

Exploring the marching issue

Views from Nationalist North Belfast

compiled by

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Introduction

Northern Ireland's 'marching season', when Protestant members of the 'Loyal Orders' – the Orange Order, the Royal Black Preceptory and the Apprentice Boys – parade in their thousands, is often seen as a barometer of the state of inter-communal tensions. Indeed, the marching season has an impact all of its own, for not only does Northern Ireland largely close down during the peak period (the '12th of July fortnight') but any emerging political initiative, particularly one which either side of the community might deem controversial, is usually held in abeyance until the summer 'heat' – with its potential for communal violence – has dissipated.

To most of those who march the marching period is a celebration of their history, culture and religion, while to most of those who do not it is at best a colourful spectacle, at worst an expression of sectarian triumphalism. But for the small percentage of marches which have become 'contentious' a sizeable number of Northern Ireland's citizens, Protestant and Catholic, view the marching season as the epitome of all that is divisive between their communities.

In 1996 world attention was drawn to the extensive violence associated with an Orange march on the outskirts of Portadown, and the impasse which resulted – one which remains unresolved – became known to Protestants as the stand-off at Drumcree Church, and to Catholics as the siege of Garvaghy Road. In Derry, however, a contentious situation was eventually resolved following patient negotiations involving the Apprentice Boys, local Catholic residents and others.

On the Ormeau Road in south Belfast the passage of Loyal Order marches has been blocked for some years, while in north Belfast the 'Tour of the North' has reluctantly had to accept route changes. However, various Loyal Order marches passing the shops at Catholic Ardoyne in north Belfast have frequently resulted in widespread violence. Even though a Parades Commission was established by government to rule on whether or not a particular march could proceed, and what restrictions might apply, few people in either community are satisfied with the current situation.

It was with a view to opening up debate on the whole marching issue that it was decided to convene the series of discussions – involving community activists from those Nationalist areas of north Belfast most affected by contentious parades – which form the basis of this pamphlet.

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Exploring the marching issue

Defining the problem

One of the organisers explained the rationale behind the meetings:

Some people recently engaged in discussions around the parades issue, looking at where the situation was at present in North Belfast. And things seem to have fallen into a pattern: with those parades which were problematic, some were contentious with the possibility of leading to violence, others were contentious only in the sense that people still objected to them but the threat of violence had receded. An example of the latter is the ‘Tour of the North’, where the Orange marchers now come up to the barricade and simply turn away. And things seem to have stuck there. If a march remains contentious but isn’t contested in a violent way, the Orange Order seem happy enough for it to stay like that, as are the Parades Commission. I think that they would like to see Ardoyne becoming the same – a contentious march with no threat of violence. And this situation could continue for years; there doesn’t seem to be any desire anywhere to move towards a resolution, or to push the Orange Order into looking realistically at their position.

However, he noted some recent developments:

The Independent Orders are trying to encourage the Orange Order to engage with residents. In relation to Ardoyne the Apprentice Boys have made moves towards wanting to engage in dialogue. And that poses the question: if someone came along and said, ‘We want to engage with your community with a view to coming to some arrangement around our parade,’ what would our stance be? If we are saying ‘No talk, no walk’, and they say, ‘Okay, let’s talk,’ how would we respond? We’d probably start to panic, or have a heart attack! So what is it that we object to about these parades? There is no consensus about what we want other than to say we are simply opposed to such marches... and it is now coming to the stage where we might have to say *in what way* we are opposed to them. That’s why some of us felt there was a need to begin a debate in our own communities about where we feel we are in terms of parades. I know in the case of Ardoyne the majority of the people in the area object to the parades. But they also suffer massive disruption, so can we just leave the situation as it is? Is there a need –or even a desire – to move things forward? Anyway, the idea was to open up a discussion and explore the whole marching/parading issue.

A resident from Ardoyne explained her predicament:

In Ardoyne we have five parades a year, although potentially there could be

seven. That covers all the Orders: the Black, the Apprentice, the Orange. And from early '96 we have had a very active group of residents and community workers who have consistently made representation to the Parades Commission, and objected to all these parades coming down. It's not simply the parades we object to, for the organisers need to realise that along with their parade – even if they deem it to be historical and cultural – come hundreds of the 'blue-bag brigade'¹, who are mostly blocked out of their heads. And there's all the sectarian chanting, and then the whole military thing that swings into operation. I am effectively imprisoned in my house from four or five in the morning, even though the parade doesn't come down until half eight. And then, if that parade is returning, the security operation resumes about three or four in the afternoon, before the marchers decide to saunter up the road round about ten o'clock. So, for a whole day, the people of the area are completely hemmed in. The Orange Order are the worst, they totally refuse to recognise that I have a right to breathe living there. But there has been movement from the Apprentice Boys over recent years about entering talks: we even got as far as agreeing principles, number of delegates and venue. But if it came to the bit, if the Apprentice Boys rang me tomorrow morning and said: 'Right, we'll meet in the Lansdowne Hotel at 7 o'clock tonight, bring your team – we're ready to talk about everything' ... what the hell do we do? We don't know what our position is, we don't know what our bottom line is, or where this could lead us. And what would the rest of our community think? Maybe we'd go back to them and they'd say: 'Get the frig! We don't accept anything you said up there!' So, I feel people need to start talking about this issue now because sooner or later we will be confronted by it. We need to start finding out what people are prepared to see us talk about. And the different types of scenarios: for example, the possibility of a parade one year and none the next, or an open admission that we don't ever want them down the road again. We need to be exploring among ourselves and among local people how we can start moving this thing forward.

Orangemen have this idea that there is opposition to their marches and parades purely for opposition's sake. But even within the Nationalist community there are different reasons for that opposition. A lot of people have stated that they are not opposed to Orange parades as such, they are against Orange parades marching through areas at will, or without consultation with the host community. We just wanted to explore the whole issue, and produce a booklet like the one done last year in Ardoyne.

I thought the Ardoyne booklet² was excellent for the community workers who were involved in it, because it helped us move on from baggage that many of us had been carrying for a lot of years –the product of internal community conflict. I think it really helped. It helped us build up a new trust and we have continued to work with each other. I think that booklet had a massive impact on people and I thought it was a really worthwhile exercise. I

1. A reference to the blue plastic bags which off-licences provide for the carrying away of drink.

2. *Beginning a debate*, Island Pamphlet No. 56.

would hope to see this one stimulate the same level of debate.

I personally had a problem with that particular pamphlet because I disagreed with how the IRSP and the issue of flags was presented by some people. Having said that, however, I agree that this discussion process is a worthwhile one.

The other aspect to the marching issue is that local community groups on our side are trying to engage with the Protestant community – for there’s poverty and other important issues affecting both communities – but our efforts are complicated by the parading issue and the fact that our community doesn’t want the Orange Order coming down. We have told the Protestant community workers that part of the reason we ourselves oppose the march is because it repeatedly sets our cross-community work back and you find you’re playing catch-up for almost the next twelve months. But they don’t always see it like that, and you find an animosity creeping in which impacts on our interface efforts. And, on our side, the whole disruptive process –especially if it is accompanied by violence –likewise impacts on our own community’s attitude to us even being involved in cross-community work. So it really is something we need to explore and debate.

We did a survey of every single house in our area and 94% of people were opposed to the [Tour of the North] march. And really, as people working in the community sector, one of the things we resent is the inordinate amount of time we have to spend in dealing with Orange marches; it actually takes us away from the valuable work we are doing in our community. From the Cliftonville perspective, as far as I am concerned the ‘Tour of the North’ is done and dusted, it’s not coming down again. They don’t apply to come down, they walk down Summer Street, and as long as they keep to that side of the road we don’t have a difficulty with it. Now, I am well aware that it causes problem in other places, and we would be supportive of other areas, but you’ll have to find out what the residents of those areas think.

I think the dilemma we have is that on the one hand we’re contesting Orange parades and at the same time we’re trying to do work with Protestant communities. And if we are successful in our efforts to work with the Protestant community the issue of parades will undoubtedly come up. So we would need to have done some thinking around that. It *is* a challenge for us, because we’re trying to work with genuine people in the Protestant community, people who *don’t* take the attitude that Catholics have no right to breathe...

... Or that we need reminded every twelve months that we don’t!

I think we would have to look at every parade separately, for every area is different. And Clifton Park Avenue is different from Ardoyne, from Brougham Street, and the problem of attacks on houses and all that there. There are issues in each place which are different, and I think when we go back to the question which was asked –what we would say if we were to go into talks? –

each area would face a different set of circumstances. There is no one set of circumstances which would cover all the different parades.

I don't think there is such an overwhelming difference that we cannot at least discuss a general outline of the sort of issues which might be raised in talks – we have to start somewhere. We can't be stating that the Orders need to enter into dialogue, and then turn round and say 'We're not talking to you' if they do agree to talks. We need to establish a bottom line. Now, it might be that we're violently opposed to those marches; that it doesn't matter what they do, they're *not* coming through. But nobody has ever said that; there's never been a statement from any community saying: 'There'll *never* be an Orange march down this road; there'll be no "Orange feet" down this road.'

We said it on the Cliftonville. Our survey found that under no set of circumstances whatsoever did people want the marchers down.

I have never heard *anybody* say there is not a single circumstance under which a Loyal Order march will walk through their community. Did one of the questions on your survey actually state there will *never* be an Orange march go through the area under *any* circumstances?

Okay, not in those exact terms.

So, there *may* be circumstances, or there may not. And if the reality was that the majority of people felt that there were no circumstances where they would tolerate an Orange march going through or past their area, then there would be no point in any of us as community people ever dialoguing with anybody. Yet the fact is we're going down to the Parades Commission, we're talking to other people about parades. Why?

Well, when *we* first spoke to the Parades Commission we had people picketing our premises because we were talking to them!

A note of caution was voiced:

I don't think we can sit here and make decisions for residents in each area.

We're not attempting to do that. We just want to explore what our collective response might be in terms of contentious parades. Or even if we *have* a collective response.

I think that different communities will come up with their own way forward, solutions, ideas –because geographically we are completely different.

But there may be a collective approach with regard to raising the primary issues, and trying to force the Orange Order off the sideline, or to develop some initiative. Are we going to sit and wait for another 'mediator' imported from outside our communities – for example, another South African facilitator brought over – or is there a way we ourselves can take the initiative?

I think the problem is aggravated on both sides. First of all on the parade

side, whose numbers swell into the thousands, 'cause they come from everywhere to walk through Ardoyne. But we also have it on the protest side: it swells and you're lookin' around you saying: 'Where the hell do all these people come from!' Like, you're standing there and somebody's telling you to do something and you're looking at them and going: 'Who the hell are you, I've never seen your face before!' So, challenges need to be made on both sides, 'cause there's problems on our side too.

I'm glad this debate is taking place, 'cause it really opens things up. And there's other issues we need to look at. The contentious parades attract people looking for fun, for a riot, for confrontation, and we need to step back and look at the reality of what's going on. The Orange Order doesn't want to talk, and the Nationalist community, I believe, are frightened to talk. Both sides, for different reasons, need to have this 'No-No' situation. So I agree that we need to step back and ask ourselves: what exactly is it we're opposed to? In the case of Ardoyne, is it solely to do with the Orange parade, or the military presence associated with it? If that's removed, then what happens to the Orange parade? And what happens to the hangers-on if there is no controversy surrounding it? I personally think they would disappear.

Why, it was asked, had the problem seemed to escalate in recent years?

If I was an Orangeman I would be asking why these marches have now become such a big issue. I can remember people sitting outside the Phoenix Bar and maybe slegging and taunting the marchers as they went past – but that was it. And that's not that long ago, so these marches weren't always an issue in these communities. So, from their perspective, they probably ask: why has all this jumped up over the last ten years?

I believe this opposition mushroomed because people – once the talk arose about 'parity of esteem' – said to themselves: 'We are now able to do this.' It wasn't that they weren't opposed to marches before, it's just that they didn't believe they could do anything about them, they had to be accepted.

I remember going to a conference and this guy said that he remembered in Derry that they used to stoke their fires up with damp newspapers so that when the Apprentice Boys were walking along the City Walls all this sooty, black smoke would rise up to meet them – he thought this was fun. At that time that was probably that community's only way of showing their disdain.

Ardoyne is a classic example of the new situation. If you went back years ago there wasn't such a large return parade with hundreds of followers. But now, because it has become a 'contentious parade' there's 16-17 bands applying to walk, there's hundreds of people who want to walk past – solely *because* it's contentious. I definitely believe that in 1996 – during the siege of Garvaghy Road by the Drumcree marchers – people came off the sideline, and while they may not support the Orange Order, a lot of Protestants clearly thought it was wrong for Nationalists to oppose their right to march. There were few people – in either community – who sat on the fence. The majority

of people in the Protestant community supported the Orange Order and the majority of people in Catholic areas supported the Garvaghy Road residents.

How many parades are there per year? Maybe two or three thousand. And how many are contentious? Only a handful. So obviously there's a vast number of parades where they're not annoying anybody.

But you can't always assume that. I mean, take Antrim town as an example... they march every Friday night there throughout the whole marching season. But just because residents don't come out to oppose these marches it doesn't mean that they're not offending people. Take Nationalists who live in the likes of Kircubben, which is a 50/50 village... those people don't make any protest because they have to live there. There's a lot of parades that go on which don't have objections to them because people live in fear.

By the way, the Orange Order don't talk to most host Prod communities; that was the word we were getting back from some Protestant residents we talked to – that they weren't being asked whether they wanted it either. Some of the Protestant residents were saying that they supported the march's right to go through but they weren't that enthusiastic supporters of it. There was very few people from their district actually took part in it.

That may be so, but it would be wrong to think that they don't want it, because that doesn't reflect reality. Any time I'm talking to Protestants their response is that these are parades which celebrate their culture and religion.

The town I'm from was an Orange town, and I'm well aware of the Orange Order's benevolent side, and the community facilities and all that which it provides. That's one aspect that is there, but I don't accept for one second that Orangeism is an accurate reflection of Protestant culture. It's a manifestation, alright, but I think its prominence is often exaggerated. The problem stems from the fact that the Orange Order was elevated politically to such a level over the years where effectively it was in government, and it can't accept that its position now is no longer what it was. But I don't think it is the only manifestation of Protestant or Unionist culture.

Conflicting rights

One of the organisers endeavoured to return to the main theme:

Exactly *why* are we opposed to the marches? Some might say they are opposed to Orange Order marches because they consider the Order to be a sectarian organisation. Others might say they are opposed to the regalia, the flags. So what is it we're opposed to? It would be good if we could highlight and list people's objections. At least it means we can dissect the problem and then be in a position to say: this is what we don't like about it all.

But why should the onus be on us? Why should *we* have to dissect problems associated with these marches? Surely it's the Orange Order which should be doing that, who should really be resolving these things? We're a community who has to suffer these parades, yet we're the ones trying to address the issue, while the Orange Order, who are bringing these problems upon us, aren't doing anything, and there isn't a lot of pressure being put on them by anyone to try and engage, or even to start analysing the situation.

Are you opposed to doing this?

I'm not opposed to it, but I don't really want to waste any time on it, I have other things to be focusing on: unemployment, massive drug problems, and all the rest of that stuff. I could do much more with my time than deal with every Orange Order parade.

I would agree with that. I don't think it's our responsibility to begin any dialogue. I think the 'croppie' has lain down long enough. We shouldn't take on any responsibility for *their* problem. Let's confront sectarianism as it exists within the Orange Order. Let the likes of the Community Relations Council, which can spend millions every year on cross-community initiatives, address sectarianism in the Orange Order. I think it's a cop-out by taking it back to us the victims and saying: where do youse fit in the resolution? CRC and other bodies have been prepared to see the Orange Order assume a mantle of respectability, as if these are noble gentle people whose only desire is to practice their culture. That's rubbish: they exist purely for sectarianism.

But the reality is that we can't ignore the issue. I live in Ardoyne and I have four children, and in Mountainview there's about 250 young kids – yet the place is completely closed off during every march. To me, it's a balance: they've got rights and we've got rights, and there's a conflict between those rights. I have a right to go to the shop if I want to go to the shop; my kids have a right to go out and play in the back garden instead of having a friggin' Landrover in it, or a Saracen. We need to start saying to the march organisers: look, people in our communities are having their lives totally disrupted each time you decide to 'promote your culture'. So we have to sit down and list all the issues which exist for us, all the things which we're annoyed about. For as well as the marchers there's the whole military thing and the policing thing which comes into it. I think we need to be challenging everything, and starting to discuss and see if there are ways we can move things forward.

People have rights – the freedom to march and public assembly – and whether I like it or not the Loyal Orders are cultural to the Protestant community, they see them as part of their culture. But, to me it's all to do with how they act out those rights in relation to the Catholic community. I mean, even the Parades Commission has commented on how the Loyal Orders behave themselves on Rosstown beach [in County Donegal]: they have a nice wee day out, with their ice-cream vans, and it's all very peaceful. But when they come down the Crumlin Road past Ardoyne it's just sheer evil

and hatred and sectarianism at its worst that's on display. It's certainly not like they're quietly celebrating their faith or culture or whatever. And since they were ordered by the Parades Commission not to play music along a certain section of the route, they sing at the top of their voices instead. And it's not hymns they sing; they're squealing and chanting 'We're soldiers of the UVF!' And they're flaunting UVF flags and UDA flags at us. It's just a show of sheer hatred and I feel that they're saying: 'This is our road, we'll walk down it when we want to walk and you just remember your place, 'cause you're second-class to us!'

Last year if you had asked people what was the greatest objection they had to parades it was not the bands, but the fact that they were led up the Crumlin Road by the leadership of the UDA, who they would see as sectarian assassins, and that's clearly objectionable.

We talk about diversity and equality and the Nationalist community has grown in stature and confidence. It's not for us to say who should march in their parade. We mightn't like it, we can oppose it, but they have a right to decide themselves. And if that's who they want marching up the road in front of their parade, then so be it.

They weren't supposed to be part of the parade; they were a vanguard who led the parade up –the Orange Order would deny that they had anything to do with them. But that would be one of the very emotive things... that a handful of sectarian assassins who have been involved in countless murders of people of the area were actually to march through that area.

We have a video of the guy who organises the 'Tour of the North' saying that the only reason he wanted to march was because it went through Catholic areas. That's actually what the Parades Commission based part of their ruling on, and why the 'Tour of the North' was stopped going along Clifton Park Avenue – on the basis of what yer man said on television.

One of the initiatives we came up with last year was to ask the Orange Order if we could put a few Catholics on the Orange parade coming down the Crumlin Road, so that they could view it from the Protestant perspective. We said: let Catholics from Ardoyne be part of your parade, to see for themselves what the Orange Order are experiencing. The Orange Order near had a heart attack; absolutely no way would they consider it. Why? Because it would expose them. They're saying that it's a church service or whatever, parading in a dignified manner, so we suggested letting a TV crew accompany them, to do a sort of fly-on-the-wall documentary, but they wouldn't entertain it. It would only expose what really goes on in the ranks of the marchers.

It's not about expressing their culture and whatever; it's deliberately provocative. For example, they could easily hold the 'Tour of the North' all along the Shore Road and elsewhere; they could easily walk around their own areas. But they wouldn't do that, because it wouldn't offend anybody.

There's no point in marching if you don't offend anybody!

In terms of the Loyal Orders I think they have to first of all admit that I have rights in living there. If we can get to a stage where they accept my rights, and I accept that they have a right to march in celebration of their culture, then I think that's a step forward. Then there has to be an acceptance that although we all have rights each set of rights can impact on others. And if we get a level playing field where we can begin to accept each other's rights, then maybe we can begin to work on the different issues.

That's the crux of what we are talking about. Either our community says: you don't have that right, we don't accept there will ever be a situation where your right to march can be exercised within this community. Or we do accept your rights, as long as you also accept and acknowledge ours. And in order to acknowledge ours they have to come and talk to us. But if we don't believe they have *any* right at all, then, as I said before, there's no point being involved in any of this.

In terms of Ardoyne, the Parades Commission tell us they see two problems, and we are responsible for both of them: 'One, you've got the problem of hosting this parade through your community, and secondly, you have the problem of dealing with those people who are opposed to it.'

But nobody asked our community whether we wanted to host it or not! Anyway, we're not a 'host' community, I think the language is important here. We're a 'victim' community – we don't ask for these marches to come through. They don't ask us whether we want them coming through, so we're not a host community in any way, shape or form: we're a victim community.

There would be no justification in my opinion for Orangemen to march, say, into Ballymurphy or any large Catholic estate where there was total opposition – I don't think even they would try to make an argument for that. But if it's a main arterial route into the town, then I think it is different. That's the argument that was used years ago to ban any Republican or Nationalist march wanting to get into the city centre – and they shouldn't have been banned, this should have been a city for everybody. So I think the question of exactly *where* the march is going must be an important consideration.

I agree, it's hard to justify opposition to the ones on main arterial routes. If we're talking about a shared city we have to accept their right to march. As long as it's not marching *through* a Nationalist community.

What I find amazing about the Ardoyne situation is that they insist on walking from Legoniel past Ardoyne, claiming they *must* walk down past there to get into the town. Yet no sooner have they trooped past Ardoyne into a Protestant area again than *half of them get onto buses* to go the rest of the way!

In England, for example, nobody would suggest that ethnic communities

should have to sit down and talk with the likes of the National Front. Nobody has the right to march wherever the hell they want.

The other complication is that the Orange Order are sitting back and hoping that the Quigley Report, when it comes out, will say that what is of paramount importance is the right to march, and all other things are secondary. I think Quigley will be detrimental to our community. If the review is implemented it's actually going to make the Loyal Orders' position solid. They're going to be told that their right to march on certain days is paramount over my right to live there with freedom of movement and be able to go to the shops.

They might come out with the right to march, but all rights come with responsibilities – such as ensuring that others have the right to live without fear and intimidation – so that's going to act as a check. For example, you have a right in law to say what you want, in freedom of speech, but you also have a right to prosecute someone for incitement to hatred.

But the Orange Order could turn round and say that's not their responsibility, that's a police responsibility; their responsibility is simply to ensure that the bands and the lodges conduct themselves in a fitting manner. Once it is stated that the right to march is paramount, then the Orange Order is elevated to a different position, and they can say: 'Security has nothing to do with us; our right is to march down that road, and it is then up to the Army or the police to ensure that our right is protected.'

I don't think Quigley will come out and say that anyone has an absolute right to march wherever they want.

People are getting a sense that what will also come out will be that you have a right to protest, but not to protest violently. Rights are going to be more enshrined. If we organise a protest then we must ensure it is peaceful. So maybe it is up to us to take the initiative now instead of waiting for someone to come along and tell us what we must conform to.

It's about mindsets as much as anything else. If *we* set out to do something in our community, no matter what it is – such as a commemoration of the United Irishmen in Clifton Street cemetery – the first thing in our head isn't: 'How do we take this through a Unionist area?' So I think it's about mindsets; they are what has to be tackled.

The Orange Order – irremediably sectarian?

It was clear that for many discussants the core problem was Orangeism itself.

I just can't envisage a situation where a member of the Orange Order could convince me that they should have my consent for them coming through. To me, they're a Fascist organisation.

I don't agree that they're a Fascist organisation. I think they're a reactionary organisation, but I certainly wouldn't call them Fascist.

We're dealing with sectarianism and the Loyal Orders are one of the defining points of sectarianism for Protestants. People can feel comfortable being a sectarian bigot within an organisation that bolsters a belief in supremacy. That is the problem for me and I can't move anywhere until that is addressed.

But there could be a completely different perception among Prods. I know a lot of Prods who will turn round and say 'The Twelfth is our carnival', and they don't associate it with anti-Catholicism the way others do. Some of them say to me: 'I'm all for cross-community dialogue, for us developing as good neighbours, but I belong to the Order, because I see it as an expression of my culture.'

My parents are country people... and this story hasn't changed to this present day... but while Catholics and Protestants in a rural setting may be neighbours and they might help you bring in the hay or whatever, come the Twelfth, come that marching season, attitudes change. You'll hear the same type of stories in an urban setting, from anybody who has worked in the mills and factories in Belfast: about Protestant workers placing flags and regalia all over the workplace, as if to stamp their supremacy over any Catholic workers. That's what it's really about. Yet these people turn round and say: 'Oh, we're a wee church group, we're really in there to do charitable Christian acts.' Their first Christian act should be not to bring their shit to me.

But I'm talking about the people who *don't* bring their shit to you, and how *they* view it.

It's like them guys in the Klu Klux Klan who used to put on their white hoods; they thought they were just being 'good old boys', and that blacks were really a sub-species, so why worry about them. These people have to be educated to acknowledge that we have rights too –it's an equality thing.

I remarked during our last discussion that in rural areas the Orange Order does play a wider community role than it does in places like Belfast. But I got to thinking about that, and realised that it only plays that role within its *own* community. An organisation like St Vincent de Paul, when it's giving out benefits, doesn't ask what religion you are or where you're from. But the Orange Order doesn't operate like that –even its very benevolence is sectarian. I really think it is a physical manifestation of sectarianism and that's why I oppose it. And after last week's discussion I also forced myself to answer the question which was posed: if there was a time when we had to sit down with the Orange Order, what would be my position? And the more I thought about it the more I came to the conclusion that there isn't really *anything* that they could do to convince me to accept they have a right to march wherever they want. In the town I come from, what it used to do when Orange parades were on was for all the bars to shut, all the shops to shut – to prevent any hassle,

any fights. In many places when there's no trouble it's because Nationalists stay away, stay in their houses, don't go out, don't go shopping, don't do anything. I don't think we should tolerate that situation any longer.

But somewhere down the line, for that situation to change, we might still have to begin to enter dialogue.

We all accept that the flags, the 'blue-bag brigade'... all that is offensive to our community. Now, suppose they said: 'Okay, we will agree to remove all those things – do you still object to us?' If we then say: 'Yes, we are opposed to the Orange Order because it is a sectarian organisation, because Catholics aren't allowed to join it,' they might respond, 'Okay, I assume then you are equally opposed to the Knights of Columbanus and the Legion of Mary?'

There's no parallel. When did the Legion of Mary ever organise a contentious march anywhere? I know you have the Hibernians and all that there, and in historical terms they are equivalent to the Orange Order, but in terms of our communities we're not a mirror image of the Loyal Orders, in that we're not looking to march through anywhere we're not welcome.

Let's imagine the marching issue was brought down to its bare bones, and if they said: 'We are going to a church service, and there'll be no band with us, and it's only twelve lodge members walking down to the church, with no return parade, no followers, no disruption to your community, etc. – what are your objections to that?' Can we really object to twelve men from a lodge walking down with no bands?

Yes! See those twelve guys who are only walking down the road in their bowler hats at eight o'clock in the morning when nobody is about, and are not playing offensive music... they are *still* a problem to me, in that they are there purely to propagate sectarianism and denigrate my community.

If they go down the Ballysillan Road is it a problem?

If they do it within their own community... no problem.

Is the fact that they *exist* the problem?

Probably. They exist to propagate sectarianism, and I've a problem with that.

You're saying the whole reason for the Orange Order is to promote sectarianism?

Yes. Let's be honest, last year we weren't just talking about 'blue-bag' drunks, we were talking about the North Belfast UDA and the North Belfast UVF marching in the vanguard on the Orange Parade, coming by Ardoyne and doing so in a manner which was saying to us: 'Aren't we the boys!'

But what if that hadn't happened, if they weren't there? What if there was no 'blue-bag brigade', no music and they were actually talking to us....

I would still object to them coming by! I think the whole existence of the Orange Order is to perpetuate sectarianism.

Based on what?

Based on its activities. It's been involved in attacks on the native Irish since its inception, right, that's what its *raison d'être* is. I believe *everybody* should be opposed to the Orange Order. Unionism was the whole abuser of politics since this statelet came into being, and its very leadership was decided by the Orange Order. That to me should have disqualified them from any consideration, should have put them outside the pale in terms of acceptability.

What about the Black Preceptory?

The Black, the Apprentice... to me the Loyal Orders are basically all one.

Are you saying then that there's no purpose us getting into talks with the Order?

Yes. I don't see any of the positive things that other people see. Brian Kennaway, for example, was a moderate churchman who was educational officer for the Orange Order. And he failed; they don't want to be educated – he was removed from office. And when I see Church of Ireland ministers defend what was going on at Drumcree....

Do you not think Brian Kennaway was courageous in what he tried to do? It was just unfortunate that there was numb-nuts within the Order who didn't grasp what he was trying to do. Maybe he's only one of a handful, but there're clearly people within the Order who want to take a new direction, one in which they know they need to begin talking to people.

To me people like Brian Kenaway only gave the Orange Order a credibility it doesn't deserve.

To get back: are you saying that there is no reason to seek dialogue with them because nothing can come out of it?

I don't believe there should be dialogue unless the dialogue is about how they wind up their marches.

Is there a difference between winding up the marches and winding up the Order?

I don't think they can exist without the marches, so if I can stop them marching, maybe that'll help lead to their demise.

Why would any of them want to speak to you, then! If your whole reason for being there is to work for their demise?

Tough!

If it was me I wouldn't talk to anyone on that basis.

Well, there has to be a starting point. And my starting point is to begin their end. If by closing off one march we can begin to stop this propagation of sectarianism, well and good. To me they are an evil organisation, they shouldn't be allowed to exist because they're not there to practice Christianity, or 'religious liberty' but to propagate supremacy over Catholics. I'm opposed to that, so I don't think they should exist.

So you're tarring everybody who's involved in those Orders as evil?

Yeah.

I couldn't sit here and say that! I think you're being sectarian in what you're saying.

Well, the only reason I can see for Protestants wanting to join any of the Loyal Orders is because of anti-Catholicism.

But if an ordinary Protestant said to me that his interpretation of the Orange Order was that it *is* about charitable works and it *is* about religion, and that he didn't want to go out and march through Catholic areas, but yet felt he wanted to be part of the Orange Order, then, whether I like it or not, I have to recognise that as a quite different interpretation of what the Orange Order might represent for Protestants. But if we're saying here that we can't recognise such a different perspective, and we're opposed to the Orange Order period, and that it shouldn't exist, then we shouldn't even be engaged in this discussion. We should walk out of here and be honest enough to say: it doesn't matter to us if you remove your flags, if you remove your banners, if you don't walk down contested routes, whatever, because your very existence is abhorrent to us, so therefore we shouldn't even be engaged in dialogue. Is that what you're saying?

Yes, you've got a fairly good grasp of what I am trying to say. Some people here seem to be trying to say that we should keep the Orange – and the other Orders – because there's some good people in them, people who are *not* bigots, who are *not* anti-Catholic, who would want to treat Catholics as equals, who would accept our background, our faith and our politics as having exactly the same validity as theirs... you're trying to tell me that they actually exist within those Orders?

I'd say they do, aye.

Well, I've never met them. I've never heard one of them stand up and say: 'Hang on, we're about equality here, we're about justice, we're about the rights of all human beings.' They even attacked Tony Blair and his wife for attending Catholic services. Now this is a religious Order supposedly preaching tolerance and humanity, and they can't accept that people have that right?

But sure Catholics have attacked Mary McAleese for attending a Protestant service down South.

Aye, but they're arseholes too!

I think what we should be saying clearly is that we oppose these marches not because the marchers are Protestants or that we're trying to step on their culture, but because of what the Loyal Orders stand for.

That approach could be counter-productive. Some people could argue that the opposition to the Orange Order in the 1990s was what actually saved them when they were on the decline. If the question is how do you consign them to the history books, then confronting them all the time isn't necessarily the way to do it.

If talks are agreed to, what do we do?

An effort was made to get the discussion back on track.

Let's get back to the question: what exactly is it that we are opposed to? Would anybody be opposed to twelve men from a lodge walking to a church service – assuming that was exactly what it was? Are we opposed to that? We are opposed to regalia, to flags, we are opposed to paramilitary trappings – those are the type of things we are opposed to. But if we take those things away, are we still opposed to twelve men walking down the road to a church service? That's what we are trying to get to the crux of.

I agree. We've focused nearly all our time here on what we think of the Orange Order and very little on what we came here to talk about: our attitude to parades. Now I understand and appreciate a lot of the views expressed here, but the reality is that we still have a march coming down the Crumlin Road this year, and other contentious marches. And we have to ask ourselves, whether if we take this extreme approach – that they're not worth talking to because they're never going to change – then that means we have to resign ourselves to what goes on in the Crumlin Road for the next hundred years.

But if our objection to parades is not simply about flags and the 'blue-bag brigade' but because we don't even like the Orange Order... period, then what *is* there to talk about?

Are there *any* reasons when it would be worth talking to them? For example, if we manage to get them to re-route a parade so that it won't be in your face any more, would that in itself not be worth talking about?

If the forthcoming judicial review says that the Orange Order, or any of the marching Orders, are responsible for the parade as a whole –including their followers – they're going to have to talk to the communities to try and exert

proper control. So, if that forces them to make approaches to host communities – either directly to the local communities themselves or through intermediaries – what’s our response going to be? We can’t just say ‘Piss off!’

But at the same time we can’t engage with them if we don’t have a collective idea as to what we’re about, if we don’t have an understanding as to why we’re opposed to things, or have a strategy for pushing the Orders into having the same type of internal debate. If I was to say to them that I didn’t believe the Orange Order to be a legitimate expression of Protestant culture, and they said to me: ‘Okay, explain to us why you believe that; what are your objections to us?’ And if I say I just object to them simply because they’re Orangemen, that doesn’t take us anywhere.

What would happen if Ardoyne said: pull everything, tell the military and the police to get the frig, we’re not doing nothin’, no protest – and let them down that road. It would only take them twenty minutes. Would they come down? I would be very surprised if they would.

That wouldn’t work. There would be loads of people who’d say: ‘Fuck them, they’re not getting down here, they’re Orange bastards!’

But either that’s our rationale for opposing them or it’s not. And if that’s our rationale then we’re simply putting ourselves in the same boat as them.

Anyway, if we were going into any form of process that involved talks with any of the Orders, we have no guarantee that we could bring our community along with us, because our community would probably be far more suspicious of them than the majority of people in this room. And that’s a reality that everybody here has to recognise.

We *do* recognise that. This is an exploration, not a blueprint. But sometimes by actually having a discussion and then throwing it out into the community, you can begin a much wider grassroots debate.

I think this debate here *is* legitimate, because there are clearly people in both communities who have different views on the issue. But, to be honest, I personally can’t envisage anything they would say to me which would change my mind about them.

That might well be, but the problem’s still not going to go away.

Maybe what we should be doing is to confront things head on. I think everybody should be mobilised to oppose sectarian marches. Because even if you remove all the other stuff you were talking about – the ‘blue-bag brigade’, the flags, etc. – you’ve still got that core problem. I think everybody should be out protesting against sectarianism.

But if that protest focuses on the ‘Orangies’ and brings hundreds of young people from the Nationalist community out onto the streets is there not a

danger that they too will be motivated by their own form of sectarianism?

Of course there is. The whole thing about sectarianism is that it spreads like a cancer, and unless you're very conscious of it, it infects you –and maybe to some degree I have some of the disease in me already.

So, you accept that the manner in which we confront sectarianism can actually help to spread it?

Yes, unless you're actually conscious and fighting against it, because that's the way it will drag you.

There is an important point there. We've mentioned on numerous occasions about the sectarianism of the Loyal Orders ... but not one of us has mentioned anyone on our side being sectarian.

This has always been an institutionally sectarian state, with a collective sectarianism. But I don't believe there's a collective sectarianism within the Catholic community.

Look, where is all this discussion taking us in terms of this summer coming; I mean, in terms of the community's needs in Ardoyne? If the Orange Order – or the Apprentice Boys – came tomorrow and said: 'Right, we're willing to talk to you,' what do we do? *Can* we talk?

You're not going to be entering into any talks unless you've the consensus agreement of the community, because you've no authority to talk. So before you do that, that's the fundamental thing you need to get.

Anyway, you have to have an objective in any talks, so what's your objective?

I want them to learn the reasons why I feel frightened of them going down the road.

They already know that. That's *why* they're coming down – to make you feel frightened.

The very fact that they're agreeable to talk to me, for a start, is recognising that I have a flipping right to live there. I want them to hear my arguments, and if they agreed to take away all that shit we talked about –the hangers-on, the flags, everything like that – then, in answer to the question about whether I would have a problem with twelve men walking down that road at eight o'clock in the morning, with no music or nothing... no, I haven't got a problem, I'm being honest about that.

That's okay for you.

If we were going into dialogue, it would be to see what they're prepared to say and offer, and then bring that back to our community, to see what the community's response is.

If it's five people giving a response to something that's said in a room I don't see how you can realistically take that back into the community.

Let me tell you, if it was something positive you could sell it very easy! Politicians have been selling us shit for years and we've all bought it. Look, living on that road, I reckon I personally know the views and the bottom line of 90% of the people who live there.

I would doubt that.

I would say 90% of people would accept an agreement. If I went back to them and said: see the Apprentice Boys on Easter Monday, now just them in their own, and we've all the shit and trimmings taken away, and we've only one lodge, twelve men, no band, no nothing... I think people would accept it.

Do you not think it's presumptuous of you to say that?

No, I don't. From the 90s we've been talking about it up there. There *are* people who live there who are saying this. Obviously there's other people – like some in this discussion group – who don't even think the Orders have the right to exist.

I just don't think we should allow them to continue to propagate sectarianism. If they're coming by Ardoyne, only to be like the dog marking its territory and treating us like the lamppost, then I'm offended.

But is there something wrong with the people who live up there saying what their bottom line is – especially if it was only the Apprentice Boys, 'cause the Orange is a completely different thing altogether.

Tommy Cheevers has learned a lot about being media-friendly, about putting together some kind of presentation that doesn't show his organisation out to be what it really is –that's what he's done.

But what do *you* know of them other than what you see?

I see what I see on the ground.

But other than what you see during a contested march, what do you know of them? What do your base all your assumptions on?

Their own history –and my lived experience.

Let's not revisit that topic again; let's keep the discussion focused on what our response would be if there were talks arranged.

I wouldn't accept any residents grouping saying, on their own, that this march goes through, or even that it must be stopped. I would want to see evidence that that's what the consensus opinion is in the area. And I think what you want to be doing is going to every household and checking whether

you have interpreted attitudes correctly, because I know of no other area in North Belfast would say what you're saying in regard to Ardoyne – it would be bucking the trend.

But we *do* have people who are prepared to do that; we also have people who are saying: 'No, we don't want them anywhere near this road.' So there's a whole range of attitudes... that's why we need to start this debate.

I think if we go into talks with anybody we need to know what we're talking about. Why do I object to parades, why do I object to the Apprentice Boys? I know I object to the Orange Order because it's a sectarian organisation that doesn't allow Catholics in. But why do we object to the Apprentice Boys? To be honest, I couldn't tell you, for I don't even know what they stand for. So, if they ask: 'What is it that you object to?' you'd be like: 'I really don't know.' You begin to look stupid. If people come and talk to us we'd need to be able to say clearly what it is we object to. For some, it might be all the paraphernalia that goes with the marches. For others, it might be the very existence of the Orders.

If you stick to the argument that their very existence offends us, we're going to go nowhere. I mean, if that was the case our people wouldn't be in talking to the British regarding their disengagement from Ireland. I think it might be interesting to look at Derry, where residents *did* agree to the Apprentice Boys marching on the City Walls following consultations, and I'm wondering if there is anything that can be learned from the Derry experience. But we also need to remind ourselves that this state actually facilitates an anti-Catholic day: the 12th July. I'd visitors from America last year, and they were in Ardoyne and they thought that the Orangemen were just lunatics who wanted to enforce their will on people of another religion, and they presumed these Orangemen had no official support. But when they heard that this was actually an official public holiday they couldn't believe it. It was almost like having an anti-Jewish day, or an anti-Black day, and not only that, but as part of that public holiday, some of those celebrating it felt the need to triumphalise through communities where they're not welcome. So I think at some point we need to take it wider, and highlight the fact that this is facilitated by the state, bearing in mind that we supposedly reached a political agreement which says everybody has the right to live free from sectarian harassment.

That's an excellent point about the state facilitating an anti-Catholic day; I mean, I haven't heard it put like that before. It's those types of things which our communities want to put the focus on.

The Parades Commission have laid down a sort of 'code of conduct' for marches, but these have been repeatedly breached and there's been no accountability. We need to be asking the Parades Commission why nothing has been done about these breaches.

I should make it clear here that we don't *negotiate* with the Parades Commission,

we *present facts* to the Parades Commission; we've never negotiated over anything around parades. We have never turned around and said: 'Look, if they take away those flags, etc, etc, here's what we'll do in return.'

If negotiations ever took place, one of the things we might be asking the Orange Order was how could they could change what currently happens on the front of the Crumlin Road into something that's more positive for us, 'cause we're going to be left with the fallout of what happens anyway.

You're asking the wrong question. The Orange Order ain't gonna go that way.

I think we need to push this as far as we can, we need to test the state as to its true attitude towards Nationalists.

By doing what? And in terms of what?

Let's consider putting a mass physical protest on the road in front of the march. We need to actually get people to pay attention, because they haven't paid attention up to now.

And widen it beyond being simply a Nationalist protest. By saying it's a 'Nationalist protest' just feeds into the problem; let's widen it out into a protest about sectarianism and all the rest of the stuff, so it's not just Catholics who are at this demonstration, there's trade unionists, there's Protestants, Jews... whoever. Now, that's a way there could be positive change brought to that situation.

All Loyal Order marches at some point are going to get a clear run by the Parades Commission down past Ardoyne shops.

No, they have restrictions of some sort now.

Which are never adhered to.

Well, they are. They're not allowed to play music, and they haven't played music going down the road since 1998. And that's through people putting pressure. I've said it before, they're like small wins that you're working towards; you have to battle in whatever way you can. You go to the Parades Commission and say: 'They're supposed to be playing hymns. Sure, they don't even know what a Hymn is! All we hear is "Soldiers of the UVF", "Beat the Fenians" and all this. We don't want to hear that music any more.' So the Parades Commission have now stopped them playing at all.

In Ardoyne there's 99 people have died as a result of the conflict, many of which have been at the hands of them people that's marching up that road. And see for us watching prominent members of the UDA and UVF lead that up, I mean, any 'small win' goes out the window when you measure it against that.

But you have to start putting the pressure on somewhere. They shouldn't have been allowed to front that parade or close the back of it. That's why you have to start challenging these people and insist: 'We don't want them people, or their flags, nor do we want them drinkers.'

In law they have the right to apply to parade, so it's challenging that right, and insisting that along with rights come responsibilities.

We don't want to deny anybody their human right to march; what we are challenging is the routes they choose – and that is a different issue. If the National Front –or BNP or whatever they're called now – wanted to march through Golders Green –which is a largely Jewish area of London –do you think that anybody would view that as acceptable?

The Orange Order played a role in the segregation of the city, so they're as culpable and responsible for the state the city is in as anyone. Most people don't see any logic to what the Orange Order is about, or why they want to march through areas where they're not welcome –most thinking people wouldn't understand the logic of that. I for one don't understand it.

I think we need to broaden the whole debate out. We need to expose the attitude of the Protestant churches, for they are the ones who provide the context and the imprimatur for the so-called 'church parades'. There needs to be a much wider debate. We also need to force the Parades Commission to start to hold the Orders accountable for any breaches of conduct. So would it not be useful to start looking at indicators of what is acceptable behaviour, not because you are seeking to endorse these marches, but because you are making a start at managing them out of existence.

I know a lot of people are saying 'Fuck the Parades Commission', while others feel we need to engage with them. But when we bring problems over the marches to the Parades Commission they invariably turn around and say to us: 'Look, we see two problems: one problem is the parade, and the other is the protesters.' Now, how can we maintain a handle on things so that the focus is on the march organisers, and the Parades Commission can't come back and claim there's two problems, the parade *and* the protesters. How do we change behaviour so that it focuses simply on the parade?

I think it's a false portrayal of our community to say that we're one half of this horror that's going on.

One of the Ardoyne participants summed up the debate:

There's a good chance that if we rang the Apprentice Boys –in particular, Tommy Cheevers –we could be able to talk next week, or the week after. Now what the hell would we be going in to talk about, what the hell are you going in to sit and negotiate over, what the hell do you hope to come away with? To me, I have to have a bottom line. And, despite all our discussions, we still haven't answered that.

Reflections

Having engaged in this debate the participants reflected on what had emerged from it.

My worry is that we seem to have focused almost exclusively on our attitude towards the Orange Order. But my distaste for the Orange Order is *in no way* a reflection of my attitude towards the Protestant community, especially the Protestant working-class –and I would be concerned that that hasn't really come through. I believe there is a lot of positive stuff happening in that community and I really want to engage with them and move this whole society forward. There is so much we need to do together, for the benefit of both our communities. I consider *all* working-class communities in this country to be 'victim' communities.

When Protestants read this document, I would be concerned that some of the things we've said here could create problems for those of us who are trying to talk to people in the Protestant community. Yet, at the same time, it is useful to have such views brought together, so that we can say to people across the interface: look, this is part of the reality in the Nationalist community, these are some of the genuine perceptions which exist, whether you like it or not – this is what both communities are going to have to deal with.

Things have stagnated at community level since the hopes that were raised by the ceasefires ten years ago. I think that one of the reasons we haven't moved forward is because neither community is confronting reality in an honest way. And while some cross-community work is genuinely challenging, other community-relations-type stuff is often entered into half-heartedly, driven more by our need to access funding. And I don't know why, but I think many people sort of imagine that our deep-seated problems have somehow lessened since the ceasefires – but they haven't, they're still very much alive.

I actually think that they have got even more entrenched.

I think we need to be far more upfront with each other about the legacy which still exists and the difficulties we all need to confront.

We really need to begin this debate: not only across the interfaces, but inside our own communities –for even this small group has revealed how diverse people can be in their opinions. And if there are things in this document which the Protestant community or the Loyal Orders feel are totally inaccurate, or grossly misrepresent them, then it is up to them to come back and, through debate with our community, put the matter right.

All these things – including our perceptions of one another – have to be confronted by both our communities before we can hope to move on.

If someone said to me, ‘Show me one thing positive in this pamphlet’, I would reply: show me one thing at the moment that is positive in regards to the parades issue –for that’s exactly where we’re at at present. That’s what we have to work from, that’s what we have to deal with.

Without a proper debate each community is viewing the other as a monolithic block, containing no diversity of opinions. Nationalists assume that the Orange Order, the Loyalist paramilitaries, hardline Unionists... all think with one mind and they’re all basically anti-Catholic. Likewise, Protestants probably look at our community in the same way. But there is a wide diversity of views and opinions within *both* communities, the problem is that it just isn’t being allowed to emerge because our communities are still so polarised.

The effect of the Catholic community opposing the marches so strongly is to bring most Protestants out in unquestioning support of the Loyal Orders. Yet I think it would be really valuable if the Protestant community was allowed the space to look at its history more objectively. Many of the marches commemorate the Battle of the Boyne, and there’s elements of 1690 which were very progressive. For example, some of the Ulster Protestants who fought at the Boyne fought under the banners of the English Levellers, who were fighting for genuine democracy. And a few years after the Battle of the Boyne Ulster Presbyterians were being persecuted by the Anglican establishment and that’s why many thousands of them emigrated to America, where they played an important role in the American War of Independence. And they were also the same type of people who were out in 1798 – fighting against English rule. The Orange Order, however, since its inception has largely acted in support of the status quo. And in its early days the Order was set up as an exclusive organisation –Presbyterians couldn’t join it. Yet somehow the Orange Order, which was formed a hundred years *after* the Battle of the Boyne, has been allowed to act as if any celebration of the Boyne remains its sole preserve. I think that the legacy of the Battle of the Boyne and the ‘Glorious Revolution’ –not only to the Protestant community but to our own – is far more complex, and could be much more radical. But while everyone’s energies are currently fixated on the issue of whether the Orange Order can or cannot get marching down certain streets, then that wider exploration will never get off the ground.

After the killing of the three children in Ballymoney that chaplain, who was a prominent Orangeman, came out and said that an Orange march down through Garvaghy Road wasn’t worth the life of one human being, and the organisers basically called a halt to it that particular year. To me that showed that it’s wrong to paint all Orangemen as incurably sectarian, whose only concern is with being anti-Catholic. There are many good, decent, ordinary working-class people on the Protestant side who we need to engage with, and some of them are members of the Loyal Orders.

If I was to read this pamphlet from the other side of the wall I would be offended by it, no doubt about that. Nevertheless, I think it should still be published, for it's time to open up this whole debate. In fact, that time is long overdue.

And not in any sanitised or polite 'cross-community' manner, but with hard, upfront views being expressed – on both sides. Otherwise we'll never move forward.

I agree. And it's not just a matter of looking at the other community, I would be interested in dissecting attitudes in our *own* community, to see if *we* have moved on, or whether *we're* still stuck in old outdated attitudes.