

*National Democratic
Institute for
International
Affairs*

NORTHERN IRELAND

BRIEFING PAPER



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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ACTIVITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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NDI's political party building program in Northern Ireland was designed on the premise that the success of the current peace negotiations will invariably lead to some devolution of power in the region. Regardless of the final peace settlement, political parties in Northern Ireland will eventually take a more active role in the territory's governance. NDI is assisting political party representatives to prepare for these new roles by offering practical, multipartisan training workshops on political organization and communication.

Program Objectives. NDI programs seek to assist party representatives in two specific ways. First, workshops and seminars provide opportunities for organizers of all political persuasions to meet and discuss the common problems of fostering and sustaining political parties in divided societies. These are unique opportunities for individuals from opposite sides of the political spectrum to forge professional relationships around common interests.

Secondly, the Institute brings into this setting political organizing experts from other countries to address political party development, elections and public service. These experts assist Northern Ireland's political activists to enhance specific organizational, management and communications skills. Survey research, internal party organization and communication, membership development, the role of women and youth, and voter contact are among the dozens of training topics offered by NDI programs. Experts from Chile, South Africa, the United States and the Netherlands have participated in this program.

Program Activities. From September 29 - October 1, NDI sponsored a seminar entitled "Northern Ireland: Practicing Modern Party Politics." The seminar was the first in a series of activities that will be conducted with political parties in Northern Ireland. This program involved: the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP); the Alliance Party; the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The program addressed such issues as internal party communication, planning and strategy, women in leadership and research. NDI plans to continue with this workshop series in 1995. Subsequent training programs will assist political parties in developing research capabilities and broadening citizen involvement in party structures.

Selection and Involvement of Political Parties. As the political situation in Northern Ireland evolves, NDI is making a concerted effort to expand participation in this program. The October conference involved only the four main constitutional parties because the ceasefire announcements of the IRA and loyalist paramilitaries preceded the conference by only a few weeks. Beginning in the Spring of 1995, NDI hopes to include the four main constitutional parties as well as parties that have recently ended campaigns of violence. These include the Sinn Fein, Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and Ulster Democratic Party (UDP).



A PRE-NEGOTIATION GUIDE TO THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND
Padraig O'Malley
September 1994

The declaration of a ceasefire by the Irish Republican Army on September 1, 1994 is potentially one of the most significant developments in Irish history since Ireland was partitioned in 1920. It represents an acknowledgement by the IRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein, that Ireland cannot be united by physical force, that the armed struggle of the last twenty five years to drive the British out of Northern Ireland has not worked, that the strategy of "the Long War," based on the premise that if the IRA persisted in its campaign of violence long enough, Britain would eventually become war-weary and throw in the towel, has failed; in short, that the central dogma of Republican theology - that only physical force would bring the British to their negotiating knees, which dates back to 1798 has been abandoned. However, whether the announcement will lead to a peaceful settlement of Europe's most enduring civil conflict is another matter.

First, the declaration is as important for what it does *not* say as for what it does say. The IRA's statement studiously avoids the use of the word "permanent" with regard to the ceasefire and does not renounce the use of violence - both of which were markers put down by the British and Irish governments as prerequisites for a seat at the negotiating table. A "complete cessation" of violence - the terminology used by the IRA - is open-ended. It leaves the door open for a return to the use of force sometime in the future if the IRA does not get what it wants at the negotiating table. While both governments can find ways to finesse the interpretations of the various phraseologies drifting in and out of the political cyberspace, the British Prime Minister, John Major, chose for a time to take a stand on the issue, making it clear that nothing less than an unambivalent declaration of a permanent ceasefire coupled with a renunciation of violence would open the way for negotiations between the British government and the IRA. It is doubtful whether the IRA will ever be in a position to make such a public declaration, and also doubtful whether Mr. Major will push the issue to the point where it derails the unfolding negotiation process. If his intention,

however, is to reassure nervous Unionists that his government has somehow not been taken in by the IRA, it may backfire badly. Already, hard-line Unionists are demanding such a public commitment to non-violence and are insisting that the IRA must surrender its caches of arms to the authorities. What all this means is that in the short-run at least, hard-line Unionists, and perhaps even their more moderate peers, are likely to boycott the negotiating process, even though the ceasefire has passed the ninety-day wait-and-see test the British insisted on to ensure that the IRA could make good on its promise to make the ceasefire hold.

Second, the IRA has not clarified its position regarding the question of consent. Both the British and Irish governments, in Article One of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, and again in the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, have acknowledged that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland will change only when a majority of the people there give their free and full consent to such a change, and both governments acknowledge that consent does not exist at the present time. In other words, *the question of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is not up for negotiation*, and whatever talks are envisioned will not have the issue of how to bring about the unity of Ireland on their agenda.

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

Accordingly, the scenes of celebration, which supporters of the Republican movement engaged in following the announcement of a ceasefire, were dangerously misplaced, insinuating as they did, that the IRA had "won" something and that "big" changes were in the offing: i.e., that Irish unity was not so far down the road. If, on the other hand, the IRA acknowledges and publicly accepts the principle of consent within its Northern framework, all kinds of arrangements for internal powersharing governance and relationships

between the North and the Republic of Ireland are possible.

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

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

For the moment, and perhaps for the indefinite future, hard-line Unionists, especially supporters of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, already equate the ceasefire with Machiavellian designs on the part of the British government to sell them out and sanction their absorption into what they regard as the theocratic state to their south.

Finally, and most problematic of all, is the question of what the Protestant paramilitary organizations - the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Freedom Fighters

(UFF), and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) - will do. They have given notice: if they construe the ceasefire as part of an elaborate plan to coerce Ulster into an all-Ireland state, they will become Ulster's avenging angels, taking the fight into the most tightly-knit Catholic strongholds. Should they make good on their threats and embark on a campaign of sectarian killing, the IRA will be hard put not to retaliate, unleashing in short order the dreadful and demonic forces that turn civil conflicts into civil wars. But more of this in the postscript.

BACKGROUND

Almost twenty five years have elapsed since the civil war in Northern Ireland first made world headlines, and though many things there have changed in the intervening years, some even for the better, the divisions between the Catholic and Protestant communities are deeper, wider, and more bitter, and seemingly more irresolvable than ever before.

The British Army continues to maintain a presence, an army of occupation to some, and to others a safeguard against civil war. The constitutional political parties have been either unwilling or unable to resolve their differences. Protestants continue to oppose vehemently anything that would weaken the province's ties to Britain, while Catholics continue to want some kind of all-Ireland state. Until very recently, the paramilitaries on both sides continued to traffic assiduously in the marketplace of death. A life is cheaper now, a killing on one side less an occasion for outrage than for casual retaliation. Like any other business, the business of murder has its own learning curve: Repetition enhances productivity.

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

cataclysm that has swept the world."

Are we talking Europe in the 1990s? Is this a Vaclav Havel reflecting on the tumultuous changes in Europe since the collapse of the Berlin Wall? No. This is Winston Churchill writing in 1922 about the seeming intractability of the Irish conflict.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROBLEM:

There are three interconnected relationships:

BETWEEN CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND

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

BETWEEN THE PEOPLES ON THE TWO ISLANDS.

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

The first relationship was ostensibly settled in 1920 when the Government of Ireland Act set up Northern Ireland as a political entity in its own right, and, in 1921 when the Anglo-Irish Treaty brought the Irish Free State into being. The political settlements of 1920 and 1921 were a failure. The resulting partition of Ireland reinforced cultural and political

separatism, making the development of parallel confessional states inevitable. This, in turn, has made the resolution of the other two problems more difficult, perhaps even impossible within existing nation-state frameworks.

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

Historically, Ireland has two political traditions.

ONE TRADITION IS CONSTITUTIONAL AND NON-VIOLENT.

THE OTHER TRADITION IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND VIOLENT.

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

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

Historically, Ireland has three cultures:

A GAELIC-CATHOLIC CULTURE.

AN ANGLO-PROTESTANT CULTURE.

A SCOTS-PRESBYTERIAN CULTURE.

The Presbyterian culture breaks down into two traditions:

THE TRADITION OF THE "OLD LIGHT."

THE TRADITION OF THE "NEW LIGHT."

The "New Light" puts the emphasis on individual freedom, religious tolerance, and equality for Catholics, while the "Old Light" emphasizes fundamentalism, uncompromising Calvinism, the Pope as anti-Christ, the Catholic Church as an abomination. "New Light" Presbyterians were drawn to the radical thinking of the French Revolution and to the United Irishmen, and for a time it appeared that an alliance between Catholics and Presbyterians might prove insurmountable.

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

Historically, Ireland has had two sets of starting points:

THE CATHOLIC STARTING POINT IS 1170.

THE PROTESTANT STARTING POINT IS 1607.

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

For the first 400 years, the English tried, with limited success, to conquer Ireland but the range of its rule was confined to a small area around Dublin with perhaps a thirty-mile radius. In the late eighteenth century, King Henry VIII tried more firmly to bring Ireland under the control of his Crown, primarily for strategic purposes (advances in technology had vastly increased the range and capability of long sailing ships, making England more vulnerable to attack through Ireland by her continental enemies). Subsequent attempts by his successors to secure the Crown's authority resulted in a major uprising led by the Ulster chieftain Hugh O'Neill. O'Neill's rebellion, however, collapsed with the defeat of the Irish chiefs at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601.

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

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

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

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

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

The events of 1688, when the native Catholics again rose up to support James II, the Catholic monarch who had been deposed from his throne by Parliament in favor of his

brother-in-law, the Protestant King William of Orange, affirmed the lessons of 1641. The forces of James with his French and Irish allies were decisively crushed by the armies of William at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and to this day, Protestants celebrate the anniversary of the battle with huge, triumphant marches throughout Northern Ireland.

For the better part of the next one hundred years, the Protestant Ascendancy ruled. It legislated the penal laws in 1695, laws that were designed to ensure a permanent Protestant hegemony. Catholics were banned from public office, the legal professions, and the army. They could not vote or own land or teach. The penal laws were the *apartheid* of their day, isolating Catholics in an inferior identity, causing the percentage of land owned by Catholics to fall steadily to 15-percent by 1703, and to just 7-percent by mid-century.

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

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

Throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, secret agrarian societies, which tenants used to control the fierce competition for land, began to proliferate. Competition for

land was particularly intense in Ulster, when several of the penal laws were repealed and Catholics were allowed to purchase land and hold leases on an equal footing with Protestants. Catholics became more attractive tenants to landlords since they were used to a lower standard of living and were prepared to pay higher rents. Protestants were not. Their secret societies turned their attention from Protestant landlords to Catholic tenants. The "have littles" fought the "have nots" along strictly sectarian lines.

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

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

Its leader, Theobald Wolfe Tone, attempted to forge an alliance with the Defenders, the most effective, well-organized, and widespread of the Catholic secret societies, and launch a national uprising with the help of the French. The uprising in 1798 was a dismal failure. Its significance, however, was the birth of the Irish republican separatist tradition, the tradition of physical force to which the Irish Republican Army (IRA) today sees itself as being the legitimate successor. The attempted uprising made the British aware of how vulnerable they were to attack launched through Ireland by their continental enemies. (The French nearly landed in Cobh, County Cork and actually landed in Killalla, County Mayo.) Accordingly, in 1800, the Act of Union, abolishing the Irish parliament, was passed. Britain

and Ireland were united in one kingdom with one parliament.

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

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

The nineteenth century was one in which the great mass constitutional movements for Emancipation, Repeal of the Union, Land Reform, Home Rule flourished. However, a parallel tradition of the unconstitutional, which held that only physical force could resolve Ireland's problems, also emerged. Uprisings in 1803, 1848, and 1867 were all easily put down. None of them enjoyed any kind of popular support nor did the majority of the people

subscribe to what they stood for. However, they fed the myths of unending rebellion, of ennobling failure. The failure of the people to respond to the message of Republicanism became subverted in time by the larger myth of heroic failure in the face of overwhelming English superiority. And the distinguishing characteristics of militant Republicanism began to emerge: elitism (to a chosen few fell the task of freeing Ireland; had the men of 1916 waited for an apathetic nation to catch up to them, there would have been no War of Independence); suspicion of politics and the democratic will; a belief in physical force to secure Ireland's independence; a hatred of England; and separatism. Moreover, the founding of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in 1858 would have an impact beyond its size. When the Irish Volunteers were founded in 1913 (nationalists were only following in the footsteps of the Unionists in forming their own "army"), it was rapidly infiltrated by the IRB, and when the Volunteers split in 1914, the IRB's control of the smaller Sinn Fein Volunteers became more pronounced. (The National Volunteers supported enlisting in the British army in support of World War I; Sinn Fein Volunteers opposed enlistment.)

The Easter Rising of 1916 was mythic. Planned in secret by a small cabal in the IRB, itself a small cabal in the Sinn Fein Volunteers, it was designed to fail, to be a blood sacrifice that would redeem the Irish nation and arouse it to action. Led by Patrick Pearse, a group of about 1,400 Volunteers took over the General Post Office (GPO) and several other strategically placed buildings in Dublin and proclaimed the establishment of a provisional Republic on behalf of the Irish people. Ill-prepared, ill-equipped, without any apparent plan of action, they were more like the occupants of a besieged garrison, ready to resist assault rather than representing the vanguard of a national uprising.

In less than a week of fighting, 220 civilians, 64 volunteers, and 134 British soldiers were killed. When Pearse surrendered, the Volunteers were jeered and spit upon by the people of Dublin as they were led away. But when the fifteen leaders of the uprising, including the seven signatories of the Proclamation, were summarily executed over a nine-day period between 3 May and 12 May, the public mood was transformed. Outrage at the Volunteers turned to outrage at the authorities, and those who had been executed became

martyr-heroes. "Every student of the Uprising, reluctantly or otherwise, has reached the conclusion that it was a cardinal event, a *cardo rerum*, a hinge or turning point of fortune, after which all recourse to Home Rule on the part of the English government became impossible," the historian George Dangerfield writes in *The Damnable Question*.

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

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

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

The IRA split over the treaty - some wanting to hold out for the Republic they had sought, others arguing that the treaty gave "the freedom to win the freedom," in Michael Collins's memorable phrase, and that the Boundary Commission established by the Treaty would redraw the border in such a way as to make Northern Ireland economically unviable. A bitter civil war followed in 1922 and 1923, pitting the Irish Free State army, largely made up of former members of the IRA, against their erstwhile comrades, before the "Irregulars" accepted that they could not prevail.

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

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

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

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

THE UNIONIST STATE

Even though they formed a permanent majority in the new Northern Ireland state, Protestants felt besieged, from within by the recalcitrant Catholic minority and from without by the new state to the South that laid claim in its constitution to Northern Ireland as part of its national territory. The Unionist government established a special paramilitary police force, the "B Specials," in 1920 to protect the state against the assaults of Republicans, and introduced a Special Powers Act in 1922 that gave the government draconian powers to

arrest and intern people without due process. The Unionists concentrated all power in their own hands, and being a permanent majority they never had to relinquish it or share it with Catholics.

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

Ever since the 1920s, Protestant response to partition has been reflexive: Behind every Catholic demand was the attempt to destroy the Northern Ireland state. Accordingly, when middle-class Catholics organized a civil-rights movement in the late 1960s, modelled, in large measure on the civil rights movement in the United States, demanding impartial police protection, an end to electoral abuses, equal employment opportunities, fair allocation of public housing, and the disbanding of the "B Specials," Protestants responded in the way they were conditioned to: with violence to thwart the perceived threat since any organized Catholic action was thought by many to be an act of subversion to bring about a united Ireland. When the police could no longer control the situation, the British government deployed British army troops on the streets of Northern Ireland in August 1969 to protect the Catholic community, and the beleaguered Catholic community received them with open arms.

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

members, six hundred of whom were believed to be in Belfast.

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

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

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

forces to breaking point.

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

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

BRITISH POLICY

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

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

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

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

Britain may or may not want Northern Ireland to remain in the U.K. It is inconceivable, however, that the U.K., given the practices of international law, would unilaterally "rid" itself of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of the people of the region, more especially so in the post-Cold War world where ethnic conflicts and disputes over national territory are resulting in violent upheavals across Europe.

The concept of the consent of a majority is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status. Simple majority consent cannot

deliver what it promises. It is regressive since it increases uncertainty about the future of Northern Ireland.

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

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

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

Northern Catholics, and the Irish Government. Says SDLP leader John Hume:

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

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

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

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

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

Northern Ireland to be part of Ireland's national territory.] (*The Irish Times*, 6/3/'93)

Since June 1974 British opinion has consistently come down on the side of British military withdrawal. There has also been a consistent consensus for ending the Union. Ulster Protestants may see themselves as British; the feeling, however, clearly isn't reciprocated by the mainland British. The lack of British concern with Northern Ireland is not surprising. It accounts for less than 3 percent of the UK's population and for just 17 of the 651 Members of the House of Commons and since Northern Ireland MPs are not members of Britain's Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democratic parties, they never become part of the government structure. The conflict in Ireland is seen as being the result of "Paddy" intransigence and bullheadedness. "Paddy," much to the chagrin of Northern Protestants, includes them, too.

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

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

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

THE DOUBLE MINORITY SYNDROME

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

There are two sets of perspectives:

THE PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE IS ESSENTIALLY RELIGIOUS.

THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE IS ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL.

Protestants fear Catholicism and absorption by what they see as a Catholic state on their frontier. However, there are distinct differences among Protestants regarding the question of allegiance. The Anglo-Protestants want above all else to remain part of the

U.K.; Scots-Presbyterians want above all else not to become part of an all-Ireland state.

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

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

There are two sets of identity, which often express themselves in terms of conflicting opposites.

THE CATHOLIC IDENTITY IS IRISH.

THE PROTESTANT IDENTITY IS BRITISH.

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

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