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AMERICAN IRISH NEWSLETTER

Political Education Committee *of the American Ireland Education Foundation*

Volume 23, Number 4 **April 1998**

Irish Complexities Overlooked

Re: British leader meets IRA political wing

Your front-page story does a grave disservice to your community of readers by continuing the common misrepresentation of the complex struggle taking place in the North of Ireland.

On the one hand, your article perpetuates the image of Sinn Fein as the "political wing of the IRA," obscuring that organization's legitimate status as a democratically elected political party. Representatives of Sinn Fein have been elected to both the British Parliament and the Irish Parliament, making it the third largest political party in the North of Ireland and the fourth largest on the island of Ireland as a whole. It is the only all-Ireland party.

Furthermore, by focusing solely on the fears of the unionist community, you have perpetuated the view of this conflict as a case of one-sided "terrorism." Your article makes no mention of the thousands of innocent Catholic civilians who have been detained without trial, tortured, harassed and murdered by the British occupying forces in the North of Ireland or by the loyalist paramilitary organizations operating there. There are 12,000 British soldiers in the northern six counties, and many communities live under constant surveillance.

Of the 3,284 deaths in the North of Ireland since "the troubles" began in 1969, almost half were caused by loyalist paramilitary groups and British forces. The vast majority of those people killed by these latter groups were civilians. These abuses of human and political rights have been well-documented by human rights organizations of international repute, such as Amnesty International.

Your article further obscures the complexity of the struggle by ignoring the rampant economic and political discrimination against the nationalist, Catholic community in the northern six counties. Catholic men are 2.2 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestant men, and Catholic men in the North of Ireland have the highest rate of unemployment of any group in the United Kingdom.

Your readers, who are unlikely to be privy to alternative information about this conflict, would have benefited from an analysis that made clear that this is more than a case of a terrorist group run amok, but is a struggle over fundamental rights of equality, sovereignty, self-determination and freedom. *[Taken from the New York Times (10/18/97). Submitted by Rebecca Johns, assistant professor, Department of Geography, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg.]*

Roisin McAliskey Free At Last

Efforts to extradite Roisin McAliskey have been dropped. British Home Secretary Jack Shaw said on March 9 that the medical evidence in her case meant extradition would be "unjust and oppressive". The 26 year-old mother had been detained by British authorities for 16 months with no clear evidence to link her to an IRA attack on German soil in 1996. Once again the British government forced pro-united Ireland forces to use their resources and energy on an issue other than ending Britain's partition of Ireland.

Newsbits by Kathy Regan

A survey in Ireland On Sunday suggests that 71 per cent of the population want to see a united Ireland. The poll, conducted for the newspaper by MRC, showed that, while the majority would like to see a united Ireland, only 25 per cent of respondents thought they would see it in their lifetime. Some 17 per cent of respondents said they did not want a united Ireland, while 12 per cent said they did not know. *(Irish Times, 3/9/98)*

* * *

Nationalists could legally challenge the holding of a referendum on Articles 2 and 3 on the same day as a vote on peace proposals on the grounds that voters would be unfairly influenced to endorse the constitutional amendments. "The constitutionality of putting a proposal to change Articles 2 and 3 alongside any possible peace package would be questionable," said attorney Barra McCrory. "Any provision of the constitution is of fundamental importance to the people of the island--but this is surely one of the most sensitive. If the Irish people were to be asked to change Articles 2 and 3, any referendum would have to be held separately from the vote on any peace package," he said. "The danger is that the Irish people might feel under undue pressure, because they might be putting the whole political settlement at risk if they did not endorse the constitutional changes. *(Sunday Business Post, 3/8/98)*

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OUR VIEW

Constitutional Claims Must be Protected

The peace process has seen the British and Irish governments bring most of the north's political parties under the talks process umbrella. By doing so, the governments got the parties to tacitly recognize the legitimacy of the talks process. They learned from their biggest failure of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement--their failure to consult any political party other than the SDLP on the makeup of the agreement. Next, the governments brought their Heads of Agreement to the talks table after Christmas. This was to be the framework in which any outcome to the talks would be decided, the governments said. Government representatives went to great lengths to tell the public that the heads were not the de facto outcome but the frame of reference. This is a classic negotiations tactic: you establish the frame of reference; you steer the talks; you gain considerable control over the outcome. The Heads of Agreement appeared after the talks adjourned for the Christmas holiday. Clearly, the governments did homework over the vacation to get "extra credit."

Now we have the governments baiting the media with talk of changes to the Irish Constitution and a linking of the referendum on the proposed outcome and constitutional change. Northern nationalists are already gearing up to oppose the link, saying that it would unfairly influence voters to suggest that voting on peace and voting on the constitution are the same thing. Already, Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern has said there can be no settlement without the change. The deal that is shaping up is along the lines of the governments' Heads of Agreement"--that is, some cross-border bodies, a new Northern Ireland Assembly, and the "Council of the Isles." These things are not even close enough to a quid pro quo for the Irish government to abandon its claims to a united Ireland. The most the Republic should do is concede that the Unionists will not be compelled to join the Republic. The Constitutional claim to unity remains the goal of the majority of the people of Ireland, north and south.

The peace process has been a series of foregone conclusions. This leads us to believe that the talks themselves are a political charade that could ultimately cost political parties such as Sinn Fein their credibility among their voters (a desirable outcome in itself for the British) and could cost northern nationalists the integrity of their demands for a fair peace.

Offensive Situations

by Terry Deem Reilly, *Colorado*

The *Denver Post* ran a column last month in time to cast a racist slur on the Irish before St. Patrick's Day. Dick Kreck's column reads (in part):

PASS THE POTATOES:
This is my idea of a St. Patrick's Day dinner. *Assignments, the official restaurant of the Colorado Institute of Art, School of Culinary Arts, is hosting a March 17 dinner cooked up by Irish native Brendan Keenan of the New York Restaurant School. Here is the menu: first course, tasting of three Irish whiskeys; second course, Harp Lager; third course, Murphy's Irish Lager; fourth course, Guinness Stout; and fifth course, Bushmills Irish Coffee flambe. Oh, yes, and it seems there will be food with each course, too.*

The words "gourmet" and "Irish" do not normally go together, but Assignments promises that Keenan has learned a lot about cooking since he left the Old Sod.

Columnist Dick Kreck is perpetuating the hateful Irish-as-drunk stereotype by insinuating that an Irish dinner would consist of alcohol and only incidentally of food. Please write the following letter to the editor of the *Denver Post*.

Dear Editor,

I urge you to retract and apologize for Dick Kreck's offensive column about what he considers to be "Irish cuisine"--booze, booze, and more booze. This is an offensive stereotype that has no place in American society, let alone an influential American newspaper. Unless you retract the article and apologize for running it, I will be forced to contact your advertisers to urge that they withdraw their ads from your publication. I will look forward to hearing from you.

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From the North by Robert Heatley, *Belfast, Northern Ireland*

(Co-founder of Campaign for Democracy, a predominantly Protestant organization)

From the beginning of the Irish peace process, which was declared on an inclusive talks process, the British and Northern Ireland (NI) unionists have pursued two objectives:

1. To extract from the talks a copperfastening, or at least a perpetuation, of existing partition.
2. To keep Sinn Fein out of the talks.

While the Conservative Party was in power in Britain, NI unionism and the British government were united in their support of these objectives. But matters were complicated when the pan-nationalist alliance of Reynolds/Hume and Adams secured the IRA cease-fire of August 1, 1994, which lasted for almost 18 months. During this time, the British and the NI unionists did everything in their power to continue keeping Sinn Fein out of the talks.

When the cease-fire broke down, Trimble, Taylor, Paisley, et. al., were jubilant. Why were they so pleased at the reversion to war? The British and the NI unionists saw an opportunity to pursue their number-one objective. This meant targeting what growing numbers of young nationalists and republicans here regard to be the "soft underbelly" of Northern nationalism, the SDLP. It was necessary for a so-called "middle ground" on which the number-one objective could be erected.

The "middle ground" had been pursued for years with no success and now the pan-nationalist tie-up was getting in the way. Then, with the fall of the main strategist behind this scheme in May, 1997, the British Conservatives, and the arrival in Dublin of a new Fianna Fail-led government, many people were hopeful that perhaps things might change. Probably in response to this mood, the IRA renewed its cease-fire on July 20, 1997. The new situation had to be given an opportunity to prove its worth; although, many were still sceptical.

And so just where do we stand as of March 1998?

As far as the talks are concerned, there is widespread discontent within nationalism and republicanism in the North as to the performance of the SDLP and the Irish government side in these negotiations. No one expected the British government to do anything other than support Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) in its dogged determination to preserve British sovereignty in this part of Ireland. But it would seem that Dublin and the SDLP, in their anxiety to placate the UUP and the loyalists (to keep them in the talks), have gone completely overboard. Some would use the word "appeasement" to describe their behavior.

At this stage, the talks seem to be predestined to deliver an outcome, to be stampeded through by May, crafted to Trimble's heart's desire. He has a new Assembly and June elections practically in the bag, his Council for the (British) Isles in place, the (Unionist) consent principle conceded by Dublin, and the dilution of Articles 2 and 3 of the politically "independent" Irish Republic rewritten by Messrs. Trimble and Blair. In return, what has the Irish side achieved? No firm commitment from the British to do anything firm or effective on balanced constitutional change, i.e., regarding the 1801 Act of Union, the 1920 Government of Ireland Act or the 1973 Northern Ireland Constitution Act.

These instruments, which underpin absolute de facto Westminster colonialist sovereignty over all the Irish in the North, are not being even mentioned by SDLP and Dublin negotiators. Because Trimble and the British would not like these matters to be raised, change to them is being airily dismissed as unrealistic. What the Irish side is seemingly being offered is a nebulously defined cross-border institution which does not impinge on the absolute remit of British Anglo-centric sovereignty. Secondly, to sweeten the pill of what could turn out to be a revived Stormont, nationalists and republicans are being promised the implementation of an "equality agenda" as part of the new internal settlement.

Given the 78 years of experience of unionism's inability, within the UK, to deliver equal rights to its political opponents, the widespread scepticism on this point is perfectly understandable. After nearly 25 years of British direct rule over Northern Ireland, Catholics/nationalists are still more than two times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants/unionists. No wonder Dr. Martin Mansergh, political adviser to the Taoiseach Ahern and well liked and respected for his personal qualities and his approachability, was given what one newspaper called a "grilling" when he addressed a Cearta meeting in West Belfast recently.

One question he was asked was: How would the mooted equality agenda be guaranteed given the settlement package that the Irish government seemed to be prepared to accept? What seemed to be in people's minds was the cavalier way in which the British dismissed the Irish government's nominees for the parades commission. Unfortunately, Dr. Mansergh failed to reassure his audience that all would be well.

Sinn Fein recently came forward with some imaginative proposals. Noting that equal treatment was a basic human right, not a matter for negotiation (and certainly not a concession from anybody), Sinn Fein wants, as part of a transitional agreement, " . . . a Human Rights Commission on an all Ireland basis . . . a Bill of Rights and an all-Ireland Constitutional Court responsible to a North/South Council and changes to the way in which justice is administered in the six counties."

Here we have a meaningful idea of what cross-border bodies should be about. Allowing for the fact that she is very new to the job, and--after her contacts with Unionists--said to be becoming "greener by the day," Dail deputy Ms. Liz O'Donnell could only say, when quizzed about cross-border bodies, that they would have to be "workable" and capable of implementing decisions in meaningful areas agreed in advance. Now that is what you call keeping your cards close to your chest, even if it is to protect Trimble from unionists who, unaware that he is holding a high card, would dearly like to trump him.

Newsbits *cont. from page 1*

Contentious parades by unionists should be re-routed away from nationalist areas, according to a team of Canadian observers from Toronto-based *Information on Ireland.* In a 28-page report, they described the actions of British Crown forces on the Garvaghy Road as "excessive, provocative and threatening" and the behavior of the RUC as "insensitive and unnecessarily aggressive." Calling for an immediate ban on plastic bullets, observers described their use as "excessive" and in contradiction of the reputed guide-lines. On July 5, the group traveled to Portadown on the Garvaghy Road. In the early hours of July 6, they were awakened abruptly with the news that the British Army and RUC had moved into the area in great force. "It was obvious to us that the rights of the Catholic community were trampled upon to facilitate the Orange march," concluded the delegation. *(Irish News, 3/1/98)*

* * *

"A Unionist commission for a Unionist people," is how Gerard Rice of Belfast's Lower Ormeau residents described the Parades body following the appointment of ex-loyalist paramilitary leader Glen Barr and Tommy Cheevers, a member of two loyal orders, the Apprentice Boys and the Orange Order. National-ist dismay at the appointment of two loyalists was compounded by two further appointments: an ex-member of the Police Authority, Rose Anne McCormick, and a solicitor for the Police Federation, Aidan Canavan. "We have absolutely no confidence in the Commission," said Donnacha MacNiallais, "we do not see how the body could be described by any reasonable person as fair, impartial or independent." A judicial review will be mounted challenging the recent appointments and the chairmanship of Alistair Graham as a contravention of British legislation requiring the commission to be independent and impartial. *(Irish News, 2/27/98)*

The Irish in Early Georgia

by Kevin P. Murphy, *Massachusetts*

This month we'll turn our attention to the Irish influence in the southern states, an influence often overlooked by historians. Many people associate the American Irish influence with the Northeast's metropolitan areas and as far west as Chicago. Yes, the Irish influence is strong in those regions, but American Irish historical facts paint a picture that includes the American Irish people in every region of the U.S.

Georgia can trace its earliest settlers and developers to Ireland. In 1768, the largest colony within Georgia was made up of Irish immigrants. These settlers with names such as John Grady, William Horan, John Kelly, and Joseph Ryan were Irish-born persons who carved towns out of the Georgia wilderness.

A main founder of Georgia was Irish-born Kennedy O'Brien. O'Brien was the force that settled and founded the present-day city of Augusta, Georgia. Irish-born trader Roger deLacy was a partner with O'Brien in founding Augusta. Other immigrants who helped O'Brien defend and build Augusta were Irish-born families named McQueen, Callahan, Gilmore, and McGillevray. The only recognition ever given to O'Brien and his fellow Irish immigrants for their achievements was a Celtic Cross in Augusta dedicated in 1901 by the Colonial Dames of Georgia.

During the Revolution, William O'Bryan became a fierce leader opposed to British rule in Georgia. The British Army sought O'Bryan for the offence of "high treason by the General Assembly of Georgia for leading a state of rebellion against the king." Fellow Irish immigrants Colonel John Dooley, Hugh McGee, and William Gibbons fought against British forces in Georgia. Revolutionary judges in Georgia included Daniel McMurphy and William O'Brien.

In the settling and building of Savannah, the American Irish also played a major role. The early land records of Savannah show that names like Murphy, Fitzgerald, Dougherty, Donnelly, and Clancy were among the original settlers of that southern city. That city still has a huge St. Patrick's Day parade. Like many other corners of our vast nation, the Peach Tree State has Irish foundations. *(Source: The Writings of Michael J. O'Brien, 1915; Colonial Records of Early Georgia, Boston Public Library)*

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We believe that over the next several months their may have to be several mass telephone call campaigns to President Clinton's office, the Irish Embassy, etc. We will be ready should this situation arise.

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The Constitutional Sellout

by James Kelly, *Dublin, Ireland, Captain, Irish Army Intelligence (ret.)*

If Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern has his way, the Irish nation will be defined in terms of its people rather than territory. The Irish claim to a 32-county Ireland will be officially eliminated and the English claim to Irish territory recognized. Why should England, the colonizing usurper, not define its own nation in terms of people, not territory? There is no reason why it cannot extend the full rights of British citizens to those Irish people who wish to avail of them, while abrogating its territorial claim to part of Ireland. It would be more logical for the colonizer to do so rather than the colonized. Further, if the Ahern concept of Irish nationhood should prevail, the Irish people will formally grant England not only the right to sustain its claim to Irish territory but to do so by force of arms if necessary.

Basically, the Irish Constitution is a national safety valve that prevents people from turning to violence in pursuit of the ideal of Irish unity. It offers a political way forward. Former IRA chiefs of staff Tom Barry and Sean McBride, together with thousands of others, recognized this in the forties, permitting the then Irish Taoiseach, Mr. Eamon De Valera, to sustain a policy of neutrality--actually benign towards Britain-- rather than be forced into a disastrous alliance with Germany.

Why is the English guarantee to unionism to be enshrined in the new Ahern Constitution under the guise of consent? To do so makes a mockery of the principle of consent. As the late Cardinal O'Fiach said, as long as the British guarantee remains, unionism will sit tight and not give an inch. This eliminates the possibility of mutual consent--all consent must be on the nationalist side. Why does Mr. Ahern propose such a **sellout** on behalf of the Irish? To help strengthen the partitionist position in conjunction with Britain, which enforces it against the electorally declared wishes of the Irish people. What does it do to promote peace in Ireland? The short answer is nothing. All the evidence since the establishment of partition by a British Government nearly 80 years ago sustains this. Every Irish person knows that partition has been the cause of all political violence, either pro or anti, in Ireland ever since.

In 1970, Britain undertook five years of counter insurgency war in Northern Ireland to consolidate the status quo of partition. In many ways, it was a purely cynical British exercise, with its military establishment seeking five years to practice in this type of warfare, because, to quote Brigadier Frank Kitson, the British counter-insurgency guru: "There are other potential trouble spots within the United Kingdom which might involve the (British) Army in generations of a sort against political extremists who are prepared to resort to a considerable degree of violence to achieve their ends."

Kitson stated that when the regular British army was first raised in the 17th century, suppression of the Irish was coupled with defense of the Protestant religion as one of the main reasons for its existence. What is certain is that soldiers were ready and waiting on the politicians to press the button. On July 2, 1970, Lord Balneil, the junior Minister for Defence at Westminster, came to Belfast and formally authorized military action. At this time, the IRA was still in an embryonic stage, with only the nucleus of an organization in Northern Ireland. But the counter-insurgency techniques of the British army quickly ensured the support of a nationalist people sufficient to make it into a viable and capable revolutionary force.

The result was more than 20 years of war, culminating in the Joint Declaration by the Irish and British governments in December 1993, which led to both ceasefires. Neither side won, but more than 3,000 people died and several thousand were injured--with the Irish Government, led by Jack Lynch, acting as "second guarantor" of the status quo in cooperation with Britain. Nearly 30 years later, another Irish Taoiseach is cooperating with Britain in preserving the status quo of partition by attempting to jettison the Irish Constitutional claim to unity. By thus cutting off this safety valve of political action, Mr. Ahern is in danger of reopening the floodgates of war. It is worth noting that the Constitution, inclusive of Articles 2 and 3, permitted Sinn Fein to recognize the Irish Government as the prime mover on behalf of Irish Nationalism and its desire for unity, making an inclusive peace process possible.

On the republican and nationalist side, there are many doubts about the validity of the peace process. Changing the Constitution, as proposed by Mr. Ahern, will only fortify those doubts. Consequently, the Irish people must oppose Ahern's proposals for constitutional change in any future referendum.

Finally, Republicans who see violence as the only way forward should reconsider and join with constitutional Ireland in rejecting any change in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. Such a rejection would have a cataclysmic effect on the peace process by ensuring that any future Irish government could no longer consider tinkering with Articles 2 and 3. Instead, it would be forced to comply with the Irish Supreme Court assertion that it would not be within the competence of the Irish government having regard to the Constitution not to claim to be entitled as of right to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland. If the Irish people unite to protecting? That claim through the ballot box, a political way to an all-Ireland solution, inclusive of a united Ireland, by agreement by the Irish people as a whole, without external impediment, would be a distinct possibility at a reconvened peace conference.

Ironically, it was Mr. Major, the British Prime Minister at the time, who proposed the above all-Ireland solution in the Joint Declaration. It would be more rational for the Irish Government to pursue such an objective than to rescind the Irish Constitutional claim to unity, to retain partition, the cause of all political violence in Ireland since its introduction.

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Cearta: Civil and National Rights are the Foundation of Peace

Editor's Note: The following essay is excerpted from an ***Irish News*** *column in which Cearta responds to columnist Roy Garland's claim that the nationalist civil rights demands have been met.*

Cearta is a grass-roots campaign that aims to promote the national, democratic, and human rights of northern nationalists in a state which . . . has been dedicated to the suppression and denial of those rights and to our existence as citizens of the Irish nation.

The achievement of those . . . rights will . . . secure the rights and aspirations of all citizens equally...It will also create a dynamic for fundamental and irreversible change in political structures that have existed in Ireland since the British parliament imposed partition. For 75 years, partition has poisoned the entire Irish body-politic with a legacy of persistent conflict, dissension, and division. While the unionist community . . . has nurtured a siege mentality, all the Irish people have been diminished socio-economically and politically by the amputation of the northeast corner from the remainder of this small island....

Through the Charter for Change, Cearta proclaims that a strong foundation of national, democratic, and human rights, is a fundamental prerequisite to any enduring resolution of the conflict in this island, from which unionists will benefit equally with nationalists.... Any just and enduring resolution of the conflict must address partition as the central cause of conflicts and redress the cumulative effects of social, cultural, political and economic disadvantage that have cascaded throughout the lifetime of the state.

Therefore, Cearta believes that the peace process, which we unreservedly endorse and support, must have as its central objective the ending of partition in a manner which respects and safeguards the rights and aspirations of all the political communities in this island--not least the unionist community... Unionist consent and unionist rights, however, do not extend to denying or frustrating the legitimate aspirations, and the national, democratic, and human rights of nationalists--even while partition continues. Nor should nationalists permit or tolerate their legitimate aspirations and fundamental, internationally-guaranteed and non-negotiable rights to be bartered at the talks table in return for concessions on political and constitutional issues.

> ***Through the Charter for Change, Cearta proclaims that a strong foundation of national, democratic, and human rights, is a fundamental prerequisite to any enduring resolution of the conflict in this island, from which unionists will benefit equally with nationalists . . .***

Roy Garland has had a sufficient level of personal contact and communication with our community and with many members of Cearta to understand the depth of feeling which prevails among nationalists about the continued denial of human rights and of our existence as citizens of the Irish nation.

It is a depressing and damming reflection on all those who have exercised power and influence in this state that most of the demands enunciated by Cearta today are a near-verbatim transcription of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights program, re-affirmed by NICRA at its AGM February 1972--within weeks of Bloody Sunday.

We reject the proposition . . . that the NICRA program has ever been fulfilled in this state...or that the sustained abuse and denial of national, democratic and human rights derives from the continuation of violence: that is the inverted, self-justifying, and self-fulfilling logic common to all those who disregard the sanctity of human rights.

Accordingly, when the central party to this conflict--...the British government--pressured the Irish government into promulgating the 'Heads of Agreement' negotiation agenda, we were entitled and duty-bound to publicly reflect the widespread and intense anger of grass-roots nationalist reaction. In the event, our analysis of that document was endorsed by thoughtful and informed observers throughout these islands. Furthermore, private discussions between Cearta representatives and senior Irish government officials confirmed that the Irish government had been deeply dismayed by the extent of critical reaction which the document attracted.

Therefore, having most injudiciously defined the Downing Street declaration and the Frameworks for the Future as their foundation stones for negotiations, the Irish government was then obliged to secure the cooperation of the British government in re-establishing that narrow foundation, which the 'Heads of Agreement' had comprehensively eroded.

It is profoundly disappointing that Roy Garland, whose efforts to engage personally with the nationalist community we deeply respect and admire, should choose to characterize as 'lunacy' and 'paranoid conspiracy theorizing' the intensive public and private efforts of Cearta to underpin and sustain the peace process.

Unlike him, we have inherited a legacy of having our legitimate aspirations repeatedly abused and denied through a combination of unionist bullying, intimidation, and violence and British governmental cowardice and duplicity. We do not wish that legacy to be inherited by successive generations of nationalists or unionists; and we are morally obliged to do all in our power to influence those who are now negotiating our future in this island.

We shall be happy to meet and discuss the Charter for Change with Roy Garland and people of any political affiliations . . . Meanwhile, he should do us the justice of refraining from publicly impugning our motives and intentions.

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Peace Process Timeline

Compiled by Sandy Carlson, *Connecticut*

February 9 • Dissident Ulster Unionists set up a new group to campaign against party leader David Trimble's handling of the multi-party talks. The Committee for Traditional Ulster Unionist Values demands that the party refuse to accept cross-border bodies and to negotiate face-to-face with Sinn Fein.

February 13 • Secretary of State Mo Mowlam is under intense pressure from unionists to throw out Sinn Fein after speculation that the IRA killed drugs dealer Brendan Campbell and leading loyalist Bobby Dougan. The IRA denies responsibility.

February 18 • A four-month-old baby is left alone as its father is lured to his death. No group has yet claimed responsibility for killing 30-year-old Lurgan man Kevin Conway, whose body was found in a disused farmhouse near the village of Aghalee. Republicans blame loyalists for the killing, but loyalists deny involvement.

February 19 • Sinn Fein's bid to prevent its expected suspension from the multi-party talks enters its third day in the Dublin high court. The party launched its legal bid hoping for an injunction against talks chairman George Mitchell, his deputies, and Dr. Mowlam.

• Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams outlines his party's economic strategy for a post-settlement economy to a high-profile business gathering in Belfast. Mr. Adams, addressing the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce for the first time, sets out a policy aimed at bringing the economies of the north and the Republic closer together.

February 20 • RUC Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, categorically denies he is behind the expulsion of Sinn Fein from the talks process. Mr. Flanagan also says he believes the loyalists will keep their cease-fire.

February 24 • The IRA denies there is any split within its organization and says it did not help other groups in recent attacks. Sinn Fein today meets Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern to try to restore faith in a process damaged by Sinn Fein's exclusion from talks.

February 26 • Loyalists urge British Prime Minister Tony Blair not to agree to any meeting with Sinn Fein during that party's expulsion from the talks process.

• The Irish and British governments reveal that they have been working on separate papers envisaging a final settlement from the multi-party talks. Within two weeks, the prime ministers hope to merge aspects of the papers in order to present an agreed document to the talks delegates.

• Questions are being raised about possible Crown Force involvement in at least one of a number of attacks on northern nationalists this week.

• Before his meeting with Mr. Ahern, Mr. Blair holds talks with the representatives of the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), which last month admitted murdering three Catholics. The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), which speaks for the UFF, was allowed to return to the talks on Monday following a four-week suspension for the killings. Emerging from their meeting this morning, UDP leader Gary McMichael warns that his party's position in the process would become "untenable" if Mr. Blair were to meet Mr. Adams before March 9. Meanwhile, Ulster Unionists are pressing for Sinn Fein's suspension from the Stormont talks process to be extended indefinitely. While Mr. Trimble stops short of threatening a walkout, he says his party is prepared to take other unspecified measures if Sinn Fein were allowed back at the talks table on that date.

February 27 • Mr. Ahern insists tonight that he wants Sinn Fein back in the multi-party talks on schedule next month, regardless of opposition from the UUP. Mr. Ahern confirms that the two governments are no longer planning to put forward a single position paper next month.

March 3 • The SDLP urge Sinn Fein to re-enter the Stormont talks next Monday, but it is understood republicans are unwilling to go back until they have a meeting with Mr. Blair. According to Sinn Fein sources, no decision has been taken yet on whether to return to Castle Buildings, Stormont, on March 9.

March 4 • UUP sources indicate that if Sinn Fein returns to the Stormont talks after their suspension, unionists will continue to refuse to have bilateral meetings with them.

March 5 • Mr. Blair agrees to Sinn Fein's standing request for a meeting to be held some time next week. The Downing Street meeting is considered crucial to Sinn Fein's decision on whether to return to talks. British officials say that no date has been set.

• Junior Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Liz O'Donnell denies reports that the Republic's government is set to ditch Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution but confirms they would be amended. Mr. Ahern tells nationalists in the north that their rights and aspirations would be strengthened under any deal. He says he feels the matters that really are important to nationalists are not Articles 2 and 3 but equality, policing, and harassment. Ms. O'Donnell rules out any unilateral changes and says any amendments must be reciprocated by Britain.

• The Irish and British governments officially invite Sinn Fein back into the talks and sign a document to say they believe the IRA cease-fire is genuine.

March 6 • Senior DUP spokesmen will address a major loyalist rally in Portadown tonight despite claims that its organizers are sympathetic to dead LVF leader Billy Wright. The rally, which has gained prominence since the bombing of Porta-down, was arranged more than three weeks ago by the Concerned Protestants Committee (CPC). The same group is currently campaigning for an inquiry into the death of Billy Wright.

March 7 • Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams acknowledges there will be no united Ireland in the immediate aftermath of a peace deal for the north in May, but demands strong cross-border bodies with control of the police and the courts. Mr. Adams also says it is vital to introduce a range of measures, including the repealing of emergency powers, the disbanding of the RUC, and replacing of it with a police force with at least 40 percent nationalist representation.

March 8 • Leading Belfast lawyer Barra McCrory says that any dilution of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution might be contested by nationalists in the Irish courts. He says that nationalists could legally challenge the holding of a referendum on Articles 2 and 3 on the same day as a vote on peace proposals on the grounds that voters would be unfairly influenced to endorse the constitutional amendments. Sinn Fein warns that dropping the constitutional claim on Northern Ireland could undermine the peace process. Mr. Ahern says that if there were no changes to the constitution then there would be no chance of a settlement.

Action Requests

Write the letters below (or call), preferably in your own words, or as is. Be courteous. Have friends, organizations, business associates, etc., do the same. Mention your membership in PEC.

1. Write: **President Bill Clinton**, The White House, Washington, DC 20500; phone 202 456-1111, fax 202 456-2461; email: president@whitehouse.gov

Message: Please use your influence and upcoming visit to Ireland to emphasize the importance to any settlement in Ireland of the protection of civil, national, and human rights. Unless the British and Irish governments grant these rights to Irish people north and south, there can be no peaceful settlement to the conflict there.

2. Write: **Ambassador Sean O'Huiginn**, Embassy of Ireland, 2234 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone 202 462-3939

Message: The Irish government must not relinquish Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. A peace settlement must not undermine the integrity of northern nationalists' desire for an independent, united Ireland.

Cornelissens Struggle to Protect Their Preserve

by Sandy Carlson, *Connecticut*

As March saw millions of Irish and Irish aficionados celebrating the wearing of the green, a family struggling to green an Irish mountain found they had little to celebrate. The family learned they could lose the mountain and the past two years' work.

Last December the *Newsletter* reported on the Cornelissens, a family in County Kerry who have invested all their material resources and time and effort into establishing their privately-owned nature reserve on Peakeen, a mountain near the majestic and famous Ring of Kerry. Though they have succeeded over the past two years in bringing a variety of flora and fauna back to a barren, rocky mountainside, financial and other challenges threaten to overwhelm their efforts. The Irish government cut their living assistance so that they have very little money on which to live from week to week. The family is entitled to the equivalent of a disability benefit for Harry Cornelissen due to health problems that prevent him from pursuing his profession as a psychiatric nurse. As a result, the family might have to sell the reserve to generate a cash flow to survive.

At the same time, a neighboring farmer challenged the Cornelissens in court for a right of way through their land. He was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the legal challenge and fees involved, in addition to the recent loss of income, have left the family in a dire financial situation. Since receiving notice of the termination of benefits, the Cornelissens have met with real estate agents to value the property before they put it on the market. "One of them straight away wanted to make all kinds of pathways where we have so many trees now planted. He does not believe in what we were trying to do with the land--not to farm it," Caroline Cornelissen said.

The Cornelissens had hoped to eventually turn over the land to the Irish government as an official preserve or to an environmental group that would care for it. The family is concerned the land will be exploited by new owners or developers and their work replanting it will be undone entirely. She said her son is afraid he will have to beg on the streets for money. "Our only hope is to find someone who would still care for the place as we did and continue on planting and restoring the old walls."

The Cornelissens can be contacted at Kilcurrane West, Kenmare, County Kerry, Ireland.

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