A process of analysis

(2) The Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community

Compiled by **Michael Hall**

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The Project wishes to thank all those who participated
in the discussions and interviews from which this publication was compiled

Although the Community Relations Council has provided generous support to Farset Community Think Tanks Project over the years, on this occasion a request for assistance was turned down on the grounds that CRC's funding "must be targeted to ensure best value with respect to the promotion of good relations." The outcome was that I had to fall back (not for the first time) on personal savings to cover the three months' work involved. ***Michael Hall***

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Introduction

Sixteen years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement issues surrounding identity, marching and flags in Northern Ireland remain as contentious as ever. Even the Stormont House Agreement (December 2014) in which Northern Ireland's political parties seemingly reached a consensus on a range of financial and legacy matters, once again pushed any discussion of identity-related issues further into the future. (I say 'seemingly', for as this publication goes to print the Stormont Executive is yet again encountering difficulties.)

Concerned at this ongoing situation, in October 2014 community activists had asked Farset Community Think Tanks Project if it could help to stimulate dialogue on these matters at a grassroots level. The Project decided to revisit an approach first utilised in Northern Ireland (in the 1970s) by Australian conflict resolution scholar/practitioner John W. Burton (1915-2010), who had been assisted by West Belfast community activist Joe Camplisson.

Burton believed that governments and mediators often confused a 'conflict' with a 'dispute'. A *dispute* could normally be resolved through negotiation and compromise, but a *conflict* – particularly one containing a strong identity-related dimension – was usually not amenable to compromise and required a quite different approach: one in which the protagonists engaged in an in-depth analysis of their respective positions, with the hope that if – as a result of this analysis – they were encouraged to view their conflict as a 'shared problem', they could then seek ways of moving – jointly – to a 'win/win' outcome.

As a test-run of a somewhat slimmed-down version of such a process, Farset Community Think Tanks Project decided to facilitate the setting up of two separate series of discussions: one involving the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, and one involving the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community.

Each grouping would be asked an identical set of questions:

(1) ***What do you feel lies at the root of the conflict?***

(2) ***What are your community's core goals and aspirations?***

(3) ***Have you considered the possibility that some of the strategies employed to advance your core aspirations might actually serve to undermine them?***

(4) ***Can you envisage sitting down with your opponents on the basis that what you are confronting is, in reality, a 'shared problem'?***

If the answer to this last question was affirmative (or if there were sufficient participants who felt this way) then a third series of discussions would be facilitated, bringing participants from both groupings into a *joint* process of analysis.

In the joint analysis the participants would be encouraged to identify impediments to the resolution of the conflict and explore how these might be collectively addressed. They would explore possible actions and strategies which could be taken, both by themselves and by the other major players, to engender *movement towards* conflict resolution and move the situation towards a 'win/win' outcome. They would explore possible alternative strategies for the attainment of aspirations and goals.

The preceding pamphlet in this series (No. 107) presented a summary of the discussions undertaken by representatives of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community.

This follow-on pamphlet is an edited account of the opinions expressed during a series of one-to-one interviews, and a number of small-group discussions, reflecting a range of political and grassroots opinion within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community. Most of the participants are involved in a variety of community development activities, and some are ex-combatants. Everyone who took part did so in a purely personal capacity.

Tim Attwood	**Breandán Clarke**	**Michael Doherty**
Gerry Foster	**Fra Halligan**	**Tommy Holland**
Geraldine Hyndman	**Rab McCallum**	**Jim McCorry**
Karen McDevitt	**Roisin McGlone**	**Sean Montgomery**
Joe O'Donnell	**Sean O'Hare**	**Paul O'Neill**
Fr. Desmond Wilson		

Michael Hall *Co-ordinator, Farset Community Think Tanks Project*

(If the joint engagement does take place it will be described in Pamphlet No. 109)

A process of analysis:

The Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community

The opinions and comments summarised below were gathered during a series of one-to-one interviews and small-group discussions. For ease of accessibility they have been collated here under the four major questions asked (listed on page 3). Participants responded to those questions in a variety of ways. Some answered them directly, others used them as jumping-off points for a diverse assortment of thoughts and opinions. However, all pertinent comments have been included, as each of them was felt to be a valuable contribution to the overall debate.

(1) What are the root causes of the Northern Ireland conflict?

The long hand of history

• To determine the core of the conflict we have to go back into history. And it is hard to disagree with the assertion that the root cause of our conflict has all to do with the sovereignty of the island of Ireland, whereby those people who consider themselves to be Irish aspire to an independent, unified nation. Now, there are many specific incidents of conflict between Britain and Ireland... Cromwell, the Plantation... but in its broadest sense the root cause remains the struggle for sovereignty of the island.

• The roots of the conflict lie in the taking-over of territory in Ireland. From what was initially a communal possession of land some families became more powerful and asserted their influence by force. Like the O'Neills: that was the first significant take-over. They then came into conflict with other families for mastership of even more territory. Then along came the Vikings, followed by the Anglo-Normans. And all of this was to do with the acquisition of territory. Then the Elizabethans instigated a prolonged series of wars. The ordinary people of Ireland had their lives ruled by a successive assortment of rulers, some native, some invaders. The amazing thing is that even invaders of a country, if they rule with decency, can become accepted. If they don't, they are resented. So the question to me is how can you create decency in government, for good governance could bring people together in a new vision, and free them from the constraints of the past. A natural political evolution might then occur, which could go either way: Catholics might feel happy staying with the Union, or Protestants might feel it was advantageous to link up with people down south. But we would be looking at our options from the point of view of *our*

wellbeing and advantage, not dictated to by the political, historical and cultural divisions which have arisen as products of our history. But, of course, as people move towards such a new relationship, others will try to recreate old divisions as diversions, like the controversy over parades. Take the 1930s, when ordinary people had a concern with their welfare and dignity, but were divided by vested interests.

• There are a lot of myths built up about our history. People talk about the 'Flight of the Earls', and think of them as great Irishmen. But I would ask: why was it not called the 'Flight of the Chieftains?' An 'Earl' is an English title. They were never Irish patriots until it suited them, until their lands were encroached upon. They didn't fight for Ireland, they fought to retain their ownership of land, and encouraged Irish peasants to fight and die on their behalf. But somehow they are presented as pure patriots. Someone once said that the 'lament of the Gael' is not the lament of the Irish peasantry, it is the lament of the dispossessed Gaelic ruling class. After the Penal Law period, the British built Maynooth for the Catholic Church and that was them bought off. Once the Church realised that the British were not going to interfere with them they had no problems with each other.

When I was at school the Christian Brothers built this image of the British occupation as an oppressive, brutal machine. Everything was grand in this wee country until the British got involved. Yes, there were the Penal Laws; yes, there was oppression. But they didn't want to tell you that it was an Irish king who invited the British here in the first place. Or about Maynooth, or the hierarchy's condemnation of the 1798 rebellion and their support for the Act of Union. When I first got involved in the conflict I would never had understood Connolly's comment that if you simply remove the British flag from Dublin Castle and replace it with a green flag you will have changed nothing. I would have thought: "What the f__k is he on about! We will have got rid of them … so we've won!" And talk about bankers and capitalists meant nothing to me. But the shit rolls down the hill, and whether you're in an Irish or a British capitalist system it runs down over the working class. Yet when you talk to pure nationalists or pure republicans about that they don't want to know. They have this narrow image of our history, of what the British did to us, but they don't talk about what *the Irish did to the Irish* during those 800 years as well.

• We cannot continue looking back to the past. How far do you go back? To when Cromwell's troops pitchforked babies in Drogheda and Dundalk? To 1690? To 1916?

• It seems as if cultural identity, even sectarianism, has a much greater pull than any efforts to create a cross-community, class-based alliance which can try to address all the issues which divide us head on. And if you look at the fundamentalist republican argument, they will say: look, we told you so, you will never resolve this situation until the contradiction of Partition is removed; it is only when you end Partition and the British withdraw that the Unionists will enter serious negotiations. And that's the argument that is being used by those dissidents who can articulate an argument – they

are saying: Sinn Féin has sold out, for too little. They have accepted Partition, they are allowing unionists to still dictate, and what have they got in return? Nothing. Our areas are very much the same, there's been no real investment in them, everything's much the same. You have a bit of peace and quiet on the streets, but little else. Now, I don't accept that argument. We were maybe too optimistic about how easy it would be to address all these issues, but the only way you are going to get a stable, progressive society in Ireland, North and South, is by a process of working our way through all these things together, through dialogue – and on the understanding that violence will never be used again, by any side, to resolve things.

• I think the media tend to present our conflict as all about attitudes. But if you only go back to the Sixties and Seventies, the root of the conflict here was to do with how the Northern state was being managed; and it was being run on a sectarian, single-culture approach to things, which didn't allow for people who were Catholics or nationalists to have any real say in decision-making processes. And when attempts within unionism to modernise were smashed by those at the extreme, it was a recipe for conflict, and that was the situation until you had the peace agreement. I think the resonant effects of all of that still haven't been sorted out: despite the Good Friday Agreement, you have conflict by other means now. But again, I don't think anyone can make any sense of it without putting it into its historical context: the relationship between England and Ireland, and the colonial nature of that relationship. For everything that is wrong, I think, flows from that: Partition, how the state was managed.... And a lot of other things: like supremacism, and this idea that some people are superior and some inferior – that's another product of colonialism.

• Sometimes you think we have moved on in many ways, but the things that seem to be preventing further progress are still linked to old attitudes and behaviours. I suppose unionists would say: have a look at yourselves and your own attitudes. I am not saying that sectarianism only comes from one community, but I think that the key motivating cause of it is systemic rather than just to do with attitudes and behaviours. Sectarianism and supremacist attitudes were promoted and harnessed by the state, and I think that is a key cause of the conflict here. People did not wake up one morning and decide they didn't like each other – it was fostered by the state.

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The desire for power

• What is at the root of our conflict? Power and greed – that sums it up for me. People usually focus on incidents of history, but these are *merely the consequences* of power-driven relationships, and it is the desire for power which is at the root of

all conflict. There is this perception that we, the Irish people, have always been in the role of victims. And while there is a certain truth in that, nothing is ever so straightforward. Take the Catholic Church. It went from being oppressed under the Penal Laws to being accorded a special status in the new Irish state. And what did it do? It stood rigidly against progressive policies, it exploited young women in its sweatshops, and it covered up the abuse of many of our most vulnerable citizens. And as for my fellow republicans? I can remember being battered by the RUC for attempting to march through the centre of my own city, and now republicans are trying to prevent Protestants from marching! So, could I put my hand on my heart and appeal to Protestants to join us in a United Ireland, believing that they would be treated as equal citizens? No, I couldn't, for there is no certainty that I myself – an atheist, internationalist socialist – would be treated as an equal citizen. I would hold no allegiance whatsoever to all-Ireland institutions unless those institutions were going to reflect the type of relationships between people which I feel are needed for this society – indeed, Humankind – to progress.

• I would agree with that; I would say 'power' as well. Everybody wants power, especially in Stormont, where they should be working together but aren't – they just want to outdo one another. You can see it when they're being interviewed on TV, they get on like children. If the 'curry my yoghurt' and that kind of stuff was said in here [community project], I would be sacked. But it doesn't seem to matter what politicians say, it just gets laughed off. They are not working together. And yet they're getting well paid for what they do. In our project if we weren't doing a proper job our funding would be cut – but not them, they get money hand over fist.

The continuing quest for the truth

• For me, at the root of today's conflict would be the unanswered questions. There was a big outcry about how much the Saville Inquiry cost. But I deal day and daily with people who have gone through the trauma of the conflict and lost loved ones. And after all this time – the ceasefires, the 'peace process' – people have only now got the chance to ask questions: why is their mother not there, or father not there? People – from *all* communities – want answers to what happened to their loved ones. Now, I am not ignoring all the killings done by republicans and loyalists – people deserve answers to those as well – but the likes of Bloody Sunday and the Ballymurphy Massacre were government-sanctioned killings. To me these came out of a deliberate 'shock and awe' strategy: "Ballymurphy is at the heart of the Troubles. Right, let's go in there and kill all round us. That will scare the bejesus out of them and break their spirit." And that was sanctioned by the government. People ask whether if, in August 1971, some decent people in the British government had questioned the role of the paratroopers, and said, "This is wrong; they have gone in and killed 11 people: priests, men, women, mothers, fathers, sisters," then six months later Bloody Sunday might

never have happened. And when Derry happened it was still ignored, and *six months later still* they came back into Springhill estate and massacred another five people, and *six months after that* they went into Ardoyne. It was as if a group of snipers was being deployed here every six months to go in and put repeated shocks into the Catholic community. We can't just wish away the trauma of all that.

So, the root of today's conflict, for many people, is all to do with the loss of their loved ones. And there were so many incidents happening on a daily basis – explosions, gun battles, people being killed, houses wrecked, people arrested – that at that stage nobody went out and started a campaign for the truth, nobody questioned. But when the peace process came along, people could begin to seek answers about the deaths of their loved ones. And we have to get away from the usual blame and counter-blame game: "British soldiers wouldn't have done such and such if the IRA hadn't done such and such...." *Everyone* who lost a loved one has the right to seek the truth. And when we sit down in cross-community meetings our Protestant counterparts should accept that *we* have the right to engage in justice campaigns, and we should accept that *they* should be able to do likewise – but that all of us should still get on with the work in hand.

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Everyone ***who lost a loved one has the right to seek the truth.***

• There is so much pain and hurt right across this whole society, so many heart-rending stories. One of the worst I heard was from this guy who described when he and his brother – they were both toddlers – were being bathed by their mother and gunmen burst into their house. And she was screaming, "Don't do it in front of the children!" But they went ahead and shot her dead anyway. And the younger brother sat with his hands on the back of their mother's head and held her brains from falling out, and that's how the paramedics found them. Then, when he was sixteen, his father was also shot dead in front of him. Now, that guy is considered to be a 'dissident', and so his story might not receive the empathy it should from mainstream republicans. But *everyone* who has a story like that not only has a right to be heard, but a right to our support and compassion.

The failure to challenge perceptions

• We create mental images of different groups of people, and we don't like these being disturbed. Many republicans view all loyalists a certain way, and loyalists view us a certain way. And it is not just confined to here: we hold certain perceptions regarding other arenas of conflict as well. For example, we have this image that all Palestinians think a certain way, and that all Israelis think one way. Yet when I was over there I found a real diversity of opinion within both groups. But the biggest

shock I got was when I was in South Africa and a black guy said to me that they were better off under apartheid! I was shocked, for I couldn't imagine anyone saying that. He said to us: "Look, you will be meeting ANC people... just ask them: 'Where is the Freedom Charter now?' There wasn't a black house that didn't possess a copy of the Freedom Charter, which stated that all the wealth of the country would be distributed amongst all of the people. Ask them where it is now." And when I did speak to ANC people it was embarrassing, for they were talking about how great freedom was and I was quoting all these dire unemployment and crime statistics, some of them worse than in apartheid days. The ANC had been in power ten years and yet at their third election only 37% of people came out to vote – and I asked if they saw this as an indictment on their rule. And as for the Freedom Charter? There was no mention of it. And some of my group said to me, "You're a bit heavy on these people." And I said, "But they're selling us a lie."

What I'm getting at is that we have to be just as honest about ourselves and our own 'peace process'. People come here hoping to 'learn lessons' from us. Students and those who have no direct experience of conflict will fall into the lies, but people from the Middle East or the Balkans realise the reality immediately. Some of them have said to me: "This is not a resolved conflict: it is conflict management or conflict transformation, but it's not a permanent peace." They see the walls still here, they know there are still very divisive issues, yet they were sold the lie that, "We had an 800-year-old war and got it sorted, so come on over!" And they go away *even more despondent* because they realise that there *are* no real lessons to be learnt from here.

• We also have to be more honest about what went on. We have to challenge notions that have remained unquestioned. For example, republicans – and I include myself – often said that we engaged in armed struggle because we "had no option". But most of my childhood and teenage mates *didn't* get involved in the republican struggle, that's a fact. Most people in this country didn't get involved in the struggle. People emigrated, got jobs, raised families, all with this mess going on, and didn't get involved. We need to nail the lie that "we didn't have a choice but to engage in armed struggle". We did! We either didn't like those choices or we thought that armed struggle was the *best* choice. But we did have choices. People who were burned out of their homes lifted their furniture and moved, and never got involved. I have a friend whose mother and brother were both shot dead by the British Army three years apart, and not one of that family – of eleven kids – got involved in the republican struggle, not one. Now, if anyone had a reason it was them – indeed, they had more right than me. But they never did. Everybody who is involved in armed struggle thinks violence is justified, and that those who question it are just wishy-washy, not as true an Irish person as them. Those are the things we need to challenge within our own community. And loyalism has to do the same, about *their* violence. We all need to challenge these myths.

• Gerry Adams was interviewed by Peter Taylor for a documentary last year [*Who Won the War?* BBC1, 29.09.14], and in response to a question about the armed struggle he replied something like: 'Show me anywhere in the world where people gained their rights without bloodletting.' But there have been numerous examples of *non-violent* revolutions.† It didn't have to be armed struggle.

• The exploiting class must be laughing at us: working-class unionists obsessed with flags and parades, and working-class nationalists obsessed with 'no Orange feet!' It really depresses me that socialist-minded republicans are allowing themselves to be side-tracked by this issue.

The 'peace process' itself – or lack of one

There is no peace process here, it's all ad hoc: there's bits here, bits there, there's no real structure to it.

• There was an important analysis published last year which more or less pointed out that there is no peace process here: people are making it up as they go along. We're not dealing with the past, it's all ad hoc: there's bits here, bits there, there's no real structure to it. When the DUP and Sinn Féin first sat down together, they should have said: 'Look, this needs to filter through to the grassroots; what can we do to help embed this process?' They could have used bodies like the Joseph Rowntree Trust to commission research to determine what needed to be done by, say, 2015, 2020 – regarding the peacewalls, or parades or whatever.

They could have urged the BBC to do programmes looking at identity in its *broadest* sense, not the narrowly-focused programmes they usually do. For example, get them to give a different view of Protestant bandsmen than people usually see. I myself have a different view of bandsmen after having worked with them in Ballynafeigh. But the typical nationalist sees these people as drunken louts who like to beat out their tunes simply to annoy Catholics. And why is that? Because that is all we see on the news, especially at Ardoyne or Short Strand. So present a broader picture of the bandsmen: okay, show what they do on the Twelfth, but also what they do *every other day*. And try and engage the bandsmen with the perceptions *held about them* by nationalists: "Do you realise that most Catholics think that you are just drunken fools, pretending to be toy soldiers? If there is more to it than that, then let us see it." Ask them if they have any understanding of *why* Catholics might feel insulted about their behaviour. And urge the bandsmen to explain to us why Catholics *shouldn't* feel insulted. Why it is *not* triumphalism. Because if they can't do that, then the residents are right in what they are saying, it *is* about insulting us. And vice versa with *our* community. Take the negative image the unionist community would have

† Gandhi's 'Salt Satyagraha' (India, 1930); The 'Carnation Revolution' (Portugal, 1974); The 'Yellow Revolution' (Philippines, 1986); The 'Singing Revolution' (Baltic States, 1987-9); The 'Velvet Revolution' (Czechoslovakia, 1989); The 'Peaceful Revolution' (East Germany, 1989).

of our community and get us to confront that image and consider just why it might be so negative. As I said, sit down and work out a structure, a process, whereby the suspicions of the past, held by *both* communities, can be explored and addressed. The problem with the 'peace process' is that there *is* no actual 'process'.

Current socio-economic realities

• Forget about the past: look at what is happening today. The grassroots community sector is in danger of meltdown. Every single worker in my organisation, myself included, is on 'protective notice'. The community is totally burnt out. We are stretched to the limit by all the work big agencies dump on us, work they cannot do themselves. See the people I have worked with over many years, the amount of voluntary time they commit, it is unbelievable. I am telling you now that it is no longer possible for us to keep taking and taking. I am looking at people who are at breaking point. Take the very successful Healthy Hearts initiative, when it operated in Upper Falls. All the research carried out on it revealed the hundreds of young people and families we engaged with. But we had a pool of integrated services workers who did 80% of that work – and there's *none* of them here any more.

• The imminent closure of our [ex-prisoner support] project is going to leave a big gap in services. But it is also feeding into the sense that the whole ex-prisoner question is not being addressed. We have had people come in here, when they heard that we were closing, quite distraught: "Where will I go for help?" And we're talking about large sections of the community– in the hundreds – especially around this area.

• Another big change is the ready availability of drugs, in a way we never had before in our communities. People are going in and out of bars and clubs and openly snorting coke; I'm talking to parents whose kids are just out of their heads. I was driving around the area the other day and seen people openly dealing to school-kids. We also have real concerns about the criminality engaged in by young people who need to get the money for these drugs. It is ravishing communities. We have really challenging times ahead, at a community level. I think politicians have become removed from the realities of what life is like on the ground.

• When you're arguing about flags and parades no-one is sitting down and asking why people are lying in hospital corridors, or questioning MLAs about their expenses. Or why it is that Stormont has 166 press officers! Do we need them, or would that money not be better spent improving the educational prospects of working-class kids, or employing more nurses, doctors.... Some years ago my son was doing an 'A' level in Politics. He showed me a paper, a comparative study of politics in Britain and the North, written by a professor at Queens, and one of the things which leapt out at me was that the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers had a staff of almost 400, while Tony Blair's office had a staff of 250. I said to my son that it must be a typing error: you can't have 400

representing a population of one and a half million, while Blair, for a population of 60 million, only needs 250 – it must be wrong. Four weeks later Brian Feeney repeated the same statistics in the *Irish News*. I was astounded! Surely to God somebody has realised what is going on! There is a gravy train up there, and yet the people on the ground are not questioning it. But you never get round to those debates, for what it will come down to is flags, marches, or whatever other controversies are used to divert people's attention.

• I am a great supporter of John Hume's analysis. Right from the start he said the problem was all to do with relationships: between the communities in the North, between North and South, and between Britain and Ireland. Those relationships were at the core and heart of the problems which were causing the conflict. Hume's analysis was that unless you resolved all those fundamental strands you would never get progress. And it was also about social justice. At the time of the Good Friday Agreement there was a great hope that things were going to change fundamentally. There was hope that the Agreement was going to resolve not only some of the political problems but also some of the social and economic problems impacting on working-class areas. Have we achieved what we set out to achieve in the Good Friday Agreement? Clearly not. In political terms the Executive is controlled by two big parties and very much dominated by them – and the DUP and Sinn Féin positions are almost tribal. But we have also fallen short of our hopes to tackle social and economic problems. Take part of my constituency – Whiterock – ten years ago it was placed third in terms of disadvantage – it is now first! Men die ten years younger in North and West Belfast than in South Belfast. The fundamental socio-economic issues that affect West Belfast have in many ways got worse, and we haven't got a handle on them. There is short-termism in government, and a lack of ambition to develop a dedicated strategy to tackle problems on a long-term basis.

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Take those two young people who spoke during President Clinton's visit to the Mackies site. He goes home and the site ends up empty; worse, it becomes a battleground between rival kids from across the interface. So instead of providing hope for those young people, you provide them with a battleground. There is no vision, or long-term strategy to confront disadvantage. There are wonderful people doing great work in working-class areas, and have been doing that work for many years, but they are struggling to keep things from going backwards. As John Hume said, if you can get agreement on how to drive economic change then the other issues might be easier to deal with. The very difficult issue of policing was tackled and, although not perfect, a working

arrangement was achieved. Why can't we do that with other contentious issues?

• Republicans might argue among themselves as to whether or not they are moving any closer to their ideals, but to me the main conversations that are going on in our communities are about basic things: jobs, housing, the state of our communities, poverty, health, and how we are very much still in the ghetto sixteen years after the Good Friday Agreement.

Failure to engage in difficult conversations

• People who criticise the 'folks on the hill' should articulate what it is they are advocating instead, what change means to them. I have been to endless meetings where speaker after speaker highlights all the problems, and researchers provide all the statistics, but very rarely do people say: now, here's what we should do about it. Usually the comments they make are bland and only skim the surface of the problems. That's our difficulty, we don't have people sitting down and saying: right, let's thoroughly explore the problems that we have and try and come up with solutions. Let's face it, there has been 30 to 40 years of cross-community work going on, yet it can be upset overnight by an issue like the parades dispute. But who is working on that? Here is a clear problem which needs to be resolved by everybody: let's get in there and do it. But people walk away: no, it's too dirty, I don't want to get involved, I don't want to be seen to be too partisan. And yet for all those thousands of people who have been involved in 'good relations'-type work, there are only a handful of people working on the parading problem. Where did everyone else go?

• We can all work away at things that are commonly agreed, but if we don't begin to address those things which *aren't* commonly agreed how do we move forward? There is no point sleepwalking along quietly for five years and then bang! another crisis comes along which polarises everyone again, as Drumcree did, as Twaddell does. When these things come along *everyone* takes a stance, one way or the other.

• In most republican discourse a United Ireland has really been off the agenda for a long time now; the talk now is about a 'new' Ireland. Now, we might all have different opinions and ideas as to what a new Ireland might look like, but it has to be one in which every citizen is fostered equally. Now, that sounds very trite, but we need a new Ireland where every single citizen is welcomed and cherished. We need to begin talking about how we can establish a new social structure for this whole island.

• That conversation does not take place. Decades ago we talked about the *Éire Nua* option, or whether we would have the same flag, or still play *The Soldiers' Song*. But I never hear that conversation any more. And why are Unionists not saying, "Look, the UK is a much better option, and here's how we can entice you to remain here." No unionist has ever spelled out to me where *my future* is in their concept of what *they* would like to see for the future. There has not been that debate. And, likewise,

where does someone from the Protestant community fit within *my* concept of a new Ireland? What would it actually look like for Protestants? We don't have those conversations, they are kept in the cupboard as if we are afraid of letting the bogyman out. We have to debate our way to a new society. There is no military solution to it, there can only be a political solution, but that solution must be satisfactory to both communities. And how do you do that? Who begins that conversation?

• There is a new generation coming through. Most young people in our areas are now more interested in Ed Sheeran, or that Justin Bieber is in town, or that Rihanna's here. The present generation is not too fussed about politics the way we were. But if it all happens again, they could be re-motivated. Things need to be resolved now, in case it all comes back to us, and our grandchildren have to face it all again.

• You get all these academic studies talking about the deep sense of unease within the Protestant community, about flags and parades, etc. And people assume that this perception is the reality for the *whole* Protestant community. But there is a difference between a perception and a reality, and people constantly feed the perception and don't challenge it. And we also hear this thing, every five years or so, that, "Oh, the Protestant community is not ready to move forward; single-identity work is still necessary to boost their self-confidence and enhance their capabilities..." I mean, the Protestant community was able to run an extremely successful Covenant Day parade, and it can mobilise en masse around flags and marching issues. So the capability *is* there! Yet they have been unable to mobilise on issues about how we might engage together. Anyway, we don't meet the Protestant community – we meet *certain sections* of the Protestant community, many of them from the UDA and UVF. How do we connect with the wider Protestant community, with the silent majority?

• Despite the gloom, I think we *have* made progress. If you look at North Belfast I can't remember the last time we had an attack; incidents of paramilitary violence are at an all-time low. Ordinary people will walk around in each other's area. People from Ardoyne walk over to Tescos on the Woodvale, and don't seem concerned. So people are doing things they never did before. People associate together more, work together. But we need to take those final steps, for unless we move beyond where we are now there will always be the potential of going backwards. We need to tackle the big questions. We all do this interface work together, but when it comes to the Twelfth there's me standing on one side of the road and the partners I work with all year round standing on the other side, and they are adamant that their parade should go up, and I am equally adamant that it shouldn't. And then two days later we are sitting back together again looking at different problems. I think we might have to

I think we* have *made progress. But we need to take those final steps, for unless we move beyond where we are now there will always be the potential of going backwards.

accept that there might be *no* reconciliation of our differences. We might need to say: okay, we will never agree, but let's look at how we move on towards something else. I think that at the moment we are too focused on trying to make everyone agree.

• We need to stop all this 'single-identity' work – it all needs to be done *jointly* now. If we want to look to our children, or our grandchildren – after all, we are *twenty years* into the ceasefires! – *we need to be getting down to it*, as a matter of urgency. If you listen to some of the young people on *The Nolan Show*, especially students, many of them say they can't wait to finish their studies and get out of here. Is that what we want? People are leaving here because we can't let go of the Past. I would love to see new leaders emerging, more concerned with economics, health, welfare, than the old divisive issues. The welfare cuts that are coming scare me. And this nonsense about "your community is getting more than ours" needs to stop – social and economic disadvantage is the *same* in working-class areas, Protestant and Catholic.

• Talking about *The Nolan Show*: I think it is now one of our biggest problems. Nolan's seeking out, and stoking, controversy all the time. I wonder if he realises the negative impact his approach is having on cross-community efforts.

• Mark Durkan once spoke to a group of Ulster Unionists in Bangor, and afterwards they said to him: that is the first time anybody has sold us the Good Friday Agreement. Unionism presents the Agreement as a defeat – everything to them is a defeat – and that only feeds into what is happening on the streets. Robinson admitted that the Union is safer, but Unionists don't sell what they have achieved. We need a real debate. There are not enough opportunities for that kind of debate across the political divide. You have to create such opportunities. What does the future looks like? For all of us? And that debate should not threaten anyone. We [SDLP] canvas on the Shankill. The first time we did we were wary, but people came out and actually thanked us for coming to speak to them. Indeed, we often got a more respectful reception there than in some nationalist areas! How do we encourage that debate, for I think ordinary people would be up for it.

• The statistics don't bear out this claim from the PUL community that Catholics are better off. It is just not true. But it is contributing to the problem. Look at North Belfast, one of the so-called 'sectarian hotspots': little has changed, there has been no real investment. Same with West Belfast. And that feeds into the negative mindsets. But we are still not mature enough to deal with the real issues, and move forward in a democratic, rational way. The tail has always wagged the dog here. It used to be Paisley, and look at the damage he did. It is now the likes of the Jim Allisters, who don't represent that many people, but they have the two Unionist parties running shit-scared of them, on a whole range of issues. So that poison is still in the system. There's a lack of vision, and a lack of leadership – it's all about following the crowd.

(2) What are your core goals and aspirations?

A new challenge

• At the core are these two different identities, one British, the other Irish. Other things come into it, like religion, but at the core is the Irish-British division. Two ethnic identities which have not resolved their relationship. For some it is also a case of *stolen identity*: the British occupation has prevented them from being who they want to be – and to me that is at the root of it.

• I was once made to fundamentally question my aspirations. When I was in prison this guy asked me, "What were you fighting for?" "To get the Brits out." "And then what?" "Well, that's it over." "Yes, but what about unemployment, what about poverty?" And I looked at him as if he was an idiot. I had this crazy idea that the minute you got the Brits out everything would be fine. And he pointed out to me about how bad life was in Dublin: poor housing, unemployment, immigration. He said, "That's not the Brits doing that." And then the question which really f__ked me up: "You consider yourself a socialist?" "Yes, why?" "What if the United Kingdom was to become a socialist republic – why would you want to make things worse for your community by leaving a socialist republic to join a capitalist United Ireland?" I remember feeling really irritated with him. I was going to myself: don't make me think about this! I had this assumption that once we got rid of the Brits everything would be fine. And it was so naive... in fact, it wasn't even naive, it was f__king stupid! But I began to open myself up to challenging ideas. Republicans still haven't got past that point of *not* having a United Ireland – but would it really matter where you were administered from as long as the people were looked after? That's a discussion we maybe need to have: why is it so important to get the Brits out of Ireland? Let us explore that, and actually come up with something broader than a simple 'Brits Out'. Our core aspirations should stem from what is best for our families and our communities – especially working-class communities – and not be subservient to romantic ideals and emotions.

We all suffer from this desire for 'purity'. Here's our pure Irish Nationalism and don't dare chip away at it. Here's our pure British Unionism and don't dare chip away at it.

• We all suffer from this desire for 'purity'. Here's our pure Irish Nationalism and don't dare chip away at it. Here's our pure British Unionism and don't dare chip away at it. And these things around identity... My identity isn't Irish – that's my nationality. My *identity* is forever changing: I'm not the same person I was when I was ten, or 17, or when I got out of prison at 25... our identity is constantly changing. And what brings about that change

is meeting new people, people who think differently from you, who challenge your perceptions. The more you interact with people the more you are challenged in your perceptions, not only about *them* but even about who and what *you* are.

• People can feel as British as they want to feel. I mean, I am in the United Kingdom, yet it doesn't stop me feeling Irish, so there is no reason Protestants could not feel British in a new Ireland. We can all be who we want to be and still contribute to the nation. After Partition people became polarised. In the South people denied their 'British' history – after all, 40,000 Irishmen died in British uniforms in the First World War – and in the North people denied their 'Irish' history and the Irishness within *their* identity. If we are genuinely seeking a *united* Ireland, then you have to accommodate *all* identities. I would also like to know why Protestants don't incorporate *us* into their Twelfth of July parade, why it is so important they do it the way they do. This present generation didn't fight at the Boyne, it is not a living memory, so let's try and look at it with different eyes. In other countries they can jointly celebrate formerly-divisive battles, like the Civil War re-enactments in the US. I would like to see the Battle of the Boyne being celebrated, not emotively and divisively, but simply as an important historical battle fought on this island.†

• I remember watching the Apprentice Boys' parade in Derry and feeling: there's nothing about the way they're walking, or their demeanour, or their attitude – and it was possibly to do with the better atmosphere that has been created in Derry – that really annoys me. In fact, it was quite enjoyable in a way. There was no swagger, no aggression. Yet, by contrast, I remember seeing the images of Orangemen going past the shops in Ardoyne, the hatred in their faces, making me go: "Look at those f__king bastards!" And I was asking myself: how do you get from being *totally* offended to *not* being offended? I think the vast majority of the people in Ardoyne aren't fussed one way or the other about the actual march. It's this business about "Stay in your box, you're inferior to us, you're nothing but scum" – *that's* the issue here. That needs to be acknowledged and dealt with.

• One of the things which annoys me is that people with a strong sense of identity are seen by some as 'the problem'. Appeals are constantly made for all of us to meet somewhere in the middle. But what does 'in the middle' mean? What history do you

† The Siege of Derry centenary commemoration, held on 7 December 1788, showed, as A T Q Stewart [in *The Narrow Ground*] pointed out, "how the celebration of the historic event might have developed in a more 'natural' way, allowing the townsfolk of both creeds to take civic pride in it." An early history of the Siege described how the celebrations culminated: "The mayor and corporation, the clergy, the officers of the navy and army, the clergy of the Church of Rome, the gentlemen from the country, volunteers, citizens, scholars and apprentices set down to a plain but plentiful dinner in the Town Hall. Religious dissensions, in particular, seemed to be buried in oblivion, and Roman Catholic vied with Protestant in expressing... their sense of the blessings secured to them by the event which they were commemorating."

teach? What are all the things which you are prepared to change? Do you change *The Queen*? *The Soldiers' Song?* You just can't will all the differences away. Maybe we should just accept the fact that we might *never* find reconciliation; that the most we can hope for is a workable accommodation. And that accommodation will probably not mean Catholics settling down into a 6-County Ulster, or Protestants settling down into a 32-County Ireland – there will need to be some other alternative. And at the minute there is a fear of addressing that alternative, especially from those sections – on *either* side – who would feel that *any* alternative will necessitate a huge loss.

• We don't know what the future might hold. There's a hurling team down near the Burren – called 'Midlands West' or something like that – and 13 out of the first 15 starting players in the team are all foreign nationals – and they are brilliant. Most of them are from African backgrounds. The future might be quite different from what we all imagine now, but it shouldn't threaten us.

A growing disillusionment

• I was in my local GAA club the other evening and we were all talking about the prospect of a United Ireland, and not one person said they would vote for it – not one! Years ago that would have been unheard of. The vast majority of people aren't interested in these things any more. If you try to talk about socialism, or even the concept of a United Ireland, they look at you as if you are some sort of idiot! Either people no longer believe these things are possible, or they just don't care.

• I would like to see a socialist Ireland, a community-based society, with community ownership, co-operatives, things like that. To me, a new society is not just about new structures but about the human relationships which exist within those structures. But how do we bring such a society about? There was a time when I genuinely believed it was inevitable, for it all made so much sense to me. And I set up a co-op and other projects, and we talked about setting up a people's bank, and community self-government... all those type of things. Then I found that people were ripping off the co-op, and when we began to make a profit, rather than putting it back into more community enterprises, the committee voted me out and split the money between them! Maybe it is an age thing too, but I no longer believe that the society which I once thought was inevitable will ever happen. I think that we're controlled by that box in the corner of the room. We no longer exist as individuals with a sense of belief; we exist collectively with our beliefs and attitudes determined for us by others. But can we see ourselves as World Citizens with a global vision, and get away from narrow Irish/British divisions? I very much doubt it.

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• All that stuff from years back no longer impacts on me. I will never let all that ideological stuff influence me ever again. We ended up no better off because of the Troubles. All those people lost their lives – for what?

I will never let all that ideological stuff influence me ever again. We ended up no better off because of the Troubles. All those people lost their lives – for what?

• Maybe it is because I'm getting older, or maybe because I watch too much news on TV, but when I see how other societies have been pushed to the brink – Syria, Iraq – I realise what fundamentalist views can do to a society. They don't make it any better; indeed, they often make life for ordinary people a thousand times worse. Nothing is ever simplistic, society is very complex. And we here – republicans and unionists – all think there is a simple answer – but there is always complexity, life is like that. And the older you get the more you see that, and the less inclined you are to urge people to get out onto the streets. So we should all be a lot more careful. And I think the good thing about your pamphlets is that sometimes when you see yourself quoted, you go: "Did I really say that?" Or, even worse: "Do I *agree* with that!" Sometimes you say things without weighing up the likely consequences, and maybe you need someone to say, "Hold on a second, did you really mean such and such by that?" and you are saying, "No, no." They hold a mirror up to your views and your attitudes. We all need this type of challenge, we need this type of discourse.

• I talk to a wide range of republicans and disillusionment is rife. They don't feel any closer to a United Ireland. They feel they were duped by what they were told by the leadership. And now all these questions are being asked: what did you go to jail for, why did you join the republican movement, what is it you feel has been betrayed? And if your goal is still a United Ireland, how do you achieve it? And how do you convince the nationalist community, and then how do you convince unionists, explain why it is to their benefit, and what guarantees are going to be there for them? That's going to be the hardest bit. But see all these different splinter groups and their actions, and people going to jail – for what?

A confused younger generation

• I think you *should* know about your culture. I think it not only helps you understand who you are, but it also takes away the fear of others. It helps you to be tolerant. We took a cross-community group over to Schomberg House [Orange Order] and both Catholic and Protestant kids were amazed when they were told that King William's elite troops [the Dutch Blue Guards] were Catholics! The kids were amazed, especially the young Protestants. They were never taught the facts. There was one young Protestant girl who had only recently learned that 'LOL' stood for 'Loyal

Orange Lodge'. She had assumed it meant 'Laugh out Loud' – although she had often wondered why Orangemen would chose to put this on their collarettes!

• We had a mixed group who told us they would rather live beside someone of the opposite religion – but from here – than beside an asylum-seeker or an immigrant. So we set up a project involving a group of asylum-seekers, although we didn't let our young people meet the asylum-seekers for some weeks. We let them speak to a camcorder and ask questions, which would then be passed to the asylum seekers. And the questions were pretty blunt: "Did you come over here to steal our jobs? Did you get here on the back of a lorry? Are you only here so you can claim benefits? Are you here because you're terrorists?" We had every conceivable question. But we didn't edit them, we just passed the DVD – which was made from the recordings – to the asylum-seekers. There were many people, including our funders, who were very unsure of our approach, but we stuck with it. And the asylum-seekers answered all the questions – via their own DVD – and they in turn asked things about *our* young people, like: "Are you involved in the IRA? Or loyalist organisations?" And our young people were stunned: "How could they think like that!" "Well, look at the way *you* perceived *them*. Perhaps you have *all* got misperceptions about one another?" See by week five, the questions had changed to: "Did you leave family at home? What is it like living in your country?" Then eventually to: "What football team do you support? What music do you like?" And when we finally brought them together in Corrymeela, there was no standoffishness, no suspicion – because it had all been dealt with beforehand. We also used story-telling, and see when the asylum-seekers shared their stories, and showed the scars they had got from beatings, or told how their friends had been disappeared in Zimbabwe... it was amazing to see the changes in perception that took place, the new understanding that took place. That's what needs to happen with the misperceptions that exist between our *own* young people.

• I was working with a cross-community group, and this young Protestant had drawn a 'life map' and he had coloured the background in as a Union flag. He said, "That's my identity, that's my flag." He then said that "Sinn Féin wants to take my flag away." He couldn't elaborate on it, he just knew that the Union flag was a big part of him and that Sinn Féin wanted to take it away. It reminded me of a conversation I had with a young [Catholic] girl, on the occasion when some people were celebrating the death of Margaret Thatcher. I had asked her why she was celebrating and she replied, "She took our milk." When I had asked her to tell me what she meant by that she couldn't tell me, other than to repeat that "Maggie Thatcher took our milk." Young people hear bits and pieces from different sources and from these they form their opinions, but with no real understanding of what the context is. I once asked a group of teenagers about the hunger strikers and two thought that Michael Collins was one of them. They had heard these names from history and were just putting everything into one big pot. They think they have to proclaim themselves to

be 'Irish' or 'British'. But most of them are still struggling to answer the most fundamental question of identity: 'Who am *I* ?'

Socio-economic aspirations

• At a political level my core aspiration is for a United Ireland. But at a local level my aspiration is to see services delivered that will enhance the quality of life for people, and for their families and communities. Whoever I meet in the street the predominant topic of conversation is what is happening in their lives: their jobs, their health, their children's education. People want to see the quality of their lives improve, but in reality they see it increasingly under threat. And those aspirations of mine to enhance the wellbeing of our community must surely also be the aspirations for people in the Protestant working class.

• I believe that our community aspirations are currently more pressing than our ideological aspirations. I was working with Billy Hutchison and Terry Enright twenty years ago and we developed an employment programme for young people. We aimed to create 1000 jobs in North and West Belfast for 18 to 25-year-olds. We came up with how to structure it, how to put it together, and we got an economist who costed it. And he worked out that for the amount of money you would otherwise be paying these young people in benefits, the programme would actually save money. But, more importantly, it would have sent a positive message into working-class communities in loyalist and republican areas, break down the cycle of unemployment, get young people used to getting up in the morning and working in community-based projects: environmental projects, working with the elderly, health, whatever. And good-quality training would be built into it which would enable them to apply for long-term employment. As it was the scheme never came to pass. I think it was a lost opportunity. Between us all we have a wealth of experience working in these communities; we also know what the needs are and how those needs can be met. And I think that if we started working on those issues together, and came up with solutions, I think that *then* we could maybe start talking about some of the other issues. But if you go in straight away to talk about constitutional issues, cultural issues, political issues, it will develop into a shouting match, a 'whataboutery', 'youse did this' – and I don't think you get anywhere.

If we can sit in a room and say: "Look, I respect the politics that you have; I disagree with them, but you are entitled to have your views. And if you can respect me for what I am, even if you dislike my views, can we park all that at the door and sit down and see what it is we have in common, what it is we want for our communities, our children and grandchildren, and how can we collectively, with all the combined experience in this room, start addressing the issues: what are the priorities in our communities, what are the greatest needs? And then start looking at where the gaps in services are, how we can fill those gaps, who is it we need to

go to, who has a statutory responsibility for that, who potentially could fund that?" And if we are able to come up with one or two ideas to try and get a couple of quick wins, to show that we do have solutions, then I think you can build a gradual trust. I have had discussions with unionists about the educational underachievement of Protestant working-class kids. And if that means there's a need for additional funding and resources going into their areas, then it goes into them. We need to get away from this 'see everything you get, we must get' attitude. I think if you start tackling those issues first, it might allow you to eventually get on to other issues.

• It's just a pity that the energy we see loyalists put into 'protecting' their identity can't be put into tackling poverty and austerity. I don't underestimate the power of identity, for it is clear that it has more power over what should be people's best interests: their quality of life, a good education for their kids, a decent income. These are the areas where I thought we were starting to make progress under the peace process, and through community development we could evolve into some broader social movement, which wouldn't be broken apart by cultural identity issues. But that was all just wishful thinking on my part.

(3) Self-defeating strategies?

Armed struggle a dead end

We could say to the armed groupings: keeping a military campaign going is a barrier to reunification. Try and convince people instead, develop ideas around what shape a United Ireland might take, start a debate.

• I believe that the current armed actions by republican groupings are self-defeating. Now, I still believe that the root cause of the conflict is the British presence in Ireland, but I believe that what you need is a referendum on the island of Ireland where people are given options about the constitutional status – like the 'One Ireland/One Vote' initiative proposed by the 1916 Societies. We could then go to these armed groups and say: look, three years from now, or five years from now, there is going to be a referendum, and you need to put all your energies into that, to convince the Irish people, convince the unionist people. It could be that you lose the first referendum – well, so be it. But if you know that every ten years there will be another one I think it's a way of convincing people. I don't see a United Ireland on the agenda at present. What we have at Stormont is people arguing about equality and the United Ireland debate has been pushed aside. We could say to these groups: we believe that keeping a military campaign going is a barrier to reunification. Try and convince people instead, develop ideas around what shape a United Ireland might take, start a debate.

Take the Scottish referendum. At the very beginning there was never a hope that

the vote would be for independence. Big banks and large companies were threatening to pull out; there was so much stacked against a 'yes' vote, it looked like there was no chance. But as momentum grew, and you got down to the last few weeks the independence campaign had managed to convince so many people that Westminster panicked. Okay, in the end they lost, but even to get the numbers they got – I was shocked. I think being able to convince those republicans who support an armed campaign that there *is* an alternative, a way of trying, democratically and politically, to achieve your objective. I personally will accept a democratic vote. If it doesn't go my way, I will accept it. But if you know that every ten years you will have a referendum it gives you something to work towards, to convince people. At the minute there is nothing and I see the violence going on. If anything it will increase and become more strategic, and I think that as social and economic conditions in our communities get worse more young people will start gravitating to these organisations. People need to see that there is an option. There will never be a 'Declaration of Intent [to withdraw]' but a referendum is a good substitute. An armed campaign will never convince people.

• What is the root of the conflict? Now, you could be flippant about it and respond: British presence – end of story. And when I say remove the British presence I mean the British administration, not the Protestant/British community. But we have to deal with the problems we are facing *today*, not the problems of 1916, or 1798... Pure republicanism would say, well, it is still the same issue: the British presence. But how do we remove that presence? By using violence? Was that helping to get rid of the British presence? And our analysis would probably be 'no' – it was self-defeating. Would we be willing to be critical when looking at the violence that *we* [INLA] were involved in in the past? I would say 'yes'.

• The question of how you deal with Protestants and unionists wasn't really dealt with within republicanism, it wasn't thought out at all. There was also this notion that we didn't even have to define what our socialism represented. Because we were anti-imperialist, and read a bit of Connolly, we were automatically socialists – full stop. And that 'kicking the tin down the road' attitude: let's deal with first things first, we need to get the Brits out... To be honest the first time I really had an in-depth political debate was in jail, when people had more time to reflect and more time to read and discuss. And it was then that those type of debates were taking place. But when you got back out again you were going back into the same old environment. I was in six years and it was like Long Kesh had been a bubble where these things had been talked about in depth, but outside it was still very much: 'Let's just get rid of the Brits!'

The question of how you deal with Protestants and unionists wasn't really dealt with within republicanism, it wasn't thought out at all.

• To me, had the unionists properly thought out the Good Friday Agreement, the flag issue would have been no big deal. This is part of the process, this is part of parity of esteem, this is all in there. They should actually have realised that there was a direct benefit to them of a more equitable society being established here. In many ways I feel that the unionists here are out of step with what's happening in Britain. In terms of multiculturalism and inclusiveness, politicians in Britain wouldn't get away with what politicians here get away with. Peter Robinson's comment that he would be happy to send a Muslim to the shops for him would have been a resignation issue if he had been a British prime minister – that comment wouldn't have been allowed to stand. Or the attitude here to gay people and the use of 'gay blood' would not be tolerated in mainstream British politics. So, in many ways, although Unionists always claim it is all about their 'Britishness', they are becoming further removed from what Britishness stands for in its modern-day context, and, ironically, republicanism is probably more in line with that modern outlook, in terms of rights-based issues and cultural inclusiveness. Unionists seem to be stuck in a time warp, while Britain itself is moving on. Churchill's 'dreary steeples'† are still defining our history, as if some unseen power keeps us all locked in a bubble, and prevents us from moving on.

• Look at this flags thing. Sinn Féin, the republican movement, who totally opposed British rule in Ireland and vowed to bring it to an end, have agreed to the Union flag flying on designated days. Yet Unionists see that as a defeat! I think if you look at it, it's a victory, that republicans have accepted this. Stormont has already agreed the same process. If Unionists really want to secure the Union I think the greatest opportunity ever is now at their disposal. And that is for them to make the Catholic population here feel comfortable, feel that their traditions, their cultural identity, all of these things, will be respected. You keep hearing people like Arlene Foster telling us how better off economically we are within the Union. Well, if we are, that will prove itself, and what you will get is a majority of Catholics for the Union. Why would anybody, Catholics included, want to go into a 32-County arrangement if the South is in such an economic mess, and they felt happy where they were, with their rights protected and their culture recognised?

The space was created to allow us to develop more mature ways of dealing with things, and the way people eventually go might not be what republicans expect or what unionists expect, but it will be a decision based on what people feel is best for

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† Winston Churchill wrote of his bewilderment that even the First World War made little impact on attitudes here: "Then came the Great War ... Great empires have been overturned. The whole map of Europe has been changed... The mode of thought of men, the whole outlook on affairs, the grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world. But as the deluge subsides and waters fall, we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that have been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world."

them, their families and their communities. But because of the sectarian attitudes and behaviour of sections of unionism/loyalism, those moderate Catholics who had no urgency about a United Ireland will be alienated and will say: "If this is the type of society I am going to be forced to live in, where you are going to be persecuted if you are gay, or belittled if you are a Catholic, I don't want to have anything to do with it. It mightn't be in my best economic interests to leave Northern Ireland but I think it is in my general interest not to remain in a society like this." I think that, ironically, extreme Unionism is itself now the biggest threat to the Union.

• I have followed your pamphlets with interest ever since you started the series. I think they give a unique insight into a society in transition. But they also depress me at times – and I'll tell you why. In one of your recent titles you quote loyalists as saying they will *never* be marched to "the top of the hill" ever again, the way Paisley did with them. And yet – I think it must have been *twenty years ago now* – in one of your first pamphlets, done by the Shankill Think Tank, they were saying *the same bloody thing*! They are *still* in bed with these people – look at the pan-Unionist front created around the Twaddell Avenue situation. I despair of loyalists, I really do. You asked me about self-defeating strategies: have you asked loyalists the same question?

(4) Can you see our conflict as a 'shared problem?'

Lack of a shared terminology

• You're asking about a 'shared problem'. But the very terminology we use is tainted by our divisions. Even the term 'shared space' is problematic. Communities should come together to work to improve local needs. Take New Barnsley police station. I think it cost £7M to build, and it was built right after the ceasefires and peace process kicked in – not much of a 'peace dividend', to have millions spent on another oppressive fortress, with its cameras directed into our communities! And it may as well be sitting vacant now, for when you call over to it, a guy tells you to go down to the Grosvenor Road station. Now, that site is right on an interface between nationalist and unionist working-class communities. It has major potential: Invest NI could create businesses and jobs; you could use it to develop conflict resolution initiatives and real joint-working, in a fantastic shared space. You have access to both communities. It's a massive site that could be used for outdoor pursuits – Blackmountain is right beside it. You could hold all sorts of educational courses in it. Young people could have sleep-overs in the sentry boxes. Get people in to give talks about aspects of local history, relevant to both communities. The massive 'peace wall' that runs up the side of it contains 1 million bricks: turn it into a series of climbing walls, public Art projects. Let's do community development, personal development, using it as our base and bringing our children, young people, families and senior citizens together. It would be

building on the cross-community efforts initiated by Farset City Farm which once occupied much of the land, where groups of children from both communities were able to get up close to farm animals, and some schools tended small allotments.

It should not be viewed by people in the Protestant community as an encroachment by the Catholic community, or some sort of hidden agenda. The *only* agenda is joint-working, community development that would benefit all of us. People talk about taking down the walls, but it's not the walls that need broken down, it's the mindsets. And here's an opportunity to do just that. Leave the million-brick wall up for the moment if people feel they need it, and engage in joint work on the *other side of it*, to test the sincerity of people from our community. More walls went up, more cameras, more fences, more gates, more barriers, *after* the Good Friday Agreement. Are we going to just let it stay like that? And if people think there is a hidden agenda, well then, ask those questions and get them confronted. If we can develop youth opportunities and spaces for small businesses, what can be wrong with that? There is funding available from Europe for redeveloping disused army bases.

At an impasse?

• We seem to be stuck at an impasse. The politicians aren't interested in a *real* engagement, full stop. Even the ex-combatant groups seem to be just treading water, which I find disappointing especially when they put so much time and energy into securing the ceasefires and consolidating the peace. And many ex-combatants still respond to calls to go to interfaces, at all hours of the day and night, to prevent inter-communal trouble from either starting or getting out of hand. They have been motivated to do all that because they, their families and their communities, suffered terribly. But an end to conflict is *only the first stage* – the *next stage is reconciliation*. I just wish that individuals in these groups would say to each other: "Right, how can we take this to that next stage? Let's set ourselves some real tasks, like: how do we move this society forward? What mechanisms, what processes, do we need to set in place? How do we confront any obstacles with the same determination with which we fought the war?" But it is not happening. And in the meantime the community sector is being increasingly decimated. And even though we are the ones who can act as honest brokers, and have developed the skills that are necessary to promote change... the whole community sector is in retreat.

I just wish people would say to each other: "Right, how do we take this to the* next *stage? Let's set ourselves some real tasks, like: how do we move this society forward?"

• I said this to you for a previous pamphlet, but people assume that because ex-combatants went out and fought, that they were all politically or socially aware. But

most of them weren't, they joined because of what was happening on the streets, or because 'our' side was fighting the 'other' side, or the British Army. People expect too much of them. And considering the amount of time and effort which has been devoted to ex-prisoners engaging with one another, to be honest I come away from most ex-prisoners' meetings feeling quite despondent. Yes, we have respect for one another. Yes, we all agree that the war is over, and that our kids shouldn't have to go through what we did. Yes, we work hard to maintain peace at the interfaces. But we seem to have stopped there, we don't seem to progress *beyond* that point; we don't seem able to sit down together and plan a pathway to the future.

• I acknowledge that ex-combatants have been instrumental in building the peace process. And yet, ex-combatants can also sometimes *prevent* things happening. Whenever we go to do something for both communities there will always be somebody there with 'community power' who pokes their head up, and if they don't like what you are doing, or they consider you a 'dissident', your efforts will be rubbished. And it happens on both sides: if you're not in with them, you're rubbished.

• Do you see the people who actually live on the front of the [Ardoyne] road, I have spoken to them, and I will be honest with you, they are much more liberal than you would imagine. When one guy, who had lived there all his life, said to me, "I believe the Orange Order have the right to march," my chin dropped to the floor. And he was only one of many. It *can* be done. But we need to rise out of our current lethargy, and find a purposeful way forward. And loyalists don't help their case. They know rightly that their protest camp is antagonising people at that interface. It is also making it more difficult for moderate nationalists to work towards accommodation.

Conversations for the future

• I would love to see a discussion on topics like: if there *were* to be a United Ireland, what impact would the large number of people who we describe as British Unionists have on Irish politics? There is no doubt that the impact would be far-reaching: you would have a completely new configuration of politics. We can't simply assume that political life would go on as before – it wouldn't, there would be an entirely new discourse. Wouldn't it be fascinating to explore what might happen, all these questions about our future – instead of going round and round in circles as we are doing now, dictated by the Past?

• The good relationship between Britain and Ireland which has developed in recent years has helped lay to rest many of the antagonisms of the past. I think we must look upon our two countries as friendly neighbours and a new Ireland must reflect the different identities of all its people. Now, I don't think it is possible, or practicable, to move overnight into a republic, we need to prepare for that event

well in advance. And I think that conversations around dual nationality, or the recognition of our different traditions within a new republic, are something which should take place. We should be adult enough, confident enough, to have those conversations. I think there would be a seismic change within the political dynamic. Unionism has no direct influence in change per se in the UK. I mean, they're even being left out of the forthcoming party leaders' debate on TV! But if unionists were in the government of Ireland I think they would have a very significant influence. I think there are great benefits to be had for Unionism in that scenario. But those conversations need to be had, those ideas need to be explored.

• I think the first step has to be the removal of the fears of unionists. In the implementation of any change on this island, there has to be a constitution that has at its core the equality and protection of all the people. And we need to have a Bill of Rights. So that we will end up with an arrangement which will be good for *all* of the people of this island. Let's not fear change, let's embrace change. Let us write a new, modern constitution that would take on board all the hopes and needs of *all* sections of the people. I mean, how often do countries get the chance to do something like that? I find that prospect exciting. And what a legacy it would be to leave for our grandchildren. We are afraid of those conversations, those discussions. We need to step out of the shadow of fear and step into the future.

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• As for sitting down I would imagine that that wouldn't be an issue at all with us [IRSP]. We would welcome those sort of talks. We would also be willing to have a similar debate, internally. With outsiders to come in and try and give a different view. Sometimes you don't see the impact your actions are having on the wider perspective, and you could actually be contributing to the problems.

• There needs to be a serious effort put into resolving the Ardoyne impasse. For it is not just about the two residents groups, or the marchers, it's about the people who live there. And it's about the rest of the town, because whatever happens there has a domino effect everywhere else. I mean, how many young people – from both communities – have criminal records because of it all? Loads. And people on either side should not be using the impasse for narrow agendas – that would be wrong. They must have as their primary objective the wellbeing of local people. You have ones travelling from everywhere just to get involved. It is wrong to be using such issues to build a power-base; that is totally detrimental to local communities. And there has to be compromise, on all sides.

• Things *can* be turned around, it only takes vision and commitment. In 1988 we had the Bramble Folk on the back of a coal-lorry as the core of the Féile. The Féile was started as a means of halting the annual cycle of violence which erupted around the anniversary of Internment. Police stations used to take delivery of thousands of plastic and rubber bullets in preparation. That first Féile went from the Bramble Folk on a lorry to stages built bigger than the ones you see at Croke Park, till you had Boyzone and Kaiser Chiefs playing in the Falls Park. There's how you change things. It went from people being killed with plastic bullets, riots, whole communities affected... to dramas, talks, music... There is an example of how things *can* be developed, how people *can* move on. Problems are *not* insurmountable.

• Despite all the setbacks, people are still beavering away, trying to make a difference. I mean, you're still trying to create dialogue through your wee booklets. Those booklets show that people can take on board different ideas, explore new ideas. I thought the one you done on the loyalist bands [*Pamphlet No. 105*] was a really good read. I gave a copy to a bandsman on our side and he said there were things in it he hadn't thought of before but could readily identify with, such as the bandsmen getting their uniforms ruined by nationalist protesters, for he knew how hard it was for his own band to raise funds for instruments and uniforms. And even the idea of getting young people off the streets, especially when one of the loyalist bandsmen talked about the bands in Protestant working-class communities being like GAA clubs in the Catholic community. He admitted that there were things in that booklet which gave him a different perspective. I think that one of the questions you should ask people for your next booklet is: what is it you want to see for your grandchildren's future?

• I remember when my da had just come out of hospital and I turned on the TV for him and there, to the surprise of both of us – for while he had been in hospital I had been busy running up and down and hadn't been paying much attention to the local news – there was Adams and Paisley sitting at that triangular table, announcing that they were sharing power. And both of us were stunned, and my da says, "Son, this is great; that's your grandkids sorted out now." I only wish it had been true.

• We cannot go on only with the things we are comfortable with, we need to address the difficult questions. It has got to the situation where there is far too much talk for talk's sake; we need to sit down and problem-solve. And ask: okay, what can we begin to do? It has to be a focused-type of conversation that leads somewhere. It just can't go on and on; we have been talking for forty years and still going nowhere. My fear is that forty years on we will *still* be talking about the same things.

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A restatement of some of the more pertinent comments

• When we sit down in cross-community meetings our Protestant counterparts should accept that *we* have the right to engage in justice campaigns, and we should accept that *they* should be able to do likewise – but that all of us should still get on with the work in hand.

• We all have to be more honest about what went on. We have to challenge notions that have remained unquestioned.

• [People, politicians included, need to] sit down and work out a structure, a process, whereby the suspicions of the past, held by *both* communities, can be explored and addressed. The problem with the 'peace process' is that there *is* no actual 'process'.

• There is short-termism in government, and a lack of ambition to develop a dedicated strategy to tackle [socio-economic] problems on a long-term basis.

• No unionist has ever spelled out to me where *my future* is in their concept of what *they* would like to see for the future. There has not been that debate. And, likewise, where does someone from the Protestant community fit within *my* concept of a new Ireland? And who begins that conversation?

• We need to stop all this 'single-identity' work – it all needs to be done *jointly* now. If we want to look to our children, or our grandchildren – after all, we are *twenty years* into the ceasefires! – *we need to be getting down to it*, as a matter of urgency.

• All this nonsense about "your community is getting more than ours" needs to stop – social-economic disadvantage is the *same* in working-class areas, Protestant and Catholic.

• We need to get away from this 'see everything you get, we must get' attitude.

• Keeping a military campaign going is a barrier to reunification. Try and convince people instead, develop ideas around what shape a United Ireland might take, start a debate.

• People need to see that there is an option. There will never be a 'Declaration of Intent [to withdraw]' but a [border] referendum is a good substitute. An armed campaign will never convince people.

• The question of how you deal with Protestants and unionists wasn't really dealt with within republicanism, it wasn't thought out at all.

• If Unionists really want to secure the Union I think the greatest opportunity ever is now at their disposal. And that is for them to make the Catholic population here feel comfortable, feel that their traditions, their cultural identity, all of these things, will be respected.

• I think that, ironically, extreme Unionism is itself now the biggest threat to the Union.

• The ex-combatant groups put so much time and energy into securing the ceasefires and consolidating the peace. I just wish that individuals in these groups would say to each other: "Right, how can we take this to the *next* stage? Let's set ourselves some real tasks, like: how do we move this society forward? What mechanisms, what processes, do we need to set in place? How do we confront any obstacles with the same determination with which we fought the war?"

• The community sector, whether voluntary or funded, is being increasingly decimated. And even though we are the ones who can act as honest brokers, and have developed the skills that are necessary to promote change, the whole community sector is in retreat.

• We are afraid of those conversations, those discussions. We need to step out of the shadow of fear and step into the future.

• We cannot go on only with the things we are comfortable with, we need to address the difficult questions. It has got to the situation where there is far too much talk for talk's sake; we need to sit down and problem-solve. And ask: 'Okay, what can we begin to do?' It has to be a focused-type of conversation that leads somewhere. It just can't go on and on; we have been talking for forty years and still going nowhere. My fear is that forty years on we will *still* be talking about the same things.

What happens next? The participants in both the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican groupings will be (separately) reconvened in preparation for a joint engagement (which will hopefully focus on the tasks described at the top of page 4). An edited account of these discussions – both separate and joint – and a summary of all outcomes, will be presented in Island Pamphlet No. 109.