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## American Irish Newsletter - April 1999

American Ireland Education Foundation - PEC

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### Recommended Citation

American Ireland Education Foundation - PEC, "American Irish Newsletter - April 1999" (1999). *American Irish Newsletter*. Paper 42. [http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/irish\\_ainews/42](http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/irish_ainews/42)

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# AMERICAN IRISH NEWSLETTER

Political Education Committee of the American Ireland Education Foundation

Volume 24, Number 4

April 1999

## We Wake to Nightmares if the Dream Deal Dies

By Brian Feeney

Reprinted from the March 10, 1999 *Irish News*

....You've heard a lot about the treaties being signed this week to provide for the North-South ministerial Council, the implementation bodies, the British-Irish Council, and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. On the face of it, the timing is to show that the two governments have done everything they need to for the executive to take over and the Agreement to come fully into operation. In one sense yes, but in another very important sense no.

Do you remember that, before Ulster Unionist Ken Maginnis's needle got stuck at decommissioning, he used to bore everybody rigid about Articles 2 and 3 [of the Irish constitution]? Ah, you might say, [that] was...settled in the referendum last year. Virtually everyone who voted in the Republic took the opportunity to ditch the articles, so that's that. Well, no. The amendments that people in the Republic voted for last May didn't come into effect then. More important, they don't come into effect at all until the Agreement is in force. Furthermore, there's a time limit. The Irish government must make a declaration within 12 months that the Agreement is in force; only then are they obliged to amend the constitution....When do the 12 months expire? June 3, 1999. Now quite obviously,...if there's no executive by June 3, the Agreement is not in force....[I]f there's no executive before June 3, the Irish government will not be able to make the declaration that the Agreement is in force. In that event, Dail Eireann will have to bring in legislation to define a "longer period," as stated in the Agreement. This has quite interesting consequences.

...[F]rom a Northern point of view, it means that the Irish government will be able to establish an absolute deadline for the completion of the Agreement. If Trimble still hasn't agreed to an executive by that deadline, then Articles 2 and 3 can't be amended, and not only will Trimble have lost the opportunity of setting up agreed institutions in the north, but also he will have failed to have the dreaded articles removed....If Trimble refuses to go into an executive as he agreed last Good Friday and allows the 12-month time limit for amending the Irish constitution to lapse, then the new British-Irish agreement (about which unionists don't speak) comes into force, Sinn Fein doesn't have to explain why they're up at Stormont sitting in two partitionist parliaments instead of only one, the so-called territorial claim will remain, and the SDLP's power-sharing project will die....[B]ut there's no evidence that Trimble has any strategy.

....It looks as if Trimble's invisible candidate for Europe could be facing Paisley on a UUP platform that the party leader has destroyed, namely that there are stable institutions in the north and Articles 2 and 3 have been amended. At his present rate of digging, Trimble is set to ensure that nothing he claimed for the Agreement will have happened and that he is the person who made sure his own claims collapsed.

## Newsbits

Rosemary Nelson, who represented the Garvaghy Road Residents Coalition in Portadown, has been killed as a result of loyalist car bomb attack earlier this afternoon. Nelson, who was very seriously injured in the attack, later died in hospital of her injuries. (*Irish News* 3/15/99)

Congressman Ben Gilman, chair of the House International Relations Committee, today criticized the... British government's decision to further delay the formation of the new cabinet executive as required by the terms of [the Mitchell Agreement.] Gilman [said], "What we need today are not more delays and calls for symbolic arms decommissioning gestures; we need substantive power sharing, including Sinn Fein's full participation in the executive cabinet won legitimately in the democratic process." (*HIRC*, 3/9/99)

A report...by US lawyers and civil rights activists based on the American experience of police reform has been handed to Chris Patten's commission on policing and Secretary of State Mowlam.... Senator Tom Hayden said American experience

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## OUR VIEW:

### ***Talk is not a Suitable Alternative to Peace***

*Though the Mitchell Agreement passes its first anniversary this month, the British and Irish governments have failed to set up the democratic political structures that were supposed to replace British direct rule and allow the people of the North some self-government.*

*Both Northern Secretary Mo Mowlam and Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern continue to insist there is no alternative to implementing the Agreement, even as they missed the March 10 deadline for setting up the Executive. On the evidence, it is clear that, as far as the governments are concerned, it's better all round to talk about the future bureaucratic trappings of the North than to establish democracy and peace.*

*Talk alone is not a suitable alternative to violence. Talk alone, like violence, is an emblem of political failure--in this case, the failure of the governments to insist that UUP leader David Trimble get past the decommissioning impasse and actually lead unionism into democracy. While Trimble stalls peace, loyalists continue to terrorize nationalists. Talk, insofar as it creates a political vacuum, undermines the potential for peace in the same way a lack of inclusive dialogue 30 years ago instigated the Troubles. Will the Mitchell Agreement see violence before its second anniversary, or will the governments finally implement it?*

## PEACE PROCESS UPDATE

### **February 16**

The Northern Ireland Assembly endorses First Minister David Trimble's and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon's proposals for a 10-member ruling executive and six cross-border bodies to address all-Ireland areas of cooperation. The vote clears the way for Northern Secretary Mo Mowlam to put in place legislation for devolution, earmarked for March 10. The deadline will be missed.

### **February 17**

Delegations from the UUP and Sinn Fein fail to make a breakthrough in the decommissioning impasse. The UUP refuses to take up seats in the Assembly before the IRA starts to decommission its weapons.

### **February 19**

Sinn Fein and the RUC clash over unionist claims that detonators found in a west Belfast arms raid this week breached the IRA's cease-fire. Republicans claim both the

**Published by**  
**American Ireland Education Foundation-PEC**  
*A non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization*  
**founded 1975**

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police and anti-Agreement unionists fail to highlight loyalist rearmament. President Bill Clinton might be asked to step in and attempt to forge a breakthrough in the decommissioning impasse.

### **February 23**

Ulster Unionist Ken Maginnis says the UUP could allow decommissioning to take place at the same time as Sinn Fein's admission to a governing Executive, provided the entire IRA arsenal were handed over by June 2000.

### **February 28**

Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness says there is not the remotest possibility of the IRA's surrendering any of its weapons ahead of the setting up of the new executive.

### **March 1**

The British Army bomb squad defuses a pipe bomb left at the home of a Catholic family near Coalisland, County Tyrone.

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## From the North

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

The new deadline for the transfer of responsibilities to the shadow Northern Ireland Assembly is now the week beginning March 29. In practical terms, this will mean April 19 because the Assembly that breaks up at the close of business on April 1 does not resume until then. Wits have pointed out that it would be unlikely for ministers (Executive members) to be appointed on All Fools Day. By April 19, Northern Secretary Mo Mowlam will have activated the Standing Order to trigger the d'Hondt procedure whereby the Executive members are to be appointed, without preconditions, as per the terms of the Mitchell Agreement. This means that parties are entitled to Executive seats in proportion to the votes cast for them in the election for the Assembly.

One of the things that stick in the throats of most unionists is that the democratic mandate has returned this result: SDLP 3, UUP 3, SF 2, and DUP 2—a 50-50 balance between nationalists/republicans and unionists. This is perhaps the main reason why the unionist No Men have rejected outright the Mitchell Agreement and the dissidents within the UUP have been satisfied to collude with the leadership in using the decommissioning of IRA weapons as a delaying tactic. Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution claiming sovereignty over the North and even the cross-border bodies issues have slipped a long way down the scale of their priorities.

That explains why one year will have passed since the parties put their names to the Mitchell Agreement but it is still not certain whether key aspects of it will ever be implemented. Even the April 19 date remains highly problematical. The problem is tendentiously presented by the British and the

Irish mainstream media as being one of conflict between the UUP and SF—with the former being in possession of the “high moral ground.” This is not the case at all! All of the pro-Agreement parties that were elected to the Assembly, except the UUP, have been clamoring for months to have the Agreement implemented. These include the pro-unionist Alliance Party, the SDLP, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), the Women's Coalition, and Sinn Féin.

Only the UUP (with 21.26 % of the votes for the Assembly, compared to 17.63% for SF) and the ragbag of rejectionists around McCartney and Paisley have been holding up the realization of democratic changes. Yet, they would not have been in this position had it not been for the difficulties that the British government created for itself. The present hiatus in the peace process goes back to a letter that British Prime Minister Tony Blair sent to the UUP in order to induce a majority of its members to accept the Mitchell Agreement in the first place. This letter promised them a scheme for the decommissioning of IRA arms that ran diametrically opposed to the Mitchell document itself. Unionists have decided to hold him to that promise. Perhaps New Labor thought that, when the deal had been concluded, sufficient pressure could have been brought to bear on the republicans to get them to acquiesce. An obvious pan-governmental alliance *potentially* existed for this purpose comprised of London, Washington, and Dublin.

Should that stratagem fail, then there was the possibility of inducement entailed in the d'Hondt system for establishing the Executive. Could the republicans possibly resist the opportunity to get SF into a system that would

share power, meaning responsibilities, and preside over cross-border bodies? Getting the IRA to give up its weaponry now seems to be opportune.

Perhaps that is why, on cue, the mainstream media jumped into action and set up a blatantly one-sided campaign aimed at getting the IRA, through threats of Sinn Féin's exclusion, to give up its arms at the time and in the way specified by Trimble, who had been chosen to act as the front-runner. No matter that what was being demanded amounted to a renegotiation of the Agreement. That, really, is what the present hiatus amounts to. Sinn Féin, supported by the other pro-implementation parties, argues that the only viable way that decommissioning—and state demilitarization—can be effected is by all the parties' getting on with implementing the reforms the Agreement specifies.

Because of unionist obstructionism, one year after the signing of the deal very little has yet been realized. Even the April 19 date could see the collapse of this “Sunningdale Mark 2” experiment with a total discrediting of Anglo-Irish politics. Realizing that he will not be able to either “park” the process or get a “review” of something that has not been given a chance to prove itself, Trimble has taken steps to protect his back in his pre-treaty meeting with Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. He claims that he got Ahern to agree to treaty amendments that would tie the fate of the cross-border bodies to that of the proposed Northern Executive. If one falls, they both fall.

Whatever about that, at the moment it looks certain that republicans are not going to comply with the UUP's *ultra vires* demands. But, whatever Mo might have said, there is a plan B and C, D, and E, for that matter. On St. Patrick's day, when this article is being written, that is the problem with is presently being grappled with in Washington.



## **Newsbits** (continued from Page 1)

had shown simply increasing Catholic numbers in the RUC would not be enough to transform policing. Suggesting "beginning anew" was the best option, he said the constitutional changes ushered in by the Mitchell Agreement were fundamental and argued police reform should take place on a similar scale. (*Irish News* 2/19/99)

Milltown killer Michael Stone has been given a release date for the middle of next year....A relative of one of the murder victims... expressed his fears that he could unwittingly come face-to-face with the killer when he is given temporary parole before the scheduled release date of July 22, 2000....The sentence review commission...is obliged to tell relatives of victims of inmates when they are to be set free, but there is no such mechanism for informing the same relatives when the same prisoners are to be let out temporarily [as part of a prerelease scheme] ....In 1989, Stone was sentenced to life imprisonment for six murders....An NIO spokesman said the review commission was independent of the British government—but said it would be "impractical" for the prison service to inform families when their loved one's killers would be given temporary parole....[Stone will be put on] as part of the early release scheme under the Mitchell Agreement. (*Irish News* 2/22/99)

British soldier Lee Clegg has been acquitted of murdering 18-year-old [Karen Reilly] in a shooting in west Belfast in 1990....Mr. Justice Kerr ...convicted Clegg of attempting to wound the driver, 17-year-old Martin Peake, who was killed at the army checkpoint. Clegg was freed on bail pending sentencing. [He had returned to military service after being released from jail after serving two years of his sentence.] (*IAIS* 3/11/99)

## **Charles A. Comiskey: White Sox Founder**

By Kevin P. Murphy, Massachusetts

With Spring here, the American imagination once again turns to baseball. Throughout baseball's history, the American Irish have played a large role. Even today, baseball's homerun king is American Irishman Mark McGwire. McGwire is part of a long tradition of American Irish involvement in the sport. Irish immigrant Charles A. Comiskey was a pioneer in the game.

Comiskey was born in Chicago, Illinois on Aug. 15, 1859. His parents fled the Great Hunger in Crosserlough, County Cavan in 1848 and settled in the growing town of Chicago. As a teenager, Comiskey became an apprentice plumber. He also became a very good third baseman.

Comiskey played professional baseball in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; St. Louis, Missouri; and Dubuque, Iowa. He played with the St. Louis Brown's World Series teams in the late 1880s and in the late 1890s became a manager of the Cincinnati Reds.

At the turn of the century, Comiskey developed the Western League, which soon became the present-day American League. Comiskey soon formed his own baseball team, the Chicago White Sox. The White Sox soon became a top-ranked team and won pennants in 1917 and the World Series. In 1910, Comiskey built a huge stadium, Comiskey Park, on Chicago's bustling south side.

This baseball pioneer never lost sight of the needs of others, however. Yearly, he donated \$20,000 to the Red Cross. He was also the only team owner to order that World War I veterans be given free admission to White Sox games. Also, he organized the first worldwide tour of baseball, during which the sport was introduced to Caribbean nations.

Comiskey died on Oct. 26, 1931. Sixty years later, a second Comiskey Park was built that today serves as a living monument to Charles A. Comiskey and the team he formed.

Source: *Library of Edward Kelley, Dorchester, Mass.*

## **Human Rights Commission is up and Running**

The new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has pledged to boost the peace process.

Chief Commissioner Brice Dickson said the new body will:

keep under review the way in which the law protects human rights in the North;

- examine laws proposed by the new assembly;
- prepare a draft bill of rights for Northern Ireland;
- promote awareness of the importance of human rights; and
- help individuals to take cases to court and to take cases itself.

It is expected to be entrusted with investigating alleged abuses of human rights—possibly including past occurrences—although the government has yet to give it those powers.

A new human rights commission will also be set up in the Republic, and, eventually, a joint committee will consider human rights across the island.



**Fresh claims of collusion between loyalist paramilitaries, the British Army, and the RUC have been made by John Weir, a former police sergeant convicted of taking part in the Ulster Volunteer Force murder of a Catholic.**

# **RUC Killer Claims Army-Loyalist Link**

By Liam Clarke

Excerpt from the March 7, 1999 London *Sunday Times*

Weir has produced names and cited specific incidents to back up his claims, unlike Bobby Philpott, the Ulster Freedom Fighter who made claims about collusion to the BBC last week. But Weir has not provided independent corroboration.

A dossier of Weir's allegations, with the names of most of those involved, was given to the RUC by *The Sunday Times* on February 18.

Weir served as an RUC officer from 1971 until December 1979, when he was arrested for his part in the murder of William Strathearn, a shopkeeper, who was shot on April 19, 1977, at his shop near Ballymena. Weir and Billy McCaughey, another police officer involved in the killing, have confirmed that the gunman was Robin Jackson, a notorious UVF assassin, who was never charged.

Weir offered to turn Queen's evidence against Jackson if he was given immunity from prosecution. He was offered a sentence review after five years, instead. He refused, and there was no evidence on which to charge Jackson.

Weir's main allegations are:

- Police officers in Newry collected homemade machine guns from an organization known as Down Orange Welfare and sold them to the Portadown UVF. Weir claims that he

was given one of these weapons in the home of Harry Breen, then a uniformed chief inspector. Breen became a superintendent in Special Branch and was murdered by the IRA in 1989.

- Guns handed in during a weapons amnesty in 1971 were routinely passed on to the UDA by RUC officers in east Belfast.

- RUC officers bombed and shot up the Rock Bar in Keady in 1975 and bombed Tully's bar in Whitecross in 1976. Some of those involved in the Rock Bar attack were later convicted.

- The farm of a former police reservist near Markethill was a meeting place for loyalist paramilitaries and rogue members of the security forces. Weir alleges it was a staging point for the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in May, 1974, and an attack on Donnelly's bar in Silverbridge in December, 1975, in which three people were killed, and other atrocities.

- An Ulster Defence Regiment intelligence officer, now a successful businessman, supplied the explosives for the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and other loyalist attacks.

Weir says he was asked to carry out terrorist attacks by an RUC inspector, now retired, and by an army intelligence officer. He claims that the inspector told him that a very senior officer, now also retired,

## *Copy and Distribute*

approved. Weir feared he was being set up and refused.

Weir's collusion with loyalists ended after an investigation by Brian Fitzsimmons, a Special Branch detective who rose to assistant chief constable and who died with 24 other senior intelligence officers in a helicopter crash on June 2, 1994. He put Weir under surveillance.

After Weir traveled to Castleblayney, County Monaghan, with Jackson in an attempt to kidnap a republican suspect, Special Branch told him he was about to be shot and moved him away from the border.

Chief Superintendent Eric Anderson, the CID officer in charge of the Omagh bomb inquiry, studied Weir's files.... He rejected Weir's claim that Breen had been involved in collusion. "Breen was a very honorable man who was killed by the IRA. I worked with him in force inspectorate and he was above reproach," he said. Anderson believes a group of corrupt officers, including Weir, was active but had no high-level support. He said some of the group had plotted to bomb a senior officer.

Kevin Sheehy, another senior detective who was involved in the review of murders during Weir's time in south Armagh, said: "I can assure you that everyone in the police who was named was rooted out and taken in for interview. We did our best to sort those people out."

For more information, contact the  
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Published by the AIEF-PEC April 1999



# For Some, the Language of Freedom is Irish

By Sandy Carlson

*Copy and Distribute*

For most Americans, the Irish language amounts to slogans that fit neatly on beer mats and paper shamrocks around St. Patrick's Day—slogans inviting revelers to drink up but signifying little else for them.

For Gerard Magee, use of the Irish language indicates something else entirely. An Irish republican in his mid-30s from County Antrim, Northern Ireland, Magee is a *Gaeilgeoir* (Irish language speaker) who sees the use of Irish as a measure of success in the struggle to achieve equality in the North.

## Language is an Issue of Identity

Irish speakers there have long sought the British government's recognition of Irish as a minority language. In Belfast, for example, the local government has long made its forms available to citizens in Chinese, a recognized minority language, but not in Irish.

"The language is an important aspect of national identity, and it gels a community," he said during a visit to Connecticut in February.

By promoting the daily use of Irish, Magee sees himself as continuing a centuries-long political struggle to achieve "the right to be Irish in Ireland and develop a sense of the nation through culture, including the language."

The regional cultural officer for Sinn Féin, Magee is responsible for organizing activities in mid-County Tyrone for Irish speakers. He said that the Irish language is enjoying increased interest from people throughout Ireland.

"For centuries, the British sought to destroy the Irish language and even made it illegal to speak it. They all but succeeded, but this phase of the struggle has renewed interest in the language and brought it back to life, so to speak. Now you can be just about anywhere and come across people who can speak the language, even if it's just a little," he said.

## Agreement to Promote Irish

The Mitchell Agreement provided a great boost for the language, Magee explained, because in it the British government promises to protect and promote the Irish language.

In the Agreement between the British and Irish governments, the British agreed, "where appropriate," to encourage the use of Irish in speech and writing, education, and the media. The British also agreed to fund Irish broadcasts and film and to "make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints."

Magee is working with his party through to see that the British government implement the language aspects of the accord.

"We'd like to see a bilingual Assembly and the opportunity for Assembly members to learn Irish so that there is equality for all speakers," he said.

## Irish Grows Throughout Ireland

Throughout Ireland, Irish language programs are in place that promote Irish in daily life, education, and the arts.

Since 1996, the Dublin-based Gael-Linn organization has been developing "a state of the art venue and meeting place for the best in Irish language entertainment, music, theatre, and cabaret, with an interactive hi-tech information center and a specialist music store" in Dublin's Temple Bar area, according to the organization.

In the same year, Gael-Linn piloted a program in some of the North's grammar schools to trace the role the Irish language has played in the heritage and culture of all communities in Northern Ireland.

In Wicklow Town in the Republic of Ireland, the state-funded *Gaelscoil Chill Mhantain* opened with 40

students and two teachers.

"The medium of instruction is the Irish language. Irish is the language of the playground, the staff room and Board of Management meetings. The school operates under a joint Catholic/Protestant ethos acknowledging the unique contribution of both traditions in Irish life," according to principal Gearoidin Ni Loingsigh.

## The Prison is an Irish Classroom

Though Magee did not learn Irish in school—he dropped it because it was a "chore"—he nevertheless comes from an environment in which Irish amounts to more than slogans and catch phrases. It is a means of forming community and surviving as one. A former political prisoner, Magee was released last September from the notorious Maze Prison.

"Irish was used in the jail since it was opened in 1971. Ever since, republican prisoners have used Irish to communicate among themselves and to shout news from cell to cell," Magee explained, adding that he quickly picked up phrases concerning cell searches and other matters.

## The Language Unites People

Magee is happy to speak Irish wherever he is, even if his listeners can't reply in Irish.

At Fitzpatrick's restaurant in Brooklyn, he tried out a few Irish words of greeting to a woman employee.

"She responded in English, but she knew what I meant," he said. "It was an Irish pub, so I figured it was worth testing it out on her. She was from County Wicklow."

For more information, contact the  
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Published by the AIEF-PEC April 1999

## Bloody Sunday Witnesses' Evidence Will not be Used in Criminal Proceedings

Bloody Sunday relatives have described as "worrying" a ruling by British Attorney General John Morris that evidence given by witnesses at the new inquiry will not be used in criminal proceedings against them.

The attorney general was responding to a request from chairman of the new Bloody Sunday inquiry, Lord Saville of Newdigate. Saville sought the legal undertaking to coax more witnesses to cooperate with the investigation to find the truth about what happened on Bloody Sunday, when the British army murdered 14 civil rights protesters.

In his official ruling, Morris said evidence presented by witnesses would not "be used to the prejudice of that person in any criminal proceed-

ings." Explaining his ruling, the attorney general said he had carefully weighed his views against the important public interests relating to the integrity of the administration of justice and the upholding of the rule of law in Northern Ireland.

"In that context, many years have now passed since the incident and evidence sufficient to justify the institution of criminal proceedings has not emerged."

He added: "I should say, for the avoidance of doubt, that, although the undertaking is cast in terms which preclude the use of evidence given by a witness as the basis of criminal investigation into the conduct of that witness, this does not amount to any

form of immunity," he said.

A relative of one of the men shot dead on Bloody Sunday has expressed concern at the ruling in light of Morris's remarks that evidence of criminal activity had not emerged.

Stressing that the relatives would consider the ruling carefully before making a formal response, Tony Doherty said the attorney general's claim that there was no evidence of criminal behavior on Bloody Sunday was wrong. It was because of the new evidence which was emerging "almost on a weekly basis" and which was presented to London by the Irish government that the new inquiry was established, he said.

### Visit the PEC's Website

for useful American Irish links, back issues of the Newsletter, and electronic access to Action Requests, visit <http://www.sirius.com/~weet/pec/>.

## Changing Times Auger Well for Unity

By Steven McCaffery

Excerpt from the February 26, 1999 *Irish News*

Gerry Adams might be right after all. Just days ago, there was outcry over the Sinn Fein president's prediction that Ireland would re-unite in 15 years. Now he has secured an unlikely ally for his theory--The Sunday Times.

As part of its five-week series of predictions--billed as "Tomorrow's news today"--the paper has predicted that Ireland's border will disappear in the year 2014.

Gazing into its crystal ball, it goes as far as to suggest Ulster Unionist David Trimble--who by that stage it says will be the "grand old man of unionism"--will back the drive for all-Ireland government.

Despite the fuss, however, no-one within UUP ranks was getting too excited.

"It would have been slightly more amusing, to say the least, if it had predicted Bob McCartney calling for a united Ireland 15 years from now," said one UUP source. "Because clearly Conor Cruise O'Brien thinks that's the way we are going."

At Sinn Fein headquarters the mood was more upbeat.

"Ah, that sounds like a very sensible position," said a spokesman. "It has been a long time coming, but we got there in the end."

The DUP wasn't surprised.

"Nothing David Trimble would do could surprise us."

The latest ruffling of feathers comes after SDLP disquiet over a menu change at the Stormont parliament. Party leader John Hume, who has often argued Northern Ireland's people "cannot eat flags," found himself standing behind the serving counter in the parliament's canteen.

The voice of the DUP's Gregory Campbell was heard calling from the queue: "John, can I have a flag please?"



## Action Request

Write the letter below, call, or send email. Have friends, organizations, and others do the same. Please mention that you are a member of the PEC.

Write: Gov. Jesse Ventura, 130 Capitol Bldg., 75 Constitution Ave., St. Paul, MN 55155, tele. 651-296-3391, email: jesse.ventura@state.mn.us

**Message:** Thank you for retracting the remark that you made on the David Letterman show that drunken Irishmen might have designed St. Paul's streets. Such comments perpetuate negative stereotypes and racism and are unacceptable.

Write: J. Markman, American Greetings, One American Rd., Cleveland, OH 44144, tele. 216-252-7300, email: information@americangreetings.com

**Message:** Your electronic "Couch Potato Famine" greeting card was deeply offensive to the memory of the millions of Irish who suffered and died during the Great Hunger of 1845-50. Please assure me that you will not exploit this event or otherwise mock the Irish in future.

## Activists win Apologies for Anti-Irish Jokes

Americans who disapprove of anti-Irish racism moved swiftly during the 1999 St. Patrick's Day season to correct Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura and American Greetings for making jokes at the expense of the Irish. Both Ventura and American Greetings apologized for being offensive. Nevertheless, the fact that the governor and the greeting card giant exploited anti-Irish racism for what they hoped would be their own benefit clearly indicates that we must continue to openly object to such offensive situations to prevent them from being repeated. (See *Action Requests*.)

Ventura commented on the Feb. 23 David Letterman show that St. Paul's confusing streets might have been designed by drunken Irishmen. Two days later, he apologized, saying he was only trying to be funny. "If I offended anyone, I apologize," he said. "The David Letterman show is a show of comedy...and that's the light in which I did the show." However, failing to see that racism is not funny, he added that he was sorry Minnesotans have "apparently lost their sense of humor."

American Greetings got itself into trouble for issuing an electronic St. Patrick's Day greeting card with "Couch Potato Famine" emblazoned above a picture of hills populated by chairs and TVs. The greeting said: "They all must be out celebrating St. Patrick's Day...Now log off and go celebrate, too." PEC member **Kathy Regan** alerted the PEC to this offensive situation. **In response to the PEC's complaint**, the company responded: "I am sorry that our greeting has offended you. We have heard the voices of our customers and we are removing the greeting from the site immediately. In the future, we will review our greetings with more discretion. Again I do apologize for any offenses."

(continued from Page 2)

### March 8

Mowlam says political progress has to be made before the summer marching season. The British and Irish governments sign treaties to set up the executive, the North-South ministerial council, the council of the isles, and the British-Irish intergovernmental council. IRA personnel in south Armagh and north Louth threaten to split from the organization if it decommissions weapons, senior gardai warn. Garda sources say that the IRA's position on arms has hardened in the past fortnight and there is now very little prospect of decommissioning.

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