



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE
Legislation and Politics (NI) Sub-Committee

During the last year the Committee held meetings with the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, the largest Northern Ireland political parties following the November 2003 elections.

The 'First Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission' was published on April 20, 2004. The Report highlighted matters of major concern for the people of Northern Ireland – paramilitary criminality and violence, the threat of violence to exert control of many local communities, and lucrative organised crime for paramilitary funding. Far from paramilitary activity disappearing, it had increased since 1998. The IMC stressed that this criminality must be tackled urgently by the rule of law, and commitment to democracy by all political parties.

The IMC Report was part of our discussions with the political parties. The Committee stressed the need for the decommissioning of IRA and Loyalist paramilitary weapons as part of building trust. The Committee also urged Sinn Fein to take its place on the Policing Board and the District Policing Partnerships.

The Leeds Castle Talks took place in September 2004 and involved the two governments and the NI political parties. In the aftermath of the meeting, there was heightened optimism about the possibility of the return of the NI Assembly and Executive with the DUP and Sinn Fein in government. The Committee expressed support and encouragement of this possibility to the two parties. Because agreement between the DUP and Sinn Fein on the decommissioning of IRA weapons could not be found negotiations failed.

The political failure was further compounded by the Northern Bank robbery of £26.5 million in Belfast on December 20, 2004. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach, Chief Constable and Garda Commissioner attributed blame for this crime to the IRA and Sinn Fein. On February 10, the Independent Monitoring Commission gave its full endorsement to this assessment. The Committee has viewed these political changes with shock and sadness. However, we are of the view that we must persist, and re-double our efforts for peace, stability and security for everyone in Northern Ireland.