

# Conference on Reconciliation and Change

H.P. Pat Doherty—"Eyewitness Account: Ireland"

✧ September 14th, 2012, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ✧  
Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus

## H.P. Pat Doherty—Eyewitness Account, Ireland:

I suppose I should start off by saying that I am very lucky that I made it here. It took me more than 24 hours of continuous travel yesterday, but that's another story. And if I come across a bit jaded, that is because I am a bit jaded!

I would like to thank you for the invitation. I am honored to have been invited to participate in this event and to share with you the experience and the lessons of what I consider to be a successful peace-building process in Ireland.

Some of you may be familiar with the story of Ireland. Presumably, all of you will have some sense of the history of the conflict, the conflict that went on for so long, and maybe even possibly some of you have an understanding of the causes of that conflict.

In any dispute, political or other, it is unlikely that there will be a common acceptance among opponents of the causes of that dispute; if there was, I suppose conflict or dispute reconciliation would be a fairly straightforward business.

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There would be no need, for example, to have this conference it would be so easy to do. But it's not that simple. If we were joined here today by someone from the British government, or of the Unionist tradition in Ireland, they would bring a different perspective of Irish history to bear on all of us, and we need to always remember that.

I don't want to dwell too much or too long on the historical narrative. Someone once asked for a concise history of Ireland. They responded, "The British occupied Ireland centuries ago, 800 years ago, and there has been trouble ever since." It's as simple as that! [laughter]. And you would know that, from whatever political perspective you come from in Ireland, or for that matter in Britain, that pretty accurately sums the situation up. And I quote this kind of concise Irish history, not in an attempt to be humorous—although it is—or to apportion blame, but simply to paint the picture of the depth and protracted nature of the conflict from which my country has, in recent years, emerged, and continues to emerge. But I do have to give you some sense of the history to understand—and I won't go back 800 years—we would be here too long—but I will go through it briefly.

There was a huge tragedy in Ireland in the mid-1840's with the Great Famine and got more in the Irish language as The Great Hunger. And the population of 8 million, 1 million died within the space of 5 years or so, 2 million more emigrated

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within 5 or 6 years, and gradually emigration kicked in, and we were left, towards the end of the 1800's, with a population of less than 4 million. So the population halved in about 50 years. A huge amount of that immigration came to America, and of course that kicks in—in a good form—into our peace process. And a strange thing, then, happened in Ireland: there was a cultural revolution towards the end of the 1800's and the early 1900's around the renewal of song, of dance, of music, of literature, and the revival of the ancient Irish language. And it was as if it came out of nowhere, it came out of the people. And from that came a new demand, a new political demand, for what was known then as “home-rule.” And the British government moved, then Westminster, of which I am a member, although an abstentionist member—and I am not going to go into that—they moved to grant home-rule. But then, as they had done 20 years previously, they deferred it. And the revolutionary tradition in Ireland said “Enough is enough,” and there was a great rebellion in 1916, which was suppressed. And then ironically, at the end of the First World War, Britain had a general election, in the normal way that any country has a general election. And Ireland at that time—because sometimes people see Ireland as being part of the British Empire—it was much more fundamental than that, it was actually part of the United Kingdom—they returned 103 members to the Westminster parliament. So my party, which had been formed in that cultural and political revival, stood candidates in the election on the demand for total independence and to set up their own government. And out of the 103 available seats, Sinn Féin won 75 and moved to establish their own parliament and the British moved to send in the military.

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The IRA [Irish Republican Army] emerged from that, and the conflict lasted up until 1922, where there was treaty negotiations, cease-fire negotiations, and out of that came two huge, huge tragedies in Irish history. One was the partition of Ireland, which gave the southern—although that is a bit of a misnomer because I live in Donegal, which is the most northerly and westerly county in Ireland, though it is supposed to be part of the south—but the 26 counties got a measure of independence that gradually developed to total independence. And in the northeastern part of Ireland, 6 counties, remained under British control.

The other great tragedy was the civil war in Ireland, where the people who had struggled to achieve independence divided over the merits of the treaty; some could not accept that their country would be partitioned and there would, for a period, still be allegiance to the British monarch. And the civil war tore the country apart even though it lasted for about only a year. It left a deep residue on politics in the south of Ireland.

But in the north, you had a state that was dominated by one tradition that was of a British mindset, of a British culture, and of a different religion, which was Protestant, to the Irish mindset, the Irish culture, and religion, which was Catholic.

And there was huge repression in the north from 1922 up until the outbreak of the civil rights movement in 1969. And, you know, when you think back on the civil-right movement it had a very simple slogan, maybe slightly sexist to today's terms because it was “one man, one vote.” And they were inspired by what was happening here in America and, indeed, in France. But, in fairness to the current British government, David Cameron made a huge apology for this just a short time back. During civil rights movements in Derry, in the early 1970's, 14 people were shot dead by the British army and everything changed. It just went into total, outright conflict, where politics was almost seen as a dirty word or an equal betrayal. And in that atmosphere, even though I was an Irish Republican, and understood all the logic of that, we were trying to promote politics with our own colleagues and comrades.

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Now, none of this is really a matter of dispute among the different political allegiances in Ireland. The reality of the past conflict has been revisited on and experienced by all sections of society in Britain and in Ireland. I mean, there is no disputing that we had a conflict, and the British were involved and the Irish insurgents were involved and that has gone on for centuries. And I still remain an Irish Republican and I come from that tradition that wants to have an end to British rule and have the reunification of my country and to have total independence. And down through the centuries the expression of all of that was sometimes by the military and sometimes by insurgency, by war, other times by politics, and occasionally by a combination of politics and insurgency almost running parallel. That only happened in Ireland on two occasions. Charles Stewart Parnell in the late 1800's developed a great political strategy, but it ran too close, some people say alongside to what was known in Ireland as the Féinian movement. The Féinians had huge support from Irish Americans that had come out of the Famine, so Irish-Americans have always played a huge part in the situation in Ireland.

And the second phase of politics and conflict happened around 1975 -maybe 1980- where Sinn Féin, who had been gone from the party in government, had been suppressed, had gone down to be almost non-existent, had started to remerge again. I became vice-president of the party in 1988, and remember we launched two documents—I was actually the speaker, though it was a party initiative—one was called, “Scenario for Peace” and the other was called “Toward a Lasting Peace.” And even though they were public documents, no one seemed to notice. And one of our colleagues said, “Well, maybe that's because they can't hear because of the noise of gunfire and explosions,” but there was politics and armed conflict running side by side.

And it took some time to develop the politics of all of this, and then something happened in the late 1980's. And I often think back that there are small phases in the development of the peace process. From 1988 to 1992, dialogue started to

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happen between the British government and us. Totally deniable, wasn't happening, couldn't happen, but it *was* happening. I remember one incident when there were so many blatant denials by the then British government ministers, this was 1991 or 1992, and our party president said, he pulled a “waiter” group together that weren't quite sure what their dialogue was—they knew something was happening and he said—and there were some members of the publicity department that said—“we have the proof, we have the documents.” And they looked at me and the publicity people said “You have the documents?” That was a massive story. The British government was speaking to Irish Republicans.

And that phase continued for about 4 years.

We were also speaking to the Irish government and the American administration, largely through the efforts of Irish Americans. Some people at home say, “Why do Irish Republicans, Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, have an influence in Congress?” -as if we, a small party in Ireland, would possibly have influence in Congress or the White House or the Senate. It's because of the huge amount of Irish-Americans who vote for Congressmen, who vote for Senators, and who made it an issue on a political platform here as Bill Clinton was moving towards his first challenge to be president. He made a commitment that he would raise the issue and he stuck with his commitment, provided we continued our work back at home. I've completely lost the run of my notes as I go off and tell these stories! [laughter]. But that was a small phase.

There was another small phase from 1992-1997 where there was open acknowledgement that there was dialogue, and we were able to persuade the IRA to bring in a ceasefire on the violence and the British government started a process of demilitarization, taking soldiers off the street. And the third small phase, we entered into real negotiations. And I've

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often said, and I'm not—and there are so many priests here I am afraid to say this—I am not particularly religious, but I am slightly [laughter]—if there are two saints in the Irish peace process it has to be Father Alex Reid and Senator George Mitchell, because what Senator Mitchell had to listen when he came to Ireland from all the different parties and the two governments, was unbelievable. What Father Reid did in the background, going privately and secretly between each of the component parts and taking so many knock-backs but never losing faith, never, ever losing faith. He kept the process going. And then we went into these real negotiations.

And by 1998 we had an agreement, which was called the Good Friday Agreement. But it took us another 8 years—8 years—to try and implement it. We would be meeting in the Assembly, there would be a row about whatever. Were the British military demilitarizing fast enough? Were the IRA getting rid of their weapons fast enough? There would be a fallout, the place would close down, and we would reassemble in a couple months. And it wasn't until 2005, actually 2006, that heavy negotiations broke out with, I suppose, our biggest opponents, Reverend Ian Paisley's party, the DUP [Democratic Unionist Party]. And once we made an agreement with them—and in fairness, we were really polar opposites—he stuck by the agreement. And since then, we have had a continuous process of the Assembly being in place based on power-sharing, recognizing that there is an all-Ireland dimension, that ministers north and south must meet recognizing that there are two cultures in the community and they both must be respected.

And I suppose the key to all of that as we move forward was *dialogue*.

Now all of this threw up new and very, very difficult challenges for all of us. The immediate challenge way back then was how do we devise a political process that would move all of us, all sides, beyond conflict, to a point where the political process would be allowed to work and within that process we could tackle the issues that had been left unresolved for generations. And it was also very difficult at times because we had come to persuade the IRA and other armed insurgents that there was a military stalemate and that there needed to be a different way forward. The British government at the time had also come to the conclusion that there was a military stalemate and that there needed to be a different way forward, but they also thought they could win in the negotiation process, that they could defeat us in the negotiation process. Whereas we were saying, “no, that is not the case. You will not win in negotiations what you have not won by political campaigning or by the military conflict; that you will have to come to an accommodation.” For the British government -you're trying to think in their shoes- they were the big government of the U.K. and this was a small insurgency in a part of the United Kingdom that they barely recognized at times, but it was still there.

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So all of this required the key understanding that negotiations will not necessarily get you everything, but will put in place a process by which all of your issues can be dealt with. The approach to negotiations premised on becoming the winner will only result in it breaking down and a return to conflict. Now we understood this from the start, but the British did not; it took them quite a while to understand that. And I suppose we understood this, and I will touch on this again, because as we were trying to develop our peace process we recognized other people were ahead of us. For example, the African National Congress [ANC]. We used to just think they were so wonderful, how they negotiated, and we even sent delegations out to ask—and even, you know, this is a smaller level, look at the Trade Union Movement, they are very good at negotiations, we knew some of them, we even did classes with them; how you structure negotiations, how you put your position forward, how you understand the oppositions. I can only share my views and my analysis and try and be helpful as you are trying to move in that general direction. But some of the critical components of a successful conflict resolution process in my experience has been the absolute need for inclusive dialogue involving all of the parties and all of the actors. A very good faith engagement on all sides, not going in there deliberately to thwart or get somebody kicked out of the negotiations because they have a different view. Good faith. The creation of peaceful conditions to allow that to happen.

Irish Republicans going to the armed insurgents of the IRA and the armed insurgents of the IRA and the armed insurgents of smaller groups within the broad Republican side, eventually talking to the Loyalist to do the same on their side - to create a peaceful atmosphere which would allow negotiations to start. That all issues would be on the agenda. And let all sides put whatever issues they may wish on the table. Don't say "No, that's not allowed on." Allow them to put it on

the table. The root causes, which lie at the heart of the conflict, must be addressed. They may not be resolved, but some means has to be brought to bear that they are recognized and that we are at least attempting to resolve them. There should be no rewriting of history. And, of course, you need at some stage to put in a time-frame dynamic, otherwise talks can go on forever and ever.

George Mitchell set Good Friday as the final deadline. Now, we went through the final deadline, but in the early hours of Holy Saturday we had a breakthrough. So while he was strong in setting a deadline, he was not prescriptive about it if you went past it by a few hours. And, when all those things are in place, then negotiations start to happen quite seriously.

An important lesson from the process in Ireland has been the setting of preconditions or the seeking of vetoes. We concluded that only obstructs, that only delays, that only upsets the development of the process and kicks in more distrust. And that brings us back to the point of good faith negotiations. To be there genuinely for the attempt, not to be thwarting it, but to advance it.

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Also, going into negotiations with predetermined outcomes is not the way to go; you cannot preclude certain outcomes, you have to recognize that the negotiations will create a dynamic of its own and could lead you to places you were not thinking of going. And you will also find in negotiations, and in the dynamic of it all, that not everyone has the same commitment to the process; some may engage thinking they will thwart others. Some participants in the Irish peace process took part to simply try and remove some other party; there were huge attempts to remove my party on a few occasions and we kept saying “This is going to lead to nowhere, this is going to lead to conflict being reactivated.”

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And we came then to the question of the international community. We realized we were a small nation, Britain was a big nation - where could we look to for help? And I often recall this story of two great successes and one absolute failure. We looked to the ANC, and they were absolutely fundamental, and solid, and

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brilliant in the advice they gave us during the proceeding of the negotiations. We looked to Irish-Americans, and they were very solid, very proactive, very hands-on in getting us contacts with various Irish-Americans, and I suppose the biggest thing they did was to persuade Bill Clinton to put some part of that program into his election manifesto in his first run at the presidency in the early 1990’s. And then we looked to the European Union. And it was a total disaster; a total disaster. They did not want to know, did not want to be involved, in the sovereignty of other nations that then existed in Europe. And I have often thought since that while they have put on huge peace programs of money -we have gone through peace 1, peace 2, peace 3, and now we were negotiating peace 4, which is literally billions of money- they never once put in an ounce of political help. Whereas Americans have put in a huge amount of political help and that is a credit to your nation and also a lesson of your own diaspora and how you involve them.

So, two big successes and one failure. There will be setbacks; there will be stalemates and there will be advances, sometimes unexpectedly. But you must always remain focused to maintain the integrity of the process and ultimately to try to advance it. The process itself will eventually have its own particular dynamic that will challenge all sides. That will make demands of all sides with respect to their own thinking and their own analysis. That will drag everyone to places they may not even have countenanced going. The very thought of my party being up at Stormont, which the great building that was synonymous with misrule, with discrimination, with sectarianism, that we were actually up there, and the very thought that Unionist parties are sharing power with us, are having dialogues with their counterparts in the Irish government, was not in the thinking of any of us at the start of the process but the dynamics brought us to there.

And we should not be afraid of any of this; the opening of new thinking as part of the peace building. And it is very different from the ordinary cut and thrust of normal politics. If I think my opponent is genuinely trying -genuinely trying- to move the situation forward but he has a big difficulty, do I in the normal cut and thrust of normal politics take advantage of that? In a peace process you cannot; you must give him space, you must give him time to do all of this. And the biggest lesson I ever remember was this: just as we thought we were on the cusp of the big breakthrough with Ian Paisley’s Democratic



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Party, there had also been parallel negotiations with the international commission that was dealing with the question of weapons. And there had been an agreement that weapons would be put beyond use and that process had started, but it was now moving into a much faster pace. And on the eve of that, when we thought we were possibly making a political breakthrough, Ian Paisley made a huge speech demanding photographs of the event that was happening; demanding sackcloth and ashes—he was a very religious man—he came out with this great statement of sackcloth and ashes. And we had a negotiation meeting that evening, and I remember Gerry Adams saying, “I believe Ian Paisley wants to make this work” —against the backdrop of all this and there was just total silence in the room—and he says, “if I can convince you before we leave here tonight of what I say is true, then we must make space with Ian Paisley to work out whatever it is he is working out within his own party.” And that proved to be right. Paisley obviously had some blockage within his own grouping—he needed time—so he makes this big speech.

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Another example of that was once Tony Blair came into power, the first thing he did was come to Belfast. He made a huge pro-Union speech and privately authorized dialogue with us. So these things happen in politics; there is the public stuff and there is private stuff and you need to be on top of all of it.

Trust between parties may develop during or beyond the conflict negotiation process; it certainly won't be there at the start, but it could, and often does, develop. The critical thing at the outset is for those genuinely engaged to have the trust in the process and trust in themselves, that they are serious about what they are doing. Political leadership and risk-taking as well as political initiatives, including sometimes unilateral initiatives will be required to create the context in which the peace process and agreements are possible. Democratic mandates for all participants should be recognized and accepted and all parties need to be treated as equals. Conflict resolution and the achievement of a political settlement are two, entirely different things. A party in a conflict will not achieve—and I've said this before—will not achieve in the room what was not achieved outside of the room. There can be no winners or losers, there has to be accommodation.

And this is very important to understand: the primary achievement of the peace process in Ireland was the creation of a political process. And that political process allowed all the parties to pursue their own political objectives in a peaceful and in a democratic way. The pursuit of differing—and many times, utterly opposing political objectives—will continue beyond the conflict resolution process. And, I was quite amazed at the earlier speeches today, that the same words kept coming up, the word “process”, which I have often felt was as crucial as the word “peace” and as crucial as the word “reconciliation”, those three words keep occurring all the time.

I remain an Irish Republican, I remain committed to the achievement of the reunification of my country, but I want to do that through the process we have created. The work of building a peaceful Ireland is by no means finished; there are many issues to be addressed, many, many issues. What we have now is a democratic process, which means now and in the

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time ahead these issues can be successfully addressed. What we now have is a political process in which all the political parties can pursue their objectives in a democratic and peaceful way. I am confident that one day Ireland will be free and independent. Of course others, from a U.K. and British perspective, might think differently, and those are the dynamics of the process. There have been, and always have been, many setbacks, in Ireland as in elsewhere.

And I should also add that there are still small numbers of people who are entirely opposed to this process, even though the vast majority of the people north and south voted in a referendum to accept that this was the way forward. And I am also very confident now that there will be no return to the conflict of the past.

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And earlier I gave you—and I will conclude on this—a breakdown of the smaller phases. I think if you look at the three larger phases, there was, in the early years, broadly, what was called the “peace process”. And then emerged the “political process” with still huge elements of the “peace process” in place but a big, new dynamic called the “political process.”

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In recent months, in not that many months, there has emerged this new, at least emerged publically—this debate has been going on in my party for some years now—that there needs to be a huge reconciliation process that is allied with the political process and the peace process. And my party chairperson, Declan Kearney, launched an initiative in a public way some months ago, and I suppose the key phrase in all of what he has been saying is “we have to ask the difficult questions. We have to ask ourselves the difficult questions, and we have to ask everybody who was involved in the process those same difficult questions.” It will be a big challenge for them and for us.

And finally, there have been many, many victims of the conflict on all sides, and their hurt is deep. It is sometimes irrational, but it is deep and cannot be ignored, cannot be pushed to the side. There have been a number of attempts to deal with it and the recent appointment of a political commissioner in the north to deal with—known as the Victims’ Commissioner. But it is really, really deep. And without us finding a mechanism, because some people think there was a very black and white view of the conflict -we were right and you were wrong; we were obeying the law and you were insurgents; even though the law was a horrendous law; you had no right to rebel, we were the state—all of these different things. People think that there are two classes of victims. But they are all victims. They all suffer great hurt and great pain and it is going to be a huge, huge job to try and resolve that but it’s one of the tasks that lie ahead of us.

So, I’m probably at my best during the question and answer session. You know, you always think when you are up here that if you don’t know the answers by now you should not be here. So, we have been through a long, long process in Ireland and as the afternoon develops and we get to ask each other questions, we will elaborate on all of this. Thank you.