

Ted Smyth took part in the Irish peace process as an Irish diplomat in the United States, Britain, and the secretariat of the New Ireland Forum.



The Unsung Heroes of the Irish Peace Process

Ted Smyth

Why did the Irish peace process eventually succeed in stopping the sectarian killing after centuries of violence in Ireland and when other sectarian conflicts still rage around the world? Might there be lessons the Irish could teach the world about reconciling bitter enemies? The political successes in Northern Ireland owe much to that oft-scorned ingredient, patient, determined, and principled diplomacy, which spanned successive administrations in London, Dublin, and Washington. The result is a structure surely durable enough to survive the IRA's disturbing recent violations: an apparently long-planned \$50 million raid on the Northern Bank in Belfast in December attributed to IRA militants and the leadership's unabashedly outlaw offer to shoot their own members responsible for the brutal murder of a Belfast man, Robert McCartney, after a pub quarrel in January of this year. The peace may be tested once again during the perennially volatile "marching season" this summer when Ulster hardliners vent sectarian passions. Still, there is agreement that a political peace now prevails, backed by a popular consensus sturdy enough to frustrate a veto by a violent minority, or a continued criminal conspiracy by Sinn Fein/IRA. The universal public revulsion in Ireland north and south toward the IRA's handling of the McCartney murder and the huge swell of support for McCartney's sisters in their public calls for the arrest and punishment by due process of his killers give ample evidence of the success of the peace process. Twenty years ago, the McCartney sisters would have

been viewed as traitors to their Catholic tribe, but today they are celebrated for their courage and integrity.

The road to peace in Ireland was led by many, many individuals who made contributions large and small. There were politicians who were truly heroic, but it should never be forgotten that the ordinary people of Northern Ireland steadily found their own way toward reconciliation, defying history and the climate of fear. Maurice Hayes, a columnist for the *Irish Independent* and a veteran peacemaker puts it well: "Throughout the troubles, in the darkest days, there have been outstanding examples of charity and courage, of heroic forgiveness, often, and most notably, from those who had suffered most. One thinks of Gordon Wilson, who held his daughter's hand while she died in the rubble of a bombing in Enniskillen, dedicating the rest of his life to the search for reconciliation."¹

Some of the finest people from two continents worked on the Irish peace process for 30 years, and their influence was apparent in three decisive elements that made the difference between success and failure. The first element was strong political leadership in pursuit of a unifying vision consistently supporting nonviolence. Such leadership is rare, but just as South Africa was fortunate to have Nelson Mandela to lead it peacefully to freedom, so Ireland was fortunate to have John Hume, an eloquent, charismatic Irishman with a Ghandi-like faith in nonviolence. As long ago as 1972, the soft-spoken founder and former leader of the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP), an essential

voice of moderation and nonviolence for 30 years, stated that peace could only be based on “an agreed Ireland,” with shared government between the two nationalisms, the Irish Nationalists who wanted Irish unity, and the British Loyalists, who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom.

The second key element was political imagination and receptiveness to new ideas by key politicians and officials in Ireland and Britain who established a series of institutional frameworks to build confidence between the two sides and to provide security. Among these institutions were the Sunningdale Agreement, the New Ireland Forum, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and the Good Friday Agreement. Probably the most important breakthrough was the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which guaranteed the equal legitimacy of the conflicting loyalties by giving the Irish government a significant role in Northern Ireland for the first time in history. A leading commentator on Northern Ireland, David McKittrick of the *London Independent*, says: “In retrospect, that agreement was a turning point in the peace process and provided the foundation for its ultimate success.”² The story of how that agreement was reached and successfully implemented is a combination of shrewd calculation and courage, which lured people from the extremes, promising respect, protection, peace, and a prospect of prosperity.

The third element was the important role of the United States in providing job-creating peace incentives and in correcting the imbalance of power between Britain and Ireland. America, with its 40 million Irish Americans, decisively helped the peace process through at least three major crises that threatened to derail it.

The sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland dates back to the seventeenth century when Protestant settlers from Scotland seized land from the native Catholic Irish as part of the British attempt to colonize Ireland. But Ireland was always a troublesome

colony, and just before the outbreak of the First World War the British government reluctantly concluded that it could not govern the country and moved to grant a form of independence. The Loyalist settlers in the northeast, fearful of losing privileged status, smuggled weapons from Germany preparing to fight British troops if necessary to retain the British link. By 1920, the British government gave in to these threats and partitioned Ireland, in effect gerrymandering a majority for the Protestant Loyalists. Half a million Irish Nationalists were trapped within the new border.

Successive British governments legitimized this stand-off by guaranteeing that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK so long as the Loyalist majority wished it. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1979, John Hume concluded that this “produced the basis for a half century of injustice, discrimination and repressive law, a situation in which the minority community have been the persistent losers and victims”³

The state that was founded on violence went on to erupt in regular cycles of violence during the twentieth century, the worst being the recent “Troubles” that left 3,600 dead and thousands more dreadfully maimed. The beginning of this latest conflict can be traced to the Loyalist murders in 1966 of three innocent civilians (one a 77-year-old Protestant, mistakenly assumed to be Catholic). At the time, many Catholics and Nationalists were inspired by the American civil rights movement to march for basic rights such as “one man, one vote” and fair allocation of public housing. The marches, with the familiar refrain of “we shall overcome,” came under increasing attack by both Loyalists and the local police, with 77 injured in a Derry march in 1969. Ian Paisley emerged as the leader of the Loyalists, ranting against Catholics and whipping up fear among Protestants. In the summer of 1969, 150 Catholic homes in Belfast were burned by rioters as the police stood by. In the face of such provocation, the Pro-

visional IRA came into being, recruiting volunteers as “the defenders” of the Nationalists. It was not long, however, before this defender role became, like that of the Loyalist terror groups, one of sectarian aggression and criminal conspiracy.

Stung by international outrage at the attacks on Irish Nationalists, the British government deployed soldiers on the streets of Belfast and Derry both to protect the Nationalists and restore stability to a situation that was getting out of hand. The troops were initially welcomed by the local population with flowers and trays of tea. But the IRA deliberately provoked the troops, and their heavy-handed reaction was seen as a broad attack on the Nationalists. In tactics eerily similar to those employed in the Sunni triangle in Iraq, local communities rallied around the “insurgents.” The British hope of acceptance as a neutral peacekeeping force was finally dashed by internment without trial of hundreds of Nationalists and the “Bloody Sunday” killings of 13 civilians by British paratroopers in 1972. Many ordinary Nationalists and Loyalists became convinced that only some sort of violent victory by one side over the other would bring peace.

Hume and the Four Horsemen

In the context of this serious conflict, John Hume proclaimed his vision of an “agreed Ireland.” The son of a working-class Catholic who had because of discrimination spent most of his life unemployed, Hume had inherited from his father a healthy skepticism for the warring loyalties in Northern Ireland. “You cannot eat a flag,” his father had said and Hume spent his early adult years founding a self-help Credit Union that provided low-interest loans to people used to living from hand to mouth.

During the worst riots in 1969, when it seemed that the Loyalists might kill many Catholics, Hume and other brave community activists and church leaders struggled night and day to reduce tensions and fears.

Asked, for example, during a meeting in Derry why he objected to “wee boys” throwing stones, he gave a reply which will resonate with anyone who has seen the genocide dramatized in the movie *Hotel Rwanda*: “Because you don’t know what effect it will have—whether it will be a broken window, twenty broken windows, or a thousand dead. When you can’t control a weapon, you don’t use it.”⁴ Later that year, Hume was elected to the local Northern Ireland parliament and together with five other members formed the SDLP, which would become the majority nonviolent voice of the Irish Nationalists.

In an attempt to replace violence with politics, the British and Irish governments joined the SDLP and the moderate Loyalist party, the Ulster Unionist Party, in a novel initiative in 1973. The result was the Sunningdale Agreement, which provided for a power-sharing government between Nationalists and Loyalists in Belfast, and a consultative role for the Dublin government. While the prescriptive arrangements were visionary, the extremists of Northern Ireland were not yet ready for compromise. The IRA and its supporters, still convinced they could achieve Irish unity by forcing the British to withdraw from Northern Ireland, escalated their bombing and killing. (They were not far wrong: recently released British archives reveal that Harold Wilson’s government seriously considered withdrawal, deterred only by the prospect of a Lebanon-type civil war on Britain’s doorstep.)

The Loyalists, in turn, were convinced that more effective repression would contain the Papist threat to their state and the following year staged a massive show of force before which the British army retreated. The sad fact was that the Wilson government lacked the will to defend the agreement if it meant fighting on two fronts, against not only the IRA but also the Loyalists. Instead, the British government introduced direct rule from London as a second-best option.

It took eleven more years of education, equality legislation, and reform in the security forces, combined with “war weariness,” before another agreement could be negotiated and successfully sustained. This time, the lessons of the past would be applied and the second key element of the peace process came into play. The new political structure was designed as an intergovernmental partnership between London and Dublin so that it would be insulated against local boycotts and terrorist intimidation. It is this intergovernmental structure that is the foundation of the peace process and gives it the strength to withstand the ongoing criminal activities by the IRA. The British prime minister, Tony Blair, recently advocated a similar process for the Middle East: “You have to have a proper insurance against the next suicide bomb and the only way of doing that is to have clear understandings about how the Palestinian state might develop.”⁵

But after the collapse of Sunningdale in 1974, British and Irish politicians and officials had to dig out from the hole created by the fact that the British could be intimidated by Loyalist terror. The British army was trained to be more evenhanded (with some Scottish regiments withdrawn), and the police force began the slow transformation to becoming a nonsectarian force. The British had much ground to make up since the European Court of Human Rights, in response to an Irish government complaint, had found British interrogation methods used in 1971 to constitute “inhuman and degrading treatment.”

While it was clear to Hume and Dublin that the British should move faster to give Nationalists an equal stake in the community, the Irish had limited leverage with the British government. Consequently, the Dublin government embarked on an intensive diplomatic campaign in the late 1970s to secure American support for change. This proved an effective strategy because the influence of American residents, members of

Congress, and media and business leaders would be one of the decisive factors in persuading Britain to sign the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Hume’s philosophy of nonviolence and vision of an agreed Ireland was attractive to Irish-American leaders. But no American president had previously been willing to interfere in what America’s closest ally insisted was an internal British affair. Events took a historic turn in 1977, when President Jimmy Carter, at the urging of the “Four Horsemen”—Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill, Senators Ted Kennedy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Governor Hugh Carey of New York—promised an aid program to Northern Ireland conditional on a solution “that the people of Northern Ireland, as well as the Governments of Great Britain and Ireland can support.” The U.S. administration was finally involved in finding a just solution and had legitimized the “Irish dimension” by stating that the support of the Irish government was necessary for any solution. These Irish-American leaders had emerged as influential supporters of moderation when Hume and Irish diplomats encouraged them to make a St. Patrick’s Day statement in 1977 that denounced all violence in Northern Ireland. This denunciation resulted in picketing and verbal abuse by Irish extremists in New York and Boston. The courage of these leaders would be comparable today to members of Congress denouncing violence both from the extreme Israeli right and from the Palestinian terrorists.

It is impossible to imagine that the American diplomatic breakthrough would have been achieved without Hume’s consistent opposition to terrorism and the trust that engendered in Washington. By contrast, the Palestinian movement, without a prominent spokesperson for peace prior to Mahmoud Abbas’s election, has not been able to secure widespread support in America.

America also helped in other ways. In 1976, Irish-American business leaders, at the initiative of the Irish entrepreneur Tony O'Reilly and Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney, founded the American Ireland Fund, dedicated to peace in Ireland. The fund was an important private sector alternative to IRA fundraising and has supported thousands of community peace programs in Northern Ireland, including the first schools that integrated Protestant and Catholic students.

American Influence and the "Iron Lady"

Some may ask why it was necessary to exert American influence on Britain to grant equal rights to Irish Nationalists in Northern Ireland. There were many reasons, some related to Britain's slow acceptance that unilateral control of Northern Ireland was no longer necessary for its strategic security, and others related to lack of prioritization, arrogance, and a failure to accept Britain's fair share of responsibility for the problem.

When Margaret Thatcher was elected prime minister in 1979, her support for the peace process was hampered by her philosophy that British sovereignty was inviolable; therefore Britain would not share power with Dublin. With the peace process spluttering, Hume and the Irish again played the American card. Thatcher was proud of her special relationship with President Ronald Reagan who was belatedly discovering his Irish roots. More important, Reagan was prepared to do a favor for Speaker O'Neill because the two old Irish pols enjoyed an unusual but close friendship. At O'Neill's prompting, Reagan told Thatcher that the United States might be willing to give financial backing to a new agreement and urged progress.

Meanwhile, Thatcher had badly mismanaged the IRA hunger strikes of 1981 and, faced with a worsening crisis, she and some of her shrewder advisors began to listen to new proposals from Hume and the

Irish government of Garret FitzGerald, a longtime advocate of compromise in Northern Ireland.

These proposals emanated from an important new initiative of all the constitutional Nationalist parties in Ireland that effectively widened the goals of Irish nationalism from unity to include joint authority with the old enemy, Britain. The rationale of this New Ireland Forum was that both conflicting loyalties would identify with such a Joint Authority and it could not be wrecked by local boycotts and intimidation. This formula provided the basis for the crucial Anglo-Irish Agreement a year later.

The British reaction to the forum was at first negative, and Margaret Thatcher, in a major rebuff to Hume and FitzGerald, said that all the forum options, including joint authority, were "out." Mrs. Thatcher's receptiveness would not have been helped by the IRA attempt on her life a few months earlier at her Conservative Party conference in Brighton, when a bomb killed five delegates and speakers.

America came to the rescue again when widespread hostile reaction to Thatcher's outburst helped persuade her to be more attentive to FitzGerald at their next meeting. For example, the *New York Times* in its editorial of November 24, 1984 stated: "No one doubts her courage in opposing the demonic fanaticism of the IRA. But she has yet to show the same resolve in dealing with Northern Ireland's Protestants who refuse to share power on even symbols with the oppressed minority."⁶

Finally, the crucial foundation of the peace process was laid in November 1985 with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, giving Dublin a significant role in Northern Ireland for the first time since partition of the island in 1920. This agreement was an event that changed Ireland. As the late Jack Holland, a prolific writer in Northern Ireland, wrote: "Unless Protestant violence got out of hand, politicians could view the next few years as a time

of opportunity for them to undermine—perhaps significantly—the IRA’s base of support in both Ireland and America by pressing reforms in Northern Ireland. That they were in a position to do so is due in large measure to the power and influence of the American connection and the success with which Irish diplomats utilized it.”⁷

The Loyalists reacted with fury to Dublin having a role in Northern Ireland, attempting to destroy the agreement as they had Sunningdale eleven years earlier. But this time the “Iron Lady” was prime minister and the Northern Ireland police had become a much more professional force. The Loyalists attacked over 500 police homes, and 150 officers were forced to move house. But despite all the riots and intimidation over the next 12 months, the agreement survived and Thatcher was the first British leader to successfully fight on two terrorist fronts in Ireland.

The IRA could not but notice that the Protestant veto on reform had finally ended. The authors of *The Secret Story Behind the Irish Peace Process*, Eamonn Mallie and David McKitterick, put it this way: “Nine years separate the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985 and the IRA cessation of August 1994. It is difficult to point to a precise moment when the peace process was born within the republican movement, but there is at least an agreement that its genesis is to be found in the document which...Thatcher and Fitzgerald signed on that frosty November day in 1985.”⁸

The Nationalist voters of Northern Ireland registered their approval of the agreement and British-Irish partnership by reducing the vote for Sinn Fein/IRA by over 30 percent in the next election.

An unsung group that played a crucial role through these years were women from both sides who realized that it was their children who were dying and began to say enough is enough. For example, it was mothers helped by the Catholic priest, Father Faul, who ended the IRA hunger strikes.

Most recently, it was the sisters of Robert McCartney, murdered by IRA operatives in Belfast in January 2005, who defied massive intimidation to demand justice. Catholic and Protestant church leaders also played a key role in defeating the “culture of violence” on both sides, providing a continuous bulwark against terrorism that could not be co-opted.

In this new environment in the mid-1980s, where the Nationalist community wanted peace, where their rights were constitutionally recognized, and where the IRA was suffering from police breakthroughs, it seemed that the IRA needed a face-saving formula to back down from its murder campaign. A priest in West Belfast, Father Alec Reid, emerged as an intermediary for British and Irish discussions with the IRA. Reid’s quiet achievement is that by a mix of persistence and self-effacement he convinced both Hume and Albert Reynolds, Ireland’s prime minister in the early 1990s, that Gerry Adams, the leader of Sinn Fein, the political front for the IRA, wanted peace, realizing that the IRA could not defeat the British.

IRA Diehards

As for the IRA, it is not clear even to this day that Adams himself is committed exclusively to peaceful methods, or whether Sinn Fein/IRA is deviously seeking to get into government by a Jekyll and Hyde combination of “democratic” politics funded by the largest criminal conspiracy in the island. Back in 1981, Sinn Fein’s Danny Morrison first articulated this policy of dualism/duplicity when he asked at a Republican rally if anyone would object “if with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite [assault rifle] in this hand we take power in Ireland.” Later, when Adams was professing his initial commitment to peace in 1987, the IRA blew up 11 civilians at a war memorial service in Enniskillen and then lied about their accountability. In 1990, Ed Moloney, an Irish journalist and author,

wrote that “the IRA leadership, including Adams, was capable of seeing the negative consequences that resulted from, for example, placing a bomb on a school bus, yet they had unhesitatingly supported a tactic that involved forcing a father of three to drive a huge bomb to an army base and then, before he had the chance to escape, blowing him to smithereens.”⁹

In recent years, Adams, in an effort to attract more voter support, has abandoned the extreme policies that had been his when he seized control of Sinn Fein/IRA. These included the goal of a far-left socialist republic, the abolition of the right to hold property, opposition to federalism, and opposition to electoral politics. He is savvy enough to realize that pure socialism does not have broad appeal among Irish Catholics.

One of Hume’s compelling arguments in hours of debate with Adams during the late 1980s was that the British were no longer an imperialist power to be fought by insurrection. The British minister in Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, finally confirmed this publicly in 1990 when he said that Britain had “no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland.” In late 1993, the two governments announced a Joint Declaration that was based on Hume’s redefinition of Irish self-determination and which went a long way to accommodate IRA rhetoric, while preserving the important principle of Loyalist consent to any constitutional change.

Inevitably, the IRA still had diehards who wanted to go on killing, and Adams said he needed to demonstrate that a non-violent strategy would be more successful in attracting support for Sinn Fein in America. Adams got the evidence he needed when President Bill Clinton granted him a visa in January 1994 to speak in New York, despite fierce British opposition. Adams was able to say to the IRA that this was proof that America would encourage Irish self-determination if the violence stopped.

The IRA announced later that year a “complete cessation” of its campaign. Hume, Reynolds, and Adams shook hands publicly saying they were “totally and absolutely committed to peaceful and democratic methods.”

Two months after the IRA announcement, the Loyalist paramilitary groups also called a ceasefire. It was announced by Gusty Spence, the Loyalist who was jailed for the murders in 1966 that launched the Troubles. It was too late for many, but Spence offered “the loved ones of all innocent victims over the past 25 years abject and true remorse.” The Loyalists also had church leaders and new politicians such as David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson who were less fearful of the increasingly prosperous and secular “Celtic Tiger” to the south and who were also less enamored of Ian Paisley.

In December, Clinton appointed former U.S. senator George Mitchell as his American envoy to advance the peace process. The momentum of the ceasefire had been punctuated by calls for IRA arms to be “decommissioned” before Sinn Fein would be admitted to the talks. Mitchell recommended that talks and weapons decommissioning should occur in parallel (an approach Israel might look to with the Palestinians). But months went by, and amid accusations of foot dragging by the British, the IRA violated its ceasefire after 18 months, bombing London’s Canary Wharf, killing two men and causing millions of dollars of damage.

In spite of this, the peace process went on. With the election of Tony Blair as prime minister in 1997, the peace process was renewed as he and the Irish prime minister, Bertie Ahern, together with Bill Clinton, tried to create local institutions that would accommodate the extremists. Assisted by Hume, George Mitchell, and the moderate Loyalist leader, David Trimble, these leaders emerged as the architects of the next phase of the peace process which led to the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998. Bill Clin-

ton personally telephoned participants at regular intervals during the final tense hours of negotiation. A month later, the agreement received overwhelming all-Ireland legitimacy in referenda north and south of the border, with 71 percent in support in Northern Ireland and 94 percent in the Republic. In December, Hume and Trimble received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, a fitting recognition for the leaders of the opposing loyalties in Northern Ireland who were willing to take many risks to achieve peace.

At this stage, one should also credit the small cadre of advisors in the Irish, British, and U.S. governments who for three decades were committed to peace and prepared to think outside the box. They are too many to be named but they are certainly among the unsung heroes.

Apart from the horrendous bombing in Omagh by a dissident IRA group in 1998, sectarian killings have been significantly reduced in recent years. By the end of 2004, the two governments and the major Northern Ireland parties were even close to establishing a local Northern Ireland government that would have been dominated by the two extremes, Adams's Sinn Fein and Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). John Hume had retired as leader of the SDLP, Sinn Fein had become the largest Nationalist party, and there was the danger that the alternative voice of nonviolence would be eclipsed. But the Sinn Fein/DUP deal to share power fell apart in December because the IRA refused to permit photographic evidence of its remaining weapons being decommissioned.

Adams warned that the photographs would have caused major problems for the IRA: "These are people who are proud, rightly proud, to have fought the British, people who have resisted attempts to criminalize and humiliate them." The only problem with this statement is that the Irish and British governments believe that the IRA was responsible for a \$50 million bank raid

a few days later. As to whether or not the IRA did it, there is a slogan doing the rounds in Belfast that runs, "Ten out of nine people believe the Provos (IRA) done the bank." The embarrassment and shock were compounded by the murder of Robert McCartney by IRA operatives, which has led to disarray and the postponement of further attempts at local government. The IRA said it was withdrawing an offer of full arms decommissioning, but gave no indication of preparing a return to full-scale violence.

Something Worth Working For

The heroic work by Hume and successive Irish and British leaders to convert Sinn Fein/IRA to democracy is suffering, one hopes, a temporary setback. The British and Irish governments have stated clearly that until the IRA gives up its weapons and organized crime Sinn Fein will be isolated from politics, and there is unlikely to be much further progress until after the British and Northern Ireland elections in May. Conor O'Clery, the *Irish Times* U.S. correspondent concludes: "Sinn Fein now faces a stark choice: split with the IRA hardliners or watch its political support erode in Ireland and the United States."¹⁰

Meanwhile, the people of Northern Ireland are grateful that the killings, the maimings and the bombings have largely stopped, with the number of sectarian killings down to four last year, the lowest number since 1968. Loyalists don't feel the menace of a united Ireland, and Nationalists enjoy increased prosperity and respect for their traditions and aspirations. The people don't have the stomach for more violence and after years of reforms see no earthly need for it. In addition, the IRA realizes that in the post-9/11 era, the Bush administration and American public opinion would react very badly to a resumption of bombing. Richard Haass, director of policy planning at the State Department in George W. Bush's first administration, confirms this: "The world has changed since 9/11 and

there is no tolerance anywhere in America for actions that smack of terrorism. If the IRA goes back to bombing that would fundamentally discredit Sinn Fein in America”¹¹

The reality is that the IRA and money laundering are not so much a crisis for the peace process as they are for Sinn Fein and Gerry Adams. Democracy and terrorism do not mix well, as demonstrated by an Irish public opinion poll in February, which revealed that Adams’s approval rating has fallen dramatically since last November, to a low of 31 percent. Nor can the British and Irish governments continue to turn a blind eye to Sinn Fein/IRA crime more than a decade after Adams pledged that he was “totally and absolutely committed to peaceful and democratic methods.”

Peter Mandelson, a close political ally of Tony Blair and currently EU trade commissioner, is one of many who confirm that the Irish peace process is durable, deliberately designed to withstand any threats from terrorism/organized crime: “The Good Friday Agreement, and the peace process as a whole, have been made possible by the integrated efforts of the Irish and British governments. This relationship is now so strong and interdependent that it will endure, particularly with the special political chemistry between Ahern and Blair. I cannot see a wedge being driven between the governments however hard some might try to do this.”¹²

To paraphrase Yeats, the centre *can* hold in Northern Ireland, but the two governments must end the ten-year “transition” for the IRA and ensure that the peace process is about the terrorists abandoning violence, and not about terrorists corrupting the legal and democratic system. Most people have learned to respect the two nationalisms, and the British-Irish framework provides security and puts off indefinitely the respective fears of either a United Ireland or purely British rule.

The Irish peace process will continue to have its ups and downs, but the silencing of the guns has been transformative for Northern Ireland and is a truly heroic achievement, based on imagination, skill, conviction, and hope. The great poet, Seamus Heaney, eloquently celebrated the peace process with these words written in 1994: “Hope, according to [Vaclav] Havel, is different from optimism. It is a state of the soul rather than a response to the evidence. It is not the expectation that things will turn out successfully but the conviction that something is worth working for, however it turns out. Its deepest roots are in the transcendental, beyond the horizon. The self-evident truth of all this is surely something upon which a peace process might reasonably be grounded.”¹³ ●

Notes

1. Maurice Hayes, article in Ireland Fund publication, 2005.
2. Interview with the author, January 2005.
3. Paul Routledge, *John Hume, A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 161.
4. Barry White, *John Hume: Statesman of the Troubles* (Belfast: Blackstall Press, 1984), p. 77.
5. *Financial Times* interview, January 26, 2005.
6. Quoted in Jack Holland, *The American Connections: US Guns, Money and Influence in Northern Ireland* (New York: Viking, 1987), p. 232.
7. *Ibid*, 151.
8. Eamonn Mallie and David McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story Behind the Irish Peace Process* (London: Heinemann, 1996), p. 35.
9. Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 349.
10. Interview with the author, February 2005.
11. Interview with the author, February 2005.
12. Interview with the author, February 2005.
13. Seamus Heaney, *Finders Keepers, Selected Prose 1971–2001* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 47.