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The Belfast Workshop

AN APPLICATION OF GROUP TECHNIQUES

TO A DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

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The Belfast Workshop brought together 56 Catholic and Protestant citizens of Belfast during August 1972. Through an intervention design which combined Tavistock and National Training Laboratory group dynamics approaches, a team of American social scientists attempted to assist the 56 to learn about their behavior in organized groups and better to understand their political opponents' situation. The workshop sought further to provide a protected setting wherein groups might explore modes of intercommunal cooperation that could later be implemented back in Belfast. This article describes the rationale behind the intervention, the methods employed, and the difficulties such enterprises encounter. It also offers a preliminary report on what was accomplished and suggests implications for long-term solutions of the conflict.

The conflict in Northern Ireland is peculiarly destructive and apparently intractable (Rose, 1971). Basically it stems from a society divided by a cumulative dichotomy involving religion, politics, culture, and ever-present history. Each side in various ways has manifested signs of both the fear and the destiny that are the hallmark of a righteous and beleaguered minority. Though they make up 65% of Northern Ireland's population, the Protestant majority feels itself a minority on the island as a whole with an uncertain border as its only protection against the permanent minority status which its Catholic neighbors now suffer as a result of that border.

Under the Northern Ireland goverment at Stormont, installed in 1920, the Catholic population has endured symbolic and real discrimination that most outsiders would consider outrageous. But most Protestants have feared that any basic changes in the structure of authority could only result in calling "the Border" into question, and thus could challenge the legitimacy of the whole regime. Furthermore, this view is regularly reinforced by Catholic nationalist statements asserting that such, indeed, is the *only* possible solution to the present difficulties.

Despite this dichotomous structure, neither side is homogeneous. The Protestant religion is fragmented into hotly competing churches and sects, a competition which gives particular importance to the Orange Order, symbol of United Protestant opposition to Popery. The Order itself, however, provides yet another source of controversy within the Protestant population. Although Protestants have voted overwhelmingly for the Unionist Party, the Party itself has been the seat of complex factional competition which in the 1960s moved it increasingly to the right. More recently, political movements of men like Ian Paisley and paramilitary formations like the Ulster Defense Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force have added more competitive than cooperative elements to the Protestant side. On the Catholic side, religion itself has provided much less of a source of factionalism, but competition between various strains of socialism, nationalism, and republicanism, now most visible in the split of the Irish Republican Army into Official and Provisional wings, has easily rivalled the Protestants in fervor and complexity.

Social class divisions cut across religious divisions and reflect the industrialized economy to which Northern Ireland belongs. Trade union membership and class awareness are high by both British and continental standards. Large numbers of people, however, have never been mobilized for political purposes along class lines. Rather, class cleavages have contributed to the exacerbated factionalism—and a high level of distrust on the part of the ordinary person for his putative leaders—within each of the religious camps. The honest attempt by leaders of the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1960s to forge an alliance between Protestant and Catholic workers was overwhelmed by the proclivity of individuals on each side to interpret the rising tension in traditional communal terms. More recently, the Alliance Party has managed to attract an interreligious following of middle-class intellectuals and, for its pains, has been

denounced as a band of traitors and "a greater threat than the bloody Fenians" by working-class Protestants and in equivalent terms by Catholic republicans.

In the eighteen months between the time we began to think seriously about Northern Ireland and the actual date of the workshop, the level and frequency of violence rose markedly. Any vestige of normal life became increasingly more difficult for larger and larger proportions of the population. The British government's suspension of the separate Northern Ireland government, if anything, exacerbated fragmentation on each side and gave the initiative to more and more extreme groups and individuals. Within the most seriously affected areas, the pressures of violence resulted in old-fashioned banditry and hoodlumism, as well as in a series of seemingly random and savage murders. These "apparently unmotivated murders" (popularly called AUMs) provided a source of continuing concern for both Catholic and Protestant organizations, which have been no more able than the Royal Ulster Constabulary to bring them under control.

Other attempts have been made by neutral private outsiders to intervene in destructive social conflicts. John Burton (1969), for example, has assembled a small number of Greek and Turkish Cypriot officials who discussed their differences and received informal instruction in principles of conflict and communication from participating social scientists not heavily committed to a single theoretical position. We ourselves, aided by specialists in group encounter techniques (in this article called *consultants*), have brought together 18 well-educated Africans whose governments are involved in boundary disputes between Kenya and Somalia and between Ethiopia and Somalia (Doob, 1970). In these and other instances, the representatives of parties to a conflict have met in a workshop where they themselves have interacted in an effort to find solutions. The interveners have employed various devices to make the interaction as productive as possible, and it has been assumed that the participants would later utilize formal or informal channels to communicate whatever fruits emerged from the workshop to their own policy makers back home. These strategies, in short, presume the existence of decision makers and of structures on each side sufficiently centralized to make it worthwhile to give leaders substantive information about mutually acceptable ranges of solution. In addition, they also presume that the decision makers have some interest in settling the conflict without totally dominating their opponents.

In designing the Belfast Workshop, we sought to profit from these past

workshops, as well as from the clinical experience we had gained from bringing together graduate students from the three countries of East Africa to discuss the rising tensions within that organization. Most important of all, a guiding principle has emerged: no single technique or combination of techniques is suitable or even relevant in all situations; the selection must be made by considering the objective of the workshop as well as the participants' background. In this instance, we never dreamed that any workshop involving persons from Northern Ireland could ultimately resolve the destructive conflict there. All of us sought continually to prevent ourselves, any of the persons we met in Belfast, or the participants themselves from falling victim to such a belief. What, then, might we achieve? The way we reached a decision is part of methodology which therefore is outlined in some detail.

Method

In June 1971, we journeyed to Belfast and informally interviewed a variety of persons occupying different positions in the society and representing virtually every shade of political opinion. We were strangers there and hence established contact through intermediaries: one of Burton's former graduate students, engaged in action-research in Belfast, who in turn introduced us to a sympathetic government official and who also functioned as an enthusiastic and helpful informant; a man important in the ecumenical movement who had previously visited Ulster and who directed us to sympathetic clergymen of both faiths; a colleague at Yale, a native of Ulster, who alerted friends in Belfast; and a network of persons at Queen's University and in the medical and psychiatric community who offered academic hospitality and advice. With one exception, everyone cordially suggested that we try something, as we certainly could do no harm. Members of the Northern Irish Parliament proposed that we attempt a workshop composed of people like themselves. Eventually, a fairly clear-cut objective emerged: to bring together persons of influence in two of the strife-torn neighborhoods in order to have them establish some degree of mutual trust and then to develop plans for establishing or improving relations between them. Our strategy was, therefore, a decentralized one which put no emphasis on appealing to any central authorities, nor on elaborating a program or manifesto which could go over leaders' heads to affect mass public opinion. To do the contrary would have maximized personalities and press releases and, in our opinion, minimized results.

DEVELOPMENT AND SETUP OF THE WORKSHOP

We considered our goals to be both more modest and more far-reaching and possibly useful regardless of Ulster's immediate or eventual status in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland. In the most immediate sense, we sought merely to provide a milieu in which persons of many persuasions, abilities, and interests could learn in one another's presence something about how they personally and collectively operate when they work with their fellow citizens on projects that interest them. They then might return to Belfast and carry out old or new organizational tasks of their own choosing somewhat more effectively. Beyond this minimal goal, we hoped the ambience we established might increase participants' realistic understanding and appreciation of the attitudes, normal behavioral patterns, and goals of those on the other side. At the very least, each individual's learning would be accomplished in parallel to that of similar individuals he might otherwise consider the enemy. Further, we would try to provide opportunities for participants to transcend parallel action and to discover realms of common interest. Then, within a protected atmosphere, they might explore and perhaps find modes of cooperation that could later be implemented back in Belfast. Finally—and this could never be more than a wild hope—we dared to think that there might be enough transfer from projects initiated at the workshop and implemented in Belfast so that, eventually, the participants could contribute a model of wider cooperation at the local level which would provide a basis for a broader social peace.

People living in the two Belfast areas, moreover, seemed willing to participate; in fact, they expressed genuine eagerness to have contact with persons or groups from the other side. If we had had the funds at the time, it might have been fruitful to organize a workshop immediately. Possibly better communication channels could have been established among the members of the Stormont parliament. But we lacked money, an intervention design, and a staff. During the academic year 1971-1972, we managed to obtain part of the money from two foundations and a private donor and the remainder, in the form of backstopping, from Yale University. We formed a planning group at Yale and, thus, unlike our first East African Workshop, we could work out details in advance among colleagues conveniently located at the same university. At first, members of various departments joined the discussion; eventually the planning groups consisted of one of us together with Edward B. Klein and James C. Miller, both clinical psychologists. The deteriorating situation in Belfast

during that period made all kinds of planning difficult, and, more often than not, the whole project seemed hopeless.

In June of 1972, nevertheless, our informants in Belfast suggested that it might not be impossible to recruit persons for the workshop. The two of us returned to Belfast together with Klein and Miller. We quickly learned that part of our plan of the previous year could not be implemented: as a result of the violence, so many people had moved out of the two neighborhoods and life therein had become so uncertain that it made little sense to think of those areas working out cooperative plans. The design we had evolved for the workshop, moreover, also suggested a wider base within Belfast. The four of us set forth criteria for the recruitment of personnel: influential within Belfast because of membership in established organizations (concerned with community development, housing, labor, playgrounds, education, politics, and so on) largely at the grass-roots level; interested in cooperating with the other side; and seemingly emotionally stable and capable of reflection.

Actually finding such persons and having them consent to attend the workshop outside the country and for a period of approximately ten days presented difficulties we ourselves could not solve. An intimate knowledge of the organizations and parties within Belfast and of promising personnel was needed which we, as outsiders, simply did not possess. In addition, even though Americans are regarded favorably by both sides, we could not quickly establish the trust and confidence required for persons to leave their homes and interact with individuals from the other side during those tense days. What we did was to find and hire two deputies in Belfast who had this knowledge and could evoke the trust: both are Americans who have lived in Belfast for many years, who have been or are attached to the university, who are interested in the people of Belfast from both a research and a personal viewpoint, and who therefore were generally known and by and large respected by the kinds of persons we wished to recruit.

Before leaving Belfast, the four of us tried to convey to the two deputies as vividly as possible the nature of the workshop. Vigorous discussions lasted for many hours; a bibliography and references were supplied. We emphasized that the workshop would be an intense and frequently unpleasant experience. It would not be just another conference attended by persons of good will—there had been meetings of that kind in and around Belfast, with few positive results so far as we could tell. We obtained the cooperation of a department at Queen's University (so that the sponsors became Yale "in association with" that department) and of various religious and other leaders in the community. We also prepared and

had mimeographed a "Preliminary Announcement of a Training Conference" which was to be given to all potential participants. Its opening paragraph under the heading of "Purpose" read as follows:

> People meet in groups and larger communities to accomplish most important everyday tasks. Such groups may either help or prevent them from achieving their goals. We propose to give from 40 to 60 citizens of Belfast:
>
> (1) The experience of learning what happens and what can happen when they participate in groups which they themselves form or which are formed before their very eyes.
>
> (2) An opportunity to explore whether they can then create for themselves ways of working in groups that will aid them in achieving goals of their own choice relating to the conflict in Belfast.
>
> (3) Whatever aid we can offer over several months in working out concrete, practical projects back home.

The announcement also indicated that the workshop would take place at Stirling University in Scotland from August 19 to August 28, 1972, and that "board, room, and transportation and other expenses will be covered from private sources in the United States not connected with politics." The site was selected for theoretical and practical reasons: participants, we felt, had to be removed from their ordinary, stormy environment if they were to feel detached and obtain perspective; Scotland was acceptable to everyone as neutral territory. It could be reached by ferry and, hence, expenses would be kept low, and participants were not required to obtain the travel documents which would have been needed on the continent; the authorities at Stirling most generously cooperated with us in every conceivable way. The design we had worked out in the course of the year was also indicated on the announcement, and it was explained in operational, nontechnical terms.

In the course of the next two months, the deputies recruited personnel by using the terms of reference we had given them orally and in the announcement. They explained or tried to explain the nature of the conference as well as they could. They emphasized the confidential nature of the enterprise; the participants' identities would not be revealed, there would be no publicity in the mass media. In all instances except about six, they personally interviewed the men and women at great length and sometimes at considerable risk to themselves. The exceptions were persons designated by their organizations to participate or were last-minute substitutions that had to be made. A more detailed announcement that had been promised participants never arrived from New Haven, presum-

ably because it had been carelessly shipped by sea rather than by air. One or both of us were available in or near Northern Ireland for consultation during the intervening time, but we neither attempted nor were asked to participate in the arduous day-to-day work of recruiting and solving numerous personal and logistical problems. Even after "Bloody Friday" on July 21, the deputies felt confident that many or most of the persons they had recruited would in fact participate.

They were right, even though there was no real detente of any sort during the next few weeks: 56 persons arrived on time to catch the ferry to Scotland and then boarded chartered buses to Stirling.

With one exception—a last-minute substitution—the participants were all leaders or important figures within formal or informal organizations of the Belfast community. Several belonged to what the participants themselves in formal sessions delicately referred to as "activist organizations" on each side of the struggle, a nomenclature we shall use in this article. Although by design none was a major political figure, one had earlier held political office and another half-dozen were in varying degrees known throughout Belfast and Northern Ireland by virtue of their positions in trade union, religious or similar near-political organizations. A similar number came from formal social service jobs in which they professionally assisted persons of the sort making up the bulk of the participants. Overall, about a quarter might loosely be described as middle-class in social origins or life style; the rest were workers or workers' wives or children, several of them unemployed. Slightly over half were Protestants, the rest Catholics; the male-female ratio was roughly 5 to 3; the approximate age range was from 16 to 60.

In addition to Klein and Miller, three other consultants reached Stirling from the U.S.: Daniel I. Alevy, Barbara B. Bunker, and Nancy French. They received no financial compensation and were motivated by an interest in the project and the research. The number of consultants was determined by the size of the group from Belfast.

THE WORKSHOP

The design which evolved in the course of the year and was indicated briefly in the announcement was in fact followed. The first half used what was generally called the Tavistock model (Miller and Rice, 1967) whose primary goal is to stimulate learning about the ways in which people function in organized groups. The participants were forced to confront directly the ways in which they respond to authority and the challenges of

cooperative and competitive work. During the first five days, the consultants and we deliberately remained aloof both in the various formal sessions and in all informal situations. This aloofness frustrated an easy search for comforting answers to people's problems and obliged them to look within themselves and their own experience to understand their reactions to pressure and conflict. Such understanding, we hoped, would then facilitate changes in behavior back in Belfast.

The Tavistock model, however, was modified at first by assigning people to introductory groups, first on the basis of sex, then religion and age; in each group, they discussed the problems associated with the common denominators so that they could appreciate the importance of role in the genesis and functioning of conflict. After an opening explanation by Klein, the director of this Tavistock half, they were assigned to small groups, each of which contained a rough cross-section of the participants and one of the consultants. These small groups met on five occasions; they had no fixed agenda or expressed purpose except "to study the group's behavior," and the consultants broke their studied silence only when they intervened to interpret some bit of group behavior. The participants came together three times in a large group, whose agenda was similarly unstructured; all of the staff was present, and again the consultants occasionally intervened and interpreted what was occurring. In the intergroup exercise, all the participants first assembled in a single room and were instructed to form whatever groups they wished in order to study, through experience, how groups can relate to one another. Five additional sessions allowed the groups to develop internally and to interact with other groups. Finally, as a transition to the second half of the workshop, application groups were formed on the basis of the neighborhoods in Belfast from which the participants came, for it was assumed that activities back home would largely take place in the areas where people reside. Clearly, then, this half of the workshop compelled the participants to move rapidly and repeatedly from one group to other groups which differed markedly in size and composition.

The second half, during the last four days, conformed more or less to the schema associated with the National Training Laboratories or Bethel approach (Bradford et al., 1964). Its aim was to give participants an opportunity to plan back-home activities in some detail and to both develop and practice specific skills which might aid in the realization of those plans. In order to symbolize this shift from learning about authority to seeking creatively devised ways to cooperate within the authority-dominated structure of Belfast, the staff abruptly became less austere—we

changed from formal to sports clothes, and we ate and drank with the participants. The change in manner and style was explicitly explained at the outset by Bunker, the director of this section. Planning groups were formed on the basis of problems specified by the participants themselves. There were various exercises, including some role-playing and a simulation in the form of a game (the Money Tree Game) which reflected somewhat realistically the struggle between the "have's" and the "have-not's." After a review on the last day, the application groups from the first half were reestablished for a single session so that the previously formulated plans for Belfast could be examined again. During this and some of the previous sessions, the consultants and many of the participants concentrated on the so-called reentry problem, and everyone made an effort to face the return to Belfast realistically; it was fine to dream up plans and to love persons from the opposing camp while living in the detached atmosphere of Stirling, but conditions at home would be quite different.

Each small or large group session and each exercise lasted an hour and a half. Almost always, there were two such sessions in the morning, two in the afternoon, and one at night. The pressure, obviously, was great, in part because we compressed the two-week period of our original design into nine days, so that the participants would be away from home a shorter period. There were breaks only four times: twice for church on the two Sundays, once in the latter part of an afternoon, and once in an evening for a trip to nearby Edinburgh. The two deputies acted as buffers between the participants and the staff and also attended to vital housekeeping chores.

Copious notes were kept by the two of us as observers during the first half and as occasionally participant observers during the second half. Discussions by the entire staff concerning what had transpired at previous sessions and concerning tactics for the following ones were taped. No recording was done during the actual sessions. In addition, the participants indicated their expectations concerning the workshop by replying during the ferry ride to open questions on a written schedule, and many of them summarized their impressions on another schedule they filled out during the return journey. Our deputies, however, decided unilaterally that the information should not be made available for analysis.

Results

We present an overview of the events at Stirling from the vantage points of group behavior and individual reactions. Results are reported as much as

possible in English and not in the various jargons of group-process professionals. These observations, however, do not and cannot convey the emotional flavor of the workshop. Perhaps a bit of it can be communicated by quoting, from our notes and out of context, some of the things participants said. Obviously they prove nothing per se, but they should be thought of as symptoms, especially difficult to interpret in view of the extremely well-developed ability of the participants to speak up, often in the great blarney tradition:

- I'm not talking about any of us.
- What are we supposed to do here?
- I've talked to people I've never met before.
- What's happening to me to make me so anxious?
- I'm learning something about myself.
- But we have to work in our own community.
- Am I really filled with hate?
- They're here to observe us, we're guinea pigs.
- I never felt I could learn so much as I did in the last two days.
- This is what happens to us back in Belfast.
- You are beating me down.
- How can we possibly think in the midst of this chaos?
- Can't you see the parallel between here and back in Belfast?
- How can we help those people in trouble?
- Is there a just God?
- I feel on top for the first time.
- You are relieving your emotions on us.
- We must find a way to get through the stress.
- Why does he hold this opinion of me?
- I felt like screaming.
- An inferiority complex makes me go to the back of the room.
- We are talking the language of doom.
- How can we help those people in trouble?
- How can we come to terms with the problems of Northern Ireland if we cannot solve our problems here?
- We are destroying ourselves, we are bringing out the bad in ourselves.
- Why not pick a subject we have in common?
- Is the violence in the staff or in ourselves?
- Why is violence wrong?
- Do we get anything out of this?
- I've learned what makes me tick.
- I frequently felt crucified.
- I now see women as individuals.
- We did not realize the significance of the remarks until they were pointed out.
- What I learned is that, if a person speaks for you, you let him speak.
- Whoever would have thought a week ago I'd be putting my arms around this lousy bastard?

– I have learned nothing.
– Is it right to use violence against those who use violence?
– I was writing out postcards and could not spell words properly.
– I was ignored because I belong to the younger generation, not because I am a girl.
– Those emotions are in us.

GROUP BEHAVIOR

In contrast with our first East African Workshop, where participants studied their group "process" to facilitate producing "substance" in the form of jointly agreed plans, at Stirling "process" became something to be valued and studied for its own sake. Only if participants could learn to see the processes working within themselves and within the microcosm the workshop constituted, might they be able to control and alter that process within their local communities.

Learning about process. Much of the learning dealt with the related issues of authority, power, and leadership. This, of course, was not fortuitous; Tavistock methodology is designed to force participants to confront these issues, and we used a Tavistock approach partly because we had concluded that these issues had particularly to be confronted in the Belfast situation. The workshop from its first moments forced participants into an ambiguous authority situation. They were presented with an immutable schedule of events and times and told that "members are free to do whatever they want." They quickly began referring to the Americans as "the authorities" or "the management," but the consultants refused to act like the authorities they knew back home. The consultants issued no direct orders; they often spoke cryptically and at first addressed only the group as a whole, never as individuals. They were aloof, but not patronizing; infuriating and ungiving at times, they made no attempt to win personal support or to charm away opposition or dissent. The nicknames the participants gave the male consultants revealed their view of them as exotic, ambiguous despots; Haile Selassie, King Farouk, the Sheik of Araby. Nor did participants find it easy to set up their own formal authority structure, though several individuals cryptically or openly offered themselves for the role of leader, only to have part of the group turn on them. Without formal authority, informal authority relations came to the fore. The old dominated the young; men dominated women; the verbal dominated the mute. This assumption of authority came so naturally to participants that its exposure in the sessions became a powerful learning aid.

For all their personal strengths and local leadership roles, the participants in common with most of their fellow citizens held little formal political power back home. Much of the process, then, concerned the dynamics of the powerless. Constant ambivalence toward authority was acted out in two ways. The first and most frequent way was to submit to authority's wishes while mounting ineffectual rebellious attacks against it. This in turn had the effect of encouraging authority to rule even more harshly and uncomprehendingly, thereby legitimating both the initial submission and the rebellious attacks. The pattern was acted out most consistently by young males, but was clearly ingrained in both the informal and formal authority relationships back home. One could catch glimpses of the pattern in the repeated verbal attacks on the Catholic Church offered by a stalwart of the Holy Name Society, and in the disappointment voiced by an old-line Marxist that there were no upper-class individuals present, against whom a comfortable form of ineffectual rebellion could be mounted.

The alternative method of handling ambivalence toward authority was repeatedly to approve authority, while covertly manipulating and subverting its operation. One young man immediately identified himself with the consultants in the meetings, constantly repeating what they said and approving it as the only hope for rapprochement, while attacking any who disagreed. With this (he may have assumed) unassailable position, he then did his best to destroy a delicate rapprochement between young Catholics and Protestants which he saw some of the consultants facilitating. This somewhat more creative response was used most effectively by women who presumably adapted a convenient intrafamiliar pattern of action to a broader context. Such a strategy depended again on the reaffirmation of arbitrary authority and thus provided little basis for other than marginal changes and short-term gains.

In the threatening situations provided by the Tavistock large-group sessions, these two ambivalent responses were combined in a self-destructive and pernicious process. The group as a whole pushed a few individuals into extreme and fruitless rebellious action which expressed some of the antipathy toward authority felt by all and which then allowed the rest to identify with authority (or with what they assumed authority must want) by condemning the rebellion and publicly dissociating themselves from the "extremist" action. By so facilitating and attacking rebellion, the group could have its cake and eat it too; yet, it could accomplish nothing positive, and it lost the contributions the rebels might have made. One particularly dynamic man whose comments suggested he was well used to

such a role was maintained in rebellion by most of the workshop. He launched occasional swingeing verbal attacks on the consultants and us ("You are like Hitler leading the Jews to the gas chambers") and talked repeatedly of organizing a parallel counter-workshop. Although he attracted a small, shifting coterie of the temporarily disaffected and did publish a surprisingly respectful and occasionally witty xeroxed workshop newssheet, he neither attracted sustained support nor, seemingly, expected it. He and the rest of the group had a comfortable relationship: his rebellion excused others from taking action.

Throughout all these reactions to authority, some of the participants nakedly expressed the conviction that they were experiencing at Stirling the very kinds of hating and loving emotions evoked by the conflict in Northern Ireland. In the workshop, however, they could appreciate fragments of their own irrationality and, with this appreciation, seek to more rationally appraise their past behavior and even anticipate their future behavior back in Belfast. Self-knowledge concerning authority, therefore, could be the initial step toward discovering ways through which the communities of Belfast might conceivably live together.

In addition to authority and power issues, the workshop participants had to confront the fact of conflict and the way they habitually deal with it. In Northern Ireland, people have had to develop elaborate codes of what can be discussed in "mixed company" so as to avoid having issues come up which give rise to uncomfortable situations (Harris, 1972: 146-148.). At the workshop, a bit of poetry, a humorous gibe, a quick handing around of cigarettes miraculously materialized at difficult moments to break the tension or veer the conversation into safer waters. Such adaptive mechanisms, essential to daily survival in Belfast, ill served a mixed group trying seriously to transcend or resolve divisive issues. Sharp resentment was shown when a consultant would intone, "The group is using humor to avoid confronting the issue."

A second way of handling conflict was to externalize responsibility for it. "We are all victims" was a theme that regularly reappeared, the workshop corollary of that being "therefore you should let us have our evasive fantasies and stop torturing us here." The unspoken Belfast corollary was, "Even if I oppress you or blow up your house, I am not responsible for I, too, am a victim." Externalization and evasion were favored by a few individuals of middle-class background or style who also had considerable organizational experience. They were conflict repressers attempting to propel themselves into authority positions on the half-stated premise that, if they were not allowed to control the center of the stage,

disaster would surely erupt. *Sans nous, le déluge,* was their implicit appeal, and it was a powerful one, even though its effect was to deny others any power or initiative. Again, this stance encouraged others to more hostile action, and covertly approved each new outburst. The relationship of such workshop action to behavior of numerous political actors back in Belfast slowly became clear to most participants and contributed to the eventual rejection of the conflict repressers as leaders.

In addition to authority and conflict, participants had to confront group loyalty, identity, and boundaries. They understandably saw themselves as divided into two religious groups. We deliberately complicated that picture by beginning, as explained above, with the three introductory group meetings organized in turn by age and sex, as well as by religion. Then, too, the seven from America provided an outgroup against which the participants could mobilize a joint Northern Irish identity. Distinctions based on profession, social class, place of residence, verbal skill, political activism, organizational competence, substantive concerns, and the like were also rapidly asserted, though they never completely submerged the dominant religious cleavage. When put under pressure, people initially tended to react by taking one of two contradictory paths: huddling into small protective groups of similar people, or fleeing into a blind large-group amalgam where the individual could hope to lose himself. Neither provided a satisfactory solution. Authority relations could not be avoided in the small groups if anything was to be accomplished, and organizational paralysis was inevitable in the large group. When small groups huddled, they had to call on full loyalty from their members and set up a protective boundary, but this left some individuals caught on the margin, subject to intolerable cross-pressures, or instead, wandering aimlessly until, perhaps, they themselves constituted a group of "dropouts" (as one group despairingly called itself). The intergroup exercise provided a formal setting in which participants could learn directly about their group behavior. Above all, it taught, first, that it is all right for everyone to have multiple identities and to interact in different roles at different times, and with different constellations of people in order to accomplish specific tasks. In turn, tasks of joint concern to several groups could be accomplished by maintaining separate groups and by promoting contact and joint action between them rather than by raiding neighbors to steal their best talent or subjecting them to one group's authority. Again, participants were not slow in seeing the applicability of this point to their situation in Northern Ireland. "We must not just get people involved in some kind of unity movement; that has disastrous consequences at home."

Learning about others. A temporary, bounded community of the sort we constructed at Stirling made learning about others unavoidable and rapid. Most people growing up in Northern Ireland had had nothing like the intensive exposure to "the other side" that they experienced at the conference. "When I got on the ferry, I was terrified when I saw who else was coming," said one woman on the second day. Then she added bravely, "Now I see they're all right, too." Or, as a man commented, "You know I've never really had a conversation with a Catholic before." Initially, people tended to see the other side as monolithic, and themselves as divided. While experiencing the frustrations of the all-Catholic intro-ductory group, one young man burst out "We're all RCs; we must trust one another—same as the Protestants in that other room are doing." But frustrations, doubt, and weakness, it soon became abundantly clear, were shared by both sides. And that simple realization was a powerful source of eventual understanding and cooperation.

While learning was shared, initial knowledge was unequally distributed. Consistent with the pattern reported for other hierarchical, plural societies, those on the bottom of the status ladder (i.e., the Catholics) seemed to have a somewhat better understanding of those on the top (i.e., the Protestants) than the reverse. This was dramatically illustrated during a role-playing simulation when otherwise very capable Protestants taking Catholic roles performed ineptly, while Catholics playing Protestants drew cheers from real-life Protestant observers. This sort of learning went on outside as well as inside the formal sessions, once initial inhibitions had been broken down. Friendship pairs, informal drinking groups, seating at meals, and at late-evening song- and drinkfests, all facilitated wide-ranging learning about other people. The participants were always aware that this was a special situation that could not easily be transferred back to Belfast. As one very political Catholic man said of the equally political Protestant woman whose company and conversation he had frequently sought and obviously enjoyed, "No chance of Rosie and me meeting back in Belfast. We're too well watched for that."

Project development. All of the learning described above might be helpful to participants once they returned home. The workshop further tried to help participants develop projects among themselves that they then might be able to implement back in Belfast. After much discussion and several additional false starts, planning groups began serious work in the areas of community center development; housing rehabilitation; and joint development of a playground area to be used by children from both a

Protestant and a Catholic housing estate. All three groups contained both Protestants and Catholics, but the first two assumed from the start that the principal action back home would be carried on by coreligionists, with at most occasional tactical cooperation and exchange of information between the two sides. The third group was different. With one exception, it consisted of youths, and they explicitly set out to do a joint project. No group during the conference was as effective as they in allocating internal responsibilities, exploring realistically the possible limits of its actions, and in general turning the workshop to its own purposes. They managed to ferociously maintain their independence from older groups and to enforce respect for their actions, no mean feat for persons from a society where the young are generally allowed only irresponsible initiatives.

In addition, a group generally referred to as the "politicals" was formed to work out some points of interest to a variety of organizations on both sides of the conflict. Its varied career perhaps best illustrates the sort of learning and application possible at a workshop of this sort. It had its informal origins at some late drinking and discussion sessions between activist individuals on opposite sides. These were conducted away from the rest of the participants, though most were aware of the meetings and of the organizational connections the individuals had back home. When, on the workshop's sixth day, formal planning groups were established, these individuals formed the nucleus of a group to work on political questions. They attracted in addition a few otherwise unattached middle-class individuals and then, en masse, an embryonic group of trade unionists. A few latecomers joined with the explicit intent of taking over the political discussions; they were individuals who in earlier meetings had revealed themselves adept at attempting to lead by repressing conflict. The group then became too large for any but the most general discussion of anodyne principles, a fate which seemed confirmed when the best known and most effective conflict represser gravitated magically into the role of chairman. Throughout a day's meetings, the group accomplished nothing; then the old activist core, together with a few persons from the middle class and the trade unions who had earlier used the intergroup exercise to make contacts with both extremes, pulled a parliamentary coup d'état by splitting themselves off from the larger group. This left the conflict repressers gasping and dispirited. The two halves of the group gave themselves the nicknames "the activists" and "the remnants," which expressed the way each half felt about itself. The remnants lapsed into lethargy: in broad terms, their leaders needed a conflict to repress; deprived of one, they could find no function.

The activists then made use of the workshop setting and the availability of the consultants (whose presence they specifically requested) to conduct exceedingly frank and realistic discussions of points of mutual interest to themselves and the organizations they represented. These discussions, carried out on the basis of personal trust without covering up basic conflicts in goals and allegiance, developed a set of suggestions which individuals agreed to communicate to their respective associates in Belfast. If later those associates wished to follow up the suggestions, a communications network was ready.

We are concerned for the moment not with the substance of these discussions, but with how individuals applied what had been learned in previous sessions about how groups function. We earlier mentioned the pernicious process that pushed active individuals to extreme actions, allowing others, while covertly egging them on, to use their actions to legitimate repressive centrist authority. This time the activists exploited the process for their own purposes. They allowed the conflict repressers to push them out of the center, but then coalesced themselves and brought in the most promising centrist individuals to aid them in developing joint and fruitful projects. The activists' success can have only indirect application back home. Still, many at the workshop learned much: that extremists may have something important to contribute to peaceful goals; that, indeed, they may be essential for some joint purposes; and finally, that moderates and extremists can sometimes work together without destroying one another.

INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS

Learning at the workshop came about under pressure and stress. Some of the stress resulted from reports of events back home, where things were no less ghastly than usual. One woman was telephoned by her daughter and told that all the windows in the house had been blown out by a bomb explosion across the street. "The sixth time this year," she sighed in resignation. But any such workshop generates its own stress. On the last day, however, a Stirling administrator expressed surprise at how calm things had seemed. He had detected none of the outward signs of tension that had been evident at previous Tavistock sessions involving middle-class Englishmen held on his campus.

Workshop learning can be painful. Many participants reported some degree of disorientation, particularly during the Tavistock portion of the workshop. One man stood up in amazement at a large-group session and recounted that he had just walked out of a campus shop in a daze and then

discovered he had taken a ballpoint pen without paying for it. Another found himself "walking around outside just talking to myself—I've never done that before." Another reported not having slept for three nights. Yet another used the word "suicide" so intensely in making a point that several participants reacted with alarm.

One young person who had been recommended by a community organization and not personally interviewed clearly had had a record of personal instability that should have precluded recruitment. The meeting was especially difficult for him, and his pattern of aimless wandering between groups or compulsive smoking alarmed other participants. A few others insulated themselves completely from events; though they attended many sessions, they participated little and must be considered dropouts. At least two individuals who early were pushed into extreme actions in large-group sessions never found their way back into useful rapport with other participants. Finally, the most prominent of the conflict repressers was unquestionably wounded and angered by the coup pulled against him, and others were hurt or ashamed that he should have been humiliated. "I just cannot forgive myself that I let this happen to him," one repeated to all who would listen.

The staff felt the pressures, too, and the heaviest price may have been paid by our two Belfast deputies, who, because of their residence in Belfast, their own political commitments, and their difficult position as administrators at the workshop, were constantly straddling a painful boundary between the professionals and the participants. Some time after the workshop had ended, they found it necessary to break their association with us, to the clear detriment of the project as a whole.

Along with these costs, individual gains also came from the experience. Several participants reported a new feeling of hard-won personal confidence, others looked to increased professional competence, just as some were surprised at weaknesses they discovered. One kindly and gentle man was carried away in the Money Tree Game and stole the purse of the woman acting as treasurer for the opposite side. Its prompt restitution did not still his reflection at this uncharacteristic act. "I have learned to see within myself . . . . I must face the hate I've discovered there." Some reflection was more immediately rewarding: one woman proudly announced that after twenty years of marriage she had just written her husband her first real love letter. Indeed, personal learning may have been deepest for many of the women participants who came to play an unaccustomedly forthright role. As one man said over a final drink, "This was great for me, but I'm damned if I'd let my wife come to one of these. There'd be no living with her afterwards."

Conclusion

After describing the workshop at Stirling, we ought to turn to the next phase of the project: what happened to the participants when they returned to Belfast? Did they profit in any way from what they learned at Stirling? Were they able to carry out whatever plans they had formulated miles away from home? Alas, we cannot yet answer these questions, and we know we shall never be able to measure some of the most important effects quantitatively. At the time of writing, we ourselves have not returned to Belfast to make direct inquiry, though we shall.[1] Our disaffected deputies have provided only fragmented and unsatisfactory reports which do, however, indicate that some of the participants have met and perhaps have been able to practice what they planned. We know for certain that two unhappy participants have attacked us publicly in the Belfast press and that a half-dozen participants counterattacked in the same newspaper and praised the workshop. More time must pass before a serious assessment can be made, and the actual activities of the participants within their organization will continue to depend in large part upon political conditions in Belfast and all of Northern Ireland.

But this much can be said: First, in spite of logistical problems and no certain source of financial support, private citizens were able once again to intervene in a social conflict without government sponsorship. Fifty-six Protestants and Catholics assembled peaceably in Scotland and there interacted more or less as we had planned in advance. We have acquired additional clincial experience which can be transferred to other situations when and if the occasion arises.

Much of this experience points to difficulties that confronted us in Belfast or Stirling and that undoubtedly will arise elsewhere. In all of the workshops we have organized, it has been virtually impossible for the participants to appreciate at the outset the relevant connection between the learning or training sessions on the one hand and the social conflicts which have brought them together. For this reason, we planned the introductory groups so that the participants would almost immediately have an opportunity to discharge the role of Catholic or Protestant. Although these groups may have attenuated some of the effects of Tavistock training, we feel that the methodological innovation was justified by the realism with which most participants later in the workshop were able to connect their experiences in Stirling with life back in Belfast.

Participants understandably resented deeply any suggestion that they were brought together as subjects in an experiment. The most disturbing charge hurled at us repeatedly by one of the outcasts during the workshop

(which was later repeated in the newspaper attack) was that we were only interested in using the good people as guinea pigs. The Americans may indirectly have reinforced the charge when a straightforward question at the opening session ("Would the findings be communicated back to the participants?") was misheard by one of the staff and answered in what must have appeared an alarmingly evasive manner. Eventually, of course, the basic points were made: participants would not be asked to do anything during the workshop not directly connected with their own learning; no artificial exercises, no psychological tests would be administered; we had no secret means of deriving data; we planned no secret reports to interested parties; any writing we did would be made available to participants who wanted it and participants' identities would be disguised—as in this article.

But verbal assurances cannot counteract the unfamiliar pressures a workshop of this sort puts on people. Underneath the warm toasts and embraces at the last night's drinkfest, we knew that many suspicions lurked and that they would be reinforced once people tried to explain their experience to family and friends in Belfast. We knew too from previous experience we should have to pay this price, and we sustain ourselves by the hope that, as peace-promoting techniques become better known, participants in the future may be pleased rather than disturbed by the idea that, in addition to what they themselves can learn at a workshop with relation to their own social or personal problems, they may be making some contribution to the common weal. If this comes to pass, then the methodologists in our midst will charge us with exploiting the Hawthorne effect. At any rate, being cast in the role of investigator or headshrinker by the Northern Irish perturbed us less than being called CIA agents by some of the East Africans.

In a simpler world, prolonged discussion would have allayed fears and prepared people fully for the rigors of the workshop before it began. Northern Ireland is not a simpler world. We had to rely on intensive oral preparation of our deputies, backed up by references to the standard literature on encounter groups that was readily available to them; we expected that they would be guided by this knowledge in choosing participants and in communicating to them some sense of the experience lying ahead. As it turned out, this communication process was faulty. Information was lost at both interchanges, and, as a result, it might be argued that we did not obtain the "informed consent" of the participants. The feeling of having been put in an untenable position doubtless contributed to the deputies' later disaffection. In retrospect, however, we

have become dubious that "informed consent" in its fullest sense could have been possible in workshops of the kind we have organized. There is just no way of preparing people who have not been through one for what they will encounter in a workshop. The problem is additionally complicated by the use of intermediaries like our deputies (and they *were* essential) and by the participants' lack of extensive education (a Belfast fact of life). We must recall that, in the first East African workshop, most participants held higher degrees and all had been told what to expect at great length and in person by us, with little appreciable effect on their readiness for the experience. The one participant who from the first seemed fully at home at Stirling had previously experienced a Tavistock conference.

Given that such complications are unavoidable and that results are uncertain and objectively unprovable, should the project have been undertaken? We strongly reaffirm a positive "yes." We agree that our original knowledgeable Belfast contacts who urged us to undertake the workshop had realistically and correctly estimated the situation: the workshop would have some positive effects. From the point of view of scholarly ethics, only one approach to the Belfast situation totally avoids criticism: to do nothing. We acknowledge this is what most sensible social scientists do with regard to most issues.

A second question should be raised: "Even if a workshop might be a good idea, should we, as foreigners, have undertaken it?" Obviously, there are practical as well as moral issues at stake here. We did not always appreciate the nuances of what participants told us. The consultants occasionally gave unintentional offense through their interpretations. Had we been natives, we could also have been constantly ready to help people follow up projects in Belfast. We would answer our second question with two points. First, no one in Belfast was attempting anything of the sort, and the few we spoke to who might have had the skills stated that their other professional activities and institutional affiliations precluded such an enterprise. Second, the very fact that we were foreigners helped in crucially important ways. We were neither Catholics nor Protestants; we were Americans and our neutrality was unquestioned. If we were to become a center of controversy, we would not compromise a valuable local institution. Finally, although they heard us say again and again that we were ready to assist them in carrying out their plans, the participants knew from the start we were not the dei ex machina they all occasionally hoped for.

For all the external ramifications of the age-old struggle, outsiders—be

they social scientists or British soldiers—cannot provide a solution. As foreigners, we offered neither a panacea nor blind comfort. But as a result of their own efforts at the workshop, some small groups of individuals in Belfast may now be able to control some part of the chaos around them.

Even though the workshop involved a mere 56 ordinary individuals selected on a far from random basis, its results ought to interest those important persons who would work toward an overall solution for the conflict. One needs no workshop to document the need for greater social and political justice which can only be brought about through massive institutional changes, if the six counties are to enjoy sustained peace. But this conflict is about more than justice, and even the most radical political changes, the best intentions and the greatest good will of the elite, backed up by British arms and money, will not alter some of what has been inherited from the past. Here we refer not to the oft-cited dates and slogans commemorating past slaughters and glories, but to what we in this article have called the pernicious process that accompanied so many relations of authority during the workshop and which, we suspect, is an adaptive response to the stern authority imbedded in the social traditions of Protestant and Catholic alike.

Many of the public comments of British and Northern Irish leaders concerned with elaborating a solution have emphasized the need to bring together the many "people of good will" while isolating the extremists. Such an approach is most appealing, but even accompanied by a strong measure of social justice, it may not work. The history and life situation of the two communities provide enough hate-filled issues and opportunities for violent and extreme appeals and actions. The process we observed too well associates isolated extremists and a center composed of "people of good will." Each element sustains the other, and the ordinary people are hurt. Even the British Army today has become a middle force, providing a buffer between the two communities. At the same time, its presence legitimates violence at both extremes, and, indeed, permits the civilian middle elements in both communities to tolerate the extremists because, unconsciously, they know they are safe from the catastrophe of mass community warfare.

Proposed solutions which rely on a solid political center, even a joint Protestant-Catholic one, to isolate and destroy the extremes, may end up creating and sustaining more extremists whose actions in turn force the center into repressive rule. Like the extremists, the center may be a problem. Any lasting solution, we venture to say as a result of what the participants made us appreciate over and over again during the workshop,

will have to recognize and legitimate extreme political positions. It must bring their exponents not just into politics, but into occasional positions of quthority, where they can act directly and openly on and with the centrist people of good will.

NOTE

1. In fact, we note as this analysis goes to press, we did return in June 1973, and shall report our encouraging findings in a future article.

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