

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A WORLD MOVEMENT

Welcome to Conflict Resolution Notes' world wide network of information and contacts. We are convinced that citizens struggling to resolve racial, ethnic, or religious conflicts in their own communities can learn from and feel supported by the experience of their counterparts in other parts of the world.

The field mushroomed in the four years we have published Conflict Resolution Notes. This publication already reaches readers in twenty two countries. We work closely with established resource centers in the Asia Pacific area, Australia, Canada, South Africa and the United Kingdom. We at the Conflict Resolution Center want to support the growth of these centers and help them to serve as vital links between the world experience and local concerns. As an experimental first step the Canadian and South African centers are distributing this issue of Conflict Resolution Notes directly to their constituencies.

If you are receiving this publication through one of these centers and you find the information inspiring or useful, please let them know. They need to hear from you to help them plan to what extent they should commit program resources to bringing this information to you. You could also insure you get the information by subscribing directly to Conflict Resolution Notes.

Future Plans

We are exploring ways for regional newsletters, or even local project newsletters, to incorporate our material directly in their own publications. We also encourage newsletters to contribute articles to the CRNotes network so we can make them available to other projects. We are exploring various ways to make this happen ranging from technologically simple cut and paste technologies to creative use of computers.

Newsletter Editors

If you would be interested in including articles like those in this issue, please write to us. It will help our planning. Let us know how broad your circulation is. Do you use a computer? If so, what make and what sort of operating system does it have? What word processing program do you use? Do you have a modem? Please send a copy of your newsletter.

NORTHERN IRELAND THE CULTURAL BASES OF THE CONFLICT by Peter McLachlan

I believe the situation in Northern Ireland contains some important psychological and cultural problems which explain why we have made such poor progress in handling our conflict.

Three and a half million people in Ireland form the "I" community (this is Irish, Gaelic, Catholic), and one million in the North form the "U" community (Unionist, Protestant, Anglo Saxon).

For seventeen years now our conflict has been conducted with violence, boycott and political and community gridlock. In that time, we have seen three "U" community prime ministers pushed out of office, a devolved Parliament prorogued and three other political institutions set up, and all of them have failed. We have had a substantial peace movement which everybody thought might produce some results, and that has disappeared, and now we have an Anglo-Irish Agreement between London and Dublin which has produced an absolute political and community deadlock.

The separation between the two cultures is deeper than people have realized. Very roughly, the division is something like this: Churches, 95% separate. Social life, very much around the Churches, 75-80% separate. Education 95%+ separate. Sport, probably under 50% but may be over. Arts 60% separate. Housing 85% separate. Commerce is at least 50% separate. Politics - it could be 100%, but with the Alliance Party it is about 92% separate.

We have omitted to look at the psychological and cultural basis of these divisions. The failure of the mediating attempts by London, by Dublin,

and by hosts of people coming in to run conferences has been that they have not taken into account these differences.

Psychological Problems

The differences fall into four groups. The first group are psychological problems resulting from the conflict over at least a couple of generations. In the "I" community there is a desperate hurt arising from the discrimination that they felt from the "U" community, and a total sense of a lack of justice from the police, court and prison systems of N. Ireland. This is an enormous hurt that goes deep, deep, deep into the half million "I" community people in Northern Ireland and will not be removed overnight.

In the "U" community there is a deep, deep, hurt because of the violence they see members of the "I" community inflicted on them in the last seventeen years; there are many sons, brothers, fathers, dead.

There is also a deep, deep sense of loss politically, because they have lost their parliament. They have lost their access to power. They feel now that they are totally isolated, and they have even lost their friends across the water in Great Britain. The "U" politicians say "No Secretary of State coming from South of London can represent us. He doesn't even come from our community or our culture."

We have lost all influence on our destiny and now we are beginning to recognise for the first time that the one million culture in the north is a separate culture, with distinct facets. It is not Irish and it is not English. Therefore it has to be looked at on its own.

Cultural Problems

The second group of problems are cultural. They result from the last eighty years. First, in the "I" cul-

ture in the North one often experiences a situation where the statement of a fact is taken as the equivalent of action. This comes from the fact that for fifty years anybody in the "I" community that wanted to do anything could only state it and could not do anything more, and that therefore the ability to implement was atrophied.

There is also an enormous difference between the articulation skills in the two communities for similar reasons. I do a regular weekly radio programme called "Street Corner" for BBC Radio Ulster. I talk to young people on the street. I find when I go to the "I" community they talk and there is no problem. When I go to the "U" community I have to work like heck to get any discussions under way.

The third group of differences derive from Church organization and practice. We are often asked whether this is a religious dispute. It is certainly not a dispute between Christians, but some of the origins of the problems that now face us have a Church base. First of all, coping with emotion is different in the two cultures. In the "I" culture, feelings rise quickly and dissipate quickly. In the "U" culture they rise and rise and rise over a long period and stay high, but do not explode or disappear. If you look at the history of the last ten years you can see how the process has operated. I often wonder whether the catharsis of feeling in the "I" culture is helped by confession.

The bulk of the "U" community are dissenters. They must use their private conscience and assent or dissent from every proposition that is put before them. In 1985 the Anglo-Irish Agreement came and the Unionist community was given no opportunity to assent or dissent. Somebody from the Unionist side recently wrote that the ferocity of the response was due principally to the fact that there was no opportunity to assent or dissent.

Leadership in the "U" community is like leadership in the Presbyterian Church, and the leadership in the "I" community is like leadership in the Catholic Church. In the "U" culture, decisions are made by elders. They are not carried by a single leader. A "U" culture leader has little room to maneuver and can never go to any negotiation and actually negotiate for his community. That is why three "U" culture prime ministers who attempted changes around 1970 all failed. All three moved without the elders having moved with them.

Finally, there are important cognitive differences in the cultures. The "I" culture draws on its Thomist theology when framing ideas. They have a broad framework, sometimes quite rigid, inside which there is flexibility. By contrast, the "U" culture draws on the 95 Theses of Luther and the 39 Articles of the Anglican tradition and develops ideas, proposition by proposition, working on each agenda item and not concerned about any overall framework.

The "I" culture always says to the "U" culture - "come inside our framework and discuss." The "U" culture says - "please can we agree to discuss detailed item 1 on the agenda, then detailed item 2." That is why we never start talking.

A poll in December 1985 found that sixty eight percent of the people of Northern Ireland, said that they would like some kind of shared responsibility in government. That was after the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been signed. If that consensus exists, and I believe it does, it is not showing politically. Why? Because of the feelings and cultural differences which have not been tackled.

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CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS OF
THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL
OF MEDIATION:
FROM A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

by
John Paul Lederach

I was invited to Central America about two years ago to do some training in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. I made the best attempts possible to make the trainings culturally relevant, demonstrating the mediation process for the crowd of participants. Their reaction was, "that sounds like a good idea, but it feels gringo [Yankee] to us." What is gringo about our model?

I looked at the North American mediation model to cull out the assumptions that are built into it that we do not normally think about to understand what happens when we attempt to transfer this technology into a culture that does not share our assumptions,

I studied interpersonal mediation training materials; looking specifically at the monologue. The monologue is the formal introduction that sets up what is going to happen in mediation. I found five major assumptions.

1) Mediation is formalized. The monologue invokes structural formality. If you look closely at what is happening in many mediation sessions, you have a public setting which is bureaucratic in nature and is outside the person's territory. It takes place indoors, and has many time constraints.

2) We assume that face to face communication is the best way to resolve conflict. Therefore we talk a lot about facilitating dialogue. I suggest that facilitation is essentially the social control of direct communication. Much of what we do in the monologue is to set up rules and roles for how we are going to talk.