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Fortnight

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BLOWN AWAY?



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FORTNIGHT ASKS:

Do we still have a peace process?

FREE Supplement: Whose City II

Decommissioning mindsets

Two days before the IRA ended its cessation with the attack on Canary Wharf **KEVIN CULLEN** spoke to Senator George Mitchell about his prospects for the peace process

After the IRA blew up the Isle of Dogs, some were suggesting that George Mitchell was the only one who saw it coming.

But in an interview two days before the Docklands bombing, Mitchell dismissed suggestions that he had inside knowledge about an impending split within the IRA and the unravelling of the ceasefire. Indeed, right up to the bombing, Mitchell was convinced the ceasefire would hold and was stunned, as were most others, when it did not.

Mitchell said the report that bore his name was merely repeating what Sinn Féin officials had stressed to him and his colleagues, Harri Holkeri and John de Chastelain, in their meetings with the International Body on decommissioning—or as the British government's press office deemed them in material it distributed, "The International Commission on Terrorist Arms."

Mitchell said Sinn Féin representatives made it clear to him and his colleagues that a split in the republican movement was inevitable if the demand for weapons was not somehow removed or softened—and that a split meant a resumption of violence. As it turned out, the threat of a split was apparently enough to lead the Army Council to resume the violence.

Mitchell agreed that the nugget in the report was tucked away in paragraph 44. "Parties should also have the option of destroying their weapons."

This recommendation did not come out of thin air. Mitchell said Sinn Féin figures "said this is an approach that could gain acceptance" within the IRA. "They said that in their written submission to us."

In hindsight, that written submission may offer one reason why the IRA chose not to inform Sinn Féin of its plans for the night of Feb 9.

Mitchell also said he was convinced that both republicans and loyalists would cease punishment beatings if talks were convened. "Both sides gave us that indication," he said.

Asked whether he was piqued that, after all their work, John Major saw fit to immediately ditch the commission's key recommendation that the British drop their demand for arms prior to talks, Mitchell would not take the bait.

"The governments made it clear in their communiqué that they weren't committing themselves, in advance, to act on our recommendations. So, was I upset? No."

Nor would Mitchell criticise Major's taking one mention of elections in 62 paragraphs and running with it as evidence of the British misrepresenting the commission's report.

"That (elections) was not in our purview. We struggled with the question of how to remain true to

our mandate, but provide a report that was useful and did not artificially segregate the issue. The way

we devised our report was to include a brief section on other ways to build confidence. We said elections, if broadly acceptable, could contribute to the building of confidence."

In the wake of the Mitchell report, a steady stream of suitors came to the White House. First, Michael Ancram, then Gerry Adams, then Dick Spring, then, after



the bombing, David Trimble. But Mitchell suggested all this shuttle diplomacy amounted to unrequited lobbying. The Americans, Mitchell said, have no intention of endorsing one idea over another.

"I've encouraged the president in that direction, of not choosing sides, and the president agrees that's the way to go," said Mitchell. "The United States can't achieve maximum effectiveness by injecting themselves, or by appearing to dictate on this. We can be a facilitator, we can encourage, but we can't choose sides."

Mitchell said that he talked to President Clinton about his philosophy on what, for lack of a better term, could be called neutral engagement before accepting the job as special advisor on Ireland. While the job description referred to economic issues, it is clear that Mitchell's portfolio includes the political.

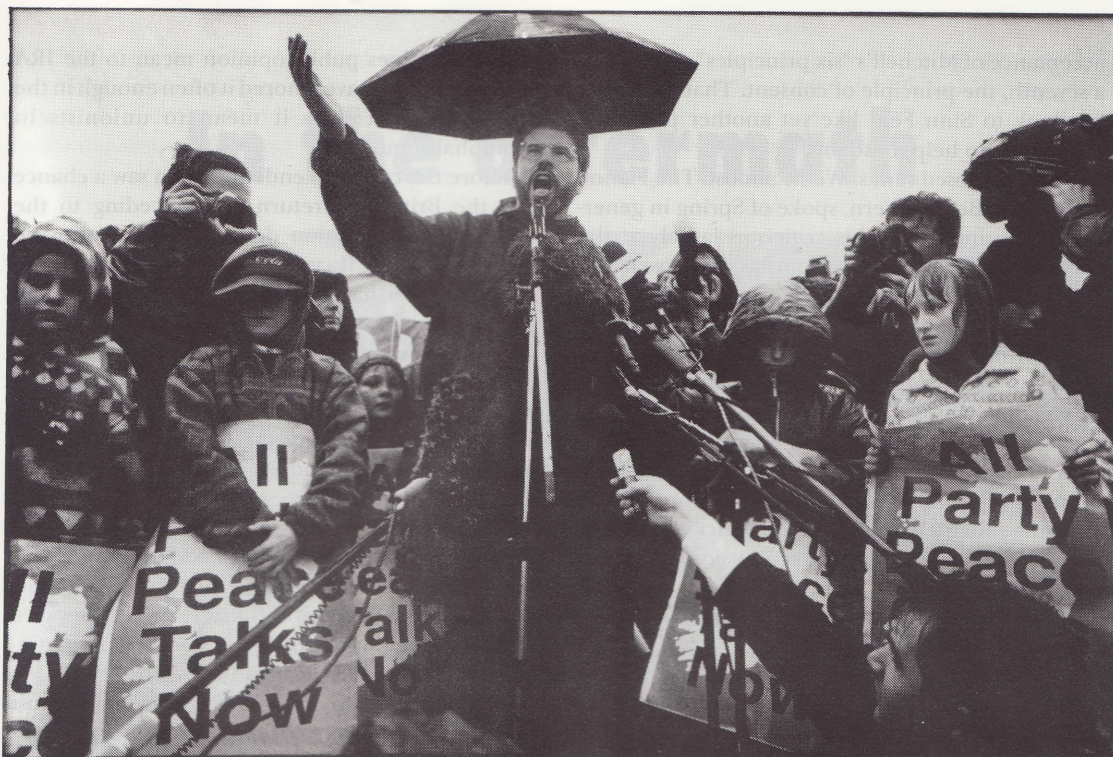
Mitchell said his experience in Northern Ireland had caused him to reconsider the value of history.

"It's striking for an American, to engage in conversations there, to see the extent to which the conversations are filled with recitations of history. It's a commonplace event, to justify a current position by citing something that happened centuries ago. I don't advocate ignorance of history, but at the same time you can become a prisoner of history. We said it right in the report. What you need is the decommissioning of mindsets."

Still, right up until the bombing, Mitchell was convinced the ceasefire would hold and that eventually all-party talks would start.

Asked what he based his optimism on, he replied. "The importance of the continuation of the ceasefire, the commitment to the democratic process on all sides."

Less than 48 hours after George Mitchell said this, Canary Wharf shook.



Gerry Adams extends the hand of friendship to the British Government at a recent Sinn Féin peace rally

Frankie Quinn

I told you so

The only people certain of their reaction were the we-told-you-so brigade. They assured us that they took no pleasure in having been proved right.

Everybody else, from taoiseach down to punter in the street, was shattered.

Some had seen it coming. When John Major threw the Mitchell report in the dustbin, one of the key officials involved assessed the chances of the IRA ceasefire continuing at no better than 40 per cent. But he did not want to believe it. Nobody wanted to believe it.

What made it infinitely worse for this man and the other main players was that they thought they had just enough time—until the end of February—to prevent it happening, and that they also thought they had devised a way out of the impasse.

Dick Spring had cooked up a scheme incorporating 'proximity talks' in advance of a Northern election, which in turn would lead directly and rapidly to all-party talks. When he left Washington on that awful Friday, he believed he had made important progress towards his aim. Journalists accompanying him on his plane journey home found him in an upbeat mood.

Then, over the Atlantic, he learned that his policy had gone up in smoke at Canary Wharf. It must have been a devastating moment for him.

That weekend Dublin came as close as it has ever done to despair and desperation. Feelings were comparable to those following the fall of the power-sharing Northern executive, or during the H-Blocks crisis. In many ways matters were seen as worse than

on those occasions, and worse than if the ceasefire had never come about.

Few things throw a government into disarray more surely than lack of information. This time there was a dire lack of information about how and when the IRA had made their decision, and about the position of Gerry Adams. What clout did Adams now retain? Could he still help Dublin to put the eggs back into their shells?

John Bruton announced the end of ministerial contacts with Sinn Féin. The opposition parties, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats, suppressed their misgivings and went along with the decision. Officials got in contact with Adams immediately, and met with him within a week of Canary Wharf. But it was far from clear that they had succeeded in assessing his position or the state of affairs within the IRA.

In the House of Commons, John Major adopted a much more conciliatory and accommodating tone than in the recent past. Dublin expressed relief, but that may have been to clutch at straws.

Those who know something of the IRA 'hard men' knew that they were certain to contrast the rejection of the Mitchell report in conditions of peace in February with the seemingly placatory approach when the peace ended. From the militarist viewpoint, that helped to bear out their belief that bombs and bullets are 'the only language the British understand.' They are wrong. But who can persuade them that they are wrong?

Secondly, the prime minister demanded Sinn Féin

In Dublin **JAMES DOWNEY** watched the Dail dither while (overleaf) **MACDARA DOYLE** gauged republican reaction in the south

acceptance of Mitchell's "six principles", along with a seventh, the principle of consent. That could not but look to Sinn Féin like yet another precondition—and no help to Adams.

The Dáil closed ranks. Well...almost. The Fianna Fáil leader, Bertie Ahern, spoke of Spring in generous terms and aimed his criticisms largely at the Democratic Left leader, Proinsias De Rossa. Privately, Fianna Fáil are severely critical of Bruton's handling of the peace process and think that had their former leader, Albert Reynolds, remained in charge of affairs, things would never have reached this terrible pass. That view is widely shared outside the party.

In the *Irish Times*, Mary Holland called the taoiseach inept. Two days later in the same newspaper Geraldine Kennedy made a sharp attack on Bruton, criticising him in particular for confusion of thought and for weakness on the decommissioning issue. These comments unquestionably represent informed opinion.

Meanwhile the *Irish Independent* published a unique opinion poll, conducted north and south five days after Canary Wharf. It showed enormous support—even from a good many Sinn Féin voters—for the principle of consent; for all-party talks even without a restoration of the ceasefire; and a degree of open-mindedness among both nationalists and unionists seldom reflected on the Northern Ireland political scene.

But what does public opinion mean to the IRA hard men? They have ignored it often enough in the past. And what does it mean to unionists in triumphalist mode?

Before the ceasefire ended, Dublin saw a chance that the British, in return for conceding to the unionists their election demand, would pressure them into making it a vehicle for immediate all-party talks. It would have been difficult enough to get unionists to talk to Sinn Féin even in conditions of peace. In the new situation, they were certain to demand reinstatement of the ceasefire along with decommissioning and assurances of permanence; and prior acceptance of the principle of consent. And Sinn Féin—floundering, blustering and with their own political strategy in ruins—were in no position to make concessions.

In the House of Commons, Paddy Ashdown had enunciated the 'iron rule' that the two governments together can succeed; without agreement, they give terrorists a chance. During the week following Canary Wharf much was made of restoring the co-ordinated approach, lately lacking when it was most needed. But the sad truth is that at this writing, eight days after the ceasefire ended, neither government has shown any sign of devising a firm policy of its own, still less a co-ordinated one, to get the peace process back on track. That the dilemma once again appears complete. And that from taoiseach to punter, we are all at our most pessimistic for years.

Tiocs shook up

Sometime before Christmas, probably in the anxious November days preceding the inauguration of the Twin-Track process, *An Phoblacht* took the decision to excise the word 'crisis' from their coverage of the peace process, writes Macdara Doyle.

In the paper's post-Canary Wharf issue (February 15), it was made plain that the decision was taken, not in order to play down existing tensions, but "because commentators ridiculed us for crying wolf."

Thus, fully three months before the ceasefire formally ended, it was evident there was a deepening sense of frustration within Sinn Féin over the obvious failure of some to appreciate the gravity of the situation, as it was then. Equally, and perhaps more pertinently, it was a frustration borne of the belief that the party's own pronouncements on the issue were not being accorded the consideration and respect they merited. It was as if they were becoming 'bit players' in their own, unfolding drama.

Yet, in the aftermath of Canary Wharf, while anger was directed at John Major and others, the overwhelming reaction among republicans was one of surprise. Thus, in *An Phoblacht's* February edition one article opined that: "Never was news of an IRA operation received with such astonishment... Maybe it was astonishing that we were astonished."

Doubtless, there are some who will dismiss such sentiments either as outright hypocrisy, or as part of a devilishly clever republican plot to keep Sinn Féin's foot in the door. But a similar tendency to attribute the most odious of motives to the party also contributed to the perception that they were indeed crying wolf—or even issuing 'threats'—in the months and weeks before February 9.

Nonetheless, the discovery of a second device six days later, and the premature explosion on a London bus resulting in the death of an IRA member, led to a degree of uncertainty superseding that initial surprise.

"There's a lot of confusion. People are unsure of what direction we're going in," said one party activist. The priority, he said, was to "rescue the peace process." And the success of such an attempt would depend on whether "we get talks."

He thought it doubtful that a coherent "package" could be fashioned from the plethora of proposals and counter-proposals currently circulating—which appears to be the strategy of both governments: "It seems unlikely. It's hard to see a workable package coming out of all that."

There is also a fear that, in the longer-term, the events of February 9 and after, may have provided those with an expressed disinterest in dialogue with just the excuse they were looking for.

Thus, another source, while pointing out that "they were virtually humiliating us, it was almost inevitable it was going to happen", ventured the opinion that: "This is my personal view, but I don't think it's going to help. There'd be others who'd have different views on that, that's my personal view. But nobody is saying they don't want to restore the peace. I can't see an instant solution, unless Britain backs down and sets a date. Obviously that would change the situation."

In the interim, the expressed hope was that Dublin would not concentrate exclusively on rebuilding a London-Dublin 'consensus':

"I just hope the same energy will be expended on meeting with us...it's stupid not to."

In the aftermath



Brent Moore

The scene of devastation following the Canary Wharf bomb

Jim Gibney Sinn Féin

It was clear from even the initial response of the British government to the IRA cessation 18 months ago that it wasn't going to approach the new situation positively or in the imaginative and flexible manner which London had claimed previously it would.

As one stall followed on another and British Ministers failed to replace the language of war with the language of peace, many Republicans became increasingly convinced that the British government was not really interested in substantive all party talks. Why? Because once locked into negotiations no party could be sure where they would lead or at what speed. For a British government, fearful of the constitutional change which would inevitably emerge, it was simpler to avoid sitting at the negotiating table—hence the prevarication and delays.

It may be difficult for some to hear this but the fact that the IRA didn't end its cessation until a full 18 difficult months later, with all the tragic implications of recent events in London, is positive proof that it was committed to the peace process.

The IRA's resumption of its military campaign could have been avoided had the British government played as full a part in the peace process on their side as Sinn Féin has on the nationalist side.

The IRA's commitment to the peace process was remarkably disciplined in the face of the British government's attempts to humiliate it, the Sinn Féin leadership and those who backed the peace process

on the nationalist side. The British government without lifting a finger were given a prize which to many observers of the Irish conflict was unthinkable. And what did the British do with it? They disgracefully squandered it.

During this time the Sinn Féin leadership put republicans through emotional hoops in its attempts to move the peace process forward and to avert its collapse and stretched its own credibility with the rank and file because it too wanted to see the peace process work.

It is important to list the many obstacles placed in Sinn Féin's way by the British government to get a measure of the difficulties republicans faced in their efforts to make peace with a British government and a political establishment which remained locked into a "psychology of war" against republicans.

Sinn Féin had to undergo for three months an insulting period of so-called "decontamination", a phrase with strong ethnic cleansing connotations, before there were talks with British officials. More time was wasted deliberately and cynically by the British and the Unionists over whether the IRA's cessation was "permanent". This was followed by British attempts to dictate US policy through trying to deny a visa to Gerry Adams. The British then insisted on the so called Washington Three requirement on decommissioning of weapons—the surrender of the IRA. The British then refused to honour a joint commitment with the Irish government to start all-party negotiations by the end of February and found and supported arguments for the Unionists refusing to take part in talks. Finally, in what

With all the major players in the Northern Ireland situation back on a war footing **Fortnight** asked them: "Do we have a peace process anymore?"

IRA CESSATION ENDS



many observed as the straw which broke the camel's back, John Major publicly binned the Mitchell report and selectively latched on to a suggested election option in the report in order to firstly secure his tenure at Westminster and secondly, pander to a Unionist agenda.

Despite being faced with such arrogance Sinn Féin pursued its policy of unconditionally talking with everyone; joined the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin, made a submission to the Mitchell Commission on the sensitive issue of 'decommissioning' and took part in the twin-track approach. Sinn Féin made a huge effort in talks with British ministers to convince them of the central importance of underpinning the peace process by taking positive initiatives but instead the British placed one road-block after another in the pathway towards a lasting peace.

Soon we hope the knee-jerking and recriminations will stop and those who have a democratic imperative to act swiftly and positively will focus their minds on the issues which need to be urgently addressed to restore the peace process. Sinn Féin has not and will not shirk from its commitments and responsibilities to represent its electorate and to continue to pursue its peace strategy.

None of this will be easy nor least because of the distrust now deepened in republican circles after 18 months of prevarication and bad faith demonstrated by the British.

That said, we don't have to trust each other but we absolutely do need to talk to each other to reach accommodation. What is required? We want to create a society in which peace is not a mere interlude between wars, but an incentive to the creative and collective energies of all the people who live on this island. There is no other way of achieving that than through talks, inclusive and without preconditions. This is a time for steady nerve, courage, risk taking and above all, a vision of the prize of real peace built on the solid foundations of the democratic principles of justice and equality.

Steve McBride Alliance Party

The IRA's savage attack on the peace process and on the hopes and dreams of the vast majority of our people cannot be allowed to bring the process to a stop. There must be urgent progress, led by the two governments, towards multi-party talks and the achievement of a negotiated settlement acceptable to the great majority of people in Ireland, north and south. The necessary basis for such talks has to be a commitment to the Mitchell principles and acceptance of the recommendations of the Mitchell report. What we need is a commitment to agreement amongst all of those taking part, if the process is to be successful in reaching sufficient consensus on the way forward.

At the heart of the so-called decommissioning issue has been the fear that the Republican movement's commitment to the peace process and to democratic methods was no more than conditional—

that sooner or later an Oliver Twist in a balaclava would be holding a gun to the heads of negotiators and saying "we want more". Unfortunately Canary Wharf proved that fear to be justified and now Sinn Féin's credibility is as shattered as the windows at Canary Wharf.

The Mitchell Commission recognised the legitimacy of the concern that paramilitaries 'will use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the negotiations, or to change any aspect of the outcome of negotiations with which they disagree'. The Commission proposed a series of commitments which, if made, 'would remove the threat of force before, during and after negotiations' and would 'encourage the belief that the peace process will truly be an exercise in democracy, not one influenced by the threat of violence'. Those who sought to trumpet the Mitchell report as a kick in the teeth for the British got it profoundly wrong. The Commission's report did indeed set aside the Washington Three demand for prior decommissioning, but far more importantly it cut through the miasma of word play and wishful thinking that has surrounded the issue and put it to the Republican movement straight—were they willing to come to the conference table without the influence of weapons? Canary Wharf was the answer.

However the peace process must continue, preferably with the involvement of the Republican movement but without it, if it is unable to adhere to democracy. In the coming weeks, we will be doing all we can to encourage everybody to the table but the ending of the ceasefire has made that a much more difficult process than it was before.

Ian Paisley, Jr. DUP

The deliberate and premeditated bombing of London by the IRA/Sinn Féin was a callous act of depraved republicanism. The resumption of the troubles on such a scale demonstrates that Sinn Féin/IRA are not fit to make peace with. Neither are they interested in peace. They are interested in victory on their terms.

That being so, they have proved the common sense position that the terrorists must decommission their arms before anyone could ever trust them to be part of the democratic process. The fact that they refuse, with such vulgar hatred against us British people, and their abhorrence of the principle of consent, justifies, nay, demands their exclusion from the democratic process.

Those people who talk about "rebuilding the peace process" are playing, unwittingly, Sinn Féin's game. The peace process was the exclusive property of the IRA. They determined whether 'peace' was on, in crisis or off. Those people who think that peace rallies, telephone polls or whatever else will repossess the peace are sadly deluded. Of course they want peace. All decent human beings want peace but the reality is that peace has got to be won. If you accept it as a gift from terrorists it is not free—it is enslavement.

There is only one direction the Government must take here. The instability of their conflicting promises about the future of Northern Ireland has created the climate wherein political instability can flourish. They must decide upon a democratic process. They must stick to that course and refuse to be deterred whatever world opinion may say.

Now is the time for short, sharp, shock military operations against the leadership of IRA/Sinn Féin. They have asked for it so give 'em hell. Round up those IRA terrorist prisoners released on the back of the phoney cease-fire and put them back in jail. Seal the border roads, impose the broadcasting ban and clamp down hard on the terrorists. It is only when the Government firmly resolves to destroy terror that the terrorists will stop or be made to stop.

As for the democratic process. No amount of talking between my party and Sinn Féin could ever have created a solution to the Northern Ireland problem anyway. The common ground that does exist between my party and the rest of the constitutional parties must be exploited. After an election, whose purpose is to let the people of Northern Ireland own the process, the constitutional parties can find the means to represent those democratic wishes. I would urge the SDLP to look beyond the election itself and to see the prospect of an agreement between my party and their party as more realistic and obtainable than the phoney concept of all party talks or spurious referenda questions. ♦

Harry Barnes, MP Labour

Was the IRA ceasefire scuppered by the support of Major, Blair and Ashdown for votes, rather than handing in guns, before all-party talks?

The democratic answer is that the only blame for the renewed violence lies with the IRA. They should now reinstate the ceasefire without preconditions. If votes really was the last straw, it was a pretty poor reason. It was certainly not in the same league as the original events which boosted the IRA in the early '70s: cops out of control and Bloody Sunday.

Despair is understandable but ignores the gains of Northern Ireland's and Britain's precious 17 months of peace. It saved hundreds of lives, thousands of injuries and millions of pounds. The military presence was scaled down substantially. Belfast came alive. Peace brought the possibility that the old divisions of war could be replaced by a new politics and cross-community dialogue. We need to build on these gains with considered responses. First, Anglo-Irish co-operation needs to be strengthened.

But was progress too slow? After 25 years of terror, was it too much to wait for say 25 months before beginning inclusive dialogue. It was bound to take time. The IRA will probably never acknowledge that democrats can't just grab what they want, but have to persuade.

The people must exert their pressure. We need the 'sound of angry voices and marching feet'—for peace. Apathy and indifference are the enemies of

peace. Popular resistance to terrorism is now needed. Dublin and Belfast have begun this with tremendous rallies and vigils for peace. We will do our best to mobilise British and Irish people here for democracy rather than terrorism. We shouldn't be mere spectators as London is blitzed by those who don't give a damn about basic values of decency. Our efforts and those of the two Governments and all democratic parties should seek to isolate terror. ♦

Andy Frew Green Party, N.I.

Acts of violence against civilians, when routes to negotiations were not yet closed, seem perverse. Rather than concede any initiative to a section of the IRA, it will be best to pursue non-violent means of working towards agreed regional government. A generation of people in these islands have pursued their interests despite violence. Politicians can be asked to do the same for a further period, and embark on all party negotiations on the basis of the Mitchell undertakings on democratic practice.

To work towards agreed structures, negotiations should firstly be insulated from the power of sectarian blocs in Westminster, by building the common approach of the Conservative and Labour parties into a binding agreement on the conduct of negotiations, verified by Irish and international observers. This will become critical as a British general election approaches.

Secondly, a second consultative forum of citizens active in community, civil, and business life should be set up, building a capacity for regional government in parallel with negotiations. We should plan for a successful outcome. The concrete interests of particular groups can be the driving force for responsible and responsive government, and for constitutional innovation in these islands. The forum should conduct public hearings and examine current government practice. Proposals for aspects of regional government, including departmental policy, which may otherwise be neglected by parties intent on negotiations, should be developed. If party political negotiations are encountering difficulty, the forum can be resourced to measure and publicise the extent of public agreement for limited proposals e.g. safeguards for minority interests. Appointments to the forum, which should include Irish and other organisations with local members, should be by an independent panel according to transparent guidelines.

Thirdly, if parties are to be elected to a constitutional convention, it should include representatives of all prospective users of a constitutional system e.g. by elections using PR-STV (proportional representation-single transferable vote) with a top-up procedure, so that fringe parties with significant support across Northern Ireland can be included. Since a constitutional convention has no executive powers, there is little justification in limiting the number of party delegates to those accountable to local Westminster constituencies. If a workable agreement

IRA CESSATION ENDS



Davy Adams, right, with UDP colleague Gary McMichael

IRA CESSATION ENDS



with the consent of local parties is not developing in the time foreseen, alternative procedures should be invoked e.g. providing for a regional administration directed by non British civil service staff for an interim period until the end of a further round of negotiations, the implementation of detailed proposals from the second forum, and international mediation.

The salaries paid to local politicians are dwarfed by the IRA's budget. The cost to life and livelihoods of paramilitary violence is beyond reckoning. We should now invest in the development of local democratic resources and trust in those whose vital interests lie in regionally responsive governance which respects cultural identities. ♦

Kevin McQuillan IRSP

The IRA called a ceasefire because it believed that John Major was willing to negotiate a resolution to the 'British problem' in Ireland. This was encouraged by John Hume and Albert Reynolds with guarantees of support from Irish-America to get the British moving.

The Republican movement were working from the false premise that Britain had honourable intent and that a 'pan-nationalist' front actually existed. They were in fact settling for parity of treatment for Northern nationalists—a lot less than a 32 county Republic. The 'peace process' offered nothing to working class people.

Although fully aware of the political dangers, the Sinn Féin leadership forged on. The British and the Unionists clearly spotted the weakness in the Republican position and 17 months later, they totally outmanoeuvred Sinn Féin.

The Republican movement has now been abandoned by Irish-America in the form of Clinton—and by the Irish Government. Hume is attempting to hold his original position. But he is finding this increasingly difficult and is receiving little backing from his parliamentary colleagues.

From the start the Republican socialist movement was unhappy with the 'peace process'.

We criticised the élitist manner in which the ceasefire was delivered. How could Republicans be committed to a long war of attrition with the British on one day and the next be involved in a 'peace process'? Nothing was guaranteed beforehand: there was no plan 'B' for an alternative mobilisation of anti-imperialists. Working class grass-roots Republicans were once more relegated to the role of on-lookers as their destiny was settled by others.

Regardless of our own disquiet, the leadership of the Republican Socialist movement agreed to try an alternative approach during the 'peace process'.

The INLA officially suspended its operations from 1st March 1995. The IRSP talked to representatives of many parties throughout Ireland. To date this position still holds.

At present we believe that the British and unionists are not yet prepared to take necessary steps leading

to the removal of the gun from Irish politics. The main opponent of the Republican Socialist movement is the British establishment not its agents in loyalist death squads.

However, if the UVF/UDA resume their violence, we could see a rapid deterioration of the situation.

The IRSP do not believe that any acceptable settlement can come out of all party talks as they are currently proposed.

There must still be dialogue without preconditions. We see merit in the proposals by the Tanaiste, Dick Spring, for proximity talks. This must involve all political parties and community groups so that those most affected by the conflict can have their say.

As witnessed on the streets of London, refusal to talk inevitably leads to conflict. ♦

Quentin Oliver NICVA

The juxtaposition of the Canary Wharf bomb and 17 months of relative peace provided a sharp contrast. The overwhelming mood of local community and voluntary groups was one of anger, distress and frustration, heightened by the feeling of 'we have won so much over the past 17 months we have so much now to lose'.

It was Liam Maskey, from the cross-community development project INTERCOMM, who described it on the radio: 'There may not have been a peace process at the political level, but there certainly was on the ground. We were doing it in North Belfast, with new projects, new ideas, new bridges And new coalitions at the local level.'

And therein lies the gulf. The traditional flexibility, spontaneity and creativity of local community groups provide in many ways a mirror image of the rigidities and barriers at the macro-political level. It is that chasm which civil society may be able to fill.

The response of the voluntary and community sector to the termination of the IRA ceasefire was to attempt to mobilise two interlocking mechanisms: firstly, the social partnership model developed between employers, trade unions, voluntary and community sector, and the farming community, on social and economic issues; and secondly, the wider concept of civil society, as an expression of the views, aspirations and opinions of a myriad of clubs, societies, associations, professional bodies, sporting groups, trade unions, churches and community organisations. "Filling the spaces between the columns" as Declan McGonigal has put it, or, "Providing something between the citizen and the state," as Sir George Quigley has described it.

The demands of the joint press conference, hosted by NICVA last month, alongside the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, were directed at government, at the politicians in general, and at the paramilitaries. These are the power brokers, each with their responsibilities. Government to create the framework within

which civil society can flourish, the politicians to represent us in doing the deals and making the accommodations, and the paramilitaries to allow us to live in freedom from fear.

Then civil society can flourish. It can offer a proactive and positive contribution to rebuilding, regenerating and building from the bottom up.

A range of voluntary and community groups expressed their views to NICVA, recorded in a moving testimony of the aspiration of local groups for peace and prosperity.

Yes, there is a peace process, at least alive if not well, on the ground. The challenge for paramilitaries is to allow it to happen. The task for paramilitaries is to allow it to happen. The task for politicians is to lead us forward to an accommodation. And the job of Government is to create the framework for the thousand flowers to take root and to blossom.

John Lowry The Workers Party

Is there still a peace process?

The answer is there must be. The people of Northern Ireland and beyond have had a relative peace for the past 17 months and they have enjoyed it and want it to continue. The vast majority of our people have no wish to return to the days of fear and uncertainty.

There must therefore be a resolve on the part of both governments and all political parties to do all that is humanly possible, in order to arrive at a political agreement, which is the surest means of making peace permanent. That task, always problematic, has been dealt a serious blow by the two bombs in London this week. But there is still hope, and a demand voiced at the many rallies and public demonstrations this week, that the people of Northern Ireland want peace.

The Workers' Party believe a number of things must happen. Firstly, the provisionals should heed the demands of the Irish people, for a permanent end to all violence. Secondly, the British and Irish governments must resolve their differences and act together with a common purpose and agenda, designed to enable All Party negotiations. There must be no more solo runs. Thirdly, all those parties who are willing to do so, should convene multi-lateral talks, involving as many parties as possible, based on the acceptance of democratic principles and consent, with a view to reaching agreement on how All Party negotiations might be achieved. All routes to such negotiations must be explored, such as that recommended by the Mitchell Report or on the basis of an elective process.

The Workers' Party have already held one such meeting with the Progressive Unionist Party. The three parties have agreed to seek support from other parties for this process. Such a public commitment to the search for political agreement by the parties, would do much to give hope, and boost confidence among the people of Northern Ireland that progress is possible.

The search for agreement will be difficult. Its success requires compromise on the part of everyone. It requires commitment from all parties to fundamental democratic principles, such as the six outlined in paragraph 20 of the Mitchell report, and of the acceptance of consent.

The people of Northern Ireland have taken to the streets this week and they have spoken. It is time to give political expression to their demands. The search for peace has suffered a serious setback, but the actions of a few, so obviously out of step with the rest of the Irish people, cannot and should not delay or stand in the way of peace.

Davy Adams UDP

Speculation on what, if any, specific event caused the IRA to end their cease-fire is futile. It tends to dilute true culpability; gives more than a passing nod to justification; and somewhat obscures the fact that the IRA, to avoid splitting, will revert to violence when faced with the frustrations, disappointments and setbacks that are part and parcel of the democratic process.

It could be argued that the Canary Wharf bomb succeeded in concentrating minds, once again, on the job at hand. And, to a certain extent, there is some mileage in that argument. Within days of the bombing, a flurry of activity by the two governments has seen movement towards an agreed position on the way forward that had hardly seemed possible during the preceding weeks and months. But, from a republican perspective, this movement could hardly be of the nature that was intended or desired. Movement has largely been by the Irish government who have now shifted much closer to the London position.

Minds have also been concentrating in another direction—towards Sinn Féin. Or, to be more specific, on trying to re-evaluate the exact degree of influence that Sinn Féin can bring to bear on the IRA. The jury is still out on that one. But what is clear, is that Sinn Féin's political clout has been severely diminished by the Canary Wharf outrage and will continue to decrease in direct proportion to further IRA activity.

Sinn Féin may now embark on a twin-track strategy whereby they argue that they never had as much influence on the IRA as others thought but, as they are the only people who have any influence, it is essential that they continue to be afforded a leading role in the peace process irrespective of IRA activity. The bottom line on that one is, if Sinn Féin cannot deliver the IRA what use are they?

Meanwhile, the republican obsession with avoiding a split, at any price, has left the rest of us to pick up the tab. This will remain the case unless, or until, Gerry Adams accepts that it is impossible to make peace without making enemies and acts accordingly. It is essential that all of us take risks within the peace process, unforgivable for any of us to take risks with it.

IRA CESSATION ENDS



Davy Adams, right, with UDP colleague Gary McMichael

Lesley Doyle

Talks, votes or bombs?

TOM HADDEN and KEVIN BOYLE discuss the choice of strategies for the two governments in the aftermath of the cessation of the ceasefire

Everyone was taken aback by the IRA bomb in Canary Wharf. We had all got too used to taking the peace for granted. But in hindsight it was not all that surprising. The only real leverage that Sinn Féin have on the peace process is not their electoral mandate but the threat of IRA violence. As time wore on, that threat could only remain credible if it was put into effect. There were repeated reports that the IRA had set a time limit for Gerry Adams and his supporters to show that their strategy could work. And when time ran out, the practical need to avoid being caught meant it had to be done by a pre-emptive strike when no-one was expecting it.

Whether Gerry Adams knew about this in advance is not crucial. The underlying reason for the breakdown was that all the parties to the peace process have been working to entirely different agendas and strategies.

Sinn Féin and the IRA had been promised - or believed they had been promised - quick access to real discussions at which substantial constitutional changes could be negotiated. Their bottom line seems to be the creation of all-Ireland bodies with executive powers - an explicit item in the Hume/Adams package as developed and approved by civil servants in the Irish Government. Their strategy, as their internal briefing paper of 1994 made clear, has been to put together a coalition of 'nationalist Ireland' and Irish-America which would then put pressure on the British Government to overrule any unionist resistance. But the time limit set by the IRA Army Council or the impatience of their militaristic wing was always going to be a problem given the extended timescales to which governments and politicians are accustomed.

The strategy of the Irish Government has been to move quickly on those aspects of the peace process over which they have exclusive control - bringing Sinn Féin into democratic politics through direct access to government ministers and the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and releasing some prisoners. They have managed to keep this up despite an unexpected change in government in 1994. And they persuaded the British Government to sign up to something close to the Hume/Adams package at least as a possibility in the Framework Documents. But they have been unable to persuade Sinn Féin or the IRA to do anything about punishment beatings or to make any gesture on decommissioning. The resulting inability to square their desire to maintain their working relationship with Sinn Féin and with the British Government led directly to the unseemly cancellation of the British-Irish summit last September and the current impasse.

The British Government, on the other hand, has played a 'long game' from the start. Every stage in

the process has been deliberately strung out to the last possible date - the initial three month 'decontamination' period in the Downing Street Declaration, the delays in agreeing the Framework Documents and most recently in setting a February deadline for all-party talks only if that proved practicable. This strategy seems to have been based partly on security advice and partly on political considerations. The security services were not convinced that the cease-fire was permanent but hoped that the longer it lasted the more difficult it would be for the IRA to maintain its organisation and effectiveness. The political imperative was not so much to keep the Ulster unionists happy but to avoid a revolt on the Tory right which would actually bring the government down. And John Major had learned from Mrs Thatcher that awkward political commitments could be avoided by changing the agenda at the last moment: hence the promise of a referendum when the Framework Documents were finally produced and the focus on elections to cloud the impact of the Mitchell report.

As for the unionists it is doubtful whether they were ever really part of the peace process. They have been happy to enjoy the cease-fire and to make occasional noises about political negotiations sometime in the future. But there has been no acceptance either by the Ulster Unionists or the Democratic Unionists of the idea that concessions might have to be made on their attitude to the Framework Documents or the decommissioning issue. Only the 'fringe' Loyalist parties have been talking about compromise - or indeed talking at all - with the other side. And they are a very small fringe in political terms. Any electoral process would have to be very carefully structured - perhaps by a list system or with very large PR constituencies - for them to get any seats at all in the elected 'Peace Convention' proposed by the larger unionist parties.

What then can be done to restore - or perhaps replace - the process which has floundered on these conflicting agendas? Most nationalists and the Irish Government are committed to the idea that getting all-party talks started at last will do the trick. Most unionists and the British Government are committed to elections to a Northern Ireland Convention or Forum which would then in some unspecified way allow the parties to move into negotiations with the two governments on all three strands of the problem. And both sides of course have been more or less 'implacably opposed' to the other's ideas. The only surprising thing about these proposals is the touching faith on both sides that either immediate all-party talks or an electoral process will lead to agreement. In fact all the evidence points in the other direction.

All parties had been working to entirely different agendas and strategies

The case against elections has been widely rehearsed by nationalists: that the idea has been tried and failed in 1974 and 1982 (though in 1982 it was because the SDLP and Sinn Féin rather than the unionists refused to play); that the manifestos which the parties would campaign on would serve only to create more obstacles to a compromise; that the built-in unionist majority on any electoral system would serve only to encourage unionist intransigence; and that there can be no guarantee that the unionists would proceed to real negotiations with Sinn Féin without some form of decommissioning by the IRA.

The arguments against immediate all-party talks have not been so widely discussed but are equally compelling. The almost-all-party talks process failed in 1992 when the Irish Government and the SDLP refused to meet the unionists half way on articles 2 and 3 and cross border bodies. What greater prospect would there be of achieving an agreement now given the current positions of the main unionist and nationalist parties? If the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation could not achieve agreement on a formulation of 'Realities and Requirements' which could bridge the gap between the main nationalist parties and the Alliance Party on one side and Sinn Féin on the other on the issue of consent, what greater prospect would there be if the main unionist parties had to be brought in too? And would the risk of the IRA resorting to bombs if Sinn Féin were overruled be any the less?

The more recent suggestion by John Hume that two referendums should be held North and South to show the popular support for peace and for all-party talks would not remove these problems. Almost everyone would vote for peace. But last week's *Irish Independent* poll showed that over 8% North and South supported violence and that over half in the North (55%) opposed all-party-talks before decommissioning.

The more positive lessons of the past twenty five years in Ireland have been not that all-party talks or elections produce agreement but that resolute and concerted action by the two governments can make progress. The successful initiatives have been the Sunningdale Agreement (at least for a time), the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and the Downing Street Declaration. All these have been based on compromises between the two governments on ways of accommodating the two communities and traditions in Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole within the existing constitutional frameworks. Everyone knows the broad outlines of this accommodation: formal acceptance of the right of the majority in Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom and the consequent amendment of the Irish Constitution; formal acceptance in legislation of the right of the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland to its Irish identity and aspirations and to the protection of its interests by the Irish Government through the Anglo-Irish Conference; the creation of some cross-border bodies to encourage functional cooperation on matters of shared interest; and a bill of rights for Northern Ireland, which would ideally be paralleled in the rest of Britain and Ireland.



All the evidence of opinion polls indicates that there is very substantial support for these policies among both communities in the North, throughout the South and in Britain. What is needed now is not another five years of inter-party wrangling, but the reassertion by the two governments of their democratic authority to implement this package with sensitivity and resolution. The two governments should declare that they will pursue its implementation, however long it takes. They should announce that they will together seek the consent of the people, North and South, for their proposals. This could be done by a consultative referendum on the broad outlines of a package. Then, when popular approval had been obtained, the details could then be discussed with the parties. This would not be unprecedented. For example, De Klerk used a referendum of this kind in 1992 to secure the consent of the whites in South Africa for a new dispensation.

The idea that either the active co-operation of all parties - from Sinn Féin and the IRA to the Democratic Unionists - or the complete cessation of violence is essential to the pursuit of this strategy should not be readily accepted. In South Africa and Israel/Palestine the elements of the settlement - though the objective was accommodation and separation respectively - were worked out while the violence continued. The two governments here should not allow the resumption of the IRA campaign to delay unduly the implementation of a settlement which the vast majority in both parts of Ireland now accept. ♦

Parallel lines

EDDIE MOXON-BROWNE develops some thoughts from his recent Frank Wright memorial lecture at Queen's on talks about proximity between Bosnia and the north. Opposite **ADRIAN GUELKE** draws lessons from Israel and South Africa's all party talks.

Until its recent breakdown, the cease-fire in Northern Ireland had lasted about 17 months. Despite the palpable return to 'normality', the political issues that lay behind the 25 years of violence remain unsolved. At one level, the conflict had come to an end; but at the political level, almost everything remains to be done.

Within the last four months or so, there has been another peace process - perhaps more remarkable than NI's - unfolding in Bosnia. It is worth looking at this other 'peace process' because it may contain lessons for Northern Ireland regarding the short term road to all-party talks, and the long term road to a final political settlement.

The principal instrument of peace in Bosnia today is an 'implementation force' (IFOR) deployed by NATO to replace the UN peacekeeping force (UNPROFOR). The main task of IFOR is to patrol a 700-mile long zone of separation (approximately 4km wide) between the Serb and Muslim/Croat forces. Bosnia has been divided into three zones, controlled respectively by the British, French and Americans while overall command of IFOR is vested in an American admiral. The USA, Britain and France are providing 43,000 troops between them and a further 23 countries (11 of them not in NATO) are taking part. The whole operation is historic in more ways than one: Germany is deploying troops outside its territory for the first time since 1949; and Russian soldiers will be serving alongside American soldiers for the first time since World War II, and effectively under NATO command. Despite divergent national interpretations of the peacekeeping function, the military side of the peace process is expected to go smoothly. The one or two hiccups that have occurred - over the vexed question of suspected war criminals - have been ironed out by IFOR. The real test of the Dayton agreement will come when the soldiers leave, with the problems of refugees and the potential for further conflict.

To avoid the dangers inherent in a vaguely intended mandate, the Dayton agreement is expressed in precise language designed to restrict IFOR's responsibilities. The emphasis is on peacekeeping and there is more than a little irony in the fact that NATO is performing exactly the same role as a classic UN peacekeeping mission: standing between the erstwhile combatants with their consent to preserve peace to which they have all agreed. The irony is further compounded by the fact that UNPROFOR's previous task evolved into something closer to peace enforcement, a function for which NATO would have been better suited and in which, of course, NATO played a part. The UN might also envy the multinational composition, but strictly controlled co-ordination, of IFOR, not to mention the robust rules of engagement that give it considerable retali-

atory flexibility in the event of any ceasefire violations or backsliding on the Dayton deadlines. Repeatedly throughout the Dayton text, the same sentence recurs: "Violators of this provision shall be subject to military action by IFOR, including the use of violence to ensure compliance". The Dayton Agreement lays out a precise timetable for the transition from a ceasefire to the creation of a stable political settlement; dates have been set (and so far largely complied with) for handing over heavy weaponry; exchanging prisoners; disbanding armed civilian groups; locating minefields; vacating transferred territory; and the holding of elections throughout Bosnia under the supervision of the OSCE.

The political minefields that lie ahead should not be underestimated. There has been a significant repartition of ethnic homelands. The new Bosnian state is effectively a confederation of two political entities one of which is in itself a Muslim-Croat federation. Given the centrifugal attractions of a "Greater Serbia", and a larger Croatia, the onus will be on the Bosnian government to convince both entities that they are equal and each has a fair share of political power. The resettlement of hundreds of refugees will constantly challenge the fragile ethnic balance on which the peace process depends.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the Bosnian peace deal is the extent to which it depends on American leadership and military commitment. The Bosnian conflict posed no direct threat to the security of the United States and yet, in sending 20,000 soldiers to Bosnia, President Clinton is probably taking the biggest risk in his political career which, if it pays off, will secure his re-election. The imperatives of the forthcoming U.S. presidential election campaign coincided rather neatly with a moment when the military balance between Serbs and Croats in Bosnia was presenting a window of opportunity for peace talks. With the Germans and the French now willing to commit troops to a NATO-led force, and the Russians, for domestic reasons, wanting to adopt a more robust role alongside the USA, the stage was set for the Dayton talks.

When we compare the "peace processes" in Bosnia and Northern Ireland, we cannot fail to be struck at the speed with which things have moved in Bosnia. At one level this is not quite surprising given the ferocity, the fatalities, the atrocities and the sheer scale of the Bosnian conflict, in contrast to the "simmering cauldron" of the North's quarter-century. There is the conventional view that the cessation of violence facilitates dialogue between politicians: in a real sense, the voices of political reason can never be heard above the clatter of gunfire. If this were true, one would have expected more progress in the past eighteen months. But the role of violence in bringing about peace should also

not be forgotten. In his complex book on Northern Ireland, Frank Wright reminds us that "Most of us perhaps owe more to violence done on our behalf than we know ... Violence does often bring a much deeper peace than before".

Leaving aside the obvious differences between the Northern Ireland and Bosnian conflicts, there are some important points of comparison between the two peace processes. At Dayton, the cease-fire became an integral part of a wider written agreement that encompassed *inter alia* the handing over of weapons, the exchange of prisoners, the policing of the cease-fire and an agreed road to a political settlement on the back of elections. The Northern Ireland ceasefire was not publicly, or in writing, linked to a series of obligations entered into by any or all of the parties to the conflict. In an important sense, the initiative remained with those who initiated (and later suspended) the cease-fire whereas, in Bosnia, the cease-fire became the common property of all parties to the conflict, and all have roughly retained a roughly equal interest in seeing it maintained.

The Bosnian peace process has been furthermore considerably assisted by a strong external guarantor (the USA) whose disinterested role is not (and perhaps cannot be) replicated in relation to NI. Another important contrast is that elections in Bosnia are the sequel to a demilitarisation process, not a parallel track or a precursor. A peace settlement in

NI along the lines of the Dayton Agreement would be much more difficult to police: unlike Bosnia, NI does not have clearly demarcated ethnic zones between which a peacekeeping force could be interposed. Even if it were acceptable to Britain for an external, international, peacekeeping force to be introduced into the North, the number of troops would be far greater than in Bosnia; and there would be a clear danger of the 'remedy being worse than the illness'; in the sense that a ubiquitous military presence would undo the 'normality' achieved since the ceasefires. Without an impartial, and powerful, eternal guarantor, it is difficult to see what 'proximity talks' would achieve even if they ever took place. Another sad, but crucial, difference between NI and Bosnia is that although the erstwhile combatants in the latter might regard a return to violence as too ghastly to contemplate, this is not true about the former, since the violence itself is consistently prevented from escalating beyond an 'acceptable level'.

Finally, any talk of a political solution emerging from a 'Dayton' approach raises the question of what kind of solution we are looking for: is it a 'grand compromise' posited on the ethnic divisions in the North (à la Bosnia) or the more difficult, but probably more durable, solution based on a transformation of NI society beyond the current unionist/nationalist dichotomy. We must construct political institutions that either acknowledge divisions or overcome them. ♦

We must construct political institutions that either acknowledge divisions or overcome them.

Paths to a settlement

Whereas the basis of the peace process in Northern Ireland was the ending of violence, a truce, the basis of both the South African transition and of the accord between the Israeli government and the PLO was a political settlement. Getting from the broad outlines agreed at the start of the process to the adoption and implementation of a new constitution did not prove easy in South Africa. Israel/Palestine is still some distance from the achievement of a final settlement, writes Adrian Guelke. However, the general acceptance of the parties that the outcome of the process would entail one person one vote in a single country in the case of Israel/Palestine meant that from the beginning of the process in each case, the destination was clearly in view.

That was not the case in Northern Ireland when the paramilitaries embarked upon their ceasefires in 1994. Conceivably, the framework document could have performed the function of establishing the parameters of a settlement here, but to have done so it would have needed the support of unionists, at the least from the Ulster Unionist Party. Might more skilful drafting of the document have brought the Ulster Unionists on board? That seems doubtful. Rather the problem is that the leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party either do not see the need for a comprehensive settlement with nationalists, or believe that the price being asked for such a deal by nationalists (especially perhaps the SDLP leader) is too high.

In the case of South Africa and Israel/Palestine, there were minimum concessions that had to be made by the party representing a majority of the dominant community for the peace process to secure international credibility. That is not as clearly the case in Northern Ireland. The prejudice of the outside world in favour of a united Ireland (just as it favours the reunification of Cyprus) means that any settlement would have to enshrine the right of nationalists to aspire to the achievement of a united Ireland. That would rule out full integration into the UK, but would permit the enshrining of the principle that any further change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status would require the consent of a majority of people in Northern Ireland. The problem for unionists is the import of 'further change', because to get a comprehensive settlement with nationalists, they would first be required to accept the inclusion of a permanent institutional link between North and South that built on the Irish dimension contained within the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The credibility of the peace process here was based on the ending of violence, a test, incidentally, that neither South Africa nor Israel/Palestine could have met. It was not based on the prospects for a settlement between the parties representing a majority in each community, the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. This was one reason why I doubted the value of the Joint Declaration of December 1993 (see *Fortnight* 325), as it placed the emphasis on ending violence over achieving a political settlement. It was predictable that those who did not believe in the necessity and/or possibility of a comprehensive settlement would regard the ceasefires as an additional argument for resisting progress in that direction. The arguments over the pre-conditions for the holding of all-party negotiations have tended to obscure the real problem, which is the absence of the basis for an agreement between the majority of unionists and a majority of nationalists. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to argue that instead of playing it long the government should have insisted on convening all-party negotiations as a matter of urgency following publication of the Framework Document. However the likelihood is that all-party negotiations would have broken down, with perhaps the same result. The obvious difficulty is that unless political circumstances change, ceasefires rarely hold, as the breakdown of literally hundreds of ceasefires in conflicts across the world shows. Further, experience suggests that the next ceasefire may not be the last. More progress is likely to be made if that reality is faced up to. ♦