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Conversion from War to Peace: Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners in Northern Ireland

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Conversion from War to Peace: Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners in Northern Ireland

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> "Those who renounce violence…are entitled to be full participants in the democratic process. Those who show the courage to break with the past are entitled to their stake in the future."

President Clinton, Mackies Metal Plant, Belfast. 30 November 1995.

Introduction

The concept of "conversion" relates to the transition from violent conflict to peace and the consequent change of use of economic and social resources and change of vocation of former combatants. Conversion is a way of minimising the cost of past conflict and of maximising the benefits of peace.

It is not possible, however, to separate the activities of conversion from the processes of conflict resolution on the one hand and the creation of a new, peaceful society on the other. For if, during a conflict, everyone wants peace, they have different views on how it can be achieved. These different perspectives will imply very different processes of conversion in the post-conflict and peace-building period. Peace through the victory of one side, for example, is likely to lead to conversion processes of a different social, political and legal character than a peace negotiated between former combatants.

The BICC 1999 Conversion Survey notes: "Politics have to come first. Only…on the basis of a real political solution, will demobilisation and reintegration support be fundamental…components of post-war rehabilitation and development." (BICC 1999, p. 91) We would add that demobilisation, reintegration and other conversion measures are likely to be an integral part of the political solution. This is not simply to say that the character of such measures will be determined by the nature of the political solution but that the way conversion is carried out can affect the nature and success or failure of the conflict resolution process as a whole.

This might be particularly the case in intra-state conflicts such as that in Northern Ireland.[1] For conversion measures must be undertaken within the one society with former protagonists required to agree, or at least tolerate them. In these circumstances, wider issues of the nature of the conflict and its resolution crop up with each conversion proposal; each of which, in turn, has the potential to derail the whole process. It is therefore vital that conversion processes reflect the core values

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[1]   This term for the north-east of Ireland is that recognised in international law and the Belfast Agreement for a region currently part of the United Kingdom. This conflict does, of course, have an inter-state dimension, given the involvement of both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, but its main protagonists are armed elements within state and civil society in Northern Ireland.

of the peace agreement and strike a similar balance between positions that may have been only partially reconciled.

The study of any set of conversion measures should not simply be, therefore, an examination of the practical techniques used, it should also involve an appreciation of the nature of the peace process itself. In this brief overview of the measures used in Northern Ireland to release and reintegrate ex-prisoners and, more generally, to open up opportunities for peaceful activities by former non-state combatants, it will thus be necessary to examine how they relate to the dynamics of the peace process as a whole. Only in this way will the problems and opportunities be clarified and the possible transferable lessons identified.

The Northern Ireland Peace Process and the Reintegration of Former Combatants[2]

It is not possible here to discuss the details of the history and causes of the Irish conflict; only its most general outlines can be sketched. We have noted that it can be seen as an intra-state or "internal" conflict. As such, it might be thought to come within the terms of Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions, which deals with non-international conflicts. If that were the case, the relationship between the peace process and reintegration of former combatants would be clear. Article 6 (5) of the Protocol says:

> "At the end of hostilities, the authorities in power shall endeavour to grant the broadest possible amnesty to persons who have participated in the armed conflict or those deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the armed conflict."

In fact, though the UK Government ratified the Protocol in 1995, it has never accepted that the Northern Ireland situation came within its terms. The historic stance of the British state, and the Irish state for that matter, has been that the conflict was a criminal assault upon democracy and civilisation by small groups of terrorists. In that view, they have had the broad support of the Unionist-minded element of the population in Northern Ireland. Even those Loyalists who illegally took up arms regarded themselves as irregulars, forced by the pusillanimity of the State to which they theoretically gave allegiance to "defend" it against insurgent enemies.

On the other hand, Republicans accused the British state of illegally and undemocratically occupying part of the Irish nation. They therefore took up arms

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[2] In this context, the word "combatant" refers to a person who has been engaged in non-state, politically motivated violence, either directly or through logistical support, irrespective of whether he or she has ever been apprehended by state forces. The term is used to be inclusive of ex-prisoners and their comrades who were never caught. At a more general level, we argue that the "combatants" in the political conflict have included the state and its forces; the utility of the term in that discourse is as a neutral description of the protagonists in the conflict which avoids ascribing any particular legitimacy to one side or the other.

as, in their eyes, Irish soldiers fighting on Irish soil for the liberation of their country from foreign invaders. Broad Nationalist opinion, while eschewing violence and stressing the need for political agreement, would have supported the view that Northern Ireland was the undemocratic result of the forcible partition of the Irish nation.

These incompatible and antagonistic ideological currents still exist and influence attitudes, in spite of the peace process. **Part of the challenge in designing reintegrative mechanisms is to avoid measures that make too overt a challenge to any of these competing paradigms.**

In these circumstances of continuing ideological conflict, the essential precondition for a peace process is that all sides, for whatever reasons, recognise that no further significant political gains are likely to be made by violence. The state recognises that military victory over its enemies is unlikely if not impossible and the insurgents recognise that their violence has reached the limits of its effectiveness.

This precondition for a peace process implies that no side has gained a military victory.[3] The corollary is that there must be an accommodation or agreement between all sides, including the violent actors and the state. In a peace process, since no-one has won the war then all must be involved in winning the peace. So, whatever the gap between protagonists, they must, in the end, agree, do a deal, make a contract. This factor has profound consequences. **One of the most important is that the process must be inclusive: those who have taken up arms against the state must be represented around the negotiating table**. **The further implication of that is that room must be found in the future polity, and in social and economic life, for actual ex-combatant personnel as well as the politics that they represent. It is in this sense that reintegrative measures are an essential and integral part of the peace process.** This is the necessary positive side to what is often seen as the negativity of prisoner release. Combined with this positive view of reintegration, prisoner release is simply the prerequisite for the building of an inclusive society. Rather than potentially contributing to violence by "letting criminals roam the streets," prisoner release and reintegration are necessary if violence is to be consigned to the past. Of course, this view can only make sense in the context of an overall peace agreement.

Doing a deal is easier said than done, however, when antagonistic ideologies and aspirations are so durable. A simple "compromise" will be difficult and, indeed, might be dangerous. Compromise, bargains and "fudge" may be required during negotiations, but a "solution" based on simple, pragmatic give and take contains inherent dangers. In an agreement that partially satisfies everyone, everyone is also partially dissatisfied. The danger is that the remaining dissatisfaction will amount to a continuing cause or occasion of violence.

The alternative is a solution that goes beyond and transcends the antagonistic positions. By this we mean a political construction or a formulation of a set of ideas

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[3] See Gilligan and Tonge (1997) for a discussion of "peace" as the absence of war and as a dynamic process.

and social practices, that may contain the essence or core of each position combined together in a new way. There can be no prescription for this, nor will the solution necessarily draw equally from both positions. What it must involve, however, is something new, a transformation of the old, a qualitative change, perhaps in the context in which positions are elaborated and perhaps in basic modes of thinking.[4]

It is certainly arguable that the Good Friday Agreement amounts to such a transcendent solution. Its complex system of institutions represents a new and inclusive set of definitions of identity, nationality, citizenship, the nature of government and the role of civil society that some believe has the capacity to transcend the categories of nationalist and unionist in a transformed and novel polity. Only time will tell whether that is a practical reality, but there can be little doubt that the aspiration of the Agreement is to resolve the contradictions between Unionism and Nationalism, between the continuing reality of British sovereignty over the North and the full recognition of an all-Ireland national identity.[5]

Since the transcendent new polity is a goal for the future, not a current reality, it is hardly surprising that the Agreement itself is still often described and supported in terms of both the dominant British/Unionist and Nationalist paradigms. It has been quoted as strengthening the Union[6], and as opening the door to a United Ireland.[7] Furthermore, there is a continuing battle to incorporate in the new polity as many features sympathetic to one side or the other as possible.[8]

It is this situation of contradictory views about the past and the future, only theoretically or potentially united in a vision of a novel and wholly untested political system, which leads to some of the obvious paradoxes of the Irish peace process. Most notably these are the facts that supporters of the Agreement hold otherwise completely contradictory political positions and that the deal, supported massively by the people, was done two and a half years ago and the process still lurches from crisis to crisis. The reality is that, on every major issue, those involved have to find formulations or structures that tend towards the transcendental – may contribute to

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[4] Johan Galtung's "TRANSCEND" approach to peace building is based, more or less explicitly, on such a dialectical approach (Galtung and Jacobsen 2000). The goal, in Galtung's conception is "a transcending outcome, not a compromise" (Galtung and Jacobsen 2000, p. 210). A compromise is achievable through bi-lateral negotiation, whereas a transcendent solution may require third party intervention and a complex process of dialogue that might be seen to involve many elements of translation between formally contradictory positions (Galtung and Jacobsen 2000, pp. 206-227)

[5] The opening declaration of the Agreement states: "We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning." (The Agreement 1998)

[6] David Trimble, Unionist Party leader and now First Minister: "The Agreement was a disaster for Sinn Fein and the IRA and it strengthens Northern Ireland's position within the Union." Irish Times. 18.04.98

[7] Gerry Adams, leader of Sinn Fein: "The cause of a united Irish Republic was given new hope and fresh possibility by the Agreement." Irish Times. 28.05.98

[8] The current debates about flags on government buildings, reform of the police force and of the criminal justice system are typical.

the building of a new society – but are also compromises between contradictory views of the past conflict.

Unfortunately, the issue of prisoner release and reintegration is one that tends to highlight and exacerbate the differences between the dominant ideologies and where it is always a struggle to resolve these differences in a common vision of the future. The reason for this is that prisoners and ex-prisoners are the most obvious ex-combatants, the visible concentration of everything that people feel about the conflict. From the point of view of the state and its supporters, they are the perpetrators of numerous atrocities, the enemies of democracy and civilisation incarnate. From the point of view of the communities from which they come, they are the vanguard fighters, the standard bearers of all that they believe in. It is clear that these views are not easily reconcilable.

A way must be found, however, for it is clear from local and international experience that no peace process works without the prisoner issue being dealt with. In a report dealing with international and Irish experience, published in March 1995, Gormally and McEvoy stated:

> "Our first and overriding conclusion is that the issue of early release of politically motivated prisoners is crucial to any peace process which follows a violent political conflict. Whatever the particular positions taken up by negotiating parties at any given time, we would argue that, until the question of the prisoners is agreed then nothing, that will create a final solution, is agreed." (Gormally and McEvoy 1995a, p. 43)

The prisoner issue is important for a number of reasons. **The prisons tend to be an important battleground in any conflict.** In some ways the conflict, and certainly the contact between combatants, is at its most intense within the prisons. The reality is that a unit of the State's security forces, the prison service, engages with enemy forces, the prisoners, twenty-four hours a day for the entire length of the conflict. Certainly in Northern Ireland, politically motivated prisoners regarded themselves as active combatants, maintained their links with their paramilitary organisations and organised themselves for struggle within the prisons.

Prisoners are, therefore, a significant constituency whose circumstances and role cannot be ignored. **But the most important factor is that prisoners are symbolic representatives of their communities.** They represent, first, all ex-prisoners already in the community, second, their families and finally they also represent the communities from which they come.

What happens to prisoners can be seen as symbolic of what is happening, or is likely to happen, to their communities. For prisoners are under the control of the State; they are continuously interacting with State forces. If the prisoners' regime is harsh and brutal, many in their communities will project that attitude on to the stance of the State as a whole. If the attitude of the prison authorities is to deny the authenticity of prisoners' politics, to threaten or bribe them, to attempt to destroy their identity – their communities will take that as an indication of fundamental

hostility by government towards themselves, whatever its words and actions in other political arenas. If, on the other hand, prison authorities are prepared to negotiate and accommodate the views and identities of prisoners, consonant with reasonable security, the communities will tend to put more trust in government.

There are, of course, **many different political currents** even in the working class urban neighbourhoods and fiercely territorial rural districts of Northern Ireland from which most prisoners come. **Within Nationalist areas,** Republicans of different factions co-exist with moderate nationalists and religious elements who are completely opposed to political violence. However, even many of those who abhor the violence that some prisoners will have committed will generally sympathise with them, not only in terms of physical conditions within the prisons, but also with their demand for political status. Nationalists in Northern Ireland feel the state has excluded them; they may not agree with violence against it but they understand it and believe it comes from a political motivation that, apart from the means employed, they tend to share. Moreover, there are no overt Nationalists and hardly any Catholics amongst the state security forces; it is the young men and women they have lived next to who are the prisoners – their guards are paid and uniformed people from the "other side."

On the Unionist side, the situation is somewhat different. At times there has been co-operation between respectable Unionist political parties and Loyalist paramilitaries, from the Ulster Workers' Council insurrection of 1974 to the Drumcree protests of the late nineties. On the whole, however, there is a greater ideological gulf between Unionism and the Loyalist paramilitaries. Loyalists believe in the state but claim it has been pusillanimous in pursuing its enemies and have resorted to irregular, illegal violence in its supposed support. Unionists also believe in the state but, however critical they might be of it, uphold the crucial significance of it maintaining the monopoly of force and so tend to regard Loyalist violence as, at best diversionary and, at worst, traitorous. When it comes to the prison battleground loyalties are also inevitably divided by the fact that Protestant Unionists and Loyalists are on both sides – they are both the prisoners and the guards.

In both sections of the population class plays a role – though not a determining one – with working people tending to be more militant and the middle classes more opposed to illegal violence – no doubt because of their different levels of access to money, power and influence. This has a geographical significance, with the disadvantaged estates of public housing being the heartlands from which most prisoners come. In these tight and militant neighbourhoods on both sides, and far beyond in the case of Nationalists, prisoners are indeed the symbolic representatives of their people.

This fact is all the more important in the approach to a settlement. **In Northern Ireland we have found, during the past few years, that the State's attitude towards prisoners is taken as a test of their sincerity and bona fides as regards the peace process as a whole.** Whatever the developments in other

areas, the prisoner issue has the capacity to make or break the peace process. In essence, the combatant organisations, and the communities from which prisoners come, want to know whether the State is sincere about a negotiated settlement or is the "peace process" counter-insurgency by other means? The attitude towards prisoners, and in particular towards prisoner release and reintegration is a litmus test of this.

On the other hand, to approach the question of making special, beneficial arrangements for politically motivated prisoners is the most difficult thing for government. Generally, the state's whole anti-terrorist position is posited on the claim that their enemies are simply criminal and are prosecuted and imprisoned only for the violent acts they have committed, not because of their politics. The early release of such prisoners and special reintegrative mechanisms for them represent massive breaches in this position. Although all kinds of legal and administrative contortions are gone through to avoid formal acknowledgement of it, these actions amount to the recognition of the political motivation of the prisoners. This opens up the way to an analysis of the conflict as about certain political difficulties, which opens up the possibility of their solution and, indeed, a negotiated solution to the historic conflict as a whole.

So central is the prisoner issue that it has been argued that it is microcosmic of the conflict as a whole.[9] Whatever about that, it is clear that these matters are an integral part of the peace process and cannot be understood outside it. Similarly, however, events in relation to prisoner issues will tell us much about the process as a whole.

Prisoner Release in Northern Ireland

We have noted above the completely divergent views on the status of prisoners incarcerated as a result of the conflict. On the one hand, we had the British Government committed to criminalising paramilitary prisoners and, on the other hand, prisoners and their political/military supporters protesting their political status. This made the very concept of negotiation problematic. The prisoner organisations were deeply concerned to avoid negotiating simply on prisoner release. "I did not go to prison just to be released from prison," was a statement heard many times from both Loyalist and Republican prisoners. The point they were making was that their imprisonment would not make any sense to them unless their release was encompassed in the context of the recognition of their political motivation. Their demand was for amnesty, a clearly political mode of release.

In contrast, the British Government went through extraordinary contortions to avoid recognising political motivation. One example was the supposed concession on the prisoner issue made in 1995 in belated recognition of the first ceasefires. This was legislation restoring the 50% rate of remission on prison sentences which anyway had existed until 1986. However, the Secretary of State denied to Parliament

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[9] See Gormally, McEvoy and Wall 1993 and Gormally and McEvoy 1995b.

that the measure was part of the peace process, representing it simply as a response to changing practical conditions and a way of bringing Northern Ireland more into line with the rest of the UK.[10] Earlier in 1995, the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) had published research on prisoner release based on four overseas jurisdictions and the history of both states in Ireland (Gormally and McEvoy, 1995a). In assessing the state of play after the introduction of the above measures, in a private report to funders, the NIACRO researchers stated:

> "We have to note with some exasperation that the position of the British Government, at ministerial level and, apparently, at official level in the Prison Service Agency, is that the issue of the release of prisoners has nothing to do with the peace process, understood as the political settlement of a violent conflict. In spite, therefore, of the extensive contact with officials over technical issues, it appears that, to a large extent, we have been speaking in different languages."[11]

That despair was well founded. Three months later the ceasefire was broken and the lack of movement on the prisoner issue certainly contributed to that (Hartley, 1996).

Progress on reconciling these incompatible positions could not be made by simple political dealing. We noted earlier that a "safe" resolution of antagonistic positions in a peace process involved a transcendence of them both rather than a simple compromise between them. This is an interpretation of the idea that a peace process involves a transformation of society, not simply a pragmatic deal. It is only within the overarching concept of a peace process that prisoner release can be made sense of. It is only within a discourse that refers to an inclusive, negotiated end to violent political conflict that formally incompatible positions on prisoner release can be reconciled.

The Good Friday Agreement itself became the transcendent context of the release process. The very clear statements on prisoner release in the treaty document made the issue a central, and highly controversial, element of the overall settlement (The Agreement 1998, p. 25).[12] Remarkably, for many, the text foresaw the release of all qualifying prisoners by two years after the document was signed. The Agreement, seen as an attempt to transcend division and establish a new kind of polity on the island of Ireland, made sense of and resolved the antagonistic positions on prisoner release.

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[10] Hansard. 30 October 1995. Col. 65. Sir Patrick Mayhew also said: "The Bill is not an amnesty. It makes no concession to people who falsely claim that those who are convicted of terrorist offences somehow become political prisoners." (Col. 26)

[11] NIACRO private report.

[12] Prisoner release was probably the most argued-over element of the Agreement during the referendum campaign to endorse or reject it. "The prisoner release issue has emerged as arguably the strongest bone of contention in the Agreement both North and South." Irish Times editorial. 12.05.98

This should not be seen simply as a victory for those arguing for prisoner release. The mechanism fell far short of an amnesty, as we shall see, and release was subject to conditions. If individual prisoners were re-convicted of relevant offences or became clearly re-involved in terrorism, they could be brought back to prison,[13] a power since used on a number of occasions. Furthermore, if the organisation to which they claimed allegiance broke its cease-fire, all its prisoners would be liable to re-arrest. For the prisoners and their supporters, however, the great prize was early release itself.

From the point of view of the British Government, although it had made the huge step of early release in the interests of peace, it could still claim not to have recognised in full the political motivation of prisoners. It constructed a release process that relied on its unique fudge on the issue.

This is found in the definition of "terrorism" in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991.[14] In Section 65, "terrorism" is defined as "the use of violence for political ends…" This appears to recognise political motivation. However, this is simply a definition for the purposes of general interpretation. Specific *offences* of terrorism are defined, either by description in the Act itself, or by reference to a Schedule of offences, already existing in the "ordinary" common and statute law, appended to the Act. The effect of an offence being "scheduled" is to trigger the special, "emergency" system of extended interrogation, no-jury courts, increased admissibility of confession evidence - all designed to suppress terrorism. However, most of the offences in the Schedule can be "de-scheduled" by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland. In practice, this allows a particular case of murder, for example, to be taken out of the system designed for terrorism if it plainly has nothing to do with the political conflict.

So, in the one Act, we have a "political" definition of terrorism but an administrative, discretionary means of triggering the use of special powers which, moreover, uses as its basis ordinary criminal law. This ambiguity allows the state to maintain the view that persons are prosecuted only for their offences against criminal law while, at the same time, in practice invoking a separate procedure for those with political motivation. Using conviction of a scheduled offence as the prime qualification to enter the early release process allows those who wish to make use of the cover, however threadbare, that it is just a particular category of criminals who are being released.

The early release process is thus a good example of a measure that could only exist because of the transcendent, transformative context of the peace process and the Agreement at its core, but which also has to take account of the divergent views on the character of the conflict. We can perhaps see it this way: The "fudge" that we have described above, is necessary to open the door to a transcendent solution, but cannot be enough in itself. What has been called "creative ambiguity" is one of those pragmatic steps necessary in reaching an agreement, but has to be

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13 Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998
14 This is simply the latest version of legislation which, in its present structure, dates back to 1973.

accompanied by a conceptual framework that is capable of transforming the political context.

Reintegration as a Concept

We said earlier that reintegrative measures are an essential and integral part of the peace process. This was recognised by the fact that reintegration was a specific commitment in the Good Friday Agreement:

> "The Governments continue to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, retraining and/or re-skilling, and further education." (The Agreement 1998, p. 25)

Unfortunately, like many others, the term "reintegration" can be seen as controversial in the Northern Ireland context. In relation to prisoners, it can be held to imply, first, that they are "outside" society and need to be brought back in, second, that they themselves must change to "fit back" into society and, third, that "normal" society was right all along and the outcasts have now seen the error of their ways. These implications are, of course, rejected by politically motivated ex-prisoners. They also often claim that they are already fully integrated into their communities and so are in no need of "reintegration".[15]

It is difficult, however, to find a more apposite and understandable term, which is why it is used in this paper. Our interpretation differs, however, from that described above. We use it to describe the set of processes, derived from the concept of an inclusive peace process we set out above, designed to increase opportunities for ex-combatants to play a full part in the new society being created. In our view, violent political conflict does exclude the "illegal" participants from full participation in society and prisoners are blatantly physically excluded. Irrespective of how much prisoners are supported by their own community, they are excluded, by definition, from the liberty and social activity enjoyed by other people. The experience of prison or a clandestine life may also concretely disadvantage people in terms of education, work experience and their personal relationships.

Their "reintegration" after the conflict must, however, be seen as a two-way process. While ex-prisoners may be encouraged to take up opportunities offered in education, training and so on, society should also change to ensure their inclusion. The details of these measures will be dealt with later. For the moment it is necessary to establish another principle. The traditional concept of reintegration suggests a certain paternalism or even a therapeutic intent, with the prisoner needing to be "healed" or at least "helped." Politically motivated prisoners will not tolerate these attitudes and, indeed, during the conflict would rarely interact

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[15] See Sinn Fein Submission to the (Dublin) Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, 20.01.95

with statutory or voluntary organisations that offered such assistance. **That is why reintegration measures for politically motivated ex-prisoners must be based on the principle of self-help with autonomous, ex-prisoner-controlled organisations delivering services to them.**

The "two-way" reintegration process we are describing, involves the state and society changing but also ex-prisoners changing. The process is really one of building a new society, neither fitting people into the old one nor insisting that society change to accept sectional, self-interested positions. The whole concept is therefore predicated on an original peace process that was fully inclusive, where all sides had an opportunity to sketch out the design of the new society, and on a continuing process that allows and encourages ex-combatants to pursue their aspirations peacefully but effectively.

Political Reintegration

We have argued that a peace process has to include the major ex-combatants to be successful. A pre-condition of that is, of course, that all are prepared to explore peaceful ways forward. The commitment to peace, of all sides, state and illegal armed organisations, is a matter that can only be resolved, to the satisfaction of all, by the long-term success of the process itself. On the way, the progress of de-militarisation[16] on the one hand and decommissioning of illegal weapons on the other, matters outside the scope of this current study, will be used as tests of that commitment. The process also demands, however, that effective routes for peaceful activism are opened up.

This can be seen as the particular solution that the Northern Ireland peace process has arrived at in dealing with the peculiarities of the situation of ex-combatant armed groups. These groups have not been militarily defeated, but neither has the state recognised the legitimacy of their past actions. There has therefore been no real question of the personnel of these illegal armies being formally integrated in the state structure nor given any special place in the political arena, as has happened after conflicts in other places. At the same time, the structure of paramilitary organisations still remains and, at the time of writing, they retain their weapons. **Political reintegration has therefore to take place – in the absence of a formal programme of demobilisation – within the context of civil society and that society is challenged to make that possible.**

Experience in Northern Ireland suggests that one major part of the project of opening up routes for peaceful political activism is that political parties representing the aspirations of former combatants are established, legalised and facilitated to operate in political society. Again, the history and role of relevant parties in

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16   In the Northern Ireland context, "demilitarisation" tends to refer to the reduction of the level of state security forces present and active on the ground. "Decommissioning" is the term generally used for the equivalent process by non-state armed elements, especially the disarmament of their weapons.

Northern Ireland is a matter for another study, but it is worth noting a couple of points. First, the election process for those accredited to participate in the peace negotiations was specially designed to ensure representation of the major paramilitary-aligned political parties.[17] Second, the structures of the Government and Assembly are designed, on an inclusive basis, to reflect party strength. Having recognised these points, we should also note, however, that the "special" character of the paramilitary-aligned parties has its downside. Their involvement in negotiations and, now, involvement in the institutions of government were and are dependent on the maintenance of a cease-fire by the relevant armed group. This is another example of contradictory views of the same phenomenon. From one point of view, these restrictions are a defence of democracy against those who would try to coerce others by the possession of "private armies". From the opposite point of view, the restrictions are anti-democratic in ignoring the electoral mandate of the parties and relegating their voters to second class citizens.

In more specific terms, the active role of prisoners and ex-prisoners in the peace process opened their way to political reintegration. It is arguable that the experience of compromise and negotiation in the prisons from the mid-eighties on laid one basis for the peace process.[18] **Virtually all of the negotiators representing paramilitary-aligned parties during the peace talks were ex-prisoners.** The parties recognise ex-prisoners as the backbone of their political organisation not only because of their habits of discipline, but also because of the respect many have in their constituencies.

Serving prisoners themselves were a vital constituency for all groups during the negotiations and had to be kept briefed and in agreement with the positions taken by their political representatives. The prison authorities regularly allowed political negotiators to consult with both prisoner representatives and large groups of the prisoners themselves. This necessity to keep prisoners on board was given dramatic recognition by the British Government when the then Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, visited UDA prisoners in January 1998 to, successfully, convince them to re-instate their support for the peace process.[19]

The other major route for political activism, apart from political parties themselves, is within the community sector. Northern Ireland has a high level of

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[17] Northern Ireland: ground rules for substantive all-party negotiations (Cm. 3232) Northern Ireland Office 1996. A similar process was not adopted for the elections to the Assembly itself and the Ulster Democratic Party, associated with the Loyalist paramilitary Ulster Defence Association, failed to gain representation in the Assembly. The consequences, if any, of this for the peace process are not yet clear. See appendix II for the relevant parties and the paramilitary organisations they represent.

[18] See Gormally, McEvoy and Wall (1993) for an analysis of the development of prison management policy, and NIACRO (1995b) for statements from ex-prisoners about their prison experience.

[19] See McEvoy (1999) for an analysis of the role of prisoners in the peace process.

community organisation,[20] particularly in the working class areas, urban and rural, from which the members of combatant organisations mainly come and which have suffered the brunt of the violence.[21]

Community groups may represent the general interests of residents in a given area or concentrate on trying to meet some particular social need. Tenants' organisation, groups working with the disabled, youth, the elderly, leisure and cultural organisations, management committees of community halls, local enterprise and economic development organisations, crime prevention projects, schemes for young offenders: these are some of the types of organisation that abound in working class communities. Usually, these are bound together at local and regional level by umbrella groupings that have a significant degree of legitimacy in representing the interests of their areas. This community sector intersects with, and some elements are organisationally connected to, a large voluntary sector of specialist associations usually receiving grant aid from government sources.

Ex-prisoners have found this a natural arena for political activism, although the issues are rarely subject to party political strife. It is, furthermore, an area where jobs are available for which the main qualification is the ability to lead and motivate the community. They may also be actively sought out by community groups. Billy Mitchell's comments about a cross-community project in North Belfast would correspond to widespread feelings about ex-prisoners:

> "The idea is to transform the idea of patriotism, so that it can include things like rebuilding your community after years of war. It is not the old community relations idea of tea and buns. We recruit mainly ex-prisoners, people with a bit of credibility, a bit of respect, who have seen that violence is counter-productive and that we need to build bridges".[22]

There is a contrary view, however, that ex-prisoners are simply the current activists of paramilitary organisations, who take over and dominate community organisations through a mixture of manipulation and intimidation. While anecdotal evidence exists that this might happen from time to time, more typical of the attitude of non-paramilitary community activists is this comment from a local enterprise worker:

> "We are involved with projects that have UDA people among those running them. Some of them are OK blokes. We know what they are –

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[20] The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) maintain a list of some 5000 organisations on their data base. See also NICVA, *The State of the Sector II: Northern Ireland Voluntary Sector Almanac 1998* (1998) and Department for Social Development, *Consultation Document on Funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector* (April 2000) which suggests that the sector provides employment for 33,000 people and has a gross annual income of £500 million.

[21] See, for example, Acheson and Williamson (1995).

[22] Billy Mitchell is himself a former prisoner for the UVF and a leader of the Progressive Unionist Party. "Transforming the idea of patriotism," is an example of creative thinking around the problem of transition from a situation of sectarian violence to a new society. Quoted in McKay (2000, p. 59).

but they are just part of the community, same as anyone else." (McKay 2000, p. 112)

At times, the British Government has taken a harsh view of paramilitary – often ex-prisoners – involvement. Its major attempt to control such influence in the community sector was the announcement of the "Hurd Criteria" in 1985. This established a political vetting system for Government funding and was a political disaster.[23] The measure fell into disuse within a few years and was quietly dropped in the early nineties.

More recently, the Government has objected to paramilitary involvement in community restorative justice schemes. These are schemes designed to deal with anti-social behaviour through the use of mediation and reparation involving the offender, the victim and the community. They have been taken up by the communities as, amongst other things, an alternative to the paramilitary systems of violent punishments, shootings or beatings.

Over the past two years, interest in restorative justice has developed extremely swiftly. It seems that the ideas of restorative justice have connected in some way with people's feelings about their community and have articulated some things that they think about justice. In practical terms, community restorative justice gives concerned people a way of doing something about anti-social behaviour, together with their neighbours, in a manner that sits comfortably with their common sense view of how communities work. The process itself satisfies many needs, bringing together all sides of the problem and encouraging all to hear each other. Very often there are practical solutions that seem fair to everyone and, even when they break down, this is in full view of the community, not in some remote custodial or bureaucratic fastness.

Both Loyalists and Republicans actively support these schemes. One of the starting points on the Loyalist side was research carried out by an ex-prisoner,[24] which led to the establishment of a sophisticated and intensive pilot project. On the Republican side, a dialogue between Republican community activists and some people from the voluntary and academic sectors led to a published report (Auld et al. 1997) and now more than twenty local restorative justice schemes. Clearly, the development of such schemes is part of the transition from violent conflict, when paramilitary organisations policed their areas with guns and baseball bats, to a new

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[23] The then Secretary of State Douglas Hurd stated in a parliamentary written answer (Hansard 27th June 1985) that it was not in the public interest to give grant aid to organisations that had "sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisations to give rise to a grave risk that to give support would have the effect of improving the standing, or furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly". This had the effect of cutting off grant aid from about 30 organisations including Irish language classes and pre-school playgroups.

[24] Unpublished research report by Tom Winstone, Greater Shankill Alternatives (1997).

society in which the community works closely with a new, acceptable police service.[25]

The British Government and the RUC have, however, been deeply unsympathetic to this process. In a series of documents and protocols, starting with papers submitted to the "Confidence-building Sub-committee" of the negotiation process, they have insisted that any scheme co-operate fully with the police. The recent Review of the Criminal Justice System, one of the processes set up under the Agreement, has taken a similar line and arguing that local schemes must not receive referrals directly from the community, only via statutory agencies (Criminal Justice Review Group, 2000: Para 9.98). Pending the implementation of the Patten Report on policing, Republicans refuse to co-operate with the unreformed RUC. Loyalists working in restorative justice are willing to co-operate with the police, but on the basis of partnership, not subservience.

This is another example of attitudes rooted in the conflict affecting the process of building a new society. Government and the police are still inclined to see former illegal combatants as the enemy. The view from schemes in Republican areas is:

> "We do want a partnership with a reformed police service in the future.
> We know that our kind of restorative justice scheme works best with a
> good relationship with the formal system. We intend to plan for that
> day. But it is not, unfortunately, here yet."[26]

If party political activity and community activism are routes for the translation of paramilitary action into peaceful participation in building a new society, it is clear that the process is not yet complete. Violent punishments continue, though at a reduced level, and the recent feud between Loyalist paramilitary organisations has seen 158 families expelled from their homes in the Shankill area.[27] In reintegration terms, the issue is whether to support clearly peaceful activities or to assume that paramilitary leopards will never change their spots and oppose any extension of their influence.

Social and Economic Reintegration

To distinguish social and economic reintegration from political reintegration is, at one level, a mistake. Clearly, the extent of social and economic reintegration will affect the political process and vice versa. The whole process is political and not the smallest decision about funding, monitoring or project practice is without its political context and consequences. In that sense, the process of meeting social and economic reintegration needs, which we will describe later in this section, has been

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[25] A contrary view, that these projects are just "another mechanism for community control" by the paramilitaries, is quoted in Knox and Monaghan (2000), through without any evidence or attribution.

[26] Community Restorative Justice (Ireland) Response to the Criminal Justice Review (September 2000).

[27] Northern Ireland Housing Executive statement (14 September 2000).

and is a major route for peaceful political practice and therefore political reintegration.

We have made the distinction here, however, partly because political reintegration is rarely addressed in those terms and therefore tends to be neglected. More important, we wished to stress the central significance of political reintegration as an essential part of an inclusive peace process. Peaceful politics must embrace and encompass the former violent actors or else the peace process must fail. Of course, the same goes, on the other side, for those who have supported a police/military solution to the conflict – they must be convinced that inclusive politics hold the key to progress, but that aspect is not the subject of this paper.

The final reason for making the distinction is to stress that social and economic reintegration cannot be understood nor evaluated in purely technical terms. We need to see the practical processes of reintegration in the light of the clashing ideological positions we have described in the previous section. We need to appreciate that investment in a training project, for example, is not just about the normal outcomes of people processed, qualifications gained and so on, but is also an act of faith in a peaceful political future. To anticipate the later analysis, **the technically best way to go about practical reintegration would have been to establish a professional training and advisory body using all the expertise and resources of mainstream state provision. The politically best way was to invest in ex-prisoners' self-help programmes, putting faith in their good faith and growing abilities.**

It is in this political context that we may go on to examine social and economic reintegration needs and the response to them.

Reintegration Needs

We have noted above the arguments about the very use of the term "reintegration". Politically motivated ex-prisoner groups have been very concerned not to present imprisonment "for the cause" as an experience that, in itself, damages people. Although they were very ready to agitate against denial of rights and brutalities within the prisons, there used to be an unwillingness to see that the experience of prison might give a person problems on release. This was especially the case when it came to possible psychological or family problems.

This position is understandable. In addition to the desire to distance politically motivated from "ordinary" prisoners, it appeared that to admit to personal or family problems would be to admit to "low morale," to weaken the image of the stalwart soldier loyally supported by his wife and family. Given the ubiquity of psychologistic explanations of "terrorism," in terms of "violent personalities" and so on, it is also not surprising that any suggestion of ex-prisoners suffering mental trauma or any other psychological effect tended to be dismissed.

These positions have changed, however. Ex-prisoner groups are confident and knowledgeable enough to recognise the range of negative effects of imprisonment and so to attempt to counter them through their work. We must nonetheless caution against any simplistic cross-applications from the experience of ordinary prisoners to that of politically motivated ones. There will be similarities, but also differences and a common experience or effect must not be assumed.

It is clear, for example, that certain aspects of long term imprisonment will be the same, whatever the reason for it: deprivation of personal liberty, the removal of responsibility, living under an alien authority, an all male society, separation from family and friends. Yet it is equally clear that the context in which these factors are experienced will be different for those who have a strong ideology, no guilt about their past actions, who have the active support of their comrades inside and out and see prison as just another arena of struggle. Insights from experience with ordinary ex-prisoners, and perhaps particularly with their families, may be useful. They should only be offered, however, within the context of a full recognition of the singularity of the politically motivated prisoner's experience and in circumstances where the organisational autonomy of politically motivated ex-prisoners is guaranteed.

This reference to motivation raises an important point about the nature of the release and reintegration process in Northern Ireland. In a "normal" prisoner release scheme, accelerated or not, the individual attitude of the prisoner is crucial. It is assumed he was properly convicted, he has been punished and his release depends on the danger he might represent to the public which, in turn, is largely determined by his attitude towards his crime and whether he might repeat it. There might be an assumption that remorse for past action is necessary and certainly that he has no intention, in any circumstances, of repeating it. The question might be posed in these term: "is this prisoner ready and willing for reintegration into society?"

As we argued above in examining the term "reintegration," this kind of individual approach is anathema to political combatants. The Northern Ireland early release process neatly side-stepped the issue. As we noted above, the only qualification for being considered for early release was conviction of a scheduled offence. The application form for the process first asked the prisoner to list his offences. The next, and only other substantive question asked the prisoner to tick yes or no: "Are you or do you intend to become a supporter of any of the organisations specified under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Specified Organisations)?" The specified organisations were paramilitary groups held to be still involved in violence, that is not on effective cease-fire as determined by the Secretary of State.

Release was therefore dependent on a factual determination of the prisoners' allegiance and thence on the behaviour of the organisation he supported, not on individual attitudes towards violence or peace. Where there was an issue about the veracity of the prisoner's denial that he was supporter of one of the listed organisations there could be a hearing, but directed toward a finding of

fact not a judgement of attitude.[28] This process also avoided the process of "signing out" – having to make a declaration of good behaviour as a condition of release – which Republicans in particular would have refused to do. On the other hand, the process did require individual prisoners to apply for release and it could be argued that their support for organisations on cease-fire implied a promise of future good behaviour. Once again, we have here an example of an element of the peace process that tends towards a transcendent goal (integration of ex-combatants in a new society) but does so in terms which, up to a point, are explicable in the contradictory terms of the old antagonisms.

When it comes to the processes of reintegration, Northern Ireland experience shows that participation must be voluntary, not a condition of release. The self-help principle – most formal reintegration processes being led by prisoner organisations themselves – largely deals with that. On the other hand, it is clear that motivation will be of great significance in individual cases. An unwillingness to leave behind the clear, if limited, status of paramilitary fighter for less certain roles is a problem the ex-prisoner organisations will have to face at times.

It is in this rather complex political context that the needs of reintegration must be examined.

The categories of Need

The specific reintegrative needs of politically motivated ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland have been extensively researched. All the major ex-prisoner organisations have carried out research and local groups have tended to replicate this within their geographical areas.[29] While the weight given to various categories of need varies, there is a great overall similarity in their findings.

Economic Issues

Economic issues dominate as we would expect. On release an ex-prisoner is usually without financial resources. A small discharge allowance is paid by the prison and he[30] is able to sign on for welfare benefits. There is no allowance, however, for the "start-up" costs of a new entrant into economic society. Unless the ex-prisoner has a supportive family network, then he must negotiate the benefit maze, fill in the

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[28] The legislation demanded that life sentence prisoners satisfy the requirement that they were no longer "a danger to the public," and officials privately claimed that this was to exclude "a handful of nutters." In fact, however, this seems to have been interpreted as just another version of the question of whether a person would be likely to support a listed organisation on release.

[29] For example, Crothers (1998), Ritchie (1998), McKearney and Hamill (1997), this last unpublished, available from EXPAC (see list of organisations).

[30] We use the male pronoun for convenience but also because the vast majority of politically motivated ex-prisoners are male. We deal below with potential particular problems of female ex-prisoners.

correct forms and will still end up with insufficient money to begin a decent and acceptable life-style.

The impact of this situation is not simply material. Experience of the benefit system is normally a demeaning experience, but for the politically motivated ex-prisoner it appears to demonstrate continuing dependency on the state for the means of life; an inability to break free from constraint. It is also one of those factors that contrasts with the inevitably heightened and unrealistic set of expectations developed in prison about "freedom".

The way to economic advancement is obviously through paid employment. The world of work is, however, extremely unkind to ex-prisoners, particularly politically motivated ones. **Some of the barriers to employment are practical, some are legal and some political, in broad and narrow senses.**

The experience of prison is hardly a good preparation for the conventional world of work. Many ex-prisoners lack formal qualifications, especially those with immediate vocational application. Up to 20% of them were first imprisoned when children (Ritchie 1998) and most come from working class backgrounds where educational provision was at a minimum. Even those who entered prison with relevant qualifications will find them out of date and those with particular skills will have lacked the opportunity to practise them.[31] Work experience, often of great value to prospective employers, will obviously also be lacking.

Some prisoners were able to gain academic qualifications in prison, up to degree level, mainly through distance learning and the structures of the Open University. The subjects open for study were, however, limited to those requiring no special equipment or facilities, only private study. Vocational training was non-existent in the Maze prison, which held all prisoners who had not renounced their political affiliation. At one point the Prison Service offered vocational training which the prisoners rejected as a criminalisation tactic. The offer was, however, largely an empty gambit as security would not have permitted the tools, equipment and movement around the prison necessary for effective training.

The prison regime gives no preparation for the discipline of work. Even though politically motivated prisoners organised themselves, took responsibility for their daily regime and operated a disciplined routine, this was collective and dependent upon the close camaraderie that developed. This was not necessarily an effective preparation for an individual commitment to the discipline of routine and sometimes alienating work. Politically motivated prisoners, of course, rejected

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[31] Most politically motivated prisoners served long sentences. There are no separate official figures available on politically motivated prisoners but, in the nineties, for example, three-quarters of the average daily prison population were serving sentences of over four years, the vast majority politically motivated (Annual Reports of the Prison Service, HMSO, Belfast). The early release scheme of the Agreement only covered prisoners serving over five years; only a handful of prisoners "claimed" by combatant organisations failed to qualify for early release because of this qualification.

"prison work" as a symbol of criminalisation though, in any event, there was no opportunity for meaningful work offered in practice.

A serious bar to employment is the issue of personal security. Northern Ireland is geographically divided between the two major traditions. Protestants find it difficult to work in predominantly Catholic areas and vice versa. This "chill factor" as it has become known is particularly a feature of the traditional engineering sector, located mainly in Protestant areas. Employers are obliged by fair employment legislation to attempt to overcome the chill factor but, as we will note, this does not apply to those convicted of a politically motivated offence.

Many ex-prisoners feel themselves, often with justice, to be at personal risk outside of their own areas. This does not just affect employment, of course, but it is a major factor preventing ex-prisoners from competing freely in the labour market.

There are various legal barriers to employment. Those with "criminal" convictions are ineligible for work in many areas of the public service. Politically motivated ex-prisoners are exempted from certain provisions of equality legislation. The Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 bans discrimination in employment on the grounds of "political opinion". Section 57 (3) of that Act, however, excludes "an opinion which consists of or includes approval or acceptance of the use of violence for political ends connected with Northern Irish affairs".

A particular complaint of ex-prisoners is the difficulty in acquiring a Public Service Vehicle driving licence. This is necessary to drive a bus or taxi, the latter in particular being a significant employment opportunity. Applicants with criminal convictions are initially barred and, although some cases are won on appeal, this unreformed system constitutes a particular barrier to employment.

Discrimination against those with convictions is, ironically, given legal legitimisation through the Rehabilitation of Offenders Order 1978. This bars discrimination but only for those sentenced to less than two and a half years, after a ten year "rehabilitation" period and not in a wide range of exempted occupations. The effect of this is to make discrimination outside these parameters, where the vast majority of politically motivated ex-prisoners falls, legal and apparently proper. Most job applications now require a declaration of convictions and instant dismissal is possible for any inaccuracy that subsequently emerges.

A wide range of jobs involving access to children are, quite properly, subject to vetting through the government Pre-Employment Consultancy Service which gives a prospective employer details of an applicant's criminal record. This process, designed to exclude violent and sexual offenders, makes no allowance for the special character of politically motivated offences. A conviction for serious violence up to murder, for example, would normally and obviously exclude someone from such employment. Many former combatants will have such convictions through their actions in the conflict though they are no actual threat to any vulnerable person. Individual employers are thus left with the responsibility of having to make a positive choice in favour of an ex-prisoner applicant and ignoring the record if they want to employ him.

It is at this point of choice for an individual employer, regardless of the nature of the post, that political discrimination comes in. It is a political choice to regard a conviction arising out of the conflict as if it were an ordinary criminal conviction, as is the reverse decision. Clearly, some employers may also be prejudiced against the particular politics of the ex-prisoner and, as we have seen, there is no legal bar against discrimination.

Some employers may also regard it as a risk to the stability of their workforce to take on "political" persons. Clearly, in our divided society, there may be real difficulties when a workforce comes from both traditions. Yet this is exactly the kind of problem that a society concerned with reintegration must be prepared to take on. **Long-term peace is hardly to be consolidated by excluding former combatants from mainstream employment.** As we have noted, government has failed to take a lead here in respect of public agencies. Encouragingly, the new Assembly has indicated that, in choosing its employees, criminal convictions will be no necessary bar.

Housing

Housing can be an immediate problem for released prisoners, especially those who are single. Most prisoners will have lived in public housing and the tenancy of a Northern Ireland Housing Executive house or flat lapses after six months. It can be a problem to get the "emergency homeless" status that is necessary to get accommodation quickly. At times the Housing Executive has interpreted imprisonment as "intentional homelessness" putting ex-prisoners at the bottom of the waiting list.

An additional problem is that, again for reasons of personal security, ex-prisoners will only be able to live in sympathetic areas. This can cut down the options for accommodation, especially in areas of high housing demand.

Public housing is the norm for working class communities in Northern Ireland, but the percentage of home ownership has been growing steadily. Long term tenants now have the right to buy Housing Executive homes and public housing is being squeezed towards "welfare housing". In current society, property owning is becoming a mark of a stake in society and represents the only opportunity for most people to pass an inheritance to their children. Prisoners are unlikely to have taken the first step on the "housing ladder", as the process of gradually improving one's housing status is known. Their economic situation tends to preclude house buying on release; they have "lost" the time in prison that might otherwise have gone towards improving their economic situation.

Families

Imprisonment puts huge stress on families, especially the wives and children of prisoners. There is economic pressure; most prisoners' families are forced to rely on welfare benefits and, in general terms, they suffer from all the problems of lone

parent families. Child-care can be problematic and it may be difficult or impossible to find work which accommodates that. In addition, however, there is the stress of maintaining a relationship between a man and a woman where one is undergoing long-term imprisonment.

There is a culture and a real history of unselfish loyalty by politically motivated prisoners' partners. But this is not without cost and can be enforced by severe community pressure. Prisoners can become caught up with their own concerns; life outside the narrow confines of prison can become unreal to them. The normal perception is that the prisoner is suffering, as, of course, can be the case and that the wife's job is to support him. From another point of view, however, the prisoner is safe – usually – and has no responsibility except to get through the day. The wife is struggling to keep the family, to bring up the kids and cope with a relationship that can only be conducted under extraordinary restraints. There is good evidence that imprisonment has a negative effect on the lives of prisoners' children, even though this was contested for a long time by prisoners' organisations. (McEvoy et al. 1999)

The release of the prisoner does not necessarily solve all these problems. Relationships can be difficult to establish. The wife has had responsibility for the whole family; she may resent sharing this or the husband may attempt to dominate. Roles and personalities can change over the decade or more that imprisonment might last. The man will have missed many of the formative years of his children; his reappearance in their lives and possible attempts to lay down new rules of behaviour may cause friction. Prisoners need to mask emotions and habits learnt in the artificial world of prison can be carried over into domestic life.

Personal Problems

It is impossible to generalise about the effect of long-term imprisonment on psychological health. Again, for a long time prisoners' organisations felt uncomfortable with this question and tended to deny the incidence of psychological trauma, much as armies have tended to underplay "shell-shock" or "battle-fatigue". It is clear that some individuals do suffer some trauma and the symptoms can include depression, paranoia and agoraphobia as well as less well-defined forms of malaise.

It is clear that prison is a dominant experience. In a company of ex-prisoners, conversation, anecdotes and reminiscences will always tend to revert to the prison experience. It is as though the incidents, the camaraderie and the political struggle were more intense than in the outside world. Ex-prisoners also tend to joke about each others prison-learnt habits such as not being able to sleep without the door firmly closed.

A common observation about newly released prisoners is their frenetic political activity. After being locked away from the 'main struggle' for years, but with intense political discussion going on inside, released prisoners tend to throw themselves into political work and other projects. This is not only understandable but, generally

speaking, positive, as we have noted above. However, in some cases disillusionment with the pace of progress can cause serious psychological stress. In contrast, those imprisoned young may demonstrate the attitudes and behaviour, the irresponsibility, of the age that they were imprisoned. There is no consistent pattern, but there can be no doubt that prison-induced trauma exists.

Women Ex-Prisoners

There has been little or no research on the particular needs of women ex-prisoners. One estimate is that they represent 8% of the total (Ritchie 1998, p. 16).[32] It is not clear whether or how their experience differs from male ex-prisoners, though clearly roles in the family and relationships with any children will differ along normal gender lines. There are anecdotal suggestions that those women with children suffer more from guilt than their male counterparts and it is generally accepted that women are more likely to recognise emotional and psychological needs than male ex-prisoners.

   Women ex-prisoners are just as respected as the men in their communities,[33] but the ex-prisoner culture, if it is possible to talk of such a thing, is male-dominated. Until the new ex-prisoner centres were established, the main institution on the Republican side was "The Felon's Club," a drinking club whose membership is restricted to Republican ex-prisoners. Many women ex-prisoners are active in Sinn Fein but as a group they do not seem as "visible" as male ex-prisoners. Ironically, the first ex-prisoner centre on the Republican side, Tar Anall, was started by mainly female ex-prisoners.

History of Reintegrative Efforts

Efforts at reintegration do not have to await a peace process. It is true that, while the conflict is at its height, the political context will be very different. In so far as the efforts come from within combatant communities, they will be seen as humanitarian aid to combatants no longer in the front line. In so far as they are encouraged by the state they will be seen, by opponents of the state, as attempts to corrupt and subvert former fighters away from the conflict.

   In both Republican and Loyalist communities any formal reintegration activities were offshoots of the various prisoner aid organisations. Organisations such as the Prisoners' Defence Fund and the Green Cross, on the Republican side, and Loyalist Prisoners' Aid and the Orange Cross on the Loyalist side, mainly collected funds to support the families of serving prisoners. They might, however, give particular help when someone was released and those with interest and experience in the welfare of ex-prisoners would gather round these

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[32] That is, on the Republican side. The vast majority of women prisoners were Republican, only a handful of Loyalist women were imprisoned during the conflict.

[33] There is now no separate organisation for women in the Republican movement, women combatants used to play operational roles in the IRA itself.

organisations and give help to individuals where possible. Later, on the Republican side, the "Prisoner of War Department" of Sinn Fein, played a central policy co-ordinating role.

On what was perceived as the state side, the Probation Board and government funded voluntary organisations such as NIACRO and Extern, offered resettlement opportunities to "ordinary" ex-prisoners and, in theory, to politically motivated ex-prisoners. In general, however, the latter regarded any participation in such schemes to be a criminalising process, tantamount to accepting that they were "ordinary criminals". The few individuals who did take advantage of these opportunities over the years had, usually, severed their links with their paramilitary organisations.

It is our experience, however, as the "peace horizon" begins to appear, that reintegration and associated activities can begin to play a role in consolidating early efforts at peace building. If we see the peace process as a dialogue between formally incompatible positions, seeking a solution that will transcend their differences, there will be a need to find many spaces, mainly within civil society, where contacts may be made, where the harsh lines of friend and enemy may be a little blurred. It is particularly important, in a dialogue between combatant communities and the state, that each side begin to see the other as less than monolithic and that both move away from the view that "he who is not for me is against me". It is arguable that this process is, in ideological terms, one of translation and that interlocutory organisations and individuals have a particular role to play in it.[34]

We may give some examples of what we mean with the caveat that no claims are being made for these activities, only that they may have contributed to a more positive atmosphere. The Probation Service kept on good terms with and operated in combatant communities throughout the conflict. Relations between the Service and both serving and ex-prisoners would have improved from the late eighties on. Politically motivated life prisoners participated in the Life Sentence Review process for deciding the date of release, which began in 1985, even though it required a Probation report on home circumstances. For many years voluntary organisations, the Quakers, Save the Children Fund and NIACRO, ran Visitor's Centres outside each of the main prisons. Politically motivated prisoners' families used these and built up good relations with the staff. NIACRO and the Probation Service worked in the community with prisoners' families, some of them politically motivated. The policy lines of such organisations and prisoner support groups increasingly converged and their general support for early release later led to cordial co-operation.

It is also worth noting that both the Probation Service and the voluntary organisations, in different ways, recognised the importance of the self-help principle from an early stage. On a number of occasions Probation wished to fund prisoner groups only to be prevented by the Northern Ireland Office on the

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[34] This terminology is developed from within the discourse of governmentality. See, in particular, Rose (1999).

basis of the "Hurd Criteria," described earlier, which prevented state funding seeming to support paramilitary organisations. Politically motivated prisoner self-help groups were therefore denied access to statutory funding even though other "specialist" groups – such as avowedly Christian organisations – could receive it.

An early, though small, venture drew out some basic principles. This was a self-build project initiated between NIACRO, Open Door Housing Association and a group of Republican ex-life sentence prisoners which began in 1989 and first received funding in 1991. The aim was to support them to build their own houses which would then become their own property. There was great suspicion on all sides. The ex-prisoners feared that this project was designed to subvert their Republican allegiance and government suspected that it was designed to bolster the strength and prestige of the Republican movement. Government actually suspended funding (from a state-funded development agency) for a year under a derivative of the "Hurd Criteria". The project eventually succeeded with seven houses built and a continuing developmental role for the organisation the ex-prisoners established.

Two important lessons from this project were that the principle of self-help must be recognised with genuine autonomy for ex-prisoner groupings and that absolute transparency is the only basis for trust between people with differing ideologies.

A more direct progenitor of reintegrative projects was PROPP (Progressive Release of Political Prisoners) which was effectively a discussion group involving both Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoners and a number of Quakers active in prison work. This began meeting in the late eighties. Active discussion on reintegration matters took place within the prisons, amongst ex-prisoners and in Loyalist and Republican political circles.

From 1991 groupings began to coalesce which would form the first ex-prisoner reintegration centres. These were EPIC (Ex-Prisoners' Interpretative Centre) aligned to the UVF and Red Hand Commando, Loyalist Prisoners' Aid which became Prisoners' Aid and Conflict Resettlement Group in 1995, aligned to the UDA and Tar Anall for IRA ex-prisoners.[35] While it is impossible to quantify, there can be little doubt that the existence and work of these organisations played a role in developing the atmosphere that facilitated the cease-fires of 1994. We have already noted the significance of prisoners and ex-prisoners in the political process; the fact that significant leaders were engaged in debate and activism around reintegration issues must have made a positive contribution to the political mood.

External Support – The EU Special Programme

The cease-fires of 1994 clearly gave an impetus to reintegration efforts and created the context for external support. Perhaps the most important aspect of this was the development of the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and

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[35] See Appendix II

Reconciliation (SSPPR)[36]. Jaques Delors, the then President of the European Commission, but whose replacement had already been appointed, took a personal interest in pushing through a new programme of financial support designed to embed the peace. At the time the colloquial term for the proposed programme was the "Delors packet". In autumn 1994 he sent over a task force headed by Carlo Jordan, Deputy Secretary-General of the European Commission. This group took evidence from a wide range of sources on what "peace money" should be spent on.

At a meeting on 1 November 1994 in Belfast, for example, ten representatives of the voluntary sector met the task force and a number of them raised the importance of prisoners being included. It is significant that, at that point, the prisoners' own organisations were not sufficiently well-developed, nor sufficiently "respectable" to be invited to such meetings. It was left to those organisations that had made friendly links to make the case. NIACRO's presentation to the task force, for example, included two elements, one around support for communities suffering high levels of anti-social crime and the other: "Support for the social and economic reintegration of ex-prisoners who have been involved in politically motivated violence."[37]

At that meeting, the point was made that: "in the new situation it is likely that ex-prisoners will desire to take the lead in developing individual and collective opportunities in their own communities." The principle of funding self-help projects was therefore argued, though the NIACRO proposal also proposed technical aid centres to assist projects with training and management; a concept later rejected by prisoner organisations. It took all of the following year for the programme to be negotiated and the delivery mechanisms established so that it was not until December 1995 that the first grants to prisoner projects were approved.

Before detailing those aspects relevant to ex-prisoners, it is worth noting some unique features of the SSPPR. First, it is all extra, additional money outside the normal structures of EU support programmes amounting to approximately 300 million British pounds (£). Second, although, as might be expected about 50% of the funds go to Northern Ireland government departments, the rest are distributed by two new forms of delivery mechanism. One is the District Partnerships. These are made up by roughly a third elected district councillors – in proportion to their party strength - and the rest of representatives of the social partners – business, trade unions, agricultural interests and the voluntary and community sector. These are an interesting, if cumbersome, experiment in localised funding. The other delivery mechanism is the Intermediary Funding Bodies, primarily voluntary organisations, many of them representative of particular sectors, such as youth or children or disabled people, which agreed to take on the job of assessing applications and making grants.

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[36] EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (SSPPR)
   (http://www.nics.gov.uk/eu/eussppr/progsumm/)
[37] NIACRO, unpublished text.

The third interesting point about the SSPPR is that the British Government agreed to provide 20% matching funding from the appropriate local department, depending on the nature of the funding measure. So, for example, grants to ex-prisoner projects, being held to be associated with criminal justice, are funded 20% by the Northern Ireland Office. Government, however, has no direct influence on who gets the money. The Intermediary Funding Bodies are all more or less independent of the state and there is no formal mechanism for government officials to influence the allocation process. This has caused some tensions in controversial areas like funding ex-prisoner projects.[38]

These aspects make clear the reality, expressed in private by European Commission officials**, that the EU was determined to get funding to grass-roots projects and not simply bankroll normal government expenditure.** By April 1998, the SSPPR had funded 11,000 projects involving a quarter of a million people, boasted Hywel Ceri Jones, Deputy Director-General DG V, at a conference in Belfast. He went on to argue that this "bottom-up approach" involving relatively small sums of money could "when well-targeted …produce hugely beneficial effects in mobilising local communities and enabling them to tackle the problems on exclusion and alienation, as well as economic issues such as long-term unemployment." (Jones 1998, p. 39)

The SSPPR has a number of Measures engaging with matters such as social and economic development, social inclusion and encouraging the role of women. Measure 4.4 is termed "Targeting Vulnerable Groups," and one of its specific focuses is the support of projects working with ex-prisoners; another is work with victims.

Responsibility for funding these two categories was given to the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT). NIVT is an independent charitable trust concerned to support community development across a wide range of issues. In the United States it would be known as a "community foundation". It was established in 1979 with a £500,000 grant from government and a promise to match, on a pound for pound basis, all sums, up to a fixed ceiling, raised independently. Its trustees were originally selected to reflect the balance of the community and, though they are self-appointing, that ethos continues. The organisation is accepted and respected in all sections of the community.

In order to achieve a level of transparency in its disbursement of monies to ex-prisoner projects, NIVT set up an advisory committee representative of the main interests involved. The main existing Republican and Loyalist ex-prisoner centres were represented as well as the Quakers, NIACRO and the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas - none of these voluntary organisations ever bid for money from this particular source. This structure allowed for open discussion of the merits of particular proposals as well as a de facto sharing of the

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[38] One NIO civil servant remarked at a meeting: "I'm in a dream world. Government money – and the government doesn't even have any influence on who's on the Boards of the bodies giving the money out! It must be a dream!" Private recollection.

monies available between the various factions. The structure is not entirely inclusive, however, as smaller groupings such as Irish National Liberation Army ex-prisoners and a non-aligned project are not represented. **The reality is, however, that some £4.5 million were given out in the life of the Programme – 1995-99 – without major complaint from ex-prisoner organisations.**[39]

Negotiations are currently well-advanced on the preparations for "Peace II" – the second phase of the SSPPR, likely to come into effective operation in Spring or early summer of 2001. It is almost certain that ex-prisoners will again be targeted, although the amount allocated is not yet known.

The Current Practice of Ex-Prisoner Reintegration Projects

The model of development of ex-prisoner self-help reintegration projects is fundamentally centre-based in that the first thing each new project has done is to identify premises and seek funding. It might be arguable that a networking model, or a centralisation and specialisation of certain services, covering largish geographical areas would have been preferable. For the centre-based model certainly involves a duplication of effort, a need for more people to learn the same skills but in a different location and a costly emphasis on bricks and mortar.

In the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, however, it is clear that the centre-based model was the only one that would appeal to ex-prisoners. Apart from the sectarian spatial segregation, communities are locally based and tight-knit. In addition, the symbolic importance of having an openly declared ex-prisoners' project located in the main street of a particular neighbourhood is clearly a factor in the social reintegration of ex-prisoners.

The activities carried out in such centres are well summarised in Figure 1.

Over the past four years, NIVT has remained the main funder of ex-prisoner projects; as we noted, approximately £4.5 million over the period of the SSPPR. Most groups have also sought support, however, from other funding sources. These include the District Partnerships, mentioned above, other government-funded social development initiatives such as Making Belfast Work and charitable trusts.

By June 1998, when an interim evaluation report was published (McShane 1998) 18 projects were receiving funding.[40] The total is now 29, roughly equally divided between Loyalists and Republicans of various types. All major factions have established developmental networks, Coiste na n-Iarchimí for IRA ex-prisoners, probably the most developed and effective, EPIC for UVF and Red Hand Commando ex-prisoners and Prisoners' Aid Networking Group for UDA/UFF ex-prisoners. In addition, the small Republican faction, the Irish National Liberation
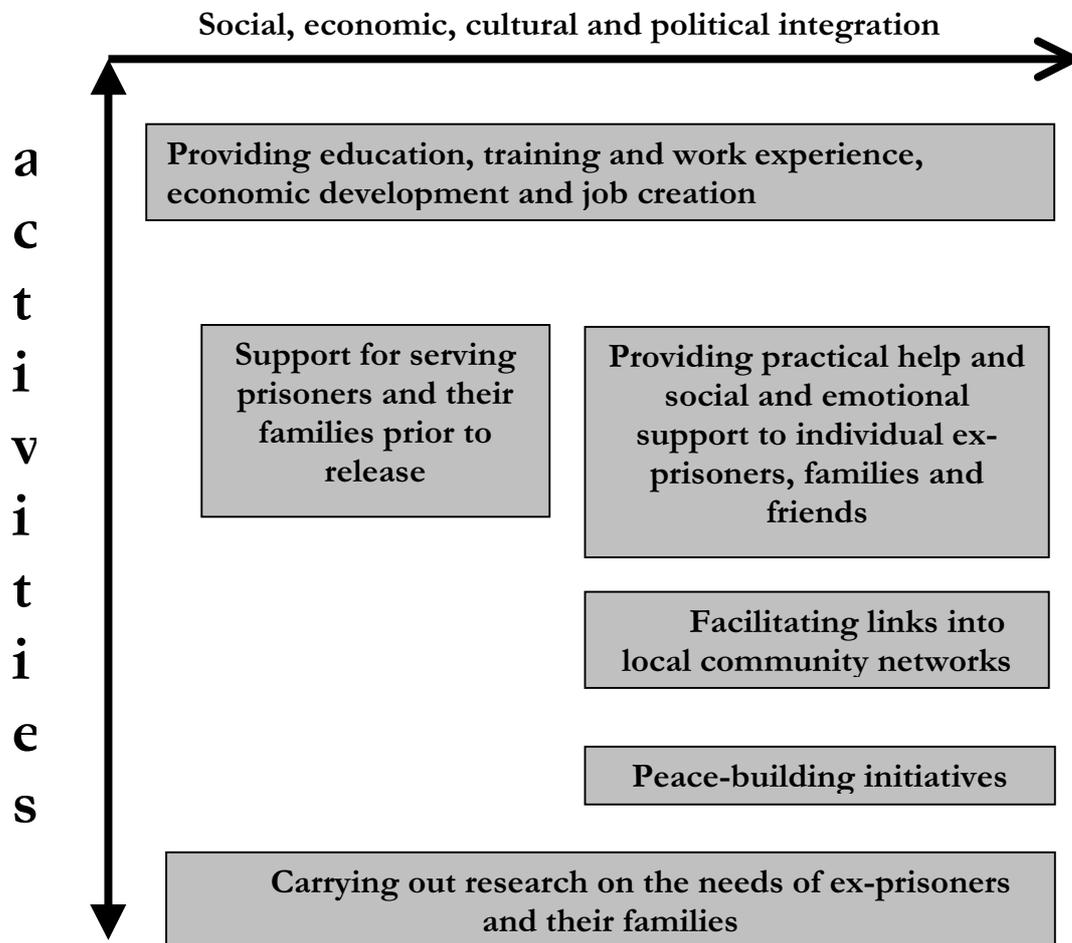
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[39] All funding is due to be spent by projects by December 2000.
[40] McShane (1998) is the only overview of the work of the ex-prisoner self-help projects and it is an indispensable source on the practice of the projects and the issues involved. It is, however, two and a half years old and a new evaluation is now needed.

Army, the old "Official" IRA and a group of non-aligned ex-prisoners have formed their own associations.

Figure 1: The reintegration process[41]

Social, economic, cultural and political integration

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Providing education, training and work experience, economic development and job creation

Support for serving prisoners and their families prior to release

Providing practical help and social and emotional support to individual ex-prisoners, families and friends

Facilitating links into local community networks

Peace-building initiatives

Carrying out research on the needs of ex-prisoners and their families

Most projects carried out research into the needs of ex-prisoners in the areas where they intended to work; we have already mentioned some of the more significant. Most new groups would receive, in the first place, a small development grant that would enable them to prepare the way for their activities and establish their priorities based on the perceived needs their research threw up. In that sense the researched reintegration needs underpin the whole operation, as the NIVT diagram implies.

Almost all politically motivated prisoners have now been released. Over the past two years, however, the main projects, such as Tar Anall, Epic and PAPCRG have sent in workers to offer aid to men in prison. This has largely been

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[41] This figure is copied with thanks from one of NIVT's series of "in brief" leaflets: "Remembering – Changing: The Challenges of Grass-Roots Peace-Building." December 1999.

to deal with welfare rights problems that they were likely to meet on release. The authorities allowed such visits on the same basis as they would other "professionals," which was a significant breakthrough in acceptance. Tar Anall managed to negotiate and deliver a "life skills" programme in the prison for Republican inmates.

It ought to be noted that **NIVT funded a number of educational and vocational courses within the prisons in the '96 to '99 period,** with the Probation Service acting as the intermediary body to receive the money. These courses were delivered by outside personnel and took place "on the wings," that is in the autonomous sections of the "H" shaped blocks in the Maze Prison that were effectively self-administered by the prisoner factions.[42]

Services to the families of serving prisoners included the provision of transport to the prisons, some financial assistance, advice on welfare rights and the establishment of self-help groups. Services to the families of ex-prisoners continue and the Ex-prisoners Advisory Group of the NIVT has launched a special initiative to encourage groups to undertake work with families and particular the children of ex-prisoners. This is difficult and occasionally controversial work and take-up has been patchy.

Services that are provided include child-care – primarily designed to allow families to participate in various activities – counselling, vocational training and general advice. Some groups are trying to work through the relationship and parenting problems that long-term imprisonment has created. Tar Anall, for example, has run a family counselling project for men, women and children aged 13 to 17 years.

Mutual support for ex-prisoners and their families, as well as the provision of particular services, tends to revolve around the "drop-in" concept. This is where the centre-based model comes into its own with the provision of a location where ex-prisoners and their families can call, feel at home amongst people with similar experiences, get information and organise their own activities. The centres also, of course, have one or more paid workers who both offer help themselves and act as a link with relevant statutory services such as the Housing Executive, the benefits agencies and Social Services.

As we noted earlier, the existence of a need for **emotional and psychological support** has been controversial in the past. However, all groups now recognise the need and many are trying to develop an effective response. **It might be noted that the recognition of this need was greatly assisted by contact with other countries, especially South Africa.** Many exchanges have taken place and local prisoner groups have been able to benefit by the experience of trauma counsellors, at the professional level, and contact with ANC ex-prisoners and ex-combatants at

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[42] "Her Majesty's Prison Maze" is still known as "Long Kesh" to all prisoner factions after the name of the original internment camp from which it developed. See Gormally, McEvoy and Wall (1993) for an account of how the management of the prison developed over the years and further references on the subject.

the grass roots level. NIVT has supported some of these programmes and **NIACRO ran a major three year programme of study trips and professional exchanges** with support from a private charitable trust. **A Loyalist group paid a visit to Nicaragua** and there have been a number of bi-lateral contacts with countries in or emerging from conflict, including other Latin American countries, Palestine and the Basque Country. As well as specific lessons that may be learned from others' experience, the sense of solidarity, of self-confidence and that "this is the right thing to do," have had an extremely positive effect.

On the whole, the prisoner groups have worked on counselling with outside bodies. EPIC, for example, works with the Shankill Stress Centre and Tar Abhaile in Derry works with the local Health and Social Services Trust Mental Health Department. Some centres are also encouraging their own workers to gain accredited qualifications in counselling so that the service can be delivered "in-house."

Many centres have adopted a positive community development approach to increase the involvement of ex-prisoners and their families in community organisation. To this end links are made with local community groups and some centres have engaged in specific projects with, for example, young people at risk of getting involved with crime or drugs. It seems a general feature that the welfare rights expertise of centres is also offered to the local community. The links that centres make with other groups and agencies, whether or not in pursuit of the delivery of services for their members, undoubtedly assists in giving ex-prisoners experience of engagement with wider society. As ex-prisoners often say, they may not need to be reintegrated into their own communities, but outside elements and structures in society often remain hostile.

What the NIVT describe as "peace-building" activities vary widely in character. In some communities the ex-prisoners' centre is a focus for activists who are interested in reducing sectarian strife and disruption. Some have an explicit focus on developing better community relations, such as the LINC project in North Belfast which works across the sectarian interfaces in that deeply divided part of the city. We have already referred to ex-prisoner involvement in community restorative justice. While these developments are not structurally tied to the ex-prisoner reintegration projects, their members are frequently in the lead.

Building the capacity of ex-prisoners to compete effectively in the market place is one of the main activities of the self-help projects. Virtually all centres run training courses of one kind or another, frequently linked in to government schemes. While all of these schemes have their weaknesses, the centres play a valuable role in assisting ex-prisoners to take advantage of them in conditions which are comfortable and safe. Some of the particular programmes run by centres have reached as high a standard as anywhere else in the voluntary and community sector, especially when it comes to Information Technology. This is one of the few areas where vocationally relevant training was available in the Maze Prison and a significant number of prisoners became expert in the field.

Work experience programmes, job search clubs and enterprise training are part of the familiar battery of labour market intervention schemes deployed in an area of traditionally high unemployment. In the case of ex-prisoner centres, such interventions can raise self-esteem and a feeling of belonging, even if they do not lead to employment. Figures on the overall success of such programmes will have to await their final evaluation. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that ex-prisoners will do well enough in getting jobs in the local community, either in the voluntary and community sector or in relatively unskilled jobs. Some will have qualifications relevant to an academic-style career. Few will, however, enter mainstream occupations that recruit on a region-wide basis nor government employment, for the reasons we elaborated earlier.

Some centres have initiated local enterprise initiatives, such as self-build community resources. Others have attempted to create sustainability for themselves through enterprises that also employ some of their members. Examples of these are a fitness suite in Derry and a co-operative printing scheme in Lisburn.

Victims vs. Prisoners Debate – A Matter of Reconciliation

As we noted earlier, the Belfast Agreement specifically commits the Governments to support reintegration and it might be thought that the generally rather prosaic nature of the projects would muffle controversy around them. There have been consistent attacks, however, on the principle and practice of funding ex-prisoner projects usually attempting to make comparisons with the allegedly unfavourable treatment of victims. **It may be unfortunate that victims were put together with ex-prisoners in the same measure of the SSPPR, thus inviting comparisons, but the fact that NIVT is the main funder of both has enabled them to put forward the facts.**

Victims groups have received approximately £3 million over the life of the programme, as against the ex-prisoners' £4.5 million. NIVT is now also, however, administering a special government fund for victims groups to which there is no ex-prisoner equivalent. In any event the reality is that the demand from the victims' "side" has been less; it seems that many, if not most, victims prefer to get on with their lives without engagement with a victims' group. **Again, unlike the prisoners, victims had no pre-existing structures to build on.** The Victims Support organisation has existed for some years but has concentrated on victims of "ordinary" crime such as burglary. Its more recent and, in policy terms, sensitive and progressive, interventions on issues relevant to victims of the "troubles," have not always been met with approval by specialist victims groups.

No-one can doubt that the early release and reintegration of prisoners is a difficult issue for those who have been directly damaged by the Troubles. It may be particularly traumatic for relatives of those killed, or those who have themselves been injured, to see the known perpetrators of the violence go free. It may also re-open the hurt for those where no perpetrator has been identified or no-one has

been prosecuted. It has been widely recognised that release and reintegration projects should not ignore that hurt and special arrangements might need to be made to alleviate it. During the early release process, for example, a special unit was set up within the prison service to offer information to victims on the release date and other circumstances of relevant perpetrators, if they wished it. Of course, there were dangers and concerns involved in this process, but it seems to have worked well on the whole.

Furthermore, proper compensation and support should be given to victims. It is one of the scandals of the Northern Ireland situation that this did not happen until the peace process.

A number of caveats must, however, be entered. First, not all the perpetrators of offences against victims were imprisoned. Nobody was convicted for many of the atrocities committed during the conflict. This is particularly true of cases where the perpetrators were security force personnel acting "in the course of their duty". Only a few such people have been prosecuted, fewer jailed and none served their full sentence. Those who raise an opposition between victims and prisoners tend to ignore those who were not "victims of terrorism".

Second, ex-prisoners are often victims themselves, not simply by their imprisonment but very often having suffered wounds or torture. Third, we now have the experience of groups that campaign for particular groups of victims. These groups have, of course, a right to exist and a right to funding, in so far as they are spending it on the real needs of their victim members. The reality is, however, that the victims issue, like the prisoner issue, has now become highly politicised.

Again, this whole debate is an example of the attitudes relevant to the conflict being carried into the peace. On the one hand, there is the position that blames the conflict solely on an assault by terrorism; release and reintegration of prisoners is therefore an affront. On the other hand, there is sometimes an unwillingness to acknowledge that prisoners and their comrades actually did bomb, shoot, kill and maim, secure in the self-righteousness of the claim that "armed struggle was justified". **The peace process requires reconciliation to the end of conflict and the reintegration of both sets of people.**

Issues and Conclusions

By summarising the main findings of the paper we also aim at putting forward a number of questions and issues ready for further research.

The central proposition of this paper is that the nature and extent of conversion processes are determined by the character of the peace process that gave rise to them. They will and should, therefore, reflect in their principles and practice, the core values of that peace process. It is argued that the theoretical and empirical overview of reintegration measures for ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland that has been attempted justifies and upholds that proposition.

It is clear that the aspirations, as well as the contradictions and ambiguities, of the Northern Irish peace process are reflected in the issues and debates surrounding ex-prisoner release and reintegration. It is similarly clear that release and reintegration have a vital contribution to make to that peace process itself.

Prisoners, serving or released, seem to be an important constituency in any conflict and certainly in the Northern Irish one. How they are treated by the state and regarded by their communities can be taken as an indicator of the state of the conflict, or the peace, as a whole. **Reintegration measures, just as humane policies within the goals, can contribute to the development of a climate conducive to peace discussions, especially when the "peace horizon" begins to appear.** Early, pre-cease-fire projects in Northern Ireland seemed to have been helpful in this way.

International and Irish experience would tend to confirm that prisoner release is an essential part of a negotiated peace agreement. It is further argued that **prisoner release and reintegration are an indispensable prerequisite for the building of an inclusive society.** That is certainly the goal held out by the Good Friday Agreement. Its vision of the transformation of a contested society into one in which identities and allegiances may compete but have equality of esteem and representation in its structures has to include the reintegration of ex-combatants. It may well be that the progress of reintegration mirrors and measures the progress of the process as a whole.

The inclusive polity and society is a goal for the future, not a current reality. That is why the antagonistic positions of the past still dominate the discourses of the present and continue to describe the peace process itself in mutually contradictory ways. This is also why ex-prisoner reintegration schemes themselves are the focus of such controversy: They bring the issues of the character of the past conflict and the present peace process into sharp relief. They cannot be analysed, justified or understood in terms of the old paradigms – which, again, explains the virulence, hurt and bewilderment of those who oppose them.

We have argued that prisoner release can only be justified, and can only help resolve old antagonisms, in the context of a discourse that embraces an inclusive, negotiated end to violent political conflict. Similarly, ex-prisoner reintegration can only be explained and supported as part of the process of building a new, inclusive society. This is one reason why it is so important: it needs and requires an explicit discourse of transformation, of building a new future, of peace without victory. **This is an area in which "constructive ambiguity" works badly if at all; we are forced to use the new language of inclusive society-building to explain and defend it.** Perhaps this fact is not the least of the contributions ex-prisoner reintegration can make to the peace process.

It might be argued, however, that the practice of the prisoner organisations is anything but inclusive. They define themselves by religious identification and by political faction and separate themselves from some of the mainstream institutions

of society. **We have argued that this structure, which facilitates self-help, is a necessary counter to the paternalistic concept of reintegration, drawn from the experience of work with ordinary offenders, that is sometimes promulgated**. We have also argued that reintegration must be **a two-way process** with society at large having to come to terms with the measures necessary to include ex-combatants in its institutions. These propositions may be justified in terms of a process that requires separation out and explicit measures to promote equality before real integration is possible. The slogan "different but equal" may apply here as elsewhere. Nonetheless, it does beg the question of what the final goal of reintegration is.

Up to a point, this question can only be answered by prisoner organisations themselves. It is, however, reasonable to ask what will become of these groupings in a future, inclusive society. Will there come a time when such organisations become more of a hindrance than a help to reintegration?

This question is related to the more general one of the maintenance of paramilitary structures and power into the future. We cannot ignore the facts that such structures are still very much alive, that prisoner organisations can be a focus for their activities and that weapons have been found in two Loyalist ex-prisoner centres. However, one of the central arguments of this paper is that **opening routes for peaceful activism, for productive engagement in the political and social structures of society by ex-combatants is an essential part of the process of reintegration**. We would further argue that this process is a much more effective way to gain the goal of a peaceful and inclusive society than simply attacking the existence of paramilitary organisations as such.

This is fundamentally an issue of transformation. **Looked at positively, one can envisage secret armies transforming themselves into veterans' movements, cultural organisations or even political mobilising centres**. A metamorphosis such as any of these poses no threat to a peaceful society. **A negative view would point to some evidence that certain paramilitary groups have given rise to criminal structures engaging in extortion, drug dealing or other nefarious activities**. However, both views perceive a movement away from political/military formations fighting in a conflict over unresolved issues of political structure, national identity and the role of the state.

On the one hand, society may have to deal with armed criminal gangs using their past political role as part of their armoury of exploitative and extortionary methods. If so, the criminal law and community mobilisation are some of the weapons that can be deployed against them. On the other hand, society may be enriched by activists with a common allegiance to their past role in the conflict but presently using their talents and organisation to help build an inclusive, if diverse and pluralist, polity. Such developments are surely to be encouraged rather than branded with the discredited tools of political discrimination and social exclusion.

Winning external support for the work of positive transformation is partly the responsibility of the adherents of paramilitary organisations themselves. There are

issues of transparency, involving open political work, accountable fund-raising and a clear stance against corruption, that can only be worked upon by them. In a new society, there will also be a need to be clear about legality and co-operation with the institutions of an agreed state. However, the responsibilities of the rest of society are equally clear. **The peace process requires repeated acts of faith by all participants. One of those should be to act in the expectation that pro-peace paramilitary organisations can and will transform themselves into active supporters of the new society.** The reactionary pessimism of the alternative view runs the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ex-prisoners would also be justified in pointing out that many barriers to reintegration remain. The various ways in which ex-prisoners are discriminated against and barred from full participation in society have been outlined above. As regards politically motivated ex-prisoners, this is unfinished business of the peace process. The attempt to criminalise politically motivated prisoners in the prisons themselves failed utterly, though at great human cost. It is ironic that the criminalising process is still in full spate in society outside the prisons.

It can be argued by progressive campaigners that discrimination against ex-prisoners is wrong and counter-productive whatever the nature of their offences. There is thus a tendency to conflate the social issue of ordinary ex-offenders with the political issue of politically motivated ex-prisoners. This runs the risk of holding up progress on both fronts, with arguments from each confusing and complicating the issues in the other. **Until the major barriers to integration are removed from politically motivated ex-prisoners, the peace process will be unable to succeed in its primary goal, the creation of a fully inclusive society.** We have already weathered the arguments against "discriminating in favour" of politically motivated prisoners in the early release debate. There is nothing new to be said, nor any greater problems involved, if we move the focus to special provisions for politically motivated ex-prisoners. The question remains, however, of how barriers to reintegration should be removed.

The preferred choice of ex-prisoners themselves would be amnesty – a legal wiping the slate clean, removing the criminal record of eligible persons. There are arguments against this, however, beyond those from positions that still refuse to recognise the political character of the past conflict. One is that removing the criminal record appears to absolve those who engaged in armed struggle for any kind of responsibility for the consequences, given that it is the only general social mark of that existing. The counter to that is that a criminal record is both an incorrect and an arbitrary mark given that the relevant actions arose out of a political conflict and that many engaged in violence, state or illegal, were never convicted of crimes.

A further argument against amnesty is that it is unfair given that victims of violence cannot remove the effects of bereavement or maiming. The counter argues that there are victims on all sides, that victimhood is not the sole responsibility of those imprisoned and that, anyway, two wrongs do not make a right.

It has been suggested that a way to reconcile these conflicting views would be to make amnesty part of a process that would also facilitate victims to put their stories on the record. It has also been suggested that such a process might have characteristics of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission where amnesty was traded for full disclosure of offences during the conflict.

A full discussion of the issues raised by the above ideas is outside the scope of this article.[43] We may note, however, how the matter of **ex-prisoner reintegration leads inexorably towards a discussion of how the peace process as a whole may finally draw a line under the conflict.** This is simply because, as we have argued all along, reintegration is a vital ingredient in the peace process and its final conclusion must be part of that of the whole phenomenon.

Perhaps, though, our earlier discussion on reintegration may lead to some insights about the peace process as a whole. **We said that reintegration could only be understood as part of the process of building a new, inclusive society.** We saw that construction as the end goal of the peace process. If that is the case then any particular proposal should be judged on how far it contributes to an inclusive society rather than the extent to which it settles a score with the past. The new society may need a truth-telling process as one of its bases, just as the criminal slate may need wiping clean. On the other hand, the construction of a new society can only be accomplished using the materials left over from the old, with all their imperfections. The remnants of the old society are us, the citizens of the new society. We all have a responsibility, whatever our role in the conflict, whatever our current status, to help build a peaceful, democratic and inclusive society.

> "Citizens in democratic societies don't have a free ride – they have work to do!"
>
> Raymond Shonholtz, President of Partners for Democratic Change, Belfast, 26 October 2000.[44]

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[43] A discussion of some of the issues is contained in Borraine 1999, a report of a series of visits and discussions by Alex Borraine who was Vice-Chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

[44] Speaking at a conference, "International Perspectives: Restorative Justice in Northern Ireland."

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Appendix I
Facts and Figures on Northern Ireland Political Prisoners and their Release

Overall Numbers of Ex-Prisoners

Figures based on the distinction between prisoners convicted of "scheduled offences"[45] – effectively politically motivated prisoners – and others are not routinely published by the Northern Ireland Office. It is not therefore possible to state with certainty the numbers of politically motivated ex-prisoners in the community. What we do know is the following:

- Between 1981 (when computerised records began) and 1997, 6,395 prisoners were received into prison convicted of "scheduled offences."[46]

- The previous ten years were consistently more violent. It would be reasonable to suppose that at least twice as many politically motivated prisoners were received into prison.

- A total of 1,491 persons were interned without trial between 1971 and 1975.

- An unknown number of people were convicted of politically motivated offences before "scheduling" and the "Diplock Courts" were created in 1972.

- An unknown number of persons served prison sentences for politically motivated acts that were not "scheduled" under the Emergency Provisions Act.

- The estimate of about 20,000 politically motivated ex-prisoners seems reasonable.

Figures on the proportion of Loyalist and Republicans are not available. In the earlier years of the troubles prisoners were overwhelmingly Republican. By the early nineties, however, the proportion was equal and on occasion Loyalists outnumbered Republicans.

According to figures released by the Northern Ireland Office on 1 March 1998, the figures for "scheduled " prisoners serving 3 years or more and due to be released after 30 April 1998 were as follows:

Irish National Liberation Army	19
Loyalist Volunteer Force	28
Irish Republican Army	224
Ulster Defense Association/Ulster Freedom Fighters	121
Ulster Volunteer Forces	107
Conforming[47] Republican	11
Conforming Loyalist	22

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[45] See main text for explanation of this term.

[46] Source: Reply to Parliamentary Question, Kevin McNamara MP, 16 February 1998. Hansard, col. 498.

[47] Conforming to the "normal" prison regime and housed in Maghaberry Prison rather than the Maze (Long Kesh)

No affiliation	33
Not recorded	33
Total	**598**

Prisoner Release

Prisoners were obviously released throughout the period of the conflict. The only category for which we have figures is those sentenced to life (average period served about 15 years). Between 1985 (when a new system of life sentence release began) and March 1998, 190 Republicans and 221 Loyalists were released. Only 3 Republicans and 10 Loyalists had their licence revoked because of re-offending, in that time.[48]

433 persons have been released early under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998

September – December 1998	229
1999	81
January – June 2000	26
July 2000 (2 year deadline)	94
October 2000[49]	3

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[48] Figures released by NIO 1 March 1998.

[49] Source: NI Prison Service Web Site – www.niprisonservice.gov.uk/news_info/monthly.htm All eligible prisoners were released by the 2 year deadline in July 2000. However, all prisoners all had to serve a minimum of 2 years, so those tried and convicted between the Agreement and July 2000 – though for offences before the cut-off date of 10 April – still have to serve out their two years.

Appendix II
Ex-Prisoner Organisations and Others Mentioned in the Text

Ex-Prisoner Groups

- Coiste na n-Iarchimí
  275-277 Falls Road,
  Belfast BT12 6FD
  Tel: ++ (0)28 9020 0770

This is the network organisation for Republican ex-prisoner groups through which all Republican projects mentioned in the text can be contacted.

- EPIC (Ex-Prisoners' Interpretative Centre)
  33A Woodvale Road,
  Belfast BT13 3BN
  Tel: ++ 44 (0)28 9074 3330

This is the umbrella organisation for Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando ex-prisoners, through which local groups can be contacted.

- Prisoners' Aid Networking Group
  361 Newtownards Road,
  Belfast BT4 1AJ
  Tel: ++ 44 (0)28 9050 1100

The main network for Ulster Defence Association/Ulster Freedom Fighters ex-prisoners through which local groups can be contacted.

- An Eochair
  426 Falls Road,
  Belfast BT12 6EN
  Tel: ++44 (0)28 9024 7291

Group for Official IRA ex-prisoners.

- EXPAC (Ex-Prisoners' Assistance Committee)
  59 Glaslough Street,
  Monaghan
  Republic of Ireland
  Tel: ++ 353 4772182

Grouping of non-aligned ex-prisoners.

- Teacht na Failte
  148 Carlton Drive,
  Strabane BT82 9PT
  Tel: ++ 44 (0)2871 382297

The organisation for Irish National Liberation Army ex-prisoners.

Paramilitary Organisations[*]

- IRA (Irish Republican Army); originally, and still in some circles, referred to as the "Provisional" IRA. The main Republican paramilitary organisation, formed by a split in the Republican Movement in 1970.
- "Official" IRA. Supposed no longer to exist, it was the other side of the 1970 split and has been on cease-fire since 1972.
- INLA (Irish National Liberation Army). Formed by a split with the Official IRA in 1975, it was quite active in the late seventies and early eighties but has been riven with factionalism and is now very small.
- UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force). Traces its history back to the organisation of the same name founded in 1912 to resist Home Rule for Ireland. Reputed to be the smaller of the two main Loyalist factions but more centralised.
- UDA/UFF (Ulster Defence Association/Ulster Freedom Fighters) Formed in the seventies as a coalition of local Loyalist vigilante groups, the UFF title was first used as a cover name when claiming violent operations. The largest faction within Loyalism but decentralised into autonomous "brigades."
- Red Hand Commando. Small group firmly allied with the UVF.
- LVF (Loyalist Volunteer Force). Formed as a split from the UVF after the cease-fires. Opposes the peace agreement but is now on cease-fire and is the only group to have given any weapons over to the International Decommissioning Body.

State Security Forces

- RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary). The permanent police force with responsibility for all aspects of policing. It has a full time Reserve deployed mainly on routine security duties. The RUC will be changed into the Police Service of Northern Ireland and many aspects of its structure and recruitment

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[*] In Northern Ireland, the term "paramilitary" refers to illegal, clandestine armed organisations operating for political motives. Elsewhere the term is more commonly applied to irregular or auxiliary state forces; there is no such connotation in Northern Ireland. The RUC is sometimes called a "paramilitary" police force, usually with a critical implication, because it deploys military-specification small arms and occasionally engages in military-style operations. Both the RUC Reserve and the RIR (see below) are sometimes referred to as "paramilitary" forces, again with a derogatory implication.

transformed by legislation currently before the British Parliament. The members of the RUC are overwhelmingly Protestant.

- RIR (Royal Irish Regiment). Formed by an amalgamation of the Ulster Defence Regiment and regular units of the British Army which recruit both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The "home service" battalions of this Regiment are recruited only within Northern Ireland and only serve close to their homes on security duties connected to the conflict. There are part-time as well as full-time members and it is an overwhelmingly Protestant force.

- British Army. Units of the British Army, regular regiments, intelligence units and specialist clandestine groups, are deployed on "tours of duty" in Northern Ireland as combatants in the conflict over and beyond the normal peace-time garrison. Their presence and operational stance is held to be contingent on the level of "terrorist threat" at any time.

- Prison Service. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is a civilian organisation now run as an agency within government, though its junior operational ranks wear uniform. It is an unarmed force, the British Army providing armed guards on prison perimeters when required. In more recent years it has resisted identification as part of the "security forces" and, from the mid-eighties on, prison officers were no longer regarded as routine legitimate targets by paramilitary organisations.

Other Organisations

- NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)
  169 Ormeau Road,
  Belfast BT7 1SQ
  Tel: ++ 44 (0)28 9032 0157

Voluntary organisation working in the criminal justice field.

- Probation Board for Northern Ireland
  80 North Street,
  Belfast BT1
  Tel: ++ 44 (0)28 9026 2400

Statutory agency supervising offenders in the community and with some responsibility for after-care of prisoners.

- NIVT (Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust)
  22-24 Mount Charles,
  Belfast BT7 1NZ
  Tel: ++ 44 (0)28 9024 5927

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and distributor of European "peace money" to ex-prisoner organisations.

BONN INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR CONVERSION

B·I·C·C

Demilitarisation in Northern Ireland –
The Role of 'Decommissioning' and 'Normalisation of Security'
in the Peace Process (DINI)

A case study by the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), in co-operation with the Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE) *

Northern Ireland, as a case of conflict in transition, is gaining increasing attention as an internationally comparable case for the settlement and resolution of intra-state conflicts with ethnic-national components. The Belfast Agreement of April 1998, despite on-going difficulties appears to provide a far reaching political framework to solve the protracted conflict in Northern Ireland.

The DINI project aims **to monitor the implementation of the demilitarisation**** **process of the Belfast Agreement,** and analyze the governing potential of the peace accord with regard to **the role of the domestic and international actors involved** in transforming and resolving conflict in the area of demilitarisation**.**

The research will focus on the potential of a satisfactory process of demilitarisation in a post-war society to foster peace building and the prevention of further violent conflict. Furthermore, it will also look at the resources for economic and community development that will be freed by the creation of a demilitarised society.

In particular, the research will examine two relevant sections of the Belfast Agreement, and will analyze the implementation of these sections of the Agreement:

- the 'decommissioning of all paramilitary arms' and the (re)integration of related personnel,
- the 'normalisation of security arrangements and practices', such as the reduction of the numbers and role of the Armed Forces, the removal of security installations and the redevelopment of former military areas for civilian needs.

    Overarching **research questions** will cover issues such as:

- How can the qualitative and quantitative role, and the medium and long-term perspectives of demilitarisation be defined for a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland?
- How do the provisions of the Agreement meet the need for the satisfactory implementation of demilitarisation? What lessons can be learned from the specific involvement of external actors in the context of security matters?
- What are the direct and indirect effects of an adequate management of demilitarisation with respect to the processes of demilitarisation, and related issues, such as confidence building, the security sector and police reform, and economic and social development?

- Are there lessons that can be drawn from comparative experiences elsewhere that can assist the process of analysis and advance the debate on issues of demilitarisation ?

Over a period of two years, the project will monitor the demilitarisation aspects of the peace process and investigate the use of learning from the experiences of other post-conflict situations to both the international community concerned with conflict settlement, and to the players in Northern Ireland.

As part of the study BICC and INCORE hope to carry out **interviews with a considerable number of stakeholders in the Northern Irish peace process** i.e. relevant personnel from the British and Irish governments and from the Independent International Commission On Decommissioning, and with representatives from all of the Assembly parties, spokespersons for paramilitary organisations, community authorities, civic groups and local businesses.

The project will also provide a number of **formal and informal opportunities for dialogue** on issues of demilitarisation as part of its process. Interim findings in the form of **policy papers** will be disseminated. A final report is expected to form the basis for an academic publication to promote debate both in Northern Ireland and internationally about the challenges and successes of the demilitarisation process.

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BONN INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR CONVERSION
B·I·C·C

The Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) facilitates the processes whereby people, skills, technology, equipment, and financial and economic resources are shifted away from the defense sector and applied to alternative civilian uses. BICC supports governmental and non-governmental initiatives as well as public and private sector organizations by finding ways to reduce costs and enhance effectiveness in the draw-down of military-related activities. As a result, BICC contributes to disarmament, demilitarization, peace-building, post-conflict rehabilitation and human development.

International think tank

BICC conducts research and makes policy suggestions. Experts provide comparative analyses and background studies on topics such as military expenditures and the peace dividend, management and disposal of surplus weapons, and the conversion of military research and development (R&D) infrastructures.

Project management and consulting services

BICC provides practical support to public and private organizations in a range of conversion projects. For instance, BICC staff advise local governments confronted with the difficult task of redeveloping former military installations. They help former defense industries cope with the transition to producing civilian goods. BICC also links development assistance and conversion by providing help with demobilization, reintegration and peace-building.

Clearinghouse

Using its independent status, BICC provides conversion support and information to international organizations, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, companies and the media as well as to individuals and organizations from the private and public sector. In this role, it mediates and facilitates the conversion process at all levels—local, national and global.

BICC's six program areas:

- *Reduced military expenditures—A lasting peace dividend?*
- *Reorientation of military R&D—A potential largely untapped*
- *Defense industry restructuring—Facing a changed environment*
- *Demobilization and reintegration—Opportunities for human development*
- *Base closure and redevelopment—A challenge for communities*
- *Surplus weapons—Dismantling the remnants of conflicts*

The work of the Center has a global scope with respect to its perspectives and activities. BICC is involved in conversion projects in many countries of the world. As an issue-driven and actor-oriented organization, BICC supports conversion activities in those regions and countries where its expertise is requested.

BICC has both an international advisory board and staff from many different disciplines and countries. Intensive international cooperation helps the Center benefit from the experience and knowledge of others, establish a presence in many regions, and lend its particular expertise as part of larger efforts. Many of its projects are conducted in cooperation with others, ranging from consultants to universities and governments to non-governmental organizations.

The Bonn International Center for Conversion was established in 1994 with generous support from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). The Center's Trustees include the two German states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Brandenburg as well as the Westdeutsche Landesbank–Girozentrale (WestLB), Düsseldorf/Münster and the Landesentwicklungsgesellschaft NRW (LEG) (Development Agency).