

## N. Ireland

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two out of every three Northern Irish Catholics favor a power-sharing government with Protestants within the United Kingdom rather than a united Ireland, which is still favored by one-third of the region's Catholics.

And John Kelly, a Dublin-based columnist for the *Irish Echo*, published in New York City, noted in a November column that the "loyalist front is beginning to split."

The largest political party in the North is the Ulster Unionist Party, often called the Official Unionist Party, led by James Molyneux.

But the UUP's more militant — and smaller — counterpart is the Democratic Unionist Party, led by the Rev. Ian Paisley.

Kelly maintained that many loyalists realize the DUP's "brand of Bible Belt sectarianism, with its underlying Ku Klux Klan brand of threatening violence, is no longer acceptable."

Observers have noted that an escalation of violence this year has highlighted the region's potential for larger-scale violence and compelled its ruler — the United Kingdom — to talk with its neighbor, the Irish Republic.

On Dec. 3 in Dublin, and Dec. 10 in Belgium, two face-to-face meetings between Major and Irish Prime Minister — or Taoiseach — Albert Reynolds over Northern Ireland raised hopes for the possibility of a lasting peace.

Major and Reynolds have even extended a hand to the Provisional Irish Republican Army and its political party, Sinn Fein, often publicly scorned in the past by both governments as nothing more than gangsters and criminals.

"If the IRA end violence for good then — after a sufficient interval to ensure the permanence of their intent — Sinn Fein can enter ... join the dialogue on the way ahead," Major said in November.

In addition to British/Irish dialogue, Northern Ireland's two most prominent nationalists, Social Democratic and Labour Party leader John Hume and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, earlier this year issued a joint peace initiative for consideration by London and Dublin.

Both men's parties have publicly favored a united Ireland, but the SDLP eschews violence, and has often harshly criticized Sinn Fein for — among other things — its connection with the Provisional IRA. Hence, the fact that two such leaders could produce a joint initiative has been seen as a significant development by many observers of the political scene in Northern Ireland.

The document has apparently received no public support from either the British or Irish governments — "there can be no question of us adopting the results of other non-governmental exercises," Major said Dec. 3. A British Embassy spokesman explained to the *Catholic Courier* that Ma-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

**Dr. Donald Muench and his wife, Marilyn, traveled to Northern Ireland last year and met with representatives of the Protestant community.**

Major and Reynolds want to set up a peace process before considering any other initiatives.

If there is a peace to be made, it must take note of nationalist concerns and unionist fears, explained Dermot Brangdon, Irish consulate press officer in New York City.

Brangdon and other commentators noted that the conflict has reached a virtual stalemate, with both sides realizing that their own vision for the region may have to be compromised. In particular, the British army, Northern Ireland's own security forces, and the region's extralegal loyalist gunmen, will never lay down and play dead before nationalist paramilitaries, he noted.

Yet, he continued, the IRA also can not

be defeated militarily, and will continue to represent the aspirations of a significant minority of nationalists in the region with genuine grievances.

According to a number of sources, the British and Irish governments' talks have fueled some unionists' fears of being sold out by the British government, even though the British — and Irish — leaders maintain that N. Ireland's status will not change without majority consent.

And reports that Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA have been secretly communicating with British officials over the past several months have certainly made those fears seem very real to these unionists.

According to documents released by Northern Ireland Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew, "the British were prepared to admit Sinn Fein to a talks process within a matter of weeks of an IRA cessation of violence," reported the New York-based *Irish Echo* in its Dec. 1-7 edition.

"The revelations have infuriated some Unionists and embarrassed the government which has always vehemently denied that it had entered either contacts or negotiations with the Provisionals," the article continued.

Previous negotiating efforts between the British, loyalists and nationalists have generally excluded Sinn Fein leaders because of IRA violence. Many republicans have often labeled such conditions as hypocritical, given that their opponents are as inclined to use — and justify — violence for their own ends as are Irish republicans.

Owen Rodgers, a native of Northern Ireland who left the region in 1980 and

who now heads the Manhattan chapter of Irish-American Unity, maintained the absolute necessity of including republicans in any peace talks.

"I don't believe that anything will come of it unless Gerry Adams or some of the other Irish republicans are at the table," he said.

Brigid Farrell, a member of the New York City-based Ad Hoc Committee for Adams-Hume Peace Initiative, echoed Rodgers' notions, reporting that her group is concerned over the lack of official response to the two nationalists' leaders peace proposal.

"Both of these men are uniquely qualified to speak for nationalists," said Farrell, a New Jersey resident who was born in Crossmaglen, County Armagh, near the border with the Irish Republic.

In a phone interview from her New Jersey home, she added that she believes neither Ireland nor the United Kingdom has the right to talk peace without the input of the nationalists and loyalists who share the North. Nonetheless, she noted that her group is not against the Major/Reynolds dialogue.

For that matter, neither is J. Bowyer Bell, author of *The Irish Troubles — A Generation of Violence 1967-1992*.

"Cheerful pessimism" toward the Major-Reynolds talks describes Bell's attitude. His 872-page tome is an exhaustive and well-balanced study of the conflict, which he called "trouble without resolution and revolution, trouble without sufficient cost to inspire effective response."

In a phone interview from New York City, Bell commented that the most difficult problem in any peace process lies in garnering support for it from the unionists — particularly those with guns in hand.

"You've got to persuade the Protestant paramilitaries that it is not to their advantage to go out and zap Catholics anymore," he said.

Farrell would like nothing better than for loyalist gunmen to adopt just such an attitude. Two months ago she visited her homeland where her fellow Catholics live in fear of loyalist murder, she said.

She noted that the British army and Northern Irish police cooperate in intimidating Catholics through extensive house searches — referred to as "censuses" — that are followed up by warnings from the authorities that the home owners are on a loyalist hit list.

Some of those loyalists engage in such terror because they fear for the very end of their culture, one which has existed longer than that of the United States, explained Dr. Donald Muench, professor of mathematics at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave., Pittsford.

Muench traveled to Northern Ireland in 1992 with his wife, Marilyn. The couple stayed with Marilyn's Catholic pen pal and had the chance to attend a meeting with representatives of the Protestant community.

One of the representatives was a former loyalist gunman who had since put down his bullets for the ballot and engages in political action. Muench noted that the man passionately emphasized Protestants in Northern Ireland no longer know where they stand, and must ask themselves after hundreds of years are they Irish? British? Scottish?

"That lies at the heart of a lot of the violence," he said. "They don't know who they are, and they'll protect whatever it is that gives them identity."

Muench added that no one he talked to — Catholic or Protestant — seemed to support the continuing violence.

Indeed, regardless of whether they consider themselves Irish, British, or something in between, the region's large numbers of Protestants and Catholics have long grown weary of the death toll, observers agreed.

"There are 25-year-olds living in Ireland who have never known peace," Farrell lamented. "They're just simply tired of it."

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