

# Irish

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other side as well.

Attempts at political power-sharing between nationalists and unionists have failed, generally because of unionist opposition, although nationalist extremists have helped to torpedo some moves.

Hope for peace sprung anew in 1985, when the Irish and British governments signed an accord that gave the Republic of Ireland a consultative role in the governing of Northern Ireland.

"(The accord) does recognize that anyone in Northern Ireland who has aspirations to a united Ireland — that that is a legitimate aspiration," noted Brian Kirk, the British government's information officer for Northern Ireland in New York City. But, Kirk said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, "violence is not a legitimate means to pursue that aspiration."

Kirk's comments echo those of John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in Northern Ireland. Hume's party, which garners about 60 percent of the nationalist vote in Northern Ireland, rejects violence as a means of unifying Ireland.

"If I were to lead a civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland today the major target of that campaign would be the IRA," Hume told a conference of the SDLP in 1988. "It is they who carry out the greatest infringements of human and civil rights whether it is their murders, their executions without trial, their kneecappings and punishment shootings, their bombings of jobs and people."

Hume's contentions find a home with the

Irish government, according to Anne Barrington, press and information officer for the Irish consulate in New York City.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Barrington labeled the IRA "murderers" and "extortionists," and praised Hume for his pacifist stance. She and Kirk also pointed to the IRA's lack of voter support, shown by the smaller percentage of votes garnered by Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, as proof of the nationalist community's disdain.

Sinn Fein sympathizers in Rochester strongly disagreed with the two governmental representatives' contentions. They noted that, until recently, Sinn Fein leaders refused to sit in the English or Irish parliaments when elected, and hence, some potential Sinn Fein supporters voted for Hume's SDLP.

One Irish native remarked that the American revolution was also supported only by a minority, and he drew parallels between the struggles of the Americans and the Irish.

"You wouldn't like it here if the British occupied six or eight states on the east coast," observed Gerry Hallinan, a part-time Irish history and language instructor at St. John Fisher College. Hallinan said he didn't support violence, but argued that the source of violence in Northern Ireland is the presence of the British, not the IRA.

Hallinan said he had once supported Hume, but that he now sees the SDLP leader as a pawn of the Irish and English establishments, which prefer to see Ireland remain divided rather than to upset the status quo.

Northern Ireland's status quo bodes ill for the average Irish Catholic, who is two-and-a-half times more likely to be unemployed than his or her Protestant

counterpart, with unemployment running as high as 80 percent in some nationalist neighborhoods. Notably, Sinn Fein derives much of its support from such areas.

Kirk said that one of the effects of the Irish accord will be felt this year, following the enactment of a fair-employment act in January. But the press officer had no kind words for supporters of the MacBride principles — patterned after the Sullivan principles many U.S. firms adopted to govern their investments in South Africa.

Irish Northern Aid, among other groups in the United States, has actively supported implementation of the MacBride principles, and has successfully persuaded several city and town councils and U.S. congressmen to publicly endorse them.

Hume has said the Catholics of Northern Ireland "need jobs, not principles" — a view reflected by Kirk's comments. "We don't oppose the principles in isolation," Kirk said, asserting that Northern Ireland is not South Africa. He said that if American companies were to divest from Northern Ireland because of criticism from supporters of the MacBride principles, the action would only harm nationalists at a time when they most need jobs.

The fact that the IRA draws much of its support from unemployed Catholics points to the essential nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland — political and economic, not religious.

Interestingly, Northern Ireland's secretary, Peter Brooke, last year told reporters that the IRA could never be defeated and that he would be interested in talking to IRA leaders if they were willing to call a cease-fire.

Brooke's proposal was explored by Sinn Fein leaders, according to *The Irish People*, a New York-based pro-Republican

paper.

Sinn Fein won't call off the struggle until it sees some proposals on Northern Ireland's future from Brooke, the article said. No such proposals have been put forward as of yet, Irish Northern Aid worker Dennis Donaldson told the *Catholic Courier*.

In the face of general unionist opposition to even discussing the question of reunification with the south, would the English ever withdraw to force the issue?

"(The British) are not going to let go," Kirk maintained. "The government has said that clearly." Indeed, the Anglo-Irish accord states that the majority of the people in Northern Ireland must accept reunification before the British will withdraw — a dim prospect given that the majority is unionist.

Sinn Fein maintains that this British position only exacerbates the conflict by assuring the unionists that their position need not change so long as British forces are in Northern Ireland. Only British withdrawal can bring the Unionists to the bargaining table, Sinn Fein asserts.

A former IRA member's words may point the way to possible reconciliation of all sides in Northern Ireland. No longer espousing violence, Shane Paul O'Doherty serves as spokesman on Northern Ireland for Dublin's Trinity College.

"The uncommon line I promote is there are three armed struggles going on simultaneously — IRA, loyalist and British," O'Doherty told the *Christian Science Monitor* earlier this month. "Everybody on the three sides is guilty ... (of) violence and, therefore, there need be no preconditions for talks ... So let's talk our way out of it."

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