

A Short History of the Conflict in Northern Ireland

... continued from *Viewfinder Special Lehrerhandreichungen* (München: Langenscheidt, 1999)
and
Update InfoSheet 9c April 1998 – Feb. 2001 (<http://www.u-e-d.de/downloads/nireupd1.pdf>).

Resignations and Suspensions

- 2001 (June) Shortly before Britain's general election on June 7, Northern Ireland's First Minister David Trimble announces that he will resign on July 1 if the IRA does not start disarming. This strengthens his position with his constituents so that Trimble can keep his seat in the British Parliament. – But since the IRA does not take any steps towards disarmament, Trimble resigns as announced.
- A group of schoolgirls and their parents are stoned by Protestant youths as they leave their Catholic primary school. Rival mobs throw gasoline bombs, stones and bottles at each other and set fire to cars. This outbreak of violence coincides with the beginning of the annual "marching season".
- 2001 (Aug. 6) The commission responsible for the disarming of paramilitary forces in Northern Ireland states that the IRA has agreed to a method of permanently placing its weapons arsenal beyond use; no further details are mentioned.
Britain and the Republic of Ireland are enthusiastic, Protestant leaders in Northern Ireland reject the proposal as unsatisfactory.
- 2001 (Aug. 11) John Reid, Britain's secretary of state for Northern Ireland, suspends the power-sharing government for one day, which allows politicians of both sides to negotiate for six more weeks before British authorities are required to call for new elections to the assembly.
- 2001 (Sept. 22) Britain suspends the devolved government again, giving the parties another six weeks to resolve their differences.
- 2001 (Oct. 23) The IRA announces that it has begun to disarm. Guns and explosives at two arms dumps have been put beyond use.
- 2001 (Nov.)6 David Trimble regains his position as first minister in a vote rerun; Mark Durkan, who succeeds John Hume as leader of the largely Catholic SDLP, is elected deputy first minister.
- 2002 (April 8) International weapons inspectors announce that the IRA has put more of its munitions beyond use.
- 2002 (July 16) The IRA publishes its first apology to the families of the 650 civilians killed by the IRA since the late 1960s.
- 2002 (Sept.) After a number of incidents which seem to be linked to continued IRA military activity, First Minister David Trimble and other Unionist leaders state that they will force the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly by resigning – if the IRA does not agree to disband by 18 Jan. 2003.
- 2002 (Oct. 14) Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary, John Reid, suspends the power-sharing government after the discovery of an alleged spy operation within the Northern Ireland Assembly and threats of immediate mass resignation unless the British ban Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, from the Assembly.
- 2002 (Oct. 30) The IRA suspends contact with the arms inspectors.
- 2003 (March/April) There are negotiations to reinstate the Northern Ireland Assembly. – British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, challenges Sinn Fein to "make a clear, unambiguous pledge to renounce paramilitary force for political means".

- 2003 (Nov.) In the assembly elections, David Trimble's Ulster Unionists and Mark Durkan's SDLP lose votes to the extremist parties, Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists and Gerry Adams's Sinn Féin.
- 2004 (Aug.) "No news can be good news in some circumstances," claims the leader of *The Guardian* on 11 Aug. 04. "The victory of the traditionally harder-line parties [nearly nine months ago] has not, in the event, frozen the political process entirely in its tracks. Potentially interesting moves are currently taking place on both sides of the divide."

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