Nonviolence in Ireland: A study guide

Introduction
This is intended as a study guide which can be used individually or in a group.

Individual use
As an individual you can work through the material as fast as you wish, taking more time when there is something of particular interest, and going in whatever order you wish. However beware of only covering what initially appeals to you (or you may not learn as much). If working individually it is suggested you make notes and write down additional questions and comments you would like to think about more, points to discuss with others, and issues to follow up.

In a group
If used in a group it needs a facilitator of facilitators who will have familiarised themselves with the questions and material, and planned in advance (roughly) how much would fit in a session taking into account the nature of the group in question. In a group the facilitator would also need to indicate in advance what members would need to have read or viewed before the next session - although video material can be viewed collectively if the group is physically together or if this can be organised remotely.

While a group can speed through material and skip sections if desired, to prevent confusion it may be wise to take the sections in order (i.e. not to jump backwards and forwards). A facilitator can consult a group as to what is of particular interest and therefore needing more time. It is impossible to say ‘it will take this long’ but it could be used as the basis of up to ten sessions of an hour to an hour and a half. There are deliberately no time boundaries or frame given because of the myriad of different ways this study guide can be used; in a group it is up to the facilitator and group. It is suggested that members of a study group write down particular points of interest and learning as they go along.

In general
Material, after sections 1 and 2, is mainly but not completely chronological. Each section begins with reading/viewing material, then questions. There are many gaps and INNATE would be happy to try to fill those with additional material or links. INNATE would also be delighted to feed information from ‘your locality’ into the narrative or into peace trails which we are working on http://www.innatenonviolence.org/trails/index Contact INNATE at innate@ntlworld.com

As is obvious in reading this guide, it is – intentionally - exclusively using material available online – a significant amount from INNATE online resources. If you have other relevant written, audio or video material use it…..

This guide appeared in Nonviolent News No.280, June 2020. It is available online on the INNATE website in both the Resources http://www.innatenonviolence.org/resources/index.shtml and Workshop http://www.innatenonviolence.org/workshops/index.shtml sections
0. Lead in on nonviolence
What is your understanding of nonviolence? You can read and think about/discuss what nonviolence is, and put together a short individual or group definition before you start.

a) See the INNATE Nonviolent Manifesto available at http://www.innatenonviolence.org/resources/intro/index.shtml
and also http://www.innatenonviolence.org/resources/index.shtml

b) For personal stories of what nonviolence means to some people in Ireland, see the “My Kind of Nonviolence” pamphlet at http://www.innatenonviolence.org/pamphlets/index.shtml

c) Also do a word search or visit the websites of organisations associated with nonviolence including the War Resisters’ International https://www.wri-irg.org/ (including their ‘Empowering Nonviolence’ section at https://wri-irg.org/en/pubs/NonviolenceHandbook) and Pax Christi (especially their Catholic Nonviolence Initiative) https://paxchristi.net/ among others.

d) It is impossible in this space to go into detail about nonviolence in general. But one issue to be clear on is whether it necessarily goes beyond non-killing to the need for structural change in society and the world. INNATE’s position is the latter. INNATE believes nonviolence implies a commitment to wide social and political change, including green issues and human rights. This study guide takes a broad definition of nonviolence and includes campaigning on particular issues which many participants might simply think of as social or political action (in this case it may be useful to distinguish between principled nonviolence and nonviolent action). Other questions include the efficacy and appropriateness of nonviolent direct action (which may be illegal) in campaigning; again, INNATE would support this in appropriate cases.

1. Introduction

Nonviolence – the Irish Experience: Quiz

Read this Quiz, with the answers on the second page, at http://www.innatenonviolence.org/resources/index.shtml (link a few items down).
Search further online for items that particularly interest you.

Initial questions:
1) What do you think having read this?
2) In your initial thoughts, at this stage, do you think we can we talk about ‘nonviolence in Ireland’?
3) If the Céide Fields community (Item 1 in the Quiz, word search for it if you like) was non-hierarchical and non-violent, do you think it was also pre-patriarchal? And if so, what is the significance of this?
4) What do you think is missing?
2. Nonviolence in Irish History pamphlet

This pamphlet, published by Dawn in 1978, looked at a variety of aspects of ‘nonviolence’ in Ireland including Daniel O’Connell, the Quakers, the first boycott, Michael Davitt, the ‘Other’ Irish in America, non-violent action and politics in the early Twentieth Century, and peace groups since the 1930s.

You can read this pamphlet online at http://www.innatennonviolence.org/pamphlets/index.shtml

It can be read, and discussed in a group, in one go or the relevant individual essays used later when relevant.

Possible questions include:

1) What did you find most impressive in this pamphlet?
2) What or who do you think made the greatest contribution to change?
3) What mistakes were made by particular people/groups, and why?
4) If writing this today, what should be included?

3. Daniel O’Connell and constitutional nationalism

Daniel O’Connell gets mixed reviews, from being someone who was highly instrumental in building Irish democracy and constitutional politics (as opposed to the physical force tradition within Irish nationalism) through to someone not that engaged with social issues and not believing the Irish language was worth saving.

See the article on Daniel O’Connell by Angela Mickley in the ‘Dawn’ pamphlet on ‘Nonviolence in Irish History’, available at http://www.innatennonviolence.org/pamphlets/index.shtml

Also O’Connell poster at http://www.innatennonviolence.org/posters/index.shtml

Do a more general word search.

Questions:
1. Daniel O’Connell – success or failure? What do you think?
2. Did he have a lasting effect on political culture?
3. Contrast the effects of non-violent constitutional nationalism with the physical force nationalist tradition. Was one more important than the other?
4. Michael Davitt and land reform

Michael Davitt was without doubt one of the most important political figures in the second half of the 19th century, on land reform, penal issues, and social and political change in general.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mysLj2G97ic is a very informative Afri film, including intriguing contributions by some of Michael Davitt’s grandchildren.


Do a word search on Michael Davitt and on movements for change in the latter 19th century.

Questions:
1. What do you think was most important about what Michael Davitt did?
2. Did the nonviolence of the land reform campaign contribute to success?

5. Francis Sheehy Skeffington and nonviolent republicanism

Francis Sheehy Skeffington was a republican (as well as being a socialist and feminist) but a nonviolent one – however he was murdered during the 1916 Rising as a result of the actions of a British officer.

a) See http://www.innatenonviolence.org/readings/2019_02.shtml by Mary Carolan


Also do a word search for him.

Questions:
1. If the republican struggle had followed Francis Sheehy Skeffington’s lead in being nonviolent, what do you think would have been the outcome?
2. See the quote from Francis Sheehy Skeffington in the poster under his name at http://www.innatenonviolence.org/posters/index.shtml - this also features in the illustration above. Does this quote still apply today?
6. The Troubles in Northern Ireland

a) Civil society and peace and reconciliation groups were working away throughout the Troubles, see e.g. https://www.flickr.com/photos/innateireland/72157614893100575 (Photos and illustrations on the INNATE photo site – see also other Northern Ireland related albums on the same site).

b) Read https://www.flickr.com/photos/innateireland/43899692560/in/album-72157614893100575/ which is a leaflet produced to go with Emily Stanton’s “Untold stories” tour of peacebuilding work in Belfast during the Troubles [a book based on her doctoral thesis on civil society peacebuilding in the Troubles is forthcoming from Routledge publishers].


d) For a short run down on eighteen peace groups in the North in 1982 see leaflet at https://www.flickr.com/photos/innateireland/10844085354/in/album-72157614893100575/ and the entry beside that. Search further for information on particular groups listed here, and other civil society groups you know about. It should be noted that many ‘peace and reconciliation’ groups were only concerned with Catholic/Protestant ‘cross-community’ relations and had no wider view of, or stand on, peace and nonviolence and in some instances supported the state uncritically.

e) If you need to look up details or background, the CAIN web resource is the most comprehensive for understanding ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ In terms of lessons for human rights, see CAJ’s “War on Terror: Lessons from Northern Ireland” (2008) https://caj.org.uk/category/publications/?s=lessons+from+northern+ireland The oldest existing peace and reconciliation group in the North, founded in 1965, is Corrymeela https://www.corrymeela.org/

Questions:
1. What contribution, if any, do you think peace and civil society groups made to ‘keeping society in Northern Ireland’ from going over the edge to all out civil war? Apart from peace and reconciliation groups, think of other civil society organisations such as trade unions, women’s groups, religious organisations, community groups, and human rights groups.

2. Do you think peace and reconciliation, and other civil society, groups contributed to the eventual settlement?

3. What limitations do you think they had? What mistakes did they make and what did they get right? How did the ‘community relations’ focus of many groups affect the development of a peace ethos?

4. How do you think the cause of peace (define ‘peace’ as you wish) can be best progressed in Northern Ireland today?
7. The Irish anti-nuclear power movement of the late 1970s


b) Look at the photos and illustrations at https://www.flickr.com/photos/innateireland/albums/72157607158367565

c) Postscript: Subsequent to the Chernobyl nuclear accident of 1986, many Irish people became involved in supporting vulnerable people affected in the region, see e.g. https://www.chernobyl-international.com/

Questions:
1. Was this movement important and if so why?
2. What do you think about the way it was organised?

8. The anti-nuclear weapons movement of the early 1980s

At a time when there was considerable fear of nuclear war and accidents, this movement in Ireland was mainly organised through CND/Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In terms of personnel in Ireland it partly grew out of the (successful) anti-nuclear power movement. It organised a wide variety of events and big demonstrations.


Questions:
1. How real a threat was (and is) the nuclear issue?
9. The Dunnes Stores strike, 1984
In a brilliant example of worldwide solidarity, workers at the Henry Street Dunnes Stores branch in Dublin – almost all young women - went on strike against handling apartheid South African goods in July 1984. This ended up in Ireland (Republic) banning goods from South Africa in 1987 and a significant contribution to the struggle for democratic freedom and overcoming apartheid.


See short Afri film at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Dakjusz1Yc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Dakjusz1Yc)

Questions:
1. What gave the strikers the courage to act as they did?
2. Who stood against them?
3. What was their success due to?

10. The role of Irish women in peace and progressive movements
Women have often been written out of history, and frequently still are. However they have always been ‘there’. Even if the story about St Brigid giving away her father’s sword to a beggar to sell to feed his family is mythical, it is quite possible her community did act as a place of refuge – and these things still indicate something about the actions and values of women, or what is attributed to them.

In more modern times, in the Ladies’ Land League, the Troubles in the North, the Dunnes Stores Strike, or other social and political movements, women have been there and often the real organising force behind organisations.

Look up Anna Parnell, Mother Jones (Mary Harris, an Irishwoman in the USA), Louie Bennett, Saidie Patterson, Inez McCormack, Mairead Maguire, among others.

Questions:
1) What other women come to your mind?
2) What contribution(s) do you think women have made? Does the contribution they have made differ from that of men, and if so why? Has there been a difference in their approach to violence and nonviolence?
3) Is Irish society still patriarchal to some extent, and if so, why?
4) To what extent do you feel the contribution of women is still underrated?
11. Corrib Gas, Erris
The onshore development of Corrib Gas on the Erris peninsula of Co Mayo was a textbook illustration of how not to go about a significant development or relate to a local community, aside altogether from the aspect of it being about extracting a fossil fuel.

There was widespread opposition but also, tragically, the creation of local division.

Do a web search for ‘Corrib Gas’ (make sure to scroll down a bit), ‘Rossport Ireland’, ‘Shell to Sea’ etc.

Questions:
1) Why did the state uncritically back developers against citizens?
2) Have lessons been learnt? And if so by whom?

12. The green movement
The biggest general political issue worldwide at the moment is undoubtedly the question of global heating, although there are many other ecological issues.

Do a web search including ‘green movement ireland’, ‘ecology ireland’ etc but be sure to scroll down well because a lot of official bodies and commercial agencies crop up.

Look at the websites of Irish environmental organisations including Friends of the Earth, Friends of the Irish Environment, and Extinction Rebellion (add ‘Ireland’, ‘Northern Ireland’ or other geographical location as you desire).

Questions:
1) How do you see green policies being put into effect in Ireland? [Think of both the Republic and Northern Ireland]
2) What power do you think the individual has in relation to green issues? How does this relate to nonviolence and nonviolent tactics?
3) How do you see the relationship between ecology/green issues and nonviolence?
13. Irish neutrality and opposition to US military use of Shannon Airport

Irish neutrality has been a traditional and also key factor in Irish nationhood and identity – but despite its high popularity (as shown by various opinion polls) political and economic elites are keen to ditch it, and the Irish government has bought into the EU’s PESCO militarisation programme, NATO’s “Partnership for Peace” etc.

Meanwhile resistance to US military use of Shannon airport has been going on now for almost a couple of decades.

a) For an instant guide to Irish neutrality see ‘Irish neutrality’ at http://www.innatenonviolence.org/posters/index.shtml


c) On Shannon, see Afri films: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xDsZU2F5WA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlOioJoxO9o https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la3fDc14UL0&t=119s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJgFRKeEdoE

d) On the INNATE photo site see some of the photos in the ‘Disarmament and resistance to war’ album at https://www.flickr.com/photos/innateireland/albums/72157616378924274

Questions:
1) How important is Irish neutrality?
2) How important is resistance to US military use of Shannon?
3) How effective has resistance at Shannon been so far?
4) What tactics are appropriate in the campaigns on Shannon and on Irish neutrality?

14. Sperrins: Opposition to gold mining

Gold mining is a very toxic and destructive process for a monetarily valuable but useless metal, these days used almost exclusively for adornment.

Do a web search for ‘sperrins gold mining’ and ‘Save Our Sperrins’; also read “Gold mining in the Sperrins” by Miriam Turley, http://www.innatenonviolence.org/readings/2019_09.shtml (second item)

Questions:
1) Why is gold mining proposed for the Sperrins?
2) Why do local communities want to resist, and how have they been doing so?
15. General
Look through, say, 6 – 8 issues of the news sections of the INNATE monthly publication *Nonviolent News* chosen at random from http://www.innatenonviolence.org/news/index.shtml

Questions:
1) What kind of overall impression does this give of peace, nonviolent and campaigning work in Ireland at the moment, either Northern Ireland or the Republic?

2) Do you have a favourite news item because of its wider importance or because it is on an issue close to your heart?

16. Conclusions
This section is about ‘wrapping up’ and ‘pointing forward’ – what have we learnt from studying this material and ‘where do we go from here’?

Questions:
1) Coming back to the question made initially, at the start, can we talk about ‘nonviolence in Ireland’? And in what way? Has your opinion changed since being involved in this study?

2) Brainstorm and list examples of nonviolence/nonviolent action, nationally or locally, not included here [INNATE would be pleased to hear your examples, see Introduction to this study guide]

3) What are the most important issues for peace work and general campaigning in Ireland today?

4) Do you have any impressions from working through this material about how we should work on issues of concern today in terms of approaches, tactics etc?

5) Are there things which you would like to follow up further, following this study?

● Produced by INNATE, June 2020

Illustration credits: The illustration accompanying the title of this study guide shows the poster for the War Resisters’ International Triennial conference which took place in Dublin in 2002. A number of the illustrations (for items 0, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 15) accompanying this guide are from the INNATE downloadable poster collection, A4 size, for home printing at http://www.innatenonviolence.org/posters/index.shtml The cartoon in the poster for Item 0 is by Len Munnik. 7 shows a poster for the first Carnsore Point Anti-Nuclear Festival, 1978. Item 8 shows the cover of an issue of Irish CND’s magazine, ‘Disarmament Today’ for July/August 1983. Item 9 shows the cover of Mary Manning’s book on the Dunnes Stores strike, photo by Derek Speirs. Item 10 shows a photo of the statue of St Brigid at St Brigid’s Well in Kildare. Item 11 is an INNATE photo of a Garda escort for a Corrib Gas construction convoy, 2011. Item 12 shows the cover of an Extinction Rebellion leaflet, 2019. Item 13 shows the cover of a pamphlet by John Lannon produced by PANA and IAWM, 2012. Item 14 is a photo by Miriam Turley of a ‘GPO’ (Greencastle People’s Office) caravan at protest camp, Mullydoo Road, February 2019. ●