August 1969 in the Bogside were to become a significant factor thirty years later in the attitudes of the IRA towards disarmament in the negotiation of the Good Friday peace settlement. John Taylor, former Provisional IRA headquarters staff member, has noted:

The IRA was in a state of disarray. The military line had been neglected in favour of a more socialist, Marxist-Leninist approach ... (a)nd so when 1969 came along and the (Catholic) areas were under attack and there was no IRA and I suppose most people felt a degree of guilt, a bit of shame, even.⁷¹

Internment

Internment without trial, another British colonial practice, was introduced in Northern Ireland in August 1971 and lasted until 1975.⁷² It was thought in London that it might end the violence in the province. In one night 346 people were arrested, none of them Protestant.⁷³ It was not until 1973 that loyalist terrorist suspects were interned.⁷⁴ The interrogation methods employed on the internees by British Army intelligence caused a domestic

and international outcry and eventually had to be stopped. In 1978, the European Court found the British Government had not been guilty of torture but had been guilty of inhuman and degrading treatment.⁷⁵ Internment provoked some of the worst violence seen in Northern Ireland. In the eight months prior to the introduction of internment 34 people had died: in the four months following internment 140 died.⁷⁶

Bloody Sunday, 1972

In another of the many defining events in the history of the conflict, on 30 January 1972 in Derry, the British Army shot and killed 13 civilians taking part in a civil rights march.⁷⁷ The Army's account was that they had come under fire and responded: the Catholic account was that the soldiers lost control and even shot people as they were running away.⁷⁸ The coroner described the Army's actions as "sheer unadulterated murder". The report of the British Government's official investigation of the event exonerated the paratroopers, concluding that although it had failed to establish that any of the victims was armed, the Army did not fire first. ⁷⁹ Whatever the truth:

For the entire Irish nationalist community, for many disinterested observers and for the millions upon millions who learned of the events on the late evening news, Bloody Sunday in Derry was a massacre. The Paras had run amok and murdered innocent civilians because they had protested, because they were there, because they were Irish. The dead empire came alive offering example and precedent: the Amritsar massacre in India in 1919, Cyprus and Aden and Palestine, all lived again on the evening news and in newspaper headlines.⁸⁰

The event led to an increase in IRA recruitment.⁸¹ A Catholic bishop who appeared in photographs of the events of the day waving a white handkerchief at the British troops as he carried a victim away, was to say later: "Many young people I have talked to in prison have told me they would

have never joined the IRA had it not been for what they witnessed on Bloody Sunday".⁸²

Bloody Sunday led to one of the most violent periods of the "troubles". The Irish Government responded by recalling its Ambassador from London in protest and again asked the United Nations to intervene in Northern Ireland. The British Embassy in Dublin was burned down in February 1972 by a crowd protesting the events of Bloody Sunday.^{83 84}

Direct Rule from Westminster

In order to avoid further embarrassment arising from events in Northern Ireland, the British Government sought to get the Northern Ireland issue out of the media spotlight and that meant putting an end to the conflict. The Unionist administration in Belfast was failing in its efforts to do so. The British Government, therefore, assigned the British Army to assume sole responsibility for security in the province. The Unionist government, accustomed to running the affairs in Northern Ireland without interference from London, resigned in protest. In March 1972 direct political rule was imposed from Westminster.⁸⁵ "On the part of the British ... (p)atience had been exhausted, toleration of the Unionists eroded. Stormont had become a liability."⁸⁶

Hunger Strikes

The major developments in the period from the early 1970s on focused largely on attempts by the British Government to resolve the conflict and re-introduce self-government in Northern Ireland. This will be addressed in

later sections of this paper but there remains one development in the 1980s that cannot be excluded from any review of events that shaped the nature of the conflict.

In 1976 the British Government had introduced a policy of “criminalization” as a strategy for portraying the members of paramilitary organizations as criminals, and not political prisoners, ending the special status they had enjoyed in Northern Ireland’s prisons.⁸⁷ One of the bitterest campaigns of the conflict was to follow. In 1980, IRA prisoners went on hunger strikes from which ten prisoners eventually died. Among them was Bobby Sands who in 1981 ran and won election to Westminster as a Sinn Fein candidate.⁸⁸ O’Malley described the feelings of many Catholics about the death of Bobby Sands:

The extended death watch [for Bobby Sands] engulfed [Catholics], making them participants in rather than observers of Sands’ ordeal, connecting them to him and him to the generations who had suffered, and in this psychological and symbolic union Sands came to stand for the accumulated wrongs done to Catholics, for the humiliation at being policed by their Protestant neighbours; for being made to endure subserviently; for the triumphalism of the Orange state that used every opportunity to drive home the relentless message ... that Northern Ireland was a Protestant state for Protestant people; for being made to feel less than equal; for having their Irishness and Catholicism reduced to labels of inferiority ... for being made to feel that they did not belong.⁸⁹

The hunger strikes led to considerable adverse publicity in the European and North American press and embarrassed the British Government.⁹⁰ They also led to a surge of support for the IRA amongst moderate nationalists and Sinn Fein⁹¹ and to urgings from US President Ronald Reagan to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to bring an end to the conflict.⁹²

II. THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS

It was a zero-sum game. Anything that appeared to be acceptable to Unionists was a sufficient reason for its rejection by nationalists; and conversely, anything that appeared to be acceptable to nationalists was a sufficient reason for its rejection by Unionists. (Padraig O'Malley, 'Northern Ireland: Political Strategies for the Management of Conflict', in Joseph V Montville, (ed), Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies, Lexington Books, Massachusetts, 1991.

The Peace Process

Once the British Government had assumed direct rule in Northern Ireland in March 1972, there was no returning the province to Protestant rule. However, the British Government did not want Northern Ireland's problems to be on its hands indefinitely. The presence of Britain in the province no longer served any British national interest. The British Government decided to pursue a peace settlement based on a sharing of power by the two communities.

Since 1969, the British Government had sought negotiations with the IRA and with loyalist paramilitary groups to bring an end to the conflict. Shortly after assuming direct rule in July 1972, the British Government and the IRA held secret peace talks.⁹³ The IRA's demands included the withdrawal of the British army from Ireland, an end to internment, an amnesty for its prisoners and public acknowledgement by the British Government that the future of Ireland would be decided as a whole by the people of Ireland. This was, naturally enough, unacceptable to the British Government.⁹⁴ But the British had expected little to come out of the talks: "The British found no reason, no reality, no flexibility, only arrogant, self-taught ideologues ... not in the end

serious.”⁹⁵ However, it was not to be the last of such talks between the British Government and the IRA.

The Sunningdale Agreement

In March 1973, the British Government, believing it had the upper hand militarily in the conflict with the IRA, decided the time was right for a major political initiative in Northern Ireland. In November 1973, it persuaded the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the Alliance Party (AP) to form a new power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive to take over the day-to-day government of the province. The British Government would retain responsibility for the security of the province.⁹⁶ Direct rule from Britain ended when the Executive took over power on 1 January 1974. However, other Unionist parties stayed out the Executive and Sinn Fein was excluded. The IRA vowed to destroy the Executive.⁹⁷

The Sunningdale Agreement came out of a conference in December 1973 between the British and Irish Governments and the parties of the Northern Ireland Executive. The agreement contained an expression of willingness on the part of the British Government not to oppose a united Ireland if a consensus for one were to emerge. It also contained an agreement by the Irish Government that before there were to be any change in the constitutional status of the province the consent of the majority of the people there would be required. It also agreed to the establishment of a “Council of Ireland”, in so doing, acknowledging that there was an “Irish dimension” to the problems in Northern Ireland.⁹⁸

The Council of Ireland was to comprise a Council of Ministers and a Consultative Assembly, with equal representation from the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, the two taking turns to chair. The membership of the Assembly would be chosen on the basis of proportional representation. The Council was to identify areas for cooperative action to include natural resources, the environment, agriculture, tourism, transport, sport, culture and the arts. The parties were also to cooperate to curb cross-border terrorism; to reflect the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in their domestic legislation; and to improve public support for the police services throughout Ireland.⁹⁹

The agreement, both its power-sharing provisions and the proposal for a Council of Ireland, provoked a general strike in Northern Ireland. In the British general election in February 1974, Unionists opposed to the Northern Ireland Executive won eleven of the twelve seats for the province. Finally, in May 1974, in the face of the solidarity of the strike, the Sunningdale Agreement collapsed. The newly elected British Labour Government of Harold Wilson had only a slim majority in Westminster and feared for its survival should it try to put an end to the strike. British direct rule of the province was resumed.¹⁰⁰ One lesson drawn from this by the Unionists, and others, was that in the face of threats of violence, the British Government would back down.¹⁰¹ But the agreement: “ ... had given a brief glimpse of what political life in Northern Ireland could be like if representative of the two communities worked together.”¹⁰²

The IRA Cease-fire, 1974

In December 1974, the IRA announced a ten-day cease-fire. Further rounds of secret peace talks took place between the British Government and the IRA.¹⁰³ Bowyer Bell described the talks thus:

The IRA were led by narrow, intense men in the grip of an almost messianic vision that legitimized their use of guns and made them indebted to the sacrifices of generations past. They wanted to move down the road to a Republic ... the British negotiators offered little but a willingness to listen and to recast official policy.¹⁰⁴

By September 1975 the cease-fire was over. The IRA announced it would not declare another cease-fire until the British Government declared its intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland. It would be twenty years before there was another sustained cease-fire. However, secret contacts between the IRA and British Government continued.¹⁰⁵

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

British Prime Minister Thatcher had adopted an uncompromising approach to dealing with the IRA. She admitted that her own instincts were “profoundly Unionist”. Northern Ireland was, she declared “as British as Finchley”, her electorate in England.¹⁰⁶ She saw the IRA as the source of the terrorist problem in Northern Ireland and thought the loyalist paramilitary groups would end their violence if the IRA was beaten.¹⁰⁷

Mrs. Thatcher had also taken the strict stand that Northern Ireland was a domestic British issue. Notwithstanding such a view, she came out in support of peace initiatives for the province by the Irish Prime Minister, Garret Fitzgerald.¹⁰⁸ High-level Anglo-Irish meetings were to lead to the two Prime

Ministers signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November 1985, which gave to Dublin a formal, consultative, role in the administration of Northern Ireland.¹⁰⁹

The Anglo-Irish Agreement stated that any change to the status of Northern Ireland could only come about with the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Both Governments also agreed to support legislation in their respective parliaments to bring about a united Ireland if the majority of the people of Northern Ireland showed that they wanted it. The agreement also established an Intergovernmental Council to deal with political, security and legal matters, including the administration of justice, and cross-border cooperation on security, economic, social and cultural matters.¹¹⁰ Wording in the agreement ensured that the Irish Government's role would not be just consultative.

Most importantly, the agreement was an end to British insistence since partition in 1920 that Northern Ireland was essentially a British domestic issue upon which there was no requirement to consult the Government of Ireland. "In this sense, the old order is dead, the agreement being ... the plug that was pulled on the artificial, political-life-support systems that were sustaining Northern Ireland ...".¹¹¹

The agreement was well received in Ireland, but not by Northern Ireland's Unionists, who had not been consulted on its terms. They thought it a sell-out by the British Government designed to bring about a united Ireland. It led to an upsurge in loyalist paramilitary violence. On the other hand, Sinn

Fein thought it signaled an interest by the British Government to remain in Northern Ireland, despite its claims to the contrary,¹¹² Only British political parties, who thought the agreement would relieve Britain of some of its responsibilities in Ireland, gave it unconditional support.¹¹³

The results of by-elections in January 1987 suggested the Anglo-Irish Agreement also had the support of moderate nationalists in Northern Ireland. The Sinn Fein share of the nationalist vote dropped from 41.9 to 35.4 per cent and the SDLP gained a seat in Westminster.¹¹⁴

The Peace Process

In the 1980s, Sinn Fein appeared to be losing ground politically and was being forced to accept that its supporters were becoming weary of war. The IRA was also losing ground militarily to loyalist paramilitary groups and security forces.

Between 1973 and 1989 at least twenty-five polls were taken in Northern Ireland on attitudes towards possible new constitutional arrangements for the province. Whyte summarized the responses: ¹¹⁵

- Unification attracted wide-spread support amongst Catholics but support was stronger for a united Ireland some time in the future and less strong as an immediate objective. Usually a united Ireland was preferred less by Catholics than power-sharing within a devolved parliament.
- Power-sharing attracted the most wide-spread support from both Catholics and Protestants: 30 to 40 per cent of Catholics normally put it as their first preference but if they were asked if it would be an acceptable constitutional arrangement, support varied

between 75 and 88 per cent between April 1974 and February 1989. In the same period, 45 to 57 per cent of Protestants said they would find power-sharing acceptable.

The republican goal of unification also appeared to be losing ground in Ireland. Opinion polls conducted there prior to 1990 suggested that people in Ireland had become ambivalent about unification. While, in principle, it retained majority support in the Republic ¹¹⁶ fewer were prepared to suffer serious inconvenience, including pay more tax, to bring about unification.¹¹⁷ Northern Ireland's economy had fallen far behind that of Ireland and unification could threaten the economic prosperity Ireland had enjoyed since joining the European Union in the 1960s.¹¹⁸ This prosperity had changed public attitudes in Ireland: " ... impatience with Northern sectarianism, lest hard-won prosperity and public order be compromised by contagion, has moved opinion".¹¹⁹

In response to these military and political reversals, in 1988, Sinn Fein sought secret dialogues with the moderate nationalist SDLP leader, John Hume and the Irish and British Governments.¹²⁰ In Sinn Fein's discussions with the SDLP, Hume argued that the activities of the IRA and the other paramilitary groups were counter-productive and served only to harden the resolve of the British to remain in the province, whereas the Anglo-Irish Agreement showed that the British wanted to leave. The talks failed to reach any substantive conclusions ¹²¹ but in February 1992, Sinn Fein announced a peace initiative in a document it called "Towards a lasting peace in Ireland". The document was notable in that it did not specify a timetable for British

withdrawal from Northern Ireland and called for a negotiated end to the conflict.¹²²

The Downing Street Joint Declaration

In December 1993, British Prime Minister John Major and Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, signed a “Joint Declaration” at Downing Street. Major restated the British Government position that it had no strategic, economic or political interest in remaining in Northern Ireland and would uphold the democratic wishes of the majority of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they preferred the Union or a united Ireland. Reynolds acknowledged it would be wrong to impose a united Ireland without the consent of the majority of Northern Ireland but said any agreement must respect the democratic and civil rights and religious liberties of both communities in Northern Ireland. The declaration also invited Sinn Fein and the loyalist parties to join talks on the future of Northern Ireland if the IRA and the loyalist paramilitary groups ceased their violence.¹²³ The significant feature of the Joint Declaration was the British Government concession to the possibility of a united Ireland.

Although Sinn Fein rejected the Declaration, Gerry Adams was under pressure from the US White House to show, by agreeing to a cease-fire, that he was committed to ending the conflict. Adams needed White House support for his very successful fund raising activities in the United States.¹²⁴ An IRA cease-fire was announced in August 1994. The IRA Council had voted 5-4 in favor, according to records of the meeting, mainly because of the

influence of the Irish–American lobby.¹²⁵ Loyalist paramilitary groups announced their own cease–fire in October 1994.¹²⁶

The Mitchell Report

Despite the announcement of an IRA cease–fire, Sinn Fein remained banned from the peace talks until the IRA started to decommission some of its arsenal as a good faith sign it was willing eventually to totally disarm. This stalled progress, not least because the Downing Street Declaration did not call for decommissioning.¹²⁷ However, with a visit by President Clinton to Northern Ireland imminent, London and Dublin hastened to announce in November 1995 the establishment of an international decommissioning committee headed by United States Senator George Mitchell.¹²⁸ The committee held its first joint meeting with Sinn Fein in January 1996.

Mitchell noted that the Irish Government, nationalists and Unionists, religious and business leaders, community activists, all wanted disarmament but he feared that if it was made a precondition to negotiations it would end the peace process. Hugh Annesley, then Chief Constable of the RUC, convinced Mitchell that Gerry Adams was not able to persuade the IRA to decommission prior to negotiations because Adams lacked control over the IRA. Mitchell, therefore, came down in favour of decommissioning taking place in parallel with the negotiations. The British Government asked that, if that was to be suggested in the report, it also call for an election for delegates to the negotiations.¹²⁹

When published, the Mitchell report did recommended that decommissioning and the peace talks take place at the same time. It also called for the elections the British Government had asked for.

The report recommended six principles, to become known as the “Mitchell Principles”, that participants to all-party negotiations should commit to:

- democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues;
- the total disarmament of paramilitary organisations;
- agree that such disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an independent commission;
- renounce for themselves, and to oppose any efforts by others, to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or the outcome of all-party negotiations;
- agree to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in all-party negotiations and to resort to democratic and exclusively peaceful methods in trying to alter any aspect of that outcome with which they may disagree; and
- urge that “punishment” killings and beatings stop and to take effective steps to prevent such actions.¹³⁰

Sinn Fein found the reference to decommissioning in the Mitchell Report problematic, arguing that the British security forces in the province and weapons held illegally by Protestants be subject to the same provisions. If the IRA was to disarm, Sinn Fein argued, it would be at the mercy of the security forces and private arms in the hands of the Protestant community. Legitimate questions were also raised over the practicalities of applying the provisions for the verification of disarmament. How could it be reliably verified that all weapons had been surrendered in such a climate of distrust?¹³¹ Mitchell concluded that since any weapons handed in could be

quickly replaced, decommissioning did not address any real security concerns.¹³²

Within hours of the issue of the Mitchell report, John Major announced that if there were to be no prior decommissioning, he would propose, as an alternative, a special election to select delegates to the peace talks. Major's announcement offered some encouragement to the Unionist camp, but had the opposite effect on the republicans and nationalists.¹³³ The move by Major appeared to have been designed to appease the Unionists, a plausible enough explanation given his tiny majority in Westminster and an imminent general election. The Irish Government was furious that it had not been consulted, as required by the Anglo-Irish agreement.¹³⁴

The End of the IRA Cease-fire

For some republicans, the new condition for participation in the talks was not acceptable. Frustrated by Sinn Fein's failure to gain a seat at the talks, in February 1996, less than three weeks after the Mitchell report was issued, the IRA ended its 17 month cease-fire with a bomb attack at Canary Wharf in London's docklands. The explosion killed two, seriously injured 43 and did extensive property damage. Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams was said to be disheartened by the bombing but he refused to condemn it. In reaction to the bombing, the US Administration put a halt to Sinn Fein's fund raising in the US.¹³⁵ Further bomb attacks were to take place in London and Manchester.

Notwithstanding the IRA bombing, the British and Irish Prime Ministers jointly announced that consultations with the parties would be held in March 1996 to address the form of elections which would lead to the negotiations. They were conscious that the vast majority of people in the Irish Republic and in Northern Ireland wanted peace and the process could easily die if progress was not made. Although Sinn Fein's first reaction was cautious, it agreed to look positively at attending the March consultations, possibly persuaded by the strongly negative reaction to the resumption of its bombing campaign from Sinn Fein sympathizers in the United States, the White House and in Dublin.¹³⁶ In the event, the Sinn Fein delegation was turned away from the March consultations because the IRA had not reinstated its cease-fire. (The two main Unionist parties did not attend because they refused to meet with Irish Government ministers in Northern Ireland.¹³⁷)

Sinn Fein had consistently argued that the only way to convince the IRA to call another cease-fire was to immediately hold all-party talks but the IRA's use of violence continued to be an obstacle to its participation. Neither President Clinton nor the Irish-American Senator Edward Kennedy would meet Adams.¹³⁸ However, Adams' US visa was not cancelled, an effort by the United States to keep him engaged in the peace process.¹³⁹

The special elections the British Government had insisted on holding to select delegates to the peace talks took place in Northern Ireland in May 1996. Only 65 per cent of those eligible turned out to vote. Sinn Fein, which campaigned on a peace platform, scored its best ever election result (15.5

per cent of the vote). However, there were reports in the media that many nationalist voters had “loaned” Sinn Fein their votes to ensure it participated in the talks. Following the election, all-party talks commenced near Belfast in June 1996. Sinn Fein was again not allowed to participate because of the continuing refusal of the IRA to restore its cease-fire.¹⁴⁰

The last IRA bombing had been in April 1996, leading to talk that a de-facto cease-fire was in place and to hopes that a formal cease-fire declaration might follow, which would allow Sinn Fein to take part in the peace talks. However, those hopes were dashed when an IRA bomb went off in Manchester in June 1996 injuring more than 200 people. The explosion was greeted with despair both in Northern Ireland and in the Ireland and with anger in the White House. The bombing led to speculation that the IRA, and not Sinn Fein, was leading the republican movement. The Irish and British Prime Ministers encouraged Sinn Fein (unsuccessfully) to make a formal split with the IRA.¹⁴¹

All-Party Peace Talks, September, 1997

For much of his term in office British Prime Minister John Major had relied on Unionist MPs for his parliamentary majority in Westminster. On July 1993 the votes of Unionist members of parliament had saved his Government, and the Maastricht Treaty.¹⁴² However, with Tony Blair’s election as British Prime Minister by a landslide in the General Election in May 1997, the Unionists lost their influence.¹⁴³

Blair made it clear from the outset that he was going to move quickly and decisively on all-party peace talks. He said he wanted Sinn Fein included in the talks but was prepared to proceed without them if the IRA was not prepared to declare a cease-fire.¹⁴⁴ In July 1997 the IRA announced a “complete cessation of military operations” opening the door to the talks for Sinn Fein.¹⁴⁵

III. NEGOTIATING THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

The political pull in Northern Ireland is not towards the center but away from it. Compromise is a foreign concept. There are no win-wins, only winners and losers, and that's a part of their history, culture, vocabulary and experience. (George Mitchell, Chairman, Northern Ireland Peace Talks, quoted in New York Times, 12 April 1998.)

The Good Friday Agreement

The announcement in July 1997 by the IRA of a “complete cessation of military operations” allowed Sinn Fein into the all-party peace talks but the British Government faced the further problem of getting the Unionist parties to sit at the negotiating table with them. DUP leader Ian Paisley denounced the talks as a sell-out to the IRA and refused to take part. The UUP reluctantly agreed to attend but said it would not talk directly to Sinn Fein.¹⁴⁶ To put an end to the parties’ maneuverings, Blair threatened to hold a referendum on the political future of Northern Ireland.¹⁴⁷

In an opinion poll conducted in September 1997, 92 per cent of the 1,000 people in Northern Ireland polled indicated that they wanted the political party they supported to take part in the negotiations.¹⁴⁸

On 11 September 1997, four days before the negotiations were to commence, the IRA repudiated the Mitchell principles. The IRA also rejected the principle of consent, whereby a majority of Northern Ireland's people would have to approve any constitutional change for the province.¹⁴⁹ Blair responded by announcing that Sinn Fein, which he described as “inextricably linked” to the IRA, would be left out of the talks if the IRA broke their cease-

fire, implying that the IRA announcement would not automatically lead to Sinn Fein exclusion.^{150 151}

The Breakthrough in the Talks

On 24 September 1997 the parties expressed support for a statement made by the British and Irish Prime Ministers that decommissioning would be an indispensable part of the negotiations, but could not be imposed. This provided the breakthrough needed to get substantive talks underway but it fell well short of the UUP's demand for the IRA to disarm during the negotiations. To satisfy Unionists, Blair wrote to them stating that the British Government would not propose to make changes to the political future of Northern Ireland without the support of the majority of the population of the province. Although Sinn Fein did not support the statement it was adopted on the basis that it had attracted "sufficient consensus".¹⁵² The DUP and the small UK Unionist party (UKUP) led by Robert McCartney, which together account for 40 per cent of the Unionist vote, and which were staying away from the talks, condemned the compromise on decommissioning.¹⁵³

Proposition on Heads of Agreement

On 13 January 1998, the British and Irish Governments concluded a "Proposition on Heads of Agreement", which they described as deriving from the views of all parties to the peace talks and represented their "best guess" at what could lead to a generally acceptable outcome. They offered the document as a basis for discussion by the parties.¹⁵⁴ The most significant elements of the document provided for a Northern Ireland Assembly to be

elected by proportional representation; an intergovernmental council of representatives of the British and Irish Governments; new Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland assemblies (the so-called Council of the British Isles); and a North-South ministerial council to promote co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland. In addition, Ireland's constitution would be amended to remove its territorial claim to Northern Ireland¹⁵⁵ and the British Government would pass legislation acknowledging the possibility of a united Ireland if a majority in Northern Ireland supported it.¹⁵⁶

The document was accepted by the SDLP and UUP as a basis for talks but a major difficulty was the relative authority of the North-South council and the Council of the British Isles.¹⁵⁷ For the UUP, the document made it clear the former, which it saw as an embryonic all-Ireland government, would come under the authority of the latter and would have no executive powers. The SDLP, unwilling to accept any arrangement that suggested the North-South council was less important than the Council of the British Isles, argued that the document spoke of the North-South council bringing together "those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government", making it clear the North-South council was intended to have executive powers.¹⁵⁸

Sinn Fein was also concerned about the absence of explicit executive powers for the North-South council. However, Irish Prime Minister Ahern, who said that during the negotiations he had been "watching and protecting the interest of nationalists" provided assurances to Sinn Fein that it would be "an executive implementation body". Notwithstanding its continued misgivings,

Sinn Fein agreed it would engage fully in the negotiations. The DUP characterized the paper as a blueprint for a united Ireland which would haunt the UUP. But a timely poll published by the Belfast Telegraph showed that just over 50 per cent of Protestants as well as an expected 96 per cent of Catholics would accept north–south co–operation.¹⁵⁹

The negotiations were taking place against a background of daily sectarian violence. However, the British and Irish Governments were determined to enforce the principle that all parties to the talks had to renounce violence. Evidence that the paramilitary Ulster Defence Association (UDA) had been responsible for the deaths of three Catholics led to a temporary ban from the talks of its political arm, the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). Two murders by the IRA in Belfast in February 1977 led to a similar ban on the Sinn Fein delegation.¹⁶⁰

Two days before the scheduled date for the conclusion of the negotiations, the talks were close to collapsing. One Irish official later described the negotiations with the Unionist parties during that period as: “...like trying to nail jellyfish”.¹⁶¹ However, the difficulties were not only between the parties and the governments but also between the two governments. A proposal for a powerful North–South Council which would not be accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and which had been the outcome of negotiations directly between the two prime ministers, was flatly rejected by UUP leader David Trimble. Prime Minister Blair indicated he was willing to reopen negotiations on the north–south bodies, but Prime Minister Ahern agreed to do so only at the very last minute.¹⁶² The issue of the relative powers of the

Assembly and the North–South Council was finally resolved through compromise language. However, the issues of decommissioning, police reform and prisoner releases remained. In the final hours of the negotiations, when it looked increasingly unlikely David Trimble and Gerry Adams would remain in the talks, US President Clinton spoke to the two prime ministers, to David Trimble, Gerry Adams, John Hume and Senator Mitchell. According to the White House he was, “cajoling, motivating, encouraging and advising”, assuring the party leaders that if they would take the political risks he would support them.¹⁶³

Both David Trimble's heir apparent in the UUP, Jeffrey Donaldson, and the deputy leader of the UUP, John Taylor, had great difficulty with the language on decommissioning. Donaldson was reported to have told Trimble he would not sit at an executive body with Sinn Fein without guarantees of IRA decommissioning. It took President Clinton's personal intervention and, more importantly, written assurances from Prime Minister Blair before Trimble was able to accept the language of the agreement.¹⁶⁴ The assurances that Blair gave Trimble came in a letter which read: “I confirm that in our view the effect of the decommissioning section of the agreement, with decommissioning schemes coming into effect in June (1998), is that the process of decommissioning should begin straight away.”¹⁶⁵

Agreement

The agreement that was finally reached on 10 April 1998 retained the essential elements of the draft jointly tabled by the British and Irish Governments:

- It acknowledged that the present wish of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland was to maintain the Union and that it would be wrong to make any change to the status of the province without their consent. However, British legislation would be adopted acknowledging the possibility of a united Ireland if a majority in the province supported it; and amendments would be made to the Irish constitution to remove its territorial claim to Northern Ireland.
- A Northern Ireland Assembly would be established, elected by proportional representation with the largest party providing the First Minister and the second largest providing the Deputy First Minister.
- Legislation passed by the Assembly and found by the courts to be inconsistent with the European Convention on Human Rights and a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, would be rendered null and void.
- A Council of the British Isles would be established with representation from the British and Irish Governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, operating by consensus amongst its members, to “promote the harmoniousness and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands”. Subjects suggested for early discussion included transport links, agricultural, environmental, cultural, health, education and EU issues.
- A North–South ministerial council would be established of “those with executive responsibilities” in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government which the Assembly would need to put into effect by February 1999, or be dissolved. The North–South ministerial council and the Northern Ireland Assembly were to be regarded as mutually inter-dependent, one not being able to function without the other.
- The British Government would make “rapid progress” with: a new regional development strategy for Northern Ireland “tackling the problems of a divided society and social cohesion”; measures on employment equality, and extending and strengthening anti-discrimination legislation; and measures aimed at combating unemployment and progressively eliminating the differential in unemployment rates between the two communities by targeting objective need.

- Members of the Assembly would be required to commit to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means. Participants in the peace agreement reaffirmed their commitment to total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations and agreed to work in good faith to use what influence they may have to achieve decommissioning within two years.
- The British Government was required to make progress towards reducing the numbers and the role of its armed forces in Northern Ireland, to remove security installations and to lift emergency powers.
- An independent commission was to be established to review the future of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and future policing in Northern Ireland, including means of encouraging widespread community support.
- An accelerated program for prisoner release would be introduced, with a view to having all released within two years, except for those prisoners who are affiliated with organisations not observing a cease-fire.¹⁶⁶

The Unionist View of the Good Friday Agreement

Seen from the Unionist side, the agreement was a victory in that it contained explicit acknowledgement that the present wish of the majority in Northern Ireland was to maintain the union and any change to the status of Northern Ireland would not be made without their consent. Additionally, the Irish constitution would be amended to remove its territorial claim to Northern Ireland. Unionists would also effectively control the new Northern Ireland Assembly. The Council of the British Isles would likely prove only symbolic in value but in a country where, as one observer has noted, perception is as powerful as reality, its symbolism could be potent. The UUP's David Trimble emerged from the conclusion of the negotiations to announce that: "we rise from this table knowing the Union is stronger than when we sat down ... the struggle that has lasted 12 years for justice and equality for Unionists has succeeded."¹⁶⁷

The DUP's Ian Paisley and the UKUP's Robert McCartney were less enthusiastic than Trimble at the outcome of the negotiations. Both had refused to participate in the talks. There were also strong differences of view within the UUP over the terms of the agreement. Trimble's heir apparent, Jeffrey Donaldson, and the deputy leader of the UUP, John Taylor, told Trimble they would not sit at an executive body with Sinn Fein without guarantees of IRA decommissioning.¹⁶⁸

However, when the agreement was put to the full UUP on 18 April 1998, it attracted 72 per cent of the vote, but only after what was described as an emotional meeting which lasted for five hours and which produced a plea that Trimble try to resolve continuing UUP concerns: firstly, at the failure of the IRA to decommission; secondly, at what UUP members saw as the overly hasty release of the mostly Catholic paramilitary prisoners; and, thirdly, at the possibility that the review of the largely Protestant RUC may lead to it being scrapped.¹⁶⁹

Unionists overall were divided about the agreement, notwithstanding the fact that constitutional experts believed it provided safeguards to the Union.¹⁷⁰ For many Unionists, the North–South council looked like the first step in a process that could lead to a united Ireland. Reinforcing their concerns were demographic trends showing that the proportion of Catholics in the province was growing and the Protestant margin shrinking. However, most demographers think the Protestants will retain their majority well into the twentieth century.¹⁷¹ And even then, recent opinion polls suggest that a significant minority of Catholics prefer to remain British citizens.¹⁷²

The Republican View

The republicans went into the negotiations over the agreement understanding that a united Ireland was not an option. However, the Northern Ireland Assembly would give to Catholics more say in the running of the province than they have ever had before. Catholics would also have welcomed the establishment of the North–South Council. If it proved unable to achieve anything else, it would have at least as much symbolic value for Catholics as the Council of the British Isles would have for Protestants. Ireland's abandonment of its territorial claim to Northern Ireland would displease some republicans but many would have seen the early release of the mainly Catholic paramilitary prisoners as a victory.

Legislation in Westminster to incorporate into Northern Ireland law the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and a proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland would address concerns that have been felt particularly by Catholics in the province. In April 1998, following the release of the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, Human Rights Watch (HRW) welcomed the incorporation of the ECHR into law. However, it noted that the British Government could hold a detainee in Northern Ireland for up to seven days without charge, a violation of fair trial standards under the ECHR. HRW suggested the British Government discontinue this practice and put an end to the emergency powers operating in the province. HRW also endorsed the creation of a Bill of Rights and a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC).¹⁷³

In its 1999 World Report, HRW claimed the British Government had been slow in implementing the human rights provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, the NIHRC was to be “independent of government”. However, in the draft Westminster legislation, commissioners were to be appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the commissioners were to be given no powers of investigation. Following lobbying, the British Government agreed the commission would have some powers of investigation and would be able to bring some actions in its own name. It would also be able to advise the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether proposed legislation was consistent with human rights standards.¹⁷⁵

HRW also noted in its 1999 World Report that human rights groups remained critical of the British Government for the continuation of draconian emergency laws, strengthened in response to the bombing in Omagh in August 1998; intimidation of defense lawyers; allegations of security force collusion in loyalist paramilitary murders; routine police abuses; and the indiscriminate use of plastic bullets.

The prospect of a reduction in the British security presence was welcomed by the Catholic community but, more so, the review of the future of the RUC.

O'Malley has remarked:

Germane to the successful implementation of the (Good Friday) agreement is an end to the situation where the Protestant community polices the Catholic community. That situation is at the core of Catholic grievances. ...Hence the IRA's wait-and-see attitude before surrendering its weapons and demonstrating finally and conclusively that it has abandoned the armed struggle.¹⁷⁶

Sinn Fein argued that as long as loyalist paramilitary forces and the RUC retained their arms the IRA should also be able to. The IRA was formed to protect the Catholic community from attacks by loyalist paramilitary groups and the RUC. Until the RUC was reformed to remove the threat the republicans claim the force poses to the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, it was not likely the IRA would dispose of its arms.

HRW was critical in its 1999 World Report of the RUC, noting that the most serious human rights issue addressed in the Good Friday Agreement was the province's police force, which had been plagued by serious allegations of human rights abuses. The HRW report expressed concern about the review being conducted on the future of the RUC chaired by former Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten. The review was to ensure that future policing arrangements resulted in a service that was fair, impartial and accountable and conformed to human rights norms. HRW's concern was that the review would not ensure RUC accountability for human rights violations.¹⁷⁷

Concerns about security force collusion in loyalist paramilitary murders of members of the Catholic community had been reinforced by the recent airing of a British Broadcasting Corporation television series in which a member of the paramilitary Ulster Freedom Fighters claimed the RUC had helped them identify members of the IRA to attack.¹⁷⁸ Equally damaging for the RUC was the report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Northern Ireland, Param Cumaraswamy, who had been investigating death threats against Northern Ireland solicitors. Cumaraswamy said that there was prime facie evidence of collusion between the security forces and loyalist paramilitary

forces. He also accused RUC Chief Constable Sir Ronnie Flanagan of complete indifference to complaints from human rights organisations about threats to lawyers by RUC officers, thereby allowing the situation to deteriorate.¹⁷⁹ The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) in Geneva called for the British Government to investigate the murder in March 1999 of prominent Belfast lawyer Rosemary Nelson, who had successfully defended high-profile republican clients. The ICJ called on the British Government to: “... seize this sad occasion and order a judicial inquiry into the wider issue of intimidation of defence lawyers by the police in Northern Ireland.”¹⁸⁰

Some republicans and nationalists, Gerry Adams said, would view the Good Friday Agreement with skepticism, but most would do so with the hope that it offered a way forward.¹⁸¹ In selling the agreement to moderate Sinn Fein supporters, Adams said he opposed paramilitary violence and advocated the agreement as a step towards the republican goal of a united Ireland. To the less moderate elements of the party he described the agreement as a “phase in the struggle” for a united republican Ireland and implied the next phase might be a reversion to military methods. However, this view is held only by those, as Bowyer Bell has described them, “... in the grip of a messianic vision that legitimized their use of the gun and made them indebted to the sacrifices of generations past.”¹⁸²

The Referenda on the Good Friday Agreement

In a referendum in Northern Ireland on 22 May 1998 the people of Northern Ireland were asked if they supported the agreement reached at the multi-party talks.

The people of Ireland were asked if they supported an amendment to their constitution to abandon the republic's territorial claim to Northern Ireland.

While there seemed little doubt the referenda would return “yes” results, it needed to attract a strong vote of support if the agreement was going to be workable. In addition to opposition from fringe political groups in the north such as Republican Sinn Fein, it was known that the Unionist vote in the province was going to split: Ian Paisley's UDP and five of David Trimble's UUP members of parliament were supporting the “no” vote. Some opinion polls had suggested that a significant number of Unionists, possibly a majority, would vote “no” on the day. Northern Ireland's new Assembly would be able to pass laws only if there were “sufficient consensus”, which the agreement defined as a majority of both nationalist and Unionist representatives. If the agreement's opponents controlled Unionist voting, the Assembly would be unworkable.¹⁸³ Additionally, a petition signed by 30 Assembly members could in some cases prompt appeals for judicial reviews.¹⁸⁴

In the event, 71 per cent of those that cast a vote in the Northern Ireland referendum and 94 per cent of those that voted in the south voted “yes”.¹⁸⁵ The “no” campaigners claimed a majority of loyalists opposed the agreement. However, a survey conducted for the Sunday Times, suggested

that 55 per cent of Protestants had voted “yes”.¹⁸⁶ O'Neill has noted that exit polling was not a precise science in Northern Ireland, but it did show that, with the exception of Ian Paisley's electorate, Antrim, Unionists overall voted narrowly in favour of the agreement.¹⁸⁷

The Election to the Northern Ireland Assembly

The election on 28 June 1998 of candidates to the 108 seats of the Northern Ireland Assembly was fought over decommissioning of IRA weapons and the release of prisoners. The British Government, figuring that, above all else, people wanted to press on with the peace process, had danced around the issues to avoid insisting on decommissioning before prisoners were released or before Sinn Fein took up its seats in the Assembly.¹⁸⁸ While the major unresolved issue was decommissioning, the early release of prisoners came a close second in terms of the emotions generated. In what proved to be a major public relations blunder, in the lead up to the Northern Ireland referendum, the Irish Government briefly released a number of IRA prisoners being held for murder to prompt the Sinn Fein grass roots that they should vote “yes” in the referendum. Unionists were appalled at the warmth of the reception given the released prisoners by Sinn Fein. UUP organizers said privately that, in the short term at least, they thought the “yes” vote lost about ten per cent of its support at one stroke.¹⁸⁹

The outcome of the election was 80 seats for pro-agreement parties and 28 for anti-agreement parties:

- UUP: twenty-eight seats (the largest number, making David Trimble Northern Ireland's First Minister)
- SDLP: twenty-four seats (making Sean Mallon Deputy First Minister)
- Sinn Fein: eighteen seats
- Progressive Unionists Party (PUP): two seats
- Alliance Party: six seats
- Women's coalition: two seats
- For the anti-agreement forces:
 - DUP: twenty seats
 - UKUP: five seats
 - Independent Unionists: three seats

In order for pro-agreement forces to pass legislation in the Assembly, they would have needed to secure the support of at least the SDLP, the UUP and the PUP. However, there were three or four UUP dissidents whose support could not be guaranteed, particularly if Sinn Fein was allowed to occupy its seats on the executive before the IRA had decommissioned all of its weapons.¹⁹⁰ The anti-agreement forces would need only two more votes to reach the thirty required to seek legal review of legislation. And an alliance of Sinn Fein and anti-agreement forces over particular issues could not be ruled out. As O'Neill has noted: "Tight parliamentary arithmetic, and the prospect of legislative ambushes, promises an uncertain future. Confusion may yet "sow his masterpiece" in a terrain predisposed to turmoil."¹⁹¹

The first session of the Assembly opened on a promising note. Sinn Fein members abstained in the voting which elected UUP leader David Trimble to

be First Minister. However, it was not a snub: Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, explained that it was done to avoid giving opponents of the Good Friday Agreement an excuse to “beat up on” Trimble. In his response, Trimble generously said that he would never assume that: “ ... simply because someone has a past they cannot have a future”, suggesting he may be able to work with Sinn Fein.¹⁹²

On 18 January 1999, following months of stalemated negotiations, Assembly members voted 74 to 27 for an executive with five Protestant ministers (three UUP and two DUP) and five Catholic ministers (three SDLP and two Sinn Fein). They also agreed to cooperate on six cross-border committees with the Irish Government. The “no” votes came from the Unionist opponents of the Good Friday Agreement.¹⁹³

A Halt to Progress

However, David Trimble had promised Unionists that Sinn Fein would not take its places on the executive until the IRA started decommissioning its weapons. The SDLP, PUP and Alliance Party accepted that decommissioning was not a prerequisite to holding office.¹⁹⁴ However, the SDLP leader, Seamus Mallon, told a SDLP conference in November 1998 that he would expel Sinn Fein ministers if the IRA had not decommissioned inside two years.¹⁹⁵ Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness had said repeatedly that decommissioning was not required by the Good Friday Agreement until May 2000 and, anyway, Sinn Fein was not able to get the IRA to disarm: “they would chase me out of the room”, McGuinness said on one occasion.¹⁹⁶

A British Government deadline of 10 March 1999 for the formal devolution of powers to the Assembly was not met due to the stalemate on decommissioning. On this occasion the UUP's David Trimble, according to one report, dealt directly with the IRA leadership.¹⁹⁷ The next chance for progress on the decommissioning issue was to come when UUP, SDLP and Sinn Fein leaders attended the White House St Patrick's Day party in Washington on 17 March 1999 where they were pressed by President Clinton, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to resolve their differences.¹⁹⁸ Lack of agreement on the decommissioning question was also the reason a further deadline of Good Friday 2 April, a symbolically important date for the Good Friday Agreement, was not met.

Politics will inevitably produces strange bedfellows, and so may it prove to be the case in the Northern Ireland Assembly if and when it begins to operate. Despite setbacks in bringing the Assembly into operation, there were small but promising signs of cooperation between nationalists and Unionists in the campaigns to support the Good Friday Agreement, a theme that will be further explored in the following section of the paper.

The Contribution of Third Parties to the Peace Process

No analysis of the peace process would be complete without assessing the role of the United States and Irish Governments in the negotiations.

Irish Governments have had an interest in the welfare of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland since partition. In August 1969, during the Battle of the Bogside, Irish Prime Minister Jack Lynch announced that his

government would not stand by in the conflict but would act as: “second guarantor” to protect the Catholic community.¹⁹⁹

Since partition, British Governments had viewed Northern Ireland as a strictly British domestic issue upon which there was no requirement to consult the Government of Ireland ²⁰⁰ but in December 1993, British Prime Minister John Major, concerned by the continuing high level of violence in Northern Ireland, discussed steps towards a peace settlement with Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds. Reynolds was later to recall: “The way I viewed it was, (I)ook, I'll take charge and responsibility of the Nationalist and Republican side. And John, you're the person who has to deal with the Unionists and between us we will try and bring the two sides together. Yes, that was the way and that had to be the way.”²⁰¹ The role played by the Irish Government in getting the nationalist parties to the negotiating table and in seeing to their interests throughout the negotiations was crucial to the conclusion of the peace agreement.

The United States also played a critical role in the peace process. An estimated 18 million United States residents claim Irish descent. The Irish diaspora in the United States has been a major source of IRA funding and weapons. In 1995 Sinn Fein raised more than \$US1 million there.²⁰² In 1984 the Irish Government seized seven tons of guns and ammunition from the United States destined for the IRA. Arrests and trials took place in the United States in the 1990s of IRA supporters attempting to ship arms to Northern Ireland, including a shipment of surface-to-air missiles.²⁰³

From the early days of his election President Clinton set out to exert influence over the question of Northern Ireland. In doing so he put at risk the special relationship between Washington and London.²⁰⁴ Three explanations have been offered for President Clinton's interest in the conflict.

Firstly, in 1992 Clinton was beaten in the Connecticut primary on the strength of the white Catholic vote. This prompted him to announce two days before the New York primary that he would appoint a special envoy to Northern Ireland, pressure the British Government on human rights issues there and give a visa to Gerry Adams to visit the United States. Clinton won the New York primary and, as a consequence, gave his campaign a large boost.²⁰⁵ In 1994 he made Senator George Mitchell his personal envoy for Northern Ireland.²⁰⁶ In January 1994, the White House, ignoring the advice of the State Department and the British Government, granted Gerry Adams permission to visit the United States. The British Government was furious about the White House decision, all the more so because President Clinton invited Adams to the White House for a St Patrick's Day celebration.²⁰⁷

Second, encouraged by the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Irish-Americans had switched their support to a peace agreement for the province and brought their influence to bear on the White House to do the same. Third, following the end of the Cold War the Clinton administration sought to resolve conflicts, such as that in Northern Ireland, and bring credit to the United States.²⁰⁸

The Unionists were suspicious of United States engagement in Northern Ireland but the British Government had been forced to accept that the White House's influence on Gerry Adams had helped to co-opt him to the peace process and produced a cease-fire that lasted for almost two years. This created a political climate in Northern Ireland that allowed moderate political leaders to advance the peace process. ²⁰⁹

IV. ARE NORTHERN IRELAND'S TROUBLES OVER?

Politics alone will not provide a final resolution. The continuing anxieties and fears on both sides betoken the deep-rooted mutual distrust between the Unionist and nationalist communities, their mutual sense of injustice and their concern that only vigilance will ensure justice in the future. Success in resolving these difficulties may well be the final building-block in the process and despite the apparent intractability surrounding them, there is evidence that a large proportion of the population on all sides is willing to compromise and move on. (Seamus Dunn, 'Northern Ireland: A Promising or Partisan Peace', *Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 52, No. 2, Spring 1999.)

A power sharing agreement will be a necessary condition for peace

The Good Friday Agreement makes no reference to “power-sharing” because of the failure to establish a power-sharing executive in 1974 due to Unionist opposition. Why then was power-sharing being pursued once again? The DUP and the UKUP, which represent 40 per cent of Unionist voters, and a few independent Unionists, actively opposed the Good Friday Agreement: some in the UUP were, at best, ambivalent. Nevertheless, the British and Irish Governments pressed ahead with a power-sharing solution. The British Government was determined to devolve much of the running of the province to Belfast, and, as polls conducted in Northern Ireland from the 1970s onwards showed, power-sharing attracted wide-spread support from both Catholics and Protestants.^{210 211}

Notwithstanding the level of popular and political support for power-sharing, questions inevitably remain as to whether it can provide an enduring political solution in ethnically divided communities. The history of this, and other ethnic conflicts, offers little encouragement for thinking it can.

Views are mixed on whether the sharing of power in a community divided along ethno-religious lines can be made to work. John Stuart Mill's view was that: "(a)mong a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist." ²¹²

Viewing ethnic conflict a century later, Azar was equally pessimistic. He argued that protracted ethnic conflicts can only be permanently resolved through decentralized political and other institutions designed to serve the different needs of groups within states and that centralized power-sharing arrangements would only become a further source of conflict between groups.²¹³

Initially, Lijphart was not optimistic about the prospects for power-sharing in Northern Ireland. He thought Unionist opposition made it "overwhelmingly unfavorable". Northern Ireland, he commented: "... exemplifies the least favorable balance of power situation: a dual division ... with one segment exercising hegemonic power".²¹⁴ However, he acknowledged that in the cases of Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland, political stability had been achieved, notwithstanding historical divisions over religion and class.²¹⁵ He concluded that, provided the British Government was insistent on the power-sharing option, it may eventually lead to a solution.^{216 217}

Steiner noted that Catholics and Protestants in Switzerland battled each other in bloody civil wars four times from the 16th to 18th centuries before

they learned that their country was more stable and prosperous when power was shared among the various groups. ²¹⁸

An analysis by Whyte of the prospects for power-sharing in Northern Ireland concluded that:

... power-sharing-plus-an-Irish-dimension offers both communities what the data suggest they most want. The surveys show that the overwhelmingly majority of Protestants wish to maintain the union, and ... they are guaranteed that. They also show that substantial numbers of Catholics would settle for an arrangement short of a united Ireland, provided they could be sure of a square deal within Northern Ireland; and a share in executive power plus an Irish dimension would help to ensure equality for them in Northern Ireland.²¹⁹

..... **but, on its own, it will not be sufficient.**

It would be reassuring if a peace settlement in Northern Ireland required only a political power-sharing arrangement acceptable to the two communities, as that contained in the Good Friday Agreement seems to be. However, the ongoing difficulties with establishing the Assembly suggest that the unresolved issues are not related to the nature of political institutions. The challenge to finding an end to the Northern Ireland conflict, as Ross has noted, is twofold: to find both a constitutional formula the parties can agree on, as well as a way for them to overcome the mutual fears that : “ ... lock the parties into a zero-sum view of any proposals”.²²⁰

As Burton has noted, there has been a: “ ... failure to recognise that there are two quite different types of conflict – those subject to the application of social and legal norms and coercive processes, and those that are not ... “.²²¹ He has argued that Northern Ireland had been characterized by the British Government as a minority rebellion in a democratic state. In defining it in

this manner, the British government failed to take issues of identity and ethnicity into account when making policy on Northern Ireland.²²²

The parties need to start talking.

As one study of the Northern Ireland conflict has argued, when the communities in Northern Ireland come to realize that they have mutual interests and start to work together and develop mutual trust the severity of the conflict between them will diminish. When they see that they need to work together to attain goals that one group alone cannot achieve but both groups working together can there will be a reduction in the tension between them. ²²³

A further study has claimed that both cooperative and competitive relationships are self-perpetuating and once established gain their own momentum. The study concludes that even when there is strong hostility between groups, joint cooperative action to accomplish goals of vital importance to both can result in continuing cooperation.²²⁴

A former leader of the UUP, Brian Faulkner, has recounted how he learned during the 1974 attempt at a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland of the high level of political intelligence and commitment that existed in the nationalist community. It had never occurred to him that political skills existed amongst his opponents. Protestants have also been amazed at discovering that Sinn Fein members seem genuinely to want to understand the concerns of the Unionist community. Republicans have been surprised at the emergence of loyalist leaders with constructive views.²²⁵

In the Northern Ireland Assembly, there will be issues that will expose sectarian differences. However, some policy issues will override those differences. Mitchell McLaughlin, Sinn Fein chairman and a one time Assembly member, noted that Sinn Fein and the PUP shared a socialist perspective on issues. Sinn Fein and the DUP have both had policies of providing grants for young farmers. Dermot Nesbitt, a UUP Assembly member, has argued that some issues the Assembly will face could bring Unionists and nationalists together, for example, to resist hospital closures. Additionally, the pro-agreement parties, Sinn Fein, SDLP and UUP, will find they will need to establish cooperative working arrangements in order to defeat the anti-agreement forces.²²⁶

If it proves to be possible for mutual interests between the two communities to develop, the severity of the conflict between them will diminish. As Giddens has commented:

The values different groups hold and the goals their members pursue often reflect a mixture of common and opposed interests. ... Open conflict is not continuous in such circumstances; rather, sometimes what both sides have in common tends to override their differences, while in other situations the reverse is the case.²²⁷

There is some encouragement in the research of Rose for thinking that the communities in Northern Ireland may overcome the differences which generates the conflict between them. Rose found in an attitude survey he undertook in 1968 at the height of the sectarian violence that on many issues Catholics and Protestants had similar attitudes. They had many of the same views on emigration, the role of the trade unions, big business, authority and social class. They also felt similar degrees of closeness or

difference with the English and the southern Irish. Rose found it was only on political and religious issues that their attitudes differed widely. He concluded that the existence of such similarity on so many issues explained the: “persistence of civil society simultaneously with political discord and disorder”.²²⁸

As Boulding has noted:

(e)ven the non-negotiable core construct of social identity that every individual and group brings to a conflict that which makes the world predictable and manageable for each party, is subject to change as social contacts change. ²²⁹

V. CONCLUSION

When I asked Brendan Hughes if he thought the "war" was over, he heaved a great sigh and said "yes" because it had "run its course". In that sigh were years of suffering and death – not just, I felt, on his side but on all other sides too. ²³⁰

Seven factors contributed to the Northern Ireland peace process making the progress it has. Firstly, the British Government recognized that not only did it have no national interests in remaining in Northern Ireland, the conflict had become an international human rights embarrassment to them. Second, the landslide victory of the Blair Government in 1997 meant that the British Government was no longer held captive in Westminster to Unionist votes. The Unionist parties could be pressured to join the peace process on British Government terms. Third, the British Government realized that the conflict was not a purely domestic British issue: the Irish Government needed to be engaged in the peace process if it were going to succeed. Fourth, the apparent willingness of the British and Irish Governments to negotiate the Anglo-Irish Declaration without consulting the Unionists signaled to both republicans and Unionists that opting out of participation would not be in their interests. Fifth, US President Clinton committed himself personally to advancing the peace process. Sixth, there was strong public backing in Northern Ireland for a peace settlement. The clear signal from both communities was that they wanted an end to the violence. Seventh, the republicans had made no headway, militarily or politically, in uniting Ireland as one country. Republican political figures had to adjust to the reality that if they were going to play any role politically at all in the province they would

have to settle for sharing power with the Unionists in a Northern Ireland which would remain for the foreseeable future a part of the United Kingdom.

There was no formula for a political settlement in Northern Ireland that would have been readily acceptable to the two communities. Power-sharing was the best option, a fact polling suggests has been accepted by a substantial majority of the residents in the province.

The remaining obstacles in the peace process result from a continuing commitment on the part of both parties to competitive approaches to resolving their differences. There is, however, some encouragement in the fact that the neither party appears to want to abandon the agreement. The sight of some of the province's moderate Protestant and Catholic leaders working to maintain the agreement suggests that mutual interests may develop between the two communities that will cut across the divide between them and lead to a reduction in the strength of their differences. In a sense they have little choice, but that may be something they are not ready to admit to themselves. It is also significant that the main paramilitary groups in both communities have not returned to the armed struggle. It is critical that the peace process not lose the momentum it has. A political vacuum would raise the prospect of further outbreaks of violence which might reverse the progress that has been made to date. The parties need to occupy their Assembly seats and elect an Executive in order to find the basis for an enduring end to the conflict.

¹ Michael Cox, 'The War That Came in from the Cold: Clinton and the Irish Question', World Policy Journal, Volume XVI, No.1, Spring 1999, pp59-60.

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- ² Quoted in Padraig O'Malley, Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today, Beacon Press, Boston, 1997, p11.
- ³ John Bowyer Bell, The Irish Troubles : A Generation of Violence 1967–1992, St Martin's Press, New York, 1993, ppx–xi.
- ⁴ David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p250.
- ⁵ New recruits to the Irish Republican Army learned of Ireland's Gaelic tradition. They were told of a nation that had been independent for over 1500 years that included all of the island of Ireland and that the Norman invasion was the commencement of 800 years of warfare which led to Ireland's economic exploitation and partition and to Northern Ireland becoming a British colony.
- ⁶ Saul Newman, Ethnoregional Conflict in Democracies: Mostly Ballots, Rarely Bullets, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1996, p156.
- ⁷ John P. Darby, Conflict in Northern Ireland: The Development of a Polarised Community, Gill and Macmillan Limited, Dublin, 1976, p3
- ⁸ Sowell, Thomas, Race and Culture: A World View, Basic Books, New York, 1994, p65.
- ⁹ John Darby (ed), Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict, The Appletree Press, Belfast, 1983, p14.
- ¹⁰ John O'Beirne Ranelagh, A Short History of Ireland, (second edition), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p81
- ¹¹ Ranelagh, pp97–98.
- ¹² Paul Johnson, Ireland: A Concise History from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day, Academy Chicago Publishers, Chicago, 1980, p54.
- ¹³ Ranelagh, p92.
- ¹⁴ Johnson, p76
- ¹⁵ Johnson, p90
- ¹⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, The IRA, Harper Collins, London, pp5–6
- ¹⁷ Cecil Woodham-Smith, The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845–49, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1962, p412.
- ¹⁸ In 1997, on the 153rd anniversary of the famine, British Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote to the organisers of the Great Famine Commemoration service in Ireland saying that those in power in London at the time of the famine had: ' ... failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy'. Irish Prime Minister John Bruton reacted to the letter by noting that it confronted the past in a way that 'heals for the future'. 'Admission of Guilt', Irish News, 3 June 1997).
- ¹⁹ Coogan, pp5–6
- ²⁰ Cox, p65
- ²¹ Johnson, p115
- ²² Ranelagh, p133
- ²³ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, The Origins of the Present Troubles in Northern Ireland, Longman, New York, 1997, p10
- ²⁴ Coogan, pp9–10. The quotations are from the 'Ulster Covenant' which was signed in 1912 by some 471,414 Unionists, some of them in blood.
- ²⁵ Ranelagh, p170,: Kennedy-Pipe, p14

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- ²⁶ John Agnew, 'Beyond Reason: Spatial and Temporal Sources of Ethnic Conflicts', in Louis Kriesberg, Terrell A. Northrup and Stuart J. Thorson (eds), Intractable Conflicts and their Transformation, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1989, p47.
- ²⁷ Ranelagh, p189: Peter Taylor, Provos: the IRA and Sinn Fein, Bloomsbury, London, 1997, p9.
- ²⁸ Republicans adhered to the principle of 'absenteeism', refusing to sit in parliaments in London, Dublin or Belfast.
- ²⁹ Ranelagh, pp189–192
- ³⁰ Ranelagh, pp194–196
- ³¹ Taylor, p12
- ³² Kennedy–Pipe, p16
- ³³ John Bowyer–Bell, A Time of Terror – How Democratic Societies Respond to Revolutionaries, Basic Books, Columbia, New York, 1978, p206.
- ³⁴ Kennedy–Pipe, p18
- ³⁵ Ranelagh, p197
- ³⁶ Ranelagh, pp200, 217–219
- ³⁷ R.S.P. Elliot, and John Hickie, Ulster: A Case Study in Conflict Theory, Longman, London, 1971, p32
- ³⁸ Kennedy–Pipe, pp20–22
- ³⁹ Taylor, p18
- ⁴⁰ Taylor, p17
- ⁴¹ Taylor, p18
- ⁴² Conflict Studies : Northern Ireland: Problems and Perspectives, Number 135, Institute for the Study of Conflict, London, 1982, p4.
- ⁴³ Conflict Studies, p3.
- ⁴⁴ Laura K. Donohue, 'Regulating Northern Ireland: The Special Powers Acts, 1922–1972', The Historical Journal, Volume 41, 4 December 1998, pp1089–1090.
- ⁴⁵ Donohue, p1114
- ⁴⁶ Bowyer Bell, 1978, p214
- ⁴⁷ Quoted in Kennedy–Pipe, p30.
- ⁴⁸ Kennedy–Pipe, p31
- ⁴⁹ Michael Cunningham, 'Northern Ireland', in Richard Kelly (ed), Changing Party Policy in Britain: An Introduction, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999, p151.
- ⁵⁰ Bowyer Bell, 1993, p4
- ⁵¹ Kennedy–Pipe, p30
- ⁵² Darby, 1983,p14
- ⁵³ Darby, 1983,pp75–78
- ⁵⁴ Taylor, pp30–31
- ⁵⁵ Kennedy–Pipe, pp40–42
- ⁵⁶ Taylor, pp30–31, Kennedy–Pipe, p42
- ⁵⁷ Colin Irwin, 'Social conflict and the failure of education policies in two deeply divided societies: Northern Ireland and Israel', in Hastings Donnan, and Graham McFarlane, (eds),

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⁵⁸ Kennedy-Pipe, pp32-42

⁵⁹ Quoted in Fionnuala Ni Aolain, Where Hope and History Rhyme – Prospects for Peace in Northern Ireland?, Journal of International Affairs, Columbia University of the City of New York, Summer 1996, 50, Number 1, p74.

⁶⁰ Kennedy-Pipe, pp32-42

⁶¹ Taylor, p40

⁶² Taylor, pp40-44

⁶³ Kennedy-Pipe, pp46-47

⁶⁴ Bowyer Bell, 1993, p105

⁶⁵ Kennedy-Pipe, p50

⁶⁶ Ranelagh, pp267-8: Bowyer Bell, 1993, p106

⁶⁷ Kennedy-Pipe, p49

⁶⁸ Kennedy-Pipe, p54

⁶⁹ Taylor, p55: Coogan, pp342-367.

⁷⁰ Ranelagh, pp269-70

⁷¹ Interview for the BBC series 'Behind the Mask: The IRA and Sinn Fein', broadcast on 'Frontline', (United States) Public Broadcasting Service, 21 October 1997.

⁷² Ranelagh, p272: Kennedy-Pipe, p54

⁷³ Kennedy-Pipe, p55, Taylor, p93

⁷⁴ Ranelagh, p273

⁷⁵ Taylor, p96

⁷⁶ Kennedy-Pipe, p59

⁷⁷ Ranelagh, p273

⁷⁸ Taylor, pp119-127

⁷⁹ Kennedy-Pipe, pp60-61

⁸⁰ Bowyer Bell, 1993, p270

⁸¹ Taylor, pp126-127

⁸² Quoted in 'Two 'Bloody Sunday': Catalysts for Change', The New York Times On the Web, 30 January 1998.

⁸³ Kennedy-Pipe, p61: Bowyer Bell, 1993, pp279-280

⁸⁴ The importance of this event to the Catholic community in Northern Ireland was finally acknowledged by the British Government on 29 January 1998 when British Prime Minister Tony Blair, repudiating the British Government's official findings, announced a judicial inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday, 1972, to be observed by international monitors. 'Blair orders new inquiry into Bloody Sunday', The Times, 29 January 1998: 'Human Rights Developments: Northern Ireland', Human Rights Watch: World Report 1999. Prime Minister Blair told the British House of Commons: 'Bloody Sunday' was a tragic day for all concerned. We must all wish it had never happened. Our concern now is simply to establish the truth, and close this painful chapter once and for all ... It is also the way forward to the necessary reconciliation which will be such an important part of building a secure future for the people of Northern Ireland.' The Guardian, 30 January 1998

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