

University of Massachusetts Boston

ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

John M. McCormack Graduate School of Policy
and Global Studies Publications

McCormack Graduate School of Policy and
Global Studies

6-1996

A Pre-Negotiation Guide to the Conflict in Northern Ireland

Padraig O'Malley

University of Massachusetts Boston, padraig.omalley@umb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umb.edu/mccormack_pubs



Part of the [European History Commons](#), and the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Malley, Padraig, "A Pre-Negotiation Guide to the Conflict in Northern Ireland" (1996). *John M. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies Publications*. 25.
https://scholarworks.umb.edu/mccormack_pubs/25

This Occasional Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in John M. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact scholarworks@umb.edu.

A PRE-NEGOTIATION GUIDE

To The Conflict in Northern Ireland

by
Padraig O'Malley

Revised - June 1996

The Author

Padraig O'Malley is a Senior Fellow at the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs and editor of its *New England Journal of Public Policy*. He is now working on a book on the situation in South Africa, "Shades of Difference: Transition in South Africa."

A PRE-NEGOTIATION GUIDE TO THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND
Padraig O'Malley
June 1996

On September 1, 1994, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) declared a ceasefire.

The declaration was potentially one of the most significant developments in Irish history since Ireland was partitioned in 1920. It represented, or at the time it seemed to represent, an acknowledgement by the IRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein, that Ireland cannot be united by physical force, that the armed struggle of the last twenty five years to drive the British out of Northern Ireland has not worked, that the strategy of "the Long War," based on the premise that if the IRA persisted in its campaign of violence long enough, Britain would eventually become war-weary and throw in the towel, has failed; in short, that the central dogma of Republican theology - that only physical force would bring the British to their negotiating knees, which dates back to 1798 has been abandoned.

However, whether the announcement will lead to a peaceful settlement of Europe's most enduring civil conflict is another matter.

First, the declaration is as important for what it did not say as for what it did say. The IRA's statement studiously avoided the use of the word "permanent" with regard to the ceasefire and did not renounce the use of violence - both of which were markers put down by the British and Irish governments as prerequisites for a

seat at the negotiating table. A "complete cessation" of violence - the terminology used by the IRA - is open-ended. It leaves the door open for a return to the use of force sometime in the future, if the IRA does not get what it wants at the negotiating table.

While both governments found ways to finesse the interpretations of the various phraseologies drifting in and out of the political cyberspace, the British Prime Minister, John Major, chose for a time to take a stand on the issue, making it clear that nothing less than an unambivalent declaration of a permanent ceasefire coupled with a renunciation of violence would open the way for negotiations between the British government and the IRA. And then came the added precondition. The IRA would have to "decommission" its arms.

The IRA will never be in a position to make such a public declaration. When, the IRA, after a protracted period of intense and often acrimonious debate, accepts the government's position, the government immediately moves the goalposts. The IRA, the government insists, must decommission all its arms before it will be given a seat at a multilateral negotiating table, an added precondition for talks, which, Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein, equally insists, the IRA cannot agree to.

A unilateral surrender of its weapons would amount to a humiliating defeat for the IRA. It would also rob the organization of the only insurance policy it has that the British will negotiate in good faith: without the possession of arms, the IRA is just one more small political party in Northern Ireland, representing ten per cent of the population, and in easy danger of being marginalized, as often happens to small parties in similar situations. Nor is there any *quid pro quo* in the offing: no suggestion that a gradual decommissioning of arms could be coupled with other issues, such as the release of political prisoners or the elimination of provisions in the Emergency Powers Act.

Besides, there are no satisfactory verification procedures that can be put in place that will ensure that the IRA would decommission all its arms; and even if such sophisticated procedures did exist and were under the control of international supervision, there is not the slightest possibility of the Unionists ever accepting that the IRA would in fact fully decommission its armory.

(Ironically, the British Government's success in convincing the public during the 1980s that the IRA, thanks to the so-called Libyan connection, had huge caches of weapons, including state-of-the-art missile hardware, stockpiled throughout both parts of Ireland, thus ensuring that it could wage war well into the next century, has so beguiled Unionists that no verification process, no matter how painstaking its procedures would assuage their ingrained belief that the IRA was simply pulling a fast one on the government.)

The fact is that the decommissioning of arms in a situation of conflict is a byproduct of negotiations rather than a precondition for negotiations; it is an outcome rather than an enabler of the process; it is a consequence of establishing a climate of trust rather than a precursor for trust; it is contingent on the evolution of an agreed-upon political framework rather than something that emerges out of a political vacuum.

One year after it declared a ceasefire, the IRA had little to show for its efforts, giving more credence in the movement to the arguments of the hard men, who were only reluctantly persuaded to the merits of a ceasefire, that the only thing on the British agenda is to smash the IRA.

The IRA has faced this kind of predicament before when the contradictions of deeply-held positions has led to splits in the movement between those who believe that the way forward is to join the constitutional process, despite its deficiencies and disappointments, and those who believe that physical force is the

only kind of diplomacy the British understand. For a time, it appeared that the former were having their way, but the latter, especially in the aftermath of the most recent bombing in Manchester, which practically destroyed the center of the city and injured over 200 people, are waiting in the wings.

Second, the IRA did not clarify its position regarding the question of consent. Both the British and Irish governments, in **Article One of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985**, and again in the **Downing Street Declaration of December 1993**, acknowledged that *the constitutional status of Northern Ireland will change only when a majority of the people there give their free and full consent to such a change, and both governments acknowledge that consent does not exist at the present time.*

In other words, *the question of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is not up for negotiation*, and whatever talks are envisioned will not have the issue of how to bring about the unity of Ireland on their agenda.

It is imperative, therefore, that the frame of reference of what is and what is not on the negotiating table be made crystal clear before negotiations begin. Otherwise, the possibility of finding common ground will simply dissipate in a welter of accusations and counter-accusations of betrayal, and the ceasefire will undoubtedly be among the casualties of the recriminations that will follow.

Third, the republican movement has always adhered to one unshakable demand: there would be no ceasefire without a declaration of intent by Britain to withdraw from Northern Ireland, even if the date of withdrawal were some twenty or thirty years down the road, and even if the guarantee was in the form of a private understanding. Unionists, in particular, have the right to demand that the IRA and the British government supply irrefutable

proof that no such deal was struck.

If the past is any guide to the future, the prospects of the British convincing the Unionists that no such deal was struck are dim at best and next to non-existent at worst. Unfortunately, there is little the British can do to allay Unionist distrust; indeed, their actions in the past, if anything, make a *prima facie* case for regarding Unionist distrust as being well-founded. And this is what will make it so difficult to bring the Unionists to the table: They have neither forgotten nor forgiven the British for excluding them from the negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which for the first time gave the Irish government a consultative role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Yet, without full Unionist participation in the process, peace will never be at hand. Moreover, vigorous British efforts to reassure Unionists that no deal was brokered behind their backs coupled with vigorous Nationalist efforts to boost their position by exaggerating what the Catholic community might expect in the future will likely result in a plethora of confusing and contradictory statements as every side tries to put its own particular "spin" on matters.

On 13 October 1994, Loyalist paramilitaries declared a ceasefire.

On February 9, 1995, the IRA announced the end of its ceasefire and, to ensure that all and sundry got the message, it detonated a bomb in London, killing two people and seriously injuring 43 others.

On May 30, 1996 the people of Northern Ireland went to the polls to elect a deliberative assembly that consisted of ninety members elected on a party list system, and twenty members appointed, two to each of the ten parties that topped the poll.

The people of Northern Ireland, perhaps innured by the experience of almost thirty years of political wrangling and the

repeated failure of efforts to secure peace, did not turn out in droves to elect the body that would select the negotiating teams to represent them in all-party talks.

Only 65 per cent of eligible voters went to the polls, hardly a turn-out that reflected the people's belief that some sort of settlement was in the offing. After all, the IRA had declared in harsh language that there would be no decommissioning of arms, questions of a ceasefire aside, until a final settlement had been agreed to; every party had reiterated its unmoveable position; every side campaigned in the language of belligerence, not the language of conciliation.

It was an election nationalists (Catholics) had bitterly opposed and Unionists (Protestants) had vigorously lobbied for. Ironically, the party that had opposed it the most (Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA), gained the most, and the party that had pushed for it the most (the Ulster Unionist Party - representative of mainstream Protestantism), gained the least.

As usual, Unionists, more apprehensive than ever about their place in the Union, voted their fears. Although the UUP headed the ballot with 24 per cent of the vote (30 seats), the DUP secured 19 per cent of the vote (24 seats), a gap of five per cent between the two compared to the gap of 12 per cent that existed after the 1993 local elections. Indeed, it could be argued that the DUP had been given a mandate to stalemate the talks since it had campaigned on the platform that it would not talk with Sinn Fein or the Irish government until the IRA had disbanded, and Dublin had deleted Articles 2 and 3 from its constitution.

Nationalists voted their hopes. Not holding Sinn Fein responsible for the collapse of the IRA's ceasefire - that responsibility they laid squarely on the shoulders of the British - and responsive to Sinn Fein's appeal for a mandate that would ensure its being seated at the negotiating table, even if the IRA had not declared a new ceasefire, they gave Sinn Fein the mandate

it sought - 15 per cent of the vote (17 seats) compared to the Social Democratic and Labour Party's 21 per cent of the vote (21 seats). In other words, Sinn Fein secured 43 per cent of the Catholic vote - its best showing ever since it had begun to contest elections in Northern Ireland in 1982.

And, so, in the narrow sense of things, both Sinn Fein and the DUP, the more extreme representatives of their respective traditions made ground. But the elections were not about what people might settle for in the way of an accommodation; the elections, like all elections in Northern Ireland, were about the different ways in which tribal beliefs express themselves. There was not one election but two; the real rivalries are not between the two traditions but *within* them.

Tribal differences are not rival i.e. they do not compete with each other; political competition is *intra-tribe*. Tribal differences complement each other. They provide cohesion for the tribe and generate the political configurations that become *intra-tribal* rivalries. Once there is a common enemy, all kinds of political rivalries are possible within the tribe. Take away the enemy and you destroy the cohesion that permit *intra* rivalries to flourish.

Hence, anything that might destabilize the status-quo is threatening. The certainty of unsecurely-held positions is always preferable to the uncertainty. Uncertainty increases anxiety; anxiety means retreat to old, securely-held positions. Holding on to securely-held positions minimizes the anxiety that possible change engenders. The psychology that sets the parameters of conflict is not the psychology of how to manage conflict, but the psychology of how to minimize the anxieties that underlie the possibility of change, and what change entails. In Northern Ireland, the overwhelming imperatives to minimize communal anxieties have always been overarching, leading to permanent

political paralysis.

Sinn Fein's vote did not register support for the IRA, but was more complex: it was at once a call for a political solution and a permanent end to violence as a means of achieving political change, and at once a censure of the British government, and in particular of what was perceived as its pro-Unionist response to the Mitchell commission's report on decommissioning, for the collapse of the IRA ceasefire. In particular, it was Irish nationalists response to the Sinn Fein platform: a vote for Sinn Fein would be a vote for peace i.e. for the restoration of the ceasefire, thus guaranteeing Sinn Fein a place at the negotiating table.

In particular, the increase in the vote for Sinn Fein was a reflection of what it ran on : A vote for Sinn Fein was a vote for peace. a vote for another ceasefire, for a negotiated settlement.

Other parties that were either elected to the forum, or qualified under the top ten formula were: the Alliance Party (7 per cent of the vote, 7 seats); the United Kingdom Unionist Party (4 per cent of the vote, 3 seats); the Progressive Unionist Party (3 per cent of the vote, 2 seats); the Unionist Democratic Party (2 per cent of the vote, 2 seats); the Northern Ireland Women's Calition (1 per cent, 2 seats); and Labour (1 percent, 2 seats).

The Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Unionist Democratic Party (UDP), despite their rather meagre vote, are disproportionately important because they are the spokespersons for the Protestant paramilitary organizations, which have the capacity to unleash an escalating sectarian that could bring all of Ireland to civil war. (It doesn't take much if you put the right demons in the right bottles).

The results of the election ensured that talks would begin in an ambience of polarization rather than one in which the need for accommodation would guide the proceedings. And true to the spirit of distrust that permeated the run-up to the election, indeed, that

has permeated the entire history of the Northern Ireland state, on June 10, when the talks were finally supposed to get under way, the Unionist parties put aside their mutual suspicions of each other, and joined forces to block the appointment of Senator George Mitchell, former Majority Leader in the United States Senate, President Clinton's special envoy to Northern Ireland, and former chairperson of the international commission that had examined the question of how the decommissioning of arms might proceed, as chairperson of the forum's plenary sessions.

They charged that his Catholic Irish /American background (even though he was raised in a Lebanese family and as a **Maronite** not Roman Catholic) and his advocacy of parallel decommissioning and talks as the way to proceed on the decommissioning issue reflected a bias on his part toward Sinn Fein. Hence, Unionists argued, he would set a Sinn Fein agenda - even though Sinn Fein had been barred from taking part in the talks because the IRA had not declared a new ceasefire. After two days of almost around-the clock haggling, Mitchell was seated, but with the understanding that there would be a review of his powers and a more precise definition of his role. Paisley, however, was not mollified. Calling Mitchell "a crony of Gerry Adams," he vowed not to attend plenary sessions headed by Mitchell.

No matter what scenario one envisaged, there was no way all parties would participate in the opening sessions of the negotiating forum, and no telling how long it might take to bring about a situation of full inclusiveness.

In the absence of the IRA having called a new ceasefire, (indeed, the IRA went out of its way to reemphasize that no ceasefire was in the offing and that no decommissioning would take place prior to a *final* agreement), Sinn Fein was not permitted to participate in the forum's opening sessions. On this question, the two governments were absolutely adamant: no ceasefire, no

invitation to negotiations. On the other hand, the IRA were equally adamant: no invitation to negotiations, no ceasefire.

In the end, what Sinn Fein had so vociferously fought for - an all-party negotiating table, it achieved; yet were denied access on the simple principle that if, the IRA would not declare a ceasefire, one side in an intra-communal conflict would bring a gun to the table and essentially say that, yes, we will negotiate, but if we don't get our way, we reserve the right to go back to the use of violence to get our way), Sinn Fein's arguments that its performance in the forum elections for the deliberative forum, a performance that confounded even the most optimistic of Sinn Fein's election strategists, cut no ice in Dublin and London. (And cuts little ice with few people, North or South; see poll results cited).

But without Sinn Fein's participation, there can be no lasting settlement: talks without its being intimately involved will lead nowhere. There is no disagreement about this; its simply a statement of the obvious.

If perchance, Sinn Fein's arguments did cut ice - and a good case can be made why they should, with some very stringent provisos - and both governments capitulated to Sinn Fein's demand to be seated, neither the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) - the mainstream Unionist party), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - the hardline Unionist party), the Alliance party (the pro-Union Catholic/Protestant party) would participate, while the SDLP (the party representing the majority of Catholics would, in all probability, follow suit. In short, no talks whatsoever. End of peace process.

Indeed, in a concession to Sinn Fein, the British government is no longer insisting on the IRA decommissioning even some of its arms as a condition for Sinn Fein's inclusion in talks. (Something it had been insisting on before the ceasefire collapsed in

door had been opened, the space provided for further dialogue, and the Hume/Adams connection continued, one of the key relationships that was instrumental in bringing about the IRA's ceasefire in 1994.

But, as has always been the case in Northern Ireland, anything that brings the competing elements of nationalism together, deepens the divisions between Unionism and nationalism.

Thus, Unionists saw the talks between Sinn Fein and the SDLP as a *rapprochement* between the two parties, as a vindication of what they had always thought: that the two were in collusion; that the differences between them were differences about orchestration, that the music itself was not an issue.

In this sense, little has changed. The miasma of suspicion that poisons every political initiative remains as pervasive as ever. Nothing diminishes the suspicion, and in the long-run, an understanding of what are not only the roots of, but the seemingly permanent "I-told-you-so" dispositions that guide the actions of both communities is a precursor for any lasting accommodation.

In South Africa, for example, blacks and whites did not distrust each other. Theirs were far more raw emotions. Whites hated or despised or feared blacks, and blacks hated the white-imposed system that oppressed them and feared the white-man's power over their lives. Raw and tough emotions can be dealt with, once they are acknowledged. Outright hatred lends itself to an antidote; lingering dislike does not.

But the endemic suspicion that permeates the political landscape in Northern Ireland is a slippery thing. It has no defined boundaries; it is amorphous, shadowy. more powerful in its lack of expression than in its expression; more difficult to deal with because they it is the product of illusion.

Will the current peace process result in their coming into being a just and lasting peace? I don't think so. But I hope I am

wrong.

The problem, as Richard Rose once so pithily put it, is that there is no solution to the problem. An uneasy accommodation of sorts, yes, perhaps, but no solution.

Republicanism is writhing in the agonies of reappraisal. Some envisage a new campaign in which the IRA would confine its activities to mainland Britain and Loyalist violence would be directed against Dublin. On the other hand, a renewal of a military campaign in the North would result in a security crackdown and a return of Loyalist violence directed at Catholics. According to the Irish police, the deepest level of support for an increased IRA campaign exists among republicans living in the Republic and in the border area of south Armagh and Fermanagh - another case of those least likely to feel the affects of violence being the most for it. [*The Irish Times* 5 June 1996].

Moreover, Sinn Fein's readiness to sign up to the Mitchell principles, which call for a renunciation of the use of violence and decommissioning of all weaponry, has caused a great deal of dissension, alarm and concern among the republican rank and file. As a result, moves, initiated by the Sinn Fein organization in Cork - about as far from Belfast as you can get - are under way to convene an extraordinary *ard fheis* (party conference) to discuss the decision on Mitchell. [Ed Moloney, *The Sunday Tribune*, 9 June 1996]

The results of an *Irish Times*/MRBI poll released three days before talks were due to start should also provide Sinn Fein with food for thought. They indicated that in the South most of those questioned believe that Sinn Fein should not be allowed to participate in the talks process without certain preconditions being met. Some 38 per cent believe that the IRA should have to reinstate the ceasefire; another 17 per cent go further and would require the decommissioning of all arms, and a further 22 per cent

February).

Now it is prepared to consider some variation of the Mitchell commission's suggestion that the parties *should* consider talks and decommissioning taking place in tandem.

But this means that even if the IRA were to call a new ceasefire, thus enabling Sinn Fein to take its place at the negotiating table, the DUP would immediately walk out.

Without the DUP, given its electoral mandate - 19 per cent of the vote, the peace process would stumble, and inevitably grind to a halt.

Nor is the UUP to be left out of the equation of withdrawals. While the UUP is now prepared to consider the new decommissioning proposals in a more conciliatory light, (its opposition to decommissioning to begin only during talks was the springboard that resulted in elections), its support is conditional at best, at least until it is convinced that the new proposals would work in practice and that verifiable procedures can actually be put in place. (How do you decommission fertilizer, the primary ingredient of the bomb that exploded in London on 9 February 1996?)

That convincing remains to be done. Any decommissioning process that does not meet the rigid standards the UUP will insist upon will lead the UUP, too, in the direction of the door. Both governments were considering a plan under which the parties would "take stock" of developments on both the "political" and "decommissioning fronts" in September - some three months into the process.

Political talks in parallel with discussion of the decommissioning issue with the built-in "review period" would appear to meet Sinn Fein concerns that the talks process would simply not gravitate endlessly around decommissioning. Thus, it would allow the IRA, before deciding whether to decommission, to judge for itself whether the Unionist parties were committed to

substantive negotiations. (But here again, there is a Catch 22: the IRA says that in the absence of substantive progress indicating that Unionists are serious about negotiations, there will be no decommissioning; Unionists say that in the absence of substantive progress towards decommissioning, there will be no negotiations on the core issues).

But this scenario would require Sinn Fein's involvement in the negotiating process, and this, in turn, would require the IRA to declare a new ceasefire. And this, in turn, would lead to a DUP walk-out.

And so it will go: political circles to be squared, even cubed.

In the end a ceasefire is inevitable - the alternative is a return to the mayhem and murder of the last thirty years, a prospect unthinkable, perhaps at last stark enough in its implications to finally concentrate minds. One bomb going off in Northern Ireland would shatter Sinn Fein, obliterating not only property and people, but the political gains Sinn Fein had accrued in the recent elections.

Indeed, that is already happening. The bombing in Manchester on 15 June 1996, and the murder of a policeman in the Republic a week earlier, seemed designed to ensure that Sinn Fein would never get a place in the multi-party talks that are currently staggering on a precarious course. The killing of the policeman, Jerry McCabe, shocked Ireland. Some 20,000 people, including the Prime Minister John Bruton and the President Mary Robinson attended McCabe's funeral.

If the IRA restarts its military campaign in the North, so, too, will the Loyalists paramilitaries, who in the two years preceding the ceasefires operated with a degree of ruthlessness and discipline that had the potential to turn civil conflict into civil war.

Even if the IRA confined its operations to the British

mainland, it would only be a matter of time before the Loyalist paramilitaries began to retaliate in the South.

Tony Blair, leader of the Labour Party, is widely seen as prime minister in-waiting; the Labour Party seems destined to become the next government, unless it finds some unfathomable way to lose - not to be ruled out, given Labour's penchant for imploding at critical electoral moments.

The party's policy regarding Northern Ireland is one that favors Irish unification, but only with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. For all practical purposes, the position is indistinguishable from the position of the Conservative Party which continues to favor the Union, but only as long as that is the wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. The Labour Party, however, is subtly less nationalist-oriented than before, and Blair's decision to support Major on the question of holding elections in Northern Ireland for a deliberative forum, despite the bitter opposition of Irish nationalists, infuriated the SDLP, which had grown used to thinking it had the Labour Party in its political pocket.

Undoubtedly, the most significant event of the latter part of the 1980s, however, was the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) in November 1985. The Agreement gives the South a consultative role in the affairs of the North and an acknowledgment by Britain that Northern Ireland is not the exclusive preserve of the British government. For better or worse, the Agreement put Anglo-Irish relations in a new context. The new context changed things, but whether it can resolve them is a different question, one on which the jury is still out.

In 1988, the SDLP and Sinn Fein, after a series of secret meetings between John Hume and Gerry Adams, engaged in an extensive dialogue with one another. The dialogue ended inconclusively, without any common agreement on a pan-nationalist way forward, and with Sinn Fein's support for the IRA as steadfast as ever. But the

would require the IRA to commit itself to the destruction of weapons in parallel with political progress. Furthermore, only 10 per cent question the constitutional status of Northern Ireland's link with Britain and only 10 per cent support the idea of a united Ireland.

On the eve of the talks, a poll taken by *The Sunday Tribune* spelled out once again the deep cleavages among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

On the question of decommissioning the differences are stark: 70 per cent of Protestants want it to take place immediately - before Sinn Fein should be admitted to talks; only 22 per cent of Catholics think it should take place immediately, while 33 per cent think it should take place only when a settlement is reached.

Attitudes divide along similar lines with regard to Sinn Fein and the IRA: 92 per cent of Protestants believe that Sinn Fein and the IRA are one and the same organization, while 47 per cent of Catholics believe they are separate organizations. (Interestingly, some 45 per cent of Sinn Fein supporters do not think that they are separate organizations).

On the issue of Sinn Fein being allowed to participate in talks prior to an IRA ceasefire, only 19 per cent of Protestants would accept Sinn Fein's admission compared with the 97 per cent of Sinn Fein supporters and 84 per cent of SDLP supporters who would countenance admission.

There is a great deal of skepticism regarding the prospects for a settlement acceptable to both communities emerging from the talks. Only 24 per cent of Protestants think so; Catholics are more optimistic - 36 per cent think a settlement likely.

Among Protestants, the most widely-favored outcome is for a local parliament without any cross-border institutions (36 per cent); their second most preferred solution is for a powersharing parliament with cross-border institutions (21 per cent). On the

Catholic side, the most preferred solution is for a powersharing local parliament with cross-border institutions (43 per cent); their second most preferred solution is for a united Ireland (36 per cent) - only 1 per cent of Protestants cited a united Ireland as an acceptable outcome. Some 75 per cent of Sinn Fein supporters want a united Ireland to emerge from the talks, whereas only 21 per cent of SDLP supporters do compared to the 55 per cent who would settle for power sharing with cross-border institutions.

Overall, the outcome that commands the most support is powersharing with cross-border institutions (31 per cent) - hardly the stuff of consensus politics.

There is virtually no support for a continuation of Direct Rule (5 per cent); and almost as little support for an Independent Northern Ireland (7 per cent).

Asked about Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution, Protestants want their immediate removal (54 per cent) or their removal during talks (37 per cent). Catholics hold diametrically opposing views: 20 per cent are prepared to consider the move when a settlement is reached; 30 per cent are prepared to agree to their removal as part of a settlement; and 24 per cent say that the two Articles should never be removed from the South's constitution.

On the question of a ceasefire, however, there is overwhelming unanimity - 97 per cent of the people of Northern Ireland want another ceasefire, including 84 per cent of Sinn Fein supporters.

[*The Sunday Tribune* 9 June 1996]

But a reinstatement of a ceasefire will not bring lasting peace. It is a necessary first step, but in itself not a sufficient one. In the end it is the politicians the people of Northern Ireland have chosen to represent them in negotiations who will have to find the courage to make the compromises that will build the trust that will lead them, united in purpose, into the uncharted political terrains they must traverse before they reach the

hollowed ground of a new Ireland.

It will be a long and arduous process. No party will get what it wants. All will have to settle for a lot less than the demands they have promulgated with such intensity for the better part of thirty years.

It will test the mettle of who we are, Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, Republican and Loyalist, Irish and British - and who we will become.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROBLEM:

There are three interconnected relationships:

BETWEEN CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND

BETWEEN THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTH AND THE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH.

BETWEEN THE PEOPLES ON THE TWO ISLANDS.

A comprehensive settlement must take account of all three relationships. A second question, however, is which of these relationships is the most critical. *Most scholars now tend to regard the first relationship as the most critical.* It involves a conflict between two communities with diametrically opposing political aspirations. Basically it is a conflict between fewer than one million Protestants who want to maintain the union with Britain, i.e., who want to remain part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and just over one-half million Catholics who want to become part of an all-Ireland state.

The first relationship was ostensibly settled in 1920 when the Government of Ireland Act set up Northern Ireland as a political entity in its own right, and, in 1921 when the Anglo-Irish Treaty brought the Irish Free State into being. The political settlements of 1920 and 1921 were a failure. The resulting partition of Ireland reinforced cultural and political separatism, making the development of parallel confessional states inevitable. This, in turn, has made the resolution of the other two problems more

difficult, perhaps even impossible within existing nation-state frameworks.

Adding to the difficulty is the fact that the Catholic community believes that the second relationship, the North/South, must be resolved before one can address the relationship between the two communities in the North. The Protestant community, on the other hand, believes that internal governance structures for Northern Ireland must be in place before one can address the North/South relationship.

Historically, Ireland has two political traditions.

ONE TRADITION IS CONSTITUTIONAL AND NON-VIOLENT.

THE OTHER TRADITION IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND VIOLENT.

Historically, proponents of the constitutional proved to be uncannily adept at using either the threat or the fact of the unconstitutional to gain its own particular ends.

The quasi-acceptance of the unconstitutional has given Irish politics its easy toleration of political violence. Implicit toleration of political violence is also made easier for many because "the unconstitutional" prevailed in 1921.

Historically, Ireland has three cultures:

A GAELIC-CATHOLIC CULTURE.

AN ANGLO-PROTESTANT CULTURE.

A SCOTS-PRESBYTERIAN CULTURE.

The Presbyterian culture breaks down into two traditions:

THE TRADITION OF THE "OLD LIGHT."

THE TRADITION OF THE "NEW LIGHT."

The "New Light" puts the emphasis on individual freedom, religious tolerance, and equality for Catholics, while the "Old Light" emphasizes fundamentalism, uncompromising Calvinism, the Pope as anti-Christ, the Catholic Church as an abomination. "New Light" Presbyterians were drawn to the radical thinking of the

French Revolution and to the United Irishmen, and for a time it appeared that an alliance between Catholics and Presbyterians might prove insurmountable.

In the nineteenth century the "Old Light" prevailed over the "New Light," giving Protestantism in Northern Ireland its particular flavor of evangelical fundamentalism. For many the Pope continues to be the anti-Christ. As a result of the plantations in Ulster in 1607, the Anglo-Protestant and the Scots-Presbyterian cultures were confined almost exclusively to Ulster, thus giving the province the characteristics that have set it aside from the rest of Ireland. The clash of the three cultures and the divergent national allegiances they inspire, and the intolerance of each for the other, are at the root of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Historically, Ireland has had two sets of starting points:

THE CATHOLIC STARTING POINT IS 1170.

THE PROTESTANT STARTING POINT IS 1607.

In 1170, Norman warriors speaking Norman-French crossed from England to Ireland with the approval of Henry II and at the invitation of the Irish chief Dermot MacMurrough. Republicans point to this as the beginning of 800 years of English rule.

For the first 400 years, the English tried, with limited success, to conquer Ireland but the range of its rule was confined to a small area around Dublin with perhaps a thirty-mile radius. In the late eighteenth century, King Henry VIII tried more firmly to bring Ireland under the control of his Crown, primarily for strategic purposes (advances in technology had vastly increased the range and capability of long sailing ships, making England more vulnerable to attack through Ireland by her continental enemies). Subsequent attempts by his successors to secure the Crown's authority resulted in a major uprising led by the Ulster chieftain Hugh O'Neill. O'Neill's rebellion, however, collapsed with the

defeat of the Irish chiefs at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601.

Kinsale spelled the end of the old Gaelic order. Within years the defeated Gaelic chiefs had fled to the continent in what came to be known as the "Flight of the Earls," thus giving King James I an opportunity to secure the most rebellious part of Ireland by colonizing much of Ulster with English and Scottish settlers. The new settlers who began to arrive in 1607 were different. The Scots were Presbyterians of the most strict and doctrinaire kind, the English were Episcopal Protestants. Hence the Protestant starting point. From the beginning, land and religion were inextricably linked, and religion remained the barrier to assimilation because the settlements took place in the context of the Counter-Reformation.

Moreover, the colonizations were partial. At all times the settlers lived in conditions of maximum insecurity. Surrounded on all sides by a dispossessed and hostile native population, they were always vulnerable to attack. And since the settlements themselves were often scattered, the threat to survival was all the greater.

Twice in the course of the seventeenth century, the native Irish, in attempts to win back their confiscated lands, aligned themselves with a British monarch, and on both occasions they chose the losing side in an English civil war. They aligned themselves with Charles I in his dispute with Parliament in 1641, and for their efforts brought down on themselves the wrath of Oliver Cromwell, who arrived in Ireland in 1649, laid to waste the towns of Drogheda and Wexford, dispatching the native Irish to the impoverished west of Ireland. *One third of Irish Catholics perished in the eleven-year war, and after Cromwell's settlements three-quarters of the land was in the hands of the Protestant*

minority.

For Protestants, 1641 had a different significance. They had long anticipated an uprising by the native Irish. Actual events confirmed their worst fears, and when a number of Protestants were slaughtered by vengeful Catholics, it gave rise to the myth of massacre, and the myth of massacre reinforced the myth of siege. Insecurity and the fear it bred became a permanent part of the Protestant mentality.

First there was the fear of being overrun and massacred by the Catholic majority. Then came the fear of what would happen if the Act of Union were repealed. Later it was the fear of Home Rule. And finally there has always been the fear of being abandoned by the British or sold out by their own. Protestant fears are endemic. They encapsulate the entire Protestant experience in Ulster. They are so deeply-rooted, so pervasive, so impervious to the passage of time that it is almost possible to think of them as being genetically encoded: a mechanism, like anxiety, necessary for the survival of the species.

The events of 1688, when the native Catholics again rose up to support James II, the Catholic monarch who had been deposed from his throne by Parliament in favor of his brother-in-law, the Protestant King William of Orange, affirmed the lessons of 1641. The forces of James with his French and Irish allies were decisively crushed by the armies of William at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and to this day, Protestants celebrate the anniversary of the battle with huge, triumphant marches throughout Northern Ireland.

For the better part of the next one hundred years, the Protestant Ascendancy ruled. It legislated the penal laws in 1695, laws that were designed to ensure a permanent Protestant hegemony.

Catholics were banned from public office, the legal professions, and the army. They could not vote or own land or teach. The penal laws were the *apartheid* of their day, isolating Catholics in an inferior identity, causing the percentage of land owned by Catholics to fall steadily to 15-percent by 1703, and to just 7-percent by mid-century.

The eighteenth century was the age of the Protestant nation. In the latter part of it, Protestant nationalism began to emerge in its own right, which, in the light of subsequent developments, has a wry irony to it. At issue was the power of the British government to override legislation passed by the Irish Parliament (an entirely Protestant body, of course), and the extent to which it engaged in this practice to ensure that Britain's mercantile interests were always put before Ireland's. The Irish Volunteers, founded in 1778 ostensibly to protect Ireland from a possible French invasion when British army resources were stretched during the war in the American colonies, were in fact an army the Ascendancy could deploy to back up its demands for legislative independence.

The threat that Ireland might go the same way as the American colonies was enough to persuade the British Parliament to grant independence in 1782. The Act of Renunciation of British legislative rights in Ireland declared that there would be two nations - one Irish, one British, each with its independent parliament under a joint crown. Two kingdoms, one crown.

Throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, secret agrarian societies, which tenants used to control the fierce competition for land, began to proliferate. Competition for land was particularly intense in Ulster, when several of the penal laws were repealed and Catholics were allowed to purchase land and hold

leases on an equal footing with Protestants. Catholics became more attractive tenants to landlords since they were used to a lower standard of living and were prepared to pay higher rents. Protestants were not. Their secret societies turned their attention from Protestant landlords to Catholic tenants. The "have littles" fought the "have nots" along strictly sectarian lines.

The paradigm was set. In the nineteenth century, when the rapid influx of new residents, especially Catholics, transformed Belfast from a Presbyterian town of some 19,000 at the turn of the century to a teeming polyglot of some 400,000 at the century's end, competition for jobs took the place of competition for land. The sectarian riots that have sporadically ravaged the city have their roots in the agrarian violence of the previous century. The cleavages of the nineteenth century have been reinforced by the events of the twentieth. Even today, the main locations for sectarian clashes have remained remarkably unchanged since the riots of the nineteenth century.

In 1791, the Society of the United Irishmen was formed, largely by Presbyterian Republican separatists. It took its mandate from the French Revolution and began to articulate a broad-based form of Irish nationalism that would unite to "end the English connection, assert the independence of the country and unite the whole people of Ireland."

Its leader, Theobald Wolfe Tone, attempted to forge an alliance with the Defenders, the most effective, well-organized, and widespread of the Catholic secret societies, and launch a national uprising with the help of the French. The uprising in 1798 was a dismal failure. Its significance, however, was the birth of the Irish republican separatist tradition, the tradition of physical force to which the Irish Republican Army (IRA) today sees itself as being the legitimate successor. The attempted uprising made the British aware of how vulnerable they were to

attack launched through Ireland by their continental enemies. (The French nearly landed in Cobh, County Cork and actually landed in Killalla, County Mayo.) Accordingly, in 1800, the Act of Union, abolishing the Irish parliament, was passed. Britain and Ireland were united in one kingdom with one parliament.

The history of the next one hundred and twenty years is the history of the attempts to undo the Act of Union, and to give Ireland its own parliament. However, the granting of Catholic emancipation in 1829, which gave Catholics the right to sit in parliament, ensured that repeal of the Act of Union or Home Rule (self-rule within a United Kingdom) would have the most deleterious effect on the status of Irish Protestants: They would go from being part of a Protestant majority in the United Kingdom parliament to being a permanent minority in a Catholic Irish parliament.

Twice in the nineteenth century, in 1886 and 1893, the Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone, who needed the support of the Irish parliamentary party (the Home Rulers) to form his government, brought Home Rule Bills for Ireland before Parliament, and on both occasions they went down to defeat. Protestant opposition to any form of Home Rule was vociferous, widespread, and militant. In 1912 they formed the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), an army of some 100,000 men who were prepared to resist Britain with the force of arms to prevent the implementation of Home Rule. Nearly half a million men and women signed the Ulster Covenant, a declaration to use "all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament in Ireland." Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith introduced a third Home Rule bill in 1912 which passed its third reading in January 1913, but its implementation was delayed when World War I broke out. It was clear, however, that Home Rule for the entire island was not on -

even nationalist leaders were prepared to grant parts of Ulster at least a temporary exemption.

The nineteenth century was one in which the great mass constitutional movements for Emancipation, Repeal of the Union, Land Reform, Home Rule flourished. However, a parallel tradition of the unconstitutional, which held that only physical force could resolve Ireland's problems, also emerged. Uprisings in 1803, 1848, and 1867 were all easily put down. None of them enjoyed any kind of popular support nor did the majority of the people subscribe to what they stood for. However, they fed the myths of unending rebellion, of ennobling failure. The failure of the people to respond to the message of Republicanism became subverted in time by the larger myth of heroic failure in the face of overwhelming English superiority. And the distinguishing characteristics of militant Republicanism began to emerge: elitism (to a chosen few fell the task of freeing Ireland; had the men of 1916 waited for an apathetic nation to catch up to them, there would have been no War of Independence); suspicion of politics and the democratic will; a belief in physical force to secure Ireland's independence; a hatred of England; and separatism. Moreover, the founding of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in 1858 would have an impact beyond its size. When the Irish Volunteers were founded in 1913 (nationalists were only following in the footsteps of the Unionists in forming their own "army"), it was rapidly infiltrated by the IRB, and when the Volunteers split in 1914, the IRB's control of the smaller Sinn Fein Volunteers became more pronounced. (The National Volunteers supported enlisting in the British army in support of World War I; Sinn Fein Volunteers opposed enlistment.)

The Easter Rising of 1916 was mythic. Planned in secret by a small cabal in the IRB, itself a small cabal in the Sinn Fein Volunteers, it was designed to fail, to be a blood sacrifice that

would redeem the Irish nation and arouse it to action. Led by Patrick Pearse, a group of about 1,400 Volunteers took over the General Post Office (GPO) and several other strategically placed buildings in Dublin and proclaimed the establishment of a provisional Republic on behalf of the Irish people. Ill-prepared, ill-equipped, without any apparent plan of action, they were more like the occupants of a besieged garrison, ready to resist assault rather than representing the vanguard of a national uprising.

In less than a week of fighting, 220 civilians, 64 volunteers, and 134 British soldiers were killed. When Pearse surrendered, the Volunteers were jeered and spit upon by the people of Dublin as they were led away. But when the fifteen leaders of the uprising, including the seven signatories of the Proclamation, were summarily executed over a nine-day period between 3 May and 12 May, the public mood was transformed. Outrage at the Volunteers turned to outrage at the authorities, and those who had been executed became martyr-heroes. "Every student of the Uprising, reluctantly or otherwise, has reached the conclusion that it was a cardinal event, a *cardo rerum*, a hinge or turning point of fortune, after which all recourse to Home Rule on the part of the English government became impossible," the historian George Dangerfield writes in *The Damnable Question*.

"This did not dawn all at once. It appeared first as sympathy for the rebels, then as a martyrology; then as a growing rejection of the sober promises of constitutionalism. Had Home Rule been accepted by the Tories in 1912, this constitutional path would have led in the long run to independence without partition...The great political effect of the Uprising was that it generated impatience in a living generation."

The public expressed its impatience in a more forceful way in the 1918 general election when it gave its overwhelming support to Sinn Fein. The party, founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905, had become an alternative option, if only by virtue of its existence, for all those, radical or conservative, who were disillusioned with the National Party (former Home Rulers). The repudiation of the National Party, the voice of constitutional nationalism that had represented nationalists in the Westminster Parliament in one form or another since 1873 for failing to deliver Home Rule, paved the way for the War of Independence, spearheaded by the Sinn Fein Volunteers, now the Irish Republican Army, under the leadership of Michael Collins, between 1919 and 1921.

In 1920, the British government passed the Government of Ireland Act, creating two Irish states within the framework of the United Kingdom: a Northern state composed of six counties that would ensure a permanent Protestant majority, and a Southern state of twenty-six counties. However, this arrangement was superseded by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, which created the Irish Free State, an independent country in its own right, albeit with dominion status, with its own parliament, and the Northern Ireland state, with its own parliament as well as continued representation in the Westminster parliament, which would remain part of the United Kingdom.

The IRA split over the treaty - some wanting to hold out for the Republic they had sought, others arguing that the treaty gave "the freedom to win the freedom," in Michael Collins's memorable phrase, and that the Boundary Commission established by the Treaty would redraw the border in such a way as to make Northern Ireland economically unviable. A bitter civil war followed in 1922 and 1923, pitting the Irish Free State army, largely made up of former members of the IRA, against their erstwhile comrades, before the

"Irregulars" accepted that they could not prevail.

Most of those on the losing side in the civil war put aside their arms, formed the Fianna Fail party in 1926, and entered constitutional politics under the leadership of Eamon de Valera. A few remained in Sinn Fein and gave their allegiance to what was left of the IRA, to the Proclamation of the Republic in 1916, to the historically ordained mandate for a united Ireland. For them, the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, with its Dominion status and the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown, was an illegal act, and all subsequent Dublin governments were, therefore, illegal. (The Provisional IRA did not abandon this policy until the mid-1980s). The IRA, they held, was the true political and military heir to the 1918 parliament. They did not accept the right of the minority created at the time of the plantation of Ulster to secede from the nation. (The Unionists used the same reasoning to argue that the Irish Free State did not have the right to secede from the Union, that the nationalists were, in fact, the real secessionists.)

When De Valera himself assumed power in Dublin in 1932, he proscribed the IRA. During the next thirty years the IRA made periodic attempts at mounting bombing campaigns in Britain and armed attacks on military and police installations in the North. Its most sustained effort was the Border Campaign of 1956-62. The movement enjoyed little popular support and was totally surprised when Northern Ireland finally erupted in 1968. In *The Provisional IRA*, authors Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie estimate that there were perhaps fewer than sixty men in Belfast in 1969 who would have regarded themselves as being members of the IRA, and at least half of them had lapsed.

Irish nationalists - Catholics for the most part - maintain that the partition of Ireland in 1920 was contrary to the wishes of a great majority of Irish people and that Northern Ireland was an artificially created entity, its borders drawn to maximize an area that would ensure permanent Protestant hegemony. The British maintain that Home Rule would have resulted in civil war. One million Unionists - Protestants for the most part - concentrated in the northeast of Ireland, who thought of themselves as being British, would have gone from being members of a majority in the UK to being a minority in an all-Ireland Catholic state. They had not only the intention but the capacity to resist any attempt to impose Home Rule. "Home Rule was Rome Rule." Britain's solution therefore: Partition Ireland into two separate political units, one of which with its Protestant majority would remain within the UK.

And thus the irony: Northern Ireland came into being because no one wanted it. Protestants did not want it. They sought only to preserve the union of Ireland and Britain; Catholics did not want it since the new arrangements prevented one-third of Ireland's population who were Catholic from expressing their identity. Catholics in the North never gave their allegiance to the new Northern Ireland state. Instead they proclaimed their allegiance to the South. At its most basic level, therefore, the conflict pits the fewer than one million Protestants, who believe the maintenance of the Union with Great Britain is the only way to preserve their future, against the just over one-half million Catholics, who believe they will be secure only within some form of a united Ireland.

NORTHERN IRELAND: THE UNIONIST STATE

Even though they formed a permanent majority in the new Northern Ireland state, Protestants felt besieged, from within by the recalcitrant Catholic minority and from without by the new state to the South that laid claim in its constitution to Northern Ireland as part of its national territory. The Unionist government established a special paramilitary police force, the "B Specials," in 1920 to protect the state against the assaults of Republicans, and introduced a Special Powers Act in 1922 that gave the government draconian powers to arrest and intern people without due process. The Unionists concentrated all power in their own hands, and being a permanent majority they never had to relinquish it or share it with Catholics.

Increasingly, Protestants came to see all Catholics as subversives and to interpret all Catholic actions in that light. Any compromise with Catholics in anything remotely political - and almost everything was - was seen as undermining Protestant hegemony. The result was widespread discrimination against Catholics, especially in housing and jobs; a concentrated effort to keep their numbers down by keeping their emigration up; stereotyping; gerrymandering with the electoral process at the local level; and a society that put the utmost premium on geographic divisions and that used religion as a badge of political allegiance to the point where one of its prime ministers was to assert that "we are a Protestant state for a Protestant people."

Ever since the 1920s, Protestant response to partition has been reflexive: Behind every Catholic demand was the attempt to destroy the Northern Ireland state. Accordingly, when middle-class Catholics organized a civil-rights movement in the late 1960s, modelled, in large measure on the civil rights movement in the United States, demanding impartial police protection, an end to electoral abuses, equal employment opportunities, fair allocation

of public housing, and the disbanding of the "B Specials," Protestants responded in the way they were conditioned to: with violence to thwart the perceived threat since any organized Catholic action was thought by many to be an act of subversion to bring about a united Ireland. When the police could no longer control the situation, the British government deployed British army troops on the streets of Northern Ireland in August 1969 to protect the Catholic community, and the beleaguered Catholic community received them with open arms.

By 1970, the civil rights movement had achieved its major objectives, but the army's presence had become the symbol of old hatreds - a symbol that at last provided a renascent IRA with a situation to exploit. By mid 1970, the Provisional IRA had fifteen hundred members, six hundred of whom were believed to be in Belfast.

In the South, from the 1920s, partition was treated only in the context of a continued British occupation of the Six Counties. There was no disagreement among the political parties in the South on this issue; thus their policies were non-policies, simply calling for an end to the British occupation, and hence for an end to partition. By insisting that a foreign occupation was the only thing precluding unification, the political parties were spared having to discuss the question of Northern Ireland, having to consider alternative possibilities, having to examine their assumptions about Irish nationalism, having to define the nature of political consent, having to develop the processes to achieve it, and, most important, perhaps, to understand the nature of Unionism and the identity of Northern Protestantism. Partition encouraged the confessional ethos of the state. The more the Free State asserted its independence, the more it asserted its Catholicism; and, with it, its Gaelicism, eventually leading one of its prime

ministers to assert that "we are a Catholic nation."

By the middle of 1972 violence in Northern Ireland was escalating at an unprecedented rate. The IRA responded to the British government's introduction of internment without trial in August 1971 with a military campaign of unparalleled ferocity. In the seven months prior to the introduction of internment, eleven soldiers and seventeen civilians died. In the five months following internment thirty-two British soldiers, five members of the Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR), and ninety-seven civilians were either shot dead or blown to bits. On Bloody Sunday - 30 January 1972 - British army paratroopers shot dead fourteen civilians during a civil rights rally in Derry, provoking an even more murderous response by the IRA in the form of an unrestrained all-out bombing campaign.

The bombing of the Abercon restaurant in downtown Belfast on a Saturday afternoon in early March, when it was sure to be crowded with shoppers, left two dead and nineteen injured. Weeks later massive car bombs in Lower Donegal Street killed two civilians and two policemen, leaving many of the 190 seriously injured or handicapped for life. Car bombs and the threat of car bombs immobilized Derry and Belfast, stretching the security forces to breaking point.

In April 1972, the British government abolished Northern Ireland's parliament and established Direct Rule from Westminster under the aegis of a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Like so many things that were supposed to be temporary, Direct Rule has become a seemingly permanent part of Northern Ireland's political landscape, and the history of the last twenty-five years is the history of the various attempts to find new structures of government acceptable to both communities that would replace Direct

Rule.

The IRA, perhaps with some sense that it could force the next step - British withdrawal - reached for the pinnacle of excess. During April and May 1972, sixteen British soldiers were killed. In May there were 1,223 shooting incidents and ninety-four explosions. And in the first three weeks of June the army's casualties - nineteen dead and several dozen injured - were worse than in any complete month since its troops were deployed in Northern Ireland.

BRITISH POLICY

During the late 1960s, the 1970s, and the early 1980s, British government policy in the North vacillated between blunt assertions that Northern Ireland was part of the UK, and as such the conflict there was an internal matter for the UK to resolve, to attempts encouraging powersharing between the two communities in the North and recognition of an Irish Dimension, to the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 which explicitly acknowledged that the Irish government had legitimate rights and interests in Northern Ireland which would have to be accommodated in any settlement, an acknowledgement that was reiterated more strongly in the Downing Street Declaration in December 1993. Whatever forms of new governance arrangements were/are envisaged, *Britain has been adamant on one point: the constitutional status of Northern Ireland will not change until that is the wish of a majority of the people living there.* Moreover, all the political parties in the South, and the SDLP, the party which represents at least two-thirds of Catholics in the North, subscribe to this proviso.

However, Britain continues to elicit distrust on both sides of

the divide, as it seeks to appease two communities that have diametrically opposing aspirations. On the one hand, it seeks to convey the impression that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the UK; on the other, that it would not stand in the way of some form of association with the rest of Ireland. It cannot, of course, formulate a policy to accommodate both ends, and its attempts to do so only highlight the underlying incongruities and magnify the distrust.

Having no long-term objectives, or at least not publicly stated ones, she is attempting to achieve short-term objectives or to develop a set of complementary strategies to deal with complementary aspects of the conflict. The result is one of confusion and contradiction, with both communities scrutinizing every government statement for nuances that might make it appear that the government is leaning to its side. The British Government's insistence that it is an honest broker and that the ingredients of a settlement must be worked out by the two communities adds to the recipe for conflict.

Moreover, claims of neutrality lead the SDLP to argue that the task of nationalists is to persuade Britain to become one of the persuaders, that is, to convince unionists to become part of some form of an all-Ireland state. One could argue, with equal logic, that the task of the unionists is also to persuade Britain to become one of the persuaders, that is, to convince nationalists that their future lies in some form of a Northern Ireland state which is part of the United Kingdom.

Britain may or may not want Northern Ireland to remain in the U.K. It is inconceivable, however, that the U.K., given the practices of international law, would unilaterally "rid" itself of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of the people of

the region, more especially so in the post-Cold War world where ethnic conflicts and disputes over national territory are resulting in violent upheavals across Europe.

The concept of the consent of a majority is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status. Simple majority consent cannot deliver what it promises. It is regressive since it increases uncertainty about the future of Northern Ireland.

Even if Catholics were to emerge as the majority of the electorate at some future stage, the consent formula would be inoperable without the consent of a sufficiently large number of Protestants to forestall a Protestant backlash against forced incorporation into an all-Ireland state, in which they would have had no say in how that state was shaped (a "unitary state", the New Ireland Forum's preferred option, being a non-starter). Moreover, Protestants are more determinedly against a united Ireland than Catholics are for it. There is little support among Protestants for any form of a united Ireland. Most Protestants are not even prepared to see it as a future option. On the other hand, there is far less complete support among Catholics for a united Ireland than imagined. As a long-term objective it receives widespread acceptance. However, in only one of the vast number of surveys carried out in Northern Ireland did Catholics opt for a united Ireland of some form as their preferred option. Usually a united Ireland is a less favored option than power sharing with a devolved government and an Irish dimension: a differentiation between the acceptable and the aspirational.

Moreover, even supposing a majority for Irish unity did emerge and some form of all-Ireland state came into being, what if a majority of the Northern Ireland electorate, having experienced

life in a unified Ireland with its lower living standards and less-developed welfare system, wanted to reverse its decision? And what if the electorate in the Republic, where polls consistently show that the South has little wish to acquire a North that will put an added squeeze on their already scarce resources, voted against incorporating Northern Ireland into an all-Ireland state, given the complete restructuring of the Irish polity that would require?

The concept of majority consent is an illusion in the context of Northern Ireland's constitutional status. It is not useful as a tool on which to build policy. This is in fact recognized by both the Social Democratic and Labour Party, which represents the majority of Northern Catholics, and the Irish Government. SDLP leader John Hume:

Differences should be respected and institutions created, North and South, which clearly respect our diversity and our difference, but which also allow us to work the substantial common ground between all of us and through that process of working together, as happened in Europe, to break down the barriers of prejudice and distrust over a few generations, and evolve into a genuine New Ireland where a unity, similar to Europe, is based on diversity and born of agreement, and mutual respect. The answer they [the Provisional IRA] keep giving is that our approach, because we insist on agreement, gives a veto to the Unionists. Could they tell us how a group of people could unite about anything without agreement? (*The Irish Times*, 25/11/93)

Said then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and leader of the Fianna Fail party Albert Reynolds:

The Fianna Fail party is committed as one of its principal aims to the eventual establishment of a united Ireland, but recognizes that realistically it can only come about through agreement and consent, and as a result of a lengthy process of dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation. (*Financial Times*, 23/4/'93)

The Tanaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Foreign Minister, Mr. Dick Spring, said at the meeting of the Irish Association in the Mansion House, Dublin, on 5 March 1993:

We are working towards an accommodation between the two traditions in Ireland, based on the principle that both must have satisfactory, secure, and durable political, administrative, and symbolic expression and protection. We could agree on certain fundamental principles to govern all future relationships and entrench them beyond the reach of all changes in regard to sovereignty. There are possibilities here which far transcend the issue of Articles 2 and 3. [In the Irish Constitution, these articles claim Northern Ireland to be part of Ireland's national territory.] (*The Irish Times*, 6/3/'93)

Since June 1974 British opinion has consistently come down on the side of British military withdrawal. There has also been a consistent consensus for ending the Union. Ulster Protestants may see themselves as British; the feeling, however, clearly isn't reciprocated by the mainland British. The lack of British concern with Northern Ireland is not surprising. It accounts for less than 3 percent of the UK's population and for just 17 of the 651 Members of the House of Commons and since Northern Ireland MPs are not members of Britain's Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democratic

parties, they never become part of the government structure. The conflict in Ireland is seen as being the result of "Paddy" intransigence and bullheadedness. "Paddy," much to the chagrin of Northern Protestants, includes them, too.

The first White Paper on Northern Ireland's constitutional future appeared in March 1973. It proposed a new seventy-eight member Assembly for Northern Ireland elected by proportional representation. The Assembly would take over the day-to-day running of Northern Ireland, although Westminster would retain control over security. The White Paper also advanced the idea of power sharing to guarantee minority representation in government. Elections for the new Assembly were held in June, 1973 and after five months of wrangling, the SDLP, the Unionist Party and the Alliance Party agreed to form a power-sharing Executive. Within a month the three parties met with the British and Irish governments at Sunningdale to work out the political framework in which it would operate. The Irish government, for the first time, recognized the *de jure* existence of Northern Ireland when it agreed to the stipulation that a change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland would require the consent of the majority of its population. For its part, the British government said it would not stand in the way of a united Ireland, if such consent did emerge, and the Northern Ireland Executive, under pressure from Westminster, agreed to a Council of Ireland (shades of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920) to give institutional expression to the Irish Dimension.

The arrangements were short-lived. Rather than face down the militant Ulster Workers' strike called in May 1974 to protest the proposed Council of Ireland, the newly-elected Labour government, dependent for its survival on a slender margin stood aside, thus

ensuring the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement and the experiment in powersharing.

For the next ten years, "initiatives" were for the most part exercises in form. The impasse was simple and complete. On the Protestant side, no powersharing and no Irish Dimension. On the Catholic side, powersharing and an Irish Dimension. On the British side, no propensity to wield "the stick."

THE DOUBLE MINORITY SYNDROME

There are two psychological perceptions of siege that collide with each other. Catholics use the framework of Northern Ireland as their terms of reference. There they see themselves as a minority of one-third or thereabouts of the population. Protestants use Ireland as a whole as their terms of reference. Here they see themselves as a minority of twenty percent. Hence both communities see themselves as the aggrieved party, both see themselves as victims, both exhibit the attitudes and passivity that are characteristics of victimization, both see themselves in zero-sum situations.

There are two sets of perspectives:

THE PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE IS ESSENTIALLY RELIGIOUS.

THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE IS ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL.

Protestants fear Catholicism and absorption by what they see as a Catholic state on their frontier. However, there are distinct differences among Protestants regarding the question of allegiance. The Anglo-Protestants want above all else to remain part of the U.K.; Scots-Presbyterians want above all else not to become part of an all-Ireland state.

Many Protestants fear cultural and religious absorption in a theocracy. The *ne temere* decree required the non-Catholic partner in a mixed marriage to give a written undertaking to raise the children of that marriage as Catholics. This was one of the main reasons why the Protestant population of the South fell from 11-percent in 1921 to less than 2-percent today. They see themselves as having disappeared. They are beginning to express the same fears in Northern Ireland. They point to the fact that the population of Belfast is beginning to become increasingly Catholic. In fact, the City Council will be dominated by Sinn Fein in a few years. Twenty years ago the population of the Shankill was 76,000; today it is 27,000. The Protestant population of North Belfast has fallen from 112,000 in 1982 to 56,000 today. Protestants feel they are in retreat; they see Catholics as being on the ascendent.

Catholics want more political power in Northern Ireland, and some form of association with the rest of Ireland.

There are two sets of identity, which often express themselves

in terms of conflicting opposites.

THE CATHOLIC IDENTITY IS IRISH.

THE PROTESTANT IDENTITY IS BRITISH.

Many Protestants, who call themselves Loyalist, have a strong anti-English streak; they regard themselves as British only in the generalized cultural definition of the term. They are much less secure in their political identity, and they compensate for that by having a much stronger sense of their religious identity. What loyalism represents is opposition to any move to absorb Ulster into a united Ireland. Allegiance to Britain is, therefore, conditional, and to this extent the term Loyalism is a misnomer.

The conditional element of the link to Britain accounts in part for the ambivalence Northern Ireland Protestants have about their identity. Since Protestants are unsure of their Britishness, and given the fact that being British is not a primary national identity but a supplementary one (no Scot or English or Welsh person would immediately identify himself/herself as being British), Protestants are a lot more sure of what they are not than of what they are. And because they are more unsure than Ulster Catholics of what their political identity is, they are more insecure about it and tend to compensate by feeling more strongly about it. And because they do not have a strong sense of political identity, they fall back on their religion for symbols of identity. And because they take their cue in religious matters from an anti-Catholicism bias that is common to all their denominations (there are at least 55 different sects in Northern Ireland), anti-Catholicism becomes an expression of a shared identity.

THE HUNGER STRIKES 1980/1981

By the mid 1970s, an explosive issue was coming to a head in the Maze/Long Kesh prison. In June 1972, prisoners convicted of "political" offenses were treated to what, in their view, amounted to prisoner-of-war status: Prisoners were not required to wear prison uniforms or to work, they were housed in compounds, and they were allowed other privileges.

But the situation changed in 1976. Under the new policy, persons convicted of "political" crimes were treated as ordinary criminals. They would have to wear prison disgusting, and repulsive. And it didn't work.

The prisoners decided to force the issue. Hence the first hunger strike in October 1980 when seven prisoners vowed to fast to their deaths until their demands for special status were met. The strike lasted fifty-three days, ending on 18 December when it appeared that both sides had agreed to mutually acceptable terms. When this proved not to be the case, Bobby Sands began a second hunger strike on 1 March 1981. He died sixty-six days later. In the following three months, nine others followed in his death-steps.

The hunger strikes allowed the IRA to reestablish itself in the heroic mold and to reaffirm its legitimacy in a historical contest, making it more difficult to dismiss the IRA as mere terrorists representing a few.

Moreover, the fact that Bobby Sands was elected to the Westminster parliament while in jail taught the IRA/Sinn Fein valuable lessons: that the mobilization of public opinion around a particular issue was a powerful propaganda tool; that the contesting of elections provided a base upon which to build an enduring political organization. That autumn Sinn Fein (the

political wing of the IRA) tested the electoral waters when it contested province-wide elections for one more National Assembly, this one based on the concept of "rolling devolution."

THE NEW IRELAND FORUM (1983/1984)

The support for Sinn Fein in the 1982 Assembly elections (they received almost one-third of the Catholic vote) made a mockery of Dublin's claim that the IRA had no substantial base in Northern Ireland. To meet the challenge Sinn Fein's performance posed, the four major constitutional Nationalist parties on the island Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, and the Labour Party from the South, and the SDLP from the North came together in the New Ireland Forum in May 1983 to hammer out their vision of a New Ireland. Among them these parties represented the ninety percent of the Nationalist electorate who disassociated themselves from the IRA's campaign of violence. The Forum had two goals: a political objective to contain Sinn Fein and a policy objective to set forth the common agenda of Nationalists for achieving a New Ireland that would provide a clear and unambiguous alternative to armed struggle.

After eleven months of deliberations, twenty-eight private sessions, thirteen public sessions and fifty-six meetings of the four party leaders, the New Ireland Forum issued a report of its findings in May 1984. After briefly setting out the origins of the problem, the report harshly criticized British policy since 1969 for being one of "crisis management." The heart of the problem, it argued, was Britain's failure to provide the Nationalist population of the North with any constructive means of expressing its nationalism and its aspirations, thereby undermining constitutional politics. Having set out what it called a "Framework for a New Ireland: Present Realities and Future Requirements," the report

addressed the question of options: "The particular structure of political unity which the Forum [would wish] to see established is a unitary state, achieved by agreement and consent, embracing the whole island of Ireland and providing irrevocable guarantees for the protection and preservation of both the Unionist and Nationalist identities." A new, nondenominational constitution would be drawn up "at an all-around constitutional conference convened by the British and Irish Governments."

In addition to the unitary state model, the Forum examined two other constitutional proposals: one for a federal/confederal state and one for joint authority. Under joint authority, "the London and Dublin governments would have equal responsibility for, all aspects of the government of Northern Ireland," thus according "equal validity to the two traditions in Northern Ireland." Finally, the Forum said that it remained "open to discuss other views which [might] contribute to political development."

TALKS (1) 1984/1985

Meanwhile, however, the real dialogue was taking place out of public view. In November 1983, Irish Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher held their second summit meeting at Chequers, the British Prime Minister's country estate. FitzGerald made the argument to Thatcher that alienation in the minority Catholic community in Northern Ireland had reached such a high level that unless measures were taken to alleviate it, there would be serious consequences for constitutional politics in Northern Ireland. Specifically, he referred to the support that Sinn Fein had elicited in the British general election in June 1983 when Sinn Fein received forty-three percent of the Nationalist vote in Northern Ireland. He argued

that if that vote got any higher, it could signal the end of constitutional politics in Northern Ireland, that if this were to happen the consequences would spill over into the South and possibly destabilize constitutional politics there, and that that, in turn, would have serious consequences for Britain.

Informal talks got under way in March 1984, and formal talks began one year later, in March 1985. Despite the lack of success of attempted political initiatives throughout the seventies and early eighties, the political formula for an agreement was already in place. Successive Irish governments accepted that the status of Northern Ireland would not change without the consent of a majority of the people there, while successive British governments acknowledged that an Irish Dimension existed, and that a devolved government would have to have the support of the Nationalist community.

In two crucial respects, however, the capacities of both governments, but especially the British government, to translate good intentions into political actions were severely circumscribed by the entrenched, unmovable positions of their respective clients.

The Unionists, secure in their constitutional position under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act (1973) and tenacious in their belief that their numbers alone precluded them from being coerced into any form of devolved government that did not countenance majority rule, or any North-South relationship that involved more than mere "neighborliness," were in a position to veto every proposal. Moreover, since their position on an Irish Dimension was absolute, the coupling of devolution that would require their making concessions on the sharing of power with the SDLP and an Irish Dimension that would involve their making concessions to the South made any progress on devolution impossible.

On the Nationalist side, the refusal of the SDLP to enter into any discussion of devolution without a prior undertaking that an Irish Dimension was an issue of at least equal standing gave it, too, a veto power that led to paralysis. Accordingly, the British government's power to move the political parties in the North in the direction of an accommodation was severely curtailed. 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.

The Anglo-Irish process, initiated in May 1980 by Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, had resulted in a series of summit meetings in December 1980, November 1981, and November 1983 between the prime ministers of both countries. In November 1981, both governments agreed to establish an Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council to give institutional expression "to the unique character of the relationship between the two countries." The Council met on a regular basis. Indeed, in one eighteen-month period, November 1983 to March 1985, it met on no less than thirty occasions. In short, the basis was laid for an institutional framework within which the Irish and British governments could accommodate their mutual interests and debate their often not-inconsiderable differences on a whole range of matters, including Northern Ireland. Such institutional relationships, it was clear, were not subject to the veto powers of the Northern parties. The Anglo-Irish process, therefore, was the first step in shifting the framework for a political initiative out of the narrow confines of Northern Ireland and making it the shared responsibility of the two sovereign governments.

THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT (AIA) 1985

The summit held at Hillsborough Castle, County Down, on 15 November 1985, at which then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her then Irish counterpart, Garret FitzGerald, affixed their signatures to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, was, according to the communiqué which followed it, "the third meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council to be held at the level of Heads of State."

The Agreement, which was ratified by Dail Eireann [Irish Parliament] on 21 November by 88 votes to 75 by the House of Commons on 27 November by 473 to 47, and registered under Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations on 20 December, effectively gave Dublin a consultative role in how Northern Ireland is governed.

It is succinct, its brevity almost concealing the craftsmanship that went into its wording.

First, both governments affirmed that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would come about only with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Both governments recognized that at present the Unionist majority wished for no change in its status. And both governments promised to introduce and support in their respective parliaments legislation to secure a united Ireland if in the future a majority of the people in Northern Ireland were clearly to wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland.

Second, the two governments agreed to set up an Intergovernmental Conference that would be jointly chaired by the

British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, currently Sir Patrick Mayhew, and a "Permanent Irish Ministerial Representative," at present the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dick Spring. The functions of the Conference would pertain both to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, specifically with regard to political matters, security arrangements, the administration of justice, and the promotion of cross-border cooperation. A provision specifying that "determined efforts shall be made through the Conference to resolve any differences" a binding legal obligation with precedent in international law seemed to suggest that the Irish government's role was more than merely consultative.

Third, both London and Dublin support the idea of a devolved government, dealing with a range of matters within Northern Ireland, that would command "widespread acceptance throughout the community." Should this occur, Dublin would, nevertheless, retain a say in certain areas affecting the interests of the Nationalist minority (such as security arrangements and human rights). If devolution did not come to pass, then Dublin would continue to have a say in all matters that affect Nationalists. Finally, after three years, the workings of the Conference would be reviewed "to see if any changes in the scope and nature of its activities are desirable."

Thus the logic of the Agreement and the ordering of the priorities: First, work out the relationship between the two governments on a government-to-government basis; develop a set of institutional arrangements not susceptible to the shifting vagaries of political actions in the North; and then look for an internal settlement within Northern Ireland. And thus, since widespread Unionist opposition to the Agreement was anticipated, the inducement the Agreement provides to encourage Unionists to negotiate an acceptable form of devolution with Nationalists. On

been subliminal in some ways but very noticeable in other ways, the feeling that the Catholic position has finally been recognized, and had to be dealt with; the fact that it gave a permanent presence in the North of Ireland to the Irish government through the Secretariat.

THE AIA: HOW EFFECTIVE?

Ultimately, of course, the Hillsborough Agreement should be judged on the extent to which it achieves its avowed aims, that is, the extent to which it promotes peace and stability in Northern Ireland and helps to reconcile the Protestant and Catholic communities, with their divergent but legitimate interests and traditions. The notion that these aims could be achieved, however, was the product of explicit and implicit assumptions on the part of both Dublin and London, assumptions that were, perhaps, not entirely tenable.

The explicit assumption was that if the alienation in the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, the result most immediately of the British government's security policies and its administration of the judicial system went beyond a certain point, the adverse consequences for constitutional politics on the island as a whole would be not only serious but potentially irreversible. The implicit assumption was that even if there was initial widespread opposition in the Protestant community to whatever agreement the two governments came to, it would subside when the benefits of such an agreement, in the form of a lower level of violence and the formal international guarantee of the Unionists' constitutional position, became apparent to a majority of Protestants. In sum, according to the logic that prevailed, the existing level of alienation in the Catholic community was such as

by the IRA, that the Agreement has facilitated and encouraged the IRA. In the early 1990s, Loyalist paramilitaries began to engage again in the random assassination of Catholics and the divisions between the two communities remain as great as ever.

TALKS (2) 1991/1992

In 1991 and again in 1992 the constitutional political parties, after years of wrangling over procedure and micro-examining the nuances of difference between the suspension of the Agreement and merely declaring it to be inactive, the four constitutional parties in the North and the British and Irish governments agreed to a formula for conducting talks at three different levels (*Strand One* involving the parties in the North and the British government concerning structures for internal governance; *Strand Two* involving parties in the North and the British and Irish governments concerning the form and expression of the association between the North and the South; *Strand Three* involving the British and Irish governments to give formal expression to whatever emerges from *Strand One* and *Strand Two*.)

In this regard, when there is a transparent absence of trust on each side of the divide, a negotiating process and practices on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed sets up a situation more like a poker

table than a negotiating table. Rather than encouraging openness and risk-taking, it encourages both sides to play their cards close to the chest and certainly cannot provide the ambience in which accommodation emerges.

At each level, negotiation should involve the inherent risk of compromise, each compromise is a building block, and as the parties grow to trust each other as they move from one compromise to the next, with concessions, though difficult, to make apparent on all sides, each party becomes invested in the process, each develops a stake in seeing the other succeed, the sum of mutual investment develops which provides the cushion when it comes to the crunch issues.

One problem, of course, that compounded the difficulties the political parties faced was their opposing perceptions as to what the negotiating process was all about. The Unionist parties wished to negotiate an agreement to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement that is, with an agreement that would give the Republic of Ireland little or no consultative role in Northern Ireland, whereas the SDLP wanted to negotiate an agreement that would "transcend in importance any agreement ever made", that is, an agreement that would give them at least, if not more than, what they had already secured in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Hence the impasse, not simply a failure of the minds to meet.

PARTY POSITIONS

When the talks were suspended in 1992, because of the irreconcilable dichotomies on almost every question - easily evinced from the preceding outlines of how parties were thinking at the time - the following *appeared* to be the positions of the constitutional political parties regarding party talks.

The Alliance Party: In the view of the Alliance Party, the public view of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) is that they want power sharing. But now the SDLP do not see power

sharing along the lines of the 1973/74 Sunningdale model as being acceptable. The SDLP is taking a more extreme position than it did 20 years ago. The SDLP is doing exactly what Unionists did for a generation: they are driving the opposition into a corner. When Unionists went to Dublin they found none of the generosity they had been led to expect.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP): In the view of the DUP, the SDLP brought to the table a set of proposals which were so outrageous that their own friends (among them *The Irish Times*) were surprised and puzzled. Everyone thought the proposals were an opening gambit. But it became clear the SDLP was not prepared to negotiate these proposals. On one occasion concessions were made on all sides. An agreement was reached on the form an internal government should take. But one day later, the SDLP reneged on the agreement. Their proposals on the final day of talks were in the same shape and form as they were on the first day of talks.

Dublin made a number of comments before the talks process indicating that Unionists would be surprised at the generosity of Dublin, but Dublin was implacable on the question of Articles 2 and 3. They were on the table, but only to be debated. There seemed to be no willingness to reform the constitution and it was quite clear that there was no business that could be done with them.

The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP): Unionists took Hume at his word; they "took the bull by the horns" and went to Dublin. The visit to Dublin became an exercise in semantics. Dublin literally got stuck on whether there could or would be a referendum on Articles 2 and 3, if certain things happened. This issue occupied the better part of two days. The paper that the UUP put forward on North-South relations was one people thought was a good, fair, and

generous paper, and a good basis on which to have an agreement. But it was not even considered by the Irish side or the SDLP.

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP): The SDLP had strong reservations about the government of Northern Ireland being controlled by an Assembly. The likelihood would be that it would behave the way local councils behave, in fact, that the Assembly would turn out to be a larger version of the Belfast City Council, that what you were against would matter, not what you were for. That it would be a disaster. Hence the SDLP proposals for a type of administration modeled partly on the European model and partly on the American model.

DEMOGRAPHY AND SEGREGATION

In divided societies, social and political change do not adhere to the narrow contours of parochial party politics. The interstices of social and cultural variables have a more lasting impact on political developments than the day-to-day megaphone-diplomacy that passes for political dialogue.

Foremost among these factors is demography. Three aspects are most important in the demographic changes taking place in Northern Ireland: (1) the rate of growth of the respective populations; (2) the spatial distribution of the populations; and (3) the increasing segregation taking place across Northern Ireland, especially in Belfast and Derry. Add to this the widening gulf between the two communities: increasingly, they live apart.

About one-half of the province's 1.5 million residents live in areas more than 90 percent Protestant or 95 percent Catholic. Overall, the 1991 census shows that the Catholic population came to

41.4 percent and is most probably rising, while the Protestant population is at 54.1 percent and most likely falling. "What is all the more disconcerting," Mark Brennock writes in *The Irish Times*, "is the relative speed of the changes. Twenty years ago Catholics stood at 34.7 percent. This population has increased by seven percent in the last two decades."

Moreover, recent studies point to a higher number of Protestants than Catholics leaving Northern Ireland. Almost forty percent of Northern Ireland university students go to colleges in Britain. More than two-thirds of them are Protestants. At present more than half the students at Queen's University are Catholics. This is probably due to the level of Protestant emigration. However, it is also due to the offspring of the previous high Catholic birth rates reaching the age at which they can attend college. The school population in Belfast is now believed to have an equal balance between Catholics and Protestants. West of the Bann, Catholics have a majority of up to three to one in the schools.

The political effects of the change can be seen most starkly in the North's 26 local government areas. Seven had Catholic majorities in 1971; 11 had Catholic majorities in 1991, with a further two having a Catholic proportion of over forty percent and rising. Most dramatically, the Catholic proportion of the Belfast population has risen from 31.2 percent in 1971 to 42.5 percent in 1991. What all this underscores is that in the context of Northern Ireland, the concepts of majority and minority are irrelevant.

The religious divide is also striking in geographical terms.

to require new political arrangements in the short run to alleviate it, whereas the possible level of alienation in the Protestant community was thought to be containable in the long run. This latter assumption has proved to be dangerously misleading.

Unfortunately, even though the new political arrangements successfully addressed some Catholic concerns and support for Sinn Fein diminished somewhat, or at least levelled off, this did not led to a stable political environment conducive to some hardheaded peace-bargaining or political stability or a reduced level of alienation between Catholics and Protestants. Reforms attributed to the Agreement by the SDLP may have weaned Nationalist votes away from Sinn Fein, but this had not resulted in a decrease in the activities of the IRA. There is no necessary relationship between the capacity or will of the IRA to commit acts of violence and the level of political support for Sinn Fein, a fact the IRA made abundantly clear over the last several years when it has carried out some of its more wanton acts of violence.

On the contrary, the IRA was able to step up its campaign of violence; in each year since the Agreement went into effect, the level of IRA violence has exceeded its pre-Agreement levels. The average number of killings per year since 1985 has exceeded 1985 levels. Until the IRA's announcement of a ceasefire in September 1994, it was able to strike randomly, ruthlessly, and with little regard for life. Each new killing of a member of the Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR), an army regiment recruited only in Northern Ireland, it is almost exclusively Protestant and is now part of the Royal Irish Regiment (RIC), or the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the Northern Ireland Police, also predominantly Protestant, has only strengthened the conviction of Protestants, who already see themselves as the victims of a calculatedly cold-blooded campaign of genocide or what they now refer to as ethnic cleansing conducted

the one hand, there is the carrot: The more willing Unionists are to share power with Nationalists, the smaller the role of the Conference, and hence the smaller the role of the South in the affairs of the North. And on the other hand, there is the stick: The longer Unionists refuse to share power, the larger and more long-lasting the role of the South in the affairs of the North.

In this sense, the Agreement was designed to undermine Unionist intransigence.

In Northern Ireland, Nationalists overwhelmingly supported the Agreement and Unionists overwhelmingly rejected it. With the passage of time, however, Nationalist support has eroded since the Agreement has made little difference in the day-to-day lives of Catholics and has failed to deliver on some of the more conspicuous promises of reform, especially in the area of the administration of justice, that were made at the time of its signing while Unionist opposition has remained firm. One poll, taken in 1988 shortly after the imbroglio over the Stalker/Sampson report and the rejection of the appeal of the Birmingham Six, found that only sixteen percent of Catholics believed that the Agreement had benefited the minority community, while an overwhelming eighty-one percent of Catholic respondents could find no benefit to their community from it. Protestants, of course, found even less in the Agreement with which they could identify: Eighty-five percent of Protestant respondents believed that Protestants had not benefited from the Agreement and only a minuscule four percent could point to some benefit to their community.

Nevertheless, despite opinion polls, SDLP leaders insist that the Agreement has had a more subtle psychological impact in the Catholic community: that the feeling of isolation from the rest of the country has decreased; that the impact of the Agreement has

Almost every local authority west of the river Bann has a Catholic majority, as has that area taken as a whole. Currently three counties; Derry, Fermanagh, and Tyrone, have Catholic majorities, so that there are in fact two minorities in Northern Ireland, one east of the Bann and one west of the Bann. Moreover, since 1978 the number of Catholics born each year has exceeded the number of Protestants while seven out of 10 deaths are of Protestants, suggesting a younger growing Catholic population and an older, more slowly growing Protestant population.

Twenty years ago, the Protestant population of the Shankill was 76,000; today it is 27,000. The Protestant population of North Belfast has fallen from 150,000 in 1982 to 67,000 today. Protestants see themselves as being in retreat; Catholics as being on the ascendent.

In the last twenty years, of the 566 district council wards, the number of predominantly Catholic wards has increased from 43 to 120; areas almost exclusively Protestant has risen from 56 to 115. The so-called Peace Wall that cuts through Belfast slicing streets into Catholic and Protestant ghettos is living testimony to the depth of the divisions and the manner in which people deal with it.

Thus, even if the level of violence has fallen over the last 14 years, the level of polarization and segregation, amounting in many cases to de facto apartheid, has not been conducive to developing a climate that will bring to fruition the seeds of trust and tolerance, and the mutual understanding that are constantly emphasized as being the necessary underpinnings of a settlement. Government housing policy, is for all practical purposes, one of

segregation, motivated, in part, by considerations of security. But that should not obscure the more fundamental cause of segregation: most housing segregation is voluntarily chosen by members of both communities as a matter of preference and is not government imposed. One result is that as the level of contact between Catholic and Protestant has fallen over the last 25 years, ignorance, suspicion, and distrust - the bases of prejudice - have risen.

As a result of the geographical dispersion of the population, politicians will have to take into account the anatomy of Northern Ireland before developing political structures for the whole unit; in a restructured Northern Ireland special arrangements will have to be made, particularly for policing, on the west side of the Bann.

"Nationalists are winning", that is the perception of the Protestant working classes, that, and the belief that if nationalists hold to their demands and refuse compromise, they will eventually prevail when Britain finds a way out of Ireland and abandons Northern Protestants to their own devices. These themes recur frequently in Belfast where there is a marked difference between the attitudes in both working class communities on the Falls, the Shankill, and North Belfast. On the Catholic side there is a marked preoccupation with the behavior of the security forces, the constant harassment of young people, the intimidation, the unacceptability of the RUC, the maladministration of justice, the marginalization of their political representatives, and unemployment and deprivation.

But while unemployment and deprivation are also one among many

concerns in Protestant working class areas, Protestants are obsessed with a deeply-felt sense that they are losing, even though they often find it difficult to articulate exactly what it is they are losing. They believe that they are somehow being pushed out, that the concerns of the Protestant working class are ignored, that the Protestant working class is being mistreated, that they are being made the scapegoat for the actions of the Protestant ruling classes in the past.

Add to the brew Protestant perceptions that they lack community leadership, that Catholics are better at community development, more skilled at raising funding and getting publicity, and the disquiet in Protestant working class areas, the sense of being the deprived majority, has disturbing overt ones overt that spill over into violence. "An eye for an eye" is increasingly the demand, even though it leaves everybody blind. Protestants feel they have been giving everything for the last twenty-five years; Catholics feel they have not caught up. There is scarcely any recognition among Protestants that Catholics are discriminated against and have some catching up to do. Protestants in working class areas do not accept the claim that Catholics are still more than twice as likely to be unemployed and they see the Fair Employment Commission (FEC) as a way of "doing Protestants down."

Central to the sense of anger in Belfast is the feeling working class Protestants have of being squeezed out and their equation of this sense of being pushed out with the belief that Catholics are winning, and that loss of territory is evidence of an advancing Catholic community, that their current experiences in Northern Ireland are a precursor of what fate awaits them in some

future all-Ireland state.

LOYALIST VIOLENCE

This is the context in which the upsurge in Loyalist paramilitary violence that began in 1992 and 1993 must be understood. The new policy: literally, "an eye for an eye" - for every murdered Protestant (i.e. member of the security forces), a dead Catholic. For the first time, greater numbers of people - all of them Catholic- were being killed by the UVF and UFF than the number of security personnel, civilians and loyalists being killed by the IRA. The fact that these killings were for the most part random killings added a more frightening dimension to the conflict; proof, as if proof was needed, that in situations of conflict, a political vacuum will create the violence needed to fill it.

There are, in fact, two wars: the class war reflected in the data for fatalities for North and West Belfast especially, and the Border war, conducted in rural areas along more traditional nationalist/Unionist lines. Over forty percent of all deaths have occurred in West Belfast or North Belfast. Areas of greatest deprivation are also the areas of greatest violence. Forty-five percent of Northern Ireland's unemployment and 65 percent of the violence are in these areas. There are two divisions, a vertical one and a horizontal one. The vertical one is between Catholics and Protestants, the horizontal one between haves and have-nots. In Northern Ireland, it's when the two intersect that the conflict has been the worst.

Between 1969 and 1989 Loyalist paramilitary organizations

were responsible for 691 deaths, or twenty-five percent of the total. Usually Loyalist violence has come in cycles and ebbs and flows with variations in political circumstance, in recurring patterns of tit-for-tat killings. In 1991, Loyalist paramilitary organizations were responsible for 42 dead, or nearly 45 per cent of fatalities; in 1992 for 35 dead, also nearly 45 per cent of fatalities; in 1993 for 49 dead, or 58 per cent of fatalities; and in 1994, before the declaration of cease fires, for 35 dead or 60 per cent of fatalities. These totals are greater than for killings by republican paramilitary organizations during the same periods.

What made this cycle of violence more ominous was the manner in which it differed from the violence of the 1970s. It was more ruthless, more sophisticated, more efficient, and less open to penetration. It was also generationally different. Members of the UDA or UVF in the 1970s were there to protect the status quo; in many ways they were convinced that they had the implicit support of the unionist parties, and were, in some instances, their armed surrogates.

Members were part of the "old Northern Ireland," grew up under successive unionist regimes, believed that Northern Ireland was a Protestant state for a Protestant people, and even if they did not share in Protestant privilege and power, they believed they belonged to the superior group and wanted to preserve their position. The Protestant working classes were marginally better than their Catholic counterparts, if only in the sense that they "belonged" to the ruling sectarian community. Even for those Protestants who were close to the bottom of the economic heap, it

was comforting to know that Catholics as a class were worse off. It fed the myth of superiority, ascension, exclusivity.

All that has changed. It is often forgotten that Northern Ireland has been under Direct Rule for 22 years, for almost one-third of the life of the Northern Ireland state. Today's loyalist paramilitaries are different. Many were born after the conflict erupted in 1969 or the imposition of Direct Rule in 1972. They have no reference point for Protestant privilege and power, never knew Stormont rule. Given the increasing alienation that has taken hold in Protestant working-class areas, they see themselves as constantly losing, see nationalists as winning, and see their relative position continuing to decline.

And they saw more: that violence pays; the IRA, in their eyes, has squeezed concession after concession from the British government; that in the end, the only thing that counted was the bite of the bullet. And they had their role model: the IRA.

The escalating rise in Loyalist violence and the IRA's response to it, and the seeming paralysis among the Northern Ireland political parties in the face of a worsening situation finally persuaded both governments, especially the British government, as the sovereign power, to take action.

If one series of events can be pinpointed as pivotal in galvanizing them into action, it was, perhaps, the carnage that descended upon Belfast in the last week of October 1993. On October 23, an IRA bomb exploded in a crowded food store on the Shankill Road, killing nine Protestants, one Catholic, and injuring

seriously fifty others. The Protestant paramilitaries promised to exact a "terrible revenge."

They did, killing within days an equal number of Catholics. In the wake of these killings, the two governments held a series of meetings leading to a Joint Declaration by Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds and British Prime Minister John Major.

THE JOINT DECLARATION

The Declaration on the 15 December, 1993 once again set down the conditions that Sinn Fein and the IRA would have to meet in order to become part of the ephemeral "peace process." Of foremost importance was the stipulation that there had to be a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence.

For its part, the Irish government acknowledged that it would be "wrong to impose a united Ireland in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland." And for its part, the British government reiterated that it had "no selfish, strategic or economic interest" in Northern Ireland.

But the Declaration also contained ambiguous, and even seemingly contradictory references regarding the crucial question of consent. "It is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively," it said, "to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish."

The decision by the IRA to announce a ceasefire was not one that was the product of an enthusiastic turnabout or a new-found commitment to non-violence, but one hammered out in the trenches of hardball political strategising, one agonizingly reached by old comrades imprisoned by unbreachable bonds, haunted by the memories of what had happened when the IRA leadership had agreed to a ceasefire in 1975, a ceasefire that had all but destroyed the movement. The fact that those who most passionately argued for a ceasefire in 1993/'94 were among those who had most vociferously opposed a ceasefire in 1975, and ,indeed, had ousted the previous leadership because of its ineptitude in managing that cease fire, added to the irony of their deliberations.

DEVELOPMENTS FOLLOWING THE CEASE FIRES

Meanwhile, the British and Irish governments developed a Joint Framework Document, made public on February 22, 1995, that will be used as the basis for future negotiations. The framework document reinforces the Joint Declaration reiterating once again that no change in the constitutional status will take place without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

However, there were also many dissimilarities and differences between the two governments regarding how negotiations should proceed and what criteria should be met before negotiations could begin. The fundamental points of contention between the two governments remain, as ever, the South's constitutional claims to sovereignty over the North, and the future form the North/South relationship would take.

Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution claim that the entire "national territory" of Ireland falls under the jurisdiction of the

In many quarters, the Joint Declaration was seen as little more than an awkward reworking of the AIA, especially of Article 1 regarding the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. ("...its essential balance," said Sir David Goodall, one of the architects of the AIA, "is no different from that struck in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement...")

Nevertheless, the Declaration was well received, perhaps because it committed British Prime Minister John Major to putting Northern Ireland on the British political agenda.

CEASE FIRES

Military stalemate, the long hard drain on republican families, especially the families of prisoners, hints by the British that they would be prepared to consider new initiatives, the absence of any sense of progress on the political front, the levelling-off of Sinn Fein's capacity to make an electoral breakthrough; indeed, the more likely reality of an impending electoral eclipse, the fruits of the dialogue the SDLP, under John Hume's direction, initiated with Sinn Fein in the late 1980s, the talks that continued between Hume and Adams after the official termination of talks between the two parties in 1990?, the dialogue within the republican movement and between republican leaders like Adams, McGuinness and McLaughlin and the IRA's Army Council, the consultations with prisoners that Sinn Fein and the IRA should begin to explore new paradigms culminated in a decision by the Army Council to give the politics of a cease fire a chance, but with the clear understanding that the advocates of a cease fire would have to prove the efficacy of their strategy - a cease fire, yes; but a conditional one.

Irish state. This, of course, is in contradiction to the concept of majority consent, which successive Irish governments have subscribed to for two decades. It was the view of the British government that the framework document could not be completed until these differences were resolved.

The second point of difference between the two governments is the form and extent of the North/South relationship. The Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds proposed that a series of North/South institutions with executive powers be established to promote economic development and cooperation between both parts of Ireland. Most Northern Ireland Protestants would be extremely wary of such institutional structures, almost certainly to the point of rejection, assuming that they were one more step in the direction of an all-Ireland state.

Prime Ministers Major and Reynolds met at Chequers on October 24, 1994 to discuss the drafting of the framework document. At the time, their meeting was not thought to have yielded much agreement or understanding. However, on November 4, Reynolds cleared the way for further action by explicitly stating that the Irish Constitution would be changed to "make it clear in constitutional terms for the first time that the Irish people say in unequivocal terms that there will be no change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority." (NY Times, November 4, 1994).

An earlier move by John Major also facilitated talks between the two governments. On October 22, 1994, he announced that his government would accept the "working assumption" that the IRA cease

fire was intended to be permanent and that representatives of the government would likely meet with Sinn Fein before Christmas.

In addition he announced that cross-border roads would be reopened in phases; that the exclusion orders forbidding Gerry Adams and Martin Mc Guinness from entering mainland Britain had been rescinded; and that the British government would publish a series of its own proposals for peace in Northern Ireland along with the framework document (Irish Times, October 23).

Acceptance of the "working assumption," was key to the continuation of the negotiating process. Until mid-October, Major's government had insisted that Sinn Fein publicly announce its intentions for a permanent cease fire. Other items in Major's statement were also intended to "appease" nationalists, many of whom were accusing Major of taking a "Unionist" position and intentionally delaying the negotiating process.

In the South, a *Forum for Peace and Reconciliation* was established by Reynolds. The terms of reference for the Forum stated that it had been established "to consult on and examine ways in which lasting peace, stability and reconciliation [could] be established by agreement among the people of Ireland, on the steps required to remove barriers of distrust, and on the basis of promoting respect for the equal rights and validity of both traditions and identities." (Irish Times, October 1994)

On October 29, the first session of the forum was held in Dublin Castle. Although the unionists parties were invited to attend, they

declined to do so. Representation in the forum was decided by past electoral performance. The 38 forum seats were held by Fianna Fail (9), Fine Gael (6), the Labour Party (5), the Progressive Democrats (2), the Democratic Left (1), the Green Party (1) from the Republic; and, the SDLP (5), the Alliance Party (3) and Sinn Fein (3) from Northern Ireland. The remaining seat was held by the late Gordon Wilson from Northern Ireland.

Following the first meeting of the forum, it was announced that subsequent meetings would be devoted to issues such as: security matters and policing; economic development; constitutional issues and political structures; North/South cooperation; cooperation within Northern Ireland; fundamental rights and freedoms; and, obstacles to building trust.

The Irish government seemed to envisage the forum as a means of establishing the North/South executive institutions Reynolds had proposed earlier in the Autumn. These institutions would address issues such as: internal investment in Ireland; tourism; agriculture and fishing; the environment; and energy and commerce. Both Reynolds and Spring made it abundantly clear that if nationalists were to accept the concept of consent, then the unionists would have to support strong North/South links.

The unionist reaction to the forum was not unexpected. A letter signed by local representatives of the DUP, given to the forum's chairperson, Judge Catherine McGuinness, at the opening session, alleged that the forum was based on an "illegal claim" to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland and that it was an "autonomous pan-nationalist front." (Irish Times 10/29). The Ulster Unionist

Party (UUP) did not openly denounce the forum, but it refused to participate.

Divisions within the Unionist camp emerged as the peace process continued. This is reflected particularly in the differences between the two main unionist parties, and also between the DUP and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). The PUP and UDP represent the loyalist paramilitary groups.

The DUP rejected the forum out- of- hand. In an article published in the *Irish Times* Deputy Leader Peter Robinson said that the DUP believed that the IRA cease fire would continue only as long as the IRA could wring concessions out of the unionists. In order for the DUP to enter the negotiating process, the two governments would have to give a pledge that a referendum be conducted before any negotiations regarding the status of Northern Ireland could begin.

While the UUP is more centrist, it, too, has stood firm on a number of issues, insisting on changes in the Republic's constitution to give expression to its position on consent.

Most important, however, was the unequivocal insistence by both parties on the question of the decommissioning of arms. They demanded that the IRA hand over its caches of weapons, before they would begin to entertain the idea of all-party negotiations.

In addition to differences between the DUP and UUP, there are also differences between the mainstream unionist parties and their

counterparts to the right. The PUP and UDP moved quickly to support the peace process by claiming credit for bringing about the loyalist cease fire. This action irked the mainstream unionist parties, especially the DUP, since it indicated that the far-right wing of the unionist community was satisfied that the Union was under no threat and was comfortable with the British government's assurances on the question of consent. Moreover, both the PUP and the UDP publicly stated their desire to meet with Sinn Fein as soon as Gerry Adams began talks with the British government. The actions of the PUP and UDP were seen by some as embarrassing to the UUP and DUP, by making them appear to be slow-moving and reluctant to advance the process.

The DUP immediately issued a statement rejecting the paramilitaries' positions and spelling out a number of conditions that would have to be met before they would engage in talks, including assurances by the British and Irish governments that a referendum would be held before any negotiations began and that its results would have to be declared binding and permanent. What happened, in effect, is that the IRA's announcement of a cease fire caught the mainstream unionist parties off-guard, a political vacuum opened, and the far-right moved quickly to fill it.

In early November, Reynolds announced a series of legal changes in the Republic, including lifting the state of emergency that had prevailed in the South since 1939, plans to release a number of Northern Ireland prisoners held in the Republic, and the passage of legislation to allow for the repatriation of Irish prisoners from British jails.

In late November/December 1994, a series of political upheavals in the Republic threatened to slow, if not derail, the peace process. First, Reynolds was forced to resign as Prime Minister, when the Labour party, Fianna Fail's partner in coalition, withdrew its support. The Labour Party's action came after it learned that the Attorney General's office waited for seven months before acting on an extradition warrant for a priest accused of molesting a boy in Northern Ireland. Moreover, Reynolds, despite his knowledge of the affair proceeded to appoint the Attorney General, Harry Whelehan, to the position of president of the High Court.

Bertie Ahern, the acting Minister of Finance, was elected leader of Fianna Fail and entered into negotiations with Labour to form a new government. But a series of disclosures in the Irish Times strongly suggested that several Fianna Fail ministers may have had knowledge of the Whelehan case which had been withheld from the Dail. Labour promptly broke off its negotiations with Fianna Fail.

After much brokering, a new government composed of Fine Gael, Labour, and the Democratic Left, the so-called "Rainbow Coalition," headed by John Bruton, leader of Fine Gael. Dick Spring retained his positions as Tanaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Bruton, who is well-known for his moderate positions on Northern Ireland, especially in regard to Articles 2 and 3, met almost immediately after being elected Prime Minister with Gerry Adams to dispel doubts as to the authenticity of his nationalist credentials.

DECOMMISSIONING

Moreover, there is an element of the incredulous to the

British government's guarantee of a place in any multi-party negotiating forum to Sinn Fein, if only the IRA decommissions its arms. The DUP, for example, have made it clear that it has no intention of joining Sinn Fein in any multi-lateral negotiating process at the moment (June 1996), decommissioning or no decommissioning of arms, and the British government is in no position to impose its will in the matter. Of course the British can negotiate to their hearts content with Nationalists of every hue, but in the absence of across-the-board Unionist participation, the whole process would have an air of Alice-in-Wonderland.

The British Government made the decommissioning of arms a stumbling block to progress. Ultimately, it is up to the government to undo the problem. In South Africa, when the National Party government tried to make the decommissioning of arms a precondition for African National Congress (ANC) participation in formal negotiations, the two sides got together and worked the problem out. The deliberations of their joint decommissioning committee did not, however, get in the way of substantive political negotiations. The rest, as they say, is history.

The fact is that the decommissioning of arms in a situation of conflict is a byproduct of negotiations rather than a precondition for negotiations; it is an outcome rather than an enabler of the process; it is a consequence of establishing a climate of trust rather than a precursor for trust; it is contingent on the evolution of an agreed-upon political framework rather than something that emerges out of a political vacuum.

In Northern Ireland the results of the political impasse on

the question of decommissioning began to unravel what had always been a tenuous peace-process. During the summer and fall of 1995, there was a steady drift into confrontations between Protestants and Catholics, increasingly ugly, increasingly inching their way towards violence, increasingly reminiscent of the sectarian confrontations of the late 1960s that were a prelude to the wider conflict.

Fifteen months after the IRA declared a cease fire, Sinn Fein had little to show in terms of political gains, giving more credence in the movement to the arguments of the hard men, who had been only reluctantly persuaded to the merits of a cease fire, that the only thing on the British agenda is to smash the IRA.

The IRA has faced this kind of predicament before when the contradictions of deeply-held positions led to splits in the movement between those who believe that the way forward is to join the constitutional process, despite its deficiencies and disappointments, and those who believe that physical force is the only kind of diplomacy the British understand. Until late 1995, the former were having their way, but the latter were waiting in the wings.

More ominously, talks between the British government and Sinn Fein had, for all intents and purposes, broken down, while the Irish government and the SDLP had not been able to find a formula for decommissioning, whether it involved an international mediation body or some other "neutral" institution, that would satisfy the British government and Sinn Fein.

Still more unsettling was Sinn Fein's failure in February 1996 to sign the final report of the *Forum on Peace and Reconciliation*, because of its unwillingness to endorse the commission's recommendations in regard to the question of consent.

The question of consent remains the bogeyman, exposing the essence of the irreconcilable elements of the conflict. No matter what language is used to obfuscate the issue, the parties to the conflict remain unconvinced of the good intentions of their protagonists.

A ROLE FOR THE UNITED STATES?

In January 1994, President Clinton, despite the vociferous protestations of the British government approved a visa for Gerry Adams to enter the United States. Almost a year later, in December 1994, in response to enormous and sustained pressure from Irish nationalist organizations, he appointed Senator George Mitchell, former President of the United States Senate as his Special Adviser on Northern Ireland. On March 16, 1995, he received Gerry Adams in the White House; in May 1995, he hosted a White House Conference on Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland, and in November 1995, he became the first US President to visit Northern Ireland, where he was received with exceptional warmth in both communities.

If the United States is to play a constructive role in promoting the peace-process in Northern Ireland, it must be seen to be unerringly even-handed, by both communities in Northern Ireland. Otherwise the US, too, will, unwittingly and despite the best of

intentions, get sucked into the treacherous swamps of the province's tribal politics, perceived by Protestants as being one more ally of Catholic interests.

While the British government likes to see itself as the "honest broker," in the peace process, and prides itself as having equal regard for the interests of both communities, it is a role it cannot play, despite its numerous and often plaintive protestations to the contrary, since it, too, is seen by both the Catholic and Protestant communities as being part of the problem.

It is in this regard that the United States can carve a niche for itself, but only if it understands the rules of the game and has a clear understanding of what negotiations might lead to, and what they cannot lead to.

WHAT IS THE PEACE PROCESS?

The peace-process is not about Irish unification. Indeed, the question of Irish unification will not be on the negotiating agenda, not because Unionists are setting pre-conditions for negotiations, but because the question doesn't fall within the parameters of the multi-party talks that were scheduled to begin on June 10, 1996.

Both the Irish and British governments have irrevocably committed themselves to one principle: that the unity of Ireland can only come about when a majority of the people of Northern Ireland give their consent in a free and fair referendum to such a change in their political status. This principle is embodied in the Anglo-

Irish Agreement (1985), which was lodged with the United Nations and is internationally binding; again in the Downing Street Declaration (1993), and the subsequent Framework Document (1994) in which the two governments set out their suggestions as to the way forward. In addition, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), which speaks for at least two-thirds of the Catholics of Northern Ireland are equally committed to the principle of freely-given consent. *There is unanimity of agreement that consent for a united Ireland does not exist at present nor for the foreseeable future.*

Unionists have a right, therefore, to demand an unequivocal declaration from Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, that it fully subscribes to this over-riding principle, which provides the context in which future talks will take place. If Sinn Fein refuses to give such an undertaking, then Unionists have a right to boycott multi-lateral talks, since their participation under these circumstances would suggest that they had somehow acquiesced on the principle of consent.

This declaration from Sinn Fein on the primacy of consent *within* Northern Ireland as a precondition for the unification of Ireland is far more important than the interminable arguments over the decommissioning of arms by the IRA. If the Unionists and the British government are serious about finding a way to handle the decommissioning of arms, they have only to look at the way in which the question has been handled in other conflict-areas of the world. The key word is *compromise* -- a concept Unionists still have problems understanding, but in the absence of which, there can be no progress.

Given the iron-clad guarantee the Unionists have with regard to their constitutional position, the fact that the IRA cease fire has held and that Sinn Fein has entered the arena of constitutional politics, the UUP, in particular, must ultimately convince its constituency that it has to start making the compromises that will secure the peace.

THE MITCHELL COMMISSION

When the IRA declared a cease fire, it seemed that the last hurdle to peace talks involving all the parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland had been successfully overcome and that peace talks would finally get under way.

But like most things involving Northern Ireland, matters were not quite that simple, and the process slid ineluctably into stalemate over the question of the decommissioning of arms.

On November 28, 1995, days before President Clinton's visit to Northern Ireland, the Irish and British governments established an International Body, chaired by George Mitchell, the president's special envoy to Northern Ireland.

The commission was charged with the task of coming up with a set of recommendations that would break the impasse on decommissioning and open the way for multi-party talks to proceed.

The commission issued its report on January 24, 1996. It called on all parties to commit themselves to six principles which, the commission felt, would, if adhered to, lead to an honorable

peace.

These principles called for a commitment on all sides to: democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues; the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations; the renunciation of the use of force to influence the outcome of negotiations; reliance only on peaceful means in trying to alter any aspect of an outcome with which they might disagree; and an end to "punishment" beatings.

On the questioning of decommissioning, the commission noted the irreconcilable differences among the parties involved, and suggested a compromise: that decommissioning take place in tandem with talks.

In response, British Prime Minister John Major said in the House of Commons that in the absence of some decommissioning of arms by the IRA prior to multi-party negotiations, he would call for some form of an elected assembly in Northern Ireland which would be used to work out the modalities of negotiation. All parties, including Sinn Fein, would be entitled to participate in this assembly, according to their electoral mandates. Mr. Major's proposal was backed by Tony Blair, leader of the opposition Labour party and by Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats - both parties endorse the idea of an united Ireland.

On the Nationalist side all hell broke loose. Major was accused of everything from deceiving the Irish government, which Major had failed to consult before he had gone public, as the protocols of the Anglo-Irish Agreement called for; of cynically

aligning himself to the Ulster Unionists, who had put forward the idea of an election in the first place, in order to bolster his wafer thin majority in parliament; to endorsing a return to old-time "Stormont Rule" under which the Unionist majority had ruled (misruled) Northern Ireland for fifty years; to betraying Nationalist aspirations and siding with the proponents of an internal solution; and even of trying to destroy the fragile peace process to secure his own grip on power.

There was no way, the Nationalist parties (John Hume's SDLP and Gerry Adams' Sinn Fein) fumed that they would ever agree to an election. It was not, they were quick to point out, included among the recommendations of the Mitchell commission (even though the commission endorsed the idea, that "if it were broadly acceptable, with an appropriate mandate and within the three-strand structure, an elective process *could* contribute to the building of confidence").

And so things rested. The British maintained that in the absence of some decommissioning before talks, the Unionists would not participate, making talks meaningless. Hence, the only way, they argued, to get all the parties around the same table was to hold elections that would give a democratic mandate to all sides to participate in the resulting forum.

Nationalists saw things in a starkly different light: in their view, the British, as always, were allowing Unionists to exercise a veto over the process.

Even staunch Major supporters acknowledge that he mishandled

his response to the Mitchell report, leaving himself open to the accusations that were leveled at him, providing grounds for Nationalists, to believe that the British were up to their old tricks, past masters, as they were perceived to be, of the art of speaking out of both sides of their mouths and acting only on what appeared to be most expedient to their own narrow interests.

Once again, the British failed to recognize the special sensitivities they must exercise in relation to Irish matters; once again they showed that they still had failed to learn the lessons of the historical past, even the recent past, and their failure to learn was seen in nationalist circles as a measure of their hubris; it became part of the inventory of grievance.

The Mitchell commission, however, was careful not to append the words "we recommend " to its proposals on decommissioning. Its language is studiously neutral, the language of suggestion ("The parties *should* consider an approach...that would represent a compromise"), not the language of judgement. In this context, the difference between its comments on decommissioning and an elective process was the difference between a "should" and a "could."

In the following weeks, the White House became like a travel office. First off the mark was Michael Ancram, Minister of State For Northern Ireland who arrived in Washington DC to make the British case for elections; next came Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, to make the case against elections and for immediate all-party talks; next Dick Spring, the Irish Deputy-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs to make the case for Dayton, Ohio-like "proximity talks."

Nationalist reaction had as much to do with the fact that the idea of an election to circumvent the IRA,'s unequivocal refusal to decommission was first mooted by David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) as with the merit or lack thereof of the proposal itself. In the zero-sum arithmetic of the Northern Ireland conflict, anything supported or proposed by Unionists is automatically rejected by Nationalists - and conversely.

In a broader context, Nationalist reaction indicates that they continue to cling to the shibboleth that the British can exert some magic elixer-like influence on the Unionists, if only they chose to. The brouhaha over the election issue obscured one of the most important underlying and most frequently overlooked realities of the conflict: *Unionist consent to the modalities of the negotiating process, not British government consent is what matters.* The British can talk to Sinn Fein until the proverbial cows come home, but unless they bring the unionists along with them talks between the two can only yield peripheral dividends, not a permanent peace.

For the better part of the last 30 years, Unionists have not regarded the British government as being the guardian of their interests. The marriage of the Union will continue, but if the Unionists were to ask for a divorce, the British government will not stand in their way. In short, there is more of a divergence than a convergence between British interests in Ireland and Unionist interests, a matter of increasing concern to Unionists, inclining them to march to the beat of their own drummer.

Major's focus on an election as the only viable way forward

allowed Sinn Fein to grab the moral high-ground ("John Major has now adopted an entirely unionist agenda in an attempt to buy Unionist votes in Westminster." One wonders what Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown were trying to buy.)

As a result, Sinn Fein was able to make the political running, keeping its rhetoric skillfully focused on the charge that the British proposals for an election signaled nothing more than surrender to Unionist angst to return to the golden days of majority rule.

In the barrage of charge and countercharge, Sinn Fein was not called on to declare its unequivocal support of the Mitchell's report six recommendations, which, if accepted by Sinn Fein, would put it in direct opposition to the IRA's adamant insistence that it will not entertain any suggestion of decommissioning, partial or otherwise, until it sees fit, in its own interests, to adopt an alternative course of action.

Also overlooked in the raucous inspired by Major's miscalculated response to Mitchell were the caveats regarding an election that were either implicit in Mayor's statement in the Commons or have since been explicitly spelled out.

An election boycotted by nationalists would be meaningless, and would be in that most English of phrases a "non-starter." All parties would have to participate, which means that all parties would have to agree on the purpose of the election, the remit of an elected assembly/forum, the length of time it would sit, the agenda it would address, the modalities of decision-making in terms of

sufficiency of consensus; the definition of consensus; the mechanisms to deal with crunch issues, and how to develop fall-back strategies to deal with situations when inevitable deadlocks threatened to derail the process.

Such a forum would have no executive powers, no legislative powers, no administrative powers; its terms of reference would be confined solely to considerations of how to advance multiparty talks with the clear understanding among all parties that there could be a truly inclusive process, a necessary prerequisite for a lasting peace settlement, *only if all* the parties in Northern Ireland reach common ground on how to proceed. In this sense, the two governments are, ironically, secondary players, enablers of facilitation rather than the prime movers.

The decommissioning issue is, of course, as the Mitchell commission insightfully points out, symptomatic of a larger problem: the absence of trust. The postures that accompanied the report's release were a manifestation of that lack of trust. Accordingly, *any* forum that would bring the parties to the conflict together creates an ambience that, if properly cultivated, could be conducive to trust-building. There is a woeful lack of such mechanisms in place at the moment.

Trust is a learned behavior.. When one community addresses the other, it must do so with particular sensitivity to the other community's politics. Parties must put themselves in the shoes of their protagonists. They must help their protagonists to bring their communities with them. In the end, successful negotiations are not so much about bringing your community along with you, as

helping your protagonists bring their communities along with them. Respect for the positions of the other, even in the face of disagreement, is germane to the whole process.

Furthermore, the level of trust that develops among negotiators is an exponential function of their ability to communicate, which, in turn, requires them to *invest* in each other. An elected forum, a pre-negotiating marketplace for the exchange of ideas, as it were, would provide the political space in which the down-payments on future investments could be made.

At every level, negotiations should involve the inherent risk of compromise; indeed, compromise is the essential ingredient of negotiations, without which there can be no progress. Each compromise is a building block, and as the parties grow to trust each other, they move from one compromise to the next, with concessions being made on all sides. Each side becomes invested in the process; each develops a stake in seeing the other succeed; a sum of mutual investments develops, which provides the cushion when it comes to the crunch issues.

The Mitchell commission put it most succinctly: "Only resolute action by the parties themselves will produce results."

BREAKDOWN

In what came as an totally unexpected move, on February 9th, the IRA shocked the world, and threw the peace-process into seeming terminal disarray, with the announcement that its cease fire would end at 6:00 pm Irish time.

One hour later, a bomb exploded in London's Canary Warf killing two people, injuring 43, and causing an estimated \$300 million in damages.

Minutes before the bomb went off, Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein rang the White House to inform the President's national security adviser, Anthony Lake "that he had some disturbing news."

Consternation and the usual plethora of condemnations followed. A return to the violence-ridden days of 25 years seemed unthinkable after 18 months of peace during which the ordinary people of NI could walk the streets free of the threat of the random bullet or hidden bomb; during which many on both sides of the political/religious divide actually got to know each other and discovered that they shared a common longing for a lasting peace under whatever political arrangements might bring it to them.

The conventional wisdom, or more correctly, the conventional wish, in the first few days following the bombing was that it might have been a "once-off", a signal by the IRA that the peace -process had to move at a quicker pace, a sign of intense displeasure with the British government's call for an election, seen in republican circles as one more stalling maneuver, and in this case an appalling one with its implicit suggestions of a return to "Stormont" rule.

Official responses reflected the trenchant statements by both governments to get the peace-process back on rails as quickly as possible.

Among the preconditions sternly enumerated at one time or another that Sinn Fein would now have to meet were:

- ** The IRA would have to declare a *new* cease fire.
- ** The cease fire would have to be a *permanent* cease fire.
- ** Sinn Fein would have to *condemn* the bombing at Canary Warf (not merely regret it).
- ** Sinn would have to *disassociate* itself from the IRA.
- ** The IRA would have to *decommission* its arms *prior* to all-party talks.

Both governments announced that until there was a new cease fire, neither would hold talks with Sinn Fein at *ministerial level*, although talks at other levels would still be possible.

One problem facing both governments was how to assess where Sinn Fein stands in relation to the IRA. If, as Sinn Fein insists, it does not speak for the IRA (it draws almost theological distinctions between being in a position to speak *to* the IRA and being able to speak *for* the IRA; to having *influence with* the IRA and having *control over* the IRA), then this begs the question: What influence does Sinn Fein have with the IRA, and what can it deliver in all-party talks, since the widely-held assumption on all sides, never denied by Sinn Fein when it has been convenient not to do so, was that Sinn Fein did speak for the IRA. This was the reason for "wooing" Sinn Fein into the process in the first place.

Indeed, John Major has gone so far as to say that the two organizations are *interchangeable* in their leadership structures

and Tories routinely refer to Sinn Fein/IRA, to reinforce their contention that both organizations are one and the same. (The Irish government holds a not dissimilar view, but without the ingenuousness the informs the British assessment.)

On the one hand, neither government could decide whether to feed Gerry Adams to the republican hounds baying at his heels; on the other hand, they cannot decide whether he is still their best bet in reaching the IRA and having an influence on it. To further complicate matters, both governments still regard him as the most reasonable, able, and sophisticated of the Sinn Fein leaders in the dancing chorus. And there seems no one on the horizon who seems capable of replacing him.

But if not Adams, then who?. How do you keep the line of communication open with the IRA open? And with whom?

How do you maintain connection, what backtrack channels do you construct when the men calling the shots, both literally and figuratively, are faceless and guard their facelessness with the diligence of the possessed?

Ironically, the decision of both governments to rule out meetings at ministerial level with Adams and his team (although sub-ministerial contacts are being maintained) weakened Adams at the very time when he needed to be strengthened.

The two governments' decision diminished Adams' clout with the IRA, or whatever residual clout he had left, just when he had most need to show the IRA that he still has some real clout with London

and Dublin.

A fundamental miscalculation in the analysis of both governments has been their belief that Adams could carry the IRA with him. Hence the British thought he could carry the IRA with him on decommissioning, despite the IRA making it clear that decommissioning of arms prior to all-party talks would be tantamount to an admission of surrender and was simply not on; and Dublin believed that he could carry the IRA with him on the question of consent (that the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland is necessary before a change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland can take place.) Both proved to be ill-founded illusions.

Inherent to the problem is that the peace-process itself as initially designed and executed was fatally flawed, although to point that out in the euphoria that accompanied the first peace in Northern Ireland in nearly 30 years left one open to the accusation of being a doomsayer, even of being somehow opposed to the peace process itself. The doubting Thomases kept their heads down and their doubts to themselves.

The cease fire was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for peace. All parties held tenaciously to their belief in its self-generating sustainability, even when the political circles to be squared became political circles to be cubed.

While it is easy to put the blame for the breakdown on the impasse over decommissioning of arms and the British government's rejection of the Mitchell commission's suggestion regarding

decommissioning and talks in tandem (although how Mitchell envisaged bringing the Unionist parties into the negotiating tent is another matter), the cold reality is that the origins of the breakdown were embedded in the premises upon which the peace process itself was built, premises based on false expectations emerging out of the belief that some agreed end to the conflict would emerge, if only the guns were silenced.

On February 18, 1996 Sinn Fein gave its response to the demands being made upon it. In a speech at Conway Mill, Adams set out the basis for a recommencement of negotiations:

Any new process [he said] must contain copper fastened and unambiguous public assurances that all-party talks will be initiated by both governments at the earliest possible date, they [must] proceed with urgency and within an agreed time frame upon an inclusive agenda, and without any preconditions whatsoever. A peace process is a means to an end. The end is a negotiated settlement - an agreed peace settlement. That requires change. Sinn Fein have argued that change is required in three main areas. There is a need for political and constitutional change. There is a need also for a democraticization and demilitarization of the situation..Because *republicans are committed to a total end to British rule in Ireland*, we have an acute sense of what the breakdown of the peace process means.

No mention of cease fires; no mentioning of decommissioning.

Indeed, if one were to identify the one obstacle to any kind of progress to try and put the shattered pieces of the peace - process back together, that obstacle is endemic lack of trust.

As things stood, no one knew how to put the pieces back together. Poorly conceived chess games invariably lead to stalemate. What remained to be seen was how the Loyalist paramilitaries would respond. Whether, in the event of further bombings in mainland British cities, they would resort to targets in Dublin and other cities in the Republic, or whether they would wait for the IRA to breach the cease fire in the North. If the latter were to take place, it would herald a return to the days of escalating sectarian killings, and unfortunately, perhaps that's the way it may yet have to be; that things will have to get a lot worse before they get better. But for the time being, the Loyalists have held their fire. And the IRA has studiously avoided taking its campaign to the North.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

** Both the British government and Sinn Fein regarded each other as being responsible for bringing the cease fire about. (John Major: "the IRA came to us and said 'the conflict is over, help us move the process forward.' Gerry Adams: '[we] John Hume and I, along with Albert Reynolds and elements of Irish America persuaded the IRA to call a complete cessation of violence...')

In reality, the cease fire was brokered, not negotiated directly among the parties involved. Thus both sides came out of

the cease fire bargaining with different understandings of what the cease fire involved.

** The British believed that Adams *et al* spoke authoritatively on behalf of the IRA. The IRA thought the British could bring the Unionists to the table, if only they had the will to do. Both were incorrect. In terms of time-frames both sides were working to the ticking of different clocks, and therefore often at cross-purposes.

** For the British, the peace process would, by its nature be long drawn-out, necessarily bureaucratic: the mandarins of Whitehall had to have their time to ply the wiles of their trade. For Sinn Fein, the peace process was a matter of extreme urgency: the IRA had put them under time constraints to deliver.

** Both sides made tactical decisions that delayed the process. The IRA would not give an undertaking that the cease fire was permanent (note the difference between "complete" and "permanent") Sinn Fein were under the impression that all-party talks would take place within three months of the declaration of the cease fire, without further modalities having to be worked out. For the British, there continued to be the question of how to bring the Unionists to the table. The IRA never sufficiently appreciated that what mattered was getting Unionist consent to talks, not British consent. Hence the issue of decommissioning took precedence over everything else and effectively stalled the process.

** The IRA's commitment to non-violence was continually questioned in view of punishment shootings it routinely carried out

transported the bomb was stolen in Larne three weeks before the Canary Wharf bombing, as were the tax disc and new licence plates. It was ferried to Strandlyre in Scotland and driven South. This was not just a knee-jerk response to the British reaction to the Mitchell Report; the British response merely allowed for moving up the date to capitalize on a situation where they could say "the Brits made us do it."

** There is a convenient propensity for amnesia to set regarding the unchanging hallmarks of Irish Republicanism when peace might seem to be in the offing:

- ** only physical force will work; physical force is the only thing the British understand - and respect.
- ** total distrust of the political process
- ** the British as always out to divide and conquer; that they stall as a matter of strategy to sap the will of their opponents and create divisions among them as they attempt to assess what it is the British are really up to.
- ** a guarantee of British withdrawal is a necessary prerequisite to a cease fire
- ** the Army Council reigns supreme
- ** the southern establishment has for all intents and purposes sold out

** The British and Irish governments, and the SDLP were under the impression that Sinn Fein had accepted the doctrine of consent. Sinn Fein had not, or even if it had made tentative moves in that direction in 1994/'95, those moves were not moot in light of its failure to sign the final report of the commission on peace and reconciliation, and the reinstatement in Adams' speech on February

15 that the aim of the movement was to end, once and for all, British rule in Ireland.

** The failure on the part of both governments to understand that what the republican movement feared most of all was a split, because of the catastrophic impact of splits on the movement in the past; and that when it came to a split or the doves having to go along reluctantly with the hawks, the doves went along in the interests of unity - and because they are disciplined members of the movement, for the most part tempered and trained by many years in jail for their beliefs.

THE WAY FORWARD

There are many who would argue that the recent IRA bombings in London achieved their tactical goal, forcing the British and Irish governments to set a date for multi-party talks and bringing to an end the stalemate that had bogged down the peace process in Northern Ireland for the last eighteen months.

Although both governments have agreed to a complicated mish mash of measures including Bosnia-style proximity talks, elections for an forum which will select members of negotiating teams, and a date for the start of all-party talks, these measures were cobbled together in response to the desperate attempt by the two governments to keep the process alive at almost any cost. Of most significance, however, is the fact that they have not induced the IRA to reinstate its ceasefire. Indeed, the IRA has rejected the Anglo-Irish attempt to revive the process as "inadequate," reaffirmed that "under no circumstances" would it decommission its

in West Belfast, heightening Unionist insistence on decommissioning prior to talks. For the IRA punishment beatings and the like were a way of letting the British know it had not simply folded its tent and lacked the will to go on. Both sides misread the signals of the other.

** For over a year, the British made decommissioning the primary condition for progress, while they should have known that decommissioning prior to all-party talks was simply not on. That it would simply be an admission of surrender by the IRA.

** And this is the crux of the failure of both the British and the IRA to understand the imperatives that were the driving forces behind the decisions of both: On the British side the failure to understand how Irish Republicanism works and what drives it. That Sinn Fein is subordinate to the army council; that the decision to agree to a cease fire was opposed by perhaps 30% of council members; that the hard liners were waiting in the wings should the Adams strategy fail; that recent changes in the personnel on the army council indicated a waning of the influence of the Adams/McGuinness faction of support. That the Adams/McGuinness axis of support on the army council lost control of the council. McGuinness was replaced. Hard liners took over. In their view, Sinn Fein had nothing to show for its political initiative.

It was back to basics. The gun worked. It was the only thing the British understood.

** In the view of most of those close to the IRA, the end of the cease fire was planned for the end of February. The lorry that

armory until there was a "final negotiated settlement" to the conflict, and dismissed out-of-hand the calls for a new ceasefire. And even if a new ceasefire did somehow materialize, it would not bring real peace -- peace that is the product of a durable and lasting *political* settlement.

In short, to say the IRA has bombed its way to the negotiating table or has lit a metaphorical fuse under the peace process would be to simplify the conflict to the point of willful distortion. At the moment there is nothing the IRA can bomb its way to.

In Northern Ireland, Yeats' terrible beauties have an almost quixotic penchant for becoming terrible mistakes, parasites that feed on each other with an insatiable appetite to capture what has never existed in the cause of a dream that has brought only nightmare, in the name of an aspiration few ascribe to but none will renounce.

Irredentist Irish Nationalism had gone back to its roots. "Brits Out," and if it takes the death of some poor Bengali blown to rubble in the explosion at Canary Wharf to advance the cause of a united Ireland, so be it. For the hard liners who had seized control of the IRA's Army Council, the cease fire was simply war by other means, and when it failed to deliver a place for Sinn Fein at all-party talks without the IRA having to commit itself to a series of unacceptable conditions, its utility was over. And, no doubt, if in time a restoration of a ceasefire better serves their purposes, they will as easily opt for that route.

Meanwhile, what remains of the peace process continues to

disintegrate in the face of what amounts to virtual paralysis in the corridors of power in London and Dublin, and the sense of the lack of trust among the key players on all sides - even on the same side - is palpable.

Indeed, if one were to identify the one obstacle to any kind of progress to try and put the shattered pieces of the peace - process back together, that obstacle is endemic lack of trust. Finger-pointing is in vogue, whispers of who is to blame for what abound, even as the whisperers themselves admit to the pointlessness of the practice. Political shadow-boxing, where the clever feint, counts as a substantial punch, usurps the place of honest dialogue.

But there are ways forward.

** Take Sinn Fein at its word. If it does not speak for the IRA, uncouple the two. In that case, arrange for direct talks between the British and the IRA to resolve the question of decommissioning. The late president of Israel, Yizhak Rabin said: "You do not make peace with your friends but with your enemies." Rabin understood the risk implicit in that course of action, and in the end he paid for that belief with his life. In Northern Ireland the time has come for the risk-takers to sieze hold of the peace process.

There must be enemy-to-enemy head-on negotiations on a bilateral basis. That means Britain and the IRA - no intermediaries. Only they can make the deals regarding decommissioning, related security matters and the release of

prisoners that will last.

** Set-up an open-ended negotiating forum, beginning with the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Alliance Party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Any party that is invited to participate would have to meet certain criteria; all parties would be free to abstain or join at whatever point they wished to, provided they met the participating criteria.

** The key criteria for participation in the forum should be a party's acceptance of the Mitchell principles.

** The Irish government, British government, SDLP, the Unionists parties, the Alliance Party, in fact all parties, with the exception of Sinn Fein have said they accept and will honor these principles. This unusual unanimity among the parties representing at least 85 per cent of the electorate in Northern Ireland must be built on; it represents the nearest thing to common ground that all the constitutional parties have agreed to since 1969 and would enjoy the support of the vast majority of the people on every side of the political/religious divide.

** Sinn Fein would have two choices: Freed from supposedly having to speak for the IRA, it could subscribe to the Mitchell principles and join the forum, leaving it up to the IRA to hammer out its own accommodations with the British government. Or it could opt to stay out of the process by not subscribing to Mitchell, await the outcome of the British/IRA talks, thus leaving the question of joining the forum open.

Either way the negotiating train would leave the station, and as long as the center (SDLP and UUP) stayed aboard, the others could either come along for the ride, or risk marginalizing themselves.

Above all, begin. Allowing a vacuum to develop on the political front will simply ensure that violence will inevitably follow.

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK

As regards constitutional models, possibilities are profuse, ranging from resuscitation of the old Stormont majority rule, to various power-sharing recipes with or without an Irish Dimension, to forms of an all-Ireland federation or confederation, some ingeniously designed, to models that would place Northern Ireland in the context of Europe, calls for independence, or at least autonomy, models of consociation, joint authority, and cantonisation.

A review of the extensive literature on Northern Ireland would put particular emphasis on the following as essential considerations that will have to frame any future settlement:

- An almost universal acceptance in the Protestant community that power will have to be shared with Catholics.
- An acknowledgment that an Irish Dimension exists which must be accommodated but an absolute refusal on the part

of Protestants to agree to any arrangement that would give the Republic an executive role in the government of Northern Ireland.

- Widespread disagreement on the form that relationship should take, varying from the "good neighbors" formulation and "cooperation on matters of mutual concern" variations to a relationship that would give the Republic an executive role in the government of Northern Ireland.
- Explicit recognition of the fact that the future of the economies of the two parts of Ireland are inextricably linked to a Single Market Europe.
- Widespread agreement that Northern Ireland should be as self-governing as possible.
- A majority rule, whether simple or proportionate, is not a viable proposition; the nationalist community has no obligation to agree to it and has the critical mass to prevent its imposition;
- The Unionist community will not accept an administration for Northern Ireland that gives an executive role to anyone from outside the U.K.
- A Bill of Rights is almost universally endorsed as being a desirable part of any settlement.
- Proportionate power sharing.

- Equal power sharing to give literal expression to the equality of the two traditions.
- No accommodation can work as long as one community continues to police the other.
- If there is to be lasting peace in Ireland, ways must be found to bring Sinn Féin/IRA and the Loyalist paramilitaries into the process.
- Special majorities required to secure passage of legislation.
- Various mechanisms to give veto rights to the minority with regard to matters of particular concern to it.
- An acknowledgment that the structure of the Anglo- Irish Agreement signed by London and Dublin in November, 1985 and, among other things, giving the Republic of Ireland a consultative role in Northern Irish affairs was asymmetrical: If the South speaks for Northern nationalists and the British government is neutral, who represents the interests of the Unionists? To the extent that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is deficient in this regard, it adds to the democratic deficit and is a legitimate source of guidance in the Unionist community.

In Northern Ireland, as currently constituted, notions that may be discarded are that:

- Northern Ireland is like any other part of the U.K.;
- The Northern Ireland communities will agree on Northern Ireland independence;
- The U.K. will quit Northern Ireland under pressure of violence;
- The Irish Republic will renounce the aim of Irish unity;
- Irish unity is a realistic prospect in the foreseeable future.

Ultimately, the question is how to establish a basis of trust between the two communities, especially when the two communities become more segregated. There is a need for some interactive process that will enable each community to "learn" the language and mode of thinking of the other. This is especially true in relation to the Protestant community which is highly distrustful of the Catholics' "hidden agenda": to somehow deceive them into becoming part of a united Ireland.

Trust is, of course, related to uncertainty, especially uncertainty over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, and hence the need for some mechanism to make that status a non-issue. If political consensus is to emerge, then mutual trust and respect, tolerance of others, and a willingness to compromise must exist at all levels of society within Northern Ireland.

NEGOTIATING PRINCIPLES

1) There should be transparency in the negotiating process, openness and the uncamouflaged. The people of Ireland should be made part of the process, so that when obstacles emerge, and they will, they can be discussed and clarified in the public domain. On no account, should an impression be conveyed that deals are being done behind closed doors.

2) Catholic negotiators must eschew the fanciful footwork, and recognize that the Protestant propensity for the inductive is an inherent part of their tradition, and must be accepted and respected in that context.

3) Every party must recognize, as must both governments, that different communities use language in different ways, and that structures should be put in place that anticipate and defuse the misunderstandings that will arise because of these differences.

4) Progress only comes when negotiating parties learn to start trusting each other. Trust is earned. When one community addresses the other, it must do so with particular sensitivity to the other community's politics. Parties must themselves in the shoes of their protagonists. They must help their protagonists to bring their communities with them. In the end, successful negotiations are not so much about bringing your community along with you, as helping your protagonists bring their communities along with them. Respect for the others' positions is germane to the whole process.

5) The level of trust that develops among negotiators is a function of their ability to communicate, which, in turn, requires them to develop a common vocabulary.

6) If political consensus is to emerge, then mutual trust and respect, tolerance of others, and a willingness to compromise must exist at all levels in Northern Ireland. In this regard, where there is a transparent absence of trust on each side of the divide, due in part to ingrained cultural differences with regard to language and process - some of which have their origins in

religious structures and competing claims to legitimacy that developed over the centuries - a negotiating process that stipulates that "*nothing is agreed until everything is agreed*" sets up a situation more like a poker table than a negotiating table.

7) The formula that "*nothing is agreed until everything is agreed,*" discourages openness and risk-taking, and encourages every side to play their cards close to their chests, making it difficult to create the ambience in which accommodation emerges.

8) At every level, negotiations should involve the inherent risk of compromise; indeed, compromise is the essential ingredient of negotiations, without which there can be no negotiations. Each compromise is a building block, and as the parties grow to trust each other, the move from one compromise to the next, with concessions, though difficult, being made on all sides. Each side becomes invested in the process, each develops a stake in seeing the other succeed, a sum of mutual investments develops, which provides the cushion when it comes to the crunch issues.

Padraig O'Malley
Senior Fellow
Center for Democracy and Development
John W. McCormack Institute of Public
Affairs
University of Massachusetts Boston
Boston
Massachusetts
June 1996