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## American Irish Newsletter - June 1998

American Ireland Education Foundation - PEC

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# AMERICAN IRISH NEWSLETTER

Political Education Committee of the American Ireland Education Foundation

Volume 23, Number 6

June 1998

## Good Friday Agreement 1998 Offers Hope for Peace

Exactly 200 years after the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen against British domination of Ireland, the British and Irish governments have crafted and signed a possibly momentous agreement of far more substance than the many others of recent years. The British and their loyalist overlords brutally suppressed the United Irishmen's rebellion. The result was the Act of Union of 1801, which placed all of Ireland directly under the British crown. Since then, of course, the Republic of Ireland has gained its independence in 26 of Ireland's 32 counties, while still claiming a right to 32-county unity as a matter of principle if not in fact. The six counties of Northern Ireland remain part of the United Kingdom.

The agreement can be compared in importance to the Act of Union and to the birth of the Irish Republic. This depends on the ability of the Irish people to make it work, to heal old wounds, and to advance together. Can this be done?

As we said, since the signing of the Agreement, the answer now rests on the good will of both sides in Northern Ireland. We agree with ANC chief negotiator Cyril Ramaphosa who said, during a visit to the north last month, that it will be essential for everybody to keep their eyes on the ultimate goal of peace and not be diverted by side issues. Mr. Ramaphosa said that the weapons question had been a very difficult issue in the South African situation as it promises to be in Northern Ireland. In an interview with the *Irish News*, he said: "It was difficult, but we found some clever ways of getting around it. When we put everything in balance, we found that if ever there was an issue that could derail the talks in our own country, it was the whole question of the handing in of weapons. It had that potential. After doing a very careful analysis, we put it aside to be separate from the overall substantive negotiations. We continued to keep our eye on the ball on what our strategic objectives were.

"Once we decided that, we found that the handing in of weapons issue, which you call decommissioning, became less and less of an issue. Once people focused their eyes on a strategic objective and trust began to grow and their commitment was renewed to achieve the ultimate goal, it became less important to insist on handing in your weapons."

We believe that if the political leaders in Ireland and Britain adopt such an attitude and focus on the important aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, then the agreement stands a good chance of transforming Ireland into a peaceful society. The important aspects of the agreement are:

- the Irish government has dropped its claim to a united Ireland except as a future goal and then only with the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland;
- Britain agrees to facilitate Irish reunification if the people of Northern Ireland want this in the future;
- a devolved Assembly will govern Northern Ireland with limited powers and elaborate mechanisms to prevent unionist dominance;
- cross-border bodies will be formed to deal with certain limited matters of common importance to Northern Ireland and the Republic; these bodies will be answerable to the legislatures of Northern Ireland and the Republic, respectively and will not have executive powers;
- a Council of the Isles will be formed to allow coordination of policy if desired by the separate legislatures of England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales; and
- reforms in the areas of policing and human rights will be considered after further study to which both governments are committed.

## Newsbits by Kathy Regan

Recorded complaints against the RUC have jumped by 33.5% in the three-year period between 1995 and 1997. The dramatic increase, indicated in the 10th annual report of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints, highlights the absence of a cease-fire by British forces over the period of an evolving peace process. The absurdity of the complaints system, in which the RUC essentially investigates itself, was underlined by the revelation that only seven formal disciplinary proceedings resulted from 1,161 complaints in 1997. Coupled with the report from Mr. Kumaraswamy's UN Rapporteur's report, this report is a scandalous indictment of RUC behavior. (*RM Distribution*, 4/29/98)

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Human Rights Watch, the largest international non-government watchdog group based in the US, said human rights issues were central to the success of the proposed political arrangement in the north. In an analysis of the Irish peace process, HRW spokesperson Julia Hall said the UK government must conform to its existing obligations under international law by addressing immediately human rights concerns which fall outside the Good Friday agreement. Ms. Hall said human rights must not take second place to the development of new political institutions. "The peace agreement is important but it is not the only game in town. People whose rights are being

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## OUR VIEW

*The Irish government openly acknowledges the vital role in the peace process of the United States and those Americans who support peace in Ireland. In a column in the April 12th New York Post, Consul General of Ireland in New York Barrie Robinson says, "The active and constructive engagement of the Irish-American community have helped to provide needed momentum and to sustain the [peace] process in times of difficulty" (see page 4 of Newsletter).*

*Clearly, PEC members have played an invaluable role in helping bring about a situation in Ireland in which nationalists and unionists will likely participate together in the government of Northern Ireland. Although the Good Friday agreement falls short of the independent, united Ireland for which we hope, it is, nevertheless, an important, and big, step in the right direction. This is why we must keep strong and continue to expand PEC's letter-writing/telephone chain networks.*

*Our job now is to continue pressuring our government to help ensure that the proposed new Northern Ireland political structures are democratic and effective. New ministers and assembly members must be vested with real responsibility to bring about democratic changes in substantive ways to improve the quality of life throughout Ireland. These officials must not be sidelined into a talking shop.*

*We urge you to join (FREE OF CHARGE) PEC's National Telephone Chain (see below). We urge you to write the Action Letters on p. 6. We urge you to copy PEC articles and disseminate them among the media and others. We urge you to do everything in your power to influence public opinion to support and seek Ireland's reunification through the democratic process.*

## Attacks

There have been 10 paramilitary attacks since the Good Friday accord. In several cases, no group has claimed responsibility. It is largely believed, however, that breakaway paramilitaries disgruntled with the agreement are responsible. Others might be drug-related. Among the attacks are:

- **April 23.** A 79-year-old north Belfast man is beaten and shot in the knees and ankle in the nationalist New Lodge area of North Belfast. Security sources blame the IRA, who deny responsibility.
- **Mid-April.** Loyalists shoot a 24-year-old man in the legs outside a bar on the loyalist Shankill Road.
- **April 21.** Catholic Anthony Friel has both legs broken, loses a kneecap, and suffers puncture wounds after being attacked by seven men believed to be loyalists carrying baseball bats studded with nails in Derry.
- **April 18.** A 21-year-old man is abducted, bound, and has his wrist and elbow broken in Limavady.
- **Late April.** Two men from the Creggan area in Derry are ordered out the area.

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## Join the PEC's National Telephone Chain

The PEC National Telephone Chain (NTC) enables PEC to quickly contact its members via phone to get them to call an important person relative to events in Northern Ireland and in some cases when the Irish image is degraded. By participating in the NTC, you can affect the peace process by acting on urgent action requests and showing that Americans care about the peace process and want to see a permanent, meaningful resolution to the conflict in Ireland. We must not only remain united in action, but we must also continue to expand our action network. In the future our action networks will play a significant role.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE!** Become part of the NTC by calling 800-777-6807. Leave your name, address, and a phone number that is connected to an answering machine.

## From the North

by Robert Heatley, Belfast, *co-founder of the Campaign for Democracy, a predominantly Protestant organization headquartered in Northern Ireland*

The proof of this Good Friday "Agreement" will be in the eating. One thing is certain--it is not a settlement of the Anglo-Irish conflict. That will happen only when Britain stops interfering in the internal affairs of the Irish people North and South. All sections of Republicanism are agreed on that point, at least. The dispute that has grown up concerns something else. Given that, if there is a Yes vote in the May referendum in the North (the one which will count, according to the British), the question is, **where do we go from here?**

By far the larger element of Republicanism is looking to a political response. The Good Friday deal, according to them, is not the end of the world. It is merely one stage in a continuing struggle which, employing a new departure of enhanced political means, is proving to be successful. Because of it Unionism is in disarray. Dissident elements of Republicanism, presently quite small, reject such a strategy. They seem to have not only a suspicion of politics, but a very limited understanding of how, in the hands of an establishment-rejecting people, they can be the most effective way of obtaining an objective. But the dispute will not be settled by verbal arguments.

As was stated at the beginning, the proof of this pudding will be in the eating. We might not have too long to wait. Despite the frenetic efforts of the British government, with an overwhelmingly compliant media backing it to the hilt, there is no guarantee whatsoever that there will be a referendum Yes vote in the North. Now that both the SDLP and Sinn Fein are prepared to give the "Agreement" a fair trial, the issue is down to the Unionists for decision. At the moment, in that camp the sentiment is said to be turning against in a 3:1 ratio.\* The forces of reaction in the Unionist camp are marshalling: proving, once again, that they are unable to countenance any tampering with the Orange/Unionist complexion of the British State in the North.

It will be possible for the referendum to return a Yes vote, say of just over 60%, which would mean that a minority

of Unionist had voted for it. Oh me! What will the British do then, poor things? Perhaps that is why Mr. Blair has been over to Northern Ireland twice in the past few days to add muscle to the efforts of the Yes campaigners in the Unionist camp. On the first occasion he had Mr. Major with him in an unprecedented show of bipartisanship. Blair's government also promised hundreds of millions of pounds (big money in NI terms) in what Paisley has called a blatant attempt at bribery.

In his efforts to extract a Yes vote from Unionism and save Mr. Trimble's neck, Mr. Blair is in danger of alienating Sinn Fein despite the fact that he thinks he has its vote tucked away safely in his pocket. Prompted by a resurgent Toryism at Westminster, with Lord Molyneux having been brought out of the crypt of the Upper House, the issue of decommissioning is being raised again in an effort to preclude Sinn Fein from seats in the Executive of a Northern Assembly should one eventually materialize.

It is expected that a June election would give Sinn Fein a right to at least two such seats. The British prime minister was explicit when he said: "There would be no fudging of the decommissioning issue . . . violence had to be given up--and decommissioning was a part of that--before Sinn Fein could be in government." Government here is an inflated word for a devolved body of extremely limited powers and functions. He continued: "The Agreement had built-in rules to ensure they would be excluded or removed

from office if they did not follow the path of democracy." Presumably, he meant a peaceful, political path -- which is not necessarily synonymous with democracy.

How Sinn Fein or, at least, its most militant followers would react if such a threat was carried out, in the face of a resounding electoral mandate for the party to be given its due quota of Executive seats, is anybody's guess. But it would not auger well for the actual implementation of what was understood to have been agreed on Good Friday. The IRA has effectively decommissioned weapons by not using them.

Since everything is, as yet, up in the air at this moment in time, I have not attempted to look in detail at the different aspects of the "Agreement" or to analyze what may be the pros and cons of it. If a No vote is recorded in the North, or one that represents a minority of Unionism, such an exercise would have turned out to have been superfluous anyhow. Suffice to say that, from a nationalist/republican democratic point of view, it has many objectionable features, not least that the colonial power will remain as the real string-puller in what transpires in the future.

Should there be a Yes vote in the May referendum which would lead us on to an implementation stage, then this deal will fix the parameters within which the forthcoming political struggle will have to be fought. The task of highlighting the possibilities for progress and identifying the inherent obstacles created by this "Agreement" will no doubt be the sole topic for continuing debate.

*\*In so far as the "Don't Knows" are concerned.*

\* \* \* \*



## Newsbits

*cont. from page*

violated now cannot wait until next summer for answers. The government should implement immediately a zero tolerance policy for abusive police practices," she said. (*Irish News*, 5/2/98)

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A confidential NIO document, predating the Good Friday agreement, on whether the British government should sign the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages appears to contradict the measures to promote the Irish language contained in the Good Friday agreement. While the Belfast Agreement says that the British government is giving "active consideration" to signing the Charter in relation to Irish, the NIO paper recommends that the Irish language should be specifically excluded from ratification of the European agreement. At the very least, the NIO paper contradicts the spirit if not the letter of the Good Friday deal. The paper reads, "I recommend that our position should be in favor of the UK signing the Charter at an early stage with part III ratification (which would give Irish full status in public life) only in respect of Welsh.... Signing up fully to the Charter would mean that the Irish language would have to be fully catered for in "education, courts, public service, media, economic and social life and transfrontier exchanges.... The document continues: "Our preference should therefore be for Irish and Scottish to be unspecified, at least at the time of ratification." (*Sunday Tribune*, 5/3/98)

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Army brass were criticized for allowing an SAS corporal and another elite soldier to illegally train civilian gun club members in anti-terrorist techniques. The corporal and his colleague were paid to teach members of the public how to use an array of weaponry, despite warnings to their bosses from Ministry of Defense lawyers that such activities on military bases were illegal. Senior officers' "confusion" about the law had resulted in footballers, members of rugby teams, and others training with "prohibited" weapons at the SAS's base at Hereford. The two soldiers were allowed to show members of the public how to fire 9mm Browning pistols, M16 and SA80 assault rifles, a machine gun, and anti-tank weapons using live and blank ammunition. They also taught evasive driving techniques, ambush drills and bomb detection methods. Military tactics in Northern Ireland were discussed on one occasion. (Ill-advised activity or collusion? Many of the guns in the north are held by civilian "gun clubs.") (*Irish News*, 4/27/98)

## An End to Ireland's Troubles? A New Beginning

by Barrie Robinson, Consul General of Ireland, New York  
The following is an excerpt from the *New York Post*, April 12, 1998

The historic multi-party agreement concluded in Belfast April 10 marks a new beginning for the people in Northern Ireland, the people on the island of Ireland, and for the peoples of Ireland and Britain. April 10 was a day when agreement and accommodation took the place of difference and division, when a line could be drawn under the conflict of the past and when, across so many important areas, there could begin a process of fundamental and continuing change.

The sheer pace of the process over the last week confounded those skeptics who pointed to allegedly irreconcilable differences and to the deep-rooted fears and divisions in society in Northern Ireland. Those divisions are indeed deep, and the fears genuine, but April 10 demonstrated that with imagination, generosity of spirit, and, most of all, courage, the visions and prospects for building a better future can transcend the burdens of history.

The Irish government has made clear that the progress made in the peace process would have been impossible without the encouragement, support, and assistance of the United States. The personal commitment of President Clinton throughout and particularly in the final hours of the negotiations, the strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill and at the state and municipal levels, *and the active and constructive engagement of the Irish American community have helped to provide needed momentum and to sustain the process in times of difficulty.*

The agreement provides for a balanced framework of interlocking and interdependent institutional and constitutional arrangements aimed at bringing together the people of Ireland as a whole. There will be an Assembly in Northern Ireland exercising executive and legislative responsibility with each community sharing power. There will also be a North-South Ministerial Council and implementing bodies that will strengthen links on the island of Ireland and provide an institutional expression of the identity of nationalists in Northern Ireland.

The agreement contains a commitment to vigorous and widespread provisions to enhance human rights and ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity. There are also measures to help establish an acceptable peaceful society dealing with issues such as policing, prisoners, security in all its aspects, and decommissioning. The agreement represents a beginning, not an end. It will now have to be addressed fairly and properly, and the people of Ireland, North and South, will deliver their verdict in referenda on May 22. We believe the agreement offers the opportunity to build trust, cooperation, and cross-community contact. Equality, cooperation, and partnership threaten nobody, and we look forward to a new era of friendship and reconciliation between unionists and nationalists in which each tradition can learn to value the other.

The road ahead will not be easy. There will be some who will continue to oppose peace in word and deed. I am confident, however, that with the determination of political leaders and with the support of the people of Ireland, North and South, we will succeed.

As we strive to give full effect to the agreement reached on April 10 and to bring about a society where diversity can be seen as a source of strength and enrichment rather than division and conflict, we take heart and draw inspiration from the American experience and from the maxim, "E Pluribus Unum," which has underpinned and sustained the world's greatest democracy.

# Media must get it right on Northern Ireland

by Eugene P. McKenna, *New York*

(as taken from the *Rockland Journal News*, March 9, 1998)

**Your recent editorial concerning the Irish peace process demonstrates a firm understanding of the causes for the seemingly endless conflict.**

**Your willingness to express this viewpoint (that England must leave Ireland) is most commendable, as it is clearly an exception to all other New York daily newspapers.**

While I am in complete agreement with this viewpoint, I find it to be inconsistent with the articles that are printed in this very newspaper. To arrive at your viewpoint, it would seem necessary that you relied on sources other than those which you have chosen to publish.

Generally, there is a profound lack of information on British occupied Northern Ireland. What articles that are published, mostly guest columns and Associated Press reports, are by ignorance or intent anti-Irish, anti-Catholic, anti-Nationalist and clearly anti-Republican.

The AP wire service does not report

on events in Northern Ireland that expose British colonial rule. While Amnesty International, a London-based group, and other human rights groups have cataloged thousands of abuses by English crown forces in occupied Northern Ireland, none of these cases is reported by the AP.

This selective nature of reporting is obviously directed by a pro-British agenda, similar to the way the Tass reported events for the former Soviet Union. Apparently, a free press is not available when the topic concerns Irish Catholics in northeast Ireland.

As for the guest columnists, such as

**NEW BOOK ....***The book everyone is talking about.*

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The author, a London-based, award-winning documentary film maker, produced a documentary film in 1991 which exposed the "committee." Exclusive first-hand testimony was given by a member of the loyalist committee responsible for the murders.

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Mary McGrory of the Washington Post, it is enough to say that these commentators must surely be relying on AP reports for their clever insight.

The point of this letter is to make this newspaper [for the benefit of all newspapers] and its readership aware that the content of articles published here are biased toward the pro-British Unionist point of view.

Irish Catholics are portrayed as terrorists or at least supporters of terrorism. Meanwhile, English troops, with their Welsh and Scottish lackeys, patrol Catholic neighborhoods in armored vehicles, aiming automatic rifles at women and children. The Royal Ulster gestapo uses internationally outlawed [plastic] bullets to murder Irish children.

I believe a more balanced media focus will expose who is terrorizing whom.

A more balanced approach would include the following information: The case of Roisin McAliskey and her imprisonment, inhumane treatment and pending extradition [since released]; about 300 murder attempts by unionist death squads, with nine successes resulting in the deaths of innocent Catholics since the latest cease-fire; the role of the RUC in providing information to the loyalist death squads; the two-year siege of a Catholic Church in Harryville, County Antrim, by Protestant mobs; the increased harassment of Catholics since the latest cease-fire was declared; and the intransigent positions of unionist leaders at the peace negotiations.

These situations are but a few of the news stories that go unreported about "The Troubles."

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# Unionism Perishes If It Yields to Paisleyism

by Brian Feeney

Excerpt from the *Irish News*, April 22, 1998

So here we are. It's all started: councils and executives consulted, and theis held, horns locked, die cast, battle joined, campaigns launched. Yet, it's unlike any election campaign ever waged before in these islands. It's really four elections: two inside each community, in the case of the referendum hermetically sealed off from each other.

First and foremost, it's a struggle for control of unionism. Trimble has to capture bunker after bunker which the closet Paisleyites in his own party hold before confronting Paisley and his ally McCartney. Previous efforts weren't struggles at all. They were walkovers. Poor, inadequate Terence O'Neill wasn't of the north although he lived here. He had no inkling of the forces lurking in unionism. He had no credibility in trying to challenge them. It was too early, his proposals too sudden, and he lacked any plan. Brian Faulkner did know what was at stake. Faulkner himself was prepared to take on the 'demon doctor' as he called Paisley; but his troops lacked the stomach. Some ran away, some turned quisling, others stabbed him in the back. An unlovely lot, gutless, charmless, lily-livered, full of supremacist loathing for nationalists and unwilling to make the political sacrifices necessary to keep a grip on office. They'd rather relinquish power than share it with Fenians. Sound familiar?

This time any unionist with a brain knows if Trimble fails to see off Paisley, Paisley will consign unionism to political oblivion. Tony Blair is here for 10 years. He can lose 100 seats at the next election and still have a majority of more than 70. By that time, Paisley will be even more obviously gaga, if not pushing up the daisies. Tony Blair will have transformed the north anyway, advised either by the Irish government or by northern politicians or both, depending on the choices made in the next month.

In all of this, Trimble is on his own. Blair needs to be careful not to help too much or too obviously. For the same reason, Bill Clinton probably better not come unless Trimble thinks he can help. Any extravagant help from outside unionism, let alone from outside the north, might help to boost

the Paisleyite argument that the Mitchell agreement is part of a conspiracy to de-Protestantize and Gaelicize the north and provide a route map to a united Ireland.

Similarly, nothing any nationalist, and certainly nothing any republican could conceivably say, would help influence anyone in unionism. This battle, long overdue, whose outcome is vital for the future of everyone on this island, is a matter for unionism and can only be fought and won within unionism. Mainstream unionism and Paisleyism alike are aware of this and all its implications. It has started dirty and it's going to get dirtier. Trimble and his few remaining henchmen are spouting much nonsense about the agreement: its contents, its interpretation, how successful they were in negotiating away all kinds of republican shibboleths, how rock solid the union is, how stable all the pillars of unionist society are because of it.

It would be easy to dissect all the half truths and nonsense, but nobody on the nationalist side with any wit will do so. Why not? Simply because nothing Trimble says matters to anyone in the nationalist camp. Nationalists know it's for the sustenance of his own troops. Nationalism and republicanism are broadly satisfied with the agreement: the only argument is whether it enjoys 80 percent or 90 percent approval rating. Therein lies a great danger for Trimble. Unionists have a fatal tendency to believe their enemies. Paradoxically, your average DUP nutter is more likely to believe Martin McGuinness than Ken Magennis. Yes, yes, it's obvious the Sinn Fein guy is smarter and spouts less blowsy rhetoric. But the paradox is that the DUP's leaders afford the status of biblical truth to the claims Sinn Fein make for the agreement, never admitting Sinn Fein have to put the best spin on it to defeat the 32-County crazies who share

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the DUP's eagerness to support their enemies' analysis.

So, if it's difficult for Trimble to know how to proceed, the turmoil in unionism, enjoyable though it is to behold, presents problems for nationalists. Do they keep quiet and thereby present Paisley and his horrible lot with the opportunity to say nationalists are smug and complacent—the cats who got the cream? Or do they expose Trimble's preposterous overselling of the unionist aspects of the agreement and thereby present the Paisleyites with ammo to fire at Trimble? It probably doesn't matter. Trimble and the Paisleyites inside and outside his party are so like two pit bulls with jaws locked onto each other it's questionable whether they'd notice anything outsiders did.

The results of the assembly elections on June 26 will be the equivalent of a bucket of water thrown over them. There'll only be one winner, but neither contender offers any comfort to nationalists. All nationalists can do is watch in fascinated horror while resisting the temptation to give the brute they want to lose a good prod up a strategic spot with a sharp stick.

The downside of it all is that Trimble is just as venomous in his hostility to nationalism as Paisley is. The only difference is that while Paisley appeals to obscurantist, backward looking, paranoid thickos, Trimble knows the game is up and has to convince his thickos it's time to make a deal because it's his only hope of preventing nationalism from making any more progress.

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## Peace Timeline

by Sandy Carlson, *Connecticut*

**April 15** -- In a move which will be seen as a severe blow to Trimble, the Grand Orange Lodge votes against the agreement at a meeting in Belfast.

**April 16** -- Trimble says that, for the first time in generations, Northern Ireland's membership in the United Kingdom will be underwritten by the Republic, and, unlike the Sunningdale Council of Ireland, there will be no autonomous North-South body with control over important matters such as the economy.

**April 17** -- *The Irish News* reports that half of the UUP's 10 MPs are known to be against the deal. The party's executive votes in favor of it by a two-to-one majority on Saturday afternoon, however. This is the first major test for Trimble, and it comes as an enormous boost to his hopes of winning the council's support.

Blair is planning to team up with John Major to help spearhead a campaign to win support for the peace agreement and head off any Ulster Unionist split.

**April 19** -- As Sinn Fein adjourns a debate at its annual conference on the settlement plan, Adams declares: "We will firstly decide whether the agreement has the capacity to build a durable and lasting peace." He tells Irish radio: "People will come down at the end of all this and have a position for or against." The meeting approves an emergency motion to return to discussions on Sinn Fein's peace strategy, possibly before the end of the month. A decision on Sinn Fein signing up to the accord will be made then, after an anticipated recommendation from the policy-directing executive.

**April 20** -- Blair is set to share a platform with Britain's Tory and Liberal Democrat leaders to campaign for a "yes" vote in next month's referendum.

**April 29** -- The IRA leadership, in its first public statement since the end of the Northern Ireland peace negotiations, gives a cautious welcome to the Good Friday agreement. The document, the statement

says, falls far short of presenting a solid basis for a lasting settlement, and next month's referenda in the north and south are not regarded as the exercise of national self-determination. Voters should be guided by their own analysis and the advice of their political leaders. The IRA refuses to hand over weapons.

**April 30** -- Mitchell delivers a message that Northern Ireland must keep moving forward to political stability and not give the men of violence control over the future. He says that one of the things which caused him greatest concern during the negotiations was the ease with which the whole society, including political leaders, was distracted and deterred by statements and actions that are contrary to the wish and desire of the overwhelming majority of people. Meanwhile, ANC chief negotiator, Cyril Ramaphosa, who is also on a visit to Northern Ireland, says that the weapons question had been a very difficult issue in the South African situation.

In an interview with *The Irish News*, he said: "It was difficult, but we found some clever ways of getting around it. When we put everything in balance, we found that if ever there was an issue that could derail the talks in our own country, it was the whole question of the handing in of weapons. It had that potential. After doing a very careful analysis, we put it aside to be separate from the overall substantive negotiations. We continued to keep our eye on the ball on what our strategic objectives were. Once we decided that, we found that the handing in of weapons issue, which you call decommissioning, became less and less of an issue. Once people focused their eyes on a strategic objective and trust began to grow and their commitment was renewed to achieve the ultimate goal, it became less important to insist on handing in your weapons."

**May 1** -- Ahern and Adams are to meet today to discuss the IRA's statement. The talks are understood to have been fixed at the request of Sinn Fein in the wake

of the IRA verdict on the Good Friday agreement and the ruling out of a weapons hand-over move. The development also follows Ahern's assessment that the IRA declaration contains "provocative" elements. He stresses that the decommissioning of paramilitary arms is an essential part of the agreement.

**May 7** -- Reports emerged tonight in Belfast that disgruntled IRA volunteers have asked members of the Continuity IRA and militant republican supporters of the 32 -County Sovereignty Committee to join them in a renewed campaign of violence.

The groups will come together and claim the title 'Oglaigh na hEireann,' effectively proclaiming themselves to be the IRA. If the republican merger is successful, a plan to escalate attacks in the Belfast area will be put into operation. Sources close to one of the groups claimed that a step-up in mortar attacks on the city's RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) stations is already in the pipeline.

It is understood that former IRA members in south Armagh and north Louth have threatened to stop providing other dissident groups with bomb-making materials because of recent botched operations. The idea to form a single organization came from these hard-line border county republicans who believe the other groups would be more effective if they joined together to share weapons, intelligence and experience under the common title of IRA. Apart from Belfast, Armagh and Louth, support for the idea of a unified republican campaign of violence is expected to come from counties Fermanagh, Monaghan, Dublin and Tipperary. The weekend decision taken by the mainstream IRA to back the Good Friday agreement was not unanimous and delegates representing around 20 percent of volunteers are claimed to have voted against. While most of those who rejected the agreement will accept the will of the majority, it is feared that others will leave to join the dissident movement.

**May 9** -- The Ard Chomhairle is proposing that the party constitution be amended to enable Sinn Fein candidates to stand in the elections on the basis of



## 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.

1. Hon. Bill Clinton, The White House, Washington, DC 20500, tel. 202-456-1111, president@whitehouse.gov

Message: As a member of the American Irish PEC, I wish to thank you for your essential role in bringing about the Irish peace process. Now I urge you to use your good offices to ensure that the governmental structures to be established in Ireland and the north are both democratic and meaningful. Also, please ensure that the peace process is not side-lined by the violence that continues in the north or by decommissioning.

2. Sen. George Mitchell, Verner, Lipfert, Bernhard, McPherson & Hand, 901 15th St. NW, Rm 700, Washington, DC 20005

Message: As a member of the American Irish PEC, I thank you for all the hard work you invested in the Irish peace process. Please use your good offices now to ensure that the governmental structures to be established in Ireland and the north are both democratic and meaningful so that they will help bring about a permanent peace.

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## Peace Timeline

participation in the assembly, both as a way of ensuring maximum republican and nationalist representation on the North/South Council and with the objective of expanding the all-Ireland structures.

We should also note that what is proposed in the change to Article 2 will confirm a constitutional right to Irish citizenship for the people in the Six Counties. Creating a momentum towards democracy places a huge responsibility upon the Irish Government that must represent the national interest in the course of seeking Irish Unity.

The Good Friday document is not a political settlement. Sinn Fein comes to this process in a positive and constructive mode in order to move our struggle into a new and potentially more productive phase and also to bring the peace process as quickly as possible to a democratic peace settlement. We have made it clear that we reject a Unionist veto and that we seek an end to Partition and British rule in our country. In the pursuit of Irish Unity our party leadership is united in exploring the potential of the Good Friday paper.

Our struggle goes on. While we understand and appreciate the difficulty that the following recommendation poses for some republicans who may wish to vote otherwise, the Ard Chomhairle in the context of our legitimate reservations calls for a Yes vote in the referendums North and South.

**May 10** -- Sinn Fein votes overwhelmingly in favor of the Good Friday Agreement. The party also votes in favor of letting its leaders participate in a new Northern Ireland Assembly to be set up if the Irish people, north and south, accept the agreement in the May 22 referenda. Meanwhile, a splinter group of IRA members dissatisfied with the agreement fire two mortars in the town of Belleek and disrupt a wedding there. The new group's leadership accuses Sinn Fein of accepting partition by accepting the agreement.

Dissident republicans who launch a botched bomb attack on a County Fermanagh RUC station succeed in ruining the wedding plans for a Co Tyrone GAA star.

**May 11** -- Blair warns Sinn Fein that it cannot participate in a new administration unless the IRA decommissions its weapons. Blair admits that if there were a "no" vote, he does not have a Plan B. "Plan B is going back to square one." He pledges to "clean up" dissident groups if they were to continue violence after the people in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic had voted for the agreement.

## Be a Letter Writer!

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