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An End to Ireland's Troubles ?

by Paul Nolan

The establishment of a new executive government in Northern Ireland in December marks the most significant development in the Irish peace process since the IRA called its ceasefire in August 1994. The normally sober *Irish Times* described 1 December as the most significant date in the turbulent history of the century, even more important than the establishment of the Irish Republic in 1921. For those who have lived through the bullets and the bombs and the bloodshed of the last thirty years, the events of the last month have been breath-taking. In the space of a single week, power was passed from London to Northern Ireland, a power-sharing executive has taken seat, ministers have chosen their departments, and the Republic of Ireland has changed its constitution to revoke Articles 2 and 3 which laid territorial claim to Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement, which inspired such hope eighteen months ago, has finally moved to the implementation stage.

This transition from bloody armed conflict to a peaceful and democratic settlement is of interest far beyond the shores of Britain and Ireland. When the "Troubles", as the civil unrest is known in Ireland, first appeared on the news abroad at the end of the sixties, the passions appeared strange and atavistic: a 17th century religious conflict being fought out on 20th century streets and housing estates. Now, as we enter a new century, ethnic conflict has become the new paradigm, and the violent hatreds of Northern Ireland—however specific the context—have a resonance in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South Africa, and wherever people are struggling to live with differences. Success stories are rare, and if Northern Ireland has managed to accommodate between its two traditions, then it is a cause for celebration.

The emphasis however still has to be on the 'if'. The new executive government is only a provisional

arrangement for the largest party, the Ulster Unionist Party, because Unionists have stated that they will not share power with terrorists. More pointedly, they said that they would not form a government with the Irish republican party, Sinn Fein, until the IRA decommissioned its weapons. The decommissioning issue, which has dominated political discourse in Northern Ireland since the ceasefire has wrong footed the IRA. In the back channel discussions which took place between the IRA and British government emissaries from the late 1980s onwards—when, incidentally, the Major government insisted it would never talk to terrorists—the decommissioning of weaponry was never an issue. What was important in those negotiations was to find a political route out of what had become a military stalemate. Twenty years of war had made two facts clear: The British Army could never defeat the IRA militarily and the IRA's armed struggle could never force Britain to abandon Northern Ireland. The peace process, as it became known, was born out of a shared recognition that a new form of political dispensation had to be sought which could strike a balance between unionist and republican aspirations.

In calling its ceasefire the IRA believed it had taken the first step in relaunching the dialogue. They were incredulous, then increasingly angry, when John Major's government refused to allow them participate in political talks until they handed over their weaponry. A new stalemate was only avoided by the adroit skills of the American mediator, George Mitchell, who patiently listened to all sides and found—at each point—the necessary compromises to move the process forward.

What has not gone away, however, is the problem of the guns. Mitchell and the two governments have been successful in moving the process along, but they have not eradicated the problem. The Unionist leader David Trimble made a promise to his supporters that he would never enter government with Sinn Fein until decommissioning had occurred. Now he has, but only—he insists—on a trial basis. Nevertheless, he only

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managed to win the vote at a meeting of his 840 strong Unionists through his post-dated resignation as well as that of his three ministerial colleagues if the IRA does not decommission its weapons by February. At that point the Northern Ireland Assembly and the other parts of the Good Friday Agreement would collapse in a heap. Given this reassurance the Unionist Council voted to support the experiment, but only by a tight margin: 58 percent supporting the strategy, 42 percent insisting on the 'No Guns, No Government' stance that had been their electoral manifesto.

So, will it happen? The sense of excitement that attends the creation of the new executive is not underpinned by the confidence that it will actually survive. For the IRA the issue of decommissioning is the line in the sand: while it allowed its political champions in Sinn Fein unlimited freedom to negotiate on political issues, it will not allow them to trade on arms. To hand in weapons is to surrender. To surrender is to admit that the last thirty years of war were futile. There is room, within republican ideology, for a voluntary act of decommissioning by the IRA. However, by requiring it within a certain deadline, Trimble has removed the possibility the destruction of weaponry will be seen as a voluntary gesture. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning has taken an active part in facilitating and supervising the paramilitarian disarmament. And there, for the moment, the debate rests. The hope in Northern Ireland is that the huge wave of popular support for the new settlement will allow the final necessary compromise to be made.

Paul Nolan is the Director of the Workers Educational Association, Northern Ireland, and chaired the Yes Campaign in last year's referendum on the Good Friday Agreement.

Staff Spotlight:



**Susanne
Heinke-Mikaeilian**

Susanne Heinke-Mikaeilian (German) personifies the diversity of work in BICC's PR and Documentation Department. Since joining the Center in October 1997, she has divided her time between outreach and research activities.

Susanne is the project leader for *ConverArt—The Art of Disarmament* and an info-exhibition titled *Disarmament and Conversion—From the Cold War towards 2000* both of which were initiated in celebration of the 350th anniversary of the Peace of Westphalia. *ConverArt* is an international competition which attracted art students from around the world. Through their work, the artists interpreted conversion. The info-exhibition complements the *ConverArt* exhibit by providing background information on peace-building and military downsizing. Susanne believes: "By presenting the two exhibits together, the complex challenge of conversion can both be made more tangible and brought to a wider audience."

ConverArt and the info-exhibition have been shown in Münster, Weimar, Bonn, Wünsdorf, and Paris (at the UNESCO). Showings are planned for 2000, including Munich, Magdeburg, and Lüneburg (under the auspices of the EXPO 2000). Susanne has high hopes that the exhibition will be shown in Krakow, European City of Culture 2000. In this way, the exhibition would span east and west—in terms of venues as well as artists.

In addition to planning and organizing the exhibition, Susanne is responsible for research and documentation activities at BICC. This type of work is not foreign to her: Susanne studied Slavic studies and library sciences at the Universität zu Köln, and in her first job she was responsible for the newspaper archive at the weekly *Volkszeitung*. From 1989 to 1991, she covered the former Soviet Union for *Sonjetunion Heute*. When the paper threatened to fold, she and the other German editors took over, and initiated *Wostok*, a journal on Russia independent of the Russian state news agencies.

In the little free time she has, Susanne loves to read and spend time in Cologne—where she lives with her husband and son.

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The Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and facilitating the processes whereby people, skills, technology, equipment, and financial and economic resources can be shifted away from the defense sector and applied to alternative civilian uses.

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Seminar Program in Russia Completed

The Russian Oblast of Nizhny Novgorod was heavily dependent on the defense industry, and is still characterized by the sector. In nearly 60 percent of all factories military articles were produced. Following the restructuring after the end of the Cold War, over a third of the people employed at defense companies lost their jobs.

In an effort to counter the negative effects on the labor markets, BICC worked with a consortium of European technical colleges from early 1997 to fall 1999 to provide former managers and factory workers with new skills. Under a Tempus-Tacis project financed by the European Union and the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the technical colleges in Cologne, Aachen, and the Dutch town of Sittard have been actively building up the university in Nizhny. In a joint spin-off project, training and qualification workshops have also been provided to adults.

BICC's involvement began in 1997, when it did extensive research on the economic situation on Nizhny Novgorod. (The results of the work were published as a BICC paper entitled: *Conversion within the Context of Economic Reform: The Case of Nizhny Novgorod.*) The deficit areas of adult education and training were also analyzed in order to determine the niche the training workshops might fill.

Six seminars held from Winter 1997 to Summer 1999 focused on the following topics:

- Business Development—Working with Banks
- Marketing
- Regional Economic Development—Partnerships and the Role of Public Agencies
- Industry Restructuring in Russia and the New German *Länder*
- Small Businesses and Computers

Each of the seminars attracted between 25 and 40 participants—predominantly from the former defense companies but also including representatives from the government and banking communities at the local and regional levels.

A final conference was held in June 1999 which brought together participants from each of the seminars as well as the academic community. The seminars appear to have been useful inasmuch as they helped the participants become familiar with the tools of business and economic development.

For further information contact

→ Steven E. Sokol at sokol@bicc.uni-bonn.de

Smart Sanctions Conference

Approximately 70 government, NGO, and private-sector experts from some 20 countries gathered in Bonn 20–23 November for the first of a series of seminars on *Smart Sanctions, The Next Step: Arms Embargoes and Travel Sanctions*. BICC co-hosted the event with the German Foreign Office in response to calls from the United Nations Secretary General to improve the effectiveness of sanctions. The aim of the seminars is to formulate specific recommendations to make arms embargoes and travel sanctions more effective.

The first expert seminar provided a forum for the discussion of initial recommendations contained in papers presented at the conference. Participants heard and discussed the papers in an opening plenary session and in four working groups. A number of important issues were raised and insights provided that will guide the working groups in drafting recommendations during the coming months.

Under the direction of the Chair, and with the assistance of the rapporteur and designated experts, the members of each working group have the mandate to further develop recommendations to be discussed at another conference in approximately one year.

Future tasks include the development of concrete proposals for improved formulation, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement of arms embargoes and travel sanctions. These tasks will be regarded in light of both the larger political situation surrounding sanctions and potential obstacles such as limited intelligence sharing, limited resources, and lack of political will.

Further information can be found on BICC's

→ Internet Web site at <http://bicc.uni-bonn.de>

Upcoming Events

On 3–5 March 2000, BICC will host a conference in Pretoria on **Demilitarization and Peace-building in Southern Africa** with the Centre for Conflict Resolution (Cape Town). Contact: kingma@bicc.uni-bonn.de

The Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (Bonn) and the Willy-Brandt-Foundation will organize an **international conference to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the famous North-South Report**, also known as the *Brandt report* on 17 February 2000 in Bonn. The focus will be to initiate a similar report for the 21st century. Contact: sef@sef-bonn.org

The International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES) is organizing an international conference **Challenges for Science and Engineering in the 21st Century** 14 to 18 June 2000 in Stockholm.

BICC Publications

In addition to its annual *conversion survey*, the BICC *disarmament and conversion studies* and other books, BICC publishes *reports*, *briefs*, and *papers*. These series analyze the international conversion process, report on conversion projects and experiences, and offer scientific as well as practical know-how. Forthcoming publications include:

BICC Disarmament and Conversion Studies, No. 1: Jörn Brömmelhörster (ed.), *Demystifying the Peace Dividend*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, Winter 1999/2000

report 14: Herbert Wulf (ed.), *Disarmament and Conflict Prevention in Development Cooperation*, January 2000

brief 15 on *Conversion in South Africa in the 1990's* will be published in January 2000, in collaboration with the Group for Environmental Monitoring (Johannesburg).

BICC Notes

On 25 September 1999, Herbert Wulf and Corinna Hauswedell participated in a seminar on **Demilitarization in Post-Conflict Situations** organized by Make It Work, Belfast. Discussion focused on international experiences applicable to the difficult implementation of the Northern Ireland peace accord. BICC is seeking funding for a research project on the Northern Ireland peace process and the role of demilitarization.

For further information please contact
→ Corinna Hauswedell at ch@bicc.uni-bonn.de

A **course on defense and development** was conducted 25–29 October 1999 by the Graduate School of Public & Development Management (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa). The course was a component of a project to increase the knowledge and policy debate among civil society on issues of disarmament and conversion. Kees Kingma lectured on the *International Conversion Experience* and on *Human Resources Conversion*, together with Tsepe Motumi, Chief Director at the South African MoD.

For further information please contact
→ Kees Kingma at kingma@bicc.uni-bonn.de

ConverArt – The Art of Disarmament was shown in Paris at the 30th General UNESCO Conference, 27 October to 17 November 1999. Speakers at the opening included Ludger Vollmer (Minister of State, Germany), Prof. Dr. Klaus Hübner, (President of the German Commission for UNESCO), and Federico de Mayor (former Director General of UNESCO).

For further information contact
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BICC has been approached to field questions on the economic impact of arms exports and new guidelines for arms exports following the media interest in **German arms exports** in the last quarter of 1999. Herbert Wulf also participated in a meeting Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer held with NGOs in mid-November on this subject.

For further information please contact
→ Herbert Wulf at wulf@bicc.uni-bonn.de

Between October 1999 and February 2000, BICC is participating in a series of seminars in Belarus—organized by the OSCE and moderated by the Gustav-Stresemann-Institute—on **Local Powers, Rule of Law, and Regional Economic Development**. Participants from Eastern and Western Europe are focusing on how civil society works at the local level. BICC's contribution is to present the challenges and opportunities of conversion for local and regional stakeholders.

For further information contact
→ Hartmut Kühle at kuechle@bicc.uni-bonn.de

BICC's **Fellowship Program for Capacity-building, on Disarmament, Conversion, and Peace Policy** was launched in November when the first Fellow arrived in Bonn. Ayesha Siddiqi-Agha (from Pakistan) will be doing research on military business. The Fellowship Program, which is funded through a generous grant by the Ford Foundation, enables researchers—primarily from Latin America, Africa, and Asia—to spend up to seven months at BICC.

For further information contact
→ Michael Brzoska at mb@bicc.uni-bonn.de

In November BICC initiated a new project on **demobilization and reintegration in Central and Eastern Europe**. Under this project, demobilization activities throughout the region and in specific countries will be analyzed. Andreas Heinemann-Grüder joined BICC to lead this project.

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