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Trends. Evolution, Devolution, and Northern Ireland: Ever Closer to Bloody Sunday?

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Author: Editor

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Time sped up, then screeched to a halt at the latest deadline for the devolution of significant political power from the British Parliament to a new Assembly in Northern Ireland. (Upon failure and contrary to Prime Minister Blair's past assertions, the deadline is not absolute, and there is a Plan B, C, and beyond.)

The latest modification of the House of Commons measure that would legalize the devolution (already and variously effected in Scotland and Wales) was also the latest attempt to resolve devolution's greatest publicly discussed impediment--the ongoing issue of Irish Republican Army (IRA) disarmament.

So-called material analysis and "facts on the ground" do not seem to clarify this issue. What constitutes the "Irish Republican Army" with its factions, organizational off-shoots, and still other like-minded and other-minded individuals and entities that willingly and unwillingly, knowingly and unknowingly, interface and interact with sectarian strife? What constitute valid empirical indicators for the beginnings and ends of processes that are confusingly and sporadically defined and interchangeably bandied about--decommissioning and disarmament? Why is there so little international discourse on symmetry and asymmetry in decommissioning and disarmament among all paramilitary sides to conflict? The white heat and white light--the Sturm and Drang--over, under, sideways, and down the issue of IRA disarmament suggest that this issue may lack any concreteness and may even be bereft of ontological substance.

Instead, perseverating on the issue of IRA disarmament may be but a contemporary expression of evolutionary psychological baggage--of something that was adaptive when physical survival was a much more essential issue for many more people than in the present. While the psychoanalytic concept of repetition compulsion suggests behavioral perseveration can be in the adaptive service of mastering anxiety, occasionally and paradoxically through the death instinct, the perseveration on the giving up of weapons (the sine qua non of survival in hunter-gatherer times) may nonadaptively mimic what once was adaptive and can be in the service of death itself. Here, evolution is impeding devolution and may foment another bloody trough after a crest of relative peace. How much all sides seem to truly have in common. (See Bouissac, P. (1998). Converging parallels: Semiotics and psychology in evolutionary perspective. *Theory and Psychology*, 8, 731-753; Hoge, W. (July 13, 1999). British putting more pressure on the I.R.A. to disarm. *The New York Times*, p. A8; Kirman, N.F. (1996). The repetition compulsion revisited. *Issues in Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 18, 36-49; Lazar, R., & Erlich, H.S. (1996). Repetition compulsion: A reexamination of the concept and the phenomenon. *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, 19, 29-55; Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (1998). Evolutionizing the cognitive sciences: A reply to Shapiro and Epstein. *Mind and Language*, 13, 195-204.) (Keywords: Devolution, IRA, Irish Republican Army, Northern Ireland, Political Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Security.)