

REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT

Cumulative Impact Case Study

How Did Northern Ireland Move Toward Peace?

June 2007

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This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.

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THE BASIS OF THIS STUDY

What can be learned from a peace process that seems to have gone well?

As anyone who lives there can tell you, Northern Ireland has not magically achieved a perfectly just and durable peace. Not yet, certainly. Yet the situation has changed dramatically in recent years. There are some who are dissatisfied with the changes, finding them not to have gone far enough, or to have gone too far in the wrong direction. By any objective standard, however, a situation of prolonged, relatively low-level, violent conflict has become much more “normal.” Conflict continues, and is expressed in other ways, not all desirable, and not free of violence, but distinctly less lethal than was the case 20 or 30 years ago.

So, what can be learned from what happened? As they reflect on the changes, how do the people of Northern Ireland understand how the changes came about, and how to build a more peaceful and just society in future? How can people in other conflicts, who may look with some envy toward Northern Ireland, know what was really crucial in bringing about change, and what are the implications for their own societies?

This study did not intend to begin with specific programmes and assess them. Instead, this study begins with the result, and asks how that came about. It is not always easy, possible, or even desirable to attribute change to a single activity or individual. What emerged here was the mention of specific events or initiatives which made a difference, and very often the description of other, related activities that made things possible or built on them. This pattern of synergy or cumulative impact will be detailed in the section on Linkage, and was seen here most often as convergence between events, circumstances, initiatives, and key individuals, with change attributed to all of these together. Because our interest was, in the first instance, in the initiatives, this study asked for and will summarise answers to that question. The reflection continues, however, with questions about analysis, strategy, and connectedness, out of which come answers about collective and cumulative impact.

Those of us in Reflecting on Peace Practice want to understand which of the peace initiatives actually helped to move the situation toward peace. Conflict theory tells us, and we understand intuitively, that many factors contribute to bringing peace out of war, including stalemate, the belief that the war cannot be won, and the opening of space in which creative solutions are possible. In our interviews with a range of actors in Northern Ireland, circumstantial factors were often mentioned, and they must be taken seriously. Our intention, however, was to contribute particularly to the broader understanding of what was done **with the intention** to promote peace, and what was the impact of these different initiatives. For that reason, this study will focus almost entirely on the interviewees’ assessment of peace initiatives and what difference they made, rather than on circumstances. This is not the only story to tell about Northern Ireland, but it is the story we will try to tell here.

METHODOLOGY

The material for this study came from 29 interviews with a selected range of people active in different aspects of Northern Ireland society and its peace process. They included community leaders, civil servants, development workers, politicians, former prisoners, and a variety of workers in peace and community relations projects.

The interviews were informal. The authors had agreed on a broad set of starting questions and areas of interest, but the path varied considerably, depending on the experience and interests of the person interviewed. The ground-rules included “Chatham House rules,” meaning that nothing would be directly attributed to any speaker.

The process was, and was intended to be, a reflection for those interviewed as well as for the authors. People were extraordinarily willing to reflect in this way, and generous with their time. Many commented that they had themselves begun to think about these issues, and appreciated the opportunity to reflect in this structured way. All were interested in seeing the results. If this study has merit, it will be because of the vast experience and thoughtful reflections of those interviewed, and we are grateful to them.

In any study of this kind, there is the likelihood that the situation will change after the interviews and before publication of the report. We completed our interviews on 27 March, 2007, just as the parties were agreeing to postpone the deadline for “bringing up” the Executive and re-establishing devolved government which happened on 8th May 2007. By the time others read this document, events will have changed the understanding of some parts of the story being told here. For all we know, the situation may become dramatically better, or dramatically worse. At the time that these interviews were conducted, and at the time this report was written, this was how it all seemed.

RISKS / CONSTRAINTS

Among the many pitfalls in this kind of study, several merit particular mention. The authors did what seemed sensible to try to minimise these risks, but they remain factors.

- In contested situations, names and terminology often belong to one side only, and are rejected by others. It’s as basic as what to call the place that this is about. We have chosen to call it Northern Ireland, though others may call it the North of Ireland, Ulster, or the six counties. In this, as in many aspects, nothing is neutral, and nothing may be taken for granted.
- The sample of people interviewed is very likely to be skewed, according to who agrees to be interviewed, the authors’ sense of whose views are salient, etc.

- The presence of the authors, known to most of those interviewed, is likely to prompt interlocutors to mention initiatives or kinds of work with which they associate the authors. (The following section includes a paragraph about the authors.)
- If there is an expectation that this kind of research will reveal clear paths of attribution, connecting specific activities with clear, attributable impact on the conflict, this is very likely to produce disappointment.
- Perhaps most seriously, there is likely to be a tendency to take for granted all the things that happened before the last initiative pushed things over the top. Rather like a jigsaw puzzle, a peace process reflection risks over-emphasising the last piece, and taking for granted all the background work leading up to it.

THE AUTHORS

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Niall has been Director of Rural Community Network (NI) since its establishment in 1991. He previously worked with the Rural Action Project, an EU 2nd Poverty Programme. He was Researcher with the Community Development Review Group in the late 80's and a Community Development Officer with the Community Relations Commission from 1970 until 1974. He established and ran a wood craft business for 14 years and was involved in a voluntary capacity on a range of rural projects in Ardboe, Co. Tyrone where he was born and still lives. He was a board member of Combat Poverty Agency from 1996 to 1999 and a member of National Economic and Social Forum 1999-2003 in the Republic of Ireland. He was a member of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Stakeholder's Forum and a member of the Government Voluntary & Community Sector Forum, he was involved in the establishment of the Civic Forum for NI. He was a Commissioner on the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development from 2004-2007. He chaired the European Citizen's Panel in 2007.

Sue Williams

Sue lived in Northern Ireland from 1987 to 2006. Her work has included reconciliation and long-term building of contacts between political and armed groups in Uganda and Northern Ireland, and shorter involvements in many other countries. She was representative of Quaker Peace & Service (British and Irish Quakers) for 10 years, and worked also with Responding to Conflict and INCORE. A member of the original steering committee of Reflecting on Peace Practice since 1998, she has been involved in various aspects of the work of CDA.

ABSTRACT / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Northern Ireland has in recent years become less violent and contested, more peaceful and stable, though by no means perfectly peaceful and just. How did this happen, and what can be learned from it? Based on interviews with a wide range of actors in Northern Ireland --- political, paramilitary, civil society, and government figures --- this study summarises what people on the spot think brought about change.

Mapping the 73 answers to the question: “To what do you attribute the changes in Northern Ireland?” reveals that more than half were initiatives of civil society, and another quarter were government-initiated. They included all five areas of work identified as necessary to peace-building: political options, righting injustice and inequity, conflict transformation, cross-community dialogue, and managing diversity.

This study focuses particularly on the four initiatives which were cited twice as often as any other: The Hume-Adams talks; work with prisoners; the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and Fair Employment legislation. These four were initiated respectively by a NI politician, by civil society, by the two governments together, and by the British government. They led to structural and systemic change, as well as changes in attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours.

The authors conclude with a series of hypotheses which could be tested against reality, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, including:

- Different initiatives can have a cumulative effect when they provide assurance that all issues and grievances will be addressed.
- Civil society was important both because it provided a multiplicity of programmes, and because its low profile and engagement with armed paramilitary organisations provided crucial contacts.
- Actors at all levels had important contributions to make: grass-roots communities, NGOs, national and international organisations, paramilitaries, politicians, and local, national, and international governments.
- It was helpful to have a complex pattern of initiatives, including some ‘constructive redundancy.’
- Societies coming out of conflict have to do more than others, and government in particular has to meet higher standards than most in order to rebuild trust.
- Paradigm shifts, sea-changes in society’s perceptions, were associated with iconic events. The most effective peace programmes were able to consolidate and build on these paradigm shifts.
- Acts of courageous individuals, visionary leadership, and changes in policy and structure all contributed to the change in Northern Ireland.

SEQUENCE OF STUDY

This study will tell, very briefly, the story of the conflict in Northern Ireland and how it changed. It can be read in two ways. Those who know Northern Ireland well may want simply to read through the report as written. Those who are not so familiar with the situation are encouraged to read the brief summary by Professor John Darby from 2003 (see Appendix.)

The body of this report will reflect the story as seen by those interviewed and by the authors.

1. What was the problem?
2. What has changed?
 - a. What are the circumstantial reasons for change?
3. What initiatives have had an impact?
 - a. Who initiated them?
 - b. What activities, and with whom?
 - c. Were they based on strong analysis and/or strategy?
 - d. Were there conscious linkages or synergies?
 - e. Are there other characteristics or results of effective initiatives?
 - f. Were there missed opportunities?
4. Hypotheses arising from this study

I. THE PROBLEM, AS SEEN BY THOSE INTERVIEWED

All of those interviewed, really without exception, described the problem at least partly in terms of unfairness, grievance, or injustice experienced by nationalists since the partition of the state nearly a century ago. There were some who felt that the injustices had been exaggerated, that nationalists never accepted the Northern Ireland State, that many unionists had never benefited from the injustice, or that the righting of wrongs had gone too far and disadvantaged unionists now. But the result, which would have seemed remarkable twenty years ago, was acceptance that nationalist agitation had been provoked by real grievances not addressed. This may reflect the nature and involvement of the individuals selected to be interviewed; others would surely disagree. It is also likely that this is both a cause and an effect of the peace process. That is, this attitude has made the peace process possible, and has been possible because there is a peace process unfolding. This is not to say that all the root causes have been addressed, all injustices redressed, all inequalities abolished. If the society is able to accept that there is a legacy of inequity or exclusion, then it is in a position to redress these problems, but it will take a great deal of work to change the attitudes, structures, and behaviours in order to build a stable, peaceful society.

With such a widely-accepted current analysis of the injustices to nationalists, what was it about the unionist government, the public institutions and the British government which resulted in such a long resistance to the need to change, in the face of the crisis which arose at the end of the '60's? An understanding of this is a crucial part of the context. After nearly 50 years of investment in state-building to meet the expectations of unionists; British disinterest, even ignorance and distaste for the Irish problem; and an administration and institutions built on loyalty to the crown; there were no mechanisms to embrace change or to address equality and inclusion. Patterns of governance which seemed to unionists self-evidently necessary for the defence of the state constituted inbuilt mindsets which resisted change, and were experienced by nationalists as wilful injustice and exclusion. The question was: Could such a state be maintained and contemplate the possibility of including nationalists on an equal footing?

Ambivalence or resistance to change constituted the dominant paradigm of unionism and the institutions of the state at the time. Ambivalence and resistance to state initiatives constituted the dominant paradigm of nationalism. No preparation for change had taken place within the institutions or within the unionist constituency. Any possibility of change was described by Ian Paisley and others as the slippery slope to a United Ireland and the disappearance of unionists. Any change initiated by the state would be viewed with suspicion by the nationalist constituency, and seen as an attempt to trick it into accepting small reforms instead of a root-and-branch dismissal of partition. Neither constituency, then, was prepared or preparing for the kind of change that would finally make it possible to move beyond violent conflict.

Some interviewers held particular parties or groupings primarily responsible for the conflict: the British state as occupier, the existence of the 'failed statelet' a contested territory from the

start, the IRA as an authoritarian terrorist group, the security forces as an illegitimate armed force. Politicians are held in low esteem, and many people are cynical about the churches, as well.

Many interviews also identified aspects of the society which served as the base for ongoing, violent conflict:

- ❖ The society was characterised by differences of culture, religion, politics, and identity. In a prevailing dynamic of stereotyping, demonisation, and polarisation, people were easily mobilised to see themselves as constant opponents.
- ❖ The situation was seen as zero-sum: if we win, you lose, and conversely. This was also described as the ‘sectarian vortex’: what’s bad for you is good for us.
- ❖ Fear: the fear of extermination, of dominance, of losing everything if you couldn’t win everything. N.I. has often been described as a ‘dual minority’: unionists are a majority in N.I. and a minority in Ireland and in the UK; nationalists are in the majority in Ireland and the minority in N.I. and the UK. Both sides feel besieged and disadvantaged.
- ❖ There was never tolerance; instead, there was politeness. People did not discuss differences, and they did not tell each other the hard truths. Instead, they lived completely different realities.
- ❖ There were also speakers who described the dynamic of war as having a force of its own. It was not so difficult to unleash the demons, but very difficult to get them back into the bottle. All sides were caught up in the unfolding drama or logic of war, and ended up behaving in ways they might not otherwise have behaved.

In all of these respects, Northern Ireland, like any society experiencing serious conflict, has lost the luxury of taking for granted many things accepted in ‘normal’ societies. In such a situation, everything is contested. People have the sense of finding themselves in a situation they did not choose, but having to work terribly hard to change it into something close to what they want. From an outside perspective, the two broad groups are not very different from each other, so small differences become powerful ways to distinguish one group from the other. In fact, people have very different experiences, and they interpret them differently as well, in the light of the (one-sided) history and the sectarian perceptions inculcated during socialisation and education¹. For all these reasons, the people of Northern Ireland had very different ideas about the situation, whether and why there were problems, and how these needed to be rectified.

We are not attempting here to write the book about how and why Northern Ireland spiralled into The Troubles --- neither why such awful things happened, nor why they did not get even worse. Instead, our focus is on how the situation improved. Still, whether and how things improved will certainly reflect each individual’s starting analysis of what the problem was. It is important to keep in mind, in reading these reflections, that they are based on varying sets of definitions of the problems and their solutions.

¹ One initiative not mentioned in these interviews, yet considered crucial by many analysts, was the development of a shared history curriculum, to replace the separate history taught in the separate school systems.

II. WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Perhaps the best summary is: It's better than where we were, but still needs a lot of work to get right. It is not better for everyone, of course, but for the vast majority, and by any objective measure, the situation has improved. Many perceived the change as coming incredibly slowly, and not necessarily moving things in the right direction, yet better than being stuck in the old inevitabilities.

Broadly, people cited a dramatic decline in sectarian violence; structures which are less sectarian (in housing, employment, education); economic improvement; changes in what is acceptable in language and behaviour; more inclusion of nationalist culture; working relationships between politicians; changes in the Irish state and its politicians; improved relations between Britain and Ireland; more contact between people from different backgrounds; less fear and anxiety (though more evidence of the legacy of damage and trauma.) These changes are mostly in the realm of behavioural and structural change, change away from discrimination or attack and toward inclusion or negotiation. For many people, it was always structures and behaviours that constituted the problem, and needed to change --- UK sovereignty, for example, or discriminatory legislation, or armed attackers at large. Others saw more deep-seated attitudes as the root causes, and looked for reductions in hatred, aggression, and prejudice. In general, attitudes change more slowly, and tend to be seen in their manifestations in behaviours and structures. So, in most cases, interviewees cited objective or visible changes, though not only these.

Another category of change is conceptual, that is, people's understanding of the situation has changed, along with their awareness that other people conceptualise it differently from them. Some interlocutors cited this as the most important kind of change. As the discourse shifted from myths of martyrdom to what is the problem here, there was the possibility of a shared analysis, comprehending the different viewpoints, and working together to create options. Several interviewees noted that, now, the vision and rhetoric of a shared future is widely accepted.

As people reflected, they often mentioned iconic events which seemed to symbolise that change was underway. These seem particularly rich, since they reveal what was, as well as what is, and how both are perceived. As one respondent commented, the situation often felt very murky, yet certain events, whether positive or negative, seemed to illuminate the murkiness. A few iconic events follow, each requiring a little story.

- Bloody Sunday (1972) and Internment (1971²) were iconic moments in the downward spiral. Both changed everything overnight. On Bloody Sunday, paratroopers shot protesters in Derry, killing 14. It was suddenly clear that the security forces were prepared to shoot unarmed civilians during a street protest, so whose security forces were they? And Internment showed that the government was prepared to imprison without trial hundreds of people who had been active in the Republican movement, saying that they were an imminent threat on the streets. These events were a key to

polarisation. They radicalised many people, entrenched others in a law-and-order mindset, and separated them from each other dramatically.

- The Hunger Strikes (1981) began with disputes over whether politically-motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland would continue to have special status and clothing, and ended with 10 prisoners dead of hunger strike. This set of events posed huge questions for many people, and seemed to have further polarised the society. It also offered opportunities, as it turned out. The Republican movement decided to capitalise on it by having hunger strikers run for parliament (though Republicans had previously refused to engage in electoral politics, and decided now to run for office but refuse to take seats if elected.) This can be seen as the first step in the Republican strategy that would eventually lead to the ballot box rather than the armalite. Many cited this as the nadir, the worst time, yet also the point where strategies were formed which would eventually lead to constructive results.
- Belfast City Council, which was controlled until 1993 by unionists, had for many years displayed on the City Hall a banner saying: *Belfast Says No*, to indicate rejection of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and any other initiative involving the Republic of Ireland. This banner was, of course, contested, and its prominent placement seemed a stark reminder of the triumphalist behaviour of unionist politicians. The following year, as the tree in front of City Hall was lighted in preparation for the Christmas holidays, the banner was replaced by one which read: *Belfast Says Noel*. The impact of this was interesting. It was taken as an indicator of Belfast's new bi-partisan politics, and also showed a new confidence and sense of humour. As one respondent commented, people clearly were no longer worried about being exterminated. They were not denying the past, but putting it into perspective and building something on it that could be shared. Not everyone would agree with this reading of the event, of course, but the dominant discourse was definitely moving on.

There were also some very recent events.

- Ian Paisley shaking hands with Bertie Ahern, the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister), and Ian Paisley at the table with Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams --- both indicators of huge shifts in politics, and acceptance by both the DUP and Sinn Fein that they would govern together.
- In Dublin, after many years of dispute, a rugby match between Ireland and England at Croke Park³, and the playing of the English anthem, "God Save the Queen."

² See also section III.e.2, on Work with Prisoners

³ This would take a long story to un-pack. Sport has been one of the lines of fracture in this situation. Yet rugby is one of the sports organised on an all-Ireland basis (not separately, north and south.) Croke Park is owned by the Gaelic Athletic Association, which has for many years refused to allow non-Gaelic or 'English' sports to be played there. Having this match seem normal is seen as an indicator of how far things have progressed.

- The 2007 funeral of Davy Ervine, leader of the PUP and former prisoner, with the full spectrum of political representation in attendance.

These are some of the many ways in which people perceived the situation to have changed. As can clearly be seen, perceptions and events influence each other, in this case in the direction of positive change and acknowledgement of change.

II.a. WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGED THE SITUATION?

What causes situations to change? Many people's first reaction was to think of the march of history, changes in the world order, or internal factors. It is important to recognise that these factors are extremely important. Understanding them and how they may affect the situation and the parties, being able to consolidate the gains and limit the losses, and having a sense of when to do what, are all part of what is sometimes called timeliness. When we get it right, the things we do seem to flow with the tide. It may be the result of luck, or it may come from analysis and intuition.

Many such circumstances were mentioned. This section will describe and aggregate them.

- ❖ Changes over time in individuals: fatigue, exhaustion, ageing, diminishing testosterone. Many of the leaders of political parties and armed groups have been in leadership positions for 20, 30, even 40 years. They get tired. Society gets tired. People who thought the conflict would end by Christmas (of 1969, perhaps) see their children and even grandchildren becoming embroiled in what seems to be the same bottomless pit of conflict. Is this to be the legacy of a life lived under difficult circumstances? Many interviews reported that this kind of change within individuals had happened to many people in Northern Ireland, and set the scene for the consideration of compromise.
- ❖ Stalemate: neither side can win militarily or electorally. At various points, one side or another feels it still may win everything on its own terms, so it fights on, it enlarges the pool of allies and supporters, it seeks resources for one last push. Finally, both (or all) sides give up the dream of complete victory. As one actor in this conflict commented: *We had reached the point where we could not afford another defeat or even a victory. In a zero-sum game, every victory is the other's defeat, and makes them determined to get their own back.* In the peace process which gave rise to the Belfast Agreement, exhaustion led to a grudging recognition that each side needed to salvage what was most important to its constituency, both pragmatically and symbolically.
 - Republicans recognised that they were not getting what they wanted, and were not getting closer to it. They saw the need to change strategy.
 - The British government wanted to extricate itself from the conflict, but not if the result reflected badly on it or led to a future war.
 - To continue was costly for both / all sides, both monetarily and in human resources.
- ❖ Time: the passage of time in itself. Interviewees mentioned the 'ripening' or 'maturing' of the conflict, the march of history, the effect of demographics, and changes in the world order as contributing significantly to the changes in Northern Ireland. This included a variety of observations:

- Nationalism was changing in the rest of the world, with increasing globalisation and the development of the EU. Elsewhere, borders were opening up and becoming irrelevant. It seemed ridiculous to be fighting over this one.
- The European Union became a more significant political and economic force. From the standpoint of Northern Ireland, the EU offered the prospect of a political space, a kind of umbrella under which it was safe to explore alternative examples and possibilities of sovereignty, autonomy, identity, and allegiance. The EU also provided both funding perceived to be independent of the British and Irish governments, and a more universal set of standards against which to interpret events at home.
- Beginning with September 11, 2001, there was a worldwide aversion to terrorists, and people here wanted to distance themselves, show they were not terrorists.
- Elsewhere, colonialism and imperialism had given way to democracy. Britain had no longer a strategic interest, and the Irish economy was improving, but neither would yield to the force of arms.
- Changing economies with the sunset industries (shipbuilding, textiles, manufacturing and agriculture) in decline: this made for a declining “pie”, and particular decline in the very industries where nationalists were disadvantaged in employment prospects compared to unionists.
- The end of the Cold War and the development of the European Union had changed British and Irish perceptions of their interests. Both governments wanted it settled, and were determined that it not become an international conflict. Europe provided space for expansion, possibility, and the creation of alternatives.
- Could it have been done more quickly? As one interviewee commented: *The slowest key person is the speed you have to move at.*
- Prisoners, in particular, had time to think, to reflect, to read, to discuss, and to develop new ideas and relationships based on these ideas.
- There was a cumulative effect of small changes, here and in the world outside, a kind of seepage that added up, finally.

Two other factors were mentioned, the first by a few people, the second by many.

- ❖ Northern Ireland is not a poor part of the world. There were enough resources to persevere, to try things until we got it right. No one would starve. International sources would support any peace agreement.
- ❖ Leadership: There was not the kind of charismatic leadership that South Africa enjoyed. Still, outside figures like Mandela, King, and Gandhi had an impact on the situation. There was leadership across the generations in Republican families, and examples of leadership in many communities. And John Hume, in particular, stood out as a visionary.

One or another of these factors was cited by more than half of those interviewed. However, when asked: Would we have got to where we are now if no one had done anything intentional, and results had been left entirely to circumstances? No one expressed agreement. Every single respondent believed that change happened because people willed it, designed it,

did it, and persevered. They disagreed about which initiatives were most significant and strategic, but all thought that people must do something to move from war to peace.

We will now focus on what we can learn from peace initiatives, that is, from activities or programmes which consciously set out to address the conflict.

III. WHICH INITIATIVES CONTRIBUTED TO CHANGE?

This section will map the initiatives and people mentioned as having had a particular impact on the situation. Those most commonly mentioned will then be described in greater detail.

III.a. INITIATIVES WITH IMPACT

Those interviewed named 73 organisations, individuals, and initiatives as having contributed to the change in Northern Ireland. These varied from broad, long-term programmes and interventions (EU funding of peace programmes, for example, or community development work) to named individuals or positions (the Children’s Commissioner, for example, or various kinds of ombudsmen.) Of these, four were named twice as often as any others, and will be the focus of the section below. First, however, we will map the broad pattern of initiatives cited: Who did them, and what kind of thing did they do?

III.b. WHO INITIATED?

One could, of course, discuss this in a divisive way: To whom will we attribute success in the peace process? In the aftermath of each “peace moment,” there have been competing claims from various actors that they brought about peace in Northern Ireland. Locally, the rule of thumb is that anyone who claims to have done it, didn’t do it.

Beyond that, however, it may be useful to examine the effectiveness both of different kinds of activity (next section, below) and of different kinds or levels of actor. Is there significance, in terms of effectiveness, in who initiates an activity?

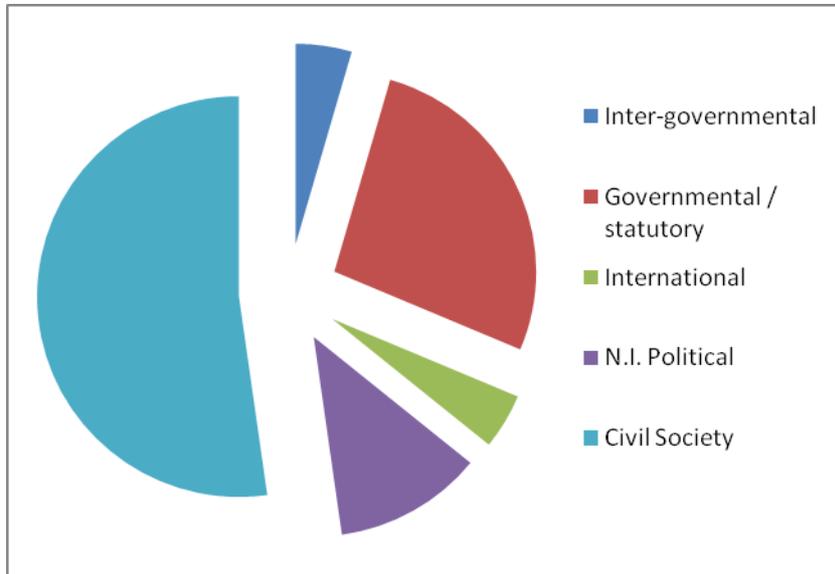
Of the activities named, nearly half were activities of civil society (including non-governmental organisations, church / religious organisations, academic or policy institutes, and the business sector.) This finding is interesting, given that many analysts and parties to the conflict dismiss civil society as having had little or no role in the peace process.

“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.”⁴

For those interviewed here, at least, more than half of the initiatives they named as contributing significantly to peace were initiated by civil society. And nearly all of these civil society initiatives were local, rather than international (though some were mixed.) As

⁴ McCartney, Clem, *Striking a Balance: The Northern Ireland Peace Process* (London, Conciliation Resources Accord series #8, p.47.) For the full text of McCartney’s article on the role of civil society, see Appendix.

can be seen on the chart below, the next largest group of activities mentioned was in the statutory or government sector (a quarter of the total,) with smaller numbers from politicians, international actors, and inter-governmental initiatives.



Please note that this chart analyses those activities which were mentioned during interviews. People in each of these sectors engaged in many more activities than were mentioned as having had particular impact. Over the 30+ years of “The Troubles,” there was a huge variety of activity⁵, only a small portion of which was cited by interviewees as having particularly contributed to changing the situation. The charts do not attempt to quantify all activities, but to draw as much learning as possible from those activities cited as having had particular impact on the situation.

What does seem to emerge from this mapping is that all sectors can contribute to peace. Initiatives from each of these sectors were seen to have impacted the situation. For many, the impact may have been temporary. The effect may have been swept away by the next atrocity or street riot, or contradicted by the next political debate. In the section on Linkage, we will consider the dilemma of how to consolidate and build on positive movement.

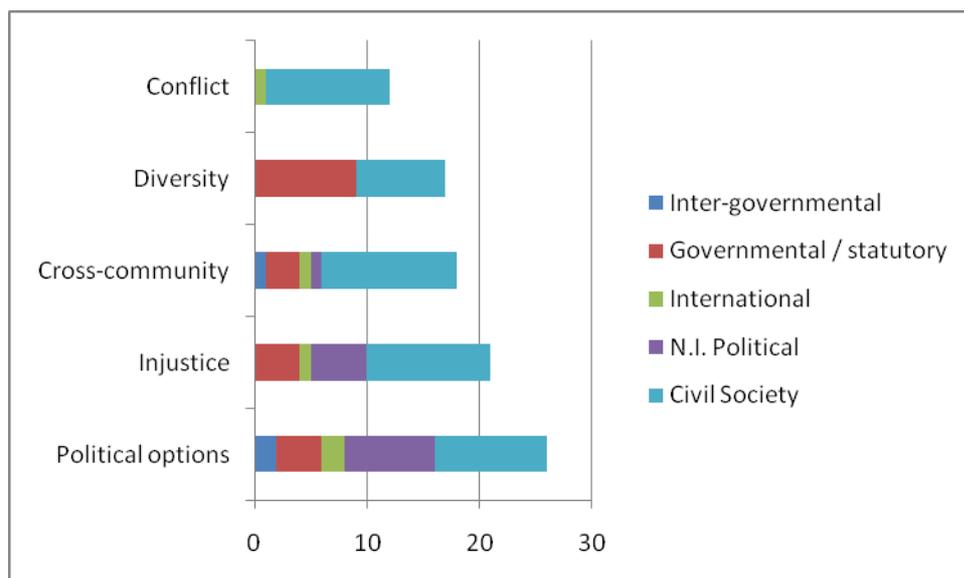
III.c. WHAT KINDS OF INITIATIVES?

These activities were then characterised using some of the terms of a widely-known typology of kinds of work to address socio-political conflict⁶. The indication across many conflicts is that divided societies will probably need to address all of these issues to move toward stable peace, though the order and method of tackling them may vary:

⁵ For example, there were some 26,000 applications for Peace II, a major European peace funding programme, of which half received some kind of grant.

⁶ Mari Fitzduff’s “Typology of Community Relations Work” (N.I. Community Relations Council, 1989.)

- Opening up new alternatives for political settlement, and involving more and more of the society in these discussions
- Righting past wrongs, and ensuring that mechanisms exist to prevent or to correct future injustices
- Dialogue or other cross-community experiences in tasks and goals of mutual benefit, in order to ensure that everyone has a stake in the shared society of the future
- Valuing and managing diversity fairly and equitably, and enshrining principles, structures and behaviours to guarantee this
- Channels of communication of grievance, and methods and mechanisms for resolving conflicts in future, to ensure that the cycle does not begin again.



This chart reveals that work on political options and cross-community activities were attributed to all sectors, and that civil society engaged in all the categories. Conflict-related work cited was done by civil society and international actors. Activities aimed at managing diversity were attributed to civil society and the governmental / statutory sector.

Again, it seems that civil society was a key actor in terms of its involvement in all the kinds of work. It would presumably have been in a good position to see connections between different areas of work, and to build on what was already happening. As we will see in the section on Linkage, however, this was not necessarily the case.

An invisible role of government, as well as international and inter-governmental actors, beyond engaging in their own initiatives, would have been to fund and encourage work by other actors. This did, indeed, occur on a grand scale. Civil society and local political initiatives both depended heavily on funding from either or both governments, as well as from the EU and the US and other governments. In the N.I. situation, funding was an important aspect of the perceived independence or partiality of particular organisations or activities. For this reason, international funding was often preferred. There was also a

particular emphasis on shifting funds contributed by Irish-Americans, which had historically tended to go to Republicans and often to arms, to get them to support community and cross-community initiatives by Republicans and others.

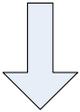
Among the activities mentioned by interviewees, a number involved more than one level of actor. There were various partnerships between politicians or local government and civil society, for example, which were seen as important change agents. There were also specific programmes, such as the placing of Community Relations Officers in each district council, which joined politics, government, and civil society, and had varying but sometimes significant impact on the ground.

III.d. MAPPING THE INTENDED CHANGE / IMPACT

On the following page appears a diagram used by Reflecting on Peace Practice to summarise the way analysis, strategy, and programme objectives are linked to each other. Later sections will deal with questions of analysis and strategy. At this moment, we will use part of the graphic to map the 73 initiatives that individuals mentioned as having had particular impact on the situation.

Broadly, activities are divided according to whether their targets are “more people” (large numbers of people, taken as individuals) or “key people” (those who are particularly influential or otherwise able to have more than individual impact.) There is also a distinction between various kinds and levels of intended impact. For example, the programme may aim to mobilise many people to be less prejudiced (top-left block: more people, individual change in attitude) or persuade members of government to work for legislation to establish an Ombudsman’s office (bottom-right block: key people, structural change.)

**CURRENT SITUATION:
Conflict Analysis
Key Driving Factors of Conflict and “Key People” or
Actor Analysis**

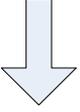


		MORE PEOPLE	KEY PEOPLE
INDIVIDUAL/ PERSONAL CHANGE	Healing/recovery Perceptions Attitudes Skills		
	Behavior Individual relationships		
SOCIO- POLITICAL CHANGE	Group behavior/ relationships Public opinion Social norms		
	Institutional change		
	Structural change		

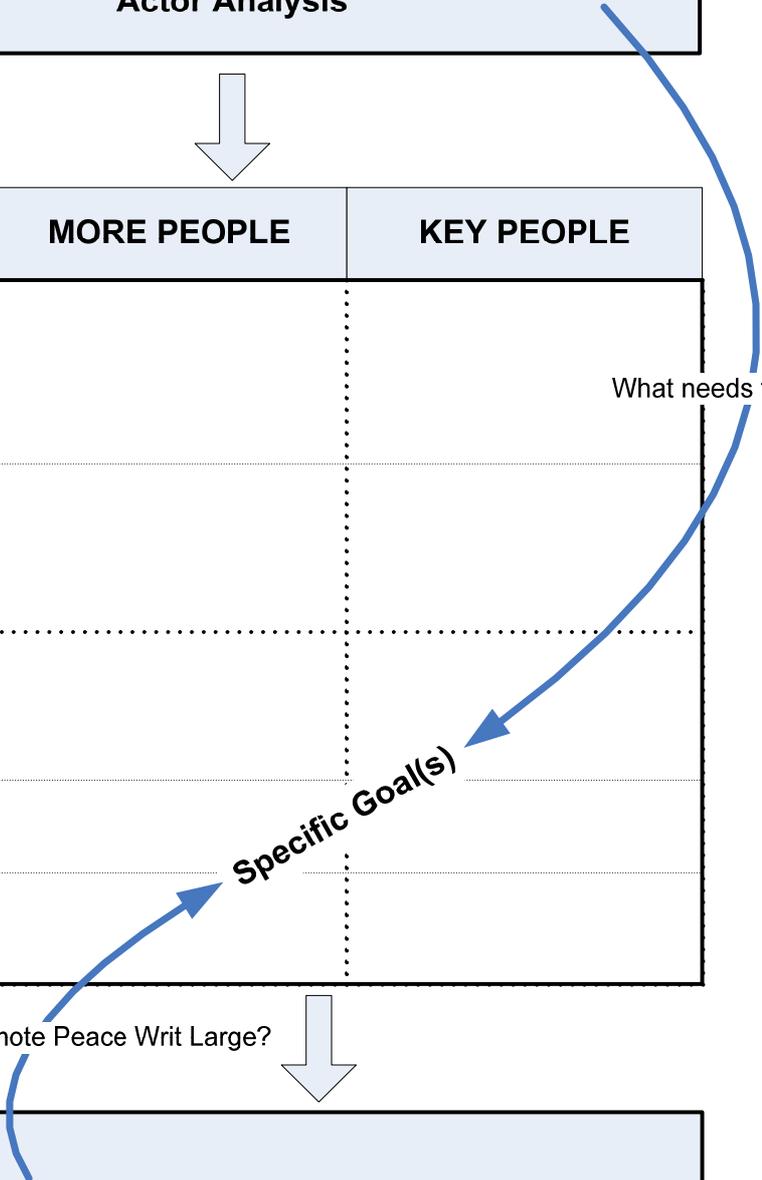
What needs to change?

Specific Goal(s)

How can we promote Peace Writ Large?



**PEACE WRIT LARGE
Vision of a desired future/Societal change**



With this understanding, the authors have categorised the initiatives / individuals named as having impact, many of which aimed at more than one block. The resulting map for Northern Ireland would look like this:

		MORE PEOPLE	KEY PEOPLE
INDIVIDUAL / PERSONAL CHANGE	Healing / recovery Perceptions Attitudes Skills	7	2
	Behaviour Individual relationships	10	10
SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE	Group behaviour / Relationships Public opinion Social norms	24	8
	Institutional change	7	13
	Structural change	10	11

These results are interesting primarily for the spread of target groups and change envisaged. Certainly, these combined maps portray a situation in which a lot of different people actually have been working in a variety of ways to change different aspects of their society. And that, over time, may well contribute to peace. In a contested situation, where groups of people experience marginalisation and exclusion, the mere fact of these different initiatives and objectives, with the underlying acknowledgement of grievance and willingness to address it, could in themselves begin to reduce the sense of exclusion and alienation.

It may be that one lesson to take from this peace process is that there is a cumulative impact, even from scattered initiatives, with different aims and audiences.

III.e. THE FOUR KEY INITIATIVES

Across all the interviews, a great many individuals, organisations, and initiatives were named as having contributed significantly to change in Northern Ireland. Four initiatives stood out. They were mentioned twice as often as any others, and were cited by people from a variety of backgrounds and experience:

1. The Hume-Adams talks, from 1988 to 1993;
2. Work with prisoners, from 1971 onward;
3. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985; and
4. Fair Employment legislation, from 1976 onward.

These are very different kinds of interventions, by different kinds of actors, with different target audiences, aiming at different kinds of change. Hume-Adams was initiated by politicians and aimed at including Republicans in political talks, in part as a way to change Republican behaviours. Work with prisoners was largely done by civil society, and aimed both at reforming treatment of prisoners and including prisoners' views in the political process. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was initiated by the British and Irish governments, consulting with politicians but not consulting either Unionists or Republicans, and aimed at changing the political landscape. These three focused broadly on what our analysis of the findings will call "political options," that is, they were intended to broaden the options for political settlement and / or include more of society in discussing political options. Fair Employment legislation was a government initiative aiming both to correct past injustices and to ensure fair treatment in future.

Out of all the hundreds, indeed thousands of initiatives taken to try to bring about peace in Northern Ireland, these four were by far the most commonly mentioned as having had particular impact on the situation. It is useful, therefore, to study them in more depth.

III.e.1. THE HUME-ADAMS TALKS

One of the relatively few initiatives mentioned which was attributable to Northern Ireland politicians, this set of talks was also one of the most commonly-named by interlocutors. The Hume-Adams talks were initiated by John Hume, then leader of the Social Democratic Labour Party and Member of Parliament. At a time when neither the British nor the Irish government was willing to talk with the IRA or its political wing, Sinn Fein, John Hume pursued his own agenda of drawing Republicans into political discussions.

"The development of a dialogue between the SDLP leader John Hume and Adams eventually led to closer co-operation between a coalition of pro-nationalist partners to pursue a united Ireland agenda. The coalition would include republicans, constitutional nationalists, the Irish government, the Irish Diaspora and the United States government. In unionist eyes, this was a 'pan-nationalist front'. A key actor in these developments was the SDLP party leader, John Hume, who had long favoured a peacemaking model in which all of the participants in the conflict would cease violence, enter into negotiations and agree to share power. The Hume-

Adams talks were unpopular, not least among SDLP supporters, but helped to assist the republican move towards a political approach.”⁷

This initiative was seen at the time, as well as upon reflection, as a very risky strategy. John Hume and the SDLP had succeeded in engaging the Irish government in the Northern Ireland situation on their own terms. They were the main ‘constitutional’ nationalist party, that is, the party appealing to Northerners who wanted a united Ireland to be achieved through constitutional methods rather than arms. In 1988, for example, Sinn Fein was able to run candidates in elections both north and south, but got less than 2% of the vote in the south, and much less than half the nationalist vote in the north.

John Hume exerted a special kind of visionary leadership in Northern Ireland. His concepts and visions, which often seemed far-fetched when first uttered, captured paradoxes and dilemmas that later turned out to encapsulate the way the situation needed to move, and tended to become the dominant discourse about the situation. In this initiative, Hume focused on his conviction that any peaceful settlement would require bringing Republicans into the process, while assuring Unionists that guns would be left out of the equation.

These talks were especially interesting because, as many respondents pointed out, they depended on contacts and relationships built discreetly by Catholic clergy, particularly the Redemptorists at Clonard Monastery in Belfast. Soon afterward, both the British and Irish governments were beginning to make confidential contact with Republicans, and some civil society groups began to prepare the ground for public acceptance of this necessary step. This was one of many examples of what we have come to call convergence: there was no master strategy being played out here, but many kinds of peace initiatives at different levels aimed strategically at compatible results, and a degree of synergy resulted.

In retrospect, SDLP supporters seem to have been justified in opposing this from a purely party standpoint, since it seems now to have cost them their political pre-eminence. In the most recent sets of elections, Sinn Fein defeated SDLP, and became the main nationalist party in the power-sharing executive and assembly. The experience of ‘working’ government, of making schools and hospitals and local government function, has transformed Sinn Fein and the more flexible of its leaders into a much less oppositional / confrontational force. The Hume-Adams talks were one of the decisive initiatives in bringing Republicans in from the cold.

III.e.2. WORK WITH PRISONERS

On 9 August, 1971, a series of raids led to the internment without trial of 342 people, all of them Catholics / Republicans. (By 1975, the total interned would be 1,982, of whom 1,874 were Catholic / Republican, and 107 Protestant / Loyalist.) This action was taken by the Northern Ireland Government of the time, Unionist-led, as it had always been. Those

⁷ John Darby, “Northern Ireland: The background to the Peace Process,” (2003, CAIN Web Service). For the full text, see Appendix.

detained were initially held in what had been prisoner-of-war camps at Long Kesh. They were held for varying lengths of time. By the end of 1975, the last of those interned had been either charged and tried or released. (By this time, the Northern Ireland Government had been prorogued by the British Parliament, government was by direct rule from Westminster, and Labour's Merlyn Rees was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.)

As soon as people were interned, civil society groups⁸ began visiting the camps to compile lists of who had been interned, make it possible for families to visit, and see to the needs of internees and visitors. Over the next 25 years, Northern Ireland would have an increasing prison population, including the highest percentage of life-sentence prisoners in the world. Like many aspects of life in Northern Ireland, the status of and attitudes toward prisoners were strongly contested. Many of the prisoners were seen by themselves, their families and supporters as political prisoners, both because their actions were politically-motivated and because they disputed the validity of the government. Those opposed to them saw them as criminals, most of them convicted of murder, attempted murder, or assault. These diametrically-opposed views were fuelled by the legacy of internment and reinforced by the number convicted only of belonging to an illegal organisation. The numbers of convicted prisoners varied, but in later years were broadly equal between Republicans and Loyalists.

Over time, the prisoner population took on specific roles and functions in the conflict. Most of the prisoners wished to continue to play a part in the political struggle, even while imprisoned. They had time to think and talk, and on both sides tended to become involved in and be seen as strategists for their respective movements. They also had time to talk to each other, and the leadership of some of the prisoner groups encouraged contact and discussion across the lines of division.

“Work with prisoners” developed over 25 years and more, and took many forms. Because many of the prisoners would not use services provided by the contested state, or those having any state funding, even services which would more normally be provided by social workers and statutory bodies tended in N.I. to be done by civil society. With such a high proportion of life-sentence prisoners (28% in 1989,) considerable attention was paid to sustaining family relationships and planning for release, without having a date to plan for. There were education schemes, training opportunities, and playrooms and toys for prisoners to play with their young children. All of this was important, crucial work, yet it was not this kind of initiative which was cited as having had such an impact on the peace process.

Those interviewed cited work with prisoners as having contributed to change primarily because of its political and transformative nature. In many interviews, prisoners were identified as the single most important constituency in contributing to the changed situation. This may be seen as reflecting both on the prisoners themselves, and on the political as well as the civil society organisations that supported them. Former prisoners interviewed stated clearly that the development of their distinctive role depended crucially on **both** the building of relationships of trust with members of civil society and the leadership taken by figures

⁸ In the first instance, those engaged with internees and prisoners were primarily from religious groups, notably Quakers and Catholic clergy.

within their own groups inside the prisons. This convergence led them into extensive dialogue with prisoners from other (opposing) armed groups, leading them to work together on common needs and to accept differences. Having built cross-community relationships while in prison, they continued and expanded them when released, and made it permissible for their own wider communities to engage with ‘the other.’ A few of the released prisoners are now politicians and community workers, while others work toward peace and reconciliation, within their own community or between the opposing groups.

Built on the base of long-term multi-faceted work with prisoners, the most strategic work took seriously the prisoners’ own determination to be a resource to their own communities, both inside the prison and after release. This category of initiatives with prisoners held the belief that their views needed to be included in the broad circle of political communication. Since neither government nor political figures were willing to be seen to do this, civil society actors kept up regular contact with prisoners and carried their views into the political domain. Like the Hume-Adams talks, this was a strategic effort to enlarge the dialogue by including hard-to-reach and marginalised groups.

From a comparative perspective, this kind of work is not a common feature of peace processes. There are, of course, demobilisation and reintegration activities in the late stages of nearly all conflicts where armed groups have been an important factor. Often, these are seen as buying off ex-combatants with tools, training, land, or employment to keep them from taking up the gun again. What was unusual about this in the Northern Ireland context is that it took place throughout the conflict, on quite a large scale, and explicitly included drawing on prisoners as political and strategic actors whose voices needed to be included. This kind of work attracted funding from a variety of local, European, and international sources, which made possible the continuity and large-scale impact. Over time, as serving prisoners were released, many continued to work for their political and justice agendas, and many worked in cross-community and reconciliation projects. Several became active politicians, and were elected to the new Northern Ireland Assembly. Interestingly, until the mass releases of prisoners following the Belfast Agreement, there was virtually no recidivism, that is, released life-sentence prisoners did not again engage in violence. Even now, the percentage of re-offence in this group is very low, by international standards.

In many situations, governments and “legitimate” politicians are reluctant to engage with armed groups, still less with serving prisoners, for fear of increasing their legitimacy or credibility. Interestingly, in Northern Ireland, at least, it seems to have been precisely by treating armed groups and prisoners as holding views worthy of consideration that these groups were drawn into participating and contributing to the peace process. In this respect, the civil society work with prisoners resonates with the Hume-Adams political talks. Both aimed to bring an energetic, confrontational force, which many perceived to be destructive, into constructive engagement with the rest of Northern Ireland society. This step was not easy for Republican prisoners or politicians, since it meant putting aside the long-held vision of direct movement to a united Ireland, and engaging instead in the reform rather than the overthrow of a state perceived as illegitimate. It was not easy for Unionist politicians, security forces, or ordinary people of Northern Ireland who had suffered at the hands of

Republicans, knowing that they would eventually have to accept them as legitimate political actors, despite the history. And it was not easy for Loyalists, seeing themselves as defenders of their community, seen by others as hapless gangsters, and in fact largely invisible to international audiences, who saw the conflict as between the IRA and the British Army or between Catholics and Protestants.

III.e.3. THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

In 1985, the British and Irish governments reached an agreement that signalled a change in strategy for both of them. Henceforth, rather than disputing each other's role in N.I. and reinforcing the polarisation between unionists and nationalists, they would work together toward an outcome acceptable to the people of the society. As John Darby notes, below, they managed to agree precisely by refusing to consult the people or politicians of Northern Ireland.

“Between 1974 and the ceasefires of 1994 there were seven attempts to reach a political and constitutional settlement.³ All of the initiatives were London-led and included an element of power-sharing between Catholics and Protestants. All foundered in the face of local opposition. In 1985, unable to secure a political settlement between majorities in both communities and unable to do more than simply contain paramilitary violence, the British government went over the heads of the people of Northern Ireland and reached an agreement with the Republic of Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Agreement gave the Irish government a consultative role in Northern Ireland's affairs. Although this fell short of joint authority, the Agreement institutionalised and made permanent the co-operation between the two governments on the management of the conflict. It was a recognition by the British government that it held limited legitimacy among the nationalist community and could not secure a lasting political settlement on its own. The Irish government was now in the position to act as a formal guarantor for Northern Ireland's nationalist community. In return, the Irish government recognised the existence of the State of Northern Ireland for the first time. For the first time it accepted the ‘principle of consent’, that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom while a majority there wished it. The Agreement also paved the way for increased security co-operation between the two governments and was an important precursor of the post-1994 peace process.”⁹

This agreement sparked unionist fury and opposition. The process was not what one would counsel for what was supposed to be a peace initiative: Ignore all the local parties to the conflict, and agree at a higher level. It was not possible, of course, to achieve a full peace agreement in this way. What this agreement did was to institute a vital structural change, which accepted the legitimate interest of both governments in the situation, and laid the groundwork for the acceptance of joint responsibility that would be a key feature of the solution. This was a first step toward allaying the fears of both sides that their identity was under threat, and that they might finally be forced into unwilling acceptance of a political identity they rejected and a sovereignty they refused. It also enshrined the principle of

⁹ John Darby, “Background to the Northern Ireland Peace Process.” (CAIN website, 2003.) For full text, see pp.5-13 of this document.

consent, that is, both governments agreed that the situation with respect to sovereignty would remain as it was (and as the majority of the population wanted it) until the people consented by voting to change it. These structural changes opened space for many changes that would follow, and forced the communities of Northern Ireland to look again at each other and work toward an agreement they could share.

In hindsight, this initiative is seen by the vast majority of those interviewed as a key event in the move toward eventual peace. Even those who disputed it at the time, whether they saw it as too nationalist, too unionist, or not participatory, now generally acknowledge that this was an important change. Local politicians could not have negotiated this or the ending of the Irish constitutional claim to Northern Ireland. Without this, they would have had difficulty arriving at the Belfast Agreement, whose process and provisions depended on an accepted role for Britain and Ireland and a degree of confidence that their conflicting identities would both be protected.

This initiative by the two governments had great impact at the structural level and therefore at the political-procedural level. It took many years for its effect to be acknowledged and accepted. Could it have been done differently, and thereby provoked less opposition? That is impossible to know. But, certainly, other initiatives over the next years would incorporate these changes, build on and consolidate them, and try to find leverage to take them to the next level. Among the initiatives mentioned here, the Hume-Adams talks built on this agreement to open the door to the negotiations that would lead to the Belfast Agreement.

III.e.4. FAIR EMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION

Unequal levels of employment (Catholics more than twice as likely to be unemployed) had been a driving factor of this conflict from the beginning, along with discrimination in housing and political gerrymandering. The fourth initiative cited as particularly effective was the broad area of Fair Employment, beginning with the Fair Employment Act of 1976 and having even more impact with the establishment of the Fair Employment Commission and Tribunal in 1989.

This was another structural change, affirming the experience of Reflecting on Peace Practice that the most effective initiatives are those that persevere until they bring systemic or structural change. It is a long process, to go from blatantly unfair employment practices to fair ones, and even longer to get to the point of a public perception of fairness. Words will not be enough to carry this through. This is particularly so when, as must be true in many cases, some of the unfairness is not conscious or intentional, but a result of an invisible bias toward people like oneself, people with whom one can feel comfortable, people whose background seems to indicate that they can do the job as the employer envisages it.

There had been real injustice in employment, and there had also been a pattern of division, not only in employment, but in education. Catholic schools did not teach some of the subjects required for engineering, for example, or did not call them by the same name, so engineering firms (a major industrial employment sector) tended to employ Protestants with educational qualifications they recognised and relatives already successfully at work in the

company. The achievement of Fair Employment was to sensitise both employers and job-seekers to both blatant and subtle forms of unfairness, and to encourage and support movement toward more fairness. Only government could introduce it, but the compliance of all levels of society was needed to implement it successfully, and it targeted all levels and sectors. Whatever their disagreements with particular elements of Fair Employment, businesses and trade unions worked it, civil society publicised it, and job-seekers used it. There are still disparities in employment in Northern Ireland, but there is also a fairly broad agreement that there is movement along a path toward fairness.

Interviewees talked of the importance of Fair Employment on all levels, structural, behavioural, and attitudinal. It became no longer acceptable to discriminate in employment, whether by policy or action, and it became normal to assume that employment should and could be fairly managed. This initiative addressed a key factor of the conflict, addressed it directly, comprehensively, and more or less impartially. By so doing, it acknowledged the legitimacy of a long-standing grievance, and offered channels to correct it. This is very nearly the definition of strategic effectiveness in peace practice.

III.e.5. ANALYSIS AND / OR STRATEGY

The project, Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP), found that peace workers believed that programme impact depended on doing good and frequent analysis, correctly identifying the key driving factors which determined whether the situation moved toward war or peace, and designing programmes based on the analysis in order to address one or more of these driving factors. Among the programmes in the RPP global study of 2003¹⁰, however, most did relatively little analysis, and it was not clear that programme strategies related to analysis.

In the N.I. case, people named those activities which they thought had had impact on the situation. Were these based on good analysis and / or careful strategy? In general, respondents thought not.

ANALYSIS: There was broad agreement among those interviewed that there was no shared analysis about the Northern Ireland situation, and no agreed strategy about how to change it. In such a divided society, this is not surprising. People felt that they knew their own situation, knew what was important, and simply set out to address that directly. Certainly, people do know their own situation very well. However, nearly everyone is influenced by the culture and experiences they have grown up with, so they are likely to 'know' one side of the story much better than another. In contested situations, 'knowing' is incomplete until it is tested and completed by the way others experience events. And, in a contested situation, many organisations draw like-minded people together, with relatively little input from those who disagree with the premises. What is, perhaps, surprising is the observation that there was no shared analysis or strategy even within broad sectors that seemed to agree, such as the peace activists. Indeed, there was not really a process to find out whether people's analyses or strategies agreed. People did lots of individual, informal analysis, and talked about the

¹⁰ Mary Anderson and Lara Olson, Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners (Cambridge, Mass., CDA, 2003.)

situation more or less incessantly, but there was a real lack of structured analysis and strategy¹¹.

Perhaps it is not an accident, though, that at least three of the four key initiatives involved a degree of shared analysis between people who disagreed.

Certainly, John Hume is noted for his continual analysis, both political and visionary. He is widely credited with changing the understanding of the conflict by insisting that it had three strands: within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the two islands. The Hume-Adams talks were initiated by John Hume, based, we are told, both on his own analysis and on considerable lobbying by Catholic clergy, whose understanding of the conflict was very different from Hume's. In Gerry Adams, he met one of the key strategists of a Republican movement devoted to strategy. The Hume-Adams talks revolved around building a shared analysis, though probably not a shared strategy.

The work with prisoners began without extensive analysis or far-reaching strategy, but these came with time, and were strongly influenced by the prisoners themselves. This kind of participatory analysis is itself a strategy for engaging the 'target audience' as actors in their own right, and this is essentially the effect achieved here. Over time, those elements of civil society who engaged with prisoners shifted their own strategy to a more enabling role, while some prisoners began to take the foreground by working together across the divide and by engaging with the victims' sector.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was a product of the British and Irish governments, with their very different analyses of the Northern Ireland situation. The process of developing the agreement forced them into a shared analysis and resulted in shared strategy, even as it excluded unionist views.

The Fair Employment legislation did not formally or necessarily involve shared analysis, though it is the product of strategic thinking and analysis by government, civil service and civil society.

STRATEGY: RPP found in its world-wide studies that, if programmes were not based on conscious analysis and strategy, they were likely to be based on "doing what we do." In other words, if an organisation had previously engaged in political dialogue or training of journalists, they tended to look for opportunities to do that, regardless of whether that activity addressed a driving factor of the conflict. This may have been true of many of the thousands of peace activities in N.I.

¹¹ A notable exception, at least for some portions of civil society, was the impact of Mari Fitzduff's Typology of Community Relations Work (see footnote 7). This had some impact on peace and human rights-oriented groups, causing them to see their work in a more strategic way, and to look consciously for gaps and combined impact. However, it did not seem to percolate beyond parts of this sector.

Those interviewed did not perceive that peace initiatives in N.I. were particularly strategic, even among the 73 cited as having had an impact. In general, they attributed the effects to perseverance, varied approaches, and a few key events.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was seen as strategic, both in structural change and in demonstrating that both governments had changed their own strategy. Even those who objected to it, saw that the political landscape had changed, and that every group would have to re-assess its own strategy accordingly. Perhaps it is precisely this change from business as usual that produces the impact on the situation.

When there is a dramatic change, strategic value can lie in the ability to consolidate and build on the change. This was seen by interviewees in the Hume-Adams talks, in the cease-fires of 1993-4, and in the lead-up to the Belfast Agreement. Respondents reported that there was strategic relationship-building by civil society, and pressure on the political, the religious and the community fronts to get politicians into pragmatic negotiations.

At the same time, several interlocutors upheld the importance of basing peace work on criteria other than immediate impact. They pointed to the long years and faithful endeavour of groups like Corrymeela, of sectors like community development and trade unions, of the slow growth of integrated education, and so many individuals who asked that their loved one's death not be avenged so that the cycle of violence might end. In their view, some of the impact really is cumulative, it comes with quiet determination over a long time by people whose names may never be known. The visible initiatives have impact against a backdrop changed by small acts of courage.

III.e.6. LINKAGE AND SYNERGY

Peace initiatives hope to have an impact on the conflict. As in all human endeavour, there is even the hope of having impact beyond what is contributed, getting out more than one puts in. This could be the case, if the impact is synergistic, or if the programme is able to connect to other initiatives and create a cumulative impact.

Interviewees responded that they saw relatively little evidence of linkage. Most programmes were not intentionally linked to initiatives at other levels, or other kinds of initiatives, in order to have a greater combined impact. There was a degree of what could be called conceptual linkage, in the sense that many programmes knew about other initiatives and structured their own activities to reinforce or extend what others were doing.

However, they did report a degree of synergy, or what some called convergence. It was not that programmes intentionally planned to link to or consolidate the gains of other initiatives. But there was a general pattern of convergence. Programmes had a combined impact, without necessarily planning for this strategically. Indeed, change was not attributed to the impact of a single programme, but to the convergence of many activities at many levels. For example: Fair Employment legislation, the public events of the Peace People, the beginnings of the programme to develop integrated education, the strategy of trade unions to confront discrimination in the workplace, some ecumenical activities by some churches, and changes

in British and Irish politics all combined to change people's political and social expectations in the direction of cross-community acceptance.

Some specific initiatives were seen as having built on others' gains. The Hume-Adams talks, in particular, depended on contacts made between clergy and republicans, including republican prisoners. The British and Irish governments both built on these talks to engage in their own secret contact with Republicans. Republican and Loyalists ceasefires added to the perception that it might soon be acceptable to engage paramilitaries in political discussions. There was no evidence that any of these combinations was orchestrated, and there was no sense of a master plan at work, yet there was a combined impact. With so many activities going on, it is perhaps inaccurate to speak as though output exceeded input overall. Yet the impact of some individual initiatives did indeed benefit from the combined and cumulative effect of so many attempts at different objectives over time, across sectors, and with different audiences.

There were also a number of initiatives mentioned, though not by so many people, as having laid groundwork that others were able to build on. We will not describe these in detail here, but will simply list them. However, each would merit much closer attention, and collectively they involved enormous amounts of work by a variety of committed people. The Northern Ireland peace process exhibits a pattern of perseverance, of modest but essential initiatives which did not succeed in the first instance, but allowed others to build on their experience and to take account of their shortcomings. There were no quick fixes.

- The Orange and the Green by Denis Barritt (1972), a pamphlet examining community relations and each side's distinct experience
- The Callaghan package of 1969, a collection of reforms proposed by the British government in response to the Civil Rights Association demands, which contained much of what would re-emerge in Sunningdale and the Good Friday Agreement
- The strategy for change produced by Chairman Maurice Hayes as the first annual report of the first Community Relations Commission in 1969
- Work with the unionist / loyalist community, including in the prisons, to help them envision the possibility of constructive change, and not just change as the penalty for advantages they had never enjoyed themselves
- Women's groups had for many years networked across the lines of division and worked to keep human issues (education, health, employment) on a political agenda dominated by sovereignty, the border, and constitutional issues
- The Women's Coalition, a political party drawing support from both communities, which had two members elected to the first NI Legislative Assembly, and which concentrated on improving how politics was done in NI
- The increasing diversity of the voluntary and community sector

- The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights reports on Community Relations, Community Development and Human Rights
- The Community Development Review Group, which published a review of 20 years of CD experience in Northern Ireland, leading to the inclusion of Community Development in the 1993 government Strategy for the Voluntary Sector and Community Development
- Rural Development in NI from 1990 was a new approach to rural areas influenced by reforms in the EU, and also linked to a policy of Targeting Social Need (TSN) to remove differentials between communities in NI
- BAN: In 1983, the Department of Education offered Belfast City Council an allocation of £100,000 per annum for three years to be spent on improving community relations, known as the BAN (Community Relations) programme.
- The Patten Commission (Independent Commission on Policing, set up in 1998) and previous work to increase Catholic recruitment and cultural sensitivity of the police and security forces

III.e.7. MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

It would be quite possible to do an equally comprehensive study of the missed opportunities in the N.I. conflict. Beginning with the Civil Rights campaign of the late '60s, which had violent opposition before it had a chance to develop its strategy, through political figures such as Terence O'Neill undermined by one side or another, through initiatives such as the Peace People which tried to do so much and overwhelmed itself, the history of The Troubles could probably be charted in missed opportunities.

Two areas of questioning took most of the focus of interviews. The first was the Good Friday Agreement / Belfast Agreement of 1998. This was seen by many as the replay of an earlier opportunity missed: it is sometimes called "Sunningdale¹² for slow learners." The consensus seems to be that the problem with Sunningdale was not what it tried to do, but when. It came too early, before most politicians and most of society were ready for it, probably before they had formed clear opinions on what the conflict was about, and certainly before they felt they had exhausted other options. A clear problem lay in trying to consolidate around the middle ground, while not drawing in those at the margins.

The Good Friday Agreement provokes mixed feelings from nearly all speakers. It is regarded by most as the best that could be achieved, complete with ambiguity so that different sides could interpret it differently. Some people feel seriously betrayed by it, either because of prisoner releases or the acceptance of the Northern Ireland entity. Most accept it as a series of pragmatic compromises. Two aspects seem particularly to denote opportunities missed. The first is that the Agreement enshrines sectarian politics, by identifying members of the

¹² Sunningdale was an attempt in 1974 to set up a power-sharing government, which was brought down by the Loyalists Workers' Strike. Many of its provisions resemble those of the Belfast Agreement.

Legislative Assembly as belonging to one community or the other, and requiring a 'sufficient consensus' of the two sides in order for action to be taken. The effect of this is to make it impossible to claim to draw support from both communities (a real difficulty for parties in the middle, whose support has declined ever since) and thus to make it more difficult to get beyond sectarian political parties. In addition, the effect of the Agreement has been to make the more extreme parties (Sinn Fein and DUP) the largest parties, and to entrust them with power-sharing government. Many people's reaction to this is sardonic acceptance: If we get through this, then we really will have peace.

One of the questions we had decided on in advance concerned missed opportunities. Was war the only way to change the situation? Responses to this were many and varied, and quite thoughtful. People spoke of the lack of an Irish tradition of non-violence, of the absence of leadership in a non-violent direction, of the moments when reason and protest failed and the gun ultimately succeeded. Overall, most people (but not all) felt that war was not inevitable, but that it would have taken much quicker righting of wrongs to avert it.

IV. CONCLUSIONS / HYPOTHESES

This section will draw together what emerges from this study, not really in the form of conclusions, but in the form of hypotheses. On the basis of the reflections of a number of key people within the situation, what can we learn which might benefit others, in other situations? Retrospective studies of other situations may provide an opportunity to test some of them.

CUMULATIVE CHANGE

In a deeply divided, conflicted society, change can come from the cumulative effect of work to address different issues in different ways at different levels. It appears that there may be a critical mass which must be reached, to provide the assurance that all issues will be addressed, though it is not necessary that every issue be solved in order to reach the point where peace replaces war. In particular, our hypothesis is that there must be examples of change in attitudes, behaviours, and structures.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society was an important actor in NI. There are two main reasons for this. The first is the sheer volume and variety of civil society initiatives, in all kinds of work with all kinds of audiences. It seems that there may have been a cumulative impact from this. The second is the role of some civil society actors in what was called 'strategic relationship-building.' It was civil society actors who had a low enough profile and sufficient credibility to make contact, build trust, and convene discussions across the divide with prisoners, paramilitaries, government ministers, community leaders, and civil servants¹³. This became important at a later stage, when key actors were testing whether it had become acceptable to entertain contact with previously-marginalised figures. At such moments, civil society actors generally acted as intermediaries, then got out of the way. Their low profile, which had been an asset earlier, was now a disadvantage. On the basis of this situation, at least, civil society may be in a position to establish contacts which will later prove useful (contacts which are often much more difficult to build at the moment that they can be used.) It might be interesting to test this hypothesis in other situations.

INITIATIVES AT ALL LEVELS

Another hypothesis is that actors at all levels had contributions to make to changing the situation. We have seen that the four key initiatives came from government, politicians, and civil society, respectively. Government had a key role in structural change, and in managing some of the key issues in a contested society: equity, tolerance, interdependence and 'parity of esteem'. Armed, non-state actors were key participants in political negotiations, and,

¹³ However, some of those interviewed thought that not enough was done with civil servants as a key constituency.

eventually, in governing. The international community had an ongoing and sometimes key role in funding, policy, and background pressure.

COMPLEXITY / DUPLICATION

Complexity is helpful. Northern Ireland society was itself becoming more complex, and even a bit more diverse, with the expansion of the EU, small but increasing numbers of asylum-seekers, greater access to higher education, more experience of travel or work abroad, and more and different ways of identifying oneself. All of these circumstances made difference somewhat more acceptable. At the same time, the peace initiatives reinforced this space for difference, through their extremely varied analyses and strategies, and through their very multiplicity. Almost from the inside out, aggrieved parties slowly began to believe that some initiatives might actually address their grievance, and in so doing became more likely to acknowledge the importance of addressing all grievances. At the same time, from the outside in, having varied initiatives networked into the rest of the world and reliant on outside funding led also to greater influence of international standards and examples from elsewhere. What had seemed to be a very simple, stark, and insoluble zero-sum situation became more complex, more nuanced, and thereby more soluble. Even without co-ordination, complexity and multiplicity offered hope.

At the same time, we are drawn to hypothesise that what appears to be duplication of efforts can actually be very useful indeed. In this situation, different agencies at the same or different levels often had similar objectives, or slightly different engagements with the same conflict actors. In the category of work with prisoners, for example, there were somewhat-overlapping initiatives by NIACRO, Quakers, Save the Children, Peace People, the Worker's Education Association, as well as prisoner groups associated with Sinn Fein, the IRA, the OIRA, UDA, and UVF. Clergy maintaining contact with prisoners included Father Denis Faul, Father Alex Reid, Rev. Roy Weir, Rev. Sam Burch, and Father Denis Bradley. This list furnished a range of intermediaries able to make contact between prisoners and others, when this was needed. And, since there was so much 'constructive redundancy,' when one programme failed, lost its funding or its credibility, or simply lost its way, there were others able to continue the work. Although it might seem like good strategy to avoid duplication, in contested situations, constructive redundancy offers subtle gradations as well as fail-safe duplication.

RE-BUILDING TRUST

Conflicted societies will have to do more than normal societies. Once trust is lost, rebuilding it will require meeting higher standards, consulting more, using less force, monitoring the behaviour of a variety of services, dividing resources equitably between opposing population groups, accepting pluralism, and addressing all manner of grievances. It is no accident that NI has acquired so many ombudsmen¹⁴ to provide extra-governmental channels for

¹⁴ There are at least 6: a general Ombudsman, plus others for police, military, prisoners, the legislative assembly, and judicial appointments.

investigation of grievance. There is less margin for error in a society coming out of violence. It seems to be necessary to deal with the past, the present, and the future all at the same time.

GOVERNMENT ROLE

Government and government services (e.g., security services, civil servants) will be held to a higher standard than others. This may not seem fair, but it does appear to be true. As we saw in NI, events such as Bloody Sunday and Internment caused the situation to spiral out of control very rapidly, because they were interpreted as government itself changing its treatment of civilians. In statistical terms, the security forces were responsible for about 11% of the killings in this conflict, while Republicans are held responsible for about 55% and Loyalists about 27%¹⁵. This was not a situation where government-sponsored death-squads were doing most of the killing. Nonetheless, any action attributable to the state which did not meet the very highest standards lent itself very easily to exploitation, and reinforced the accusation that the state was illegitimate and behaving improperly toward minority citizens.

PARADIGM SHIFTS

There are key, iconic events, when key actors exhibit the ability and the willingness to change dramatically. These iconic events may not change the situation by themselves, but have impact because they are indicators of paradigm shifts, major shifts in how the parties understand the situation and in what is considered normal or possible.

Positive examples from the NI context include the following:

- Peter Brooke's 1990 statement that the British government has no strategic interest in NI;
- The cease-fire statements of the IRA and the Combined Loyalist Command in 1993-4, the IRA because of the cease-fire itself, the Loyalist one because it included a statement of regret;
- The willingness of the Irish government to offer a referendum to change the constitutional provision laying claim to Northern Ireland, and the society's willingness to support it.
- Peter Hain's warning to NI politicians that devolution and power-sharing offered everything they needed, but that "the world would move on without politicians who miss the opportunity"¹⁶.
- Negative paradigm shifts are also important, in ratcheting the situation downward. Thus, Bloody Sunday and Internment were also iconic events, revealing a shift in the government's and security services' attitudes and behaviours. There were similar

¹⁵ Source: Malcolm Sutton (1994) 'An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969-1993', from CAIN website.

¹⁶ Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, speech at British-Irish Association conference, 10 September 2006, Oxford.

moments when others crossed lines of taboo, particularly as regards the treatment of ‘civilians’:

- The IRA taking families hostage in order to force civilians to drive bombs into army bases;
- Loyalists staging many weeks of protests which frightened small children on their walk to Holy Cross School;
- The Republican Action Force killing three people in the midst of a Gospel Hall church service.

A working hypothesis would be that those working in conflicted societies would do well to pay attention to such iconic events. They seem to be interpreted as setting new standards, for good or ill. It might be possible to use these events more strategically by structuring analysis and discussion around them and what they mean¹⁷, with the intention of influencing perceptions and behaviours constructively. Would it help, would it even be possible, to mobilise public opinion to resist declines in standards of acceptability, and to notice gestures which signal the intention to aspire to higher standards?

PREPARING THE GROUND

Another hypothesis would be that a vital step in Northern Ireland was preparing the ground. What shifted the situation was not so much specific, clever solutions, but the movement of key constituencies toward willingness to consider and discuss the possibility of any solution at all, short of total victory. There came a moment when people on opposite sides could each begin to imagine an agreed solution which was not worse than the actuality. We have discussed it with the (appropriate) metaphor of potato-growing. Heretofore, the society had sustained itself in parallel furrows, which never met, but which nourished the people. What was necessary was the harrow, to smooth out a space where the furrows could meet. The analogy breaks down, of course, but the space for shared analysis and new ideas nourished the change.

- Individuals and organisations did some preparatory analysis and strategy, but hypothetically would have been more effective if this had been more widely shared.
- Some initiatives did try to create and preserve space for shared analysis, but they had to operate with the long-standing tension between government, politicians, and the voluntary sector. Here, constructive linkage and mutual support might have had serious impact.
- There was an important role for empathy and curiosity as well as structured space in overcoming mutually-exclusive analyses. In a society where empathy did not seem to be valued, individual curiosity and the provision of safe space offered movement.

¹⁷ An example of what could be done is the work of War-Torn Societies / Interpeace, not in NI, but in many violent conflicts, facilitating the discussion of analysis and strategy by a mixed group of local people. (see: www.interpeace.org)

There seems to have been a kind of tacking between individual shifts, leadership, and structural change. Individual actions had the capacity to open an emotional or psychological space which permitted empathy and a degree of identification with the other. Thus, Joseph Parker's placing of crosses and Gordon Wilson's description of his daughter's death beside him at Enniskillen, both touched a human note about how humans treat each other. Leadership offered a vision of an alternative future that interrogated the existing reality. Peter Brooke's statement and John Hume's entering talks with Gerry Adams both raised the possibility that Britain, Ireland, and Northern Ireland might relate differently to each other. And structural reform showed how change could happen, incrementally, but really, as in the areas of employment, housing, and voting rights. In general, change seems to have proceeded in this order. Many individual actions accumulated. They did not seem to lead directly to examples of leadership, but served as the backdrop for it. And examples of leadership seem to have led fairly directly to specific structural changes.

This pattern, however, is likely to vary according to the emotional impact of the issue. Employment, although a strong motivating factor, is less emotive than integrated housing or education, and was able to depend more on rational argument and persuasion, that is, on public awareness-raising and advocacy. Changes in education took much more individual initiative, over a longer period of time, before they were accepted into the system as an option, and attitudes of most people may never change enough to permit integrated education as the standard. Similarly, with questions of identity, an important change occurred when the focus shifted away from persuading people to accept a particular identity, to whether both or all identities could be accommodated. This, in itself, may be an important lesson learned. Northern Ireland was able to develop processes and capacities not to decide between all contested pairs of options, but to recognise issues where citizens must be allowed to differ.

Gains were made by remarkable individual action, by visionary leadership, and by the application of basic principles of fairness to the structure of society. In the end, complexity, multiplicity, and perseverance paid off.

APPENDICES

Glossary, including descriptions of major groupings

Map of Ireland

Background reading:

John Darby, Background to the Northern Ireland Peace Process

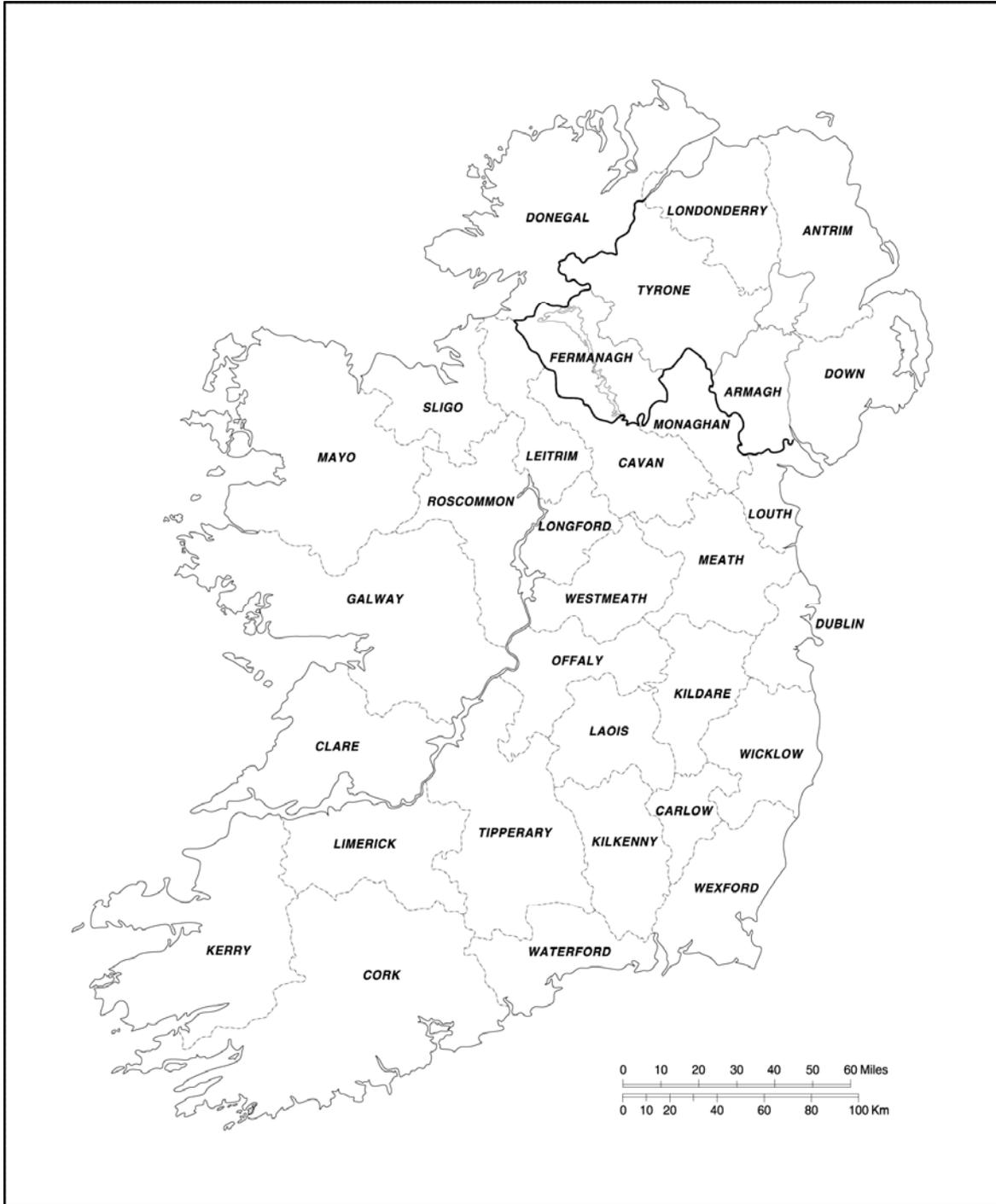
Clem McCartney, The Role of Civil Society

Bibliography

GLOSSARY: Names of groupings

Alliance Party	Political party drawing support from both communities; recent leaders John Alderdice, David Ford
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party, favouring retention of UK sovereignty; leader Rev. Ian Paisley
IRA	Irish Republican Army, illegal paramilitary force sanctioning violence in order to expel the British and achieve and united Ireland
Loyalist	Favouring UK sovereignty; usually willing to use violent methods to achieve this; sees self as defending community; see also, Unionist
Nationalist	Politically, favouring united Ireland; sometimes used interchangeably with Catholic; see also, Republican
Paramilitary	Illegal, armed groups in Northern Ireland with political agendas; includes groups on both sides, Loyalist (UDA, UVF, Red Hand Commando, etc.), and Republican (IRA, INLA, Continuity IRA, etc.)
Provos	Provisional IRA, used to distinguish it from Official IRA following the split in 1969; since 1972, when the OIRA declared a cease-fire; the Provisional IRA became generally known as the IRA, and is the group best known outside the country
Republican	Favouring united Ireland; usually willing to accept violent methods to achieve it; see also, Nationalist
SDLP	Social Democratic Labour Party, favouring united Ireland by constitutional means; largest nationalist party until recently; recent leaders John Hume, Mark Durkan
Sinn Féin	Political party favouring all-Ireland socialist republic; leader Gerry Adams; viewed as political wing of Irish Republican Army
Unionist	Politically, favouring UK sovereignty; sometimes used interchangeably with Protestant; see also, Loyalist
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party, favouring retention of UK sovereignty; during most of the years of the Troubles, the largest party in Northern Ireland; recent leaders David Trimble, Reg Empey

MAP OF IRELAND



CHARACTERISATION OF THOSE INTERVIEWED

The authors interviewed 29 people, who could be described in the following terms:

All but one were local.

16 Catholic, 13 Protestant

22 men, 7 women

AGES

30-40	3
40-50	7
50-60	10
60+	9

SECTORS

The following table characterises the sectors represented by those interviewed. Since some individuals were seen as representing more than one sector, the total is greater than 29.

Politicians	6
Civil service / government	5
Former prisoners / warders	3
Grassroots organisations	6
Intermediary ¹⁸ NGOs	5
Academics	3
Journalist	1
Business	3
Law	2

¹⁸ A distinction is made here between grass-roots level NGOs, which worked primarily within the community sector, and those NGOs which worked primarily with policy-makers.

**Northern Ireland: The background to the Peace Process,
by John Darby (2003)**

The following monograph has been contributed by John Darby, who was Founding Director of [INCORE](#) (INitiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity). The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the members of the CAIN Project. The CAIN Project would welcome other material which meets our [guidelines for contributions](#). *This monograph is copyright (© 2003) of John Darby and is included on the CAIN site by permission of the author. You may not edit, adapt, or redistribute changed versions of this for other than your personal use without the express written permission of the author. Redistribution for commercial purposes is not permitted.*

**Northern Ireland: The background to the Peace Process
by John Darby**

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What's the trouble anyway?

Northern Ireland's conflict is a tangle of interrelated questions. What should be the essential political context for the people of Northern Ireland? How can social and economic inequalities, especially in the field of employment, be remedied? How can the state accommodate religious and cultural differences relating to education, the Irish language and the broad spread of cultural expression? How can political disputes be conducted without resorting to violence? How can security and order be justly and inclusively administered in a deeply divided society?

It is not easy to weigh the relative importance of these questions. Northern Ireland's population is approximately 55% Protestant and 45% Catholic, and the two communities place their emphases on different elements of the problem. Protestants are more likely to

see the conflict in constitutional and security terms, and are primarily concerned about preserving the union with Britain and resisting the perceived threat of a united Ireland. Catholic views fall generally into two broad categories. Some perceive the issue as a nationalist struggle for self-determination, looking back to what they regard as the historical integrity of the island and the gerrymander of partition. Others approach it as a problem of corruption or unfair practices by successive Unionist governments between the 1920s and the 1970s which, if removed, would create a society in which both Catholics and Protestants could live peacefully together. These two categories are not discrete, and the balance between them has shifted back and forwards since the formation of the state.

Amid these interwoven perceptions, four issues have been particularly intractable: politics, violence, community relations, and inequality. The political dispute about the existence and nature of Northern Ireland itself lies at the core of the conflict and ensured that the constitutional issue dominated elections, and that political allegiances remained petrified. The problem of endemic violence is the manifestation of the Northern Ireland problem best known internationally. No generation since the sixteenth century Plantation of Ulster has escaped it, and it went on without interruption for twenty-five years before the 1994 ceasefires. The community relations problem, if less easily quantified, is equally persistent, with high levels of demographic and social segregation and a perception among many Catholics and Protestants that they belonged to distinct groups. Inequality added an additional layer of grievance for Catholics; on many indicators of socio-economic disadvantage – employment, educational and health care provision - Catholics experienced higher levels of need or disadvantage than Protestants. Yet majorities in both groups tend to believe that government gives preferential treatment to the other group.

The Historical Background

Two general points about the historical origins of the conflict are worth making. The first is that the proximity of Britain and Ireland has guaranteed a long history of interaction and linkage. In addition to the military and political history of conquest and resistance, there were exchanges, many of them unequal, of people, cultures, goods, technologies, ideas and language.

The second general point relates to the peculiar nature of the settlement of the northern areas of the island of Ireland by English and Scottish settlers from the sixteenth century onwards. The 'Plantation of Ulster' attracted settlers from all classes, many of them smallholders or artisans. This pattern of settlement meant that the Protestant settlers lived in close proximity to the Catholic Irish who were cleared to the geographical margins but not exterminated. Within several generations the broad outlines of the conflict had been established. The territory contained two groups who differed in political allegiance, religious practice and cultural values. One group believed that their land had been stolen, while the other was in a constant state of apprehension. Northern Ireland still suffers from the problems of rival ethnic groups living cheek by jowl and in suspicion of each other.

The island was partitioned in 1921, with the southern twenty-six counties gaining independence from Britain. The other six north-eastern counties remained part of the United Kingdom. The new state of Northern Ireland had an in-built Protestant majority (roughly 65

per cent Protestant and 35 per cent Catholic at the time of partition) and acquired its own parliament and considerable autonomy within the United Kingdom. Sovereignty was retained in Westminster, as was responsibility for defence, foreign policy and other UK concerns. London was content to leave most Northern Ireland matters in the hands of the new Stormont administration. From its inception until the return of Direct Rule in 1972, political tension was constant in Northern Ireland, only varying in intensity. Sectarian strains were never far from the surface. A chronically insecure Protestant majority, an alienated Catholic minority, electoral malpractice, ethnic bias in the distribution of housing and welfare services, and a declining economy meant that the state could never command full political legitimacy. Nevertheless few observers could see the meltdown around the corner.¹

The Troubles

During the 1960s a civil rights movement began to campaign for a more equitable access to political power, social provision and cultural recognition. It met with resistance and divisions within unionism. Politics spilled onto the streets. In 1969 the London government deployed the British army in an attempt to restore order. Initially many in the Catholic population saw the army as their protectors from the Northern Ireland state and a repressive majority population. For more militant nationalists, however, the introduction of the army restored the traditional republican symbol of oppression - British troops on Irish soil. The campaign for internal reform of the Northern Ireland state was subordinated to the need to remove the British presence and unify with the rest of Ireland. A rejuvenated militant republicanism, in the form of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA/IRA), emerged from the increasingly politicised and assertive Catholic minority. This in turn prompted violence from Protestant loyalist militants. By early 1970 the Provisional IRA had started its campaign of violence against the army. By 1972 it was clear that the local Northern Ireland government, having introduced internment in 1971 as a last attempt to impose control, was unable to handle the situation. Invoking its powers under the Government of Ireland Act, the London parliament abolished the Northern Ireland government in March 1972. Northern Ireland was to be governed from London, with a British Secretary of State responsible for Northern Ireland affairs.

The pattern of violence changed throughout what were colloquially called the Troubles. The inter-communal rioting that characterised the late 1960s was gradually, although not completely, replaced by a triangular low intensity conflict. The protagonists were the British state (represented by its army, locally recruited regiments and a militarised police force), republican paramilitaries (mainly the PIRA, but including smaller violent groups like the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)) and loyalist paramilitaries (the Ulster Defence Association/Ulster Freedom Fighters (UDA/UFF) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)). State responses to the violence sometimes contravened basic human rights. By the mid-1990s, more than 3500 people had been killed, a significant number given Northern Ireland's small area and 1.6 million population.²

Other, more indirect, impacts of the violence were less easily quantified. They included the deepening of community divisions, the perpetuation of old grievances and the creation of new ones. The economy, struggling to keep pace with the restructuring of the British economy in the 1970s and 1980s, was further battered by a backdrop of political violence.

Above all the Troubles were a human crisis with thousands of individual, family and community tragedies.

Between 1974 and the ceasefires of 1994 there were seven attempts to reach a political and constitutional settlement.³ All of the initiatives were London-led and included an element of power-sharing between Catholics and Protestants. All foundered in the face of local opposition. In 1985, unable to secure a political settlement between majorities in both communities and unable to do more than simply contain paramilitary violence, the British government went over the heads of the people of Northern Ireland and reached an agreement with the Republic of Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Agreement gave the Irish government a consultative role in Northern Ireland's affairs. Although this fell short of joint authority, the Agreement institutionalised and made permanent the co-operation between the two governments on the management of the conflict. It was a recognition by the British government that it held limited legitimacy among the nationalist community and could not secure a lasting political settlement on its own. The Irish government was now in the position to act as a formal guarantor for Northern Ireland's nationalist community. In return, the Irish government recognised the existence of the State of Northern Ireland for the first time. For the first time it accepted the 'principle of consent', that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom while a majority there wished it. The Agreement also paved the way for increased security co-operation between the two governments and was an important precursor of the post-1994 peace process.

Building Blocks for the Peace Process

A number of pieces fell into place during the late 1980s and early 1990s to make a peace process possible. Through the Anglo-Irish Agreement the British government recognised the validity of both the nationalist and unionist traditions. New legislation was introduced to deal with religious imbalances in education and employment.⁴ This period also saw further development of civil society in Northern Ireland, a development that was vital for creating the conditions for wider political change over the subsequent decade. South of the Irish border, the retreat from the demand for Irish unity was accepted with equanimity by the people of the Republic of Ireland, reflecting a growing post-nationalist ethos.

The militant republican movement underwent a number of significant changes from the mid-1980s onwards. An internal debate on the sustainability of the conflict led to a questioning of the 'long war' or attrition strategy designed to wear down British government resolve to stay in Northern Ireland.⁵ The 'long war' had exacted a heavy toll from the republican community in terms of lives, prison sentences and quality-of-life opportunities. In addition, violence led to exclusion, demonisation and lack of legitimacy. The move towards a more political approach was confirmed by the emergence of new leaders, predominantly from the north, and the election of Gerry Adams as President of Sinn Féin in 1983. The development of a dialogue between the SDLP leader John Hume and Adams eventually led to closer co-operation between a coalition of pro-nationalist partners to pursue a united Ireland agenda. The coalition would include republicans, constitutional nationalists, the Irish government, the Irish Diaspora and the United States government. In unionist eyes, this was a 'pan-nationalist front'. A key actor in these developments was the SDLP party leader, John Hume, who had long favoured a peacemaking model in which all of the participants in the conflict

would cease violence, enter into negotiations and agree to share power. The Hume-Adams talks were unpopular, not least among SDLP supporters, but helped to assist the republican move towards a political approach.

The move towards a political approach was mirrored within loyalist paramilitary organisations. The Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), representing respectively the UVF and UDA, often appeared more pragmatic and willing to compromise than the constitutional unionist parties.

Changes in the United States also contributed towards the start of the peace process. The emergence of a small group of Irish-Americans, with key political and corporate links, was instrumental in persuading the Clinton White House to become interested in Northern Ireland.⁶ They reflected background changes within the Irish-American diaspora. Traditionally sympathetic towards militant republicanism, many moderated their attitude and encouraged Irish republicans to consider the advantages offered by a ceasefire and a peace process. For Clinton, Northern Ireland would be a low-cost, low-risk foreign policy endeavour. He was pushing a door already half open.

First movements: 1990-1994

The first moves towards peace progressed along two parallel routes. Route one sought to maintain momentum between the constitutional parties, and route two saw the first tentative moves to involve republicans in talks. In 1990, the Northern Ireland Secretary of State Sir Peter Brooke authorised secret contact with the IRA in order to find the conditions under which republicans would consider calling a ceasefire and was complemented by more public overtures. In late 1992, the Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, unaware of the back channel between the IRA and British government, authorised secret contacts between his officials and senior members of Sinn Féin. These secret talks eventually drew both governments towards the same conclusion. On 15 December 1993 the British and Irish governments published the Downing Street Declaration. In a key line, the Declaration noted that '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.' In what the British government regarded as a major coup, the Irish government reiterated its support for the principle of consent and promised, in the context of an overall settlement, to amend the Irish Constitution to enshrine the consent principle in law. In January 1994 President Clinton's decision to grant Gerry Adams a US entry visa despite a continuing IRA campaign was a further reminder of the rewards on offer should Sinn Féin pursue the path of constitutional politics. Northern Ireland's unionists, meanwhile, remained acutely suspicious that a secret deal was under way between the British government and republicans.

Ceasefires and after, 1994-1995

On 31 August 1994 the IRA declared 'a complete cessation of military operations', the main loyalist paramilitary organisations following their example in October. The British government

shared the unionist suspicions of the IRA ceasefire and ruled out face-to-face talks with Sinn Féin until the permanency of the ceasefire could be established. Nevertheless the British and Irish governments moved to establish the conceptual framework for any political negotiations through the publication of the Frameworks for the Future document. The document stressed that the two governments wanted to see a 'comprehensive settlement' that would return greater 'power, authority and responsibility to all the Northern Ireland people'.⁷ It also reaffirmed the three stranded approach and outlined, in detail, the issues that could be discussed in each strand.

The Frameworks document marked the limit of early progress. The slim majority held by the British Prime Minister, John Major, removed momentum from the peace process. In March 1995 the Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, elevated British demands for arms decommissioning into a formal precondition for Sinn Féin's entry into talks. Sinn Féin regarded decommissioning as a diversion designed to mask an underlying British reluctance to enter into negotiations with them. In late November the governments announced a new approach to the impasse. Under a 'twin-track' scheme, an independent decommissioning body, chaired by former US Senate Majority leader George Mitchell, was set up to consider options for paramilitary disarmament while, in parallel, multi-party talks would commence. The International Body on Arms Decommissioning published its report on 24 January 1996. The Mitchell Report's key recommendation that arms decommissioning and all-party talks should begin in parallel was turned down. In February the IRA called off its ceasefire by detonating a massive bomb in London's Canary Wharf. It accused John Major and unionists of 'squandering this unprecedented opportunity to resolve the conflict'.⁸

The collapse of the ceasefire did not mean an end to the peace process, although Sinn Féin was barred from the talks on 10 June. Nevertheless talks started between nine other political parties and the two governments. The negotiations rapidly became bogged down on procedural issues, particularly over the appointment of George Mitchell as chair. They were suspended in early July 1996 when tension and violence associated with a contentious Orange Order parade at Drumcree near Portadown spread across Northern Ireland. In July 1996 an independent review body was established to recommend how the parading issue could be handled in the future.

The Good Friday Agreement, April 1998

In May 1997 the Labour Party leader Tony Blair took power with a massive parliamentary majority. He quickly set about drawing Sinn Féin into the political process. By mid-June, the demand for decommissioning prior to Sinn Féin's entry into talks was dropped. The IRA declared another ceasefire on 20 July 1997, and Sinn Féin entered the talks on 9 September. Throughout the negotiations Unionists refused to engage directly with Sinn Féin, converting them into Dayton-like proximity talks. Reports of splits and dissension within both the IRA and Sinn Féin underlined growing nervousness among republicans. There was also dissatisfaction within David Trimble's UUP. Four of the its ten MPs made a public call for the party to leave the talks.

In April the chairman of the talks, George Mitchell, set a target date of 9 April for an agreement in order to facilitate a referendum in May. In late March the negotiations

intensified, although many issues were still outstanding. The UUP and SDLP held differing views of how power would be shared between both communities in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin was deeply uneasy at the prospect of any new Northern Ireland assembly and contributed little to negotiations on this matter. The UUP was concerned the remit of cross-border bodies and their relationship with the Northern Ireland Assembly and Irish Parliament, and anxious to tie the Irish government down on the proposed changes to its constitutional claim on Northern Ireland's territory.

A copy of the Good Friday Agreement was delivered to every home in Northern Ireland in April 1998. It had five main constitutional provisions. First, Northern Ireland's future constitutional status was to be in the hands of its citizens. Second, if the people of Ireland, north and south, wanted a united Ireland, they could have one by voting for it. Third, Northern Ireland's current constitutional position would remain within the United Kingdom. Fourth, Northern Ireland's citizens would have the right to 'identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both.' Fifth, the Irish state would drop its territorial claim on Northern Ireland and instead define the Irish nation in terms of people rather than land. The consent principle would be built into the Irish constitution.

Three new interlocking institutions were set up. Relations within Northern Ireland were to be addressed by a power-sharing assembly that would operate on an inclusive basis. All of the main parties would be members of a permanent coalition government. Key decisions would be taken on a cross-community basis. Relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were to be dealt with through the creation of a North-South Ministerial Council which would allow co-operation between the Northern Ireland Assembly and Irish Parliament on certain functional issues. As a safeguard, the Northern Ireland Assembly could only operate if the North-South Ministerial Council was also functioning. Under Strand Three, a British-Irish Council was to be established. This would draw members from the British and Irish governments, as well as the devolved parliament in Scotland and assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Bedding in the Agreement, 1998-2003

A referendum was held on 22 May to ratify the Agreement. Seventy-one per cent of Northern Ireland's voters supported the Agreement. This represented virtually all nationalist voters, but unionism was evenly split between supporters and opponents of the Agreement. The Agreement received 94 per cent backing in the Republic of Ireland.

Following intensive talks between the local parties, and much arm twisting by the British and Irish governments, agreement was reached on two critical issues - the number of government departments in the new Northern Ireland administration and the remit of the cross-border bodies. Despite these successes, a number of serious obstacles remained in the post-agreement years. One was policing reform, a real and symbolic conflict between unionists and nationalists, and a committee under the chairmanship of Chris Patten was set up to suggest a way ahead. The Patten report's 175 recommendations included proposals to reduce the force's size from 11,400 to 7,500 while increasing Catholic representation from 8 to 30 per cent within ten years.⁹ The other main problems were summarised in the phrase 'no guns, no government'. Unionists were still unhappy at the prospects of Sinn Féin

assuming ministerial office in the absence of IRA decommissioning. IRA statements, while re-affirming their ceasefire and support for the peace process, refused even to accept in principle that decommissioning could take place at some time in the future.

In 1999 the British and Irish governments invited George Mitchell to help break the impasse, and the resulting Mitchell Review squeezed through the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) by 480 to 349 votes. At last the Northern Ireland Executive was elected and took office in November. The UUP and SDLP nominated three ministers each, and the DUP and Sinn Féin two each. Unionist discontent continued to grow, and, with the sand in David Trimble's resignation hourglass fast running out, Peter Mandelson stepped in on 11 February and suspended the devolved institutions. It was restored, after another close vote in the UUC, following an IRA statement contained the breakthrough phrase that it would 'completely and verifiably' put arms beyond use.¹⁰ Arms dumps would be inspected by third parties, later confirmed as former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari and ex-ANC General Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa. Meanwhile elements of normal governance crept into Northern Ireland's body politic. In early July the Executive announced its 'Agenda for Government' in which the outlines of a legislative and policy programme were set out. By December 2000 the Assembly approved a £6bn budget.

However, with the political issues of decommissioning, demilitarization and policing unresolved, the façade of business as usual still looked decidedly thin. The Unionist party was deeply divided over the agreement, many thinking that too much had been conceded to republicans. The UUP remained vulnerable to attack from the Democratic Unionist party, which was unqualified in its opposition, and lost support in succeeding elections. In 2002 the Executive and Assembly were suspended again, and direct rule was resumed. On the nationalist side too Sinn Féin continued to make inroads into the SDLP vote. To this backcloth of electoral pressure on the centre parties, by 2003 the peace process stood in suspension until the stalemate was resolved between Unionist demands for an unqualified disbanding of the IRA and nationalist demands for full implementation of policing reform, demilitarization and a return of local institutions. The peace process had delivered changes almost unimaginable in 1994, but in 2003 the strength of the underlying sectarian suspicions and fears seemed as stark as ever.

Notes

1. For an overview of the modern phase of the conflict see John Darby, *Scorpions in a Bottle*, (London: Minority Rights Group, 1997).
2. A detailed analysis of the death and injury toll can be found in Marie-Therese Fay, Mike Morrissey & Marie Smyth, *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The human costs* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).
3. Details can be found in Brendan O'Leary, 'The Conservative Stewardship of Northern Ireland, 1979-97: Sound-bottomed contradictions or slow learning?' *Political Studies*, xlv (1997), pp. 663-676.
4. Anthony M. Gallagher, 'The Approach of Government: Community relations and equity', in S. Dunn (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-42.

5. For more detailed reviews of the changes within republicanism see Eamonn Mallie & David McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace: The secret story behind the Irish peace process* (London, Heinemann: 1996) and Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997)
6. See R. Mac Ginty, 'American Influences on the Northern Ireland Peace Process', *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 17, 2, (Fall 1997), pp. 31-50.
7. *Frameworks for the Future*, (Belfast: HMSO, 1995), p. v.
8. IRA statement contained in 'Truce lies in tatters', *Belfast Telegraph* (10 February 1996).
9. The full Patten Report, and other key documents in the peace process, are available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/index.html>
<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cds/>10. IRA statement, *Irish Times* (8 May 2000).

CLEM MCCARTNEY'S "THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY"

Clem McCartney (December 1999)

Accord series #8: Striking a Balance: The Northern Ireland peace process

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 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 cooperation 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.

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 analyse 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 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 cooperation 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.

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