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New Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict.
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Book Reviews

Adrian Guelke (Ed.), *New Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict*. Brookfield, VT: Avebury, 1994. \$54.95 hardcover.

Peace is a necessary condition of social justice, and its pursuit a legitimate aim of social work. While such an assumption is commonplace in social work with individuals and families, it finds less expression in the literature of community organization where emphasis has not infrequently been on conflict as a strategy towards a larger goal. Yet the foundations of civil society in places as diverse as South Africa and Israel depend on harmony or at least cooperation in seeking the common good. It is significant that the origins of *New Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict* can be traced to sessions at the First International Congress on Prejudice, Discrimination and Conflict held in Jerusalem in 1991, and that the book's editor is a South African, the Jan Smuts Professor of International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The commonalties of civil strife and the quest for peace are apparent. The contributors Adrian Guelke has drawn together represent an interdisciplinary group of social scientists who in their examination of the Northern Ireland situation probe the parameters of conflict and its resolution.

One of the ironies of the book, published just before the present peace initiative, is that it holds out relatively little hope for a peaceful solution. Guelke's last word is: "Termination of the conflict by either accommodation or a struggle to the finish seems improbable. The word that most aptly describes Northern Ireland's political conditions is intractable." So much for the predictive power of social science! Against the odds, a cease fire was declared by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the summer of 1994, matched shortly after by the Unionist side, and prospects for a lasting settlement are now at least conceivable. But you always hold your breath when thinking of Ireland, and the grounds for Guelke's caution are centuries old.

The scope of the book is relatively narrow and more effective on that account. Leaving aside ancient history, the contributors confine themselves to the more recent "troubles" (an Irish euphemism if ever there was one), beginning in the late sixties

with the flare-up of intercommunal violence, a state of affairs that lasted with varying degrees of intensity until recently. A paradox with which the contributing authors deal is the "relatively low level" of violence which nonetheless persisted throughout the period. Contrary to popular perception, in no sense was there civil war; even terrorism strikes many as too strong a word for the on-again-off-again bombings and reprisals that took place during this period. There is talk about "legitimate targets" and "acceptable levels of violence", in themselves rather shocking terms, to describe the controls which both communities (Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist) put on their militant wings. At root is the question: should the North remain part of Britain (the Unionist position) or should it be integrated with the Republic of Ireland (as the Nationalists would have it)? There is, of course, a range of options under each scenario.

A refreshing break from the rational discourse of the authors is the language of the most directly affected by the violence and social injustice. The streets and schools in surveys and interviews echo distaste and sometime humor directed at extremists. A Protestant begs not to allow stereotyping to put him in the same bag as "a wee Christian . . . a Bible-thumper." Children in the midst of sectarianism show themselves surprisingly sensitive to cultural diversity. Liam, Catholic, 15 years old: "People are all brought up differently." Jennifer, Protestant, also 15, describing her new school: "Now I have Catholic friends. They come and stay at my home."

For all that, sectarianism is alive and well in Belfast. The men and women, the girls and boys interviewed have for the most part no doubt where their ethnic and religious allegiance lies, and generally this identity influences political sentiment. While the official and indeed the passionate line of the mainstream churches, both Catholic and Protestant, is firmly against violence, and even as the family victims of violence invariably plead against reprisals, violence has continued. As Guelke puts it, "the role of religious belief, like that of segregation, is contradictory: acting as a restraint on violence, on the one hand, while contributing to the divisions that give rise to the violence, on the other."

The strength of this book is its sophistication, its uncanny ability to see both sides of the question. The book presents no

formula for peace, but the "new perspectives" of its title shed light on the complexities of political discourse in a divided society, the inconsistencies of British government policy, the status of the military and the police, working class unemployment, the evolution of a mainly quiescent Catholic middle class, biculturalism and segregation, the role of education on both sides of the border, and the limits to conflict and accommodation. At times the discussion widens to other parts of the globe, but for the most part readers are left to draw their own conclusions on how the lessons learned from Northern Ireland can apply to regional conflicts elsewhere.

For those unfamiliar with the situation in Northern Ireland, *New Perspective* is an excellent introductory text. Even for those who have some knowledge of the politics of the province during the last three decades the book has important insights to offer. Here is a fine case study of communal strife and the search for a solution.

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Robert B. Hill, *Research on the African-American Family: A Holistic Perspective*. Westport, CT: Auburn House, 1993. \$47.95 hardcover; \$15.95 papercover.

This book, one of four, produced for the project, "Assessment of the Status of African Americans," coordinated by the William Monroe Trotter Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, should be read by every person interested in doing and understanding research on African-American families. The book offers that the causes and nature of the current crisis among African American families must be understood from a holistic perspective. Such a perspective must necessarily explore the separate and combined effects of societal trends, community, family and individual factors and social policies.

The first chapter provides a framework for understanding what is meant by a holistic perspective. It then recommends that any study of African-American families must give priority to themes of diversity, dynamism, balance, solutions and empiricism. Each of these dimensions are explored to demonstrate how