

# Irish peace process is in peril as government falls

by Mary Jane Freeman

The coalition government which has governed Ireland since 1992 fell on Nov. 17, as Labour Party leader and Foreign Minister Dick Spring resigned, along with five other Labour ministers. The fall of the government could jeopardize the Northern Ireland peace process, which is at a critical stage of discussions between the British and Irish governments.

The crisis began with a walkout by Irish Labour Party coalition partners at the Nov. 11 cabinet meeting. Prime Minister Albert Reynolds immediately called on his Labour Party partners to put national interests first, and warned that the threatened breakup of the Fianna Fail-Labour Party coalition government could jeopardize the Northern Ireland peace initiative. "At this crucial stage of the peace process, it is my personal conviction that the interests of the nation are best served by the government continuing in office," Reynolds said.

The ostensible cause for the walkout was Labour's opposition to the appointment of Attorney General Harry Whelehan to the High Court as its president; Whelehan is under attack for allegedly delaying the extradition of a priest accused of child abuse. On Nov. 15, Reynolds expressed his "deep and genuine regret" to the Irish people over the handling of the case, and urged the House not to let the controversy over a single judicial appointment jeopardize "the biggest breakthrough in Northern Ireland in 25 years."

Despite Reynolds's call for unity, after the Labour ministers formally resigned, he announced his own resignation from the government, as well as from the leadership of his party, Fianna Fail. He asked President Mary Robinson to form a new government, as is required by the Irish Constitution.

## Major sabotage

The most crucial question of the whole affair is, who benefits from this disruption of the peace process?

Up until Nov. 10, despite British Prime Minister John Major's foot-dragging, all of the players and pieces were coming together to bring about a peace settlement for war-torn Northern Ireland. In September and early October, both the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the militant Loyalists had announced cease-fires. On Nov. 1, President Clinton announced a major trade and investment package for North-

ern Ireland in support of the peace process; and on Nov. 4, the first meeting of the Irish Forum for Peace and Reconciliation occurred.

The stage was set for the next phase of negotiations to proceed, leaving Major no more excuses to "go slow." But the events of Nov. 10 and 11, including a murder in Newry, Northern Ireland and the Labour Party ministers walkout, put the peace process in peril.

The disrupting events unfolded as follows: On Nov. 10, in the town of Newry, which is about 40 miles south of Belfast, postal worker Frank Kerr was shot to death when he attempted to stop a robbery. Within hours, the Royal Ulster Constabulary claimed the three gunmen "had known links" to the IRA, and, on cue, media outlets worldwide mooted that the IRA cease-fire had been violated. The claims of the IRA link caused Justice Minister Maire Goeghegan-Quinn to halt the early release of nine IRA political prisoners, to which the Irish government had agreed after examining the specific cases.

On the next day, mid-term parliamentary elections were to be held in Cork, Ireland, home of the semi-state-owned Irish Steel plant. Opposition parties to the Fianna Fail-Labour Party-led coalition government were making inroads in Cork due to high unemployment there, which is expected to increase if a government plan to streamline the steel plant goes into effect. Early evening returns from Cork showed opposition parties Fine Gael and the Democratic Left leading and likely to win. On the same day, the government crisis erupted.

British reactions to the events are telling. Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Patrick Mayhew, commenting on the Newry killing, stressed a British point of contention, i.e., that IRA weapons must be relinquished before peace talks can go forward. "It demonstrates the wanton dangers of illegally held weapons," he said. Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) legislator David Trimble condemned the IRA for the murder, saying, "I think [the Newry murder] underlines the wisdom of the British government's cautious approach to this matter . . . and the priority now must be disarmament" of the IRA. The UUP has insisted that Northern Ireland remain under British control and thus has supported Major's "go slow" approach to the peace initiative. And suddenly, as the Irish government crisis hit, Major had a change of heart and an-

nounced plans to meet with Northern Ireland Loyalists and Sinn Fein leaders—something he has refused to do until now.

Conor Cruise O'Brien, a mouthpiece for former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's line that independent Germany would become a "Fourth Reich," cheered on the potential fall of the Reynolds government in his Nov. 13 London *Sunday Independent* column. Calling the peace process just a bunch of "hype," he declared the "quest for reconciliation" between Catholics and Protestants of Northern Ireland to be "revolting."

O'Brien hailed the results of the Cork elections, saying that it was the "best news of the week" because they "strengthen[ed] the opposition," especially the Fine Gael. Fine Gael President John Bruton, who has echoed Major's doubts that the IRA cease-fire is "permanent" and accused Reynolds and Spring of ignoring "domestic problems" as they "jet-set" around the world pursuing peace, is O'Brien's favored replacement for Prime Minister Reynolds. It is an open secret that opposition parties, particularly Fine Gael, have long been looking to exploit the differences between the Fianna Fail and Labour parties over the Whelehan appointment.

### **Economic aid must be forthcoming**

The positive side of this otherwise bleak picture is the effort by both U.S. President Bill Clinton and the European Commission to support the drive for peace with offers of economic aid. Along with announcing a major conference on trade between the United States and Northern Ireland for April, President Clinton's Nov. 1 trade package announcement said one of the U.S. objectives is to "enhance our cooperation with Northern Ireland in science and technology, especially strengthened collaboration with our Manufacturing Extension Partnerships and other programs to encourage technological innovation."

In addition, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency will "lead a delegation to Northern Ireland to identify infrastructure and industrial projects that represent mutually beneficial trade and investment opportunities," according to the President's statement. Simultaneously, the European Commission announced on Nov. 15 that it has granted \$1.27 billion in aid to Ireland to promote industrial development.

Just a week before the beginning of the fall of the government, the Irish prime minister told American businessmen at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York that economically uniting the North and South "can be achieved, without prejudice to constitutional differences" between Ireland and Britain. But not naive to the tensions the 25 years of the "Troubles" have brought, the prime minister cautioned, "sensitive issues lie ahead in the whole area of total demilitarization." And, presaging the ominous events which followed, Reynolds concluded, "The Troubles in Northern Ireland were in large part the product of the old divide-and-rule policy pursued by successive past British governments over the centuries."

# Schiller Institute celebrates poet's 235th birthday

by Susan Welsh

In this age of multiculturalism, when what is *particular* is considered to be politically correct, nearly 2,000 people met in cities around the world, under the banner of the Schiller Institute, to celebrate the 235th birthday of the most *universal* poet and playwright of the last three centuries: Friedrich Schiller.

On Nov. 10-13, the institute honored the occasion with poetry readings, performance of Classical music, and selections from Schiller's plays. Participants also commemorated the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Schiller Institute, and the fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Schiller was born on Nov. 10, 1759 in Marburg, Germany. Although he never traveled outside his native land, he became the beloved "national poet" of many nations, first and foremost for his poem "An die Freude" (the "Ode to Joy"), which Ludwig van Beethoven used for the choral finale to his Ninth Symphony. The poem's theme, "All men shall become brothers," has inspired countless republicans ever since, including the heroes of China's Tiananmen Square freedom movement in 1989. Each of Schiller's plays portrays the struggle for freedom and universal truth, in a different national context: *Joan of Arc* (France), *Cabals and Love* (America), *Don Carlos* (Spain), the *Wallenstein* trilogy (Germany), *Mary Stuart* (England), *William Tell* (Switzerland), and the unfinished play *Demetrius* (Russia).

### **Relevance for today**

Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the founder of the Schiller Institute, sent a message of greeting to the celebrations, underlining the importance of Schiller's ideas for solving the crisis facing mankind today.

She quoted from Schiller's "Second Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Man," that art must elevate itself above people's felt needs, and draw its prescriptions from the necessity of the mind and not from other pressing needs. "Now, however, need dominates, and presses mankind under its tyrannical yoke," Schiller wrote. "Utility is the great idol of the time, an idol to which all forces should dedicate themselves and which all talents should worship. Upon this crude scale, the intellectual merit of art has no weight, and deprived of all encouragement, it disappears from the screeching mouths of the century."