

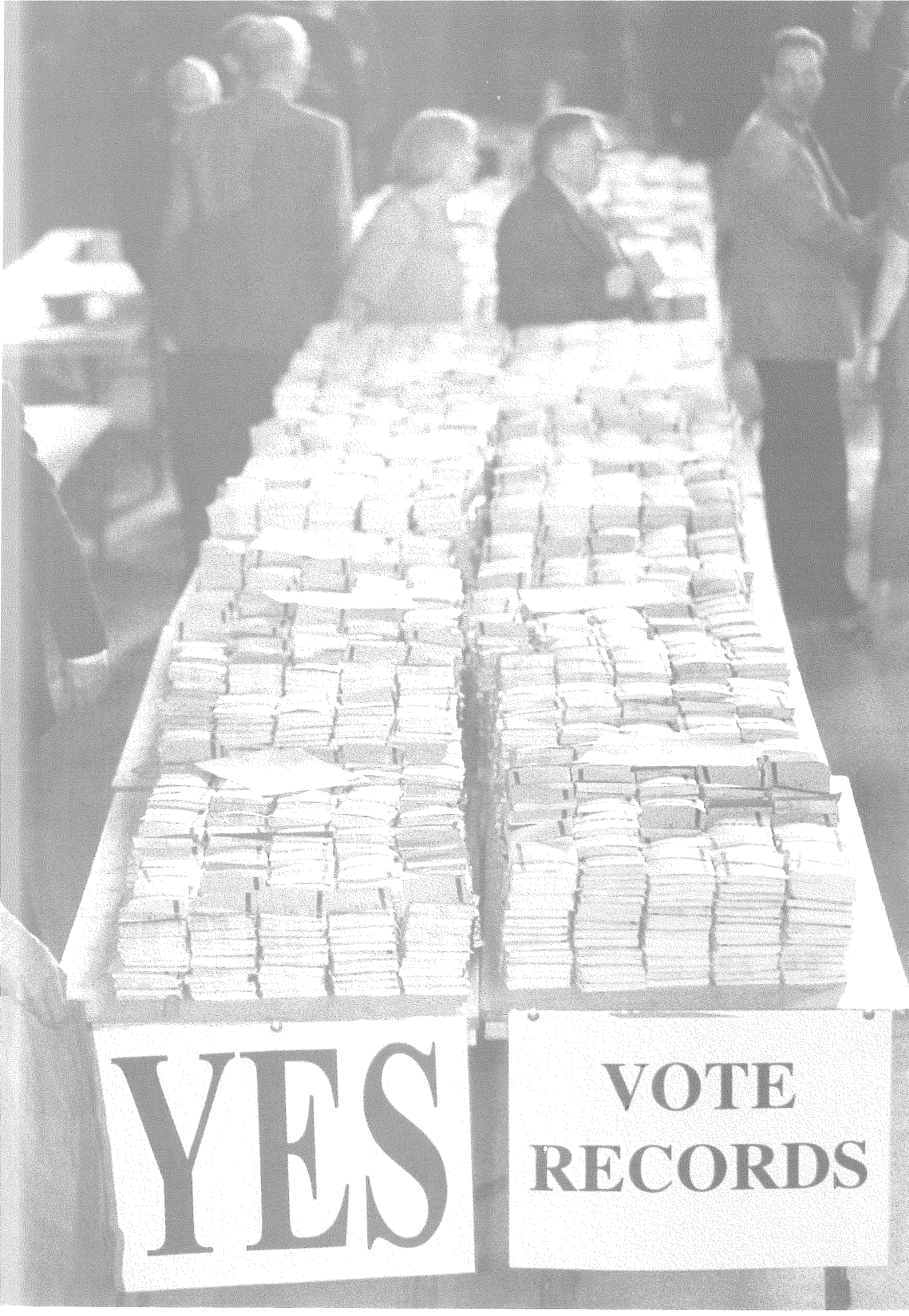
Accord

Striking a balance

The Northern Ireland peace process

Conciliation Resources

London 1999



YES

**VOTE
RECORDS**

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Cover picture: West Belfast, early 1980s

Source: Belfast Exposed

**Ballot count for referendum on
Belfast Agreement, May 1998**

Source: Crispin Rodwell



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Glossary

Terms used in Northern Ireland

As in many other conflicts, place names can be very contentious and the search for acceptable language is an important element of the conflict resolution process. Unionists prefer terms that give legitimacy to the division of Ireland and British governance while republicans prefer to use terms which deny the legitimacy of partition and emphasize their Irishness. Authors have been allowed to use the terms with which they are comfortable. Therefore Northern Ireland, the North, Six Counties, Ulster may be used to refer to the part of Ireland which is still in the United Kingdom. Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Éire, the South, the Twenty-Six Counties may be used to refer to the independent state in the south and east of the island. In the same way Londonderry and Derry are names with political connotations for the same town and are used interchangeably.

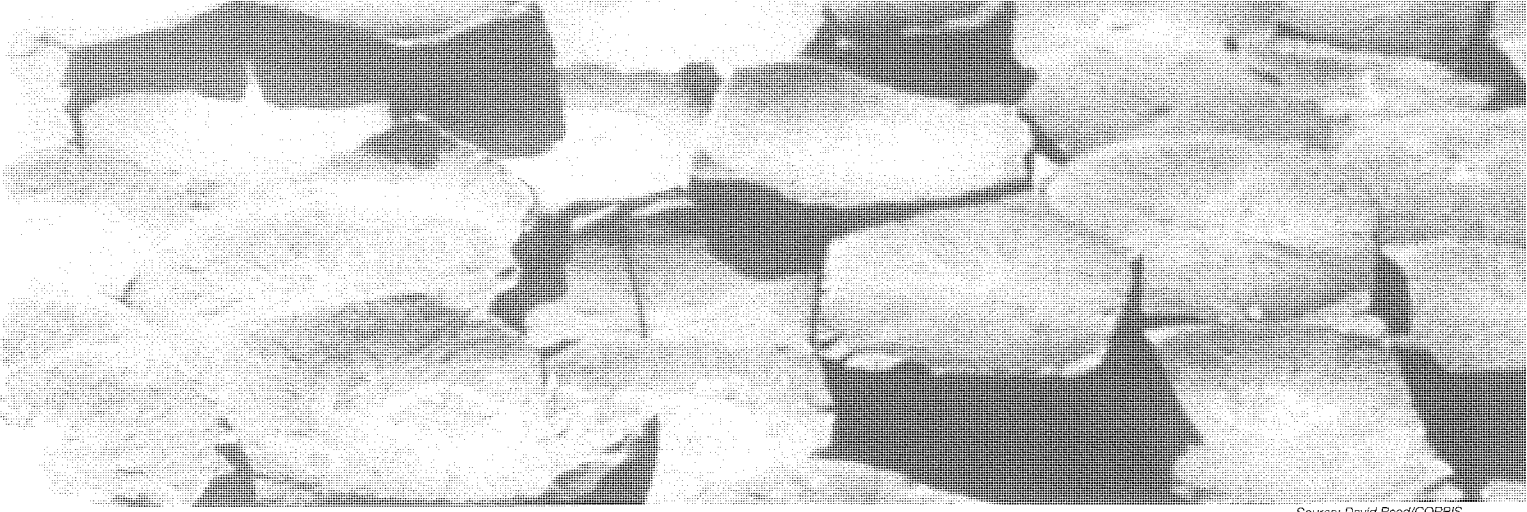
The name of the agreement reached on Friday, 9 April 1998 is also applied with some flexibility. Originally it was simply called 'The Agreement' and sometimes it is referred to as the 'Good Friday Agreement' or the 'Stormont Agreement'. The Belfast Agreement is becoming the recognized title and is used in this publication.

Constitutional parties

A loose term used to distinguish political parties supporting the use of constitutional means to achieve change as distinct from those linked to paramilitary groups.

Loyalist

Uncompromising unionists (mostly Protestant) who take pride in their loyalty to the British Crown and state. They oppose greater involvement of the Irish government in Northern Ireland's politics and support any measures which strengthen the union with Britain



Source: David Reed/CORBIS

and foster unionist cultural traditions. The term loyalist is sometimes, though not always, used to refer only to those who accept the use of force to defend the union by paramilitary groups.

Nationalist

Nationalists hold the view that Northern Ireland is part of the Irish nation and that political arrangements should reflect this. Moderate nationalists, like the SDLP, generally stress the importance of achieving political change with the consent of people in Northern Ireland. Nationalists are often, though not always, from the Catholic community. They would also seek to foster Irish cultural traditions including the Irish language.

Parallel consent

A safeguard for minorities ensuring that they cannot be outvoted by the majority in a context where majoritarianism might normally apply as in parliamentary institutions. Strand One of the Belfast Agreement provides that key decisions will require 'a majority of those members present and voting, including a majority of the unionist and nationalist designations present and voting'.

Paramilitary group

A term given to secret underground armed groups. In Northern Ireland the term reflects the members' self-perception as an unofficial army in terms of command structure, discipline and organization.

Parity of esteem

The term is usually used in relation to equality issues: 'The principle of political, social and cultural equality of treatment before the law and attitudes of valuing and respecting those with different beliefs, lifestyle and background'.

Proximity talks

Procedures to allow parties to participate in negotiations or talks when they are not willing to meet face to face.

They tend to be in separate rooms in the same or adjacent buildings and intermediaries move between them.

Republican

The term republican is sometimes, though not always, used to refer to those who accept the use of force to achieve a united Ireland. There is a tendency for most republicans (predominantly Catholic) to identify with the traditions of violent struggle and sacrifice against British rule in Ireland. The republican movement is normally taken to refer to Sinn Féin and the IRA.

Sufficient consensus

This is a procedural means to prevent one party blocking progress in negotiations where there is a general consensus. The term was coined in the constitutional negotiations in South Africa. A proposition was deemed to have sufficient consensus if a majority of representatives of each tradition or faction support it even though one or more parties do not.

The Troubles

This is the popular euphemism for the thirty-year conflict in Northern Ireland.

Three-strand process

A concept from negotiation practice of dealing with issues or strands independently of each other then seeking to reach a final agreement on the package of the outcome of all the strands. In the context of Northern Ireland three strands were identified: democratic institutions within Northern Ireland, North–South relations and British–Irish relations.

Unionist

Unionists have supported Northern Ireland's status within the United Kingdom. They are traditionally Protestant and oppose the involvement of the Irish Republic in Northern Ireland.

Foreword

Thomas Abraham

Thomas Abraham is the UK and Ireland correspondent of *The Hindu*. He has reported on the Irish conflict as well as Sri Lanka and the Balkans for the last ten years.

One of the most remarkable events of 1998 was the signing of the Belfast Agreement. It was arrived at after a long and arduous process of negotiations, promised to bring to an end one of the world's longest running conflicts. At the time, it was hailed as a triumph for the process of conflict resolution through democratic negotiations rather than through the power of the gun.

The euphoria that surrounded the Agreement evaporated somewhat in the months that followed. It soon became apparent that getting Northern Ireland's political parties to implement the various provisions of the Agreement was not going to be as straightforward as had been hoped. But despite the inter-party wrangles over the interpretation of key provisions of the Agreement, there is little doubt that there has been a dramatic change in atmosphere in the province. A ceasefire by the main armed groups has more or less held, the level of violence has decreased dramatically, and ordinary people are increasingly getting accustomed to living their lives without the constant fear of disorder.

The Belfast Agreement is significant not merely for the people of the province, but for those caught in similar conflicts around the world. While every conflict is unique, shaped by its own particular circumstances, disputes between groups of people over issues of nationality, identity and statehood also have universal elements. This is why it is rewarding to study peace processes in other parts of the world: there are always lessons to be drawn from successful, or even failed peace attempts which can be applied to one's own situation.

There are several elements in Northern Ireland's path to peace that are worth studying. One of these is the process by which the Irish republican movement gradually changed its tactics from an almost exclusive reliance on armed struggle to trying to achieve their aims through negotiations and the ballot box. The transformation of an armed struggle into democratic political movement is one of the hardest tasks in conflict resolution. This volume provides insights into the

conditions and strategies that made this possible in Northern Ireland.

It is not only armed groups who have to abandon long held strategies in the interests of peace. Democratic parties have often to make painful compromises as well, as illustrated by the experience of the Ulster Unionists, the principal party of the Protestant, unionist community. The experience of the Ulster Unionists as they 'travelled that extra mile to reach an agreement', as one of the contributors to this volume puts it, holds valuable lessons.

Three governments, Britain, Ireland and the United States played key roles in the peace process. Britain and Ireland, as the two countries directly involved, played a variety of roles at different times ranging from mediation to acting as a proxy for the different parties in Northern Ireland. But by far their most important contribution was to have laid a foundation for peace talks by declaring they were willing to abide by the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. This created the space for the political parties in the province to decide their own future through negotiations.

Perhaps the most striking part of the Belfast Agreement has been the way the principle of consent has been woven into its every strand. The essence of the Agreement is that the future of the province can only be determined by the consent of its people. What is important is that this consent is not mechanically defined as agreement by the majority of the population, but instead as an agreement by the majority of people in both the Protestant and Catholic communities. In other words, Northern Ireland's future can only be determined on the basis of a genuinely popular consensus that would cut across communal and sectarian divisions.

The Belfast Agreement was arrived at through negotiations, endorsed by a popular referendum and backed by the international community. This is a pattern of conflict resolution that is worth emulating.

Introduction

Clem McCartney

*History says, 'Don't hope
On this side of the grave.'
But then, once in a lifetime,
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.*

from *The Cure at Troy*
by Seamus Heaney

Clem McCartney is an independent research consultant on conflict and community issues and has worked closely with the political parties on the peace process since the mid 1980s.

The conflict in Northern Ireland is in many ways a paradox. The region has adequate resources and, although it has been a rather marginal area of the British Isles, is nonetheless quite affluent compared to most of the rest of the world. The people are invariably described as friendly and hospitable and to outsiders they seem to form a homogeneous community. The United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland is a part, is a functioning democracy where it might be argued there is no need for violence in order to bring about political change. What kind of problem can make people with this background engage in a thirty-year violent struggle against their neighbours and produce some of the most effective militant groups of modern times?

Northern Ireland challenges the assumption that conflicts only occur in underdeveloped countries where tribal loyalties are more important than citizenship, where there is a limited democratic tradition and where there are massive problems of poverty and inequality. There have, of course, been other conflicts in Western Europe since the Second World War including the Basque country and Corsica, but apart from perhaps Cyprus few have been so bitter and none as long-lasting.

Although there have been issues, such as discrimination in housing and employment, electoral manipulation and religious histories, which have separated the two sides, the conflict can be stripped down to the core issues of the balance of power, relations between the communities, and questions of governance. It is rooted in the struggle of one part of the community for an independent and unified Ireland and hostility to that struggle from the other part of the community wanting to remain within the United Kingdom.

For the people living in Northern Ireland the situation has proved so intractable because of a vivid awareness of



past attitudes and behaviour and the fear that these will be replicated in the future. Their concerns about the past and the future in turn govern and limit their present conduct and reconfirm the belief that opponents have learnt nothing from the past: they have not and will not change. It is important to appreciate these perceptions and relationships in order to understand the processes, mechanisms and proposals which were needed to allow the parties to negotiate the Belfast Agreement in April 1998 and to understand the continuing hesitation and opposition to completing this process.

The conflict is complex because of the number of actors involved, both inside and outside Northern Ireland. The states most directly affected are the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Ireland began to come under English influence and control from the twelfth century when Anglo-Norman knights were invited to assist Irish chieftains in a local conflict. Hadrian IV, the only English Pope, then issued the papal bull *Lauda Abiliter* in 1155–56 allowing Henry II to conquer Ireland. Eventually the country became an integrated part of the United Kingdom. Since then there has always been some level of resistance to English and later British involvement in Ireland. In the early years of the twentieth century the demands for independence became overwhelming following the Easter rising of 1916. In 1921, after a nationalist revolt, the major part of the island became a separate state under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. This confirmed the partition of Ireland into the largely Catholic Irish Free State and Northern Ireland where the majority Protestant community wished to remain part of the United Kingdom. Until recently, colonial history continued to influence the attitudes of the English and the Irish towards each other (with the Scots and Welsh less involved) and to dominate relationships between the two governments. At the extremes of these intercultural relations the English displayed an underlying sense of superiority towards the Irish, who in turn struggled to overcome a sense of inferiority and impotence at their inability to prevent the partition of the island.

Interlocking interests

The relationship became more balanced in recent years, not least because of the common British and Irish membership of the European Union (EU). Partly as a result of EU membership, Ireland's economy has prospered to the extent that it is now known as the 'Celtic Tiger' and Britain's world standing has diminished from the days of the British Empire. These changes have had a significant effect on British-Irish relations and have helped both countries to leave behind past assumptions and work together to find a way out of the conflict.

The EU's concerns over a situation of instability within its borders make it a relevant party to the conflict. The EU Parliament has made recommendations, most notably in the Haagerup Report of 1984, which advocated a greater role for the EU in Northern Ireland, for power-sharing and increased intergovernmental co-operation. More important than its specific conclusions was the signal it gave that the EU considered it had the competence to comment on the hitherto 'internal' affairs of the UK. The Commission has since provided generous financial aid to try to improve living conditions and create a greater sense of normality in Northern Ireland.

The other key international actor that has played a significant third-party role is the United States of America. Over the centuries of emigration from Ireland to North America, the nationalist community there has maintained its identity and formed one of the most effective lobbies in the US. The US administration has tended to be sympathetic to its case and sensitive to its political leverage and has used what influence it has with the British government. Irish American individuals and groups have consistently given financial support to organizations in Ireland, mainly nationalist and reconciliation groups, with whom they identify.

Identity and ethnic background

Over the centuries the communities living in the northern part of Ireland have found it difficult to coexist. Suspicion and hostility have been a significant feature of their inter-communal relationships. Although there are many examples of co-operation and good neighbourliness, mutual distrust has fed the conflict and in turn provided numerous experiences of hurt and grievance, which have reinforced hostilities.

The two communities are distinct in their backgrounds and in their religious and cultural practices and many within them have believed that their interests are incompatible. Consequently they have developed their sense of identity in opposition to each other, stressing those aspects which are different – encouraged by a common fear of cultural assimilation. However, there are no obvious physical features to distinguish them, nor are their family names always a good guide. For example, the republican leader Gerry Adams, who identifies himself as Irish, has a family name of English origin while a leading unionist, Ken Maginnis, who identifies himself as British, has an Irish family name.

The religious divide

The most obvious difference between the two communities is religion – Protestantism and Catholicism – although there have also been bitter disputes between



Source: Crispin Rodwell

different strains of Protestantism. But the conflict is not about religion, though the churches as institutions have worked to safeguard the religious identities of their communities and in doing so have reinforced the divisions. A few people reject the dominant political aspirations of their community of origin: some Catholics are happy to be part of the UK while some Protestants favour a united Ireland. Consequently, the use of political categories such as unionist and nationalist is more accurate, though the religious distinction is very strong.

Most Catholics consider themselves to have descended from the Celts or Gaels, the people already living in Ireland when British influence began. They are typically proud to be Irish and identify with Irish or Celtic culture. Many resent the partition of Ireland and their lack of influence in the new polity. Politically they have tended to want Northern Ireland to lose its link with the UK and become part of the Republic of Ireland, and their usual political identity is therefore nationalist. More uncompromising nationalists are known as republicans, a term used to describe both those who have a strong commitment to the goal of a united Ireland and those who accept the use of violence to achieve that end, though not all republicans support the use of violence. The republican adversary was Britain, which they believed had a continuing imperialist interest in Northern Ireland. Hardline republicans tended to see all Protestants as puppets of the British state and the legitimate targets of their antipathy.

Protestants come from two main backgrounds: Scotland and England. The twelve-mile stretch of sea between Scotland and Ireland has always facilitated contact and movement back and forth, and there were many Scots

living in the north-east of Ireland before the arrival of the English settlers. The Celtic leaders in this part of Ireland failed in their resistance to growing English influence and went into exile. Their lands were confiscated by the British government and awarded to merchant companies in London who in 1609 developed a settlement scheme, known as the Plantation of Ulster, offering tenancies to English settlers or planters. These settlers, and the increasing numbers of Scot immigrants, were mainly Protestants in contrast to the Catholic farmers who were displaced. It was said that 'the Protestants got the best land and the Catholics got the best views'. Some settlers had influence with the British administration in Dublin but believed that their economic and material success was based more on their Protestant habits of thrift and hard work rather than political privilege. Not surprisingly, there was suspicion and hostility between the old Irish and the new settlers. Sectional or sectarian tension and recurring violence, occasional massacres and rebellion marked their subsequent history. The settlers distinguished themselves from the native Irish whom they believed threatened their way of life. They therefore sought to subordinate the Catholic population.

Consequently, in the nineteenth century, the northern Protestant community was best placed to take advantage of the industrial revolution. Industries were established in towns and villages throughout the North so that by the end of the century the region had very different economic interests from the rest of Ireland and looked to Britain and the British Empire as the key to their continued prosperity. When the rest of Ireland wanted independence the northern Protestants believed that their social and economic interests were best served by remaining within the United Kingdom and mobilized

PORTADOWN
DISTRICT L.O.L. No 7

OUR
BANNERETTE
IS STILL AT
DRUMCREE



successfully to ensure that outcome. Their political identity emerged as unionist reflecting their desire to maintain the union with Britain. More uncompromising unionists are known as loyalists, though all unionists share loyalty to the British monarch.

The Stormont era

This pattern of sectarian relationships continued and even intensified within the new Northern Ireland. Under the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which was intended to establish arrangements for the future administration of Ireland, a subordinate administration was established in Belfast and an imposing parliament building was erected in the suburbs at Stormont. Though in principle subordinate, it acted with no oversight from the British Parliament and this contributed to the entrenchment of relationships between the communities.

The unionists held a majority of seats in the new parliament that was described by Sir James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, as 'a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people'. This was taken to mean that it would ensure priority of Protestant interests. Despite these constitutional safeguards, many Protestants continued to feel threatened by the Irish state and were aware that the small Protestant population there had declined rapidly after independence. Marriage opportunities within the community were limited and in mixed marriages the Catholic Church ruled that children be brought up Catholic. Whatever the reason, Protestants in the North were reinforced in their fear of assimilation by Catholics and were suspicious of the minority population in Northern Ireland whose opportunities for advancement they restricted. The nationalist population dealt with the discrimination and alienation that they felt

by withdrawing socially and politically, and for much of the next fifty years they did not take their seats in the Stormont parliament.

Persisting insecurities

It seems remarkable that the conflict has persisted and remained significant for so many people despite changes in the surrounding environment. It is perhaps not surprising that there are contradictory views on the nature of the problem. Some see it as unfinished business from the colonial era that will only be resolved when the United Kingdom, as the colonial power, has no further involvement. Others see it as a new, post-colonial problem of two communities who are thrust together by history and need to find ways to manage their differences.

The concept of the 'double minority' may give the best insight into why the conflict has persisted. Nationalists have felt themselves to be a marginalized minority in Northern Ireland while Protestants are aware that they are a minority within Ireland as a whole and have consequently developed a siege mentality. In the context of the British Isles Irish nationalists are aware that they again comprise a minority of the total population. The nature of the conflict has encouraged the fear in each community that it will be undermined from within by individuals and groups becoming more accommodating to the other side. While the conflict is unacceptable to many, some consider it to be tolerable and that any change could make the situation worse. There is a fear of assimilation of one community by the other because there are so few differences between them. In this context small differences become important and symbolic. Practices such as the aggressive display of flags and slogans and,



especially among loyalists, parades and marches are a way of giving both an uncompromising message to opponents and maintaining internal cohesion.

In these circumstances there has been little room for the middle ground. Unionism and nationalism have reinforced traditional attitudes making it difficult to promote more inclusive politics. For example, there has never been much support for class-based politics, which could unite Protestants and Catholics. While there have been progressive individuals within the institutions of civil society who have campaigned for greater popular participation, they have tended to be typical of their communities and have reflected the fundamental division in society. The phrase 'tyranny of democracy' has been an apt description of politics in Northern Ireland. The public trusted and supported populist political leaders who reflected sectarian politics even if they would have liked them to work for better community relations. Politicians dared not challenge the conventional sectarian political attitudes for fear that they would be rejected. If politics were to become less sectarian, politicians and the public would have to move at the same time and this has been difficult to achieve.

Similarity in difference

Although the unionist and nationalist communities define themselves in terms of their differences, on the surface, the lifestyles of the communities are not dissimilar. Traditionally both communities consisted of small farmers and, from the early 1800s, they became increasingly urbanized working in the tough and squalid conditions of the factories of the industrial revolution and living in the neighbouring terraces of poor overcrowded houses. Each community had its share of all social classes but Protestants had a bigger and more influential landed and business class whereas a much more significant proportion of the Catholic community lived in poverty. There were Protestant poor, but they valued their sense of privilege or comparative advantage even if it was more apparent than real. They felt connected to the Protestant establishment and their families always had the hope that they might gain some benefit from this connection. In more recent times improved standards of living and public welfare have meant that the circumstances of both communities have improved.

The communities have always lived close to each other, in a patchwork of small Protestant, Catholic and mixed communities. During periods of overt violence there has been a tendency for the mixed areas to become more homogeneous either by the forceful expulsion of one or other section of the community or by the withdrawal of one section of the community to the security of their co-religionists. This demographic mosaic has meant that it is impossible to solve the problem by creating two new

political units: one predominantly Catholic and one largely Protestant. It has also increased the possibility for direct confrontation between the communities. While sectarian attitudes and hostility have always existed across the entire community, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the location of violence was in poor rural areas. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the urban slums have been the major sites for the most overt sectarianism and inter-community rioting. These are the areas which today show the most direct evidence of the underlying tensions and which are often separated by 'peace walls' or boarded up dwellings. The violence is therefore localized, and away from these areas life can be peaceful and untouched by the Troubles. But, with the segregation of social institutions such as education, the same sectarian attitudes are present. There is less incentive to move away from the traditional uncompromising politics. It is perhaps therefore no surprise that much of the new inclusive thinking about the way forward has come from the 'front-line' areas and paramilitary groups.

The uneasy balance between the two communities, which lasted for fifty years from the partition of Ireland in 1921, was often threatened by the nationalist population's aspiration for more equality and the reunification of the island. In the 1940s and 1950s there were ineffective campaigns of violence by the IRA. With the creation of the Welfare State after the Second World War living conditions improved and, most notably, educational opportunities were provided for people from working class backgrounds. This had a more significant impact in the nationalist community where access to higher education had been restricted. In the 1960s a new unionist prime minister, Terence O'Neill, made some attempt to modernize the region and shed some of the more traditional sectarian attitudes in order to make it more able to compete in the emerging global economy. As is often the case, with improving conditions came fresh demands for faster development.

The civil rights movement

In the late 1960s individuals from the new educated classes, unionist and nationalist, spearheaded the civil rights movement which was inspired by the civil rights campaign in the USA and stimulated by the student protests of 1968 in Paris and elsewhere. They included John Hume, the future leader of moderate nationalism. In the past the nationalist argument had been that Northern Ireland was 'irreformable' in the sense that it had been established to protect unionist interests and could therefore never become an equitable society. The civil rights movement took a different approach and believed, or at least acted on the assumption, that Northern Ireland could become a society where the civil rights of all citizens were protected and everyone had



Source: Adam Wooll/CORBIS

equal opportunities. They took no position on the reunification of Ireland, but many unionists, most notably the emerging leader of uncompromising unionism Ian Paisley, believed that they were the republican movement under a new guise and opposed their demands and public demonstrations.

Rally and counter rally led to minor violence and the confrontations were joined by more militant sections of each community. In trying to control the situation the police force and its reserves, the 'B-Specials', were not impartial. Largely Protestant themselves, they tended to sympathize with unionist opinion and to act more harshly against the civil rights campaigners. In any case, the situation was moving further out of their control. The escalation seemed to confirm for both the nationalist and unionist communities that gradual reform was impossible. For unionists that meant that all protest needed to be suppressed and for nationalists that only strong concerted action would bring about any change. In August 1969 British troops were deployed to try to maintain control of the situation on behalf of the Stormont administration. A loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), was already being revived but the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was uncertain how to respond to the situation. In the mid-1960s it had moved away from a military strategy because of its failure to gain popular support for its previous campaign and because of its espousal of a Marxist ideology which called for the building of alliances between the Protestant and Catholic working classes. However after the arrival of British troops there was a rapid growth of underground armed groups, often known as paramilitaries.

Conflict-related deaths in Northern Ireland 1969-94

Year	Security forces	Civilians	Total N.I.
1969	1	12	13
1970	2	23	25
1971	59	115	174
1972	146	321	467
1973	80	171	251
1974	50	166	216
1975	31	216	247
1976	52	245	297
1977	43	69	112
1978	31	50	81
1979	62	51	113
1980	26	50	76
1981	44	57	101
1982	40	57	97
1983	33	44	77
1984	28	36	64
1985	29	25	54
1986	24	37	61
1987	27	66	93
1988	39	54	93
1989	23	39	62
1990	27	49	76
1991	19	75	94
1992	9	76	85
1993	14	70	84
1994	6	54	60
TOTAL	945	2,228	3,173

Source: Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, Police Authority, 1996

For republicans the presence and activities of British troops in their communities focused attention on the role of Britain in supporting the unionist system and encouraged the arguments for armed struggle against the British and their unionist 'surrogates'. Loyalists did not believe that the authorities would take sufficient action to deal with the threat which they saw coming from the nationalist community. They felt that the threat could only be handled by moving outside the rule of law, even though the state had special powers and were using army forces to deal with the civilian population. They formed defence groups, most of which in time merged into the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).

The Troubles

By the early 1970s a new phase of open and violent hostility had developed between the two communities, which is euphemistically known as the Troubles. On the streets rioting was a daily occurrence though it later diminished as shootings became more commonplace. On each side a number of paramilitary groups were using violence and terror to achieve their ends. Most constitutional politicians and the public at large were against the use of force by paramilitary groups but there was little consensus on an acceptable way to govern Northern Ireland. Moderate nationalists, mainly in the new coalition known as the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), hoped for some kind of power-sharing or co-operative arrangement of government between unionists and nationalists. Most unionists were unwilling to lose any of their authority and distrusted all nationalists as ultimately working to undermine Northern Ireland and join with the Irish Republic. Many in the Republic of Ireland felt sympathy for the nationalists but also felt unable to make a significant impact and were afraid that the instability would spread to their state. The British tended to see themselves as somehow above the conflict. In 1972 they dissolved the Stormont parliament in the face of its incapacity to contain the growing violence and its unwillingness to accept more British control of the security response. Direct rule was established and the British presence, together with a measure of self-control on all sides, prevented the situation from breaking down completely. Had Britain not intervened the situation might have escalated further, or there could have been stronger pressures to resolve it.

A number of peace campaigns emerged from within civil society calling for an end to the violence. The most remarkable of these was the Peace People campaign, which quickly gained mass support in 1976. However, as with smaller initiatives, there was no consensus on how the conflict should end and its efforts made little long-term impact. Since the 1970s there have been repeated attempts to find a constitutional settlement. The main thrust of these efforts was to find arrangements for the constitutional parties to work together in such a way as to satisfy nationalist demands while limiting the scope for change enough to prevent unionist withdrawal. Initiatives were based around three elements: giving expression to the conflicting aspirations of the parties, creating a more equal society, and meeting the need for security and protection of the community. It was hoped that these arrangements would marginalize the paramilitary groups whose campaign would become irrelevant as had happened in the past. All of these attempts failed and the paramilitary campaigns continued.

During the 1970s the scars of the conflict were allowed to remain very evident, perhaps in the hope that the sight of

damage and destruction would shock the public into rejecting violence. However, in the 1980s there was another shift in government policy to create an air of normality. Damage was repaired quickly and the dividing lines between the communities were masked by environmental improvement schemes, which it was thought might create more optimistic attitudes, and make the conflict irrelevant. The hunger strikes of 1981 signalled a further intensification of the struggle. Little progress was made through a campaign to win over the 'hearts and minds' of those people who supported paramilitary groups by improving their quality of life and creating a more fair and non-discriminatory society.

Reaching agreement

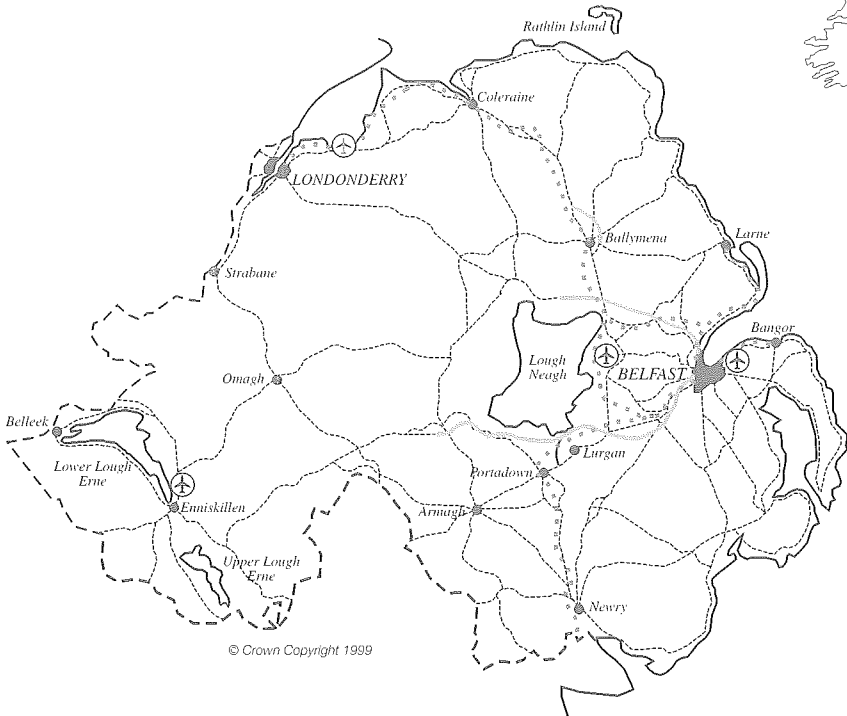
In 1985 the British and Irish governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement which indicated their willingness to accept each other's goodwill and work together with the common aim of destroying the paramilitary threat. It was hoped that a combination of tighter security measures and the involvement of the Irish government in policy making would achieve this. It was strongly opposed by the unionist community, which objected to the role given to the Irish government in the domestic affairs of Northern Ireland. The IRA also perceived the co-operation between the British and Irish governments as a threat. However, as a treaty between two states, it was an attempt to create a structure for dealing with the conflict which was impervious to political and community pressure within Northern Ireland.

Consequently the parties realized that they needed new strategies which might accommodate the interests of their opponents and in this way the Anglo-Irish Agreement became the stimulus for the creation of a new basis on which a peace process could be built. The awareness of other realities was also encouraging parties to rethink. It had proved impossible for the constitutional parties to create and maintain a political settlement in the face of the instability caused by the paramilitary groups. Republicans were becoming aware that IRA attacks on members of the security forces from the Protestant community only increased Protestant reliance on the British state to protect their interests and prolonged the conflict. It was also becoming clear that the SDLP did not have sufficient leverage on their own to achieve a settlement that they would accept as fair and reasonable. Unionists had also to face up to the steady erosion of their position while the conflict continued and the fact that the population balance was shifting in favour of Catholics. The conclusion was that a political settlement and an end to violence were mutually beneficial, but the determination not to compromise on core commitments and values was still strong. At this point there was still a long way to go if those initial vague hopes were to lead to a durable settlement.

Northern Ireland



Scale 1:10,000,000
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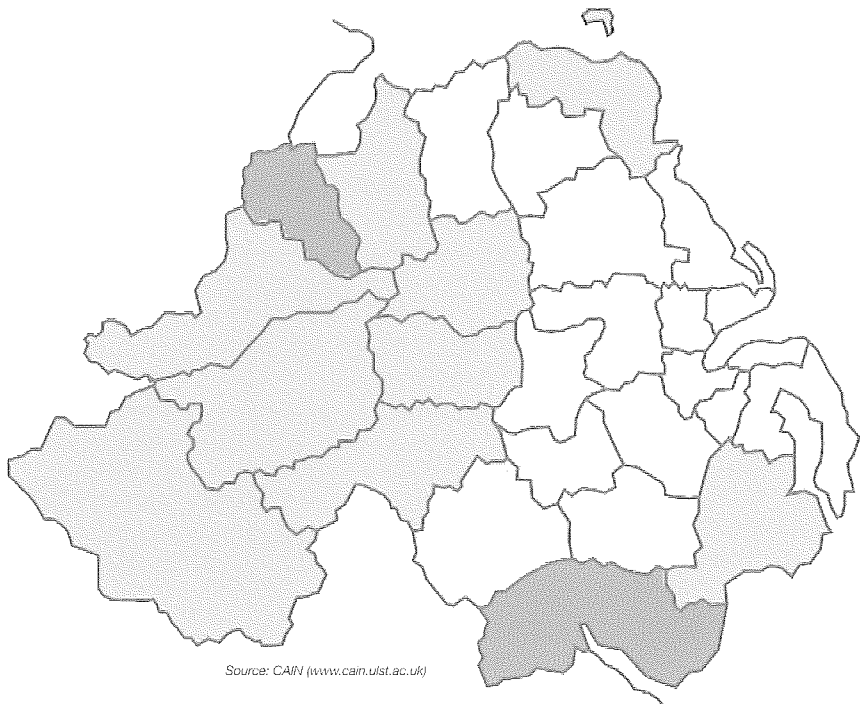


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Northern Ireland

- Main Roads
- ===== Motorways
- Railways
- ⊕ Airports

Scale 1:866,000



Source: CAIN (www.cain.ulst.ac.uk)

Catholic % Protestant

100	0
70	30
50	50
30	70
0	100

The early stages of the Irish peace process

Martin Mansergh

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He was special adviser to the Taoiseach
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Most important events in history have multiple causes and the Irish peace process is no exception. It came into being through a combination of factors: the war-weariness associated with prolonged political and military stalemate; the courage displayed by governments and constitutional parties in dealing with the politicians close to paramilitary forces; the examples of breakthroughs and peace processes elsewhere in the world; the creation of a political alternative by a democratic nationalist consensus; the economic need for peace and stability; the active partnership between the British and Irish governments (even if there were often strains in the relationship); and the unprecedented high priority commitment given by a US President to peace in Ireland, including a willingness to act as ultimate guarantor. The overwhelming public desire for peace in both Northern Ireland and the Republic was perhaps the most critical factor of all. It had been consistently displayed over a long period and reflected a great deal of valuable and unsung work for peace by countless individuals and organizations.

By the late 1980s, despite much political and diplomatic effort, the prospect remained one of prolonged political and military stalemate. In protest against the republican movement's repugnant campaign of violence, constitutional nationalist politicians had ignored their political demands and refused to have any contact with 'representatives of terrorism'. But they had failed to reach a cross-community political settlement that would marginalize the paramilitary organizations and create the political consensus that might make it easier to force an end to their violence. On the other hand, violence was not yielding significant political advance for republicans, although after the hunger strikes by IRA prisoners in the Maze Prison in 1980–81 they began to gain electoral support, receiving ten per cent of the vote in elections for the new Northern Ireland Assembly in 1982. Tentative



feelers were put out, and John Hume, leader of the constitutional nationalist party the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), sought a direct encounter with the IRA which he had to abort. But it took the catalyst of the Enniskillen Remembrance Day massacre of 8 November 1987 to start the dialogue that marked the beginning of the peace process. After Enniskillen, many people felt that the time might be ripe for dialogue to bring violence to an end. First of all, there was a moral duty to try and prevent any more Enniskillens, and secondly there was a sense that the futility of a continuing campaign of violence was becoming obvious to all.

Without a peace strategy Sinn Féin was unlikely to make any further electoral progress in either part of the island. No Sinn Féin candidate came anywhere near winning a seat in the 1987 general election in the South, although two abstentionist candidates incarcerated in the H-blocks of the Maze Prison had been elected to the Dáil in June 1981. Any remaining public tolerance of continuing paramilitary atrocities was sharply diminishing. The physical capacity to continue had to be distinguished from the moral and psychological capacity to sustain an armed struggle that increasingly had no obvious point. Sinn Féin needed to break out of political isolation and clearly hoped to form a pan-nationalist front that would reinforce its demands without necessarily requiring the complete abandonment of the armed struggle.

A private proposal

In November 1987 Father Alex Reid, a Catholic priest who for many years had been involved in conflict mediation in Belfast, wrote a discussion paper setting out the principles of self-determination and consent on which could be based the dialogue and negotiation necessary for a political settlement, including circumstances in which the British government would depart from Ireland.

The paper accepted the republican position developed around the time of the 1918 all-Ireland general election (held under British rule) that self-determination should be by the people of Ireland as a whole and that self-determination meant consent. But the paper argued that this could only be realized by the twofold consent of the people of the nationalist tradition and the unionist tradition and that this in turn could only be achieved through dialogue and agreement. The paper proposed a constitutional conference that the British government would be prepared to sponsor and facilitate. The author was satisfied 'that the British have no longer any colonial interest in Ireland, that is, they have no political, economic, strategic or military interest of their own for remaining in Ireland', and that they were willing to declare this if it would make a significant contribution to the cause of peace in Ireland. But they would not set aside the

Government of Ireland Act 1920 (the partition act) until alternative constitutional provisions had been worked out and agreed on by the Irish people.

It was a remarkably prescient document. It came with the moral authority of the Catholic Church, the initiative having the approval of Cardinal Ó Fiaich. It anticipated the statement made by Peter Brooke, the UK Secretary of State, in November 1990 as well as the repeal of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 (which formed part of the Belfast Agreement) and the eventual multi-party talks process of 1996–98 in its idea of a constitutional conference. There was not yet a clear recognition that in republican terms any settlement at this stage could only be an 'interim' one. The unspoken premiss of the entire paper was an understanding that an IRA ceasefire was necessary for all-party negotiations to take place.

An inter-party approach

As a result of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 which had formalized the influence of the Irish government in Northern Ireland's affairs, the SDLP were keen to challenge the assumptions underlying the republican struggle. Papers were exchanged between the SDLP and Sinn Féin in 1988. The SDLP maintained that the British government had become neutral and were prepared to back a united Ireland based on consent. The challenge was to win that consent. Sinn Féin contested British neutrality and held to a doctrine of self-determination that required the British government and the unionists to accept the majority will of the people of the whole island of Ireland without regard to the partition which had divided the island for over sixty-five years.

On two occasions Fianna Fáil, the party in government in the Republic, in parallel, ancillary and largely exploratory but secret talks with Sinn Féin leaders sought to convey to them the unacceptability of violence to the people of the South. Violence not only divided nationalist opinion in the North but also created divisions between nationalists north and south of the border, and among Irish Americans. The argument was put forward that nationalist Ireland was strongest and had achieved the greatest advances when it was politically united (for example during the New Departure in 1878 and under Sinn Féin 1918–21), and that this was only possible now on a peaceful and democratic basis. It was also a reality that NATO countries would never tolerate within their territory anything resembling 'a terrorist victory'.

It soon became clear both to the SDLP and to Fianna Fáil interlocutors that no meeting of minds was possible at this stage since there was no commitment to bringing the struggle to an early end. In those circumstances it would be dangerous and irresponsible to prolong a

dialogue that could be interpreted as collusive in the context of a continuing open-ended campaign of violence.

Waiting for favourable conditions

The mainly peaceful revolutions of 1989 in central and eastern Europe, the unification of Germany in 1990 and, after the release of Nelson Mandela in the same year, the beginning of a negotiated transition to majority rule in South Africa, suddenly transformed problems that had previously looked frozen into situations that could be solved politically. Any background fears about the potential strategic role of Northern Ireland in a cold war context, sometimes expressed as an unreal Cuban analogy, were dissipated. Hope that more propitious conditions might arise for a breakthrough was not abandoned. Father Reid maintained regular contact between the Irish government, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. The Taoiseach Charles Haughey had already offered to reconvene the New Ireland Forum, which had met in 1983–84 to consider future constitutional arrangements in the event of an IRA cessation of violence and include Sinn Féin.

Other initiatives were taken by non-official groups to try to stimulate new thinking. On a number of occasions key figures in parties across the political spectrum were invited to participate in seminars to explore ways of moving the political process forward. For example, Eberhard Spiecker, a German lawyer, brought together representatives of the Alliance Party, DUP, SDLP and UUP, with Father Reid acting as someone who could provide an insight into Sinn Féin, at a private meeting at Duisburg. They came tantalizingly close to reaching an understanding of the potential basis for a political settlement. Similar meetings were organized by academics and non-governmental organizations, and while it was often difficult to agree the basis for a meeting with the parties, the interaction and discussion were invariably very useful and relationships were established which made a contribution to the subsequent formal negotiations.

British initiatives

A new, imaginative British Secretary of State, Peter Brooke, took office in July 1989 and after a hundred days made the remarkable acknowledgement that democratic governments, on the Cyprus analogy, sooner or later end up talking to terrorists. He said that although the IRA could be contained it was difficult to envisage their being defeated militarily and that if violence were ended he would not rule out talks with Sinn Féin. In 1990 he authorized the reopening of an indirect channel of communication involving Michael Oatley, an intelligence

officer, and Denis Bradley, a Derry priest in the confidence of Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness. A year later, Brooke declared that Britain had no 'selfish strategic or economic interest' in Northern Ireland and was prepared to accept a united Ireland by consent. The statement largely settled one of the main points of contention between the SDLP and Sinn Féin in the late 1980s and was one of the key foundations of the peace process. In November 1990, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher resigned following an internal challenge within her party over her government's European policy. From a republican point of view she had been extremely antagonistic and was held responsible for the deaths of ten republican hunger strikers, including Bobby Sands, in 1981. Because of her triumphalist attitudes and the possibility that she would have proclaimed any ceasefire to be a republican defeat, it had always been difficult to envisage a ceasefire while she was in office. Her replacement by the milder, more pragmatic John Major brought a change in atmosphere which made such a ceasefire more possible.

In 1991 Peter Brooke at last achieved his ambition of starting political talks between the constitutional parties on the totality of relationships. While outwardly contemptuous, republicans had always to be aware of the possibility that at some point these talks might just succeed. The paramilitary organizations would be placed under huge pressure if they had contributed nothing to an agreed political settlement endorsed by the people in referendums in both parts of Ireland, as proposed by John Hume. With no military breakthrough, despite the IRA's possession of a sophisticated arsenal imported from Libya in 1985–86, and with the increasing effectiveness of the loyalist paramilitaries, the situation was ripe for a renewed push for peace.

The search for agreed perspectives

With ideas crystallizing around the concept of a joint declaration by Taoiseach and Prime Minister, John Hume presented Taoiseach Charles Haughey in October 1991 with the sketch of a draft declaration – an idea supported by Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Féin. Its broad themes covered the need to overcome the legacy of the past, the opportunities provided by the European Union with its constructive ethos and the right to self-determination (with a time frame for it to be exercised). This should happen in the context of the Irish government's recognition of the necessity for the consent of the people of Northern Ireland and the establishment of a nationalist convention or forum that would give Sinn Féin a platform.

These ideas were developed by the Irish government and the exchange of papers continued under the new Taoiseach Albert Reynolds. Direct dialogue between the



Source: Cogan Pearson

Irish government and Sinn Féin was eventually resumed. From December 1991 the British Prime Minister was made aware of the possibility of an initiative. Sinn Féin wanted a declaration that reflected its ideology as faithfully as possible. The Irish government's principal concern was that, despite the adoption of language more associated with the republican movement, the proposal should remain compatible with Ireland's international obligations, and notably the principle of consent under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The SDLP leader had the most pragmatic attitude to the content of the draft declaration.

Whereas Charles Haughey had had a cautious attitude to the initiative, the importance and controversial nature of which he recognized, Albert Reynolds came to office imbued with the idea that peace was a moral imperative. He often described his intentions to an unsuspecting public by saying that he was seeking 'a formula for peace'. He aroused the non-committal interest of Prime Minister John Major who, with new Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew, now put greater emphasis on trying to establish a new phase of political talks. But the inter-party talks that were revived in April 1992 broke down seven months later at the time of the Irish general election. The unionists alleged constitutional inflexibility by the Irish government and declined to return to the talks.

John Hume had kept senior British officials informed of what was happening, but both governments also had their own direct lines to Sinn Féin. The British government was in parallel exploring the republican movement's readiness for peace. However, the position was complicated on the British government's side by its narrow parliamentary majority and consequent growing dependence on the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) for its

maintenance in office until 1997. Far from being influenced towards more direct engagement with the republican movement by bombs that caused considerable damage in the City of London in the spring of 1993, the government concluded an informal political alliance with the Ulster Unionists in the summer of 1993. At that point it received from the Irish government the draft declaration to which the republican movement had given only tentative backing, nervous of the unlikely possibility that the British might accept it as it stood. The document has subsequently been referred to in popular parlance as 'Hume-Adams', though in private republicans referred to it at that time as the Dublin government's initiative rather than theirs. The declaration of principles was initially entirely nationalist in character. From the British government's point of view it had Gerry Adams' fingerprints on it and consequently they were not prepared to accept it as a basis for negotiation, though they did discuss it with Irish officials. Albert Reynolds, however, was absolutely determined to pursue the initiative and refused to take no for an answer. He was prepared if necessary to reformulate the paper as a purely Irish initiative and confront the British government's reluctance to move on it. 'Who is afraid of peace?' was his clarion call. At the same time, it was clear that if the proposal were to be adopted by the British government it would require modification and amplification.

In autumn 1993, after a period of waiting, John Hume and Gerry Adams made public the fact that they had put a proposal to the Irish government for transmission to the British. Unionist and loyalist fears were greatly heightened and violence increased as it often did when there were signs of political progress.

The Irish government entered into dialogue using Protestant clergy as intermediaries with both the Ulster unionist leadership and the loyalist paramilitaries in order to defuse fears and rumours. It was necessary to incorporate some loyalist thinking and use language that addressed unionist concerns in the draft declaration.

The Downing Street Declaration

The key factors that led to the successful negotiation and conclusion of the Downing Street Declaration were the judgement of its acceptability to substantial sections of unionism, the determination of the Irish government to proceed with its initiative and the sympathetic support of American opinion. The business community in Northern Ireland had suffered from the Troubles and wanted to see them brought to an end. It was prepared to pay a political price for peace, provided it was not too high. Bill Clinton became US President in January 1993 with strong Irish–American backing and in the knowledge that the British Conservative Party had tried to assist his rival President Bush during the presidential election. In the mid-1990s the so-called ‘special relationship’ with the US, the cornerstone on which Britain had built its post-war foreign policy, was at a low ebb and its existence openly questioned in Washington. Throughout the century Britain has been anxious to prevent Ireland from clouding its otherwise excellent political relations with the US that counteracted the pressures exerted by the UUP members at Westminster.

The Downing Street Declaration of 15 December 1993, while recognizably retaining many features of the draft proposal passed by Reynolds to Major the previous June, also represented a challenge to the IRA. The British government’s acceptance of the right to self-determination, subject to concurrent consent, its renunciation of any selfish strategic or economic interest, its commitment ‘to encourage, enable and facilitate’ the achievement of agreement between the people of Ireland and its promise to accept the admission of Sinn Féin to political dialogue with the other parties, and not just in a nationalist forum, challenged the whole rationale of continuing the armed struggle. It took another eight months for the republican movement to be convinced.

From clarification to ceasefire

In order to further encourage the IRA to move to a ceasefire a number of confidence-building gestures were made, notably the lifting of broadcasting restrictions in the South and the admission of Adams to the United States on a short visa. The Irish government provided a great deal of clarification of the Declaration but declined to move away from it despite the ideological difficulties for republicans created by the principle of consent. The

British government was eventually persuaded to issue clarification as well and the Irish government had to provide the same to the UDA. The decommissioning issue figured nowhere in these exchanges.

In March 1994, after a long pause, IRA violence resumed but work continued on a framework document between the two governments to provide a foundation for resumed political talks. When eventually published in February 1995 it covered, in particular, equality issues, institutional structures for north–south co-operation in specified areas, balanced change to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution and amendment or repeal of the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Sinn Féin was sufficiently briefed to know that important negotiations were being prepared, with or without their participation.

The republican movement was faced with the necessity of making a decision in July 1994, having exhausted the possibilities of clarification, as well as the patience and expectations of the public, the SDLP and most of the Irish government. Albert Reynolds had made it clear on several occasions that he would reject out of hand any temporary or time-limited ceasefire and the republican movement was advised of the type of language that would be acceptable to him.

The IRA ceasefire of 31 August 1994 was intended to be permanent, even if many activists were left with the impression that the option of returning to violence still existed. Albert Reynolds moved fast to create momentum, meeting John Hume and Gerry Adams on 6 September, a week after the ceasefire. The British government on the other hand, believing in the virtues of procrastination, was much slower, more cautious and publicly the very opposite of euphoric about the end of the IRA campaign. It seemed, in fact, determined to look a gift horse in the mouth. Nevertheless, security on the border was rapidly reduced, border roads were reopened, support for economic reconstruction was sought from the US and negotiated with the EU, and the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was convened.

The first IRA ceasefire was one of the most difficult and crucial achievements of the peace process. It was inevitable that there would be setbacks such as the IRA raid on 10 November 1994 when a Newry post office worker was murdered, an event which was used by the British government to bring forward the issue of decommissioning. But there was no warning that Albert Reynolds’ government would collapse and momentum would be lost. It had been expected that the constitutional talks would start within six months but there proved to be a long and stony path ahead to real negotiations, an agreement and its implementation.

The creation of a framework for negotiations

Unionist concerns

Nigel Dodds

Nigel Dodds OBE is Minister for Social Development in the new Northern Ireland Executive. He was a DUP member of the Northern Ireland Assembly 1982–85 and represented the party in the 1991 Brooke talks and was a delegate to the multi-party talks 1996–97.

A number of attempts to reach an agreed basis for negotiations between the political parties in Northern Ireland were made in the early 1990s. Throughout this period the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was concerned that negotiations should take place on a level playing field and that to be involved parties must be fully committed to democracy and the pursuit of political objectives by exclusively peaceful means. It also emphasized the necessity to delineate carefully the respective roles and inputs of Her Majesty's government and the government of the Irish Republic. As far as the DUP was concerned the Dublin government could not be given any role in any negotiations about the internal administration of part of the United Kingdom. It was also emphatic that in any negotiations the parameters must permit an outcome acceptable to the unionist electorate.

The DUP was determined not to accede to a negotiating process that would inexorably and inevitably result in an outcome weighted against the unionist community. Unionists had not subscribed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and while it was still functioning were unwilling to enter into the talks proposed by Secretary of State Peter Brooke. Eventually, in 1991 after a prolonged interlude of 'talks about talks', the British government and unionists agreed that no inter-governmental meetings would take place under the Agreement for the period of the negotiations, effectively setting the Agreement to one side. Equally significantly other parties to negotiations were not so bound to the Agreement that they were unable to consider and accept an alternative.

Following the conditional IRA ceasefire of 1994, concerns were again raised by unionists about any new negotiating process. The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 was a set of foundation principles that



Source: Crispin Rodwell

the governments believed would safeguard the vital interests of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland. The Framework Documents of February 1995 were intended to be the basis upon which agreement would be built but were universally rejected by unionism which could not allow its negotiating base to be limited or defined by the terms of any agreement reached behind its back without either consultation or consent. The overriding issue was whether it would be possible to establish a process for negotiations without pre-conditions, and without the approval of the DUP.

Unionist alternatives

In January 1995 the DUP presented the Prime Minister with an alternative which proposed an election to a Northern Ireland Convention charged with considering issues relevant to all three strands (internal Northern Ireland matters within Strand One; North–South issues within Strand Two; British–Irish issues within Strand Three). The Irish Republic would be consulted in relation to Strands Two and Three while the British government would of course be involved in relation to all three strands. The DUP made it clear that it would not sit down with the Dublin government unless and until the Republic removed its illegal and aggressive claim of jurisdiction over Northern Ireland from its constitution. This was consistent with the view that negotiations should take place between parties on equal terms. The UUP also supported the idea of elections.

The DUP focused on providing a forum for active politics to fill the political vacuum, while at the same time ensuring that representation at negotiations would reflect the actual balance of political views in the country. This was always a key consideration for the DUP in its

approach to the talks process. All parties would of course be free to stand for election and take their seats in the elected convention. The DUP has consistently maintained its opposition to negotiating with Sinn Féin given its inextricable links to IRA terrorism. The election process for a convention preserved that position while effectively creating an inclusive process in which others could negotiate with whoever they chose. The DUP believed that no arbitrary time limit should be imposed and that this proposal would permit steady progress to be made. In the end it was a variation of this proposal that the government adopted, although the modifications that were introduced created more problems for the process than they removed.

The weapons issue

Decommissioning or, as the DUP prefer to put it, the handing over of illegal terrorist weaponry, was not introduced as a last minute device or stalling tactic to stop Sinn Féin entry into talks as has sometimes been argued. Even before the first IRA ceasefire Dick Spring, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, stated in the Dáil that the issue of terrorist arms would have to be dealt with before Sinn Féin could enter talks. The DUP has never accepted that negotiations can be fair if around the table there is a party which has at its back a paramilitary terrorist organization with access to a massive stockpile of armaments. Negotiations on that basis are conducted with a gun metaphorically – and literally – pointed at the heads of the other parties who come armed only with their electoral mandates.

At the end of 1994 the IRA had failed to declare a permanent ceasefire and unionists were justifiably concerned to see evidence of a real change of heart. Their

scepticism proved to be justified when the IRA returned to violence at London's Canary Wharf in early 1996. The issue of decommissioning has never been properly dealt with at any stage leading up to the talks or since. It has been fudged and pushed down the line at every juncture of the negotiating process. Initially the requirement of the British government was that a substantial amount of illegal guns and explosives had to be handed in before Sinn Féin could enter talks. This was changed to a requirement for a token beginning to decommissioning in a speech given by the Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew in Washington on 7 March 1997. The setting up of an International Decommissioning Body under George Mitchell to examine the issue was announced in an Anglo-Irish communiqué of 28 November 1995, but it resulted in yet further concessions to the republican movement. This represented a major internationalization of the process. The idea for such a body had initially come from the UUP. It was gladly seized upon by nationalists and the Irish government who, along with Sinn Féin, were enthusiastic about increasing the influence of a US administration which had clear sympathies with the broad pan-nationalist position and which itself was being pushed hard by the Irish-American lobby to become more active in the search for a 'solution' to the problems of Northern Ireland.

Following the Mitchell Commission's report in January 1996, the new position of the British government became a requirement for parallel decommissioning by the IRA alongside talks at which Sinn Féin would be present.

The elections process and its outcome

At the same time the government called elections to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue from which delegates would be chosen to participate in a talks process. However the procedures adopted confirmed the concerns of the DUP. Firstly, the election system was manipulated to ensure that those parties with links to paramilitary organizations would qualify even if they would not gain sufficient votes to be elected under the normal system of proportional representation. The ten parties with the highest total vote would be entitled to two seats. It meant that the smallest parties at the talks had fewer votes across the whole of Northern Ireland than the bigger parties had in one constituency. Secondly the elected Forum was boycotted by nationalists and republicans precisely because, in the view of the unionists who remained, it did reflect the political balance in the community. It was left as a talking shop and a smaller group was selected to carry out the negotiations. To make matters more unfair all the parties, regardless of size, were given two, and at most three, seats at this negotiating table in a clear negation of the democratic process. The parties were equally represented

regardless of size or electoral strength. The election as proposed by the DUP had been designed to allow parties to obtain a mandate from the electorate for the strategy they would pursue – including the selection of parties they would deal with directly and those they would avoid as illegitimate. However, that possibility was not realized because the talks format meant all the parties sitting together, and so the DUP withdrew at the prospect of the entry of Sinn Féin.

The DUP, in line with its consistent view that any negotiating process must have the capacity to produce an outcome acceptable to unionism, rejected the attempt by the British and Irish governments to impose upon talks participants their own set of ground rules and procedural guidelines for the conduct of the substantive talks. This was clearly an attempt to dictate the course of the talks. Similarly the pre-selection of the American chairman without consultation with talks participants indicated that ownership of the process was not to be given into the hands of the delegates if the governments could possibly avoid it. This resulted in a protracted period of discussion over the basis of the talks. Misrepresented as procedural wrangling by opponents, it was in fact an assertion of the fundamental principle that primacy and control must rest with the parties in the talks process themselves.

The election in May 1997 of the new Labour government produced a major shift in British government policy on the issue of decommissioning. Sinn Féin remained barred from talks because it had not fulfilled the requirement of a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and to the democratic process. All unionists at the talks united to adopt a series of proposals in the early summer of 1997 that would have required the IRA to hand in weapons before entering talks. Prime Minister Blair and Secretary of State Mo Mowlam simply ignored this and announced that by the start of September substantive talks would commence with Sinn Féin present, provided there was a restoration of the previous conditional IRA ceasefire. The Trimble-led UUP reversed its position and agreed to enter talks with Sinn Féin-IRA. The people of Northern Ireland were told that the Mitchell Report (January 1996), which favoured the requirement for parallel decommissioning by the IRA and other paramilitaries, still stood and that Sinn Féin should be put to the test. The scepticism of the DUP was subsequently justified when at the conclusion of the talks the IRA had still not commenced decommissioning.

With the decision of the DUP and the United Kingdom Unionist Party, which together represented almost half the unionist electorate, to stand by their election pledges not to negotiate with Sinn Féin and to remove themselves from the talks, the government had failed to ensure an inclusive process.

The creation of a framework for negotiations

A leap into uncharted waters

Seàn Mag Uidhir

Seàn Mag Uidhir was a republican prisoner from 1976 to 1984 and then an activist until 1997, including a period as Sinn Féin cultural officer, three years working on the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and two years in the Sinn Féin Publicity Department.

The decision by the IRA leadership to call a complete cessation of military operations in August 1994 was a leap into uncharted waters. For the leadership of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness – who had taken over the reins of power after the failure of the 1974–76 ceasefire to advance the republican position – this was a particularly hazardous course of action to take.

After the 1974–76 ceasefire, the IRA had come closer to defeat than at any other time during the conflict. It was reorganized and geared towards a long war of attrition and Gerry Adams took on the task of developing a strong political party, moving Sinn Féin beyond simply being a support group for the IRA. ‘Ceasefire’ had become a dirty word in the Republican vocabulary, and therefore the steps to the 1994 cessation had to be slow and patient, ensuring that the movement’s unity and cohesion were maintained above all else. It took a great leap of faith to convince the republican base that a cessation could actually advance its position. The chief fear of republicans was that any protracted cessation would be used by the British government to sap the will and ability of the IRA to wage war – as had been their experience of 1975. Others worried that Sinn Féin would be sucked into a process and become indistinguishable from parties such as Fianna Fáil and the SDLP, who had failed to achieve an end to partition.

Preparing the ground

There was however, broad acceptance of the leadership’s assertion that the movement alone was not strong enough to bring about the conditions necessary to end partition and that allies were needed. The advantages of republican involvement in negotiations were clear in terms of increasing Sinn Féin’s profile and just being there would stiffen the backbone of the SDLP who were likely to accept less than republicans.

The experience gained in breaking down the policy of treating prisoners as criminals following the 1981 Hunger Strike had instilled confidence in the movement's middle leadership. Another source of confidence was that the IRA was leaving the field intact on its own terms: unbroken and unbowed. This was of immense psychological importance to an organization that had suffered military defeat in previous campaigns. The Sinn Féin leadership drew heavily on experiences gained in Palestine and South Africa where conflicts were also drawing to a close with the aid of international involvement.

Nothing was left to chance, however, and the base was prepared for the ceasefire announcement in a series of detailed briefings over a three-week period in the run-up to 31 August. A set of strategic objectives was laid down which made progress measurable and a return to armed struggle was never ruled out. Activists were told clearly that John Major's British government and the unionists were not willing participants in the peace process. They would accept change only where there was no other credible way out. The dynamic in the peace process would be the axis of Adams, Hume and Reynolds. While there was still some nervousness in republican ranks, the movement was united in its determination to try to make the peace strategy work.

Nationalists all over the island welcomed the cessation as a great opportunity to test the British government's assertion about having no 'selfish or strategic interest' in Ireland. The British government and the unionists were clearly wrong-footed by the announcement of the cessation, but Major set the tone for the next eighteen months of stalling, prevarication and obstruction by saying he wanted to hear that the cessation was permanent.

Coming in from the cold

Republicans remained upbeat as the Irish government under Albert Reynolds moved quickly to live up to its promises. Reynolds steadfastly refused to be drawn into the debate on permanency. He met with Gerry Adams and John Hume within days at Leinster House (the Irish seat of government) and the public handshakes signalled the coming in from the cold of Sinn Féin. He began a prisoner release programme, set up the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and ended censorship of the party in the media.

Compared to the IRA's complete cessation of military operations, the British response was derisive and begrudging, and they still seemed more intent on defeating the IRA than building a peace settlement. Throughout the cessation there was no serious engagement by the Major government. They announced a 'decontamination' period before their officials – rather than ministers – would meet with Sinn Féin. Military patrolling of nationalist areas remained high, they restored remission for prisoners to pre-1989 levels rather than beginning a prisoner release scheme and only lifted the broadcasting ban on Sinn Féin when it became too embarrassing to continue.

However, if there was one event which killed off the potential of the 1994 cessation to culminate in a peace settlement it was the resignation of Albert Reynolds in November 1995 over an unrelated political scandal. The writing was on the wall from that point. Reynolds was a key figure and had taken political gambles in the run-up to the cessation to bring republicans on board. That is not to say that the breakdown was unavoidable with a bit of imagination or willingness from the Major government to participate actively in the process.

The new Taoiseach, John Bruton, could be described at that time as republicans' worst nightmare. The Fine Gael leader had been a consistent critic of Reynolds' support for the Hume–Adams initiative until the cessation was actually announced. He was considered overly sympathetic to unionists. With Labour leader Dick Spring, Bruton did at least make some ground in the British and Irish governments' Framework Documents of 1995. The documents fell short of republican aspirations but they did formalise the centrality of all-island institutions in any solution to the conflict. Republicans felt that this could provide building blocks towards Irish unity.

While Bruton did make an honest effort to advance the peace process, he failed to comprehend fully that he needed to be proactive in persuading the British and the unionists of the need for change. As a result he allowed the British government, in particular, to choke the life out of the potential of the 1994 cessation.

Meanwhile, British insistence on no movement without decommissioning (which now replaced a demand for an assurance that the ceasefire was permanent as the sticking point) began to exasperate not just the republican leadership and the IRA, but the nationalist people as a whole.



Source: Pacemaker Press

Back to arms

The talks between Martin McGuinness and British officials had become both insulting and damaging, as the British government refused to get involved some seven months after the cessation. This strategy was sending out the wrong signals to the republican base. A listening device was discovered in rooms being used by republicans in Stormont during the meetings, and the talks charade was allowed to die a natural death without Sinn Féin being unduly criticised for walking out. Eventually the British Secretary of State did meet Gerry Adams in Washington in March 1995.

The next nail in the cessation's coffin was the British government's reversal of previous decisions to ban Orange parades along the Ormeau Road in Belfast and Garvaghy Road in Portadown. Nationalists all over the North saw the triumphalism of Ian Paisley and David Trimble in Portadown as a humiliation. It rekindled a feeling that despite twenty-five years of conflict

nationalists still didn't count in the eyes of a British government faced with loyalist violence and Orange pressure. The Major government was by then totally dependent on Unionist votes at Westminster to stay in power and would not have been able to move forward even if it had been willing.

Republicans were rapidly coming to the conclusion that the political process at that time offered no potential to end the conflict – with a weak Tory government in London and Bruton at the helm in Dublin. The British stalling tactics and what was seen as duplicity were beginning to erode the unity of the republican movement and this factor too weighed heavily on the decision to resume the armed campaign. There was an air of inevitability within Republican ranks that there would be yet another round of warfare.

The end of the ceasefire might have come sooner than February 1996 but for the feel-good factor generated by

the visit of US President Bill Clinton to the North in November 1995. The visit captured the mood of huge public support for the peace process, and the world's most powerful leader demonstrated a strong commitment to the achievement of peace in Ireland. The Sinn Féin leadership had worked hard to secure US involvement in the process, and the IRA was not about to commit political suicide by resuming its armed campaign before the Clinton visit.

Alarm bells

Gerry Adams issued a series of warnings that the process was in trouble but it seemed that no one was listening. Many had confused the IRA cessation with the achievement of peace, but for republicans conflict resolution meant dealing with the whole range of issues that had sparked off and then sustained the conflict. Some commentators accused Adams of sabre-rattling. Adams however had his finger on the pulse of the republican community and understood perhaps better than anyone that the cessation could not hold without movement by the British government at least on the core issues of equality, justice and human rights.

The last straw was Major's rejection of the Report of the International Body on Decommissioning which had been established by the British and Irish governments and which offered a way out of the deadlock on decommissioning. Although it later emerged that the IRA had been preparing for the Canary Wharf bombing for months beforehand, Major's rejection of the report made it inevitable.

However in spite of the breakdown, the isolation of the republican movement had been broken. Even though the governments moved immediately to break contact with Sinn Féin following Canary Wharf, dialogue continued with officials. Personal relationships established between the Sinn Féin leaders and all the major players on the Irish side survived the resumption.

New directions

New doors had also opened between Sinn Féin and Protestant clergymen and in particular with the unionist business community who saw the potential for economic growth unleashed by the prospect of peace and stability. European money for Peace and Reconciliation had revitalised the community sector and inter-community contact had been strengthened

The situation that existed up to the 1994 ceasefire was set in stone. The IRA cessation broke that mould and made the political situation fluid. The republican movement like every other part of the body politic has been affected by the winds of change unleashed by the 1994 cessation.

The Sinn Féin leadership had handled the period with great skill and had emerged from the shadow of the IRA. They were now seen as competent leaders who were sincere and prepared to do business. The strategic objectives set out in 'Towards a Lasting Peace' in 1991, though refined, continue to govern the direction of the republican strategy of conflict resolution. The political advances made by republicans were borne out in the next elections held North and South in 1997. Unionism on the other hand had been weakened with new divisions opening up daily.

For the IRA too everything had changed. There could be no return to the long war of attrition and it was recognized that dialogue would be a necessary element in bringing the war to an end. Given the right conditions there would be another cessation. It was no surprise therefore that the elections of Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern within a month of each other in 1997 brought about a second cessation as soon as they announced the beginning of inclusive all-party negotiations for that Autumn.

Ceasefires and elections

Harry Barnes and Gary Kent

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By the beginning of 1996, the main paramilitary groups had maintained their ceasefires since late 1994 but little progress had been made in finding an agreed basis for inclusive talks. The Conservative government in London was nearing the end of its term and finding it difficult to maintain majority support for its policies in parliament.

The issue of decommissioning was becoming a major stumbling block. Although the IRA had begun a ceasefire in September 1994, there had been no negotiations on decommissioning. There had been significant ministerial contact with Sinn Féin and also with the loyalist parties whose paramilitary wings had declared their own ceasefire in October 1994.

The need for a new impetus

It was hoped that the Independent Body on Decommissioning headed by Senator George Mitchell would provide a way forward. When it reported in January 1996, a central recommendation was that decommissioning of illegally held paramilitary weapons should be parallel with, rather than prior to, all-party negotiations.

Mitchell's recommendation was accepted by John Major's government and by the UUP. The government also highlighted another Mitchell proposal: that there be elections to a Northern Ireland political forum. Those elected would constitute the pool from which the parties would draw their negotiating teams for the all-party talks. Major's actions caused consternation among many Irish nationalists and Sinn Féin in particular, even though inclusive talks were a central Sinn Féin demand. It was

said that the Conservative government was hostage to the UUP to maintain its very small majority in the Commons. Yet the party had voted more often with the Labour opposition than with Major's government, whose parliamentary majority was probably more imperilled by restless right-wing backbenchers.

However, Sinn Féin's inaccurate view that Mitchell's report had been 'binned' became the conventional wisdom. The IRA now had an apparently plausible excuse for resuming its war. On 9 February it broke its ceasefire with the massive Docklands bomb in London which killed two civilians. It is, however, increasingly clear that the Docklands bombing was planned well in advance of Major's response to Mitchell. The British and Irish governments' response to renewed IRA violence, including the destruction of Manchester city centre and the bombing of the British Army headquarters in Lisburn, was to suspend contact with Sinn Féin.

There was also a considerable upsurge in the activities of peace groups such as the Peace Train and the umbrella STOP 96 organization whose supporters were antagonistic to Sinn Féin–IRA.

Elections for entry into the talks

Sinn Féin did very well in the Forum elections, achieving its highest result for many years, and came close to overtaking the constitutional nationalist SDLP of John Hume. Sinn Féin's success reflected a widespread desire among many Catholic voters to boost what was seen as the peace faction within the republican movement.

The electoral system drawn up for the Forum elections allowed increased representation for smaller parties such as the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) – linked to the two main loyalist paramilitary groups. This also boosted the peace factions within the loyalist coalitions. For the first time, the newly formed Women's Coalition and the small Labour Party, both of which supported inclusive negotiations, won seats.

The government determined the terms of decision-making in the negotiations – the principle of 'sufficient consensus'. This required majority support for key measures within unionist and nationalist blocs and meant that the PUP and the UDP could ally with David Trimble's majority UUP to deliver the unionist part of this equation without having to rely on the votes of Ian Paisley's hardline DUP.

Impact of British and Irish elections

The peace process was in suspended animation due to the imminence of UK elections in May 1997 and the unexpected general election in the Republic of Ireland following the fall of John Bruton's coalition government in June 1997. The peace process benefited from the coincidental election of a majority Labour government and a viable Fianna Fáil government. The Labour Party was better positioned than the outgoing Conservatives to roll back international suspicion of the British government while Fianna Fáil, the party traditionally associated with the ideals of republicanism, was able to deal more decisively with the republican movement. They both had fresh mandates and motivation. Furthermore, Sinn Féin leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were elected to the London parliament and Sinn Féin also won a seat in the Irish Dáil. This gave the party increased political credibility, not least in the USA where it focused its energies on much needed fund-raising. The new British Prime Minister, Tony Blair moved quickly to establish that the search for peace in Northern Ireland and close co-operation with the Irish government remained high priorities for his government.

Steps towards cross-community talks

Blair cleared the table of the wreckage of past negotiations and deprived the republican movement of excuses for violence. He accepted an independent investigation into Bloody Sunday, when fourteen unarmed civilians were shot dead by British soldiers in January 1972. Within a fortnight Blair visited Northern Ireland to deliver a keynote speech which signalled that the Union was safe – probably for generations. This also helped sustain the loyalist ceasefire which had held since October 1994 despite the IRA's return to violence.

There has been a remarkable consistency of policy between successive British governments on the key concept of consent – that Northern Ireland should determine its own destiny. Furthermore, the idea that a British government should become a 'persuader' to edge unionists towards Irish unity was never accepted. Blair maintained a ban on ministerial contact with Sinn Féin but announced that talks with officials would open. He stuck to this despite the murder of two unarmed police officers in Lurgan by the IRA just weeks before Sinn Féin was re-admitted to multi-party talks after its declaration of a second ceasefire in July 1997.



Source: Pacemaker Press

On the day that Sinn Féin joined the all-party talks, Trimble's most vociferous opponents within the unionist camp – the DUP and Robert McCartney's UKUP – walked away from the negotiations. Trimble symbolically walked in with the UDP and PUP leaders. Both events effectively gave Trimble political cover to increasingly engage with republicans.

As what had become multi-party talks proceeded, UUP negotiators moved from proximity talks with Sinn Féin to direct bilateral negotiations. These unionists found it easier to take part in talks that involved Sinn Féin because technically they were remaining in talks that had been going on for many months rather than entering new talks with Sinn Féin.

When Trimble won the UUP leadership in 1996 he was widely perceived to be a hardliner who would be incapable of doing a deal with the nationalists. Republicans apparently calculated that he would not stay in negotiations and that unionist intransigence would be punished by the British and Irish governments imposing a deal over the heads of unionists. But Trimble stayed and eventually the Belfast Agreement was made and ratified by a massive majority of voters throughout Ireland as a whole.

The Mitchell Principles

Six principles proposed by the International Body on Decommissioning. Acceptance of them could be taken to indicate a commitment to non-violence. The principles were adopted by all parties as a test for entry into the talks. The relevant passage of the International Body's Report reads:

'Accordingly, we recommend that the parties to such negotiations affirm their total and absolute commitment:

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

The negotiations in practice

Mark Durkan

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The formal negotiating process that led to the Belfast Agreement on 10 April 1998 was unusually long. The twenty-two months it lasted from 10 June 1996 provided many opportunities to try different mechanisms and assess how they helped negotiations to move forward. The mechanisms were not new in themselves but the participants were occasionally able to use them in innovative ways to overcome obstacles when the talks became bogged down. At other times individual parties persisted in supporting specific procedures which seemed to protect their interests and as a result for long periods little progress was made and the talks appeared to be going nowhere.

Procedural disputes

The talks got off to an acrimonious and inauspicious start with sessions dominated by the issue of rules of procedure. The unionist parties were resentful that the British and Irish governments had published a set of ground rules on 16 April and appointed the three independent chairs without consulting them. They argued that this set the precedent for the governments to control the talks. Consequently the first day was characterized by delay and uncertainty as the unionist UUP, DUP and UKUP parties rejected both the ground rules and the appointment, in particular, of former US Senator George Mitchell as the senior independent chair. The arguments regarding the rules were more than just pedantic points about procedural preferences. They were about the working ethos of the process and its political potential.

Doubt and suspicion were heightened by the unfamiliar format for negotiations which was designed to ensure the involvement of up to ten parties as mandated in the election of May 1996, including those with even very marginal electoral support. Provision was made for Sinn Féin's inclusion in the negotiations at the invitation of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the basis of a reinstatement of the IRA ceasefire.



There was anger and embarrassment as the independent co-chairs were not allowed to assume their duties. Media attention focused on unionist resistance to the appointment of Mitchell and their insinuations about his intended role. However, he and his colleagues were installed when the UUP, having made its point that it would resist any suggestion that proposals could be imposed on the parties, rested its objection. In return the two governments accepted that the talks participants would negotiate and agree rules of procedure for the negotiations themselves.

Those preliminary negotiations were conducted without agreed rules, with Mitchell effectively managing the proprieties with the confidence of all the parties. At this stage no time constraints were imposed on contributions in plenary meetings, and many arguments were long-winded and repetitive. It was inevitable that some parties would labour their attitudes to the 'peace process' and background events in this induction period of the negotiating process.

The independent chairs facilitated these negotiations more actively than they facilitated the substantive negotiations. They sought proposals from parties, provided comparative tables to guide discussion and used bilateral meetings to ease things forward. As total compromise did not emerge voluntarily, Mitchell ended up shuttling and brokering with his own compromise drafts on the still disputed points. Under the rules for the rest of the negotiations that he helped to establish, Mitchell did not play as direct or decisive a mediation role again.

The arguments revolved around the role and remit of the independent chairs; how comprehensive the agenda could be; whether or not parties had the right to raise issues free from veto; the principle of inclusion of parties 'related' to paramilitary groups on ceasefire; whether or not decommissioning was to be a 'term of entry' for Sinn Féin; and the construction of a mechanism to secure agreed decisions where consensus proved impossible. The formula adopted was 'sufficient consensus' which stated that a decision could be adopted if a majority of the representatives of each community, unionist and nationalist, were in agreement.

The adoption of agreed rules represented a more significant achievement than was recognized. It followed a very difficult summer with crises over Orange Order (the Protestant society linked to the UUP) parades and the resulting resignation of the SDLP from the unionist-dominated Forum, the elected body which had been established to provide a pool from which the negotiating teams were drawn.

The manner in which the rules were adopted is worthy of note. Even with the parties' own adjustments and compromises and the mediation of the independent

chairs there was still no unanimity over all areas of the rules. However, the DUP accepted a procedure under which the section of the rules on decision-making by sufficient consensus would be voted on first. This method was then applied to the other sections of the rules which meant that the DUP could record its opposition but not block procedures which it did not like – what Peter Robinson of the DUP termed a 'good loser' approach.

The format applied

A crucial part of the initial discussions was the arranging of a suitable environment for negotiations, including the division of issues between different meetings, the representation of parties, and the structuring of the meeting room. Since the Brooke talks in 1991 it had been accepted that there were three sets of relationships which should be dealt with in separate strands: Strand One dealing with internal relationships within Northern Ireland; Strand Two with relations within the island of Ireland; and Strand Three with UK–Irish relations. Consequently five 'formats' were named in the Rules of Procedure: Plenary, the three Strands, and a Business Committee. Under Rule 5 liaison sub-committees on confidence building and decommissioning were eventually established in order to separate out topics which threatened to undermine the ability of the parties to work together.

The Plenary format (chaired by Mitchell) as well as Strand Two and the Business Committee (both chaired by General de Chastelain) involved all the parties and both governments. Strand One (chaired by the British government) did not include the Irish government. Strand Three negotiations were between the two governments with arrangements for consultations with the other parties. To an outsider these arrangements may seem pedantic and immaterial, but the parties were attempting to establish a working environment that reflected their positions. For example, the unionists attempted to merge Strand Two and Strand Three so that they would participate in the discussions between the British and Irish governments while the SDLP and the governments wanted to retain the concept of separate and equal consideration of each Strand.

The term 'format' is also used to describe the form of the negotiations arrangements which deal with the numbers involved and the style and shape of meetings. UK legislation had provided for the larger parties to have three negotiating seats each and the smaller parties two, with all parties entitled to three people in support. The two governments each had three negotiating seats and five people in support. The three independent chairs also had their support staff (up to five in practice) and there were civil service note takers working under the direction of the independent chairs. This meant that formal

negotiating meetings were relatively large. With the DUP and UKUP walkout on the entry of Sinn Féin there ended up being sixty-eight at the plenary sessions.

In these circumstances there was not really a negotiating table but a chamber with a large square of tables, two rows of seats and a lot of space in the middle. Contributions had to be by microphone for acoustical as well as procedural reasons.

The ‘top’ side of the square was occupied by the independent chairs flanked by the British and Irish governments. The parties were seated in alphabetical order and the chair, for a long time, took submissions from the parties in alphabetical rotation, always starting with the Alliance Party. For the purposes of the talks the DUP used its full title, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party, thereby securing a later turn in a round.

Too many parties

Problems did not derive from the number of parties involved and unproductive bilateral meetings show that having a smaller number of parties would not necessarily have improved communication. Indeed earlier talks involving four parties suffered from a similar syndrome.

The large number of parties in fact helped communications on several counts. The negotiations were more inclusive, with the widest span of democratic representation ever involved. This helped to differentiate the process from previous failed initiatives and underlined that ‘ownership of the process’ was not just for the larger parties. The multi-party negotiations were in keeping with the likely composition of any new elected institutions which were expected to comprise more than just the bigger parties. The larger number of parties helped with the problem of language in the negotiations. In previous negotiations parties had tended to be very precious about their own terminology and quite jealous or suspicious about the language of others. In practice the larger number of parties generated a wider range of language and induced more flexible attitudes to innovative and variable terminology.

Controlling the agenda

The fact that the Opening Plenary ran from June 1996 until September 1997 could not be blamed on the format of the negotiations but on the attempts of parties to advance their aims by controlling the topics for discussion. Such considerations lay behind the unionist insistence that no substantive negotiations could begin until they were satisfied on the issue of decommissioning. An alternative proposal that the Opening Plenary should only ‘address’ rather than ‘resolve’ the issue was not accepted.

The following weeks and months saw the strongest manifestation of ‘variable geometry’ – the concept of flexibility in the shape and size of meetings. Bilateral discussions between the UUP and the SDLP and later trilateral discussions involving the Alliance managed to produce a working paper on decommissioning on which there was, even according to UUP sources, ninety per cent agreement. At the same time bilateral discussions had produced agreement between the SDLP and the UUP on a possible Comprehensive Agenda for the substantive negotiations which was designed to reassure each party about the intentions of the other. The Alliance Party was also willing to support this proposal. When the Opening Plenary finally concluded on 24 September 1997 the Procedural Motion contained the SDLP/UUP/Alliance proposed Comprehensive Agenda and relied heavily on the ‘unagreed’ decommissioning paper.

The fact that a Westminster election was pending seemed to further inhibit some parties for the first few months of 1997. Aware of a likely change of government, the UUP, along with other unionist parties, now stressed the differentiation between ‘decommissioning’ and ‘the terms of entry for Sinn Féin’. Tedious and pedantic as the differentiation seemed to some, it indicated that David Trimble was trying to establish a justification for remaining in talks in the event of the admission of Sinn Féin after a second IRA ceasefire.

May 1996 election results for entry to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue

Total electorate	1,166,104
Total valid poll	752,388
% turnout:	64.69

PARTY	VOTES	% VOTES
UUP	181,829	24.17
SDLP	160,786	21.37
DUP	141,413	18.80
Sinn Féin	116,377	15.47
Alliance	49,176	6.54
UKUP	27,774	3.69
PUP	26,082	3.47
UDP	16,715	2.22
NIWC	7,731	1.03
Labour	6,425	0.85
Others	17,990	2.39

The 'sufficient consensus' rule caused a significant problem in the way it was applied in the Opening Plenary. The independent chair was reluctant to convene meetings or set business without sufficient consensus for this course of action. This made it impossible even to discuss issues on the basis of 'taking note without voting'. Extending the sufficient consensus requirement to even relatively mundane matters of procedural management served to compound the sense of gridlock and heighten the frustration.

Surfing the agenda

One shared tactic to avoid difficulties in dealing with specific substantive issues was to review widely all the issues or 'surf the agenda'. When the 'substantive negotiations' finally started in October 1997, the chairs decided to take each of the Strand One and Strand Two agenda items in turn, normally meeting one day per Strand each week. The intention was to allow parties to air and share all the issues that mattered to them and to gain some measure of the approach being taken by others. Parties were invited to submit papers on each item on which they were entitled to speak in the large negotiating format.

The parties' contributions and exchanges centred more on what they were not prepared to compromise rather than on what they were willing to accept. With limited written submissions from some, conflicting historical analyses and a shortage of actual proposals this 'surfing the agenda' exercise had little substantive value. It did, however, mark some sort of graduation in the negotiation process with parties starting to get a sense of how serious others were about given issues. Some significant points were made and with some passion. The importance of good listening was now more apparent and relevant – at least to some.

Experience in smaller formats

Everyone agreed on the need to get the negotiations to move up a gear or two but not on how to achieve this. Proposals tended to be about getting stuck into an issue or locking on to one Strand to get some substance established. It was not just the agenda that mattered but format, with all parties seeming to agree on the limited value of the big room sessions.

During the long Opening Plenary bilateral and multilateral meetings were the favoured channel for real negotiations. However, these also had a questionable success rate. Successive bilateral discussions with all the parties in turn were hardly stimulating. Impressionistic accounts of other parties' positions or intentions were exchanged at second and third hand and different parties focused on quite different things in the same round of

bilateral or multilateral discussions. These ineffectual meetings usually took place as a way of trying to avoid sterile sessions in the large format.

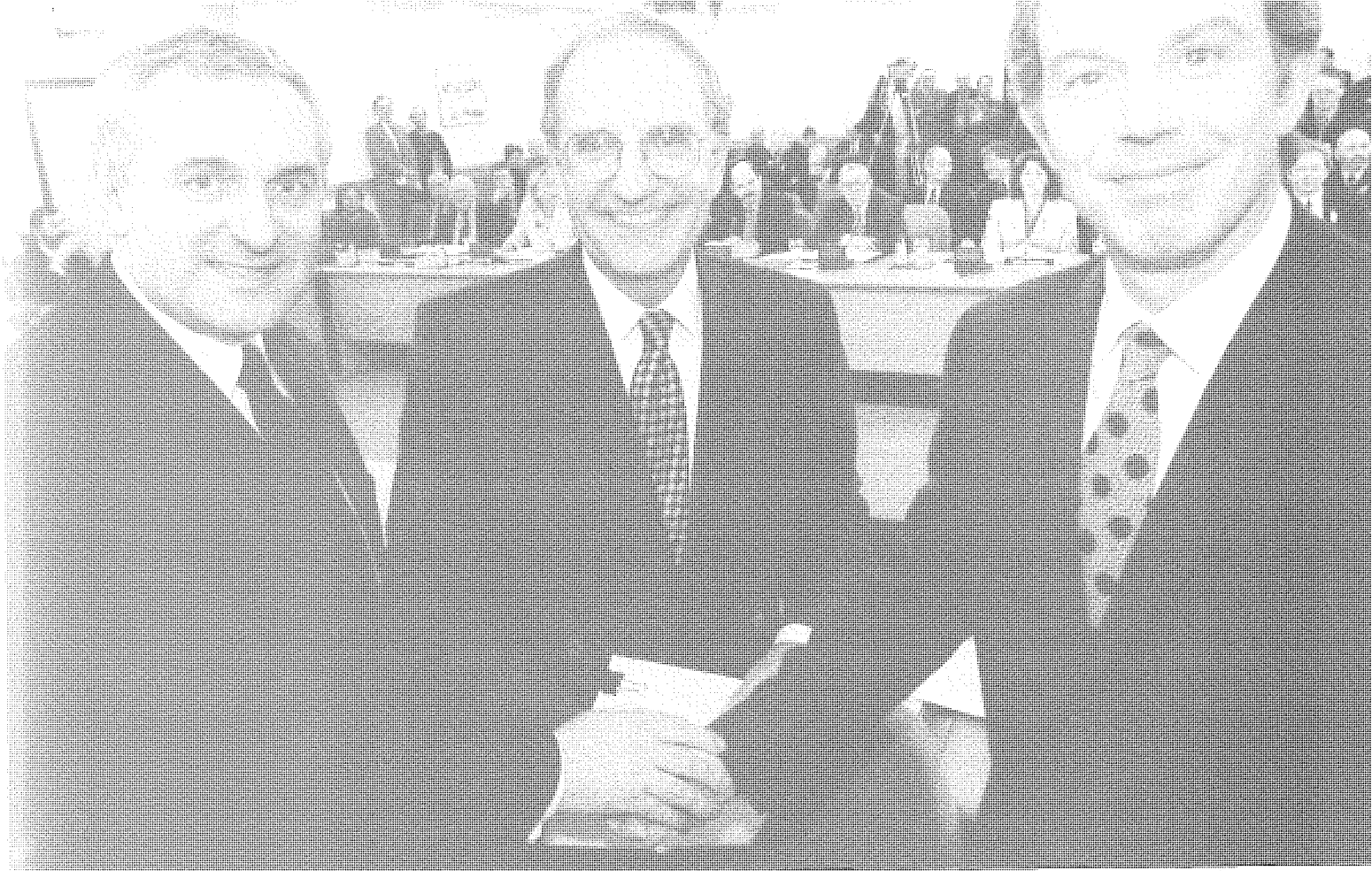
In 1997 a smaller Plenary sub-group format was established with two representatives from each party to identify key issues for resolution and to propose an appropriate format for dealing with them. A new room was created adjoining the conference room to accommodate this smaller format. It was not free from tension or recrimination and had no guarantee of enhanced understanding.

Some private press briefings by government officials misleadingly heralded this exercise as 'drawing up heads of agreement' – something that parties were hardly minded to do going into a three-week Christmas recess. Based on these discussions the independent chair offered a paper outlining the main issues which needed to be addressed but, predictably, parties had various sensitivities and reverted to their own proposals in the subsequent discussions.

In deference to the collegiate spirit which was supposed to inform this smaller format, SDLP negotiator Seamus Mallon once asked if there might be a coffee break of fifteen minutes 'so that a couple of us could talk with a view to offering some compromise on this'. The two SDLP and UUP representatives stayed on in the meeting room and managed to reach some agreement that was given strong encouragement by both governments. Sinn Féin reacted adversely and the Irish government declined to support the SDLP/UUP compromise. At one point Sinn Féin complained that people had asked for a coffee break but had not even gone for coffee while the SDLP and UUP delegates were pointing to their coffee cups still on the table.

Engineering 'sufficient consensus' was still difficult. In this context it was also inappropriate. The SDLP view, made clear at the time, was that any such reconstitution of the agenda should be agreed by consensus to avoid creating unnecessary and unhelpful 'winners and losers'. A 'note not vote' option which allowed the tabling of papers on key issues which participants could note without prejudice but would not have to vote on was rejected. The UUP began to insist that this sub-group format could take no decisions anyway.

The seriousness of the situation was brought home to participants. At the last Plenary before Christmas the independent chair cautioned participants that they were going into probably the last recess of the negotiations. The SDLP warned that the failure to produce a working list of the key issues and agree a format would be an even greater problem when negotiations resumed. The warning that 'the calendar will not stay neutral just



Source: Crispin Planchet

because we have called a recess' was borne out by subsequent statements and events when the Secretary of State and some party leaders went into the Maze Prison to discuss the process with sceptical loyalist paramilitaries. At this point the prospects for progress seemed to be fading fast.

Establishing engagement

In early 1998 signs of 'chemistry' became evident as parties and personalities got back to each other's points or ideas in other than negative tones. It is not entirely clear why this was so but a number of developments may have helped. Responding to the difficulties during and before the recess, the two premiers in January prepared their own 'heads of agreement' paper similar to the 'key issues' drafts on the table before the recess. The aim was to give the resuming negotiations some measure of focus as the proposed May deadline came closer.

At this stage the smaller negotiating format was used but with only two assistants allowed in support of the two representatives per party. Some parties fielded different negotiators according to the issue under discussion with the effect of giving mixed messages at times. Parties canvassed their various proposals, concepts and models but, more importantly, with some tactical exceptions, they explored each other's ideas, seeking further explanations or offering explanations for their own reservations or objections. The SDLP and UUP eventually had language proofing sessions where they could

identify and explain for each other their sensitivities about the sort of terms they were respectively using or likely to use. These sessions lapsed into discussions of substance but this was hardly a problem in the circumstances.

Sessions in London and Dublin (three days in each city) in this period were dominated by the exclusion of the UDP in London and Sinn Féin in Dublin because of breaches in the ceasefires. Although the intended benefits of a change of scenery were not realized, one of the most significant and poignant personal contributions of the talks process was made in London by Reg Empey of the UUP when he struggled to show some appreciation of the attitudes and calibre of the republican negotiators, and asked for something similar for unionism. The genuineness of the terms in which he spoke had an impact on the other parties that they tried to reciprocate. In bilateral talks, as well as rehearsing arguments on the issues, parties were sharing constituency sensitivities and exchanging thoughts on how the negotiations could be advanced to a productive climax.

The government-ordained 9 April deadline was needed. With the deadline in place parties began to press on the issues which had not been substantively pursued in the negotiations to date. They stressed issues and ideas of particular importance to them such as policing, prisoners, civic forum, decision-making and safeguards, and the UUP returned to the decommissioning question. It was recognized that policing could not be properly addressed



Source: Pacemaker Press

in that negotiating context and that some form of commission should deal with it. Predictably, most parties went into public relations overdrive in this period which added to the impression of intractability.

However, what was needed was reflection on what was being said and on options that would as far as possible meet the requirements of the parties. For example, an informal 'homework club' evolved within the SDLP in which a small group of party members met to discuss options, test them against party requirements and against those of other parties, redraft them for better acceptability and workability and even produce alternative versions to have in reserve for the conclusive negotiations. SDLP party member Seamus Mallon told this group at the time to 'let the others draft their press releases, we have to draft an agreement'.

The rapid development of proposals at this stage is exemplified by the emergence, only weeks before the deadline, of the concept of a binary office of First and Deputy First Minister, in which all functions would be exercised jointly. There was also concern that key decisions in the proposed assembly should have cross-community support. This led to a proposal for the adoption of 'parallel consent' under which a majority of both unionists and nationalists would be required for such decisions.

Bringing it all together

The real challenge now was how to bring the negotiations, imperfect as they were, from all the different Strands into one arena so that one agreement could be decisively negotiated. An interim deadline of 3 April 1998 was set for the independent chairs to produce a paper that would be a draft agreement for final negotiation. Mitchell held further private meetings with individual parties to explore their proposals before completing the draft. At this stage he was doubtful about the inclusion of specific ideas which might not obtain broad support, and parties were concerned that the draft might not reflect their ideas. Following its meeting with Mitchell, the SDLP was somewhat worried that he was not encouraging about its Strand One proposals on 'parallel consent' and other related safeguards in relation to decision-making and their proposal for a joint office of First and Deputy First Minister. He made it clear that, as with Strand Three, the Strand Two section of his paper was being prepared by the two governments.

Worry about Mitchell's likely approach was replaced by profound concern and resentment when, on 30 March, Downing Street faxed its draft for Strand One to Hume and Trimble but to no one else. Anger was expressed in the strongest possible terms. There was no question as far as the SDLP was concerned of negotiating with a fax machine. The objection was not just the manner of delivery of such a paper. Its content reflected very little of the party's thinking.

The sense that this was no way to manage serious negotiations was strengthened by the fact that Mitchell knew nothing of such drafts until told of them by the SDLP. When a subsequent Downing Street draft was sent on 2 April, a corrected or revised version followed within a couple of hours; and even Paul Murphy, the British Minister of State at the negotiations, and his officials were unaware of this when the SDLP went to discuss concerns with him.

The 3 April deadline for the Mitchell paper was missed because the governments had not finalized their Strand Two paper. Mitchell wanted to circulate the paper minus Strand Two but the other parties advised strongly against this for a variety of reasons but most importantly because the proposals needed to be considered as a complete package. While waiting for the Mitchell paper on 3 April and fending off Downing Street's faxes, parties continued their own bilateral discussions. On the morning of 3 April the UUP and SDLP held a bilateral meeting to address some major issues of difference. The UUP was concerned about the idea of an executive model in Strand One as well as Strand Two as a whole and at this point the SDLP outlined its concept of the joint office of First and Deputy First Minister which had already been developed in the 'homework club'. The UUP expressed working interest in

the concept but declined the offer of a paper. Other contentious points included decision-making safeguards such as 'parallel consent'. These were also points of difficulty for the Alliance Party. It was only in the final week that the SDLP came up with the conclusive answer to these points with the idea of electing the First and Deputy First Minister jointly by 'parallel consent'.

When the Mitchell paper was circulated on the night of 6 April, only three days before the deadline for the end of the talks, there was an intense negative reaction from unionist parties and the Alliance Party to the Strand Two paper because they found the proposed cross-border links were too strong. Privately the SDLP, the only nationalist party negotiating in Strand One, was disappointed and worried about the Strand One proposals because only marginal consideration had been given to their ideas. When the two premiers arrived the UUP and Sinn Féin concentrated on Strand Two but negotiations also continued on prisoners, policing, equality, human rights as well as the other Strands.

There was therefore no collective or round-table negotiation as such. In all probability no one participant, not even the independent chair or either prime minister, knew everything that was going on throughout this period. It was not perfect traffic management but it beat the gridlock. Instead of the stalemate of a zero-sum game we now had a complex matrix of negotiations. Some participants were surprised – not all pleasantly – when they saw the aggregate outcome in the proposed final Agreement on 10 April. The Plenary session to formally table the Agreement was delayed as a result of discussion in the UUP delegation on whether to accept a package which did not resolve all their concerns. Meetings between party leaders and the prime ministers continued as problems were cross-checked and supplementary issues raised. Rumours and varying moods went round the building like waves as people were tired after a sleepless night, hungry, with no food in the building, and relieved, surprised, exhilarated or humbled with the anticipation of agreement.

Those final two weeks had seen the sort of constant and concentrated negotiation that was crucial. The role of the two prime ministers had been decisive in terms of negotiation and brokerage, but the role of the parties should not be underestimated. The patience and sensitivity of the independent chairs – not just George Mitchell but Harri Holkeri and John de Chastelain too, helped to facilitate all of this. Mitchell's sense of purpose was matched by his sense of patient caution. He had all along talked of himself as 'Humpty Dumpty – I can only jump once'. His instinct for the right time was acute, as demonstrated by his decision to call the plenary session at fifteen minutes' notice on the evening of Good Friday.

Decision-making

- The negotiations will operate on the basis of consensus. If it appears to the Chairman, after a reasonable period of discussion, that there is no unanimity, he may follow one or more of the courses of action set out below:
 - a. consult with the participants, with a view to putting forward a solution that he believes will secure agreement; and/or,
 - b. invite the participants to set up a broadly representative working group, including nominees of both Governments (or of the British Government alone in the case of Strand One issues); and/or,
 - c. obtain the agreement of the participants to refer the matter to an agreed group of experts for advice, requesting a report within an agreed specified period.
- It will also be open to the participants, acting solely by agreement and only at their instigation, and subject to the provisions set out in paragraph 37 below, to refer the matter to the forum for consideration, requesting a report.
- If, after the participants have considered any further proposals arising from one or more of the courses of action set out above, there is no unanimity on a particular proposition, the Chairman may propose that negotiations proceed on the basis that the proposition has been approved by sufficient consensus, as defined in paragraph 34.
- Sufficient consensus may apply to all decisions taken in any format.
- A proposition would be deemed to have sufficient consensus when supported by participating political parties which, taken together, shall have obtained a majority of the valid votes cast in the elections held on 30 May 1996 and which between them represent a majority of both the unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland respectively and which also constitute a majority of the participating political parties. With the exception of Strand One, both Governments must endorse the particular proposition for it to be deemed to have sufficient consensus.
- Where it does not prove possible to achieve either unanimity or sufficient consensus, the Chairman will work, in consultation with the participants, to remove obstacles to the reaching of agreement, or, with the agreement of the participants, may decide to move on to the next item on the agenda.
- The negotiations will proceed on the principle that nothing will be finally agreed in any format until everything is agreed in the negotiations as a whole. Subject to this principle, it would nevertheless be possible, solely on the basis of agreement among the participants, to proceed on the assumption of contingent agreement on any individual aspect of the negotiations.

from the Rules of Procedure 29 July 1996

The role of civil society

Clem McCartney

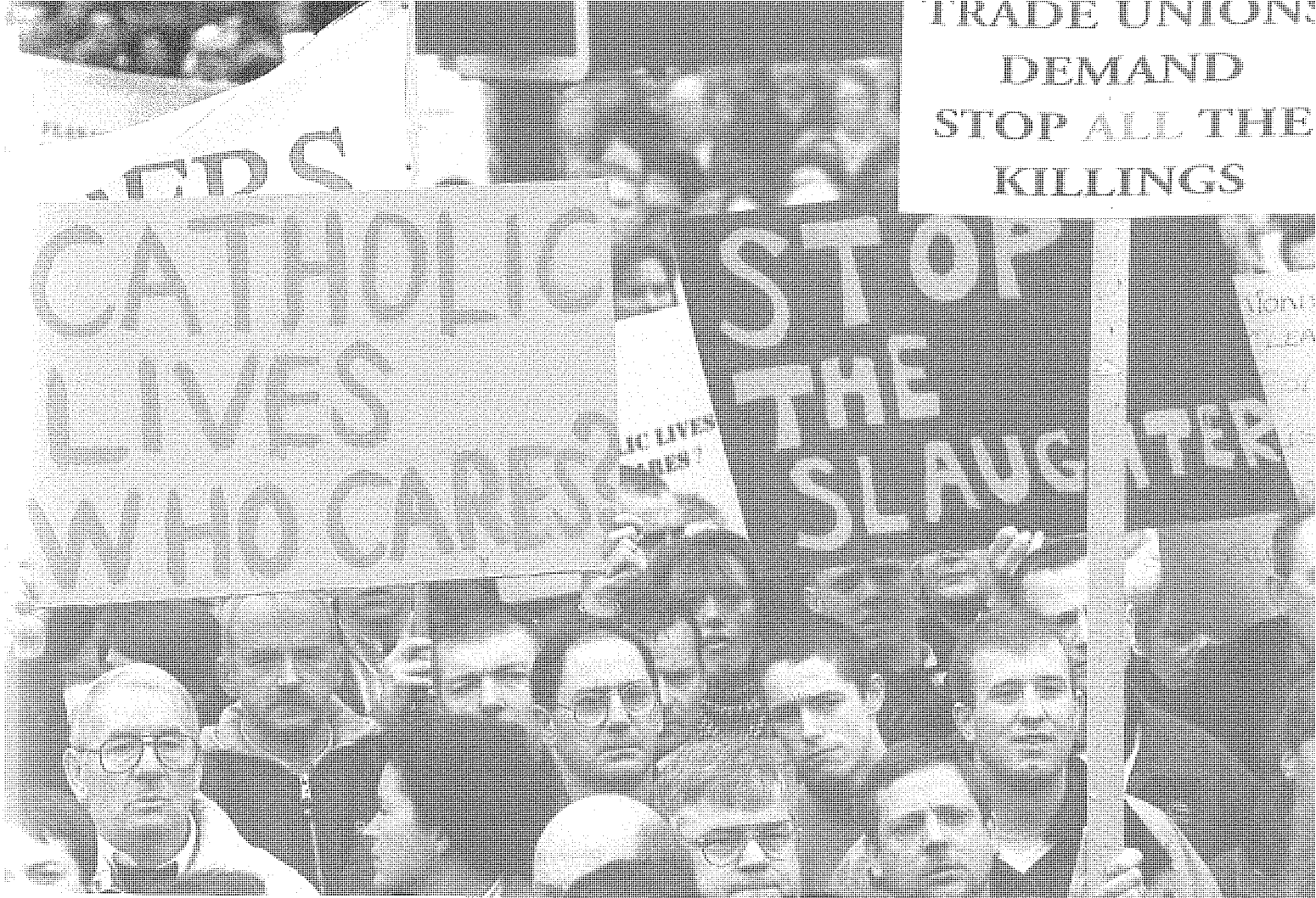
When the Troubles began in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s, one response from the British government was the establishment of a Community Relations Commission to develop strategies to improve relationships between the two communities. The Commission thought that society suffered from a lack of community infrastructure and local leadership and that it was important to create a pool of community activists who would eventually connect across the divide and create a new non-sectarian stratum of society which could develop a new politics.

The wider public was in part already involved in political action. The Orange Order, for example, permeated all sections of the Protestant community and acted as an important link between political and civil society. The leaders of the civil rights movement, although mainly middle class and professional, were successful in mobilizing a wide section of the community in their campaign. Their opponents were led by uncompromising Protestants, mainly from the Free Presbyterian Church of Ian Paisley, though participants in their protest rallies also included other disaffected loyalists. Both communities had only limited opportunities for developing a broader political understanding of the situation and street politics remained largely a reflection of traditional sectarian loyalties and identities.

The rise of organized community activity

With the support of the Community Relations Commission, the early period of the Troubles saw a flowering of local community activity and the development of community leadership. Those involved tended to reject conventional politics and community action provided an alternative stage from which to work





Source: Pacemaker Press

for social change. When powers were returned briefly to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1974 one of its first steps was to close down the Commission, arguing that it was no longer necessary now that there was a new representative assembly. But the level of organized community activity in working class neighbourhoods continued to grow.

It was also true that in other sectors of civil society there was a great deal of disillusionment with politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Many who did not support the predominant system of sectarian politics found their sphere of activism in the trade unions, churches, and neighbourhoods, but they had little impact on the overall political situation. Most sectors of society, including the churches, were themselves divided about the most appropriate response to the conflict, and in these circumstances intransigent voices were dominant. Perhaps it was inevitable that violence would muffle the voices of those who support accommodation. Intransigent voices speak a simpler and more forceful message that is easier to understand than the more intricate and less obvious arguments in favour of co-operation and dialogue. It has always been difficult for civil society in Northern Ireland to open up a broader middle ground where a settlement might be more likely to be found.

Prophets and reconcilers

Throughout the conflict a number of groups emerged calling for peace. The most notable of these was the Peace People, which in 1976 was able to organize huge rallies and demonstrate a strong desire for an end to violence. Its founders, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but the movement could not find a common basis for a settlement on which its supporters could unite. Soon it had lost its popular appeal and, like other peace groups, worked quietly in the background to raise issues, to help relieve the stress of living in a violent society and to bring together small groups of Protestants and Catholics to learn about each other and develop mutual respect.

Cross-community contact was promoted most vigorously among young people and there were a variety of pilot education programmes in schools and summer holiday schemes, not only in Northern Ireland but also in other parts of Europe and the USA. They were sponsored partly by local host groups and in part by the government. Their experience pointed the way for the eventual inclusion in 1992 of a theme entitled 'Education for Mutual Understanding' in the core school curriculum. Although the education system remains largely segregated, one of the most striking achievements of civil society groups has been the creation of a system of

integrated schools. They started in the 1980s with no official support and are now an established, if small, part of the government-funded education system.

On occasions individual church leaders met politicians and paramilitary groups to urge them to end their violence. The business and trade union leadership tended to speak out in favour of the commercial advantages of a settlement. Trade unions organized actions against sectarianism – in particular against the loyalist-organized Ulster Workers Council Strike in 1974 that aimed to bring down the power-sharing assembly – but these efforts had little support. One of the most consistent and innovative organizations in its methods and programmes is Corrymeela, a Christian community with its own residential accommodation in a quiet rural area. Its members were scattered throughout society and were encouraged to work in their own neighbourhoods and local associations to challenge the prevailing nature of politics. It was also one of the few civil society groups which tried to build links and enter into dialogue with political parties. With notable exceptions, such as the Centre for the Study of Conflict at the University of Ulster, the academic community gradually took a professional interest in the conflict – but tended to analyze its nature rather than attempt to provide critical viewpoints for politicians and policy makers.

Slow progress

The politicians tended to dismiss activists in civil society as naive or unwilling to get involved in the messy compromises of real politics. These initiatives had limited direct impact overall, though it is probable that indirectly they contributed to the development of a climate where new ideas could be explored. Civil society and politics came together in working class areas where community activists and supporters of paramilitary groups overlapped. At times 'community activist' became a convenient title which allowed supporters of paramilitary groups from each side to meet each other or 'constitutional' politicians and government officials. This overlap between community politics and paramilitary politics may help to explain why some of the more innovative and non-sectarian political thinking came first from political parties with paramilitary links.

There was therefore limited interaction between the more conciliatory sections of civil society and the political process. When a conflict seems intractable, there is often a hope that the stalemate could be broken by movement within civil society. Such a scenario is attractive in affirming the importance of the whole community and in suggesting a way forward when progress at the political level seems impossible. But the experience of Northern Ireland gives little evidence of civil society mobilising to

play such a key role. Society remained polarized. There was a growing weariness of the constant hostility and a fear of violence, but the determination not to compromise on core commitments and values remained strong.

Developing synergy

However, as the peace process gathered momentum there were shifts within civil society. In the early 1990s, the UK government carried out a review of community relations work and developed a more integrated strategy. A new Community Relations Council was set up as a co-ordinating body, and local authorities – often forums for sectarian politics in the past – were invited to develop community relations programmes which were relevant to local problems. Financial support was made available and the European Union also established a Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconstruction. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Sinn Féin was interested in opening up contacts with influential members of the unionist community, and individual clergy were prominent in these efforts (such as Ken Newell and Sam Burch), not least because they were more willing and free to meet political opponents.

Perhaps one of the most significant civic contributions was Initiative '92, which described itself as a citizens' inquiry. A group of civil activists established a commission, which sat from 1992 to 1993, to take opinions from the community and political parties on the way forward. It was composed of weighty individuals from Ireland and Britain and was chaired by Professor Torkel Opsahl from Norway. Opinions vary on its impact. Its findings may not have been particularly original, and its lasting contribution may have been its efforts to encourage community groups and individuals to think and discuss the options for the future. As a result the wider community began to have greater confidence in putting forward its views and engaging with the political process and politicians from whom it had felt alienated for so long. For example, the leaders of the seven main co-ordinating bodies of industry, business and trade unions formed a loose group, known as the G7, through which they developed opportunities for dialogue with politicians. Two local newspapers, identified with the sectarian divisions, began to work together, even printing a common editorial on one occasion.

Finding a voice

Nevertheless, peace groups still found it difficult to mobilize public support for their calls to end violence, even when political movement became evident. Most support for peace rallies occurred in late 1993, before the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 and after the breakdown of the IRA ceasefire in 1996, but not during the



Source: Photograph Press

negotiations when they might have provided encouragement for the risk-taking politicians. It seems that those in favour of an end to violence were worried that public action might make the situation worse and only got involved when the situation looked very bad.

It is noteworthy that the electoral process for selecting the representatives to take part in the negotiations provided an easy opportunity for new groups from civil society to be elected and yet very few civil society groups were formed. Well over ninety per cent of the electorate voted for the existing parties and only one new group, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, was successful. It was able to make a significant alternative input into the negotiations, though it only had one per cent of the popular vote.

Towards the end of the negotiations small groups of pro-Agreement activists had begun to engage in a new type of action. Throughout the Troubles opponents of accommodation have made their views known by assembling outside buildings where significant political meetings were taking place. Now those who supported political co-operation and accommodation also began to appear. Their presence reinforced the realization that there was support for inclusive politics. This message was

perhaps most important for those opposed to the peace process.

Once the Belfast Agreement had been achieved, it had to be ratified by a referendum, and this presented another opportunity for civil society to make its voice heard. The anti-agreement 'No' campaign was more vociferous and the pro-Agreement political parties were rather half hearted in their campaigning. A civil society 'Yes' Campaign was quickly organized with members of Initiative '92 at its core, and they attempted to create a popular campaign involving local celebrities. The will for a settlement did exist and had some influence over politicians.

International influence

The influence of civil society in other parts of the world has also been relevant. Perhaps the most significant of which was that of the Irish-American lobby in the US. It has always been generally supportive of Irish republicanism and one section has given important financial and lobbying support to the IRA. Others have given significant support to community relations and community work, notably through the American Fund for Ireland. Irish-Americans hold important and influential positions in the commercial and political life of the US

and their opinions are taken seriously by political leaders in Ireland. In the 1990s they began to encourage the republican movement in its shift towards a political strategy, and provided it with credibility and legitimacy. For example, they supported the granting of a visa to Gerry Adams after the IRA ceasefire and provided access to influential groups and organizations. The possibility of diminishing its support in America has been a powerful influence on the republican movement throughout the negotiations.

Ideas of conflict resolution and joint exploration of issues, especially that it is possible to find solutions which satisfy the interests of all parties, were beginning to percolate through society and among politicians. A number of initiatives involving politicians and others in off-the-record conflict resolution training or problem-solving seminars were undertaken, mainly by American groups. Their impact is unclear and some of the most intransigent activists, who did not see the need for new alternative approaches, tended to be dismissive of such initiatives. Politicians made a number of visits to countries such as South Africa and met with local leaders from divided communities. Those involved have often said these were their most significant and meaningful experiences, encouraging them to believe that a settlement was possible.

The good offices of civil society

In addition to the attempts to shift public opinion and influence decision-makers and politicians, individuals and civil society groups have tried throughout the Troubles to make a contribution to the search for a settlement by offering their good offices in the form of unofficial private diplomacy. They carried messages, facilitated meetings and helped political groups to evaluate their strategies and goals. Clergy and religious groups were well placed to fulfil this role and were able to maintain contact with key politicians without raising suspicions while continuing with their normal pastoral duties. Some clergy brought with them the institutional authority of their church. Other individuals, including academics and community workers, also played a part. Sometimes individuals had a contact which could be developed or a particular problem or confrontation arose in their area and they were able to respond. Occasionally an approach might be made to someone to act as an intermediary. These efforts were not public but they often had a significant local impact in defusing tense situations and these small achievements may have encouraged a gradual change in thinking about how to deal with the overall situation. These 'good offices' roles were ultimately most useful in opening up communications when in the 1990s the parties themselves began to work towards negotiations.

The experience of the Troubles has been profound for civil society. Many of those who have endured the years of conflict have been energised and become more aware of the nature of their society and the roles they can play in making it function more effectively. A Civic Forum is to be established under the Belfast Agreement to maintain the interaction between civil society and politicians. The lessons already learned and the confidence gained could make a major difference in building a new peaceful society and dealing with the many issues which still exist.

An assessment of the Belfast Agreement


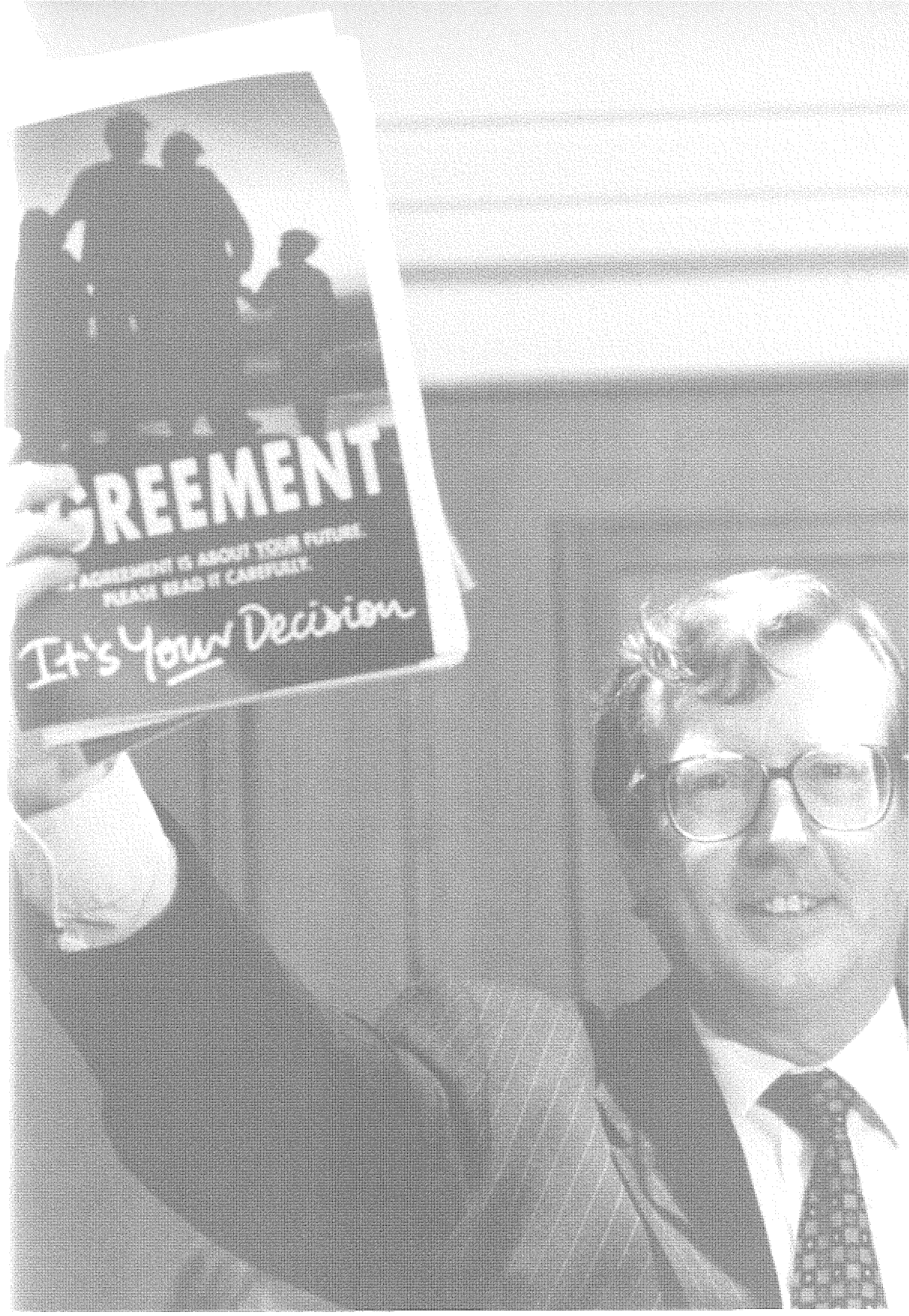
Dermot Nesbitt

Dermot Nesbitt is a member of the UUP and was a senior negotiator in the negotiations leading to the Belfast Agreement. He is Junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Belfast Agreement is not a perfect document, but it does represent a significant attempt to deal with issues that affect all situations of inter-group conflict. The approaches that were adopted in the Agreement may help others attempting to resolve similar problems elsewhere. The threat to peace and stability within Europe is now often more likely to come from intra-state than interstate disputes. Any assessment of the Agreement should therefore be made in the light of developments in international principles and practice demonstrated in the array of international agreements, including, most recently, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which became operable in May 1998. These agreements aim to guarantee the rights of citizens within states and the obligations of states towards their citizens. They represent the collective wisdom of all involved and have been based on the often bitter experience of the realities of differing allegiances within a state – the intrinsic problem in Northern Ireland.

Conflicting national identities

The basis for a lasting solution of intra-state conflict has often been referred to as 'group accommodation' or 'minority protection'. In order to try to solve such conflict the underlying dynamics of the intrinsic problem need to be clearly understood. The difficulty in Northern Ireland, according to Austin Currie, a former member of the SDLP, is that 'fundamentally the Northern Ireland conundrum is one of conflicting national identities between those who believe themselves Irish and those who believe themselves British. There are religious, social, cultural, political and other dimensions to the problem but they are only dimensions of that central issue.'



AGREEMENT

AGREEMENT IS ABOUT YOUR FUTURE.
PLEASE READ IT CAREFULLY.

It's Your Decision

The talks process has endeavoured to resolve the central problem where community identity and allegiance do not coincide with the state. The challenge has been to find ways to satisfy the concerns of different groups and at the same time not concede on fundamental international principles and practice. The unionist community has for a long time faced formidable pressure in this respect, for example in the arrangements proposed under the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) and the Framework Documents (1995). This challenge has been met in the last round of negotiations with not only determination and resolve by the UUP but also a clear and positive vision for the future. No doubt other parties have felt that they were responding to similar challenges.

The Belfast Agreement reflects international norms, in their broadest interpretation, with, for example, its inclusive form of government and methods of cross-border co-operation. The Agreement contains many detailed provisions such as the proposals for oaths of office and draft constitutional changes for the British and Irish Parliaments. The ethos of the Agreement is most clearly expressed in its approach to the concept of minorities, the question of human rights, the division of a homogeneous group by state boundaries, and the recognition of territorial boundaries. One other issue that needs to be considered is the commitment to democratic principles and the existence of armed groups.

Concepts of minority

The word minority, often used in reference to Northern Ireland, is one that in many quarters is disliked because it implies a lesser degree of importance. The Council of Europe has referred to a national minority as a group of people within a state 'who display distinctive ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics' and are 'motivated by a concern to preserve together that which constitutes their common identity'. Such a national minority is to be 'sufficiently representative, although smaller in number than the rest of the population of that state or a region of that state'. This reflects more truly the unionist concept of minority and accords with the usage of the term in the Belfast Agreement.

No grouping should consider itself a minority within Northern Ireland in the sense of being less important. The Celtic Romansh in Switzerland consider themselves to be not a minority, with all its connotations, but rather the fourth and smallest language group in Switzerland and equal in status to the French, German and Italian speakers. Dr Michael Breisky, the Austrian ambassador in Dublin, stressed in a speech at Queen's University Belfast the equal importance of protecting minorities by the norms of international rules and the breaking down of psychological barriers. The sense of superiority and

inferiority must be eliminated and confidence and trust must be built.

Unionists must convince nationalists that there will be a fair deal for all within Northern Ireland, that they have a stake in Northern Ireland and will play an important role at each level of government. Equally, nationalists must convince unionists that they will work within the institutions of government in Northern Ireland. This is where real confidence building is required. When David Trimble was elected Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party in September 1995, a review of party policy was carried out and in November, at a special meeting of the party's ruling Executive, it was agreed that all constitutional parties should have 'a role at each level of responsibility in proportion to party strengths'.

The structures of government contained in the Belfast Agreement reflect this inclusive dimension. In Strand One – Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland – Section Two refers to 'safeguards to ensure that all sections of the community can participate and work together successfully in the operation of these institutions and that all sections of the community are protected'. Measures proposed include the proportional allocation of ministerial positions and committee chairs using a mathematical formula (the d'Hondt system) which ensures that parties are allocated positions according to their party's strength in the Assembly. There are also proposals to ensure that key decisions have cross-community support. Rather than ignoring the identity background of members of the Assembly, each member is required to register 'a designation of identity – nationalist, unionist or other', and two alternative voting systems are proposed for key decisions. The first option is 'parallel consent' under which a majority of both unionists and nationalists must support the motion. The second option is 'weighted majority' under which sixty per cent of all voting members must be in favour and at least forty per cent of both unionists and nationalists. These arrangements did not satisfy those who feel uncomfortable with either identity. They argued that the divisions in the community are being entrenched. Nonetheless their inclusion provides reassurance to the two major sections of the community. Two sections of the Agreement are devoted to human rights and economic, social and cultural issues in order to provide further protection and reassurance.

The question of human rights

The UUP's manifesto for the elections to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue in June 1996 stated that rights were 'the fundamental building block in any agreement regarding the future governance of Northern Ireland'. This pledge reflects much more than a party

obligation: it is an obligation on all involved to subscribe to international norms. The basic requirements for order in any democratic society today are found within international human rights law.

One submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, convened by the Irish government in 1994 to bring momentum to the process of reconciliation stated that 'The human rights to be protected... are defined by established conventions drawn up by international agreement... As such they form part of international law and must not be thought of as subject to bargaining between parties.'

Asbjørn Eide, Director of the Norwegian Institute of Human Rights at the University of Oslo and a leading international authority in the field of human rights, in another submission to the Forum in Dublin described the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as 'the most effective contemporary international instrument ensuring compliance with human rights'. It details a set of principles which include freedom of peaceful assembly and religion; access to the media for national minorities in order to promote tolerance and to permit cultural pluralism; usage of personal names in the minority language; the right to display minority language signs of a private nature visible to the public; and the right to use freely and without interference minority language, in private and in public, orally and in writing.

It is the intention of the Agreement that these principles should be reflected in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. In the context of Northern Ireland there is no more important issue to be addressed than how to organize society with respect to human rights. This corpus of rights embraces a number of categories: civil, political, economic, social, religious and cultural. The question is how to manage the differences that exist in Northern Ireland in ways consistent with democratic values and human rights.

Consequently a separate section in the Belfast Agreement (Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity) deals specifically with rights. It states that the European Convention on Human Rights will be incorporated into Northern Ireland law, a new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will be established and that body will advise on the development of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland reflecting 'the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem'. There is also an obligation on the Irish government to take comparable steps to further strengthen the protection of human rights in its jurisdiction.

Interstate division of peoples

By viewing the Northern Ireland situation as different from others, UK and Irish governments created for themselves an unnecessary problem in their efforts to resolve the questions posed by a divided society. In the foreword to Frameworks for the Future published on 22 February 1995, which set out proposals for accountable government in Northern Ireland and relationships within the island of Ireland and between the two governments, Northern Ireland was described as being in a special, even unique, position. The population was made up of different communities with allegiances to different states: the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The assertion that the central problem in Northern Ireland is unique is not based on objective judgement: there are perhaps a hundred million people across Europe who consider themselves to be on the wrong side of a border. Nor does the presumed size of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland make it unique. There are national minorities in some countries, for example the German speakers in the South Tyrol region of Italy that constitute majorities in their own regions. Eide has described this type of conflict as 'ethno-nationalism' and often the most difficult to resolve.

The dispute between Austria and Italy over the South Tyrol was resolved in 1992 within current internationally accepted norms after a conflict of over thirty years that saw bombs, many people dead and bitter arguments regarding the self-determination of the South Tyrol. The German-speaking (Austrian) community in the South Tyrol has achieved full parity of esteem with the Italian community within a framework of self-government established in line with the accepted principles of government in other parts of Italy.

What threatened to make the Northern Ireland conundrum insoluble was thinking that it was uniquely complicated to the extent that it could only be tackled by pursuing measures such as joint authority which, unionists argued, were untried, dangerously innovative, complex and without precedent elsewhere, and which would offer only continued instability. The overwhelming international consensus favours accepting the territorial integrity of existing states and offering maximum internationally defined guarantees to national minorities within them as the best hope for stability.

Key Points of the Belfast Agreement

Constitutional Issues

British constitution

The Government of Ireland Act, claiming British jurisdiction over Northern Ireland, is to be repealed.

Political status

Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom. A united Ireland could be created in the future but only with the agreement of the people in both the North and the South, subject to the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

Irish constitution

The Irish Constitution will be amended, withdrawing the Republic's territorial claim on Northern Ireland and offering formal recognition that Northern Ireland is legitimately part of the UK.

Citizenship

Both governments accept the right of Northern Ireland citizens to declare themselves as either British or Irish. Dual citizenship will be provided for those who desire it.

Implementation and review

The Agreement will be put to a popular vote in Northern Ireland and simultaneously a referendum will be held in the Republic of Ireland on the amendments to the Constitution. The two governments will sign a new British-Irish Agreement replacing the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. In the event of difficulties, the two governments may institute a review in consultation with the parties in the Assembly.

Northern Ireland Democratic Institutions (Strand One)

Legislative Assembly

A 108-member assembly with legislative powers to govern Northern Ireland will be elected by proportional representation from 18 constituencies.

Cross-Party Executive

The Assembly will elect The First Minister and a Deputy First Minister. Ministers will be appointed on the basis of party strength in the Assembly with responsibility for such devolved matters as health, education and social services.

Assembly Committees

Ministers will be supported and scrutinized by a cross-party committees.

Civic Forum

A Civic Forum made up of representatives of civil society will be consulted on social, economic and cultural issues.

North-South Ministerial Council (Strand Two)

With a joint secretariat staffed by civil servants this council is to be established to develop co-operation between the two states. The Council is to be made up of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly and two Ministers from the Irish government and other relevant ministers. In addition to Plenary sessions, implementation bodies will meet frequently with the participation of appropriate ministers.

British-Irish Institutions (Strand Three)

British-Irish Council

This council will consist of representatives of the British and Irish governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. It will exchange information, discuss, consult and seek to reach agreements on co-operation in the areas of transport links, agriculture, environment, culture, health and education as well as approaches to EU matters.

British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

The new Conference will bring together the British and Irish governments to promote bilateral co-operation.



Protection of minorities

Bill of Rights

The European Convention on Human Rights is to be incorporated into Northern Ireland law with a new Bill of Rights supporting it.

Human Rights Commissions

Separate Human Rights Commissions will be established in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and there will be a Joint North–South Human Rights Committee to liaise between the two.

Parallel Consent

Decisions requiring cross-community support will require a majority of those voting in the Assembly including a majority of the unionist and nationalist delegates.

Equality Commission

This new Commission will replace the Fair Employment Commission, Equal Opportunities Commission, Commission for Racial Equality and Disability Council in Northern Ireland.

Victims

Support for the Northern Ireland Victims Commission in developing community-based initiatives and the provision of statutory funding.

Language Rights

The importance of respect for and tolerance of the Irish language, Ulster–Scots ‘and the languages of the various ethnic communities’ is explicitly recognised. The British government is to sign the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Economic Development Strategy

A new economic development strategy for Northern Ireland is to be developed by the British government.

Policing and the Judiciary

Independent commission

This will be established to make recommendations for future policing arrangements in Northern Ireland with the aim of ensuring that the police service operates within the bounds of human rights and equal opportunity and has the confidence of the public.

Independent review

A parallel wide-ranging review of criminal justice will be carried out aiming to ensure that a fair and impartial justice system exists, which is responsive to community concerns and has the confidence of all parts of the community.

Prisoners

Both Governments will put in place mechanisms to provide for the release of all prisoners affiliated with organizations maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire within two years of the enactment of the agreement. Facilities will be provided for re-integration of prisoners into society.

Decommissioning and Security

The participants confirm their intention to work with the Independent Commission on Decommissioning. They are ‘to use any influence they may have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years’.

Meanwhile, the British government is committed to reducing the security forces in the North, removing security installations, ending emergency powers and taking other measures to return as soon as possible to normal peacetime security arrangements.

Balancing differences

From a unionist viewpoint the legitimacy of Irish nationalism is not rejected in the sense that it is entitled to wish for a united Ireland, though unionism does not accept the validity of the nationalist argument. The unionist and nationalist viewpoints have equal legitimacy as viewpoints but they are entirely different in law. Northern Ireland is accepted by international law as part of the UK, whereas the nationalist viewpoint has the status of a legitimate right to wish for a change in Northern Ireland's position within the UK. The section of the Agreement entitled 'Constitutional Issues' deals with these different aspirations. It is very carefully worded in order to demonstrate that each party acknowledges and respects the concerns and aspirations of the others.

The British and Irish governments made a commitment that, in the new British–Irish Agreement replacing the Anglo–Irish Agreement of 1985, they will firstly 'recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Great Britain or a sovereign united Ireland.' Secondly, they will 'recognise that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of 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, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.' Thirdly, they will 'acknowledge that while a substantial section of the people in Northern Ireland share the legitimate wish of a majority of the people of the island of Ireland for a united Ireland, the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, freely exercised and legitimate, is to maintain the Union....' The other parties to the talks endorsed that commitment.

Additionally, in paragraph five of the section of the Agreement entitled 'the Declaration of Support', the parties 'acknowledge the substantial differences between our continuing, and equally legitimate, political aspirations. However, we will endeavour to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements. We pledge that we will, in good faith, work to ensure the success of each and every one of the arrangements to be established under this agreement. It is accepted that all of the institutional and constitutional arrangements – an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North–South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, a British–Irish Council and a British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference and any amendments to British Acts of Parliament and the Constitution of Ireland –

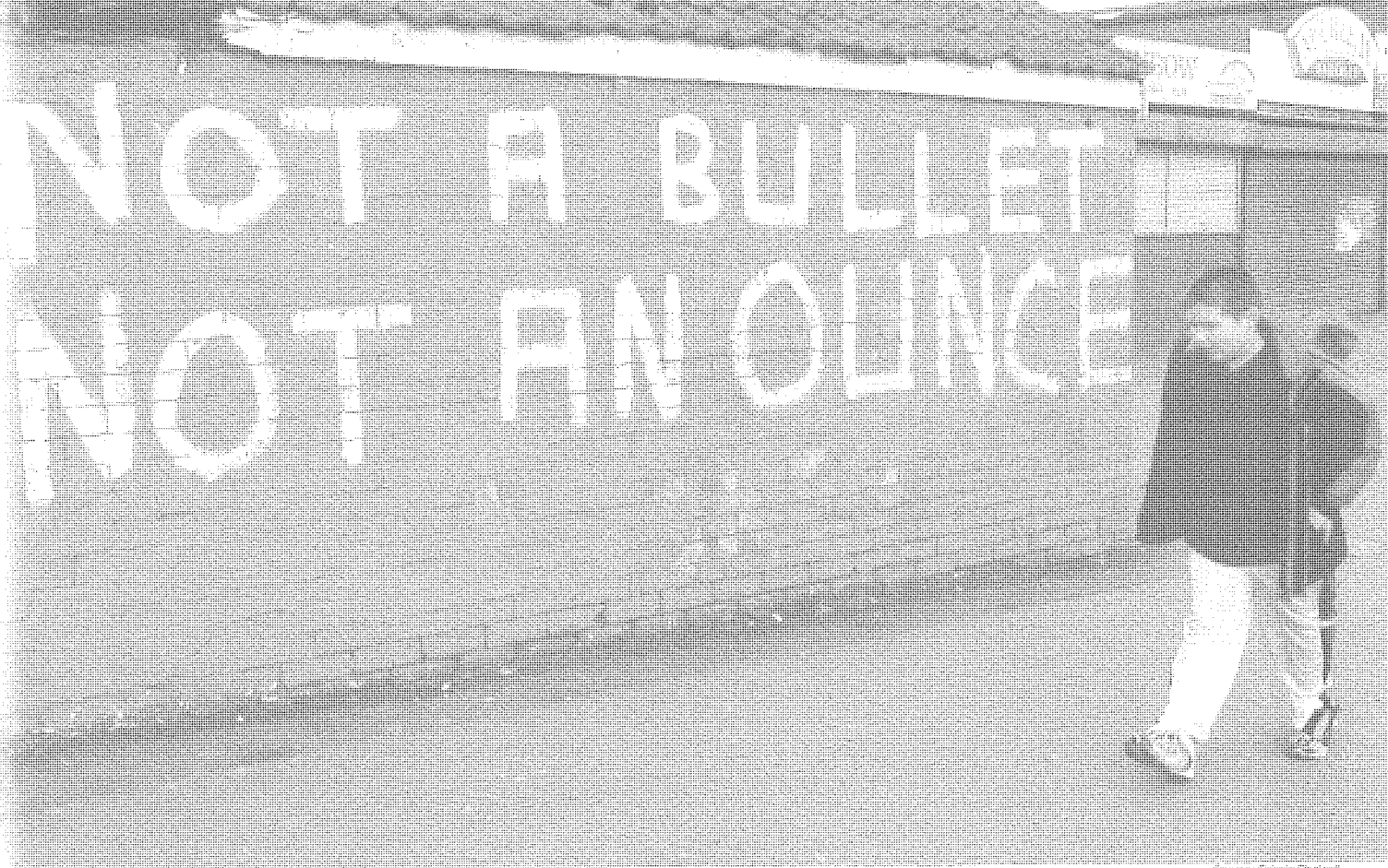
are interlocking and interdependent and that in particular the functioning of the Assembly and the North–South Council are so closely inter-related that the success of each depends on that of the other.' From a unionist point of view these bodies do not take away from the current position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom but from a nationalist perspective they provide opportunities for co-operation based on mutual benefit and allowing for their identification with the whole island of Ireland.

In order to make these arrangements function each identity group has to have confidence in the commitment and goodwill of the others. The Agreement therefore included a system of checks and balances so that if one part of the Agreement does not work the other parts will also cease to apply. For example, Ministers are expected to sit on the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly and to take part in the North–South Ministerial Council established to 'bring together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish government' and 'develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland'. Some politicians will embrace this dual role as a reflection of their commitment to good government. Others may find one or other of these bodies difficult, but they do not have the option of only taking part in the one which fits best with their own sense of identity.

International law and territorial boundaries

During the negotiations matters relating to the relationship with Dublin were the most difficult to resolve. The only reference in international human rights law to cross-border links is to be found in Article 17 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention which states 'The parties undertake not to interfere with the right of persons belonging to national minorities to establish and maintain free and peaceful contacts across frontiers with persons lawfully staying in other states, in particular those with whom they share an ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, or common cultural heritage.' It is worth noting that this article supports people belonging to a minority in establishing and maintaining free and peaceful contact across borders, but it does not extend to formal trans-border political institutions.

Various concepts in the practice of international law are relevant to the Northern Ireland situation. The international community has tended not to recognize as legitimate the change of state boundaries as the result of the use of force, even though it has not always been able to prevent such action. When faced by irredentist claims by neighbouring states, or separatist demands by a national group, the presumption is that the existing



Source: Ciarán Fionn

jurisdiction of the institutions of the state should be respected. If there is dissension within a region of a state regarding the validity of that state, autonomous regional government should be developed and institutions should be created within that state to protect all ethnic groups. Tension and a lack of trust across borders should be countered by encouraging co-operation and should be built up slowly from the base of already existing regional government. Where there is a state that has an ethnic affinity with a group of people in a neighbouring state, it has a natural interest in the welfare of that minority but this does not extend to a say in its government. The UUP wants to see a network of practical political co-operation extended to all the regions of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland on matters that are of mutual benefit as there is more in common between the two states than there is dividing them. Alongside the North–South Ministerial Body there is also a ‘British–Irish Council’ to ‘promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships’ between the peoples of the UK and the Irish Republic.

The final difficulty

There are indeed unique aspects to the Belfast Agreement, not least the right of all the major parties, based on electoral strength, to have a role in the government. Sinn Féin, as the political representatives of the republican movement, has a right to be in the government of Northern Ireland along with other

political parties, but participation by each party is conditional on its acceptance of democratic principles. However, it is not enough to merely subscribe formally to international democratic norms. All sections of the Northern Ireland community must feel at ease with each other. The psychological barriers of distrust and lack of confidence must be broken down. There is no place in a functioning democracy for equivocation on violence or the threat of violence. The right to be in government carries with it a responsibility to demonstrate absolute commitment to peace, democracy and therefore stability. It goes beyond accepted international norms for a political section of any movement to participate in the government of a region when its paramilitary section has done no more than declare a ceasefire: by the end of 1999 the threat of a return to violence by the IRA was undiminished.

One difficulty in the Agreement is that the provisions are interdependent but some could come into operation earlier than others. Parties found it difficult to be sure that if they met their commitments other parties would do the same. Since the Agreement, the UUP has consistently argued that all parties could fulfil all their commitments under the Agreement simultaneously and that this would be the best way to develop confidence and to allow both communities to feel at ease with each other. In particular, the commitments to forming the government and to decommissioning paramilitary arms could have taken place at the same time, a process known as ‘jumping together’. This is only fair and reasonable and it was





Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair at Hillsborough, 1999

hoped that the republican movement could see a way to accept this proposition.

Consequently, the UUP was unwilling to participate in the creation of the Executive in the absence of a start to decommissioning. Sinn Féin's view, expressed in the words of national chairperson Mitchell McLaughlin, that 'as far as republicans are concerned... they (the unionists) will never enter into a power-sharing executive' is simply untrue and now has been clearly shown to be untrue. The UUP still believes that the other commitments which have been entered into and effected must be matched by a commitment from the republican movement, and in particular the IRA, to end violence. Without that commitment, demonstrated by decommissioning, the new Northern Ireland government will not be sustainable. With that commitment fully demonstrated will come the full and balanced implementation of the Agreement.

The Belfast Agreement reflects fully the guiding principles provided by the international community. In accepting the Belfast Agreement the unionists involved have not shirked their responsibility in endeavouring to provide a political framework within which all democrats can feel at home. They have gone that extra mile to reach an honourable settlement.

Problems of implementation

Monica McWilliams and Kate Fearon

Monica McWilliams is a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly for South Belfast, and co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and senior negotiator in the talks leading to the Belfast Agreement.

Kate Fearon is a political adviser to the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and member of the team at the multi-party talks leading to the Belfast Agreement.

The Belfast Agreement was hailed as a major achievement in the history of relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It allowed all shades of unionism and nationalism to buy into the vision of a new society. There were also bitter pills to swallow, but these proved to be palatable when washed down with some of the more positive provisions. The Agreement is hugely ambitious and by no means a perfect product, but it has what some have termed a 'protective ambiguity' which provides some freedom of interpretation necessary for it to be sold to the opposing constituencies. When put to the people in a referendum it was overwhelmingly endorsed, but the result was hard won.

It required many different factions who had been hostile to each other to pull together and promote the flawed product to the people in the face of a vociferous 'No' campaign. But the freedom of parties to interpret different provisions to their own advantage at the expense of their enemies, while tactically useful at the time of the initial campaign, has proved to be a double-edged sword. In the short term, in the absence of trust between parties, this was a pragmatic and effective stance. For the long term though, a different strategy should have been embarked upon.

Fulfilling the obligations of the Belfast Agreement required some seventy-four different tasks of varying degrees of difficulty. These tasks were variously the responsibility of the British government, the Irish government, the parties participating in the process, and the new First Minister and Deputy First Minister to complete. Some provisions were not assigned to any named sponsor and therefore depended on individual parties and interest groups to lobby for their implementation.



Negotiating the implementation

Getting the Agreement was only the beginning. As the months after the tough referendum campaign and elections passed and the multiple components began to be put into effect, people realized that the process of implementation would require as much, if not more, concentrated energy as the process of negotiation that produced it. Although the drafting of the Agreement had taken place in the seven months prior to 10 April 1998, most participants had been in the room with each other for the greater part of two years. The question of their entitlement to participate in that process had been carefully constructed. To begin with, and in contrast to past attempts to cut a historic deal, the process had gone beyond the traditional elites for participants. Holding elections to determine entitlement to attend the talks had ensured a process that was grounded in inclusion. Not all participants, however, had been keen to include other parties despite their democratic mandates, but it was not until all interests were represented around the table that things had begun to move.

The political process had been managed principally by the British government together with the Irish government until the onset of multi-party talks in 1996, at which point the independent co-chairs took on the management and facilitation role, always gaining the consent of the participants to do so. Over time the independent chairs, by demonstrating a willingness to provide space without favour to each participant, gained the respect of most participants, and their authority as managers of the process became accepted. This then, was the framework upon which the talks process had been constructed and which was dismantled once the Agreement had been accepted.

The governments, particularly the British government, took on the task of implementing only those areas of the Agreement which specifically named them, or which was clearly their legal responsibility. They continued the inclusive format in the task of translating the various aspects and aspirations of the Agreement into legislation, consulting with all the relevant parties in the summer of 1998. However, they took a distinctly hands-off approach to managing the overall implementation, even shifting their key personnel who had built up real expertise and relationships with the influential players on the Northern Ireland political scene. Their rationale was understandable: the Agreement was supposed to herald the demise of direct rule, and the British government was sensitive to how new locally elected politicians might react to a heavy-handed government in London insisting on running the Agreement. But this stance has cost the process dearly. Even a relatively low-intensity but sustained management role could have greatly aided the implementation process. The British government, as a

sovereign power, has a responsibility to govern both specifically and generally. In the implementation of the Agreement it has governed specifically with regard to its identified commitments. But it has governed only sporadically with regard to its general duty of overall implementation except at crisis points when the local politicians proved unable to execute their responsibilities fully. On these occasions the pattern has been one of short bursts of highest level engagement bringing with it the pressure to succeed quickly and produce results. In engaging at this level, the premiers have diminished their joint credibility and, arguably, become a destabilizing resource instead of a driving force.

Initial progress

Implementation began on a high note. The election of David Trimble of the UUP and Seamus Mallon of the SDLP as First Minister (designate) and Deputy First Minister (designate) respectively on 1 July 1998 was the first step to bedding down the Agreement and the institutions it established. The two ministers were required to produce a report detailing new administrative departments and cross-border implementation bodies. On the face of it, this was a relatively straightforward task and the consultation recreated the inclusiveness of the previous negotiations. It was conducted bilaterally and round-table meetings with all participants did not occur on a regular basis. An initial discussion paper detailing a number of options was produced in August, but as it continued into September and October the process of implementation only served to provide new opportunities to play out old battles. The dual roles of Trimble and Mallon – as Assembly ministers representing all the people of Northern Ireland and as leaders of their own parties – meant that they were unable to focus on overall implementation alone when serving their constituencies as well. In addition, Trimble became vulnerable as other parts of the Agreement, over whose implementation he had no control, began to be delivered. Such an area was the accelerated release of politically motivated prisoners. The unionist analysis was that the Agreement was designed to deliver quickly on issues, including prisoner releases, which were seen to favour republicans. They argued that it was difficult for their constituency to see the value of the Agreement in this context when their favoured part (a working Assembly in Northern Ireland) would not be delivered until later down the line.

These tensions have undermined the whole implementation process and made it impossible to meet the first deadline laid down in the Agreement. By 31 October 1998 the parties were expected to have undertaken a work programme with a view to identifying and agreeing areas where co-operation and implementation for mutual benefit will take place.

How did you vote in the Referendum for the Belfast Agreement?

	All of N.I.	Protestant	Catholic
Yes	74%	64%	89%
No	26%	36%	11%

If the Referendum was held today, how would you vote?

Yes	65%	49%	88%
No	35%	51%	12%

Do you want the Belfast Agreement to work?

Yes	83%	72%	98%
No	17%	28%	2%

Source: The Belfast Telegraph, October 1999

The importance of maintaining an inclusive process was overlooked. Very few round-table meetings were held, and the number of parties involved in the process of negotiating on this part of the Agreement was reduced to just the SDLP and the UUP. There had been no internal or external encouragement to maintain an inclusive implementation process until the Mitchell Review.

Stalling and delay

The nature of these discussions dragged on until December 1998, when the Prime Minister and Taoiseach stepped in and, reportedly, facilitated a deal between the UUP and the SDLP. When they left, however, the deal proved illusory and the next few days were spent in recrimination and blame. This, compounded with non-implementation, led to accusations of bad faith and further engendered mistrust. An inclusive consultative process with an increased number of participants would have made the process more open and transparent and enabled participants to verify any statements made by the parties at the centre of the dispute. Broadening the scope of the discussions would have shifted the focus away from the hostile UUP–SDLP axis, softening the glare of the media spotlight and making it easier to agree details that may have been unpalatable to the main players.

The process picked itself up again and a deal between the SDLP and the UUP, identifying the ministries in the new

Executive, was eventually brokered in the middle of December 1998. The question of how committed some parties, particularly the UUP, were to implementation surfaced again in January 1999 when the First Minister and Deputy First Minister were due to present the deal to the Assembly for endorsement. The UUP, fearing that might result in the automatic establishment of an executive, backed off from the deal because very few people knew exactly what the legislative status or impact of any progress or decision might be. They therefore held back for fear of doing something indirectly that they did not intend to do. A last-minute compromise was brokered to acknowledge (but not formally endorse) the report for a month until the legal position could be clarified. At a tense meeting in February 1999 the report was formally accepted.

In contrast, the process that decided the composition of the Civic Forum, which was to act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues, was conducted in a more business-like manner. A working group was established, comprising one representative of each of the political parties, with senior civil servants forming the secretariat. Representatives on this group tended to be of junior rank, reflecting the lower political importance given to it by the bigger parties, and included more women (four out of seven regular attendees). An initial paper was produced by the secretariat and the representatives discussed and amended it at frequent meetings over a two-month period. This is not to say these negotiations were easier – they were not – but there was a commitment to discuss the issues until they were resolved and as many round-table meetings as necessary were held. When it was completed the report of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, which outlined the arrangements for the Civic Forum, constituted the largest and most detailed section.

The report on departmental structures, North–South bodies and the Civic Forum was finally endorsed by the Assembly in February 1999. Attention then turned to the remaining component of the Agreement which was the sole responsibility of the Assembly participants: the establishment of an inclusive executive to which powers could be devolved.

Getting bogged down

UUP members of the Assembly had followed Trimble’s leadership line in voting for the report. The vote illustrated that he and the pro-Agreement unionists still commanded a majority over anti-Agreement unionists in the Assembly – but by only one vote. The UUP had demanded that IRA decommissioning of weapons take place before Sinn Féin representatives could assume their seats in government, though no such demand was in the

Agreement. Indeed, Sinn Féin representatives stated that if it had been they could not have delivered any weapons or the referendum 'Yes' vote. The British government also had a specific role to play as the Secretary of State had the responsibility for calling a meeting of the Assembly to run the d'Hondt election procedure (by which parties would nominate their ministers to serve on the executive). It therefore began to play a closer role again. Mo Mowlam, the Secretary of State, had in January set a target date of 10 March for the d'Hondt procedure to be run. On 17 February, the day after the Assembly formally agreed the report of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, both governments announced that over the next fortnight there would be a new drive to break the decommissioning deadlock. On the same day, the first party-to-party meeting took place between Sinn Féin and the UUP. This was indicative of part of the problem. The people who were negotiating around that table, even though they had been in a talks process for over two years and had been on the same side for the referendum campaign, did not know each other. During the process steered by Mitchell, there had been structured and facilitated listening, if not dialogue, between parties but the process had never required them to form personal relationships. Trips abroad sponsored by international non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations had provided opportunities for interpersonal contact, but the potential, certainly between Sinn Féin and UUP members, was not realized on returning to Northern Ireland. Given this context, the meeting appeared to be a relative success. After it was over though, Trimble sidelined the Secretary of State and travelled to Downing Street to lobby the Prime Minister. Blair was to continue in this vein over the next few months, becoming the facilitator in bilateral discussions about acceptable arrangements to allow the implementation of the agreement with Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the UUP. On occasion, the Irish government would also be present in Downing Street.

These meetings culminated on three occasions (April, May and July 1999) in intensive negotiations held at Hillsborough, Downing Street and Stormont involving the two premiers. At the same time, the Secretary of State and her Minister of State convened a parallel process in Belfast, holding round-table meetings with all participants. These became problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, while the SDLP and Sinn Féin sent high level delegations (Hume and Adams appeared at least once), Trimble never appeared for the UUP. This and personnel changes to the UUP delegations caused Sinn Féin to stop sending its top people. Secondly, the government, which chaired and participated in the meetings, was reluctant to have parties commit their positions to paper. Thirdly, the governments did not prepare an agenda. The round-table meetings tended to

be open sessions for re-stating initial positions on the subject and were undermined by a sense that the 'real business' was being conducted at Downing Street with a much narrower range of participants.

To and fro

On 8 March the Secretary of State indicated that it would be pointless to activate her previous plans to run the d'Hondt procedure on 10 March. The unionists were not ready to establish the executive in the absence of progress on decommissioning, and so she put off the deadline until 'no later than the week beginning 29 March'. The shuttle back and forth to Downing Street and the round-table meetings at Stormont continued sporadically, but the axis of communication was between the governments and individual parties, not between the parties themselves. With little progress having been made as the deadline loomed, Blair and Ahern travelled to Hillsborough Castle, the Secretary of State's residence in Northern Ireland, to embark on yet more fire-fighting. The pressure cooker atmosphere had worked well in the context of the talks with the setting of a deadline paying off for Mitchell, and the two premiers felt it would serve them equally well. But they mismanaged the process.

Mitchell had been working within an ongoing process for many months, but the two premiers had not – the round-table talks at Stormont were illusory in this regard. Initial discussions were conducted between the UUP, SDLP and Sinn Féin. Other pro-Agreement parties were not involved until the negotiations had been going on for almost a day. The two governments did not on that occasion recall the lesson from the writing of the Agreement that people are much more likely to support something they have had a hand in creating. Additional pressure was created by the fact that both premiers, by becoming so directly involved, were putting their reputations on the line. They needed a result no matter what and could not return to their parliaments empty handed.

The Hillsborough Declaration, which was drawn up after an all-night negotiating session, envisaged a way forward which would see some weapons put 'beyond use' together with a timetable for running the d'Hondt procedure and a collective act of reconciliation. But there was never a first, let alone a final, round-table discussion where all parties could gauge the feasibility of the deal. The governments met all parties individually and then went out to announce the deal to a waiting world media on 1 April. The deal, however, quickly fell apart, as the realization dawned that not all the consent the governments claimed for it was actually there. All parties except the UUP and SDLP rejected Hillsborough on these grounds.

Back to the drawing board

The series of directionless meetings continued in Belfast alongside the discussions in Downing Street between the three pro-Agreement parties due to sit in the executive. These discussions culminated on 15 May in a declaration from Downing Street which was allegedly agreed by the SDLP, the UUP and Sinn Féin and again brokered by Blair. No other parties were involved. Both the SDLP and Sinn Féin believed that they had just agreed a deal with the UUP. It turned out that they had agreed a deal with Trimble, who had real problems selling it to his colleagues in the Assembly who rejected it, undermining his leadership further. More recriminations followed and the relationship between Trimble and his Deputy Seamus Mallon, having been sorely tried by the postponement of their report in January, soured substantially. The Prime Minister, to his credit, signalled his intention not to let this latest setback become an insurmountable obstacle. He announced a new 'absolute' deadline of 30 June – a difficult date to understand except that devolution to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly was due to take place on 1 July. In Northern Ireland terms it was right at the beginning of the marching season when tension over Orange Order parades is at its height. However, instead of working in a sustained fashion up until that time, the Northern Ireland parties, so used to not working until the premiers were around, did not seriously engage again until they returned.

This time there were greater preparations. All parties (including the anti-Agreement parties who had not been involved in prior negotiations) were given offices in Castle Buildings, Stormont. On Friday 25 June, the two governments began with bilateral meetings and got the consent of all pro-Agreement parties to three principles that would form the foundation of further negotiations after the weekend. These were an inclusive Executive exercising devolved powers, decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons by May 2000, and decommissioning to be carried out in a manner determined by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD). Thus for the first time all parties were starting out from the same position. There was, also for the first time, an agreed interpretation of what the outcome of the paragraph on decommissioning meant. It was a promising start.

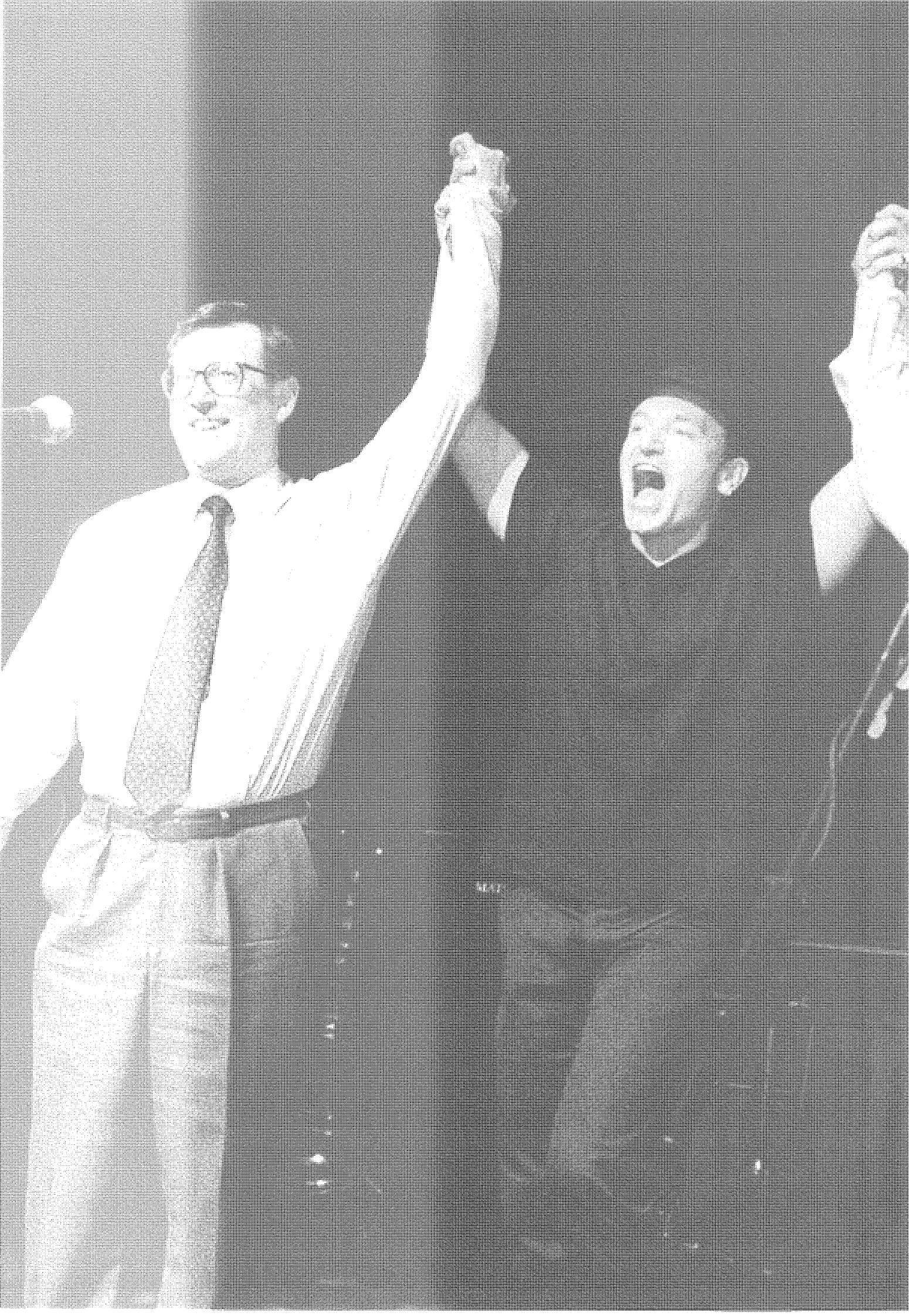
During the following week's negotiations the governments reported substantial, even seismic progress being made. But, again, there was no way for the other parties to confirm this. There was no round-table meeting until the Thursday – a day after the 'absolute deadline' had been reached. But it was here that things began to speed up as parties committed themselves to paper, so that the extent of the reported promises could actually

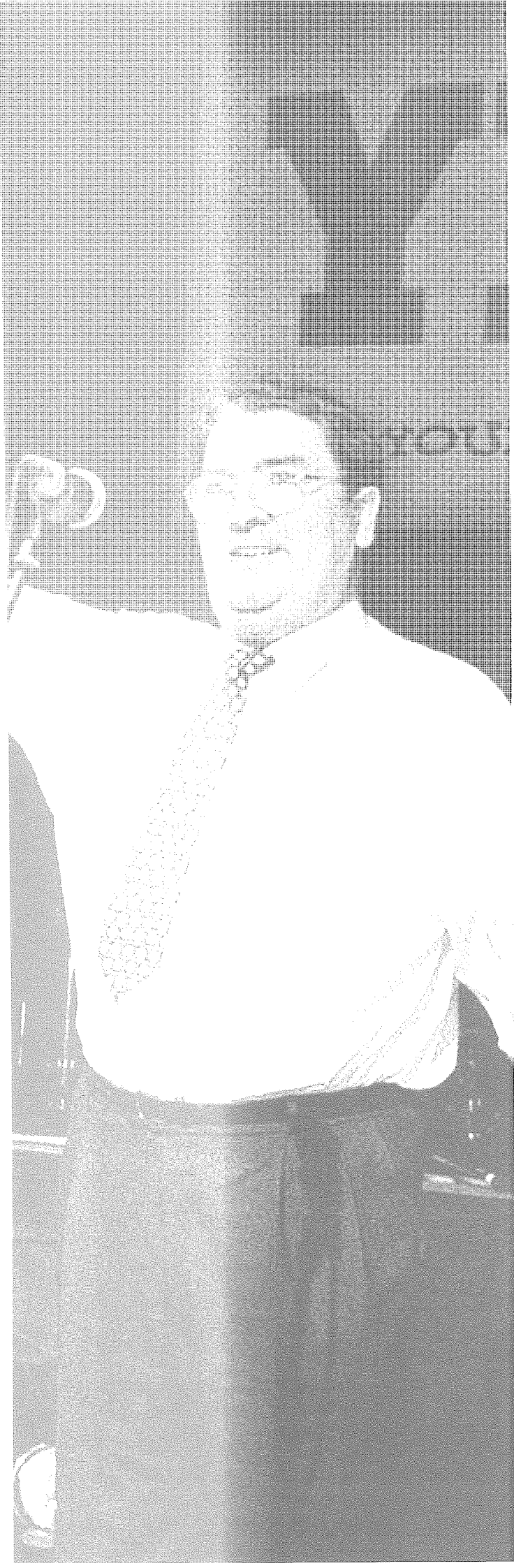
be verified. The result was the Way Forward document, issued on 2 July 1999, which committed the British government to introducing a legislative 'fail-safe' mechanism as a guarantee that if the IRA did not begin to decommission 'within days' of the creation of an executive, the institutions of the Agreement would be suspended. A timetable setting the date for the d'Hondt procedure to be run on 15 July was laid down. On 12 July the Bill which offered the fail-safe mechanism was introduced in the British parliament but the UUP party in the Assembly did not look as if they would accept it. On 15 July the Secretary of State called a meeting of the Assembly as envisaged in the Way Forward document. The UUP boycotted the meeting and as a result it was universally agreed to have been farcical in the extreme. The only moment of dignity in the proceedings came with the resignation of Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon. The governments immediately announced that Mitchell, the chairman of the original talks, would conduct a review of the Agreement.

The way forward

The trajectory of transition has not cut a clean arc. Anti-Agreement unionists have claimed that there has been a loss of confidence in the Agreement among unionists since April 1998, though this is only partly reflected in opinion poll data. There has been an actual loss of confidence by pro-Agreement unionist representatives who have to deal with the vociferous anti-Agreement unionists. Each attempt to break through the issue of the establishment of an executive has resulted in further loss of faith in the Agreement by the UUP members in the Assembly. It is true to say that some issues were not addressed explicitly at the time the Agreement was negotiated. But it was hoped that the process of implementation would provide all parties with the opportunity to become part of a shared project and enable trust to be built up sufficiently so as either to make the issue of decommissioning less important or to make it easier for both parties to move. But for that to happen, and for the Agreement to be implemented fully, greater sustained overall management, not fire-fighting, was required.

The Mitchell Review of the Agreement (September–November 1999) was able to address this very issue. It had been intended to be a brief review, with most observers predicating that it would last for around a month, but as the weeks unfolded Senator Mitchell became convinced that it should be given more time. Trust, as one UUP delegate put it, 'was creeping in'. The value of the review was that it provided enough sustained contact between parties to enable them to respond positively to the opportunities for mutual





David Trimble, Bono and John Hume, May 1998

understanding that its final phases provided. The improving relationship between the UUP and Sinn Féin was consolidated in week ten when Mitchell invited all the parties to London to spend some time informally at the residence of the US Ambassador to Britain.

The final phase of the Mitchell's review was designed to create trust-building opportunities that could be reciprocated immediately. When the parties, especially Sinn Féin and the UUP, saw that taking small risks, like issuing helpful statements, fostered the build-up of trust, they realized that, collectively for the first time, they could prepare the ground on which bigger decisions had to be taken. The series of incremental steps worked like closing a zip fastener, locking in each stage inter-dependently. Thus, when the time came to make bigger decisions about the establishment of an executive, the party leaderships were more convinced of each others' honest intentions and more prepared to sell the deal to their respective constituencies. Once this process started it rapidly developed momentum and, as Christmas approached, the new institutions came to fruition and the new political processes seemed as if they had long been the norm. As Senator Mitchell stated in his final report, the relationships between the various parties 'may not be trust yet, but it's an important start'. The establishment of the Executive is a momentous step, and in providing regular, even mundane, opportunities to work together and build trust has the potential to truly transform Northern Ireland from conflict to democracy.

Key texts

Selected Documents

Titles in bold are reproduced on the following pages

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- Report of the Advisory Committee on Police in Northern Ireland (Hunt Report) *Belfast HMSO, 1969*
- Report of the Review Body on Local Government in Northern Ireland (Macrory Report) *Belfast HMSO, 1970*
- Report of the Enquiry into Allegations Against the Security Forces of Physical Brutality in Northern Ireland Arising out of Events on 7th August, 1971 (Compton Report) *London HMSO, 1971*
- Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors Appointed to Consider Authorised Procedures for the Interrogation of Persons Suspected of Terrorism (Parker Report) *London HMSO, 1972*
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- **Downing Street Declaration** *London HMSO, 1993*
- Framework for the Future *Belfast HMSO, 1995*
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- **The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland** *London Stationery Office, 1998*

DOWNING STREET DECLARATION

by An Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D., and The British Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. John Major, M.P.

15 December 1993

JOINT DECLARATION

1. The Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, TD, and the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. John Major, MP, acknowledge that the most urgent and important issue facing the people of Ireland, North and South, and the British and Irish Governments together, is to remove the causes of conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions which have resulted, recognising that the absence of a lasting and satisfactory settlement of relationships between the peoples of both islands has contributed to continuing tragedy and suffering. They believe that the development of an agreed framework for peace, which has been discussed between them since early last year, and which is based on a number of key principles articulated by the two Governments over the past 20 years, together with the adaptation of other widely accepted principles, provides the starting point of a peace process designed to culminate in a political settlement.

2. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister are convinced of the inestimable value to both their peoples, and particularly for the next generation, of healing divisions in Ireland and of ending a conflict which has been so manifestly to the detriment of all. Both recognise that the ending of divisions can come about only through the agreement and co-operation of the people, North and South, representing both traditions in Ireland. They therefore make a solemn commitment to promote co-operation at all levels on the basis of the fundamental principles, undertakings, obligations under international

agreements, to which they have jointly committed themselves, and the guarantees which each Government has given and now reaffirms, including Northern Ireland's statutory constitutional guarantee. It is their aim to foster agreement and reconciliation, leading to a new political framework founded on consent and encompassing arrangements within Northern Ireland, for the whole island, and between these islands.

3. They also consider that the development of Europe will, of itself, require new approaches to serve interests common to both parts of the island of Ireland, and to Ireland and the United Kingdom as partners in the European Union.

4. The Prime Minister, on behalf of the British Government, reaffirms that they will uphold the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland. On this basis, he reiterates, on behalf of the British Government, that they have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. Their primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island, and they will work together with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement, which will embrace the totality of relationships. The role of the British Government will be to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement over a period through a process of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland. They accept that such agreement may, as of right, take the form of agreed structures for the island as a whole, including a united Ireland achieved by peaceful means on the following basis. The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of 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. They reaffirm as a binding obligation

that they will, for their part, introduce the necessary legislation to give effect to this, or equally to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so determine without external impediment. They believe that the people of Britain would wish, in friendship to all sides, to enable the people of Ireland to reach agreement on how they may live together in harmony and in partnership, with respect for their diverse traditions, and with full recognition of the special links and the unique relationship which exist between the peoples of Britain and Ireland.

5. The Taoiseach, on behalf of the Irish Government, considers that the lessons of Irish history, and especially of Northern Ireland, show that stability and well-being will not be found under any political system which is refused allegiance or rejected on grounds of identity by a significant minority of those governed by it. For this reason, it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. He accepts, on behalf of the Irish Government, that the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland and must, consistent with justice and equity, respect the democratic dignity and the civil rights and religious liberties of both communities, including:

- 'the right of free political thought;
- right of freedom and expression of religion;
- the right to pursue democratically national and political aspirations;
- the right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means;
- the right to live wherever one chooses without hindrance;
- the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, sex or colour.

These would be reflected in any future political and constitutional arrangements emerging from a new and more broadly based agreement.

6. The Taoiseach however recognises the genuine difficulties and barriers to building relationships of trust either within or beyond Northern Ireland, from which both traditions suffer. He will work to create a new era of trust, in which suspicion of the motives or actions of others is removed on the part of either community. He considers that the future of the island depends on the nature of the relationship between the two main traditions that inhabit it. Every effort must be made to build a new sense of trust between those communities. In recognition of the fears of the Unionist community and as a token of his willingness to make a personal contribution to the building up of that necessary trust, the Taoiseach will examine with his colleagues any elements in the democratic life and organisation of the Irish State that can be represented to the Irish Government in the course of political dialogue as a real and substantial threat to their way of life and ethos, or that can be represented as not being fully consistent with a modern democratic and pluralist society, and undertakes to examine any possible ways of removing such obstacles. Such an examination would of course have due regard to the desire to preserve those inherited values that are largely shared throughout the island or that belong to the cultural and historical roots of the people of this island in all their diversity. The Taoiseach hopes that over time a meeting of hearts and minds will develop, which will bring all the people of Ireland together, and will work towards that objective, but he pledges in the meantime that as a result of the efforts that will be made to build mutual confidence no Northern Unionist should ever have to fear in future that this ideal will be pursued either by threat or coercion.

7. Both Governments accept that Irish unity would be achieved only by those who favour this outcome persuading those who do not, peacefully and without coercion or violence, and that, if in the future a majority of the people of Northern Ireland are so persuaded,

both Governments will support and give legislative effect to their wish. But, notwithstanding the solemn affirmation by both Governments in the Anglo-Irish Agreement that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, the Taoiseach also recognises the continuing uncertainties and misgivings which dominate so much of Northern Unionist attitudes towards the rest of Ireland. He believes that we stand at a stage of our history when the genuine feelings of all traditions in the North must be recognised and acknowledged. He appeals to both traditions at this time to grasp the opportunity for a fresh start and a new beginning, which could hold such promise for all our lives and the generations to come. He asks the people of Northern Ireland to look on the people of the Republic as friends, who share their grief and shame over all the suffering of the last quarter of a century, and who want to develop the best possible relationship with them, a relationship in which trust and new understanding can flourish and grow. The Taoiseach also acknowledges the presence in the Constitution of the Republic of elements which are deeply resented by Northern Unionists, but which at the same time reflect hopes and ideals which lie deep in the hearts of many Irish men and women North and South. But as we move towards a new era of understanding in which new relationships of trust may grow and bring peace to the island of Ireland, the Taoiseach believes that the time has come to consider together how best the hopes and identities of all can be expressed in more balanced ways, which no longer engender division and the lack of trust to which he has referred. He confirms that, in the event of an overall settlement, the Irish Government will, as part of a balanced constitutional accommodation, put forward and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution which would fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland.

8. The Taoiseach recognises the need to engage in dialogue which would address with honesty and integrity the fears of all traditions. But that dialogue, both within the North and between the people and their representatives of both parts of Ireland, must be entered into with an acknowledgement that the future security and welfare of the people of the island will depend on an open, frank and balanced approach to all the problems which for too long have caused division.

9. The British and Irish Governments will seek, along with the Northern Ireland constitutional parties through a process of political dialogue, to create institutions and structures which, while respecting the diversity of the people of Ireland, would enable them to work together in all areas of common interest. This will help over a period to build the trust necessary to end past divisions, leading to an agreed and peaceful future. Such structures would, of course, include institutional recognition of the special links that exist between the peoples of Britain and Ireland as part of the totality of relationships, while taking account of newly forged links with the rest of Europe.

10. The British and Irish Governments reiterate that the achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence. They confirm that, in these circumstances, democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the Governments and the political parties on the way ahead.

11. The Irish Government would make their own arrangements within their jurisdiction to enable democratic parties to consult together and share in dialogue about the political future. The Taoiseach's intention is that these arrangements could include the establishment, in consultation with other parties, of a Forum for Peace and Reconciliation to make recommendations on ways in which

agreement and trust between both traditions in Ireland can be promoted and established.

12. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister are determined to build on the fervent wish of both their peoples to see old fears and animosities replaced by a climate of peace. They believe the framework they have set out offers the people of Ireland, North and South, whatever their tradition, the basis to agree that from now on their differences can be negotiated and resolved exclusively by peaceful political means. They appeal to all concerned to grasp the opportunity for a new departure. That step would compromise no position or principle, nor prejudice the future for either community. On the contrary, it would be an incomparable gain for all. It would break decisively the cycle of violence and the intolerable suffering it entails for the people of these islands, particularly for both communities in Northern Ireland. It would allow the process of economic and social co-operation on the island to realise its full potential for prosperity and mutual understanding. It would transform the prospects for building on the progress already made in the Talks process, involving the two Governments and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister believe that these arrangements offer an opportunity to lay the foundations for a more peaceful and harmonious future, devoid of the violence and bitter divisions which have scarred the past generation. They commit themselves and their Governments to continue to work together, unremittingly, towards that objective.

THE BELFAST AGREEMENT

DECLARATION OF SUPPORT

1. We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning.
2. The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.
3. We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands.
4. We reaffirm our total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues, and our opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose, whether in regard to this agreement or otherwise.
5. We acknowledge the substantial differences between our continuing, and equally legitimate, political aspirations. However, we will endeavour to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements. We pledge that we will, in good faith, work to ensure the success of each and every one of the arrangements to be established under this agreement. It is accepted that all of the institutional and constitutional arrangements – an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, a British–Irish Council and a British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference and any amendments to British Acts of Parliament and the

Constitution of Ireland – are interlocking and interdependent and that in particular the functioning of the Assembly and the North/South Council are so closely inter-related that the success of each depends on that of the other.

6. Accordingly, in a spirit of concord, we strongly commend this agreement to the people, North and South, for their approval.

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

1. The participants endorse the commitment made by the British and Irish Governments that, in a new British–Irish Agreement replacing the Anglo–Irish Agreement, they will:

(i) recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Great Britain or a sovereign united Ireland;

(ii) recognise that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of 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, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland;

(iii) acknowledge that while a substantial section of the people in Northern Ireland share the legitimate wish of a majority of the people of the island of Ireland for a united Ireland, the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, freely exercised and legitimate, is to maintain the Union and, accordingly, that Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom reflects and relies upon that wish; and that it would be wrong to make any change in the status of Northern Ireland save with the consent of a majority of its people;

(iv) affirm that if, in the future, the people of the island of Ireland exercise their right of self-determination on the basis set out in sections (i) and (ii) above to bring about a united Ireland, it will be a binding obligation on both Governments to introduce and support in their respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish;

(v) affirm that whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities;

(vi) recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland.

2. The participants also note that the two Governments have accordingly undertaken in the context of this comprehensive political agreement, to propose and support changes in, respectively, the Constitution of Ireland and in British legislation relating to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

STRAND ONE

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. This agreement provides for a democratically elected Assembly in Northern Ireland which is inclusive in its membership, capable of exercising executive and legislative authority, and subject to safeguards to protect the rights and interests of all sides of the community.

The Assembly

2. A 108-member Assembly will be elected by PR(STV) from existing Westminster constituencies.

3. The Assembly will exercise full legislative and executive authority in respect of those matters currently within the responsibility of the six Northern Ireland Government Departments, with the possibility of taking on responsibility for other matters as detailed elsewhere in this agreement.

4. The Assembly – operating where appropriate on a cross-community basis – will be the prime source of authority in respect of all devolved responsibilities.

Safeguards

5. There will be safeguards to ensure that all sections of the community can participate and work together successfully in the operation of these institutions and that all sections of the community are protected, including:

(a) allocations of Committee Chairs, Ministers and Committee membership in proportion to party strengths;

(b) the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and any Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland supplementing it, which neither the Assembly nor public bodies can infringe, together with a Human Rights Commission;

(c) arrangements to provide that key decisions and legislation are proofed to ensure that they do not infringe the ECHR and any Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland;

(d) arrangements to ensure key decisions are taken on a cross-community basis;

(i) either parallel consent, i.e. a majority of those members present and voting, including a majority of the unionist and nationalist designations present and voting;

(ii) or a weighted majority (60%) of members present and voting, including at least 40% of each of the nationalist and unionist designations present and voting. Key decisions requiring cross-community support will be designated in advance, including election of the Chair of the Assembly, the First

Minister and Deputy First Minister, standing orders and budget allocations. In other cases such decisions could be triggered by a petition of concern brought by a significant minority of Assembly members (30/108).

(e) an Equality Commission to monitor a statutory obligation to promote equality of opportunity in specified areas and parity of esteem between the two main communities, and to investigate individual complaints against public bodies.

Operation of the Assembly

6. At their first meeting, members of the Assembly will register a designation of identity – nationalist, unionist or other – for the purposes of measuring cross-community support in Assembly votes under the relevant provisions above.

7. The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Assembly will be elected on a cross-community basis, as set out in paragraph 5(d) above.

8. There will be a Committee for each of the main executive functions of the Northern Ireland Administration. The Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Assembly Committees will be allocated proportionally, using the d'Hondt system. Membership of the Committees will be in broad proportion to party strengths in the Assembly to ensure that the opportunity of Committee places is available to all members.

9. The Committees will have a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department with which each is associated, and will have a role in initiation of legislation. They will have the power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation; approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee stage of relevant primary legislation; call for persons and papers; initiate enquiries and make reports; consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by its Minister.

10. Standing Committees other than Departmental Committees may be established as may be required from time to time.

11. The Assembly may appoint a special Committee to examine and report on whether a measure or proposal for legislation is in conformity with equality requirements, including the ECHR/Bill of Rights. The Committee shall have the power to call people and papers to assist in its consideration of the matter. The Assembly shall then consider the report of the Committee and can determine the matter in accordance with the cross-community consent procedure.

12. The above special procedure shall be followed when requested by the Executive Committee, or by the relevant Departmental Committee, voting on a cross-community basis.

13. When there is a petition of concern as in 5(d) above, the Assembly shall vote to determine whether the measure may proceed without reference to this special procedure. If this fails to achieve support on a cross-community basis, as in 5(d)(i) above, the special procedure shall be followed.

Executive Authority

14. Executive authority to be discharged on behalf of the Assembly by a First Minister and Deputy First Minister and up to ten Ministers with Departmental responsibilities.

15. The First Minister and Deputy First Minister shall be jointly elected into office by the Assembly voting on a cross-community basis, according to 5(d)(i) above.

16. Following the election of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, the posts of Ministers will be allocated to parties on the basis of the d'Hondt system by reference to the number of seats each party has in the Assembly.

17. The Ministers will constitute an Executive Committee, which will be convened, and presided over, by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

18. The duties of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will include, inter alia, dealing with and co-ordinating the work of the Executive Committee and the response of the Northern Ireland administration to external relationships.

19. The Executive Committee will provide a forum for the discussion of,

and agreement on, issues which cut across the responsibilities of two or more Ministers, for prioritising executive and legislative proposals and for recommending a common position where necessary (e.g. in dealing with external relationships).

20. The Executive Committee will seek to agree each year, and review as necessary, a programme incorporating an agreed budget linked to policies and programmes, subject to approval by the Assembly, after scrutiny in Assembly Committees, on a cross-community basis.

21. A party may decline the opportunity to nominate a person to serve as a Minister or may subsequently change its nominee.

22. All the Northern Ireland Departments will be headed by a Minister. All Ministers will liaise regularly with their respective Committee.

23. As a condition of appointment, Ministers, including the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, will affirm the terms of a Pledge of Office (Annex A) undertaking to discharge effectively and in good faith all the responsibilities attaching to their office.

24. Ministers will have full executive authority in their respective areas of responsibility, within any broad programme agreed by the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly as a whole.

25. An individual may be removed from office following a decision of the Assembly taken on a cross-community basis, if (s)he loses the confidence of the Assembly, voting on a cross-community basis, for failure to meet his or her responsibilities including, inter alia, those set out in the Pledge of Office. Those who hold office should use only democratic, non-violent means, and those who do not should be excluded or removed from office under these provisions.

Legislation

26. The Assembly will have authority to pass primary legislation for Northern Ireland in devolved areas, subject to:

(a) the ECHR and any Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland supplementing it

which, if the courts found to be breached, would render the relevant legislation null and void;

(b) decisions by simple majority of members voting, except when decision on a cross-community basis is required;

(c) detailed scrutiny and approval in the relevant Departmental Committee;

(d) mechanisms, based on arrangements proposed for the Scottish Parliament, to ensure suitable co-ordination, and avoid disputes, between the Assembly and the Westminster Parliament;

(e) option of the Assembly seeking to include Northern Ireland provisions in United Kingdom-wide legislation in the Westminster Parliament, especially on devolved issues where parity is normally maintained (e.g. social security, company law).

27. The Assembly will have authority to legislate in reserved areas with the approval of the Secretary of State and subject to Parliamentary control.

28. Disputes over legislative competence will be decided by the Courts.

29. Legislation could be initiated by an individual, a Committee or a Minister.

Relations with other institutions

30. Arrangements to represent the Assembly as a whole, at Summit level and in dealings with other institutions, will be in accordance with paragraph 18, and will be such as to ensure cross-community involvement.

31. Terms will be agreed between appropriate Assembly representatives and the Government of the United Kingdom to ensure effective co-ordination and input by Ministers to national policy-making, including on EU issues.

32. Role of Secretary of State:

(a) to remain responsible for NIO matters not devolved to the Assembly, subject to regular consultation with the Assembly and Ministers;

(b) to approve and lay before the Westminster Parliament any Assembly legislation on reserved matters;

(c) to represent Northern Ireland interests in the United Kingdom Cabinet;

(d) to have the right to attend the Assembly at their invitation.

33. The Westminster Parliament (whose power to make legislation for Northern Ireland would remain unaffected) will:

(a) legislate for non-devolved issues, other than where the Assembly legislates with the approval of the Secretary of State and subject to the control of Parliament;

(b) to legislate as necessary to ensure the United Kingdom's international obligations are met in respect of Northern Ireland;

(c) scrutinise, including through the Northern Ireland Grand and Select Committees, the responsibilities of the Secretary of State.

34. A consultative Civic Forum will be established. It will comprise representatives of the business, trade union and voluntary sectors, and such other sectors as agreed by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. It will act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will by agreement provide administrative support for the Civic Forum and establish guidelines for the selection of representatives to the Civic Forum.

Transitional Arrangements

35. The Assembly will meet first for the purpose of organisation, without legislative or executive powers, to resolve its standing orders and working practices and make preparations for the effective functioning of the Assembly, the British-Irish Council and the North/South Ministerial Council and associated implementation bodies. In this transitional period, those members of the Assembly serving as shadow Ministers shall affirm their commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means and their opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose; to work in good faith to bring the new arrangements into being; and to observe the spirit of the Pledge of Office applying to appointed Ministers.

Review

36. After a specified period there will be a review of these arrangements, including the details of electoral arrangements and of the Assembly's procedures, with a view to agreeing any adjustments necessary in the interests of efficiency and fairness.

Annex A

Pledge of Office

To pledge:

(a) to discharge in good faith all the duties of office;

(b) commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means;

(c) to serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations on government to promote equality and prevent discrimination;

(d) to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government;

(e) to operate within the framework of that programme when agreed within the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly;

(f) to support, and to act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly;

(g) to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Ministers must at all times:

- observe the highest standards of propriety and regularity involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relationship to the stewardship of public funds;
- be accountable to users of services, the community and, through the Assembly, for the activities within their responsibilities, their stewardship of public funds and the extent to which key performance targets and objectives have been met;
- ensure all reasonable requests for information from the Assembly, users of services and individual citizens are complied with; and that Departments and their staff conduct

their dealings with the public in an open and responsible way;

- follow the seven principles of public life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life;

comply with this code and with rules relating to the use of public funds;

- operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment;
- not use information gained in the course of their service for personal gain; nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests;
- ensure they comply with any rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality that might be offered;
- declare any personal or business interests which may conflict with their responsibilities. The Assembly will retain a Register of Interests. Individuals must ensure that any direct or indirect pecuniary interests which members of the public might reasonably think could influence their judgement are listed in the Register of Interests; STRAND TWO

STRAND TWO

NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

1. Under a new British/Irish Agreement dealing with the totality of relationships, and related legislation at Westminster and in the Oireachtas, a North/South Ministerial Council to be established to bring together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland – including through implementation on an all-island and cross-border basis – on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the Administrations, North and South.

2. All Council decisions to be by agreement between the two sides. Northern Ireland to be represented by the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and any relevant Ministers, the Irish Government by the Taoiseach and relevant Ministers, all operating in accordance with the rules for democratic authority and

accountability in force in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas respectively. Participation in the Council to be one of the essential responsibilities attaching to relevant posts in the two Administrations. If a holder of a relevant post will not participate normally in the Council, the Taoiseach in the case of the Irish Government and the First and Deputy First Minister in the case of the Northern Ireland Administration to be able to make alternative arrangements.

3. The Council to meet in different formats:

(i) in plenary format twice a year, with Northern Ireland representation led by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Irish Government led by the Taoiseach;

(ii) in specific sectoral formats on a regular and frequent basis with each side represented by the appropriate Minister;

(iii) in an appropriate format to consider institutional or cross-sectoral matters (including in relation to the EU) and to resolve disagreement.

4. Agendas for all meetings to be settled by prior agreement between the two sides, but it will be open to either to propose any matter for consideration or action.

5. The Council:

(i) to exchange information, discuss and consult with a view to co-operating on matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Administrations, North and South;

(ii) to use best endeavours to reach agreement on the adoption of common policies, in areas where there is a mutual cross-border and all-island benefit, and which are within the competence of both Administrations, North and South, making determined efforts to overcome any disagreements;

(iii) to take decisions by agreement on policies for implementation separately in each jurisdiction, in relevant meaningful areas within the competence of both Administrations, North and South;

(iv) to take decisions by agreement on policies and action at an all-island and cross-border level to be implemented

by the bodies to be established as set out in paragraphs 8 and 9 below.

6. Each side to be in a position to take decisions in the Council within the defined authority of those attending, through the arrangements in place for co-ordination of executive functions within each jurisdiction. Each side to remain accountable to the Assembly and Oireachtas respectively, whose approval, through the arrangements in place on either side, would be required for decisions beyond the defined authority of those attending.

7. As soon as practically possible after elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, inaugural meetings will take place of the Assembly, the British/Irish Council and the North/South Ministerial Council in their transitional forms. All three institutions will meet regularly and frequently on this basis during the period between the elections to the Assembly, and the transfer of powers to the Assembly, in order to establish their *modus operandi*.

8. During the transitional period between the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the transfer of power to it, representatives of the Northern Ireland transitional Administration and the Irish Government operating in the North/South Ministerial Council will undertake a work programme, in consultation with the British Government, covering at least 12 subject areas, with a view to identifying and agreeing by 31 October 1998 areas where co-operation and implementation for mutual benefit will take place. Such areas may include matters in the list set out in the Annex.

9. As part of the work programme, the Council will identify and agree at least 6 matters for co-operation and implementation in each of the following categories:

(i) Matters where existing bodies will be the appropriate mechanisms for co-operation in each separate jurisdiction;

(ii) Matters where the co-operation will take place through agreed implementation bodies on a cross-border or all-island level.

10. The two Governments will make necessary legislative and other

enabling preparations to ensure, as an absolute commitment, that these bodies, which have been agreed as a result of the work programme, function at the time of the inception of the British-Irish Agreement and the transfer of powers, with legislative authority for these bodies transferred to the Assembly as soon as possible thereafter. Other arrangements for the agreed co-operation will also commence contemporaneously with the transfer of powers to the Assembly.

11. The implementation bodies will have a clear operational remit. They will implement on an all-island and cross-border basis policies agreed in the Council.

12. Any further development of these arrangements to be by agreement in the Council and with the specific endorsement of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Oireachtas, subject to the extent of the competences and responsibility of the two Administrations.

13. It is understood that the North/South Ministerial Council and the Northern Ireland Assembly are mutually inter-dependent, and that one cannot successfully function without the other.

14. Disagreements within the Council to be addressed in the format described at paragraph 3(iii) above or in the plenary format. By agreement between the two sides, experts could be appointed to consider a particular matter and report.

15. Funding to be provided by the two Administrations on the basis that the Council and the implementation bodies constitute a necessary public function.

16. The Council to be supported by a standing joint Secretariat, staffed by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Irish Civil Service.

17. The Council to consider the European Union dimension of relevant matters, including the implementation of EU policies and programmes and proposals under consideration in the EU framework. Arrangements to be made to ensure that the views of the Council are taken into account and represented appropriately at relevant EU meetings.

18. The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas to consider developing a joint parliamentary forum, bringing together equal numbers from both institutions for discussion of matters of mutual interest and concern.

19. Consideration to be given to the establishment of an independent consultative forum appointed by the two Administrations, representative of civil society, comprising the social partners and other members with expertise in social, cultural, economic and other issues.

STRAND THREE

BRITISH-IRISH COUNCIL

1. A British-Irish Council (BIC) will be established under a new British-Irish Agreement to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands.

2. Membership of the BIC will comprise representatives of the British and Irish Governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, when established, and, if appropriate, elsewhere in the United Kingdom, together with representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

3. The BIC will meet in different formats: at summit level, twice per year; in specific sectoral formats on a regular basis, with each side represented by the appropriate Minister; in an appropriate format to consider cross-sectoral matters.

4. Representatives of members will operate in accordance with whatever procedures for democratic authority and accountability are in force in their respective elected institutions.

5. The BIC will exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant Administrations. Suitable issues for early discussion in the BIC could include transport links, agricultural issues, environmental issues, cultural issues, health issues, education issues and approaches to EU issues. Suitable arrangements to be made for practical

co-operation on agreed policies.

6. It will be open to the BIC to agree common policies or common actions. Individual members may opt not to participate in such common policies and common action.

7. The BIC normally will operate by consensus. In relation to decisions on common policies or common actions, including their means of implementation, it will operate by agreement of all members participating in such policies or actions.

8. The members of the BIC, on a basis to be agreed between them, will provide such financial support as it may require.

9. A secretariat for the BIC will be provided by the British and Irish Governments in co-ordination with officials of each of the other members.

10. In addition to the structures provided for under this agreement, it will be open to two or more members to develop bilateral or multilateral arrangements between them. Such arrangements could include, subject to the agreement of the members concerned, mechanisms to enable consultation, co-operation and joint decision-making on matters of mutual interest; and mechanisms to implement any joint decisions they may reach. These arrangements will not require the prior approval of the BIC as a whole and will operate independently of it.

11. The elected institutions of the members will be encouraged to develop interparliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body.

12. The full membership of the BIC will keep under review the workings of the Council, including a formal published review at an appropriate time after the Agreement comes into effect, and will contribute as appropriate to any review of the overall political agreement arising from the multi-party negotiations.

BRITISH-IRISH INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

1. There will be a new British-Irish Agreement dealing with the totality of relationships. It will establish a standing British-Irish

Intergovernmental Conference, which will subsume both the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council and the Intergovernmental Conference established under the 1985 Agreement.

2. The Conference will bring together the British and Irish Governments to promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Governments.

3. The Conference will meet as required at Summit level (Prime Minister and Taoiseach). Otherwise, Governments will be represented by appropriate Ministers. Advisers, including police and security advisers, will attend as appropriate.

4. All decisions will be by agreement between both Governments. The Governments will make determined efforts to resolve disagreements between them. There will be no derogation from the sovereignty of either Government.

5. In recognition of the Irish Government's special interest in Northern Ireland and of the extent to which issues of mutual concern arise in relation to Northern Ireland, there will be regular and frequent meetings of the Conference concerned with non-devolved Northern Ireland matters, on which the Irish Government may put forward views and proposals. These meetings, to be co-chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, would also deal with all-island and cross-border co-operation on non-devolved issues.

6. Co-operation within the framework of the Conference will include facilitation of co-operation in security matters. The Conference also will address, in particular, the areas of rights, justice, prisons and policing in Northern Ireland (unless and until responsibility is devolved to a Northern Ireland administration) and will intensify co-operation between the two Governments on the all-island or cross-border aspects of these matters.

7. Relevant executive members of the Northern Ireland Administration will be involved in meetings of the Conference, and in the reviews referred to in paragraph 9 below to discuss

non-devolved Northern Ireland matters.

8. The Conference will be supported by officials of the British and Irish Governments, including by a standing joint Secretariat of officials dealing with non-devolved Northern Ireland matters.

9. The Conference will keep under review the workings of the new British-Irish Agreement and the machinery and institutions established under it, including a formal published review three years after the Agreement comes into effect. Representatives of the Northern Ireland Administration will be invited to express views to the Conference in this context. The Conference will contribute as appropriate to any review of the overall political agreement arising from the multi-party negotiations but will have no power to override the democratic arrangements set up by this Agreement.

RIGHTS, SAFEGUARDS AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The parties affirm their commitment to the mutual respect, the civil rights and the religious liberties of everyone in the community. Against the background of the recent history of communal conflict, the parties affirm in particular:

- the right of free political thought;
- the right to freedom and expression of religion;
- the right to pursue democratically national and political aspirations;
- the right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means;
- the right to freely choose one's place of residence;
- the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity;
- the right to freedom from sectarian harassment; and

- the right of women to full and equal political participation.

United Kingdom Legislation

2. The British Government will complete incorporation into Northern Ireland law of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), with direct access to the courts, and remedies for breach of the Convention, including power for the courts to overrule Assembly legislation on grounds of inconsistency.

3. Subject to the outcome of public consultation underway, the British Government intends, as a particular priority, to create a statutory obligation on public authorities in Northern Ireland to carry out all their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; and sexual orientation. Public bodies would be required to draw up statutory schemes showing how they would implement this obligation. Such schemes would cover arrangements for policy appraisal, including an assessment of impact on relevant categories, public consultation, public access to information and services, monitoring and timetables.

4. The new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (see paragraph 5 below) will be invited to consult and to advise on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience. These additional rights to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and – taken together with the ECHR – to constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Among the issues for consideration by the Commission will be:

- the formulation of a general obligation on government and public bodies fully to respect, on the basis of equality of treatment, the identity and ethos of both communities in Northern Ireland; and

- a clear formulation of the rights not to be discriminated against and to equality of opportunity in both the public and private sectors.

New Institutions in Northern Ireland

5. A new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, with membership from Northern Ireland reflecting the community balance, will be established by Westminster legislation, independent of Government, with an extended and enhanced role beyond that currently exercised by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, to include keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of laws and practices, making recommendations to Government as necessary; providing information and promoting awareness of human rights; considering draft legislation referred to them by the new Assembly; and, in appropriate cases, bringing court proceedings or providing assistance to individuals doing so.

6. Subject to the outcome of public consultation currently underway, the British Government intends a new statutory Equality Commission to replace the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission (NI), the Commission for Racial Equality (NI) and the Disability Council. Such a unified Commission will advise on, validate and monitor the statutory obligation and will investigate complaints of default.

7. It would be open to a new Northern Ireland Assembly to consider bringing together its responsibilities for these matters into a dedicated Department of Equality.

8. These improvements will build on existing protections in Westminster legislation in respect of the judiciary, the system of justice and policing.

Comparable Steps by the Irish Government

9. The Irish Government will also take steps to further strengthen the protection of human rights in its jurisdiction. The Government will, taking account of the work of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution and the Report of the Constitution Review Group, bring forward measures to strengthen and

underpin the constitutional protection of human rights. These proposals will draw on the European Convention on Human Rights and other international legal instruments in the field of human rights and the question of the incorporation of the ECHR will be further examined in this context. The measures brought forward would ensure at least an equivalent level of protection of human rights as will pertain in Northern Ireland. In addition, the Irish Government will:

- establish a Human Rights Commission with a mandate and remit equivalent to that within Northern Ireland;
- proceed with arrangements as quickly as possible to ratify the Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities (already ratified by the UK);
- implement enhanced employment equality legislation;
- introduce equal status legislation; and
- continue to take further active steps to demonstrate its respect for the different traditions in the island of Ireland.

A Joint Committee

10. It is envisaged that there would be a joint committee of representatives of the two Human Rights Commissions, North and South, as a forum for consideration of human rights issues in the island of Ireland. The joint committee will consider, among other matters, the possibility of establishing a charter, open to signature by all democratic political parties, reflecting and endorsing agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living in the island of Ireland.

Reconciliation and Victims of Violence

11. The participants believe that it is essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation. They look forward to the results of the work of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission.

12. It is recognised that victims have a right to remember as well as to contribute to a changed society. The achievement of a peaceful and just

society would be the true memorial to the victims of violence. The participants particularly recognise that young people from areas affected by the troubles face particular difficulties and will support the development of special community-based initiatives based on international best practice. The provision of services that are supportive and sensitive to the needs of victims will also be a critical element and that support will need to be channelled through both statutory and community-based voluntary organisations facilitating locally-based self-help and support networks. This will require the allocation of sufficient resources, including statutory funding as necessary, to meet the needs of victims and to provide for community-based support programmes.

13. The participants recognise and value the work being done by many organisations to develop reconciliation and mutual understanding and respect between and within communities and traditions, in Northern Ireland and between North and South, and they see such work as having a vital role in consolidating peace and political agreement. Accordingly, they pledge their continuing support to such organisations and will positively examine the case for enhanced financial assistance for the work of reconciliation. An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES

1. Pending the devolution of powers to a new Northern Ireland Assembly, the British Government will pursue broad policies for sustained economic growth and stability in Northern Ireland and for promoting social inclusion, including in particular community development and the advancement of women in public life.

2. Subject to the public consultation currently under way, the British Government will make rapid progress with:

- (i) a new regional development strategy for Northern Ireland, for consideration

in due course by a the Assembly, tackling the problems of a divided society and social cohesion in urban, rural and border areas, protecting and enhancing the environment, producing new approaches to transport issues, strengthening the physical infrastructure of the region, developing the advantages and resources of rural areas and rejuvenating major urban centres;

- (ii) a new economic development strategy for Northern Ireland, for consideration in due course by a the Assembly, which would provide for short and medium term economic planning linked as appropriate to the regional development strategy; and

- (iii) measures on employment equality included in the recent White Paper ("Partnership for Equality") and covering the extension and strengthening of anti-discrimination legislation, a review of the national security aspects of the present fair employment legislation at the earliest possible time, a new more focused Targeting Social Need initiative and a range of measures aimed at combating unemployment and progressively eliminating the differential in unemployment rates between the two communities by targeting objective need.

3. All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

4. In the context of active consideration currently being given to the UK signing the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the British Government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it:

- take resolute action to promote the language;
- facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand;
- seek to remove, where possible,

restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language;

- make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints;
- place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education in line with current provision for integrated education;
- explore urgently with the relevant British authorities, and in co-operation with the Irish broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more widespread availability of *Teilifís na Gaeilge* in Northern Ireland;
- seek more effective ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland; and
- encourage the parties to secure agreement that this commitment will be sustained by a new Assembly in a way which takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community.

5. All participants acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division. Arrangements will be made to monitor this issue and consider what action might be required.

DECOMMISSIONING

1. Participants recall their agreement in the Procedural Motion adopted on 24 September 1997 “that the resolution of the decommissioning issue is an indispensable part of the process of negotiation”, and also recall the provisions of paragraph 25 of Strand 1 above.
2. They note the progress made by the Independent International Commission

on Decommissioning and the Governments in developing schemes which can represent a workable basis for achieving the decommissioning of illegally-held arms in the possession of paramilitary groups.

3. All participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission, and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement.

4. The Independent Commission will monitor, review and verify progress on decommissioning of illegal arms, and will report to both Governments at regular intervals.

6. Both Governments will take all necessary steps to facilitate the decommissioning process to include bringing the relevant schemes into force by the end of June.

SECURITY

1. The participants note that the development of a peaceful environment on the basis of this agreement can and should mean a normalisation of security arrangements and practices.

2. The British Government will make progress towards the objective of as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland, consistent with the level of threat and with a published overall strategy, dealing with:

- (i) the reduction of the numbers and role of the Armed Forces deployed in Northern Ireland to levels compatible with a normal peaceful society;
- (ii) the removal of security installations;
- (iii) the removal of emergency powers in Northern Ireland; and
- (iv) other measures appropriate to and

compatible with a normal peaceful society.

3. The Secretary of State will consult regularly on progress, and the response to any continuing paramilitary activity, with the Irish Government and the political parties, as appropriate.

4. The British Government will continue its consultation on firearms regulation and control on the basis of the document published on 2 April 1998.

5. The Irish Government will initiate a wide-ranging review of the Offences Against the State Acts 1939–85 with a view to both reform and dispensing with those elements no longer required as circumstances permit.

POLICING AND JUSTICE

1. The participants recognise that policing is a central issue in any society. They equally recognise that Northern Ireland’s history of deep divisions has made it highly emotive, with great hurt suffered and sacrifices made by many individuals and their families, including those in the RUC and other public servants. They believe that the agreement provides the opportunity for a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole. They also believe that this agreement offers a unique opportunity to bring about a new political dispensation which will recognise the full and equal legitimacy and worth of the identities, senses of allegiance and ethos of all sections of the community in Northern Ireland. They consider that this opportunity should inform and underpin the development of a police service representative in terms of the make-up of the community as a whole and which, in a peaceful environment, should be routinely unarmed.

2. The participants believe it essential that policing structures and arrangements are such that the police service is professional, effective and efficient, fair and impartial, free from partisan political control; accountable, both under the law for its actions and

to the community it serves; representative of the society it polices, and operates within a coherent and co-operative criminal justice system, which conforms with human rights norms. The participants also believe that those structures and arrangements must be capable of maintaining law and order including responding effectively to crime and to any terrorist threat and to public order problems. A police service which cannot do so will fail to win public confidence and acceptance. They believe that any such structures and arrangements should be capable of delivering a policing service, in constructive and inclusive partnerships with the community at all levels, and with the maximum delegation of authority and responsibility, consistent with the foregoing principles. These arrangements should be based on principles of protection of human rights and professional integrity and should be unambiguously accepted and actively supported by the entire community.

3. An independent Commission will be established to make recommendations for future policing arrangements in Northern Ireland including means of encouraging widespread community support for these arrangements within the agreed framework of principles reflected in the paragraphs above and in accordance with the terms of reference at Annex A. The Commission will be broadly representative with expert and international representation among its membership and will be asked to consult widely and to report no later than Summer 1999.

4. The participants believe that the aims of the criminal justice system are to:

- deliver a fair and impartial system of justice to the community;
- be responsive to the community's concerns, and encouraging community involvement where appropriate;
- have the confidence of all parts of the community; and
- deliver justice efficiently and effectively.

5. There will be a parallel wide-ranging

review of criminal justice (other than policing and those aspects of the system relating to the emergency legislation) to be carried out by the British Government through a mechanism with an independent element, in consultation with the political parties and others. The review will commence as soon as possible, will include wide consultation, and a report will be made to the Secretary of State no later than Autumn 1999. Terms of Reference are attached at Annex B.

6. Implementation of the recommendations arising from both reviews will be discussed with the political parties and with the Irish Government.

7. The participants also note that the British Government remains ready in principle, with the broad support of the political parties, and after consultation, as appropriate, with the Irish Government, in the context of ongoing implementation of the relevant recommendations, to devolve responsibility for policing and justice issues.

ANNEX A

COMMISSION ON POLICING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Terms of Reference

Taking account of the principles on policing as set out in the agreement, the Commission will inquire into policing in Northern Ireland and, on the basis of its findings, bring forward proposals for future policing structures and arrangements, including means of encouraging widespread community support for those arrangements.

Its proposals on policing should be designed to ensure that policing arrangements, including composition, recruitment, training, culture, ethos and symbols, are such that in a new approach Northern Ireland has a police service that can enjoy widespread support from, and is seen as an integral part of, the community as a whole.

Its proposals should include recommendations covering any issues such as re-training, job placement and educational and professional development required in the transition

to policing in a peaceful society.

Its proposals should also be designed to ensure that:

- the police service is structured, managed and resourced so that it can be effective in discharging its full range of functions (including proposals on any necessary arrangements for the transition to policing in a normal peaceful society);
- the police service is delivered in constructive and inclusive partnerships with the community at all levels with the maximum delegation of authority and responsibility;
- the legislative and constitutional framework requires the impartial discharge of policing functions and conforms with internationally accepted norms in relation to policing standards;
- the police operate within a clear framework of accountability to the law and the community they serve, so:
- they are constrained by, accountable to and act only within the law;
- their powers and procedures, like the law they enforce, are clearly established and publicly available;
- there are open, accessible and independent means of investigating and adjudicating upon complaints against the police;
- there are clearly established arrangements enabling local people, and their political representatives, to articulate their views and concerns about policing and to establish publicly policing priorities and influence policing policies, subject to safeguards to ensure police impartiality and freedom from partisan political control;
- there are arrangements for accountability and for the effective, efficient and economic use of resources in achieving policing objectives;
- there are means to ensure independent professional scrutiny and inspection of the police service to ensure that proper professional

standards are maintained;

- the scope for structured co-operation with the Garda Síochána and other police forces is addressed; and
- the management of public order events which can impose exceptional demands on policing resources is also addressed.

The Commission should focus on policing issues, but if it identifies other aspects of the criminal justice system relevant to its work on policing, including the role of the police in prosecution, then it should draw the attention of the Government to those matters.

The Commission should consult widely, including with non-governmental expert organisations, and through such focus groups as they consider it appropriate to establish.

The Government proposes to establish the Commission as soon as possible, with the aim of it starting work as soon as possible and publishing its final report by Summer 1999.

ANNEX B

REVIEW OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Terms of Reference

Taking account of the aims of the criminal justice system as set out in the Agreement, the review will address the structure, management and resourcing of publicly funded elements of the criminal justice system and will bring forward proposals for future criminal justice arrangements (other than policing and those aspects of the system relating to emergency legislation, which the Government is considering separately) covering such issues as:

- the arrangements for making appointments to the judiciary and magistracy, and safeguards for protecting their independence;
- the arrangements for the organisation and supervision of the prosecution process, and for safeguarding its independence;
- measures to improve the responsiveness and accountability of,

and any lay participation in the criminal justice system;

- mechanisms for addressing law reform;
- the scope for structured co-operation between the criminal justice agencies on both parts of the island; and
- the structure and organisation of criminal justice functions that might be devolved to an Assembly, including the possibility of establishing a Department of Justice, while safeguarding the essential independence of many of the key functions in this area.

The Government proposes to commence the review as soon as possible, consulting with the political parties and others, including non-governmental expert organisations. The review will be completed by Autumn 1999.

PRISONERS

1. Both Governments will put in place mechanisms to provide for an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners, including transferred prisoners, convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland or, in the case of those sentenced outside Northern Ireland, similar offences (referred to hereafter as qualifying prisoners). Any such arrangements will protect the rights of individual prisoners under national and international law.

2. Prisoners affiliated to organisations which have not established or are not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire will not benefit from the arrangements. The situation in this regard will be kept under review.

3. Both Governments will complete a review process within a fixed time frame and set prospective release dates for all qualifying prisoners. The review process would provide for the advance of the release dates of qualifying prisoners while allowing account to be taken of the seriousness of the offences for which the person was convicted and the need to protect the community. In addition, the intention would be that should the circumstances allow it, any

qualifying prisoners who remained in custody two years after the commencement of the scheme would be released at that point.

4. The Governments will seek to enact the appropriate legislation to give effect to these arrangements by the end of June 1998.

5. The Governments continue to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, re-training and/or re-skilling, and further education.

VALIDATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Validation and Implementation

1. The two Governments will as soon as possible sign a new British-Irish Agreement replacing the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, embodying understandings on constitutional issues and affirming their solemn commitment to support and, where appropriate, implement the agreement reached by the participants in the negotiations which shall be annexed to the British-Irish Agreement.

2. Each Government will organise a referendum on 22 May 1998. Subject to Parliamentary approval, a consultative referendum in Northern Ireland, organised under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996, will address the question: "Do you support the agreement reached in the multi-party talks on Northern Ireland and set out in Command Paper 3883?". The Irish Government will introduce and support in the Oireachtas a Bill to amend the Constitution as described in paragraph 2 of the section "Constitutional Issues" and in Annex B, as follows: (a) to amend Articles 2 and 3 as described in paragraph 8.1 in Annex B above and (b) to amend Article 29 to permit the Government to ratify the new British-Irish Agreement.

On passage by the Oireachtas, the Bill will be put to referendum.

3. If majorities of those voting in each of the referendums support this agreement, the Governments will then introduce and support, in their respective Parliaments, such legislation as may be necessary to give effect to all aspects of this agreement, and will take whatever ancillary steps as may be required including the holding of elections on 25 June, subject to parliamentary approval, to the Assembly, which would meet initially in a “shadow” mode. The establishment of the North–South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, the British–Irish Council and the British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the assumption by the Assembly of its legislative and executive powers will take place at the same time on the entry into force of the British–Irish Agreement.

4. In the interim, aspects of the implementation of the multi-party agreement will be reviewed at meetings of those parties relevant in the particular case (taking into account, once Assembly elections have been held, the results of those elections), under the chairmanship of the British Government or the two Governments, as may be appropriate; and representatives of the two Governments and all relevant parties may meet under independent chairmanship to review implementation of the agreement as a whole.

Review procedures following implementation

5. Each institution may, at any time, review any problems that may arise in its operation and, where no other institution is affected, take remedial action in consultation as necessary with the relevant Government or Governments. It will be for each institution to determine its own procedures for review.

6. If there are difficulties in the operation of a particular institution, which have implications for another institution, they may review their operations separately and jointly and agree on remedial action to be taken under their respective authorities.

7. If difficulties arise which require remedial action across the range of

institutions, or otherwise require amendment of the British–Irish Agreement or relevant legislation, the process of review will fall to the two Governments in consultation with the parties in the Assembly. Each Government will be responsible for action in its own jurisdiction.

8. Notwithstanding the above, each institution will publish an annual report on its operations. In addition, the two Governments and the parties in the Assembly will convene a conference 4 years after the agreement comes into effect, to review and report on its operation.

ANNEX

AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND

The British and Irish Governments:

- Welcoming the strong commitment to the Agreement reached on 10th April 1998 by themselves and other participants in the multi-party talks and set out in Annex 1 to this Agreement (hereinafter “the Multi-Party Agreement”);
- Considering that the Multi-Party Agreement offers an opportunity for a new beginning in relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands;
- Wishing to develop still further the unique relationship between their peoples and the close co-operation between their countries as friendly neighbours and as partners in the European Union;
- Reaffirming their total commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence which have been fundamental to the multi-party talks;
- Reaffirming their commitment to the principles of partnership, equality and mutual respect and to the protection of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights in their respective jurisdictions;

Have agreed as follows:

ARTICLE 1

The two Governments:

(i) recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Great Britain or a sovereign united Ireland;

(ii) recognise that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of 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, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland;

(iii) acknowledge that while a substantial section of the people in Northern Ireland share the legitimate wish of a majority of the people of the island of Ireland for a united Ireland, the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, freely exercised and legitimate, is to maintain the Union and accordingly, that Northern Ireland’s status as part of the United Kingdom reflects and relies upon that wish; and that it would be wrong to make any change in the status of Northern Ireland save with the consent of a majority of its people;

(iv) affirm that, if in the future, the people of the island of Ireland exercise their right of self-determination on the basis set out in sections (i) and (ii) above to bring about a united Ireland, it will be a binding obligation on both Governments to introduce and support in their respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish;

(v) affirm that whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the

principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos and aspirations of both communities;

(vi) recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland.

ARTICLE 2

The two Governments affirm their solemn commitment to support, and where appropriate implement, the provisions of the Multi-Party Agreement. In particular there shall be established in accordance with the provisions of the Multi-Party Agreement immediately on the entry into force of this Agreement, the following institutions:

- (i) a North/South Ministerial Council;
- (ii) the implementation bodies referred to in paragraph 9 (ii) of the section entitled “Strand Two” of the Multi-Party Agreement;
- (iii) a British–Irish Council;
- (iv) a British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

ARTICLE 3

- (1) This Agreement shall replace the Agreement between the British and Irish Governments done at Hillsborough on 15th November 1985 which shall cease to have effect on entry into force of this Agreement.
- (2) The Intergovernmental Conference established by Article 2 of the aforementioned Agreement done on 15th November 1985 shall cease to exist on entry into force of this Agreement.

ARTICLE 4

- (1) It shall be a requirement for entry into force of this Agreement that:
- (a) British legislation shall have been enacted for the purpose of

implementing the provisions of Annex A to the section entitled “Constitutional Issues” of the Multi-Party Agreement;

- (b) the amendments to the Constitution of Ireland set out in Annex B to the section entitled “Constitutional Issues” of the Multi-Party Agreement shall have been approved by Referendum;
- (c) such legislation shall have been enacted as may be required to establish the institutions referred to in Article 2 of this Agreement.

(2) Each Government shall notify the other in writing of the completion, so far as it is concerned, of the requirements for entry into force of this Agreement. This Agreement shall enter into force on the date of the receipt of the later of the two notifications.

(3) Immediately on entry into force of this Agreement, the Irish Government shall ensure that the amendments to the Constitution of Ireland set out in Annex B to the section entitled “Constitutional Issues” of the Multi-Party Agreement take effect.

In witness thereof the undersigned, being duly authorised thereto by the respective Governments, have signed this Agreement.

Done in two originals at Belfast on the 10th day of April 1998.

For the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

For the Government of Ireland

ANNEX 1

The Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Talks

ANNEX 2

Declaration on the Provisions of Paragraph (vi) of Article 1 In Relationship to Citizenship

The British and Irish Governments declare that it is their joint understanding that the term “the people of Northern Ireland” in paragraph (vi) of Article 1 of this Agreement means, for the purposes of giving effect to this provision, all persons born in Northern Ireland and having, at the time of their birth, at

least one parent who is a British citizen, an Irish citizen or is otherwise entitled to reside in Northern Ireland without any restriction on their period of residence.

Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin at Stormont during the night before the Agreement, 9 April 1998



Source: Crispin Rodwell

Chronology

1968

August–October

The first Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) march at Dungannon. At a subsequent march in Armagh, loyalists organize a counter-rally and violence breaks out as police try to keep the groups apart. Television coverage of a Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) baton charge against civil rights marchers in Derry draws public attention to heavy-handed police involvement.

November

Terence O'Neill, the moderate unionist prime minister of Northern Ireland, announces plans for political reform but this fails to contain unrest.

1969

April

Loyalist-organized explosions at electricity and water supply facilities in Northern Ireland are blamed on the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Unable to control the worsening situation, O'Neill resigns.

August–October

Rioting in working class areas of Derry (later referred to as the Battle of the Bogside) and Belfast, both against the police and between Protestant and Catholic communities, results in intervention by the British Army to maintain order. Publication of the Hunt Report recommends the disarming of the RUC and disbandment of the police reserve B-Specials. This sparks further rioting during which loyalists kill the first policeman to die in the Troubles.

1970

January–April

The IRA is ill-prepared for the growing inter-community violence and internal tensions increase over its failure to offer resistance to attacks from neighbouring Protestant communities. As a result Sinn Féin, the republican party associated with the IRA, and the IRA itself split into provisional and official wings. In April, the Alliance Party is formed to represent the small, moderate non-sectarian middle ground.

1971

August

Internment (or imprisonment without trial) is introduced in response to the escalation of violence, but it exacerbates nationalist alienation. Only nationalists are detained in the initial phase, and most of them have no current involvement in the republican movement. The

Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) is formed by supporters of the civil rights movement, Republican Labour, and some members of the Nationalist Party and Northern Ireland Labour Party. It becomes the main representative of the Catholic community.

October

Ard Fheis (Party Conference of Provisional Sinn Féin) adopts the 'Eire Nua' (New Ireland) policy which advocates a federal Ireland. Loyalist leader Ian Paisley forms the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

1972

January

The worst year of the Troubles begins. A total of 470 are killed and 4,876 are wounded. The IRA carries out hundreds of bombings and shootings in this period. On 13 January, known as Bloody Sunday, fourteen die as a result of shooting by the British Army in Derry at the end of a civil rights march. None of the marchers killed are armed, but a subsequent Commission of Inquiry (Widgery) exonerates the security forces. The anger and distrust of the British judicial system continue to reverberate into the 1990s.

March

The Northern Ireland government resigns rather than hand over security to the British government, the Northern Ireland parliament (Stormont) is suspended on 24 March and direct rule from Westminster under a Secretary of State is imposed.

July

On 7 July, secret talks are held between Secretary of State for Northern Ireland William Whitelaw and IRA representatives. On 21 July, known as Bloody Friday, nine are killed by the IRA when twenty-two bombs are exploded in Belfast in the space of seventy-five minutes.

October

British government proposals include an 'Irish dimension' which would introduce the involvement of the Republic of Ireland in Northern Ireland affairs.

1973

March–July

A referendum on whether Northern Ireland should remain part of Britain produces an overwhelming 'yes' vote, but very few Catholics take part. The government proposes a new Northern Ireland Assembly with proportional representation – the first formal peace initiative. Following elections in June, the Assembly holds its first meeting in July.

October–November

Secretary of State Whitelaw chairs talks between the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) which set up a power-sharing executive.

December

At the Sunningdale Conference the power-sharing executive and the British and Irish governments discuss how the executive will function. The Sunningdale Agreement affirms that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland can only be changed with the consent of the majority and establishes a Council of Ireland.

1974

January–May

A majority of members of the Ulster Unionist Council opposes the Sunningdale Agreement. Its leader Brian Faulkner resigns leading to a split in the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). All eleven unionist MPs elected to Westminster in February are opposed to the Agreement. The Northern Ireland Assembly endorses the Sunningdale Agreement with the votes of the rump of unionists who support the Agreement together with the nationalists. A strike by the Ulster Workers Council leads to the collapse of the power-sharing executive after only five months and the Assembly is suspended.

July

The government proposes elections to a Constitutional Convention which would seek a solution – its second formal peace initiative.

December

A small group of Protestant clergy meet secretly with the leadership of the IRA to try to persuade it to call off the campaign of violence. The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), later linked to the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), is formed. The IRA announces a ten-day ceasefire for the Christmas period as a sign of goodwill.

1975

February

Following contact with representatives of the British government, the IRA suspends hostilities with the British Army and government-funded 'incident centres' staffed by republicans are established to monitor the ceasefire.

May

The Constitutional Convention meets. Its proposals for majority rule reflect the priorities of the unionist majority.

July

The INLA is formed in the context of a feud between the IRSP and the Official IRA.

November

The Secretary of State announces the end of special status for paramilitary prisoners and argues that the IRA ceasefire is becoming meaningless.

December

Internment is ended because it is seen to be ineffective and counter-productive. By now all terrorist cases are tried under the Diplock Rules which made convictions easier to obtain. The First Fair Employment Act introduces measures to tackle discrimination in recruitment and other discriminatory practices in the workplace.

1976

March

The Constitutional Convention is dissolved by the British government because its proposals do not command widespread acceptance throughout the community.

April

Republican prisoners begin a campaign against the loss of their special status. These 'dirty protests' (wearing only blankets and refusing to wash) are accompanied by attacks on prison warders for the first time.

August–September

Mass peace rallies take place in Belfast and all over Ireland in the months following the accidental death of a young family when republicans crash their car while pursued by the security forces. The movement becomes known as the Peace People and its founders, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, are later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1977

May

The Independent Unionist Group, mainly composed of former members of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, publish 'Proposals for a New Initiative to Achieve Peace and Democracy in Northern Ireland' which advocates sharing responsibility with nationalists. One member of the group had links with the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which later supports the document.

1978

January

British interrogation methods used on interned paramilitary prisoners in 1971 are judged to be 'inhuman and degrading' by the European Court of Human Rights.

1979

March

Conservative Party opposition spokesman on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave, is killed by an INLA car bomb in the House of Commons car park in London.

June

Ian Paisley of the DUP tops the poll for the Northern Ireland constituency in the first elections to the European Parliament.

August–September

On 27 August separate IRA bomb explosions claim the lives of Lord Mountbatten and eighteen soldiers. Pope Paul visits the Republic of Ireland but is advised for security reasons not to visit Northern Ireland. He calls on paramilitary groups to end their campaigns.

October

Secretary of State Humphrey Atkins invites the four main political parties to attend a new constitutional conference – the government's third formal peace initiative. The invitation is rejected by the UUP which indicates a shift away from its preference for devolved government.

1980

January–March

The constitutional conference set up by Humphrey Atkins fails to agree to proposals on government for Northern Ireland because of continuing divergence between unionist support for majority rule and nationalist support for power-sharing.

May

At their first meeting the British and Irish premiers agree on closer co-operation.

October–December

The first republican hunger strike by IRA and INLA prisoners is organized in the Maze prison in support of demands for special category (prisoner-of-war) status, their 'dirty protest' having failed to gain concessions. The hunger strike is called off on 18 December, the strikers believing, mistakenly, that the government has made concessions.

1981

March–October

IRA and INLA prisoners begin a second hunger strike over political status. One of the prisoners, Bobby Sands, is elected as an MP to the Westminster parliament in a by-election in Fermanagh–South Tyrone but dies one month later. In the following months nine more hunger strikers die. The strike peters out as families permit their dying relatives to be fed. Following the end of the hunger strike the government makes concessions in the prison regime without recognizing the prisoners' political status. Sinn Féin's party conference agrees its 'armalite and ballot box' strategy and decides to fight elections for seats on local government bodies.

November

The British and Irish premiers establish the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference to improve co-ordination of policy.

1982

April–November

Secretary of State James Prior introduces legislation for 'rolling devolution', an initiative designed to transfer powers to a Northern Ireland Assembly gradually and in agreed areas – the fourth formal peace initiative. The SDLP consider the scheme unworkable and stand for the elections in October on an abstentionist platform. Sinn Féin also fields candidates on an abstentionist platform, as it does not recognize Northern Ireland as a political entity, and wins five seats.

1983

May–November

New Ireland Forum established by Irish government to review future constitutional arrangements for Ireland opens in Dublin. The three main parties in the Republic of Ireland and the SDLP take part, but Sinn Féin is not included. Gerry Adams, the new President of Sinn Féin, wins the West Belfast seat in the UK general election and the party's total vote reaches thirteen per cent. The UUP withdraw from the Assembly in November in protest against the security situation – a further blow to Prior's experiment.

1984

May

All three options proposed by the New Ireland Forum as possible solutions – a unitary Ireland, a federal Ireland, and joint UK–Irish authority – are rejected by the British government as they represent a loss of their sovereignty in Northern Ireland.

October

The IRA confirms its continuation of the armed struggle by attempting to kill Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and cabinet members with a bomb at the Conservative Party conference in Brighton.

1985

November–December

The Anglo-Irish Agreement formalizes Irish influence in Northern Ireland and confirms that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority. In December mass unionist protests are organized against the Agreement.

1986

March

Unionists strike and march against the Anglo-Irish Agreement but fail to have a significant impact.

June

The Northern Ireland Assembly is wound up after it becomes a vehicle of unionist opposition to the Agreement.

September

Individuals in the UUP and the DUP discuss independence options for Northern Ireland.

November

Sinn Féin ends its policy of abstentionism in elections to the lower house of the Irish Republic's parliament, the Dáil.

1987

May

Eight IRA men are killed in an attack on a police station in Loughgall by a security force ambush. It fuels suspicions of a shoot-to-kill policy.

June

The Ulster Defence Association (a loyalist paramilitary group) publishes its Common Sense document with proposals for a form of power-sharing in a new Northern Ireland Assembly.

October–November

The IRA bombs a Remembrance Day parade in Enniskillen on 8 November killing eleven. Concern over security increases. Father Alex Reid, a Catholic priest in Belfast, writes his paper laying out the arguments for saying that the conflict was ripe for resolution and how the process of resolution might work.

1988

January–September

SDLP leader John Hume holds the first of a series of talks with Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams which were to last eight months. Sinn Féin also makes contact with representatives of the Irish government.

October

Members of proscribed organizations are banned from speaking on radio and television. The ban is mainly directed at Sinn Féin. Broadcasters use actors to provide 'voice-overs' for the politicians. Members from four Northern Ireland political parties meet for unofficial talks in Duisburg, West Germany organized by the Lutheran lawyer Dr Eberhard Spiecker.

1989

March

Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin, makes a speech in which he says that he seeks a 'non-armed political movement to work for self-determination' in Ireland.

July–November

Peter Brooke is appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 24 July. On 3 November he states that if violence were ended he would not rule out talks with Sinn Féin and suggests that the IRA cannot be defeated militarily.

1990

January

New Fair Employment legislation comes into force following the failure of previous legislation to solve the problem of discrimination in the workplace.

October

Peter Brooke authorizes the reopening of an indirect channel of communication involving Michael Oatley, an intelligence officer, and Father Denis Bradley.

November

In a constituency meeting Peter Brooke makes the significant statement that Britain has 'no selfish economic or strategic interest' in Northern Ireland and would accept unification by consent of the majority. The Irish opposition leader, John Bruton of Fine Gael, accepts that there could be changes to Article 2 of the Republic's constitution, which declares that the national territory consists of 'the whole island of Ireland'. John Major replaces Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party, and he begins to take a more flexible approach to Northern Ireland policy.

1991

March–July

In March constitutional parties agree to Peter Brooke's formula for Three Strand talks to examine relationships 'within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands'. These talks became known as the Brooke–Mayhew talks. In April loyalist paramilitaries of the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) declare a ceasefire for the duration of the talks to facilitate the negotiations. In June, political talks begin on Strand One (i.e. relationships within Northern Ireland), on the unionist's condition that no Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference meetings take place during the talks. In July the CLMC declare an end to their ceasefire.

1992

April

Strand One talks reconvene during a gap in Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference meetings. Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin loses his Belfast seat in the UK general election.

July–November

The new Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew initiates talks between representatives of the British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland parties on Strands Two and Three under independent chairman Sir Ninian Stevens, a former governor-general of Australia. In the absence of agreement on the form of devolution the premiers set 16 November as the date for the next Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference, effectively setting a limit to the talks. August sees the introduction of 'Education for Mutual Understanding', a programme to improve awareness of the different traditions and their aspirations in Northern Ireland, as part of the school curriculum under the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989.

November

The Irish Coalition Government collapses and a general election is called for 25 November. Unionists withdraw from the Brooke–Mayhew talks, bringing the process to an end.

December

Mayhew suggests that if Sinn Féin renounces violence 'for real' they can be included in the political dialogue. The IRA calls a three-day ceasefire.

1993

April

Talks between Hume and Adams become public knowledge. They are known to be working on a document that might provide a generally acceptable basis for negotiations with the British government. They issue a joint statement asserting the right of all Irish people to 'national self-determination' and rejecting an internal settlement in Northern Ireland.

June

The Opsahl Commission, a 'citizen's initiative' to investigate public views on possible ways to deal with the conflict, publishes its report.

September

The Hume–Adams dialogue is suspended while their peace proposals are considered by the two governments.

October

Twenty-two conflict-related deaths in one week spark peace rallies.

December

Prime Minister John Major and Albert Reynolds, Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister), issue a joint declaration from 10 Downing Street, London (the document became known as the Downing Street Declaration). This expresses their willingness for Sinn Féin to participate in talks following a permanent end to violence. It confirms that there will be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority. It reflects draft position papers produced by Hume–Adams, the Irish government and Sinn Féin, which were commented on by representatives of loyalist paramilitary groups before being finalized.

1994

January

The broadcasting ban on Sinn Féin is lifted in the Republic of Ireland. Despite British objections Gerry Adams is granted a visa to enter the United States of America to address a peace conference.

March

The IRA declares a three-day ceasefire over the Easter period.

May

The Northern Ireland Office publishes a twenty-one-page clarification in response to questions raised by Sinn Féin regarding the Downing Street Declaration.

July

Sinn Féin discussions are seen as a rejection of the Downing Street Declaration.

August–November

On 31 August the IRA declares 'a complete cessation of military operations'. Loyalist paramilitaries cease all operational hostilities on 13 October and declare that its permanence would depend on 'the continued cessation of all nationalist/republican violence'. The Dublin government fulfils its promise to convene the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation with Sinn Féin participation. The Alliance Party from Northern Ireland also takes part. The broadcasting ban is lifted on proscribed organizations including Sinn Féin. John Major, speaking in Belfast announces that exclusion orders on Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, would be lifted, all border roads would be reopened, and that exploratory talks between the British Government and Sinn Féin would begin before Christmas. In Dublin, the coalition government headed by Albert Reynolds collapses.

December

Talks are held between government officials and Sinn Féin representatives. President Clinton appoints Senator George Mitchell as special economic adviser on Ireland. A new coalition Government is formed in the Republic of Ireland and John Bruton, leader of Fine Gael, is elected Taoiseach.

1995

February

The document Frameworks for the Future is issued. Proposals include a devolved Northern Ireland Assembly and cross-border political and economic bodies. Unionists condemn the document but agree to participate in talks. US special envoy George Mitchell addresses the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

March

Sir Patrick Mayhew signals a shift in the government position on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons during a visit to Washington, where he says that republicans could only enter into substantive negotiations when they show a willingness to disarm by decommissioning some of their arms in advance of talks.

April

Mayhew invites UUP, DUP, SDLP and Alliance Party representatives to bilateral talks.

May–June

The first ministerial level talks are held with Sinn Féin (the first official meeting between SF and the British Government in 23 years), but the party withdraws from exploratory talks because of perceived unequal treatment.

July

Lee Clegg, a paratrooper with the British Army, is released from prison on the orders of Sir Patrick Mayhew, after serving four years of a life sentence. He had been convicted of murder after shooting at a stolen car and killing a passenger in 1990. The decision sparks serious rioting in nationalist areas of Northern Ireland.

August

Mayhew announces measures for the early release of paramilitary prisoners.

September

David Trimble is elected as leader of the UUP.

November

An Anglo-Irish communiqué announces an independent body chaired by George Mitchell in order to separate decommissioning issues from political negotiations – the ‘twin-track’ strategy.

1996

January

The Mitchell International Body on Decommissioning reports and establishes six principles for participants at all-party talks. British Prime Minister John Major adopts one of its other proposals for elections as a route to all-party talks.

February

The IRA ends its ceasefire with a bomb at an office block in the Docklands area of London, because of lack of progress in the all-party talks. The governments refuse to meet Sinn Féin until the IRA ceasefire is restored.

May–June

Elections to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue are held. Successful parties nominate representatives to the all-party negotiations. Sinn Féin attracts a record 15.5 per cent of the votes.

June

Party talks commence without Sinn Féin. The IRA explode a bomb in Manchester, England, which destroys a large part of the city centre and injures 200 people

July

The RUC prevent a march by Portadown Orangemen from returning from Drumcree Church via the Garvaghy Road (a nationalist area). After four days of protests and roadblocks by Loyalists across Northern Ireland, the parade is allowed to proceed. A car bomb believed to be the work of a new group called the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA) explodes in Enniskillen causing substantial damage.

1997

May–June

Following elections the new Labour government in the UK and new Fianna Fáil government in the Republic of Ireland provide fresh impetus to the political process. Tony Blair on a visit to Northern Ireland gives the go ahead for exploratory contacts between government officials and Sinn Féin. The British and Irish governments issue new proposals on decommissioning. Delegates from the parties elected to the Northern Ireland Forum travel to South Africa to learn about their transition from apartheid.

July

The Orange Order march in Drumcree, Portadown creates disturbances in nationalist areas. The IRA ceasefire is restored allowing Sinn Féin’s entry into the talks.

August

An International Commission under the chairmanship of the Canadian General John de Chastelain is established to oversee the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.

September

Sinn Féin signs up to the Mitchell Principles and enters multi-party talks. The United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) and DUP withdraw from the talks as a result.

December

INLA prisoners shoot and kill Billy Wright, leader of the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), within the Maze Prison. Loyalist prisoners vote to withdraw their support for the peace process.

1998

January

Mo Mowlam, the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, goes into the Maze Prison to meet UDA and Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) prisoners. This strategy works and the prisoners subsequently restate their support for the peace process. At a low point in the negotiations the two governments produce the Heads of Agreement paper to focus discussion on the outstanding

issues to be resolved. Following the revelation that the UFF had been involved in the killing of at least three Catholics, in the recent weeks, the British and Irish governments expel the UDP under the agreed procedures.

February

Sinn Féin is expelled from the multi-party talks because of an assessment by the RUC that the IRA had been involved in the recent killing of two men. Sinn Féin is told that it can re-enter the talks in two weeks if there were no further breaches of the IRA ceasefire. The UDP rejoins the multi-party talks.

March

Sinn Féin rejoins the multi-party talks. George Mitchell sets 9 April as the deadline for reaching an agreement between the parties.

April–June

The Belfast Agreement (also known as the Good Friday Agreement) is reached on 10 April. A referendum on the Agreement produces a seventy per cent 'yes' vote, although it is supported by just over fifty per cent of unionists. Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly are held.

August

An explosion in Omagh kills twenty-eight. The Real IRA, an anti-Agreement splinter group of the Provisional IRA, claims responsibility.

1999

January–July

Failure to reach agreement on decommissioning and the formation of the executive prevents implementation of the Agreement. Rosemary Nelson, a human rights lawyer, is killed by a car bomb in Lurgan, County Armagh. Prime Minister Tony Blair announces an 'absolute' deadline of 30 June 1999 for the formation of an executive and the devolution of power to the Assembly.

July

Former Northern Ireland talks chairman, Senator George Mitchell is invited to take part in a summit meeting on the peace process between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister.

August

The Northern Ireland Parades Commission decides to allow an Apprentice Boys march to go down the lower Ormeau Road, Belfast, despite nationalist condemnation. The decision leads to violence in Derry and Belfast.

September – November

Senator Mitchell chairs a review of the Belfast Agreement. The Patten Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland releases its recommendations for a radical overhaul of the police service. Senator George Mitchell returns to the United States after issuing a report on his 10 week-long review. He concludes that the basis now exists for devolution to occur and there is an understanding of the sequence for the implementation of the outstanding elements of the Agreement. The RUC is awarded the George Cross, Britain's highest civilian award for gallantry. The Council of the UUP decide by 480 votes to 349 to back the Mitchell Review. The Northern Ireland Assembly meets. The d'Hondt procedure for the appointment of ministers in a power-sharing executive is triggered and 10 ministers are appointed. (This is the first time in 25 years that Northern Ireland has a power-sharing Executive.) Both houses of the British parliament approve a devolution order under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 that allows for the transfer of power from Westminster to the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont.

December

On 3 December Direct Rule comes to an end as powers are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. At a meeting in Dublin the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Ministerial Council are formally established. At the same time the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 is replaced by the British-Irish Agreement. At 9.20am the Irish Constitution is amended and Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution, which laid claim to Northern Ireland are changed. At 3.00 pm the new Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly meets for the first time. Present at the meeting are representatives of the UUP, the SDLP, and Sinn Féin. The DUP refuses to attend. At 8.30 pm the IRA issues a statement indicating that it will appoint a representative who will meet with the Decommissioning Body chaired by General de Chastelain.

Profiles

Individuals

Gerry Adams



Born in 1948 in Catholic West Belfast, Adams came from a family with a strong republican tradition, his father having been imprisoned during the IRA campaign in the 1940s. After leaving school at seventeen, he worked as a barman until the beginning of the Troubles in 1969. His active involvement in republican politics goes back to the 1960s and he has been part of the so-called provisional wing of the movement ever since its split in 1970. He is alleged to have held senior positions in the IRA, although he has always denied membership. He was interned without trial in 1971 and released in July 1972 to take part in the delegation representing the IRA at a meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in London. During a second period in prison between 1973 and 1976, he and his fellow prisoners began to develop the new political strategy that was to characterize the movement from the 1980s. In 1978 Adams was elected vice-president of Sinn Féin, becoming president in 1983. In 1982, in the wake of the republican hunger strikes, he won a seat in the Northern Ireland Assembly for West Belfast. In 1983 (and subsequently) he was elected to the UK parliament but, unwilling to take the oath of allegiance to the Queen required of new members, he has never taken his seat. He became the most prominent spokesperson for the republican movement and, more than anyone else, has personified its political development. He has been the target of a number of violent loyalist attacks and in 1984 was shot and wounded. In spite of his increasing public profile and his status as an elected representative, he and other leaders of Sinn Féin were snubbed by foreign governments for many years. Adams' meeting with the Taoiseach in the week following the IRA ceasefire of 1994 and his being granted a visa to enter the United States were seen as key steps in the peace process.

John Hume



Source: Pacemaker Press

Born in Derry in 1937, Hume studied near Dublin and then returned home to teach French. He became active in the civil rights movement and was elected to the Northern Ireland Parliament in 1969. In 1970 he co-founded the SDLP and won a seat in the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1973. He was appointed Minister for Commerce in the short-lived power-sharing executive in 1974. Keenly aware of the benefits of cross-border co-operation he has advanced the role of economic development in the resolution of the conflict, using the EU as a model. He has been a member of the European parliament since the first elections in 1979 and was elected to the UK parliament in 1983. He was instrumental in developing the role of the Irish government as a protector of the interests of the minority in Northern Ireland as expressed in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. In the late 1980s his analysis led him, alone among constitutional politicians, to believe that Sinn Féin should be brought into the political process. He developed contacts with Sinn Féin, which eventually led to what has come to be known as the Hume-Adams dialogue. When it became public in 1993 he was heavily criticized, not least by members of his own party who felt he was giving credibility to Sinn Féin and increasing its electoral threat to the SDLP. Recently Hume's health has been uncertain and he may be forced to take less part in the detail of policy. In 1998 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, jointly with David Trimble, for his contribution to the peace process. He is generally regarded as one of the most far-sighted politicians in Northern Ireland and perhaps has had a more significant impact on the peace process than any other politician.

David Trimble



Source: Chris Rodwell

Born in 1945 in Bangor Trimble graduated in law from Queen's University in 1968 and remained there as a lecturer until 1993. He was a founder member of the Vanguard Unionist Party in 1973 and from 1985 was involved in the Ulster Clubs. Although both organizations were formed to challenge appeasement by mainstream unionism he supported the Vanguard leader's proposals for sharing power with nationalist parties in 1975. He later joined the UUP and used his legal skills behind the scenes until his election to the UK parliament as MP for Upper Bann in 1992. His constituency includes Drumcree, the notorious flashpoint of tensions over the routing of an Orange Order parade through a nationalist area. An attempt by the government to ban the parade in 1995 resulted in a challenge to the security forces by the Orange Order, which refused to accept the ruling. This posed a major threat to public order, but Trimble negotiated for the parade to proceed. This performance was assumed to have made him attractive particularly to hardline UUP members and so, despite being the party's newest MP, he was elected its leader in November 1996. Under his leadership the UUP entered multi-party talks. Although commentators initially found it difficult to assess his commitment to the process, he continued to participate in the talks following the entry of Sinn Féin, despite strong opposition from within his own party. The resulting Belfast Agreement provided for the establishment of new institutions in Northern Ireland. After an 18-month deadlock caused by lack of progress in decommissioning, David Trimble steered his party towards accepting participation in the new institutions on the understanding that decommissioning would eventually take place. In 1998 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, jointly with John Hume, for his contribution to the peace process.

Governments and inter-governmental organizations

British Government

Though policies regarding Northern Ireland have varied, the British government has persisted with proposals for devolving power to a local assembly, in which power is shared between nationalists and unionists. Successive British governments have attempted to maintain a neutral stance on relations with the political parties, but this aim has rarely been achieved and both communities have remained suspicious of their motivation. Unionists have been dissatisfied with British consultations with the Irish government since the 1980s and would like a more forceful law and order policy. Nationalists find the law and order policy discriminatory and in breach of human rights. They have seen the government's constitutional guarantee that the status of Northern Ireland will not change without the agreement of a majority of the population as a unionist veto on any proposals. The department that deals with Northern Ireland affairs is the Northern Ireland Office, headed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Recent holders of this office are Peter Brooke (1989–92) and Patrick Mayhew (1992–97), both for Conservative governments, and Marjorie (Mo) Mowlam (1997–99) and Peter Mandelson for the current Labour government.

Royal Irish Regiment

The RIR is Northern Ireland's regiment of the British Army. It incorporates the former Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), most of whose members were part-time and Protestant. The UDR was unacceptable to the nationalist population and the merger was an attempt to improve its image. Other British regiments also serve in Northern Ireland, although the British government has reduced the number dramatically in recent years.

Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)

The Northern Ireland police force has around 8,500 full-time officers, 3,000 reservists and 2,000 part-timers. Republicans consider it to be the armed wing of an illegitimate state. The Hunt Report of 1969 recommended reforms, including the disbanding of the part-time reserve B-Specials who were particularly trusted by unionists and particularly hated by nationalists. The government also adopted the recommendation that RUC officers should not carry weapons, but escalating violence led to a reversal of this policy. In the 1970s, security had been increasingly the role of the British Army, but in the 1980s primary responsibility for security was returned to the heavily armed RUC in an attempt to create a sense of normality. Between 1969 and 1994, 169 officers were killed in the Troubles. During the early 1980s

nationalist distrust was reinforced following allegations that the force was pursuing a shoot-to-kill policy and using informers. In its fight against terrorism the RUC has developed closer co-operation with the Garda Síochána (Irish police). Despite attempts to attract applications from both communities, fewer than ten per cent of RUC members are Catholics. As part of the peace process a review of the RUC was carried out by Chris Patten, a former minister in the Conservative government, to consider ways to make the police service more acceptable to all sections of the community. His proposals, which include a change of name to the Northern Ireland Police Service, have been opposed by many unionists who believe the RUC to be a professional force protecting the community. The RUC was awarded the George Cross for civilian bravery in November 1999.

European Union

As an organization for co-operation between the countries and governments of European states, the European Union supports efforts for peace in Northern Ireland financially and politically. Its promotion of a federal Europe of the regions, cross-border institutions and support for power-sharing increased unionist suspicion that the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic would disappear. However, the EU's economic support has contributed to significant economic development and thereby helped to create the conditions that led to the peace process. It created the £1 billion Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation as the peace process gained momentum. It also commissioned the Haagerup Report, which in 1984 recommended increased intergovernmental co-operation, but has not otherwise intervened in the resolution of the conflict apart from support for the British and Irish governments.

Irish Government

The Irish Constitution of 1937 contains articles which claim jurisdiction over the six counties of Northern Ireland, but the Irish government had no formal role in the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland until the Anglo-Irish Agreement provided structures for consultation in 1985. The constitutional claim had been a stumbling block for unionist relations with the Irish government and is replaced under the 1998 Belfast Agreement. The peace process has seen close co-operation and a number of joint statements and initiatives, from the Downing Street Joint Declaration in 1993 to the Heads of Agreement in 1998. Irish politicians have generally been more open to moves from republican and nationalist parties in the North than the British government. The Dáil Éireann is the lower house of the Irish Parliament whose members are elected by universal suffrage. Parties holding seats in 1999 include

Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Irish Labour Party, Progressive Democrats, Green Party and Sinn Féin. The party commanding a majority forms the government, but in recent times no party has held a clear majority. The upper house is called the Senate or Seanad. The department dealing with Northern Irish matters is the Department of Foreign Affairs but in recent times the Taoiseach (the Prime Minister) has been directly involved. The holders of this office in recent times have been Garret Fitzgerald of Fine Gael (1982–87), Charles Haughey (1987–92) and Albert Reynolds (1992–95), both of Fianna Fáil, John Bruton of Fine Gael (1995–97) and (from 1997) Bertie Ahern of Fianna Fáil.

United States of America

Successive US governments have taken an active interest in the Northern Ireland situation. The influence of the Irish lobby in the US has kept the issue high on the political agenda. President Clinton has followed the peace process closely and visited Northern Ireland in 1995. That same year he created controversy in Northern Ireland by granting Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin a visa to visit the US. The political parties in Northern Ireland are keen to maintain the goodwill of the US administration. Economic aid from the US represents another contribution to the search for peace in Northern Ireland. The chairman of the 1996–98 talks, George Mitchell, is a former US Senator.

Political parties and organizations

Alliance Party

Formed in 1970 as a moderate cross-community party, with mainly middle class support, the Alliance Party's share of the vote has remained small. In the 1997 general election, it polled eight per cent of the vote in Northern Ireland. This was enough to achieve representation in the Forum and the talks. The Alliance Party favours partnership government between the two communities and North–South links.

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

Formed in 1971 by Revd Ian Paisley who has led the party since then, the DUP is an uncompromising unionist party. As a party of protest it has been involved in numerous demonstrations which contributed to the escalation of street rioting and fighting. Its leader has always denounced the use of force, but he has been associated with rather shadowy organizations such as Ulster Resistance (some of whose members have been caught in the possession of illegal weapons) and the Third Force. The party has maintained the support of two diverse populations: respectable Protestant fundamentalists

(mainly from rural areas and small towns) and aggressive militant loyalists (mainly from working class areas of Belfast). However, since the late 1980s loyalists, particularly in paramilitary groups, have become increasingly disenchanted with Paisley's leadership. As a result he is no longer able to rely on the level of mass support he could once command and has been less able to disrupt the political process through street protest. The DUP's relations with the other main unionist party, the UUP, have varied between co-operation and open hostility as they compete for popular support. After securing representation in the Forum for Political Dialogue and talks, Paisley's party withdrew from the talks in the summer of 1997, protesting at Sinn Féin participation. In common with other unionist parties, it rejected the proposals in the Downing Street Declaration and the Frameworks for the Future document for undermining the union with Britain. It regards the Belfast Agreement as a betrayal by the British government and the UUP. Despite the DUP's opposition to the Belfast Agreement they have two members in the Executive formed in 1999.

Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP)

This small Marxist republican party was founded in 1974 by members of Official Sinn Féin who were dissatisfied by the lack of militancy in the main party. Ex-Westminster MP Bernadette McAliskey (née Devlin) was a founder member. The party has never been able to gain much popular support, probably because of its uncompromising left wing politics and the recurrent internal factional fighting in the INLA with which it is associated.

Orange Order

The Orange Order, formed in 1795 after sectarian conflict in County Armagh, is a quasi-political loyalist club modelled on the Freemasons. Its founders used the Protestant William of Orange as their figurehead because he replaced the Catholic King James as king of England, having defeated him at the Battle of the Boyne. The Order's rules restrict membership to Protestants, and there are about 80 – 100,000 members in Ireland, mostly male. Orangemen hold church services and engage in a series of annual parades, a minority of which are contested by residents in Catholic areas. Orange Order parades, characterized by bright banners and marching bands, are perhaps the most easily identifiable aspect of Protestant culture. They are colourful to supporters but menacing to their opponents. The Orange Order has a significant influence on the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP).

Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)

Seen as the political wing of the loyalist paramilitary group the UVF, the PUP was formed in 1979 and describes itself as a socialist party. After the loyalist ceasefires of October 1994, the PUP was invited, along with the UDP, to engage in dialogue with British government officials and subsequently won seats in the election to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue and the multi-party talks. In the 1997 General Election the PUP gained just three per cent of the vote in Northern Ireland. It has two members in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Sinn Féin

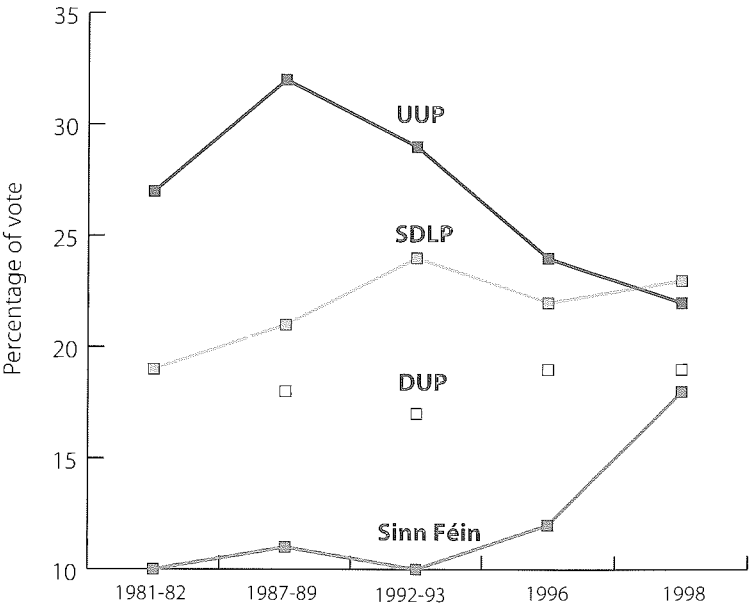
A republican political party organized on an all-Ireland basis, Sinn Féin (We Ourselves) is widely seen as the political wing of the IRA even though the party stresses that it is a separate body. Like the IRA, Sinn Féin split into separate official and provisional organizations in 1970 over the failure of the organization to respond to the situation in the North of Ireland. It is still often called Provisional Sinn Féin. It has supported the use of force as a necessary strategy to expel Britain from the Six Counties. In refusing to recognize the legitimacy of existing institutions for government in Northern Ireland and the Republic, Sinn Féin had a policy of abstention, but in the 1980s it adopted some changes to allow it to take seats in local councils and later in the Irish parliament. However, the policy still applies to the Westminster parliament. Sinn Féin boycotted the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue but took

part in the multi-party talks from 1997 after agreeing to the Mitchell Principles. Since the party has supported the peace process its vote has risen steadily from 11.3% in the 1989 local council elections to 16.9% in the 1997 local council elections. During the 1970s Sinn Féin favoured federal arrangements for Ireland's government. Now the preference is for a united Ireland with regional councils, although it is willing to work within the institutions established by the Belfast Agreement on the basis that they have an all-Ireland dimension.

Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)

The SDLP, the main constitutional and nationalist party, was formed in 1970. Traditionally pressing for power-sharing arrangements and an Irish dimension in the government of Northern Ireland, the party recognizes the need for consent for a united Ireland from the majority of voters in Northern Ireland. Party Leader John Hume was involved in exploratory talks with Sinn Féin which brought them into the political process. Though opposed to the proposals for an elected Forum, the SDLP contested elections and took part in all-party talks. Party member Seamus Mallon was elected Deputy First Minister in the 1998 Northern Ireland Assembly following the Belfast Agreement. With 24.1% of the vote in the 1997 general election the SDLP is the largest nationalist party and the second largest party in Northern Ireland. In the new government formed in November 1999 it took three ministerial posts.

Proportion of votes allocated to main parties in successive elections from 1981 to 1988



Source: national and local election results 1981-98



Source: Pacemaker Press

Ulster Democratic Party (UDP)

Originating from a loyalist think tank linked to the UDA paramilitary group, the UDP developed into a political party reflecting the thinking of the UDA. Since 1987 the UDP have supported power-sharing arrangements. After the loyalist ceasefires of October 1994 the UDP, along with the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), were invited to talks with officials of the British government. The UDP subsequently won representation in the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue and in the all-party talks. In 1997, UDA involvement in murder attacks forced the UDP to withdraw from talks in anticipation of a brief suspension. The party failed to gain a seat in the elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

The UUP, sometimes known as the Official Unionist Party (OUP), is the largest party in Northern Ireland. It governed Northern Ireland under the Stormont regime 1921–72. The UUP represents many shades of unionism and since the 1970s has been vulnerable to splits between more uncompromising and more flexible wings of the party. Policy has shifted between support for devolved

government and closer integration with the rest of the UK. In the Northern Ireland election for entry into talks, the UUP polled only 24.2% as the prospect of negotiations encouraged unionists to rely on more uncompromising candidates. In the 1997 General Election the party obtained 32.7% of the vote. Party leader David Trimble was elected First Minister of the new Northern Ireland Assembly. It has been the largest Northern Ireland Party at Westminster and currently has 9 MPs though the numbers have been gradually declining from 11 seats in 1983.

United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP)

This small unionist party, founded by lawyer Robert McCartney, favours closer integration of Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK. After election to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue with 3.7% of the vote, the UKUP was admitted to all-party talks but withdrew with the DUP in 1997 in response to government contact with Sinn Féin. Leading party members broke away in early 1999 to form the Northern Ireland Unionist Party (NIUP). It currently has one seat in Westminster and one seat in the Northern Ireland Assembly, both held by Robert McCartney.

Paramilitary organizations

Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC)

Paramilitary groups with a unionist or loyalist political stance (the UVF, UFF, UDA and Red Hand Commando) have played a significant role in the Troubles, using campaigns of terror against the nationalist community. Their rationale was that the nationalist community sheltered the republican paramilitaries, and they hoped to intimidate that community to withdraw cover and pressurize republicans to end their campaign. In general there is considerable rivalry and factional feuding amongst the various groupings, but in 1994 they co-operated through the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) to bring about a ceasefire which has largely been maintained. However, some members of the UVF broke away to form the Loyalist Volunteer Force in 1996 which continued attacks on Catholics until 1997.

Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)

A small republican paramilitary group established in 1975 by breakaway elements from the Official IRA, the INLA has suffered from factional feuding during the 1980s and 1990s. A splinter group, the Irish People's Liberation Organization (IPLO), was founded in 1987 and disbanded in 1992. The INLA observed an unofficial cessation of violence through the period of the IRA's first ceasefire (1994–96), but not during the second ceasefire until it finally made its own statement that the war was over. As with other paramilitary groups it has links with a political party, in this case the tiny Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP).

Irish Republican Army (IRA)

The IRA is the republican paramilitary group that is linked with the political party Sinn Féin. It is more accurately referred to as the Provisional IRA following a split in the republican movement in 1970. The rump organization, known as the Official IRA, declared a ceasefire in 1972 which was never rescinded. The Provisional IRA employed terrorist tactics with the aim of disrupting the British administration of Northern Ireland and of eventually forcing its withdrawal and the creation of a United Ireland. In 1994 the IRA declared a 'complete cessation of military operations', allowing Sinn Féin to participate in dialogue with the government. Membership is estimated at four hundred, with more than five thousand having passed through its ranks in the last twenty years. The IRA (along with Sinn Féin) was reluctant to decommission weapons until an executive government was established and a plan for demilitarization (the complete withdrawal of British troops) was drawn up, but following the establishment of the executive in November 1999 it appointed an interlocutor to the Decommissioning Commission.

Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF)

Formed in 1996 around dissident UVF members in the Portadown area, this small post-ceasefire loyalist paramilitary group actively engaged in violence and intimidation. LVF leader Billy Wright was assassinated in prison in 1997 by members of the INLA.

Republican splinter groups

Small groups have broken away from the mainstream republican movement since the first IRA ceasefire of 1994. Groups such as the Real IRA and Continuity IRA oppose the use of negotiation, compromise and entry into mainstream politics to achieve an Irish republic and engage in terrorist activities partly to disrupt the peace process. A bomb planted in Omagh by the Real IRA in August 1998, which killed twenty-eight people, led to a public outcry and the group has since been silent. Though they represent little military threat, actions by splinter groups can damage the peace process by raising tensions and there have been rumours that they have been linking up to co-ordinate a new campaign of violence against the Belfast Agreement.

Ulster Defence Association (UDA)

As a loyalist paramilitary group, the UDA sees its violence as defending Ulster against the threat from nationalists and the violence of republican paramilitary groups. The UDA was not declared illegal until 1992. The Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) is considered to be a more militant section within the group. The UDA took part in the loyalist ceasefire in 1994 that followed the IRA ceasefire by six weeks. In January 1997, UFF activists were implicated in a number of sectarian murders. Their combined membership is around six hundred. The political views of the UDA/UFF are represented by the UDP.

Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)

A loyalist paramilitary group, the UVF has an estimated 300–600 members. Its strategy is similar to the UDA in seeing its violence as defensive. The Red Hand Commando is an associated group. The UVF is part of the CLMC and has maintained a ceasefire since October 1994. The political views of the UVF are close to those of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), which has participated in the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue and multi-party talks and has two members elected in the Northern Ireland Assembly.



Source: Cogan-Holmes

Institutions from the peace process

Independent chairs

The UK and Irish governments and the political parties agreed that the talks process which began in 1996 should have independent chairs and George Mitchell, Hari Holkeri and John de Chastelain were appointed. From November 1995 to January 1996 they had been the members of the Independent Body on Decommissioning and they established at that time the confidence and respect of the parties. George Mitchell, a former US Senator for Maine and leader of the US Senate, was first involved in Northern Ireland as the President's special economic adviser on Ireland. Hari Holkeri was formerly prime minister of Finland and General John de Chastelain was formerly Chief of Staff of the Canadian Armed Forces. General de Chastelain has continued his involvement in the peace process, as chairman of the Independent Commission on Decommissioning, to oversee the decommissioning process. Senator Mitchell chaired the successful review of the Belfast Agreement from July to November 1999 after the parties could not agree on how to implement the Agreement.

Forum for Peace and Reconciliation 1994–1996

Established by the Irish Government after the IRA ceasefire to provide an opportunity to involve Sinn Féin in discussions with other political parties. It was also

attended by the other political parties in southern Ireland and the Alliance Party and SDLP from Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin was not willing to endorse the final report.

New Ireland Forum 1983–1984

Established by the Irish Government at the suggestion of John Hume to consider future governance options for the North of Ireland. Its participants were Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Irish Labour Party and the SDLP. It brought forward three options – united Ireland, federal system and joint authority between UK and Ireland – but all three were rejected by the UK government.

Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue 1996–1998

This temporary elected body, which first met in June 1996, was established by act of parliament. The complex electoral system ensured the representation of Northern Ireland's ten most popular parties on a regional and constituency basis. Parties gaining seats in the Forum and signing up to the Mitchell Principles were admitted to all-party talks. Mainly a 'talking shop' and with a majority of unionists, it was boycotted by Sinn Féin and after July 1996 the SDLP also withdrew in protest at the UK government's climb-down over Orange parades.

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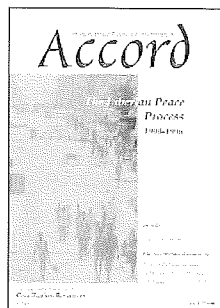
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<http://www.ireland.com/special/peace/>
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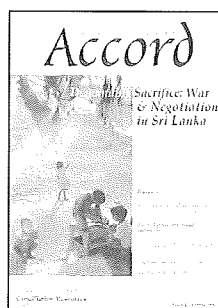
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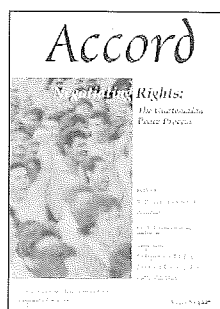
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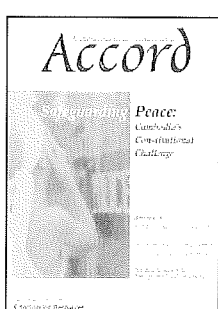
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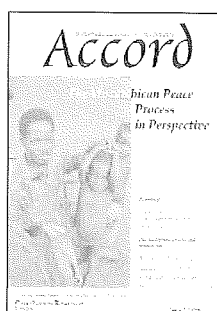
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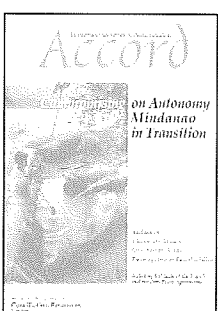
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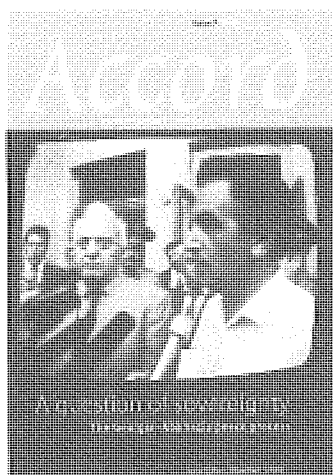
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A question of sovereignty: The Georgia-Abkhazia peace process

Issue 7 October 1999

Between the outbreak of war in August 1992 and the end of 1993 half the population of Abkhazia was displaced creating a humanitarian crisis in Georgia and the disputed territory of Abkhazia. Since then Georgia and Abkhazia have embarked upon a faltering peace process. In exploring the background and the issue at the heart of the conflict - the Abkhaz demand for sovereignty and Georgia's refusal to grant it - Accord 7 provides a unique insight into a political stalemate and points towards possible avenues out of the deadlock. Writers from both Georgia and Abkhazia analyse the obstacles and the opportunities of the negotiations process. International authors look critically at interventions from the United Nations and the Russian Federation and at civic peace initiatives. The conflict illustrates the challenges faced by divided communities in the search for peace when parties are unable to move beyond grievance and insecurity.

Russian language edition available from CR in 2000.

Next issue **Sierra Leone** Issue 9 June 2000

The Lomé Accord between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone formally brought to a halt more than eight years of a devastating civil war fought out by a complex cast of pro- and anti-government forces. While the July 1999 agreement ostensibly addressed the war's political and security issues, Sierra Leoneans, with limited support from the international community, face a daunting struggle to shore-up this fragile foundation for long-term peace.

Abbreviations

BIIGC	British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference
CIRA	Continuity Irish Republican Army
CLMC	Combined Loyalist Military Command
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
DFM	Deputy First Minister
EU	European Union
FM	First Minister
IICD	Independent International Commission on Decommissioning
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IPLO	Irish People's Liberation Organization
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRSP	Irish Republican Socialist Party
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
NI	Northern Ireland
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NIUP	Northern Ireland Unionist Party
OUP	Official Unionist Party (now the UUP)
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
RIR	Royal Irish Regiment
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
UK	United Kingdom
UKUP	United Kingdom Unionist Party
USA	United States of America
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party (formerly the OUP)
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

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